Abstract

Issues of The Atlanta Constitution newspaper in January 1913 made women’s place in society remarkably clear. Ads, articles, and “help wanted” sections all illustrated that women held a less powerful place in society than men. Women’s rights were limited by the roles they were expected to play in society. Society encouraged women to get married, stay in the home, perform the roles of housewife and mother, and organize their lives around men. The overall environment women lived in depicted men in the center and women at the periphery. A plethora of articles taught women the best ways to attract men, encouraged them to value beauty above everything else, and demonstrated that society in 1913 truly was “a man’s world.” Naturally, not all women accepted this, which led to the Women’s Suffrage movement and less recognized forms of resistance. The world of women was changing in 1913 as women pushed back against the confines of their social roles and redefined their place in society. This research paper will analyze issues of The Atlanta Constitution from January 1913 in order to show women’s role in society at the time and how some women worked to redefine it.
A Woman’s Role in 1913:
The Role of Fashion, Marriage, and the Woman’s Suffrage Movement
In Demonstrating Female Rights

Issues of *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper for January 1913 made the place of women in society remarkably clear. Ads, articles, and “help wanted” sections all illustrated that women held a less powerful place in society than men. Women’s rights were limited by the roles they were expected to play in society. Society encouraged women to get married, stay in the home, perform the roles of housewife and mother, and organize their lives around men. The overall environment women lived in depicted men in the center and women at the periphery. A plethora of articles taught women the best ways to attract men, encouraged them to value beauty above everything else, and demonstrated that society in 1913 truly was “a man’s world.” Naturally, not all women accepted this, which led to the Women’s Suffrage movement and less recognized forms of resistance. The world of women was changing in 1913 as women pushed back against the confines of their social roles and redefined their place in society. *The Atlanta Constitution* in January of 1913 shows women’s role in society at the time and how some women worked to redefine it.

In analyzing *The Atlanta Constitution*, the contrast between female and male power was clearly defined. It was evident that men held a more dominant political position in society. Most of the articles in *The Atlanta Constitution* were about men, especially those involving politics or conventionally “powerful” roles. The gendered societal roles were emphasized in a wedding article that said “Mrs. Floyd is… much admired for her sweet and charming personality and Mr.
Floyd is a rising young business man of Atlanta.\textsuperscript{1} This was an overarching theme throughout the newspapers, as men’s intelligence and business was emphasized and almost every woman was labeled as simply “pretty.” The different societal roles and power structure were further emphasized by descriptions of the deceased in obituaries. In a man’s obituary his job was identified, and the contributions he gave to society were dwelled on. In most women’s mortuaries, only their children were listed. This shows the power differential between men and women in 1913. Many men wanted to retain the separation of women from political power. In response to a bill that would allow women to participate in jury duty, Atlanta Senator Williams retorted, “I should hate to see the time come when my wife or my daughter would be chosen for service on a mixed jury.”\textsuperscript{2} Articles throughout the paper made it clear that many men did not want the society they lived in to change. They did not want to give political power to women.

However, women’s role was evolving in 1913, as females fought against societal confines. In 1913, women were actively fighting against one of the most obvious limitations to women’s rights, the fact that women could not vote. Several women participated in the Women’s Suffrage movement, and fought tirelessly for greater political power. They participated in suffrage parades, strikes, and protests. In one instance, 500 women on strike even attacked the police to show how dedicated they were to their cause.\textsuperscript{3} After the government in Atlanta tried to remove a suffrage bill from the legislature, women suffragists struck back. They smashed the windows of the courthouse and grappled with police. The police arrested them and gave them all fourteen-day prison sentences. They agreed to release the women if they would each pay a $10

\textsuperscript{1} "Johnson-Floyd." \textit{The Atlanta Constitution} [Atlanta, GA] 2 Jan. 1913: 8. Print.
\textsuperscript{2} "Women Like Cocktails and Also High Balls." \textit{The Atlanta Constitution} [Atlanta, GA] 27 Jan. 1913: 7. Print.
fine. Most of the thirty-three women arrested refused to pay the fine and threatened to throw a hunger strike. When the fine for one of the leaders was anonymously paid, she was released from prison. Far from rejoicing, she said, “whoever paid that fine was no friend of mine. But I am going out to fight again.”4 Like other suffragists, she was dedicated to achieving greater political power for women.

