

UNITED BY WHITE SUPREMACY: WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO A 'WHITES ONLY' CITIZENSHIP ACROSS THE GENERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how white women in the US have centered their right to citizenship on the maintenance of white supremacy. While current scholarship primarily focuses on white male supremacy and women's promotion of racist ideologies, little is dedicated toward establishing a connection between some women's white supremacy and their organizing efforts to maintain the whiteness of 'the citizen' across the generations. Through a close examination and analysis of existing literature, I demonstrate how different groups of women in varying spaces and times assisted to create a 'whites only' citizenship by emphasizing their whiteness and femininity and claiming their right to agency and privilege because of their ideological distance from Black women's supposed uncivilized, masculine, and promiscuous nature. They asserted themselves as the 'civilizing' fair sex who is educated, chaste, pure, and domestic. From the fair sex advocates of the founding era to the tradwives of today's digital world, seemingly disparate groups of women united to advocate for a 'whites only' citizenship using every avenue possible: committing violence against Black women and other people of color; writing letters and ads; holding protests and rallies; participating in grassroots organizing; building far-reaching political networks; publishing articles; and creating social media accounts. These white women positioned themselves as the enforcers and sustainers of an exclusive US intended to privilege whites and marginalize non-white 'others.'

Keywords: Whiteness; Femininity; Citizenship; White supremacy.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, a resurgence of far-right politics has infiltrated the US with white women as its backbone. On January 6, 2021, crowds of mostly white men and women violently attacked the United States Capitol. Incited by Trump, they claimed election fraud and opposition to a newly elected president who stated in his first joint address to Congress, "White supremacy is the most lethal threat to the homeland today" (Biden 2021). The rioters proudly flew their white-supremacist flags, wore shirts with racist and anti-Semitic slogans, burned Black Lives Matter banners, flashed "WP" hand gestures to symbolize "white power," and erected a "Day of the Rope" noose meant to punish "race traitors" (Washington Post Staff 2021). Some conservative

and many liberal white women were shocked at the insurrection, appalled at such an affront to democracy. However, it should not come as a surprise that such an event would occur. White supremacist ideology has been integral to America's identity since the inception of the republic. An historical analysis reveals that white women have helped to facilitate what I am calling a 'whites only' citizenship, a construct of exclusion that equates 'the citizen' with whiteness.

While current scholarship primarily focuses on white male supremacy and women's historical campaigning for citizenship, little is dedicated to establishing a connection between women's white supremacy and their organizing efforts across generations. Research largely explores white supremacy in general terms, frequently neglecting white women's particular form of organizing. Mainstream narratives focus on white men, obscuring the roles white women have played in white supremacist politics, leaving some whites confused as to why a substantial contingent of women would support it today. Additionally, some scholarship has addressed citizenship as it pertains to the exclusion of people of color (Anderson 2016, 2018; Roediger 1991; Harris-Perry 2011; Feagin and Ducey 2019; Lipsitz 2018) and how white women perpetuate white supremacy (Jones-Rogers 2019; McRae 2018; Freeman 2020; Davis 2008; Anderson 2021; Brüchmann 2021; Phillips-Cunningham 2020; Gilmore 1996; Darby 2020). However, few have connected seemingly disparate groups of women across centuries to demonstrate how they advocated for a 'whites only' form of citizenship. Through a close examination and analysis of existing literature, I argue that different groups of women in varying spaces and times assisted to create a 'whites only' citizenship by emphasizing their whiteness and femininity.

THE ORIGINS OF A GENDERED 'WHITES ONLY' CITIZENSHIP

An exploration of a gendered 'whites only' citizenship is necessary to foreground white women's organizing. Their white supremacist political campaigns are intimately connected to the concepts of whiteness and femininity that originate with colonizers' encounters with indigenous and African women's bodies during the 1500s (Morgan 2004, 17-21). Although whiteness is a relatively modern invention from the 1600s

(DiAngelo 2018, 65), the concept of “white woman” can largely be attributed to Europeans distinguishing the familiar white woman from African women’s bodies (Morgan 1997, 167-190). European colonists and slaveholders described Black women in stark contrast to white women (Morgan 1997). The gendered and racialized construct of Black women is directly linked to white femininity. Since the colonization of Black and brown bodies, there has been a systemic effort to legitimize the institution of slavery by comparing the “purity” of white women with the “savageness” of African women (Morgan 1997, 167). An historical overview of the connections between white women and Black women’s identities is an essential component to understanding the complex dynamics of a gendered ‘whites only’ citizenship.

