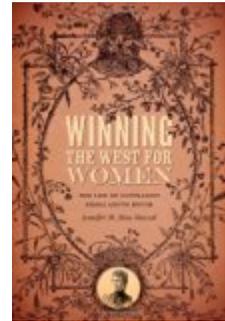


Jennifer M. Ross-Nazzal. *Winning the West for Women: The Life of Suffragist Emma Smith DeVoe*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011. xv + 256 pp. \$26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-295-99086-6.

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The Feminine Approach: Emma Smith DeVoe and Western Suffrage

Eight-year-old Emma Smith found herself standing alone in 1856 when Susan B. Anthony asked an Illinois audience who among them supported female suffrage. It was not until she was in her forties, however, that she fully embraced an active approach to the cause. Emma Smith DeVoe came from a Baptist, abolitionist family in Illinois and at a young age took to music and public singing, facets of her life that were to serve her well during the struggle for enfranchisement. Jennifer M. Ross-Nazzal, an historian at the NASA Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, narrates and analyzes Emma Smith DeVoe's life as a suffragist in the American West and elucidates the conflicts, clashes of personality, and inner workings of the effort to achieve the vote for women in the West and at the national level from 1889 to her death in 1927.

Historical biography should aim to do two things: present the life of the subject and place that narrative within a broader historical context. Ross-Nazzal argues that "Emma's career provides a unique lens through which to understand the suffrage reform movement.... [Her] career is a microcosm of women's struggle to achieve the vote" (p. 6). The author claims that DeVoe's career demonstrates how local and state suffrage organizations in the West related to the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and how these organizations raised and spent money, as well as showing how suffragists actually accomplished the hard work of long-distance travel, persuasion, and politicking. De-

Voe's career clearly proves that the women's suffrage movement was far from monolithic, as she butted heads with other leaders over tactics and money. The author also does not shy away from discussing the controversies surrounding DeVoe's approach and her sometimes ego-driven personality.

Ross-Nazzal's discussion of tactics represents her most important historiographical contribution. DeVoe was in no way a radical or confrontational feminist. She utilized a "feminine approach" to draw people into supporting enfranchisement, and especially the use of "sweetness" in addressing male voters (p. 7). DeVoe emphasized her appearance during public talks and forums, striving to appear ladylike in demeanor and presentation. The images of DeVoe included in the book clearly support this. Historians have questioned whether these conservative tactics were effective in the West and if they actually reinforced commonly held views of women in this era. Ross-Nazzal makes clear that DeVoe and her feminine tactics were very effective in terms of converting both sexes to the cause, raising money, drawing the support of politicians, and bringing respectability to the movement for women's suffrage.

DeVoe's significant contributions to women's suffrage in the West include her central role in pushing for female enfranchisement in Washington state in 1910; the establishment of the National Council of Women Voters (NCWV), headed by DeVoe and influential in the passage

of the Nineteenth Amendment; and her role promoting women's political rights as an important member of the GOP in the 1920s. In all these developments Ross-Nazzal informs the historiography of how western "regionalism played a significant role in the campaign for a federal amendment" and why historians' tendency to focus on eastern efforts for female suffrage only tell part of the story (p. 12).

DeVoe gradually came to prominence in the western suffrage movement during her time in South Dakota in the 1880s. The character of the West in the late nineteenth century contributed to DeVoe's conversion to life-long suffrage activist. The rough-and-tumble world of Huron, South Dakota included gambling dens, taverns, and prostitution houses. The DeVoes got involved in efforts of moral reform to eradicate these ills, often playing music or singing to various reform audiences. During South Dakota's statehood movement, which involved the question of whether the territory would enter the Union as a "wet" or "dry" state, DeVoe learned how to organize a campaign and canvass voters. Ross-Nazzal paints this period of DeVoe's life as crucial to her expanding role in reform and the road to national recognition. She shifted towards working for women's suffrage in the late 1880s when she came to believe more fully that women's political rights would help do away with drunkenness, prostitution, and other unsavory practices she witnessed during her time in Huron.