Along with these strikes and protests, women suffragettes participated in several suffrage parades during January 1913. One parade showed the evolution of women’s roles over time. The women organizing it wanted to point out that women were now involved in all other primary roles in society—they were only barred from government. The parade contained several floats depicting how women had entered other sectors barred from women in the past. The first parade float contained men and women working in a field, the second showed both sexes laboring on farms, the third showed them both as home-makers, and the fourth showed how they were both involved in war. It is important to note, however, that there was still a societal distinction regarding the role of women on the war float. On the float, there were soldiers, who were men, and nurses, who were women. There was no mixing of these roles. The fifth float showed men and women in college, the sixth consisted of men and women lawyers, and the seventh contained men and women doctors. The very last float was supposed to be what society had not reached yet, but was evolving to. It was the “ideal government car,” in which men and women of the future held equal roles in politics.5


However, there were forces opposing the expansion of women’s political power. There were suffrage opposition groups composed of women, and several composed of men. Both spoke out publicly on a regular basis. One woman said that voting was one of the few things men could do without woman, so they should let them do it.\(^6\) Others were not completely committed to halting suffrage specifically, but advocated that women move slower. One man said that women should not focus on involvement in the law or medicine, but should shoot for lower goals initially. He specifically suggested they manage hotels or design the interior of homes, as these occupations were more within a woman’s skill set.\(^7\) These attitudes illustrate how deeply ingrained people’s visions of men and women’s societal roles were. Despite these attitudes, women persisted. The dedication of women suffragettes helped to change the boundaries of women’s political rights. Their persistence helped lead to a resolution introduced in North Carolina that called for suffrage,\(^8\) and suffrage bills that passed in New York, Iowa, and Montana.\(^9\)

Through the Suffrage Movement, women worked to redefine a woman’s “natural” position in society.

Another societal power distinction women worked to change was the idea that a woman’s role in society was defined by her husband. Throughout the newspapers, women were constantly identified by their husbands. A lady would give up her name at marriage and become, for example, “Mrs. John Dashwood.” In almost all cases, a woman’s name was immediately followed by her husband’s name. An article about Mrs. S. W Wilkes said, “Mrs. S W Wilkes,

\(^6\) “If Man Can Do Anything Without Aid of Woman, For Goodness Sake, Let Him Go On and Do It!” *The Atlanta Constitution* [Atlanta, GA] 19 Jan. 1913: 2-M. Print.


wife of Colonel S W Wilkes…” Another article stated that “[the bride] inherits brilliancy and wit from both sides of the family; her father, the late Eugene Spalding, was a prominent and highly esteemed citizen, while her mother was distinguished in motherly charm, being the only daughter of the Hon. Henry Hilliard, soldier, scholar, and diplomat, and one of the most noted men in the south of his day.” In this article, as in several others, the focus was on men. The bride’s name was not even given until the very end of the piece. She was identified by men before she was identified by herself, her name. Men were not identified by their wives in the same way. This shows women’s lack of power and how society tried to make them dependent on men.

Some women resisted this, of course. They stepped outside the bounds of what women were supposed to do by themselves. One woman not only worked on her own farm, she managed a plantation of 7,000 acres. The article stated, “this is a day when women are taking a larger share in the affairs of life and are stepping into professions and businesses that a few years ago were only open to men.” This women’s involvement in farming was completely new. Like women suffragists, she was forging a new path for women of the future. Women also become involved in politics, one of the greatest sectors from which they were barred. Several women started a Women’s National Democratic League, and a woman was elected as the City Controller. This was the first time a woman was ever appointed to this powerful position. This


same year, Tennessee public school officers also elected their first woman president. Miss Mary Williams. In achieving these powerful roles, women made a name for themselves. The women who adopted these new roles were never labeled by who their husbands, fathers, or brothers were.