European notions of femininity shifted to highlight what colonizers considered to be the apparent differences between African and European women’s bodies. African women’s bodies became the antithesis of European women’s bodies. Jennifer L. Morgan (1997) explains the “gendering of racial ideology” that contributed to shaping the social constructs of race, gender, and sexuality. Both Amerindian and African bodies were depicted as deviant from the white “feminine” body. Morgan states, “femaleness evoked a certain element of desire, but travelers depicted black women as simultaneously un-womanly and marked by a reproductive value dependent on their sex” (1997, 168). Colonizers compared the familiar “feminine” white woman’s body with the unfamiliar masculinized African or Amerindian bodies of women of color. As raced women, “Europeans found a means to articulate shifting perceptions of themselves as religiously, culturally, and phenotypically superior to those black or brown persons they sought to define” (168). White women were portrayed as subservient, pure, delicate, modest, fragile, domestic, and overall culturally superior through white femininity (Schloesser 2002, 8). Thus, Black women’s deviation from white women’s “feminine” bodies, and the links made between sexuality and savagery “fitted them for both productive and reproductive labor” (Morgan 1997, 184). Whereas the English woman’s work was exclusively domestic and viewed as feminine, the African woman was depicted as an extractable reproductive laborer who could be forced to provide masculinized labor (Morgan 2004, 40). These perceptions of African women as savage and masculinized

became the framework for understanding whiteness, femininity, and ultimately citizenship.

THE ORIGINS OF WHITENESS

During the late 1600s, “white” appeared for the first time in colonial laws (DiAngelo 2018, 17). People were asked to designate their race on the census in 1790 and in 1825, blood counts were being used to determine classification as non-white. The immigration boom of the 19th century solidified the notion of whiteness, and the first part of the century became the most critical and formative years in constructing working-class whiteness (Roediger 1991, 14). David Roediger argues that whiteness was a strategy in which white workers responded to their “fear of dependency on wage labor and to the necessities of capitalist work discipline” (13). Racial identity and independence became associated with whiteness in contrast to the ‘savagery’ of racialized others: Native Americans and Black people. The racial inferiority and barbarism of indigenous people and Africans was justified by comparing their nudity, skin color, and other characteristics to whites (Gallay 2009, 3). Prior to the revolution, not all whites could describe themselves as free within the institution of white indentured servitude (Roediger 1991, 20-21). However, whites desired to eliminate the model of “slavish Europe” and adopt a “republican liberty” in the US (49).

Between the revolution and the onset of republicanism with its emphasis on independence, white workers distanced themselves as much as possible from Black enslaved people. Race has been a ‘determinant’ for a person’s access to politics, the labor market, and their understanding of identity since the beginning of the 18th century (Omi and Winant 2015, 7-8). One of the primary ways in which working class whites distinguished themselves from Black enslaved people was through language. “Hireling” was disassociated from “slave,” “boss” replaced “master,” and “freemen” the exclusion of Black people (Roediger 1991, 46-49). Attempting to assert their white femininity, white women who performed domestic labor distinguished themselves from Black servants by choosing to call themselves “help” or “hands” (49). Herrenvolk republicanism, as Roediger terms it, describes how Black people were framed not only as anti-citizens, but

also as a threat to republicanism (1991, 172). Through its association with servility and dependency, blackness was considered a threat to white freedom. Hence, the establishment of the white working class helped to justify the continuation of Black enslavement and solidify whites' dominance.

During the eighteenth century, white women were labeled the "fair sex" (Schloesser 2002, 7). The phrase mirrors previous understandings of women's political position in Europe. In 1340, the term "fair" was used to describe women who were morally pure, clean, unstained, or free from blemish (54). After the English made their first contact with Africans, fair became associated with skin and hair color, giving birth to dichotomies such as light versus dark, white versus black. The term "fair sex" was then used to distinguish those who were of lighter complexion – white – and sex was a reference to women (7). It was a term created to exclude all non-white women from the category of woman. As Pauline Schloesser explains, "because discourses on the fair sex took *white* women as their object, they were already bound by race and class. Articles on the fair sex or the 'ladies' were directed at white women from the property-owning classes, not women of color, enslaved, or indentured women" (2002, 8). Although the fair sex was originally intended to support white men, the ideology allowed white women's "subjectivity and agency" by placing nonwhite 'others' and children under their surveillance (8). In many ways, the fair sex was credited with maintaining "civilization," a racial code for whiteness (56, 80). Therefore, as Schloesser argues, the concept of citizenship has been too narrowly conceived. Rather than equate citizenship with the right to vote, the 'citizen' question must be broadened to consider how white women's adoption of white supremacy made room for their agency and access to oversee and oppress non-white persons since the inception of the republic. Through fair sex ideology, Anglo women became white through positioning Black women as the antithesis to white femininity (the fair sex) and their adoption of white supremacy (81).

WHITE WOMEN SLAVEOWNERS

The typical narrative of white women's involvement with enslavement is that it was extremely limited, dependent on extenuating circumstances, or highly regulated by

their husbands (Jones-Rogers 2019, xiv-xv). Stephanie Jones-Rogers challenges this assumption in her historical analysis of formerly enslaved interviewees that were collected shortly after emancipation in the South. In her study, Inge Dornan estimates that women made up about 7 to 10 percent of all slaveholders in the low country during the colonial era (2005, 389). When the interviewees spoke about their experiences of masters and mistresses (white women slaveowners), they expressed an equal distribution of power and control by both sexes, and an increased brutality from white women in comparison to men (Jones-Rogers 2019, xvi, 480-482). Although married women were regulated by coverture laws that regarded them as belonging to their husbands, their whiteness and economic investment in slavery gave them access to more agency by using “legal loopholes” to negotiate these legal impediments (xvii). White slave-owning women’s active involvement in enslavement disrupts the notion of white men’s omnipotent dominance during the antebellum era (xvii).

