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Elizabeth R. Varon. *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia.* Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. x + 234 pp. ISBN 978-0-8078-2390-3.

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Elizabeth R. Varon's *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* examines the history of women's political involvement in the first half of the nineteenth century. Varon dispels the notion that Southern women did not express their opinions about political issues as she "challenges the received wisdom" of historians (p. 2). Through extensive use of archival sources Varon proves that women assumed active roles in political life by campaigning, sponsoring rallies, and lending their names to causes. The study begins with a discussion of benevolent societies, moves on to outline female involvement in partisan politics, and concludes with an examination of women's roles in creating the Mount Vernon Association and finally, with women's work following the Civil War.

In her introduction Varon defines politics as "first and foremost, with electoral activity–campaigning, voting, office holding, legislating (p. 2)." While acknowledging that involvement in these activities was part of the male domain, Varon suggests that politics was a public activity and, therefore, open to all. She expands her definitions with a discussion of physical space as well as figurative space. Physical space was, of course, the material world women lived in while figurative space comprised the "world of letters–constituted by newspapers, novels, journals and other publications (p. 2)." In both spaces women located their voices and made themselves heard. Analysis of the figurative spaces, the letters, journals and publications written by women, are part of what make this study important and fascinating. For example, in Chapter two, Varon discusses the work of the American Colonization Society through the letters and journals of women who worked to bring slaves from Africa. According to Varon's research the women saw colonization as a religious activity rather than simply a political quest. The writings and work of Mary Berkeley Minor Blackford "a staunch Episcopalian" are the focus of much of this chapter.

Benevolent societies and female charities were natural breeding grounds for women to learn leadership skills which they would use in political life. Throughout the study Varon examines the subversive side of benevolence and the language which veiled the women's true interests. Again, these arguments are supported by excellent and extensive archival research of women's diaries, journals and minutes of societies. Her discussion of the Female Orphan Asylum is one example. Varon examines the correspondence and petitions filed by the sixteen women who founded the society with the vision to improve conditions.

Varon highlights the campaign of 1840 in Chapter three, "The Ladies Are Whigs: Gender and the Second Party System." Through a discussion of what she labels "Whig womanhood," Varon demonstrates how women were encouraged to take an active role in political campaigns. Her study and research counter the previous historical work done on the subject which suggested that women were part of the audience rather than active participants in social and political change. While Democrats made "sporadic appeals to women," the party never embraced women (p. 72). Through the Whig Party, however, women participated in politics to the legal extent because the Whigs believed that Whig mothers raised Whig sons. Rather than dismissing women's influence in the family and community, the Whig Party took advantage of women's work and power. In 1844 the women formed the Virginia Association of Ladies for the Erecting a Statue to Henry Clay. Discussion of the Clay Association comprises part of this chapter.

Through domestic fiction Southern women "created a literary defense of slavery and the South" (p. 103). Some authors are still familiar to us today, such as Mary Virginia Terhune and Caroline Lee Hentz. The Southern reaction to Uncle Tom's Cabin constitutes a portion of the chapter. This text "served as a catalyst in the transformation of Southern literary sectionalism into Southern literary nationalism" (p. 107) according to Varon. Through her discussion she is able to show how other

female authors reacted to the novel and to the political climate. The discussion of the novelist Mary Virginia Terhune shows how she reconciled her commitment to the Union and her Southern identity through the Civil War. Terhune's novels, as well as some other writer's works, became "weapons in the cultural contest for sectional supremacy" (p. 116-117).

The work of the Mount Vernon Association, which formed to save George Washington's home, extended beyond the borders of Virginia. The chapter which discusses this association outlines the problems women faced when communication was not clear between parties, states and members. The discussion of this association concentrates on the "wealth of discourse in Virginia on women's civic duty" which it generated (p. 125). The division of gender roles is made clear through the analysis of securing the property for restoration and the tensions created by partisan politics.

Finally, Varon focuses on "Confederate womanhood" (p. 138). She notes that Southern women were "purer Southern patriots than men" (p. 138). The discussion in this final section depicts the struggles associated with secession which Southern women faced. The conflicts drew on the political and domestic activities up to the time of the war. Following the Civil War, Southern women, like women throughout the United States, poured their energies into civic duty. Varon's study ends as traditional women's clubs flourished along side women's political activity during the post war era.

Elizabeth R. Varon's work is a significant contribution to the history of women and particularly to the history of Southern women in the 19th century. Her work adds a new dimension to the Southern lady, who was not merely a silent by-stander but who participated actively with a forceful political voice. Varon proves that women did not just fulfill domestic roles associated with home life, but fought to infiltrate political life throughout the 19th century. Her study provides an excellent analysis of archival sources and a way in which to reconsider women's work in the Antebellum South.

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