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Allison L. Sneider. *Suffragists in an Imperial Age: U.S. Expansion and the Woman Question, 1870-1929.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. viii + 209 pp. $125.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-532116-6; $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-532117-3.

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Global Citizens and Imperial Agents

It is rare that one can thumb one's nose at the maxim "never judge a book by its cover," and even rarer that a reviewer should start a piece by focusing on cover art. But the cover image of Allison Sneider's *Suffragists in an Imperial Age: U.S. Expansion and the Woman Question* offers a brilliant gateway into the book's promising project. The image, "The Awakening," is taken from a 1915 edition of *Puck* magazine and inverts much of the traditional symbology associated with Western expansion and trans-oceanic American empire. Many a book on American expansion has featured, in some form or another, John Gast's image, "American Progress, or Manifest Destiny." The 1872 advertisement-turned-historical-icon features the "Star of Empire," an angelic figure, floating above a classic scene of the settler drive westward, carrying in her hands the tools of "enlightenment" to spread light and civilization to the darkened West and beyond. Gast's work has become a mainstay in the symbology of post-Civil War expansion and has served historians well as an icon of the dawn of an age of American empire. Yet, the suffrage imagery of "The Awakening" tells a different story. Facing eastward and standing above the newly incorporated western states, Lady Liberty bears her torch of enlightenment and reaches to the outstretched arms of masses of women in the darkened East. A subtle but powerful inversion of Gast and the traditional iconography of westward expansion, "The Awakening" reveals a consciousness in America's emerging imperial citizens that the borderlands and peripheral holdings of the United States were having a reaching and real effect on the contours of national power in that country's political centers. But more than a commentary on the dialectic between peripheries and metropole, "The Awakening" hints at the guiding interconnection between empire and women's suffrage debates, which in turn ties together Sneider's book.

Like much of the recent and growing literature on empire in Europe and the United States, *Suffragists in an Imperial Age* aims to reinvigorate historical inquiry into imperial studies by approaching national movements and identities within broader global events and imperial discourses. As such, Sneider attempts to connect the seemingly disparate threads of empire building and women's suffrage, arguing that the rise of U.S. women's suffrage must be understood as "inseparable from the history of U.S. expansion and the related question of political rights for potential new citizens that expansion inevitably raised" (p. 5). Tracing the sixty years between Reconstruction in 1869 and the eventual couching of women's suffrage within American-Puerto Rican relations in 1929, Sneider proposes that it is apparent that "if the United States had not been such an expansive nation after the Civil War suffragists would have had a much harder time raising their question at the national level" (p. 6). Like Antoinette Burton and Catharine Hall, among others, Sneider posits that national and imperial histories must be seen as inseparable. Examining how expansion, and then formal empire, provided suffragists with opportunities to thrust their agendas into the national (and later international) spotlight, Sneider argues that understanding suffrage through the lens of empire provides historians with an opportunity to both connect national debates with global forces and to show how debates about voting rights and citizenship connect into much larger questions about the scope and power of the state and boundaries of the nation (pp. 15-17).

Binding their language, or what she calls "vocabularies," to the changing contours of ideas about governance, Sneider maps out a shift between two "seemingly distinct, yet overlapping, conversations about citizenship, political capacity, self-government, and national belonging, each of which had its own vocabulary." On the one

hand, there was the vocabulary of Reconstruction, which presented a way "to talk in terms of black and white, of slaves and citizens, and of federal power and states rights." On the other hand, there was what Sneider calls the language of expansion and empire, which provided a way to blur the lines between Reconstruction's seemingly distinct and "coherent categories," turning the vote into a matter of civilization and civilized behavior rather than a matter of universal or natural right (p. 5).

Built on the legalistic and social space created by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, which created a national definition of citizenship for the first time, the vocabulary of Reconstruction provides the starting point for Sneider's work. Her second chapter–one of the most interesting–begins by examining how this vocabulary developed as suffragists intervened in congressional debates over new government for the federal territory of Washington, D.C. in 1870. When Congress proposed the reorganization of government in D.C., a political space was opened for "the woman question" which at that time presented a dilemma for the many parties concerned with universal suffrage. For those concerned with black voting rights, such as Fredrick Douglas, the reorganization of D.C. appeared as a plot to revoke municipal government, dragging Washington away from the nation's authority and towards a state system that would override federal authority. Yet Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and others viewed the situation as an opportunity for women's rights to gain a legal foothold in the new amendments. When Victoria Woodhull introduced the idea that "voting inhered in the condition for national citizenship"–that voting was a natural right–Reconstruction language had come to equate the vote with citizenship, and it appeared that this formula would guide the logic and language for suffrage along racial and gendered lines (p. 31).