White women took every measure to ensure their “property” remained intact. In the courtrooms and in their own households, they publicly and privately challenged anyone who attempted to claim ownership of the enslaved people they owned (Jones-Rogers 2019, 46). When others accused them of lying, they presented evidence to the contrary by filing petitions that asserted their rights to the enslaved persons in question. These women supplied documentation of their involvement in the slave markets and beyond. In fact, slaveholding widows had equal legal rights to the white men who had previously owned enslaved people; they became their property (4). Inge Dornan found that many slaveholding women would place ads in the local papers when enslaved people ran away stating they wanted their return, “dead or alive” or “severely flogged” (2005, 386, 402). They took aggressive direct action by asserting their authority over enslaved people in their efforts to retain them. Women also had to appoint trustees for their “property” and when confronted with the decision, they often chose their mothers, aunts, or sisters as trustees rather than their husbands (Jones-Rogers 2019, 47-48). This is an indication that they were unwilling to relinquish control of the enslaved people they owned. These slave-owning women would let no man or court stand in the way of their economic investment in slaveholding.

White women enforced disciplinary techniques that ranged from “kindness to brutality” to ensure their economic investment was profitable, and to maintain their power as white slaveholders (Jones-Rogers 2019, 62). Kristen Wood explains that some former enslaved people “recalled women attacking domestic slaves and children with pokers, irons, brooms, or whatever else came handy” while others remarked that they were “too compassionate or too weak” to beat them (2004, 50). Evidence demonstrates that at times, they would intervene in the beatings of their enslaved people by husbands or overseers (Wood 2004, 51), which may have been an effort to sustain profits lest their enslaved people become unable to work or unsellable in the slave markets (Jones-Rogers 2019, 64). At other times, enslaved people remarked on the special cruelty of their mistresses (Jones-Rogers, 78-79; Wood, 51-52). Like men, women slaveholders likely used extreme methods to punish enslaved people (Dornan 2005, 400; Wood 48). Although brutality that results from disfiguration or murder may seem “counterproductive” for profit, it served as an important method to assert women’s power over enslaved people and in the community at-large (Jones-Rogers, 79). They used force “deliberately and instrumentally” toward enslaved people (Wood, 50). Jones-Rogers explains, “[...] a slave-owning woman’s decisions to abuse, maim, or kill her slaves was simply an ‘extreme version’ of her ‘right to exclude’ others from reaping the benefits of having access to the slaves she herself abused or destroyed” (2019, 79). As a strategy to ensure their dominance, some women forced enslaved people to watch as they tortured the enslaved person. This kind of treatment was within their purview, because slave-owning women had laws that protected them nearly without impunity if they maimed or killed enslaved people.

According to formerly enslaved people, the slave market was not bound by a slave yard, pen, auction house, or road; it was in households and white women were fully engaged. Contrary to previous understandings that framed slave trading as a masculine endeavor, Jones-Rogers documents how white women facilitated the sales, purchases, and exchanges of enslaved people in their homes (2019, 83). The *Georgia Gazette* and the *South Carolina Gazette* had “numerous” ads written by women asking people to purchase their slaves (Dornan 2005, 386). Some chose to employ relatives or

family friends to do this for them, while others chose to directly involve themselves (Jones-Rogers 84-85). Southern white women were intimately familiar with the slave market and used that knowledge to their economic advantage (Jones-Rogers, 100; Wood 2004, 53).

After abolition, former white women slaveowners wrote about their experiences of slavery (Jones-Rogers 2019, 200). They thought of enslavement as a positive force to civilize African “savages” (201). Slavery was part of God’s plan to help these ‘inferior people,’ and white women were simply adhering to his directions. They were immersed in the system of enslavement, so they had to support it. These views reflected their own experiences of slavery, but they did not write about how they economically benefited from it. To justify their involvement in slave trading, they explained that it was a necessary evil, only a last resort, and felt tremendous “anguish” because of it. This largely contradicts the accounts of enslaved people who intimately experienced the detached cruelty of the mistresses who violently beat them and sold them (Jones-Rogers 2019, 201-203).

White women were not passive bystanders within the institution of slavery; they were active participants in it. Through their involvement, they enforced the dominance of whiteness and what it meant to be a woman within the institution of slavery. Although many of them deviated far from the acceptable behavior of a lady at the time, they were able to retain their status within their respective communities. White slave-owning women couched their authority to enslave Black people within the construct of whiteness. They claimed their privileged position by exerting their agency to oppress non-white others deemed as savages. They negotiated—whether through courts, markets, or the privacy of homes—their entitlement to own Black people and commit ruthless acts of violence against them. And when their actions were challenged to be ‘unladylike,’ they constructed a narrative to fit within the confines of femininity. White women were not helpless victims of a sexist society; they strategically used their whiteness and womanhood to establish power within the existing structure of slavery. As slaveowners, white women located themselves as enforcers of white supremacy and the makers of a “whites only” citizenship.

