A Passion for Politics: Esther Griffin White's
Role in Indiana Politics, 1912-1938

HONRS 499

by

Kristin Stout

Thesis Advisor
Kim L. Jones-Owen, Ph.D.

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 2005

Graduation Date May 7, 2005
Abstract

While she was a key figure in the cultural and intellectual atmosphere of Richmond, Indiana, Esther Griffin White’s zeal for Indiana politics remained consistent throughout most of her life. Not only did she break through gender barriers to advance her own political career, but also she continually combated political candidates and organizations that threatened the political rights of all women. In the 1920s, White became the first woman in Indiana to run for political office, to become Delegate to the Republican State Convention, to attempt a mayoral race, and to campaign for a seat in the House of Representatives. Despite her vital role in Indiana politics, White faced numerous roadblocks to her politically motivated messages. Until now, her legacy of political reform was hidden by lack of and/or misinformation in recent historical scholarship. Through her involvement in the women’s suffrage movement and her political campaigns, it is evident that Esther Griffin White greatly contributed to the political climate of Richmond and the state of Indiana, and her achievements paved the way for Indiana women of today to express themselves politically.
Acknowledgements

- I have to thank Dr. Kim Jones-Owen for advising me through this project and through my entire Ball State experience. I hate to think what my college career would have been like without her guidance and support.

- I want to thank Dr. Ron Morris for his advice regarding my thesis and for creating and overseeing the Traces and Trails: Intersections of Wayne County seminar at the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry. The research I conducted for Traces and Trails allowed me to stumble upon the fascinating life of Esther Griffin White.

- I would also like to thank Dr. Colleen Boyd for her input regarding the direction of my research project. I survived this thesis and my last semester because of her patience and encouragement.

- Thanks to Dr. Ellen Thorington, I was able to maintain my sanity throughout the completion of this thesis. She suggested books and strategies and offered words of support to help me through this challenging time.

- I must also thank Dr. Thomas Hamm and Michelle Riggs at the Earlham College Friends Collection for their research assistance. I spent basically the entire week of Spring Break 2005 combing through the Esther Griffin White Papers, and they were exceptionally tolerant and accommodating.
"White, whose creative instincts and bohemian temperament were better suited to the arts than to politics, left a more valuable legacy through her cultural pursuits than through her political activities."¹ George T. Blakey, Professor Emeritus of History at Indiana University-East in Richmond, Indiana, wrote the above statement to introduce Esther Griffin White's work as an art collector in Richmond, Indiana. Ironically, Blakey's dismissive words immediately follow several pages detailing her political activities. While Esther Griffin White contributed to numerous facets of the Richmond community, including the cultural climate of the area, it is impossible to ignore her political achievements, which opened the door for women in politics in the Richmond area and the entire state of Indiana. In The Little Paper, a newspaper written and edited by Esther Griffin White, she proclaimed that, for her, art took a backseat to politics. In a reference to an art center in the "Paragraphs" section of The Little Paper, she stated, "If the women of this famed art center would take as much interest in suffrage . . . we'd all be voting next year."² Unintentionally, Dr. Blakey's comment aims to negate the groundwork she laid for


² Esther Griffin White, "Paragraphs," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 13 November 1915, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.
women in Indiana politics. While this is the most recent attempt to silence her politically, it is not the first time by any means. Throughout her 26 years of political action in Indiana, those who opposed her views strove to discredit her and limit her media exposure. Despite numerous efforts to stifle her political voice, Esther Griffin White’s legacy in Indiana politics and the campaign for women’s suffrage refuses to remain silent.

Born and raised in Richmond, Indiana, Esther Griffin White contributed to the intellectual and political development of the Wayne County area. She achieved numerous feats in her life. White was an accomplished writer, a diligent art collector, a bold journalist, and an active politician. Since White (see Fig. 1) came from a prominent Quaker family, her political views were extremely influenced by her Quaker background and beliefs. She was opposed to militarism, war, and national segregation. Also, she supported movements of international good will. Many

---


4 Photo of Esther Griffin White, Late 19th Century, File I.6, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

5 Esther Griffin White to Editor of American Friend (Richmond, IN), April 1926, File VI.6, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.
of her newspaper articles are laced with these political principles.