With the Reconstruction era's connection between the right to vote and citizenship, the debate over the possible annexation of Santo Domingo gained a new salience. Sneider claims that when President Grant introduced the possibility of annexation the true impact of Reconstruction thinking and terms revealed itself (p. 47). Framing their arguments for and against annexation in terms of citizenship, public figures as disparate as Douglass and Charles Sumner posited that a new Republican state in Santo Domingo would mean new citizens and, therefore, a further extension of the right to vote. Suffragists had little time to think through what Caribbean expansion would mean for the woman question. While some claimed voting as a right of national citizenship, the Supreme Court rejected that argument in the *Minor v. Happersett* case of 1875 (p. 55).

Nevertheless, the question came back into focus with continental expansion into Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. With Congress debating the matter of citizenship and the vote for Indians, the disenfranchising of male and female polygamists in Utah Territory, as well as the incorporation of the territories of Washington and Wyoming, women's suffrage turned again to the Reconstruction vocabulary. Suffragists attempted to lift the woman question above the congressional fray which, using the language of empire, portrayed Mormon polygamy and Indian citizenship as a matter of civilization and savagery. Instead, suffragists chose to see it as a matter of "national authority over states" (p. 10). The renewed focus on national authority over the vote was especially irritated by the fact that women in Washington and Utah territories already possessed the right to vote. Expansion into these territories meant the national government faced a dilemma: either continue to support states' authority over voting, or prevent women's suffrage by intervening. Congress settled on the latter option. After being convinced that there was no danger of a national precedent being set and passing laws that deprived polygamists and Washington women of the vote, suffragists' attempts to push through a sixteenth amendment seemed clearly a lost cause. But the admittance of Wyoming, Utah, and Washington into the union substantially muddied the constitutional waters around states' rights and national authority, revealing the importance of expansion to the women's suffrage movement. As the nation spilled across the continent, it was clear that expanding boundaries meant the possibility for reconfiguring gender boundaries of political space by forcing the nation-state to act as a governing and deciding figure on matters of the vote (p. 86).

It was this lesson, Sneider argues, that brought suffragists to the vocabulary of empire during the Spanish-American and Philippine-American wars. While suffragists had anything but a unified position on the wars or America's incremental slide into imperialism, the possibility of acquiring the territories of Hawaii and the Philippines offered a new national platform on which they could revitalize arguments for women's suffrage. As was the case with westward expansion, annexation of Pacific territories raised new questions about national belonging and the capacity of "alien races" to possess the rights of citizenship. Sneider points out that those suffrage leaders who came of age during the Reconstruction era "tended to see the complexities of U.S. imperialism as a problem of federal relations" (p. 91). These individuals agreed that any new territory would have to allow its

female residents the franchise. The result was the 1899 "Hawaiian Appeal." The appeal demanded that the word "male" be stripped from the Hawaiian constitution but largely embraced the imperial vocabulary and its focus on "civilization," "race," "education," and "capacity to govern." Why key suffrage figures like Henry Blackwell and Stanton slid into imperial thinking and made imperialist arguments has been a significant question for suffrage history. Sneider argues, convincingly so, that the appeal affirmed the disenfranchisement of native Hawaiians and even Asian migrants to America by sacrificing the Reconstruction concern for universal suffrage to the pragmatic hope that racialist arguments about Hawaiians' ability to self-govern would place American women higher on the pecking order of civilization/imperial thinking (p. 104). Buying into the language of civilization and empire meant that activists like Stanton and Carrie Chapman Catt abandoned any commitment to universal suffrage in the hope of gaining access to the vote through a form of rhetoric of civilization, not as subjects of domestic imperialism (p. 114).

