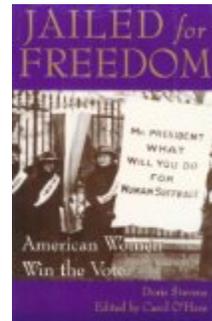


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Doris Stevens. *Jailed for Freedom: American Women Win the Vote*. Troutdale, Ore.: NewSage Press, 1995. 220 pp. \$12.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-939165-25-4.

Reviewed by Cynthia Harrison (George Washington University)
Published on H-Pol (September, 1997)



Consent of the Governed

On August 6, 1918, one hundred women dressed in white, holding pro-suffrage banners of purple, white, and gold, assembled in the square across from the White House around the base of the Lafayette monument. As Dora Lewis, a prominent Philadelphian, began to speak, a policeman seized her, making her the first of forty-eight women arrested at the demonstration. After a ten-day delay, while the Government's attorney figured out what to charge them with, twenty-six women were tried and convicted of "holding a meeting in public grounds" and "climbing on a statue," receiving sentences of ten or fifteen days. The twenty-six convicts were immediately removed to a prison building that had been closed for nine years, having been declared unfit for human habitation. They were the only inhabitants of the cold, damp, cells, which were outfitted with iron cots; the water from the unused pipes made the women ill.

But suffragists had faced horrendous conditions in prison before. Some had served sixty-day terms at the Occoquan workhouse, for the offense of holding a banner with the words: "Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed." (In that case, the formal charge was "obstructing traffic.") While in the workhouse, these well-bred matrons had been stripped naked, beaten, fed rancid food riddled with worms, denied soap and water for washing, and placed in solitary confinement on bread-and-water diets. The guards occasionally compelled black women prisoners, arrested on other charges, to beat the white women. Suffragists who fasted in protest had been force-fed. Nevertheless, hundreds of suffragists continued to engage in public protest,

submitting to arrest and imprisonment repeatedly for the sake of political liberty for women.

Jailed for Freedom, a memoir written in 1920 by Doris Stevens, tells this electric story. Stevens, a leader of the National Woman's Party (NWP)—the ringleader of the radical suffragist wing—herself helped plan these protests. Arrested twice, Stevens served three days in the Occoquan workhouse, after which she was released by virtue of a pardon from an embarrassed President Wilson. With Stevens' narrating, the mainstream women's suffrage movement gets short shrift, although its slow, steady, accumulation of women enfranchised by state action made federal action plausible. But the NWP parades, protests and arrests certainly generated the excitement in the fight to win the vote and this first-person account conveys the determination and courage of the women who took part.

In this edition of the memoir,* Carol O'Hare has edited and substantially abridged the original, which ran to almost four hundred pages with appendices; with new back matter, this volume comes to 220 pages. While the original text bears editing, O'Hare's treatment amounts in places to rewriting and nothing distinguishes Stevens' original words from O'Hare's additions. As a result, this edition suits a popular audience more than an academic one. The helpful new introduction by Edith Mayo, Curator of Political History at the Smithsonian Institution, and historical and biographical notes added after the text, will assist an uninitiated reader in understanding the place of the National Woman's Party in the suffrage campaign

and later. (The introduction, though, includes one inaccurate statement—that the 1964 Civil Rights Act “assured ... that hard-won protective laws [applying only to women] ... would not be abolished but, instead, extended to men and women on equal terms” [p. 32]. In fact, many labor laws were eliminated rather than extended.) Photographs from the collections of the Smithsonian, the National Woman’s Party, and other sources further enhance the appeal of this volume. While college teachers will want to ask students to read portions of the original rather than this redacted version, this edition will make a truly heroic story accessible to a larger audience beyond the college classroom.

*This volume joins numerous recent publications concerning suffrage, including Ellen Carol DuBois, *Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage* (Yale, 1997); Ann D. Gordon with Bettye Collier-Thomas, eds., *African American Women and The Vote, 1837-1965* (Massachusetts, 1997); Sara Hunter Graham, *Woman Suffrage and the New Democracy* (Yale, 1997); Susan E. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage* (Wisconsin, 1997); Kristi Andersen, *After Suffrage: Women in Partisan and Electoral Politics before the New Deal* (Chicago, 1996); Lee Ann Banaszak, *Why Movements Succeed or Fail: Opportunity,*

Culture, and the Struggle for Woman Suffrage (Princeton, 1996); Suzanne M. Marilley, *Woman Suffrage and the Origins of Liberal Feminism in the United States, 1820-1920* (Harvard, 1996); Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, ed., *Votes for Women! The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee, the South, and the Nation* (Tennessee, 1995) and *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement* (NewSage, 1995); Genevieve G. McBride, *On Wisconsin Women: Working for Their Rights from Settlement to Suffrage* (Wisconsin, 1993); Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (Oxford, 1993); Mary Martha Thomas, *The New Woman in Alabama: Social Reforms and Suffrage, 1890-1920* (Alabama, 1992); and Steven Buechler, *Women’s Movements in the United States: Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (Rutgers, 1990). Other new editions include Eleanor Flexner and Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States*, enlarged edition (Belknap Press of Harvard, 1996).

Copyright (c) 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-pol>

Citation: Cynthia Harrison. Review of Stevens, Doris, *Jailed for Freedom: American Women Win the Vote*. H-Pol, H-Net Reviews. September, 1997.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1268>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.