THE FAIR SEX ADVOCATES

Despite powerful and progressive white women of the founding era identifying with the ‘others,’ they mostly asserted their whiteness as superior and as a means to meet their political agendas (Schloesser 2002, 201). They distinguished themselves from black and indigenous women, establishing themselves as the “fair sex,” the markers of civilization (Schloesser 191-192; Newman 1999, 8). White women who subscribed to the fair-sex ideology incurred benefits from the dominant culture that included some political agency, property, and power (Schloesser, 94). Many of the frontrunners were educated and literate; their privileges associated with their race and class (94). Schloesser explains, “Through fair sex ideology, Anglo-American women ‘became white’ [...] because whiteness underwrote women’s middle-class standing and their limited autonomy and authority as ‘civilizing’ beings” (2002, 94). Disrupting fair sex ideology would have meant challenging the racial hierarchy, a risk most were unwilling to take. They chose to challenge gender issues in isolation from race to help facilitate the beginnings of a “whites only” citizenship (Schloesser 2002, 95; Newman 1999, 4-5).

Mercy Warren, Abigail Adams, and Judith Sargent Murray were some of the most prominent women in the founding of the US. They were all well-read, articulated their own views on politics, and participated in debates during the Revolution (Schloesser 2002, 188-189). These women envisioned a world in which rights could have been extended to people of color, but they ultimately signed onto white supremacy. They understood gender inequality to be socially constructed, yet were unwilling to identify racial constructs in a similar vein. Warren argued that women were as rational as men, but she could not assign rationality to Black people (Schloesser 2002, 190). Adams critiqued women’s oppression but stopped condemning slavery. She opposed immigrants’ influence on politics and identified indigenous people as “odd savages” and accepted their genocide (Miller Center 2021; Schloesser, 190). Murray, a fierce advocate for women’s natural rights, was blatant in her white supremacist views. Not only did she economically benefit from her brother’s plantation, but she also feared that enslaved people would negatively impact her nephews’ racial purity (190). Despite their progressive philosophies on women’s rights and citizenship, they ultimately succumbed

to fair sex ideology that upheld both a gender and racial hierarchy during the founding era.

Their acceptance of racial dominance and gender subordination sustained some benefits. The fair sex ideology helped construct “white women as an exclusive group, just as white men were an exclusive group” (Schloesser 2002, 192). Juxtaposed against the masculinized savagery of Black and indigenous women, the fair sex was tender, proper, delicate, and civilized (204-205). Their importance was linked to the oppression of ‘others’: people of color and immigrants (192). Though white women were not accepted as full citizens of the early Republic, they certainly advocated for a racial hierarchy that would mark the beginnings of a ‘whites only’ citizenship for future generations.

THE SUFFRAGISTS OF THE NORTH AND SOUTH

White suffragists of both the North and South knew that uniting themselves under a racist banner would be key to gaining the right to vote. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Carrie Catt among other nineteenth-century women purported that there were essential differences between white men and women, and between whites and people of color (or immigrants) to demonstrate their right to vote (Schloesser 2002, 188; Newman 1999, 60). As the “fairer sex,” they notably argued that white women were peaceable, empathetic, and loving, giving them more capacity to balance out or mitigate the “destructive forces of men” (Schloesser, 188). Although these women voiced support for abolition, they did not identify people of color as equal counterparts. As the ‘civilized’ race, they deserved access to the vote more than the savage uneducated people of color and immigrants. To demonstrate their right to enfranchisement, white women positioned themselves as the arbiters of assimilation for nonwhites (Newman 1999, 56). They would argue both their racial proximity with white men and their racial superiority to people of color.

Most of the early women’s rights and suffrage movements consisted of middle-class, educated, white, native-born women (Davis 2008, 62). As they did not represent the most exploited workers or Black women, their politics reflected a ‘whites only’

approach (129). After the Civil War, Stanton's platform became about distinguishing white women from black men and immigrants. When Frederick Douglass wrote that black male suffrage should come first, she responded by saying that she would not support "ignorant negroes and foreigners" creating laws that would apply to her (Davis 2008, 137). These white suffragists supported the ideology that white women were the "rightful, natural protectors of uncivilized races' whose enfranchisement would not challenge sexual difference and would promote the progress of civilization" (141). This became their specialized racial responsibility: to 'protect' nonwhites; and in doing so, claimed their rights as white, woman, and citizen (Newman 1999, 57). Hence, their combination of education and femininity would supposedly counteract men's destructive nature and people of color's uncivilized nature (Davis 2008, 141).