As society tried to keep women out of certain spheres and jobs in 1913, it also attempted to keep women in very narrowly defined roles in society. Basically, it tried to keep women in the home. A woman was supposed to make a comfortable home for her husband. The majority of the articles in *The Atlanta Constitution* produced the impression that women were meant to stay in the home because this was their “natural” role. In response to an advertisement for women stenographers in the Philippines, the “Society” section of the paper wrote “at the very moment when individuals…are striving to keep women from entering fields of labor, unless they have to go into them, trying to keep women at home unless they have to go out of them to get bread, the government urges them to leave the home even when they have become wives, or have prospects in that direction.” They were encouraged to stay in the home. In this way, society tried to control and limit women’s freedom and power.

Within the home women fulfilled three primary roles. These were the roles of housewife, cook, and mother. A woman’s role included throwing social events, often for her husband’s benefit. Even when it was a private gathering between women, it was usually held inside the woman’s home. In the “Society” section of the paper, there was a list of all recent past and future

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social engagements. With a title like “Miss Jenkins Entertains”\textsuperscript{17} or “Miss Levin’s Eggnog Party,”\textsuperscript{18} elaborate descriptions of the party were given. The women’s outfits were described in great detail, as were the flower arrangements, and all of the women were labeled as “pretty.” In this way, women’s were objectified and encouraged to stay inside the home.

In a similar way, advertisements in \textit{The Atlanta Constitution} frequently offered women jobs as housekeepers. The only other job offered to women was being a stenographer. Men, on the other hand, were desired as railroad clerks, businessmen, and detectives. The newspapers actually labeled one section “Wanted: Male Help,” and the other “Wanted: Situation Female.”\textsuperscript{19} Along with relegating men and women to different jobs, the way this distinction was worded suggested that only men could help. The phrase “Situation Female” seemed to suggest that the employer was helping out the woman, especially when contrasted with the phrase “Wanted: Male Help.” Advertisements also helped to perpetuate the idea that women were naturally meant to be inside the home. Advertisements about new cleaning products always depicted a woman, as did sales pitches for new cooking products or food. Tip-Top bread sales campaigns in particular were always targeted at the female. In regards to a woman’s role as a cook, one advertisement depicted a woman saying “between you and me, tip-top bread is better than my own baking.”\textsuperscript{20} Another sales article said “the average housekeeper may not be a chemistry specialist, but it’s a

\textsuperscript{17} “Miss Jenkins Entertains.” \textit{The Atlanta Constitution} [Atlanta, GA] 1 Jan. 1913: 6. Print.


million molecules to amic picture that she can tell you when she gets hold of a good flour.”

Here again, the distinction of women inside the home was made clear.

While a woman’s role was tied to being a housewife and a cook, her role as a mother was primarily emphasized in *The Atlanta Constitution*. In 1913 society, a woman’s social identity was centered on being a mother. Her obituary was filled with the names of her children, and advertisements for new food products or infant formulas were directed at the female. Articles selling Tip-Top bread were particularly adamant about this. Their sales campaigns were always targeted at the female. One advertisement advocated that “children are great eaters of bread… that’s why you should be careful, mothers, to feed them only the best bread [Tip-Top bread].”

In another ad, one woman celebrated a new medicine because it allowed her to fulfill her “natural” roles as a wife and mother once again.