As early as the 1910s, Esther Griffin White became heavily involved in the women's suffrage movement in Indiana in an effort to combat the political silencing of Indiana women. In 1916, she became the Sixth District Chairman and the Chairman of the Publicity Committee for the Indiana Woman's Franchise League.⁶ According to White, the Indiana Woman's Franchise League, which was a branch of the National American Woman

---

⁶ Esther Griffin White, “Indiana Suffragists Bury Differences And Get After The Coin,” Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 12 May 1916, Esther Griffin White Collection, Wayne County Historical Museum, Richmond, IN.; Esther Griffin White, “Train Your Optics on the Claypool Next Week When the Suffragists Meet in State Conclave,” Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 8 April 1916, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.
Suffrage Association, was "... the dominant organization of its character in Indiana ... to concentrate all the suffrage activities of the state into one channel." She further insisted the organization was founded and existed for the sole objective of obtaining women's right to vote. While the Indiana Woman's Franchise League was founded in 1911, its membership had reached 3,000 women by 1916. She truly believed in the organization's power to bring about suffrage for women and felt that it had "... put suffrage on the map in Indiana." At a 1916 G.O.P. convention in Chicago, Illinois, Esther Griffin White was one of several thousand women to march seven miles in the rain to call for Republican support of the women's suffrage amendment. In

---

7 Ibid.; Esther Griffin White, "Women Organizing Sixth District for Suffrage Campaign," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 13 November 1915, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

8 Esther Griffin White, "State Convention of Woman's Franchise League in Indianapolis in April," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 26 February 1916, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

9 Esther Griffin White, "'Rule or Ruin' The Policy of the Stimson Faction in the Franchise League," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 24 June 1916, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

10 Esther Griffin White, "Paragraphs," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 17 June 1916, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.; Thornburg, 12.
the June 17, 1916 edition of The Little Paper, White wrote the following detailed account of the event:

"The women didn't want to vote anyway," wound up a representative of the Anti-Suffragists in a speech before the resolutions committee of the G.O.P. convention. Just then the doors burst open and five thousand drenched women who had marched to the Coliseum through one of the worst storms of the season on the lake front filed in. And the Resolutions Committee laughed.11

While these are valiant strides toward women's suffrage, her efforts did not end there.

Through her work as a journalist, White sought to promote the cause of suffrage. By 1912, her journalistic endeavors had turned increasingly political.12 She began using The Little Paper as a platform for announcing suffrage speakers and events in Indiana, including Indianapolis, Indiana's visit from Carrie Chapman Catt, President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, for the Woman's Franchise League of Indiana Conference.13 With her articles, White also started to draw


12 Blakey, 291.

13 Esther Griffin White, "County Suffrage Convention in This City Feb. 19," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 5 February 1916, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.; Esther Griffin White, Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 17 April 1915, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.; Esther Griffin White, "Suffrage Fuses To Be Lighted In Indianapolis Next Week," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 17 June 1916, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.;
attention to steps toward and setbacks to achieving women's suffrage. One highly publicized obstacle was that Indiana was one of only three or four U.S. states in 1916 without any form of suffrage for women. Among strides mentioned were Republican candidates who were nominated and elected despite their favorable position on suffrage and U.S. states that achieved full or limited suffrage for women. When the national Republican platform finally indorsed women's suffrage in June 1916, White explained, "The fact that these women voters would . . . be able to swing the result of an election one way or the other, began to dawn on the Republican politicians. And that's why the Republican platform went on record as in favor of suffrage for women." On July 8, 1916, she posted the Susan B. Anthony Amendment, what would later be known as the Nineteenth

---

14 White, "Train Your Optics."

15 Esther Griffin White, "Paragraphs," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 11 March 1916, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.; 8 April 1916 Dark Red Cover.

16 Esther Griffin White, "Pouring Precipitation Gave Suffrage Parade Publicity," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 17 June 1916, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.
Amendment, on The Little Paper's front page for all to see. Written by Susan B. Anthony in 1873 and first introduced to the U.S. Senate in 1878, the amendment was not ratified until August 18, 1920. White decided that the Senate dragging its feet regarding the issue for roughly 40 years was particularly excessive. Therefore, she took it upon herself to entice others to consider the amendment.

While The Little Paper insisted it was not a politically driven publication, many articles were obviously politically motivated. As Editor of The Little Paper, Esther Griffin White supported acts in favor of women's suffrage and opposed all political actions and candidates that were in opposition to a

17 Esther Griffin White, "Text of Susan B. Anthony Amendment," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 8 July 1916, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

18 "Suffrage History in U.S.,” c. 1919, File VI.2, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.