In 1890 South Dakota voted on a state constitutional amendment towards women's suffrage, and DeVoe, now state organizer of the South Dakota Equal Suffrage Association (SDESA), put her "feminine" tactics to work. She spoke frequently supporting the amendment, using patriotism, Civil War memory, humor, and conciliatory approaches to both sexes to persuade audiences. As DeVoe and Susan B. Anthony became friends, DeVoe focused more and more upon suffrage, shedding her previous attachment to a variety of other reforms. During the South Dakota campaign DeVoe also received her first taste of criticism, as some of her colleagues felt that she was "self-serving ... ambitious and selfish" (pp. 57-58). Despite her efforts, the measure failed in South Dakota.

By the time she moved to Washington state in 1905, DeVoe had forged a national reputation. Her fundraising and oratorical skills led to the position of national lecturer for NAWSA and she traveled widely throughout the West organizing state and local suffrage clubs and bringing in money. Two things stand out during this period of her life. The first is that DeVoe's experience as

national lecturer for NAWSA shows the grueling schedule and continuous travel of a prominent suffrage advocate during this period. She spent significant amounts of time organizing, lecturing, and raising money in Iowa, Kansas, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, and Nevada. The second is the relation between Populism and suffragists. Emma "dabbled" in the Farmers' Alliance (but separated from the order to maintain strict nonpartisanship), and her husband Henry joined the People's Party (p. 61). In places such as Colorado, Populists helped pass women's suffrage amendments; but in other states, such as North Dakota, suffragists' connection with Populists delayed the movement for enfranchisement. Although it is beyond the scope of the book, this connection is fascinating and deserves further investigation.

DeVoe's biggest victory to date was the winning of female suffrage in Washington state in 1910. As president of the Washington Equal Suffrage Association, she used the same tactics and rhetoric she had honed over the years, overcame conflict within the movement, and survived being let go by NAWSA. She met with and persuaded farmers' organizations, the governor, and the press to support suffrage, and the amendment passed by a wide margin. This phase of her career ended with her creation of the National Council of Women Voters (NCWV), made up of voting women in several western states. The NCWV's goal was to support and assist other states' suffrage movements.

The NCWV under DeVoe's leadership also played an overlooked role, according to Ross-Nazzal, in the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, granting all female U.S. citizens full voting rights. At the state level the NCWV helped enfranchise women in Nevada and Montana, and at the federal level the organization convened a hearing in front of the House Committee on Rules to urge the creation of a Committee on Woman Suffrage in the House. The chapter on DeVoe's contribution to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and the subsequent ratification of the amendment by the states could be improved by connecting her efforts more fully to the federal level. DeVoe certainly played an important role in Washington State's ratification of the amendment, and in convening the House hearing and calling for a national suffrage demonstration in 1914. However, Ross-Nazzal could strengthen her argument regarding DeVoe's important role in the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment with more direct evidence of her contribution.

For the remainder of DeVoe's life she served as a prominent member of the Washington State Republican

Committee and as an appointee to the national GOP Committee on Policies and Platform. The party never made her a full member of the Republican National Committee, demonstrating that despite the right of suffrage, women had a long way to go in the male-dominated political world. Emma published many pieces decrying Democratic policies while emphasizing the GOP's small-government and frugal-spending characteristics. Ross-Nazzal claims that DeVoe's articles on these subjects "played a role in the party's efforts to regain control of the White House in 1920" (p. 171). However, this claim seems to need further backing by the evidence. After years of effort towards female suffrage and female political participation in the Republican Party, Emma Smith DeVoe died of cancer in 1927.

The modest critiques above do not take away from the significant contributions of this book. Ross-Nazzal's research and evidence span county and legal records from the various places in which the DeVoes resided; newspapers from the plethora of western states DeVoe visited on her organizational and fundraising sojourns; the institutional records of the numerous suffrage organizations she dealt with; political papers of the politicians she worked to persuade; and other manuscript collections from nearly every western state. Ross-Nazzal is right to suggest that Emma Smith DeVoe's important role in the women's suffrage struggles of the West has been overlooked and that western women did in fact play a crucial role in winning passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

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