Many white women outright refused to include Black women as an integral part of suffrage. Alice Paul, President of the National Woman's Party, banned Addie Hunton, a black secretary at the NAACP, from speaking at the National Woman's Party about including suffrage for Black women in 1921 (Newman 1999, 6). Paul argued that black women's enfranchisement should be taken up by racial rights rather than a women's organization. Frances Willard, a prominent suffragist and president of Woman's Christian Temperance Union, insulted Black women as a common method to secure the vote (Fields-White 2011). Similar organizations such as the National Woman's Party and The National American Woman Suffrage Association followed suit. Willard and other suffragists argued that only the literate should be admitted to citizenship and the vote (Giddings 1984, 124), knowing that it would simultaneously eliminate the poor, Black people, and immigrants from the ballot (Davis 2008, 149). Stanton said it "would also be our most effective defense against the ignorant foreign vote" (150). Black women countered by saying that character should be a criterion rather than educational requirements (Giddings 1984, 124). Ida B. Wells, an advocate for black people's suffering and anti-lynching legislation, also challenged white women's exclusive views. She slandered Willard for her racist commentary and questioned white women's detachment from Black people's lives (Fields-White 2011).

White suffragists used their whiteness and femininity as a weapon against Black women and all oppressed groups of the time. They attained suffrage under the guise of a ‘whites only’ citizenship in 1920. As a bargaining chip, they promised to maintain white supremacy in both the North and South (Giddings 1984, 125). The National American Woman Suffrage Association nationally proclaimed, “White women’s vote would give supremacy to the white race” (125). White women willfully excluded Black women and other people of color from the vote for another generation, and the suffrage movement became yet another iteration of white women’s fight to sustain a ‘whites only’ citizenship.

THE SOUTHERN BELLES OF WHITE SORORITIES

Founded in 1902, the National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) desired to represent the epitome of white femininity: the southern belle (Freeman 2020, 2). She was thought to be pious, pure, and physically alluring. From the 1920s to 60s, both nonsouthern and southern sororities held rush parties that were plantation-themed, with costumes, food, and drinks that were supposed to be southern. Sororities practiced a “southern aesthetic” which mythologized the heritage of the South and southern women’s beauty (Freeman 2020, 3). Black people’s experiences of the Old South were either completely erased or created to conform to their imagination. This southern aesthetic practice connected the entire NPC and continues to this day (Freeman 3; Beatty and Boettcher 2019, 39). Margaret Freeman explains, “Nonsouthern sorority leaders simultaneously desired and othered the southern aesthetic as they privately supported segregation, while also pointing to white southerners as the reason they needed to uphold their whites-only membership policies” (Freeman 2020, 3). They discriminated against anyone who did not conform or submit to the epitomized southern belle image. They additionally wrote white clauses in their constitutions to ensure the exclusion of anyone who did not fall under the parameters of whiteness (Harris et al. 2019, 19). The white southern belle was called upon to emphasize racial hierarchies and became a symbol to voice fears about shifting demographics and racial issues (Freeman 2020, 5).

Freeman argues that it is important to explore both southern and nonsouthern areas of the US to provide a framework for use of the southern aesthetic (2020, 3). These historically white organizations created a national network for women's conservative activism. Throughout the 1900s, sororities worked to ensure their members were imbibed with conservative ideology. They relied on the southern belle image to construct a model for American womanhood and trained sorority women to mold themselves after it across the US. Beginning in the 1930s, sorority women aligned with anti-radical conservative thought out of concern for liberal influence and the "destruction of 'American democracy,'" which was racially coded language for white America (Freeman 2020, 3). The NPC sororities were part of a grassroots network that helped to facilitate and grow the conservative movement in the twentieth century and largely continue that trajectory today.

As a response to the civil rights movement, the demographics of college campuses were changing during the 1960s. Desiring to keep NPC sororities as 'whites only,' they reacted by clinging to conservative ideology that proclaimed an anticommunist and a "pro-America" rhetoric (Freeman 2020, 127-128). They cloaked their 'whites only' policy under the political right to individual freedom, freedom of association, and anti-federal government intervention (Freeman 128; Salinas et al. 2019, 30-31). To defend themselves, NPC sororities said their "American way of life" would be attacked if they gave in to liberals and communists (Freeman, 128). Critics of their racial exclusivity were constructed as either "communists" or "communist sympathizers" (129). National officers created citizenship trainings to indoctrinate their members to espouse the "all-American values of individual freedom, private property rights, free enterprise, and adherence to the Christian faith" (142). These programs taught that the southern belle conservative aesthetic and ideology were vital for an upright citizen. Members were told that it was important for them to take an active role in promoting conservatism. Meanwhile, they attempted to downplay their engagement in politics, saying that it was part of their maternal role – another form of caregiving. Their stance was that the federal government was trying to intervene into their homes, an invasion of privacy to include non-white 'others' (Freeman 2020, 129).

According to the sororities, they were the ‘authentic’ American citizens who were pushing back against others’ attempts to destroy democracy (Freeman 2020, 130). White middle- and upper-class women defined themselves by othering those who did not fit NPC sorority membership qualifications: people of color (Freeman, 130; Harris et al. 2019, 18-19). Sorority women felt threatened by anyone who looked ambiguous, different, not a ‘true’ American and began to question potential members about their “backgrounds,” i.e. their whiteness (Freeman, 131). Leaders like Mary Love Collins, a national delegate of an NPC, warned against “racial mixing” as part of a communist plot. Freeman explains, “by linking the continuance of sorority exclusivity to displays of wartime patriotism, the committee paved the way to argue for their ‘right’ to discriminate in membership as a basic American freedom in the 1950s and 1960s” (133). The Citizenship Committee connected the threat of desegregation with American freedom, and reasoned that white power was under attack (146-147).