20 Esther Griffin White, "Here's the Man I'd Vote For If I Could Frank T. Strayer," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 26 February 1916, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.; Esther Griffin White, "Paragraphs," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 12 February 1916, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.
woman's right to vote. In *The Little Paper* dated April 1, 1916, White affirmed, "... the Little Paper is for universal, equal, nation-wide suffrage, and expects to do everything within its power to defeat any candidate of any party who openly, or by implication, declares himself against suffrage." She also encouraged Indiana women to utilize their political influence despite their lack of suffrage. "... Whether or not women can vote they have as decided political leanings as the men," declared White in an article on June 17, 1912. On June 3, 1916, she used her editorial position at *The Little Paper* to call upon Indiana suffragists "... to interrogate local members of the Legislature of ... all parties as to their position on suffrage." Then, she pushed for all suffragists to resist any Indiana candidate who responded against women's

---

21 Esther Griffin White, "Intemperate Temperance Reformers Again Defeat Nation-Wide Woman Suffrage," *Little Paper* (Richmond, IN), 1 April 1916, in *The Little Paper* (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

22 Esther Griffin White, "Women Like Roosevelt," *Richmond Palladium* (Richmond, IN), 17 June 1912, File VI.2, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

23 Esther Griffin White, "We'll Show the Politicians We're Sitting Up and Taking Violent Notice," *Little Paper* (Richmond, IN), 3 June 1916, Esther Griffin White Collection, Wayne County Historical Museum, Richmond, IN.
suffrage.24 Despite her claims that The Little Paper was not driven or influenced by politics, obviously her political leanings leaked into her articles.

White also informed the Richmond community of the two main national women's suffrage organizations and how the division of suffragists blockaded women from gaining national suffrage. The two "great" national suffrage organizations, the National American Woman Suffrage Association and the Congressional Union, believed in different methods to attain nationwide women's suffrage.25 While the National American Woman Suffrage Association did not believe in rivaling or allying with any particular political party to achieve the vote, the Congressional Union strongly combated the Democratic Party because of its lack of support for women's suffrage.26 While she worked to educate the public about the differences between these two organizations, she often spoke out against the division of suffragists. In her opinion, the inability of suffragists to work together prohibited women from obtaining the vote.27 White

24 Esther Griffin White, "Attention! It Looks Like We’ll Have to Defeat Will Bartel," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 25 March 1916, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

25 White, "Suffrage Fuses."; White, "Train Your Optics."

26 Ibid.

27 White, "‘Rule or Ruin.’"
expressed this viewpoint in the following passage from the June 24, 1916 issue of *The Little Paper*:

The two opposing forces are biting, snatching, snarling, spitting, scratching and will, in the course of time, eat each other up . . . and still, within that body, are some of the ablest women in Indiana, who, if they would act like human beings, could start a campaign which might close in on the Legislature next year . . . 28

Despite her own involvement with an organizational affiliate of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, she saw beyond organizational ties for the greater good of all women desiring the right to vote.

Esther Griffin White viewed the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) as yet another blockade to women's suffrage. While she recognized and respected the initial strides the W.C.T.U. made toward national suffrage,29 White truly felt the W.C.T.U. contributed to the unpopularity of women's suffrage by intertwining it with the issue of alcohol prohibition.30 In doing so, the W.C.T.U. was responsible for turning those who opposed the prohibition of alcohol against women's suffrage as well. In her journalistic endeavors, White

28 Ibid.


30 White, "Intemperate Temperance."
made every attempt to clarify and separate the two issues. Her stance was that the cause for women's suffrage should not be used as a reform movement for the prohibition of alcohol. Women did not want the vote to reform; they were entitled to the vote based on their natural rights as citizens of the United States of America. "... Why should the women be in the position of having to be given something that is their right as human beings?" inquired White in the 1913 article "A Hypocritical Handout." Through her writings, White tirelessly battled the common misconception that women, if given the vote, would all vote together regarding prohibition and other political issues. Even if that myth was true, it was beside the point as far as she was concerned. No matter how women decided to vote, it was a violation of their human rights to outlaw their right to suffrage.

As soon as she stepped onto the political scene, she allied with the Republican Party. From the 1910s through the 1930s, many women supported the Republican platform because of the

---

31 Esther Griffin White, "The Women's Wail that the 'Liquor Lobby' Vetoes the Vote is False and Fallacious," Little Paper (Richmond, IN), 1 May 1915, in The Little Paper (Dark Red Cover), Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.