Of course, some women resisted the idea that these were women’s natural roles and that the home was their natural habitat. Women often used the newspaper as an outlet to resist the role they were supposed to play in society. When she felt the newspaper did not adequately cover news on the woman’s suffrage movement, one woman remarked that it was because there was so much space dedicated to describing women in the home. By this, she was referring to the vast amounts of space dedicated to describing social engagements that kept women occupied in the home. In response to Senator W. Bailey’s comment opposing woman’s suffrage, one woman sarcastically wrote “the trouble is the pedestal [that men place women on] is so squat sometimes
that women do not have any trouble about the distance to come down.”

Women redefined their roles by serving in places of power and leadership, such as City Controller or the President of the Tennessee Teachers group.

While society attempted to keep women out of certain social spheres, it also limited women’s rights in more basic ways. One of these was the right to expression. Fashion controlled the costumes of the time, and advocated outfits that were physically painful to women. Corsets created a tiny waistline that was seen as “desirable” in society. In order to achieve a smaller waistline, women frequently laced themselves into insensibility. To faint from its effect, then, was “an essentially ladylike act.” In order to conform to Atlanta society at this time, immigrant Chinese women were forced to quit the trousers they wore in their home country and wear skirts instead. The change from trousers to skirts represented much more than just a clothing exchange and limitation of expression. It represented an actual physical change in power and dependence.

The assumption that all American women were obsessed with fashion also played a role in defining a woman’s “place” in society. Starting on January 19, there was a “Woman’s Section” of The Atlanta Constitution dedicated to fashion. An advertisement for the new section said “in Sunday’s constitution will be inaugurated a feature which will strongly appeal to every

woman. This new feature will consist of a supplement containing articles on fashions and other subjects dear to a woman’s heart.” Throughout the paper, the reason why women should be so interested in fashion was made clear. Fashion was a way to emphasize beauty, and beauty was the way to win a man’s heart. To these ends, The Atlanta Constitution often offered beauty tips about how to appeal to men’s desires. The advice ranged from ways to double hair beauty to using one’s eyes on men to methods to obtain perfect hair and teeth. One advertisement even said that “[a woman’s bust was her] chief charm, her most wonderful fascination, nature’s greatest gift” and urged women to “write today for [the] newest treatment and develop [their] bust quickly.” In contrast, advertisements for men’s clothes focused on intelligence more than appearance. One advertisement appealed to men by selling “clever shoes for men.” While men had more freedom, a women’s societal role in 1913 was supposed to be focused around men.

Naturally, not all women followed these parameters of fashion and power. A young woman in “New York City headed the suffrage parade down 5th avenue, riding cross saddle… her hat was that kind that men wear; her collar was stiff, and she wore top boots and carried her riding crop w/ truly masculine grace.” She opposed the societal constraints imposed on women and the obsession with female beauty by dressing as a man. This was revolutionary. However,

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even during the Woman’s Suffrage movement, many women were still instructed to appeal to men’s interests. This illustrates how far the inherent differences and definition of “female” in society penetrated. The definition of “beauty” and “femininity” seemed synonymous in several articles. Even woman suffragettes were told to “be just as feminine as you know how [when asking for votes]. Wear frilly clothes and becoming hats, and earrings so as not to look too strong-minded.” They were instructed to use fashion to look as attractive as possible, to stay a short time on suffrage calls, and to leave the men wishing they had stayed longer. Whether or not this was an effective strategy, it shows that society valued women for their physical features, and instructed them to use these when they wanted something. This led to, or at least continued, the fact that women were seen as material objects.

Inez Borrero was a Weber-Field girl, part of a traveling company of conventionally beautiful women. The owners of the company said she was the “finest specimen [they had] in captivity” and labeled her as “Exhibit A.” This of course, was like a zoo of women—they were almost like animals, in this case. Senator Joseph W. Bailey took a different route in saying, “I cannot understand how any woman wants to step down from the high pedestal upon which man has place her to mingle in the broils and baucheries of politics.” His statement received tumultuous applause even though it depicted women as a kind of China Doll to be put on a shelf and admired occasionally, but never to be seriously listened to.


