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Marion K. Barthelme, Inc. NetLibrary. *Women in the Texas populist movement: letters to the Southern mercury.* College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 1997. xii + 248 pp. ISBN 978-0-585-17515-7; ISBN 978-0-89096-742-3.

Michael Lewis Goldberg. *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas.* Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. x + 313 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-5562-7.

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U.S. history textbooks seldom fail to stress the central role of "Bleeding Kansas" in 1850s politics, when the nation slid toward war. But few note that Kansas remained a key site of political struggle from the 1860s to the 1890s. After the Civil War, former abolitionists and former slavery sympathizers battled over new issues, especially prohibition and woman suffrage. In addition, economic grievances arose among farmers, and Kansas was the first state in which the Populist Party won power. Women occupied an important place in these struggles, and Michael Goldberg has done us a great service in telling their story.

A story it is, because Goldberg's style is engaging and his narrative a pleasure to read. He documents the rise of a white middle-class "Woman Movement" in Kansas and its moment of success in the 1880s, when the state's women won municipal suffrage. During an 1887 drive for prohibition of liquor, Woman Movement leaders temporarily succeeded in building a moral alliance with women of the working class and African-American women against a male culture of violence and exploitation. The clash centered in frontier cow towns, which prospered on the income from saloons and brothels. Goldberg's account focuses on Leavenworth and is admirably nuanced. The author concludes that Woman Movement leaders "created a political culture they claimed represented an alternative to mainstream politics. Many activists, however, had not decided whether they wanted to tear down the house called male politics or dwell inside it as equals" (p. 126).

The strength of Goldberg's book lies his attention to this dilemma. He revises the view of the Woman Movement as nonpartisan, showing that women activists were deeply entangled in partisan loyalties and factions. The high point of the book is its analysis of Kansas' 1894 referendum for women's full voting rights, a debacle that destroyed the state suffrage movement for a decade. Goldberg shows that Kansas suffragists–some of them Populists, some Republicans, and a few Prohibitionists or Democrats–sought to be "ALL PARTISAN" as well as "nonpartisan" (p. 227), working for both suffrage and partisan victory. Fierce conflict between Republicans and Populists thus created the conditions for the referendum's demise. With only Populist men endorsing ballots for women, Republican women had to choose between suffrage and party, and the Equal Suffrage Association dissolved in bitter recriminations.

Goldberg's treatment of Populism is less groundbreaking, relying at many points on the work of Peter Argersinger, Gene Clanton, and Scott McNall. His analysis of the Farmers' Alliance "movement culture" (p. 141) relies overmuch on Lawrence Goodwyn's *Democratic Promise* (1976), though Goldberg does make an interesting comparison between the public personae of two famous Kansas Populists, Annie Diggs and Mary Lease.

On the whole, Goldberg's contribution is to gender analysis: he treats both femininity and masculinity as contested categories and explores the conflicts over each with insight, subtlety, and humor. *An Army of Women* left me pondering women's painful struggles for security and respectability, as well as the contrast between Leavenworth's violent, hard-drinking men and the ideal of the gentle farmer, celebrated in "The Strong Brown Hand":

In sickness he'll be the best nurse in the land There's the tenderest touch in the sturdy brown hand. … He'll be strength in your weakness, a solace in grief In his strong manly faith you will find sweet relief. (pp. 158-59)

Marion Barthelme's *Women in the Texas Populist Movement* also provides wonderful glimpses into the primary record. A collection of 180 letters from women

to the *Southern Mercury*, predominantly from 1888-1889, this is the first work of its type and as a paperback will hopefully receive wide circulation. The letters cover a range of topics, from politics and cooperative economics to marriage, family, and fashion, giving a vivid sample of the views of poor rural white women in this era.

Barthelme's introduction is less satisfying. Though she gives thumbnail sketches of the Alliance and farm life, she relies heavily on Goodwyn's romantic *Democratic Promise*, suggesting again (as does Goldberg's book) that Populism is ripe for some rethinking. The title of the book is inaccurate: this is, in fact, a book about women in the Farmers' Alliance, and the overwhelming majority of letters date from before a national (or Texas) Populist Party appeared.

Both Goldberg and Barthelme accept the standard view that women were active in the Alliance but shut out of the more masculine, electorally focused Populist Party–though each cites evidence suggesting a contrary view. For local reasons, the *Southern Mercury* was in crisis by 1889, but women continued to write to many other papers endorsing party Populism. Scattered letters from Texas women, at the end of Barthelme's collection, express strong support for such measures. Goldberg's account shows us the strength of women's party loyalties during the 1890s in both Populist and Republican camps. As such, he tentatively suggests new directions in the history of women and Populism, in addition to his excellent analysis of the Woman Movement and its complicated relationship with Republicanism.

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