33 White, "Women's Wail."
party's early support of national women's suffrage. One of her main political focuses was to create more female involvement within the party and politics as a whole. From attracting women voters to Republican candidates to running for political office, it was clear that both the Republican Party and women in politics were extremely important to her. Further, she did an excellent job combining the two, all while aiding her own campaigns and the political party as a whole.

Esther Griffin White's initial run for political office was a first in Indiana history. In 1920, Esther Griffin White was the first woman whose name appeared on an official ballot in the state of Indiana. Her 1920 campaign for delegate to the State Convention of the Republican Party in Richmond's Fourth Ward was a definite milestone for women's rights. While she was chosen as delegate in three consecutive elections in 1920, 1922, and 1924, the real accomplishment lies in how she obtained her initial nomination in 1920. Until August 18, 1920, Indiana women still did not have the right to vote. Esther Griffin White chose to not let this stand in the way of voicing herself politically. Several months before national women's suffrage was achieved, the name "Esther Griffin White" appeared on the

34 White, "Women Like Roosevelt."

35 "Lady Candidate For Congress Long Active Public Life," c. 1926-1928, File VI.6, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.
ballot. While studying the election laws in Richmond, she discovered a loophole. The election laws of the time referred to voters as "male." However, since many lawmakers of the time would never have considered the possibility of a woman running for political office, the law relating to a delegate's candidacy referred to the potential delegate only as a "candidate." Sex was never specified. Therefore, she proceeded in her bid for delegate to the Republican State Convention. She received heavy opposition from the state and county boards of election commissioners and from the state attorney general. Then, the Wayne County Circuit Court held a hearing to attempt to block White's name from appearing on the ballot. Since nothing in the law kept her name from being on the ballot, she was allowed to run. Five candidates were in the running for delegate to the State Convention, and two delegates were chosen in the Fourth Ward. To her critics' disappointment, Esther Griffin White emerged victorious, earning second in the polls. Among 1,500 delegates, she was the only woman delegate to the State Convention of the Republican Party. This early, immediate success only further propelled her into politics and the Republican Party.

36 Carolyn Maund, "Miss White's Bid For Seat In Congress Aroused Wide Interest," 1954, File VI.6, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.
After her three consecutive successful delegate races, Esther Griffin White had her eye on larger political positions within the state of Indiana. From 1920 to 1922, she was the first Republican woman "chairman" for Wayne County. During her time as chairwoman, many members of the Republican Party praised her efforts in gaining the women's vote for various Republican candidates. In a letter to White from Perry W. Reeves, Bureau of Labor Manager for the Indiana Republican State Committee in 1920, he states, "I feel that you have done all in your power for the success of the Republican Party. We wish to remember you as one of our valuable assets in the campaign of 1920." Additionally, she was the only Richmond woman to be present at the first Women's Republican Convention for fourteen states held in Chicago. In 1921, Esther Griffin White ran for mayor of Richmond on the Republican ticket, making her the first woman in Indiana to run for the mayor's office (see Fig. 2). This campaign came merely less than a year after women in Indiana

37 Thornburg, 12.

38 Perry W. Reeves to Esther Griffin White, 29 October 1920, File VI.3, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

39 Political advertisement for Esther Griffin White Candidate for Mayor on the Republican Ticket, 1921, File VI.7, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.; Thornburg, 12.
received the right to vote.\textsuperscript{40} Although her initial campaign was unsuccessful, she was third highest in votes out of eight candidates, thereby defeating five men in the popular vote.\textsuperscript{41} She tried her bid for mayor again in 1925 and was again unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{42} Despite these upsets, her next campaign was quite possibly the biggest of her entire political career.

Esther Griffin White ran for Congress in the Sixth Indiana District as a Republican candidate twice in her political career, once in 1926 and again in 1928.\textsuperscript{43} In 1921, she became

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{40} Blakey, 295.
\end{footnotesize}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{41} Thornburg, 12.
\end{footnotesize}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{42} Indianapolis News (Indianapolis, IN), "Woman Writer Seeking Mayoralty at Richmond," 6 April 1925, File VI.7, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.
\end{footnotesize}
the first Indiana woman to go for a seat in the House of Representatives. At this time, three other women already held Congressional offices from other states. In both elections, Prohibition was a major political issue. Although she did not approve of the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, which called for the prohibition of alcohol, White desired a modification to the Volstead Act, which related to the enforcement of Prohibition. She was continually forced to defend her position on the Volstead Act. She felt it too costly to enforce Prohibition and the law was not being enforced equally and fairly. In the Boston Traveller, White was quoted as saying, "A law that it has taken $20,000,000 to enforce and then is not enforced is wrong somewhere. And it will never be enforced unless it is so changed that it can be enforced." However, a number of news reporters and opponents simplified her stance on Prohibition by labeling her as a "wet" candidate who was against

