

John C. Putman. *Class and Gender Politics in Progressive-Era Seattle.* Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2008. xi + 296 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-87417-736-7.



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Recently, Progressive Era historians have reached either internationally or locally in their research. For example, Daniel T. Rodgers's *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (2000) stretches overseas as he studies the impact of British Progressivism upon American reforms. Eric Rauchway's *Blessed Among Nations: How the World Made America* (2006) reaches even farther as he examines how the entire world shaped U.S. Progressivism. Others, in contrast, narrow in upon a single urban center to explore Progressivism's local character. Michael Willrich in *City of Courts: Socializing Justice in Progressive Era Chicago* (2003) demonstrates how reforms within Chicago's judicial system set the pace for the rest of the nation, while Robert D. Johnston in *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon* (2003) complicates the nature of class itself in Portland, Oregon. Much like E. P. Thompson's seminal study about the English working class, Johnston argues there was no such thing as the American middle class.

This local focus is where John C. Putman's book, *Class and Gender Politics in Progressive-Era Seattle*, fits in. Willrich, Johnston, and Putman each take a single city as a case study. Whereas Willrich uses a single institution to explain Progressive Era tendencies, Putman examines the conflict and collaboration between social classes. Putman's work is closer in scope to Johnston's work, particularly since Putman too challenges Richard Hofstadter's premise in *The Age of Reform* (1955) that Progressivism was solely a middle-class phenomenon. Yet, while Johnston's book is peppered with his own personal politics, Putman leaves his out and also excludes an explicit theoretical framework.

Historiographically speaking, *Class and Gender Politics* neither overturns the status quo nor significantly shifts its parameters. Like many prior works on the Progressive Era works, it takes reform as its unit of analysis. It also asks two typical Progressive Era questions: Who were the Progressives? And, how did they promote reforms?

Class and Gender Politics makes its contribution by choosing Seattle, focusing on women's efforts, and examining working-class reformers. Early on, Putman makes a successful pitch for why we should care about Seattle. The city is important not only because it rests on the very edge of the western United States, but also because it provides us with particular data about local politics. Putman argues that examining politics on the municipal level reveals two things. It adds to a collection of urban data that comparative researchers can then use to advance larger claims. It also reveals issues that Americans cared about most--local issues that hit close to home.

Putman effectively establishes the importance of Seattle to progressivism. After all, female suffrage came to the city early in 1910. In contrast to studies about women's political rhetoric, Seattle women's early experience with the ballot reveals how women actually voted. In other words, because female voters learned the practice of politics a decade before most of the nation, Seattle shows us how the female vote tangibly contributed to Progressive reform efforts. According to Putman, this contribution was both real and immediate. For example, Seattle voters recalled their mayor shortly after women's enfranchisement.

Seattle's female Progressives promoted a rather typical reform agenda--for women's votes, direct politics, and labor legislation, among others. Putman examines their efforts in a manner distinct from most earlier historical works. Seattle's Progressives joined a "cross-class alliance" (p. 95), comprised of women from both the working and middle classes. With this focus, Putman emphasizes not only that the middle class desired reforms, but also that the working class did too.

Throughout *Class and Gender Politics*, Putman tells stories about the ebb and flow of working- and middle-class cooperation: from the first awareness of their common bond during the Klondike Gold Rush, to working-class women's growing distrust of middle-class intentions, to the

dissolution of middle-class support for working-class problems during the Great War. Throughout, the characters are colorful, the stories illustrate Putman's argument, and the book's arguments are supported by a substantial set of historical records.

The book has a few shortcomings. Chapters beyond the introduction rarely employ a wide-angle lens. *Class and Gender Politics* cursorily examines the changing character of Progressivism itself. In addition to a general disregard for national and international influences upon Seattle, Putman only skims the surface of the rhetorical and tactical shift within Seattle's own brand of Progressivism. For example, once women gained the vote in 1910, reformers rallied behind sociocultural issues rather than those related to democratic governance, which they had earlier emphasized.

Furthermore, Putman's own introduction highlights racial and cultural diversity as significant reasons why historians should study the Progressive West. Yet Putman limits himself to an analysis of class and gender in this project. There are points in this work where race and ethnicity prove strangely absent. For example, Putman presents what at first glance appears a fair justification for focusing on only white women's experiences: Seattle's black and Asian populations were so small. However, if Seattle's black and Asian women were proportionately overrepresented in the lower and working classes then Putman missed an important piece of Seattle's Progressive puzzle. The very presence of black and Asian women raises important questions about their participation in, or exclusion from, Progressive reforms. This is especially important since Seattle's foreign-born population was one of the highest across all U.S. cities. In 1910, the city's population was comprised of 25 percent foreigners, including many Canadians, Swedes, Norwegians, and Germans (p. 34).

Despite these shortcomings and in light of its strengths, researchers interested in the Progress-

sive Era, the U.S. American West, gender, labor, or urban studies will find this book useful as a reference. Additionally, anyone interested in Seattle history will gain an understanding here of local political culture in the early twentieth century.

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