When there were governmental or other public objections to their ‘whites only’ policy, the NPC termed it “discrimination hysteria” (Freeman 2020, 135). The Supreme Court rulings against racial segregation fostered fear in NPC members that their state and private rights to discriminate were in jeopardy. They encouraged their members to exclude by stating, “Those who have the capacity to discriminate, [...] give quality to what they do” (135). The NPC Public Relations Committee explained further, “the heart of discrimination is not racial but an effort to preserve deeply rooted American freedom” (135). The NPC argued that their right to discriminate and choose their white members was akin to choosing their closest friends; it was a private matter, and a ‘democratic’ government would not intervene. Although sororities have eliminated their explicit ‘whites only’ clauses, there is an implicit policy to exclude all non-white others because most of their members remain white to this day. The NPC sororities solidified their right to exclude based on their southern belle aesthetic as white and feminine (Freeman 2020, 135).

IRISH AND ITALIAN WOMEN

The story of Irish and Italian women's assimilation into whiteness differs from men's experiences. Beginning in the late 1600s, one had to be classified as white and male to be considered a full citizen of the US (DiAngelo 2018, 17; Schloesser 2002). Men of various groups petitioned the courts to be reclassified as white (DiAngelo 2018). The Armenians won their case as white because they had the assistance of scientific witnesses who said they were "Caucasian." However, in 1922, the Japanese could not be legally white because they were classified as "Mongoloid." The court also ruled that Asian Indians were not legally white even though they had been scientifically classified as "Caucasian" (DiAngelo 2018, 17). Many groups from Europe were not readily integrated as white in the US. The Irish were lumped together with Black people and labeled as the "Blacks of Europe." (Tehrani 2000, 825; Battalora 2015, 79). The Italians, Slavs, and Greeks retained a low social status that remained for years (Tehrani 2000, 825). To legitimize the inconsistent outcomes, the Supreme Court proclaimed that "being white was based on the common understanding of the white man [. . .] People already seen as white got to decide who was white" (DiAngelo, 17).

For the racial boundaries that were fluid and blurry, racial determinations were based on the groups' ability to perform whiteness and assimilate (Tehrani, 828). Omi and Winant explain, "Concepts of race prove to be unreliable as supposed boundaries shift, slippages occur, realignments become evident, and new collectivities emerge" (2015, 105). People—both individuals and groups—sought to claim "distinctive racial categories and identities" that challenged classifications of race imposed by the states (105). Irish men became white through their clashing with Black people at work, participating in mobs against abolition, and supporting the pro-enslavement Democratic party (Arnesen 2001, 13; Battalora 2015, 81). They earned whiteness by adopting white supremacy and anti-Black sentiment (Arnesen, 15; Battalora, 83-84). Although granted citizenship much earlier, the Immigration Act contained provisions to ensure the legalization of Irish immigrants as late as 1990 (Portes and Zhou 1993, 86).

Irish women were considered non-white immigrants who were "destitute, brutish, lazy, dirty, uneducated, and immoral." (Phillips-Cunningham 2020, 8). Upon their arrival to the US, Irish women were confined to domestic work associated with

Black women's labor (Phillips-Cunningham, 13; Battalora, 82). Black women's relationship to domestic work is tied to the history of enslavement whereas Irish women, constructed as non-white foreigners who held proximity to blackness, were relegated to domestic labor (Phillips-Cunningham 2020, 13). Domestic service was narrowly conceived as exclusively for non-white others and unacceptable for 'ladies' (13). Working predominantly in northeastern homes of white families, these groups of women were characterized as servants who were more submissive than other groups. Irish women were considered brutish, domineering, and ignorant, and Southern Black women as uncivilized and masculine (Phillips-Cunningham 2020, 14).

Irish women used their race and gender to reframe and assimilate themselves into whiteness. They insisted their right to higher wages and better working conditions based upon the argument that they were subjected to "white slavery" (Phillips-Cunningham 2020, 116). The idea of white slavery stemmed from distinguishing themselves from Black people who were considered inherently inferior and thus did not deserve protection (116). In doing so, Irish women asserted their respectability in comparison to Black women and reconceptualized what it meant to be a lady within the parameters of white womanhood. The term 'lady' had been reserved for middle to upper class white women who were native-born and not earning wages. As women earning an income, they had to relocate themselves and expand the concept of ladyhood and whiteness. To do this, they joined women's groups in white labor unions (117). They published in newsletters attempting to hold employers accountable for their exploitation. Danielle Phillips-Cunningham explains that they used "local newspapers to insert themselves into white respectability by taking to task both male and female employers who complained about Irish servants" (2020, 117). Irish domestic servants closely scrutinized housewives when they did not live up to the expectations of ladyhood, and they expanded the concept of 'lady' to include themselves by judging their employers' actions. Because of the combination of their organizing efforts with white native-born women and their reframing of ladyhood in publications, Irish women were able to assimilate themselves into white womanhood (Phillips-Cunningham 2020, 131).