43 Esther Griffin White to Indiana Anti-Saloon League, April 1928, 1, File VI.6, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

44 Blakey, 295.

45 Everett C. Watkins, "Wet-Dry Fight To Be Clearcut In 6th District," Indianapolis Star (Indianapolis, IN), 1 April 1926, File VI.6, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

the Eighteenth Amendment.47 At the time, being seen as challenging Prohibition was basically suicide to one’s political career, and many newspapers saw to it that she was viewed to be against Prohibition. In a newspaper article following White’s death on August 31, 1954, she was quoted explaining the following:

It was the prohibition era. I announced myself in favor of the modification of the Volstead act . . . At that time there was considerable dissatisfaction at the working of the prohibition amendment . . . Much of the dissatisfaction arose from the intemperate manner in which the Volstead act was enforced all over the country and especially in Indiana . . . 48

In addition to some members of the Society of Friends opposing her stance on the Volstead Act, a major opponent to her platform was the Indiana Anti-Saloon League. At the beginning of the Congressional race, the Indiana Anti-Saloon League sent questionnaires to the candidates regarding their stance on the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act. She truthfully informed them of her aspirations to try to modify the Volstead Act if elected. For this, White was harshly criticized by members of the league. Because she “. . . had the nerve to buck

47 Watkins.; Esther Griffin White to Editor [of] Star, May 1926, File VI.6, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

48 Maund.
the Anti-Saloon League and its proponents out in the open,"49 she believed that members of the Indiana Anti-Saloon League were against her campaign.

White's supposed "wet" platform gained national attention in newspapers such as the New York Times, New York Sun, Chicago Tribune, San Francisco Chronicle, Palm Beach News, Birmingham Herald, Boston Herald, Washington D.C. Star, Dayton News, Detroit Free Press, and Topeka Journal.50 Despite the national publicity, some local media such as The American Friend refused to advertise her campaign based on their own political views and out of fear of alienating readers. In a letter to Esther Griffin White regarding her desire for the paper to print an

---

49 White to Indiana Anti-Saloon League, 1-2.

article on her behalf, Editor Walter C. Woodward expressed the following complaints:

There is one feature of your letter, however, which would undoubtedly attract the attention of all our readers and that is your position on the Volstead Act. I can easily visualize the stream of protests that would be pouring in upon me for having given space to a candidate who has taken such a position . . . the more I forecast the complications to which this letter would give rise, the less I am inclined to publish it. ⁵¹

Because of the negative publicity and lack of publicity, she was defeated by incumbent congressman Richard N. Elliott. Although her loss was a major disappointment, she was successful in gaining over 5,000 votes in her favor despite lack of funds and time for campaigning. ⁵² In 1928, she ran for Congress again on the same platform with similar results. ⁵³ Despite her Congressional losses, Esther Griffin White set the stage for change. While organizations such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union pushed for the abolishment of alcohol use, others felt Prohibition reform was necessary. ⁵⁴ In 1929, women who, like Esther Griffin White, desired a change in Prohibition

⁵¹ Walter C. Woodward to Esther Griffin White, 20 April 1926, File VI.6, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

⁵² White to Editor [of] Star.

⁵³ White to Indiana Anti-Saloon League, 1.

enforcement founded The Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform. The organization lasted until Prohibition ended in 1933, and it was a driving force in the fight for the modification of Prohibition. 55

Esther Griffin White’s final political race was not as a Republican Party member. Fed up with what she felt was gender discrimination within the Republican Party, she and several supporters formed the Independent Party of Richmond, Indiana in 1938. Basically, the sole purpose of the party was to nominate White as a candidate for mayor once more. 56 Her intentions were simple and her platform was clear. In the November 1938 The Little Paper article titled “Hello, Everybody! This is Esther Griffin White Speaking! Remember Me? I’m the Independent Candidate for Mayor,” she said, “My sole and only purpose in running for Mayor is for the salary.” 57 Further in the article, she stated, “I have no desire to ‘reform’ anything . . . I do


