

Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, ed. *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement*. Troutdale, Oregon: NewSage Press, 1995. 388 pp. \$18.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-939165-26-1.

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The Struggle for Suffrage

American women obtained the right to vote in 1920, but this success came after decades of struggle. To coincide with the 75th anniversary of women's right to vote, Marjorie Spruill Wheeler has put together a collection of essays focusing on how women achieved this goal. Included are essays from prominent historians which Wheeler argues illustrate that far from being a solely white middle-class movement, woman's suffrage cut across class and racial lines, providing space for disfranchised women of all persuasions.

Wheeler organizes her book by first introducing readers to the background surrounding the battle for suffrage. Articles focusing on prominent women from the early national period to post-1920 are then presented. In addition, before each essay Wheeler introduces the subject and puts it into an historical context.

The first essay, by Linda Kerber, examines the United States' constitution and how it applied to women. According to Kerber, the Constitution did not mention gender; rather, the authors usually spoke of "persons." All men and women were thus considered citizens. Although voting rights were established by the states, the Constitution did not bar women from voting or running for office. It was not until the 14th Amendment, which refers to "males" over twenty-one years of age, that gender was first identified in voting. Yet women challenged that notion. In 1875, the Supreme Court in *Minor v. Happersett* ruled that citizenship did not guarantee women the right to vote. This angered woman's rights activists like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton who

felt this ruling justified women's second-class status. To them, suffrage was only a part of women's emancipation; egalitarianism was the true goal.

The next two essays, edited by Matilda Gage and written by Alice Rossi respectively, explore the first woman's rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York and the relationship between Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The convention in 1848 emerged from women's anger over their exclusion from an anti-slavery meeting in London and the general sense that male reformers were unsympathetic to women's plight. The meeting, though the brainchild of Stanton and Lucretia Mott, was chaired by Mott's husband. Neither woman felt comfortable leading such a convention. Over 300 women and men were on hand to formulate *The Declaration of Sentiments* which was a rewrite of the Declaration of Independence to include women and to list the improvements these delegates wanted. The most controversial was the right to vote. It passed in the convention because of the support of Frederick Douglass and Stanton. This document was then widely circulated and became the list of demands for which women agitated.

The relationship between Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony began in 1852 when Anthony joined the movement for woman's rights. Immediately, these two women became friends and remained so until their deaths. According to Rossi, they were very different people: Stanton was married with seven children, while Anthony remained single. Stanton was a gifted writer who often wrote speeches for Anthony to deliver. Because

of her marriage and childrearing responsibilities, Stanton was unable to travel extensively in support of woman's rights. Anthony became the chief advocate and most visible symbol. Both women, however, were instrumental in organizing the National Woman's Suffrage Association (NWSA) to promote voting rights for women. And both served as president after 1890 of the combined National American Woman's Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

Andrea Kerr argues in her essay that Stanton and Anthony receive the most credit for furthering the suffrage movement, and yet Lucy Stone was crucial to its success. Stone was vital to the early movement but she ran into disagreement with Anthony and Stanton over the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. Following the Civil War, these amendments defined citizenship and provided voting rights for all men. Anthony and Stanton denounced them and called for their defeat since women were not included. According to Kerr, Stone believed that after black men got the vote, it would be easier for women to achieve it, too. This split over the amendments caused the woman's suffrage movement to split also between Anthony and Stanton on one side with NWSA, and Stone on the other with the American Woman's Suffrage Association (AWSA). Kerr argues that historians usually attribute the split to disputes over direction of suffrage, whether to push for the federal amendment (which Stanton and Anthony urged) or campaign for states to expand the electorate to include women (which Stone supported). Kerr contends that dispute over the amendments was the true split. She further states that Stone's direction was the most sound and Stanton and Anthony came to accept that by the late 1880s, which facilitated a reconciliation of the two organizations by 1890.

The west was an area where women first received the right to vote. In her essay, Beverly Beeton argues that the frontier-like setting of the west contributed to this trend. She contends that women "proved" their worthiness for the vote through their hard work and determination in conquering the west. However, there were other reasons suffrage was extended. In Wyoming, male leaders believed that voting rights for women would gain the new state publicity and additional settlers. In Utah, Mormon leaders felt voting rights for women would ensure support for polygamy in their state. Mormon women's votes, combined with those of their husbands, would guarantee a Mormon stronghold in Utah.