Although they were deemed white, Italian women were not immediately welcomed into the citizenship privileges of whiteness. Italian immigrants were portrayed as “dark,’ ‘swarthy,’ and ‘kinky-haired’” and as such, situated into a despised group (Guglielmo 2010, 5). Largely immigrating from southern Italy, they were poor peasants and considered “racially suspect” (5). The image of southern Italians was an inferior group fitted for menial labor and criminal activity. At the same time, Italian women were considered whites worthy of saving and reforming. They were positioned as hopeless victims who were heavily oppressed by tradition and the men in their lives (Guglielmo 2010, 3). Other European American female labor activists perpetuated the victim narrative by claiming Italian women’s docility and invisibility in the labor movements (3-4). They were often contrasted with the liberated white middle-class women. However, this ‘victim’ image of southern Italian women became most prominent at the peak of Italian women’s involvement in revolutionary activism.

Jennifer Guglielmo explains that by framing Italian women “as victims in need of rescue, social reformers positioned them as entitled to protection and the rights of citizenship” (105). This image of “needing saving” largely contradicted their substantial activism in some of the most revolutionary social movements that included a belief in anarchy and socialism, and their involvement with labor strikes and industrial unionism (2010, 105). Unlike the stereotype, Italian women were not simply victims; they were predominantly garment workers who stood up to their bosses and demanded legal protection (Guglielmo 2010, 205-206). During 1919 and 1920, police raids against labor activists and radicals increased dramatically. The government sought to completely obliterate anyone they deemed an “anarchist” threat (199-200). Italian women’s paths to organize became incredibly repressed. They learned that their assimilation into the US required abandoning their involvement in social movements and adopting nationalism and anti-blackness (6, 200). Supporting nationalism and antiradicalism became their avenue to the full citizenship privileges of whiteness.

Both Irish and Italian women earned white womanhood through their adoption of white supremacy. They were both despised groups relegated to low wage work. Destructive narratives were constructed about both groups to reinforce their

marginalization. However, the Irish were deemed non-white, and Italians, white. They were differentially situated in their proximity to whiteness. However, both groups strategically achieved the full privileges of whiteness: the Irish through framing themselves as ladies and Italians through dissolving their labor activism and embracing white nationalism. They understood whiteness as a status symbol that granted them access to citizenship in the US among other advantages. They knew that their path to full citizenship was through a 'whites only' politics that hinged on their adherence to the constructs of whiteness and femininity.

SEGREGATIONIST WOMEN

To maintain respectability, middle- and upper-class white women identified their political actions with segregation as an extension of their maternal role (Brückmann 2021, 5). Though they were confined to a domestic role, they justified their public organizing by capitalizing on their identification as housewives. They used their positionality as the "fairer sex," the 'maternal' gender, to advance the cause of school segregation. This maternalistic narrative was a strategy to expand their participation in public protests against equality for all races. White women of every class status legitimized their involvement in grassroots organizing and politics through maternalism (Brückmann 2021, 5). Segregationist women, however, did not limit themselves to politics associated with maternalism. They leveraged their positionality to become active in multiple issues to advocate for a 'whites only' citizenship.

Working-class white women deviated from maternalistic politics and created a state of emergency regarding desegregation after the federal *Brown* ruling (Brückmann 2021, 12-14). They held public protests to incite anger with the conviction that their privileged positionality was rightfully theirs (12-14). Integration threatened the 'whites only' way of life and they cultivated support from white elites to loudly assert their claim to white power. This strong reaction to *Brown* in 1954 marked the beginnings of white women's massive resistance. Theirs was a method of public agitation, using their bodies to fill the streets and elevate the 'crisis.' However, their public protests waned and middle- to upper-class white women's maternalistic methods outlasted theirs.

Southern white women became motivated by suffrage and showed up in high numbers at the polls (McRae 2018, 61-62). They upheld their end of the bargain to maintain white supremacy in their support of segregation. Elections gave them access to organize around social issues that ultimately structured a segregated south (62). They built local and national networks around a colorblind narrative that promulgated strict immigration policies and, states' rights, slandered the New Deal, opposed anti-lynching legislation, and urged states to reject federal paths into social welfare and election reform (McRae 2018, 83-84). White women segregationists did everything in their power to prevent their communities from being touched by any of the shifting national politics that might threaten segregation.

Although segregationist women participated heavily in electoral politics, their white supremacist grassroots efforts were multifaceted (McRae 2018, 136). White women lived and breathed segregation in their homes, schools, hospitals, and workplaces. These spaces are where their 'whites only' privilege and power would be felt, and they knew their daily practice of exclusion was starting to crumble. Fearing their loss of support from the Democratic party, they elevated the narrative. Supposedly, communism was now an imminent threat, soldiers' votes would compromise states' autonomy in elections, and white women would suffer from black men's sexualization of their bodies. Segregationist women challenged every shift, change, or agenda that would potentially threaten whites' control of everything and every person of color around them. Their massive resistance to what they deemed an unconstitutional federal intervention and an infringement upon states' rights gained traction, and ultimately appealed to those political organizations that prioritized white people. Their strategy was successful due to their facilitation of nation-wide networks through building connections with conservative organizations.