This followed the 1913 vision that women were weak, easily breakable. Several men advocated that women should have better working conditions simply because they were women. While better working conditions would have been for all of the workers, specifically targeting women reflected and maintained the culturally held belief that women were inferior to men. Men wrote that politicians and bosses should be forced to look after increased comfort of city’s wage-earning women.\footnote{42} During civil unrest in Mexico, women were ordered to flee the country and return to the United States. Men were not ordered to leave, but children were.\footnote{43} 1913 society seemed to believe in women’s physical weakness. Women contested this as well. There were articles about a woman boxer, and a woman who chased down a thief because she was not willing to wait for a male police officer.\footnote{44} She was strong enough to get her purse back from the thief.

In the same way that society believed in a physically “weak” woman, they insisted that women were not as intelligent as men. Instead of being valued for their intelligence, they were valued for their beauty. Women were not expected to go to school; they were expected to get married. In The Atlanta Constitution’s Sunday “Social Realm” section, all of the articles were about engagements or how women entertained inside the home.\footnote{45} Miss Marie Cuming was a freshman at Agnes Scott College when she left school to get married. She talked about marriage like it was her goal. Society seemed to agree that this was the right place for her. The article said “at the same time Miss Cuming became a member of the class of ’16 at Agnes Scott, and began


\footnote{44} "Mrs. Thomas Lathan Chases Negro Thief." The Atlanta Constitution [Atlanta, GA] 5 Jan. 1913: 7-B. Print.

\footnote{45} "In Atlanta’s Social Realm: News of Interest to Women." The Atlanta Constitution [Atlanta, GA] 5 Jan. 1913: 2-M. Print.
to trouble her head over trigonometry and such like, [Mr. Featherstone came to Atlanta and they got married].”[^46] Here again, she was valued because she was “pretty.” In the way they described her attempts at learning, they devalued her intelligence. Even when a new woman’s college was created, it was advertised as “having been adapted to the needs of women…”[^47] Women suffragettes were described as “pretty” or “comely.”[^48] They were admired for their physical appearance, and rarely for spirit or intelligence. Through articles titled “Pequod Indian Finds Ideal in Pretty Atlanta Pride”[^49] and “Pretty Alabama Bride Won by Chief Yoeman”[^50] the idea that men saw women as “pretty” prizes to be won, and not as intelligent human beings, was really driven home.

Women in 1913 were beginning to change this, however. By entering fields like law and medicine, women gradually gained more respect. One woman in particular served as an example of this. Miss American gained political power through advocating immigration reform. She became a widely recognized figure throughout the male-dominated political world. By working with her, many men came to acknowledge her intelligence and talents even though she was a woman. Even “Theodore Roosevelt said that he wished that women were eligible to positions in the President’s Cabinet so [he could] appoint Miss American.”[^51] She espoused the idea that men needed women in the great affairs of the world in order to gain different perspectives,


imaginative minds, and sense of purpose. Her sense of purpose, her dedication and involvement in politics, helped create a new respect for women in power.

In Atlanta in 1913, women’s roles were clearly defined. They were supposed to stay in the home, take care of the children, cook, and clean for their husbands. They were not supposed to adopt powerful roles in their world or to step out of confines that society had created for them. They were marginalized by constricting clothes, and were instructed to appeal to men through beauty. Their physical strength and intelligence was devalued in several ways. Men were depicted as the center of the world, and women were on the side. In order to change women’s roles, women had to fight against deeply ingrained societal beliefs about what a woman’s “natural” role was. Several women did push against these confines, however, and forged a new way forward for women in society by adopting unconventional jobs, using the newspapers as an outlet, conducting strikes, and leading the Woman’s Suffrage Movement.
Bibliography


"Girls! Girls! Surely Try This! Double the Beauty of Your Hair!" *The Atlanta Constitution* [Atlanta, GA] 12 Jan. 1913: 9-M. Print.