The novel aspects of this book, however, are the essays which illustrate the diversity of the suffrage movement. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn analyzes the contributions

of African-American women to suffrage, while Wanda Hendricks focuses specifically on Ida B. Wells-Barnett. The role of the working class and their spokesperson, Harriot Stanton Blatch, is examined by Ellen Carol DuBois. And Sherry Katz looks at socialist women's contribution. In all four essays, it is apparent that white, middle-class women were not the lone supporters of suffrage. It is also clear that these same middle-class women distanced themselves from those who were not of their class, race or political persuasion. Rather than being inclusive, suffrage leaders discouraged any involvement with black women, working-class women, or socialists. Instead, they actively recruited members of their own class. It would be easy to claim that white women "achieved" suffrage, but that would ignore black women who formed suffrage associations. These women argued that they needed the vote because they suffered from discrimination as women and as blacks. Therefore, these women worked for their own enfranchisement and the reenfranchisement of black men who were kept from the polls. The working class were also ignored by suffrage leaders. Yet Harriot Stanton Blatch furthered their inclusion in the movement and adopted some working-class tactics like open air meetings and parades to publicize suffrage. Socialist women were in a double bind. Male socialist leaders criticized them for worrying about the vote when they should be focusing on liberating all workers, and suffrage leaders spurned socialist women who wanted to be involved. To socialist women, the vote was an economic necessity for women who would be able to vote to protect their jobs and families.

While essays are included which illustrate the importance of support from Frances Willard (Woman's Christian Temperance Union), Jane Addams (Hull House and Woman's Peace Party), Alice Paul (Congressional Union, National Woman's Party), and Carrie Chapman Catt (NAWSA President), Wheeler also addresses the large anti-suffrage campaign. In her article "Better Citizens Without the Ballot," Manuela Thurner examines women who campaigned against the vote. According to Thurner, these women believed that the vote would rob them of their objectivity, their nonpartisanship. In addition, voting rights would "diffuse woman's energies" and separate them from the female organizations which had been so successful (p. 204).

The book concludes with a look into the ratification of the 19th Amendment and women's political activism in the 1920s. According to Nancy Cott, the 1920s was not a decade of inactivity by women, as some historians argue, but rather a period when women continued

to strive for improvement in their lives. The new League of Woman Voters worked to educate women about their responsibilities as voters. But more importantly, Cott argues that women's role in voluntary organizations remained strong, illustrating that women did not abandon each other once suffrage was achieved.

The struggle for women's suffrage is an important piece in the puzzle of American history. *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement* is an excellent tool in understanding that process. For those familiar with history and newcomers too, this anthology provides valuable information and interesting anecdotes about this important movement. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler adeptly weaves the essays together in a logical way which, on the one hand, illustrates the process toward suffrage, while on the other hand allows for in-depth reading on various subjects. This is no easy accomplishment and yet Wheeler manages to achieve it. The subjects discussed by the numerous scholars are wide-ranging and key to understanding the suffrage movement.

While the book attempts to illustrate the diversity of the suffrage movement, information about the working class seemed insufficient. The one essay which highlighted working-class efforts focused mostly on Harriot Stanton Blatch's efforts to bring them into the movement. However, little about working-class interest in this process was provided. In general, the book is great in illustrating individual women or select groups, but the

feelings of *common* women were absent. The suffrage movement obviously needed leadership at all levels, and yet the local leaders and their efforts were largely ignored. If Wheeler's book was designed to highlight important leaders, then that focus should have been made more clearly. The title calls for the "rediscovering of the Woman Suffrage Movement" which implies a broader look into the movement. While in some ways that is accomplished with the inclusion of essays about important African American and socialist women, the majority of women were not discussed. In general, what were the differences between these women based on geographic location, class, occupation, age, race, ethnicity, and marital status? Those factors illustrate the complexity of the movement and make the success of it more impressive, since women overcame far greater obstacles than discussed in this book.

This book, however, does provide important information about the woman's suffrage movement. The essays chosen by editor Marjorie Spruill Wheeler clearly illustrate the complexity of this issue. Thus, this book serves as a useful source for students and scholars alike. *One Woman, One Vote* is not only an important source for American women's history, but for history in general.

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