56 Minutes of First Meeting of Independent Party of Richmond, 16 September 1938, File VI.7, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

57 Esther Griffin White, “Hello, Everybody! This is Esther Griffin White Speaking! Remember Me? I’m the Independent Candidate for Mayor,” Little Paper (Richmond, IN), November 1938, Esther Griffin White Collection, Wayne County Historical Museum, Richmond, IN.
not intend to try to be anything but just the Mayor."\(^{58}\) Despite her expressed lack of interest in reforming the government, she still desired to see a few changes. As mayor, she wanted Richmond businesses back in the hands of the Richmond people. Additionally, she sought harsher enforcement of traffic violations. Also, White called for more protection of Richmond’s park system and required better care of their shade trees. She promoted her belief in a "square deal" for everyone regardless of race, religion, color, creed, nationality, or social affiliation.\(^{59}\) Because of her seemingly loose political stance, she was again unsuccessful in becoming mayor of Richmond. However, despite her efforts to attract attention to her campaign using her own *Little Paper* (see Fig. 3),\(^{60}\) she also felt her campaign’s failure was partially due to being ignored by the media.\(^{61}\)

Throughout her political career, Esther Griffin White faced gender discrimination at every turn. She believed the Republican Party often did not back her election efforts due to its lack of desire to see a woman in political office. In

\(^{58}\) Ibid.

\(^{59}\) Minutes of First Meeting of Independent Party.

\(^{60}\) Photo of Esther Griffin White working on her newspaper, c. 1915, File I, Esther Griffin White Papers, Friends Collection, Earlham College Library.

\(^{61}\) Blakey, 299.
nearly every newspaper article discussing her campaigns or political views, she was not simply a candidate; she was always referred to as the "woman" candidate. White felt this most likely skewed the journalists' perspective of her and, therefore, distorted the people's view of her. In a May 1926 letter to the Editor of the Star regarding her Congressional

---

62 "Lady Candidate For Congress."
defeat, she asked, “Why . . . ‘overwhelmed’?”63 Apparently, the newspaper printed, “Esther Griffin White, of Richmond, was overwhelmed by Richard N. Elliott . . . ”64 Regarding the men who lost their Congressional races, the article simply referred to them as being “defeated.” While men who lost were “defeated,” it was the view of this newspaper that a woman must have been overpowered by the political race.65 Esther Griffin White simply did not see her loss in that light. She saw it for what it was: simply a loss.

Despite her frustration with the Republican Party later in her political career, Esther Griffin White was a powerful and active figure in the party who gained national notoriety. Even after she ran for mayor under the self-created Independent ticket, White’s respect and support for the Republican Party was still evident. When asked to support a female Democratic candidate for senator in 1938, she replied, “I am a Republican and intend as I always have done to support Albert J. Beveridge for United States senator.”66 This definitely proves the quality of White’s character. Although getting women elected for

63 White to Editor [of] Star.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

political office was a primary concern for her, the candidate's political views were ultimately more important than his/her sex. While she knew that every political party had its flaws, she also recognized that did not mean every candidate from that party could not represent her political interests. However she felt about the Republican Party towards the 1930s, Esther Griffin White's various campaigns for Republican office pushed the Republican Party in Indiana to keep women's issues in mind and pushed the door open for women's entrance in Indiana politics.

In spite of opposition and newspaper media attempts to blockade her political expression, Esther Griffin White remains an essential figure in the history of Indiana politics. She broke down many barriers to allow women to freely express and act upon their political aspirations. Through the work of Esther Griffin White and other politically charged Indiana women of her time, today's Indiana woman cannot only vote and hold political office, but also her right to have and express her political views is, for the most part, recognized by the political community. By using her own political voice, White empowered countless women to discover and communicate their political views. The lack of and/or misinformation in recent scholarship intends to silence her still; however, Esther Griffin White's legacy will not disappear. It cannot remain
silent, for her spirit is too commanding to stand for such restrictions. The intention of this work is to bring to light what all Indiana voters, particularly women voters, need to know and respect: their political rights and opinions are recognized because Esther Griffin White refused to accept her role as a silenced woman.
Bibliography

Primary Sources

White, Esther Griffin. *The Little Paper* (Dark Red Cover).
Friends Collection. Earlham College Library.

White, Esther Griffin Collection. Wayne County Historical Museum, Richmond, Indiana.

White, Esther Griffin Papers. Friends Collection. Earlham College Library.

Secondary Sources