The civilizers' vocabulary, Sneider argues, became especially apparent in the debates over home rule in Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Faced with territories which (unlike Hawaii) were not intended to become states, suffragists found that critics were unable to fall back on traditional states' rights arguments to oppose the idea of women's suffrage. Instead, the legalistic and political grey zones created by these protectorates and unincorporated territories, as opposed to the traditional framework associated with states, meant that new laws had to be adopted for both states and territories not on the path to statehood. By 1912 it was apparent that the "states' rights opposition to woman suffrage [had] foundered, although it did not immediately sink, when suffragists once again attached woman suffrage amendments to the governing bills for [Puerto Rico and the Philippines]" (p. 121). The expansion of the nation and its legal framework for dealing with unincorporated territories, Sneider argues, created the conditions wherein authority over the vote in Hawaii had to be left to local legislators. But more than a victory in Hawaii, the legal space provided by imperialism and the adoption of the language of empire gave the women's suffrage movement important national victories that anticipated the Nineteenth Amendment (pp. 120-121). While the collapse of states' rights arguments can be partially attributed to the victories of individual states, Sneider argues that U.S. colonial possessions and the debates over government bills for these new territories played an imperative but largely unrecognized role. Providing a new way to discuss the question of women's suffrage, outside of the states' rights framework, the incorporation of the language of domesticity as crucial to the advancement of American civilization and the imperial project, paved the way for women's voting rights to become an "integral part of U.S. colonial policy" throughout the 1920s and beyond (p. 134).

Suffragists in an Imperial Age is a compact but extremely dense work that evades simple and short summarization. Part of the density of this book can likely be attributed to the author's hope that it be considered part "of a larger project of mapping how and in what ways Americans did and did not come to think of themselves as imperial citizens" (p. 16). As such, Sneider attempts to jump off from works like Kristin Hoganson's investigation of jingoism and manly ideals during the Spanish-American War, and Laura Briggs's work on prostitution and American science in Puerto Rico around the same period–both of which have examined the interplay between language and gender. But Sneider takes a very different approach. While Hoganson and Briggs have gone to great lengths to explore gender itself as a disputed category reinforced through language and rhetorical metaphors, Sneider chooses to focus on political and legal/legislative language, and how it changed to meet the fixed demand for the vote. As such, hers is a story of women using language to exploit the spaces that imperialism created in the national legal fabric rather than one focused on the cultural spaces created by fluctuating metaphors for gender. Sneider says that this is no slight on cultural and discursive approaches which hope to uncover "the importance of imperialist discourses" which have "sustained the U.S. imperial project" (p. 16). Instead she hopes that her work reveals how discussions about the parameters of the right to vote and equal citizenship constituted "debates about the boundaries of the nation and the power of the state" (p. 17). Sneider, then, is attempting to bring to the fore the fluidity and ambiguities of identity (based in nationality, race, or gender) by showing how the tensions of empire served to interrupt the static definitions that gives the law its power.

This approach is engaging, and rightly aims to bridge a gap between cultural historical work on gender and the more established woman's history tradition that has been fascinated by the questions around woman's suffrage and its key figures. But those portions of Sneider's work that focus on both constitutional history and legal definitions are often hard to follow, especially in her discussions on the differences between federal territories, unincorporated territories, and their relationship to the states' rights debate. In her drive to show how imperialism created a political space in which suffrage could be

thrust, Sneider leaves packed many of the important and shifting distinctions that historical subjects used to explain and articulate ideas like imperialism, colonialism, and expansionism. Instead, she imposes a legalistic and rather jumbled distinction between formal empire, "empire by deferral," and what she calls "an expanding union" to explain the shift from the vocabulary of Reconstruction to that of imperialism (pp. 11, 16).

Despite this, Sneider's attempt to situate the history of U.S. women's suffrage within larger global discourses on race, citizenship, and belonging and her exploration of suffragists as participating imperial citizens in American empire are both important and timely. Her work opens up some important avenues for the burgeoning work on the history of women's internationalism, and fits nicely with the work of foreign relations historians and those studying the interplay between the foreign and the domestic–if such a distinction can be made–and its effect on policy, governance, and identity. As the book's cover image shows, the interplay between imperialism and gender, as with most other identities, can be traced through documents and representations from this period. But, as Sneider demonstrates so well, to see imperial power relations, historians must see even the most seemingly benign and well-intentioned movements, such as for suffrage, as sites of contested power.

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