Historians, journalists, and activists often present the history of American feminism as a series of generational “waves.” At the same time, older women urge young women to find mentors in workplaces and political organizations. This creates a fundamental tension between urging intergenerational cooperation as a present strategy and writing histories that emphasize generational rivalries. My project, "The Mother of the Race and Modern Girls: Racial Prejudice and Generational Conflict in the US Women's Rights Movement, 1870-1920," addresses this dilemma directly by focusing on a key moment in the American woman suffrage movement when established and emerging leaders jockeyed for power. Using the tools of intellectual and political history, as well as insights from critical race theory and cultural gerontology, I tease out the ideas and practices that foster productive intergenerational alliances, and, conversely, what types of beliefs and strategies exacerbate generational tensions.

My research will result in an academic book and journal article that will challenge historians, journalists, and feminist activists to question why they so often present the progress of women’s rights as a series of generational "waves" defined by the achievements of educated white women. By analyzing the history of women’s mentoring within a broader context—particularly the spread of evolutionary social science, the rise of Jim Crow, and debates over what the nation owed male veterans of the Civil War—I will show how many Americans, not just woman suffragists,
connected generational conflict to white supremacy at the turn of the twentieth century.

The relationship between established and emerging leaders was central to the expansion of the woman suffrage movement after the Civil War. Between 1870 and 1920, what had been a loosely organized coalition of diverse activists promoting women’s rights and the abolition of slavery became a highly bureaucratized movement to win women the vote. During these same years, prominent individuals who led the antebellum women’s rights and abolitionist movements—Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Frances Harper, and Frederick Douglass, for example—grew old, retired, and died. Those seeking to consolidate national suffrage organizations had to create bureaucratic structures that would distribute power between aging pioneers and new recruits. This was a long and contentious process through which some white suffragists such as Carrie Chapman Catt and Ida Husted Harper eventually gained power by entrenching both generational and racial segregation in their organizations. Through the celebration of suffrage birthdays—grand events honoring aging leaders, especially Stanton and Anthony—white suffragists promoted a particular vision of generational succession in which old women represented the past, middle aged women the present, and white children the future. These rituals meanwhile presented interracial coalitions as a strategy suited to the abolitionist past but not conducive to the progress of white women in the future. African American suffragists such as Frances Harper, Josephine St. Pierre
Ruffin, and Mary Church Terrell resisted racial segregation in part by working to sustain intergenerational coalitions among aging abolitionists and younger activists.

The white women who succeeded Stanton and Anthony lived long enough to be written off as old and out of date by a new generation who in the 1910s called themselves feminists. White feminists in the 1910s celebrated the spirit of youth, even though many of them—most notably Charlotte Perkins Gilman—were in fact middle-aged. Feminists continued to rely upon intergenerational and interracial networks—their innovation was to disavow these connections publically, instead equating progress with generational succession and racial segregation.

The story of woman suffrage has been told many times, but generally from a perspective that assumes, rather than explains, generational conflict. My study will make three main contributions. First, I will demonstrate why some factions of women’s rights activists chose to emphasize generational and racial conflict while others worked to sustain intergenerational and interracial networks. Second, I will place the ideas and strategies of African American suffragists at the center of this history, showing why black and white activists developed very different understandings of generational relations during this period. Finally, I will show how women contributed to the development of political organizations and government policies emphasizing both age and racial difference.

I began researching and writing this book in conjunction with my first monograph, The Struggle for Equal Adulthood: Gender, Race, Age and the Fight for Citizenship in Antebellum America (University of North Carolina Press, 2014). The
project now needs a condensed period of dedicated archival time to research the private papers of leading woman suffragists.

I am applying for research support so that I can make two trips to the Schlesinger this summer, from June 6 to 24 and from July 18 to August 5. My research this summer will focus on the papers of Matilda Joslyn Gage who was perhaps the most influential feminist theorist of generational relations in the late nineteenth century. In *Woman, Church, and State* as well as her numerous speeches, Gage defined patriarchy as a system of gender and age privilege through which older men gained power at the expense of old women. She called on female elders to claim power and authority. Her own experience of late life, however, was a struggle with financial difficulty, health troubles, and political rivalries. To understand the relationship between Gage's political theory of aging and her personal struggles, I will study her family letters and scrapbooks at the Schlesinger.

This summer, I will also research the papers of Olympia Brown and Anna Howard Shaw, two women who were key figures in the transition between Gage's generation and Catt's. As white woman suffragists promoted a vision of generational succession at the turn of the century, the contributions of women between generations fell out of sight. The personal papers of Brown and Shaw will be key to understanding this process.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, I will be using the Charlotte Perkins Gilman papers online as well as collections at the Library of Congress. Next summer, I will return to the Schlesinger to research the papers of Carrie Chapman Catt, Inez Millholland, and Edna Lamprey Stantial.