

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jo Freeman. *A Room at a Time: How Women Entered Party Politics*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000. xii + 353 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8476-9804-2.

Reviewed by Millie Jackson (Grand Valley State University)  
Published on H-PCAACA (March, 2001)



## Women in Politics, 1918-1941

### Women in Politics, 1918-1941

Ruth McCormick, Molly Newson, Harriet Upton Taylor. Most readers will probably not recognize these names. However, these women, along with many others, learned about issues and organized women so they could enter into party politics. These are only a few of the women who are the focus of Jo Freeman's volume, *A Room at a Time: How Women Entered Party Politics*.

Through extensive archival research Jo Freeman has drawn together the history of women's political activities in the twentieth century. While this well documented book provides the reader with a history up to the 1970s in America, it concentrates on the decades between the two world wars when women laid the foundation for work in political parties. Freeman demonstrates how women fought for their places in party politics and proved loyalty to the parties. This book is a comprehensive addition to the political history of women in the 20th century. It is an important addition to the work that has been done on 19th century women's work in politics and in social causes as well.

The focus of this study is not only on women's issues, however, it is on women working for the party. The importance of being a party woman is emphasized in this history. According to Freeman, men welcomed women so they could do the difficult work. For example, Republican men assigning women to "canvass the most intransigent Democratic districts that were loyal to Tammany Hall" (230). The women had to be interested in the good of the party, not just in issues relating to women in order

to gain a place in the party structure. She traces women's entry into and advancement through the party machines and into elected office. This is the story of the women who worked at the grassroots, the county, the state and the national levels to make women's voices heard and make their voices count.

Freeman documents the work of women in both the Republican and Democratic parties. Some readers may be surprised at Freeman's findings that Republicans were more liberal than Democrats up until the late 1960s and early 1970s. More opportunities existed for Republican women to serve their party than for Democratic women. The Progressive Movement and the suffrage battles of the early twentieth century are highlighted in the discussions. Both influenced women's involvement, though the suffrage movement did not sway party politics as much as some might expect.

Freeman also discusses the interactions with traditional women's organizations which flourished in the early part of the twentieth century. Many of these organizations focused on issues that were important to women but not necessarily important to the party. Influences of groups such as the League of Women's Voters, initially viewed as dangerous and subversive, are discussed. The development of fight for the ERA is also discussed throughout the book.

The book is a remarkable history of women in general and a few influential women in particular. Persistence and hard work were the key characteristics that gained women a place in the rooms of political parties. Women

moved slowly and steadily into roles that were more important in party politics. Despite setbacks along the way, they did not give up. This will be a useful volume for political historians and scholars in women & gender studies.

This review is copyrighted (c) 2001 by H-Net and the

Popular Culture and the American Culture Associations. It may be reproduced electronically for educational or scholarly use. The Associations reserve print rights and permissions. (Contact: P.C.Rollins at the following electronic address: Rollinspc@aol.com)

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

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

**Citation:** Millie Jackson. Review of Freeman, Jo, *A Room at a Time: How Women Entered Party Politics*. H-PCAACA, H-Net Reviews. March, 2001.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=5022>

Copyright © 2001 by H-Net and the Popular Culture and the American Culture Associations, 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 P.C. Rollins at [Rollins@osuunx.ucc.okstate.edu](mailto:Rollins@osuunx.ucc.okstate.edu) or the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).