Segregationist women used politics to eliminate challenges that posed threats to the racial hierarchy. They maintained that "separate but equal" was a fair system for inferior non-white 'others.' Southern white women violently fought to uphold Jim Crow laws that excluded people of color from citizenship by organizing rallies, protests, and creating conservative anti-integration networks across the US. They gave massive

resistance a national platform (McRae 2018, 137). They created a metaphorical stage that reached beyond the South by framing integration as an attack on the Constitution, something that necessitated the activism of every white citizen (Brückmann 2021, 162). To lose segregation would mean that the ‘whites only’ privileges of a full citizen—preferential treatment and adequate medical care, education, transportation, jobs, parks, stores—would be opened up to the ‘savages’ and foreigners. Segregationist women would not let that happen. To prevent integration, white women positioned themselves as the maternal protectors of a white supremacist society.

TRADWIVES, MOMMY VLOGGERS, AND TRUMPETTES’ CLOAKED WHITENESS

In light of the above, it should be no surprise that white women are the backbone of today’s white nationalist movement. Tradwives, Mommy Vloggers, Trumpettes, and other white women’s groups are the hidden movers of today’s white supremacist politics. They cloak their racism in colorblindness—values, ideologies, classifications—that serves to reify and elevate alt-right views to sustain a ‘whites only’ white supremacist citizenship within US institutions (Anderson 2021, 5). Because white women have been historically excluded from formal politics, they employ online spaces as their digital platforms to signal whiteness and coded racism (13-14). Appropriating terms from the Civil Rights Movement, they use terms like “freedom of speech,” “diversity,” and “American” to hide their racist ideology (18). Their online presence has largely contributed to the mobilization of the white nationalist movement.

Like their white supremacist foremothers, contemporary white nationalist women employ a maternal ‘feminism’ that emphasizes their individual choice to confine themselves to domesticity. As mothers who are dedicated to preserving whiteness, they have the privilege of choosing the right white person and producing white babies as part of their maternal role. Their goal is to marry a white man and have white children (Anderson 2021, 111-112). By adhering to maternal ‘feminism,’ they establish themselves as “mothers of the movement” (112). However, the feminism they espouse does nothing to dismantle power structures. Instead, they use their individualistic feminism, ‘white’ mothering, and internalized sexism as a way to reinforce white supremacist structures.

Within the confines of maternal ‘feminism,’ white women bestow some power and assurance of protection, but their gender oppression is completely dismissed. According to Wendy Anderson, white men are the knights in shining armor and white women are the “shield maidens” with some agency that serve to “soften and normalize” a ‘whites only’ citizenship (2021, 19; Love 2020, 2).

Some white nationalist women are calling themselves traditionalists who claim to access their limited agency and power within traditionalism (Anderson 2021, 115). Although they appear similar to maternal feminists, they have tried to create some ideological difference between themselves and anyone who associates with the word “feminism,” Black Lives Matter, socialism, Marxism, or anything that is deemed destructive to the nuclear family. These mommy vloggers and tradwives have cropped up on social media within the past few years. They purport that being a good housewife—having kids, being subservient to their husbands, being at home—is the epitome of what’s defined as a traditional wife (Kelly 2018). They post pictures of themselves in dresses, heels, and red lips. They post recipes and beauty advice, but interwoven throughout those seemingly innocuous pics are strains of white nationalism. To disguise their authoritarian ideology, they exude white femininity, giving a “friendly face” to the white nationalist movement (Christou 2020). Like many other white women throughout history, they use their ideological location—as white and feminine—as a means to maintain a ‘whites only’ citizenship that excludes people of color.

CONCLUSION

White women—north, south, liberal, conservative, Italian, Irish, poor, wealthy—strategized to maintain a ‘whites only’ citizenship that subscribed to white supremacist ideology. Since the 18th century, they have reasoned that their whiteness makes them superior to all other races. White women’s articulation of identity hinged upon the dominance and exclusion of people of color. Using Black women as the benchmark and antithesis of white womanhood, they argued that their identity was well-suited for white power and privilege. After all, they are the epitome of whiteness and femininity.

Christina Cavener |

They are the “fairer sex,” the educated, civilized, maternal ladies. They ‘deserved’ more agency than the non-white others they sought to exclude and dominate.

White women in various spaces and times demonstrated their shared belief in the importance of every day white supremacy. As Rebecca Brückmann eloquently observes, the understanding of “white people’s essential superiority, and spatialized power, resting on the assumption that all spaces, public and private, physical and social” belong to white people and people of color are intruders, is a basis for understanding the depths of white women’s uniting for a ‘whites only’ citizenship (2021, 15). White women positioned their whiteness and femininity as legitimate grounds from which to enforce white supremacy. From the fair sex advocates to the tradwives, they built networks and campaigned for white supremacy with letter writing, protests and rallies, publications, and citizenship training programs. They used every avenue possible to ensure their dominance for generations to come. They were largely successful. To this day, behind every campaign to maintain white supremacy, is a white woman in heels, red lipstick, and a smile organizing for a ‘whites only’ citizenship.

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Christina Cavener |

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