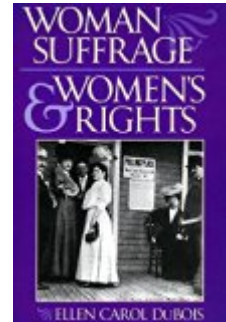


Ellen Carol DuBois. *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights*. New York: New York University Press, 1998. vii + 309 pp. \$55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8147-1900-8.



Reviewed by James Seymour

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To honor the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention, Ellen Carol DuBois collected twelve previously published pieces and two new additions in *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights*. DuBois examines the evolution of the woman suffrage movement and places it within a larger women's rights struggle. The result deftly charts the professional and ideological development of the author, one of the foremothers of women's history.

Written especially for the book, Chapter One ("The Last Suffragist: An Intellectual and Political Autobiography") explains the circumstances behind the writing of her articles, including both professional and political matters, and cites criticism of her work by other historians. The reader learns about the modern feminist struggles in which she actively participated and sees how political changes influenced her writing. The outcome demonstrates her goal of creating history "that was both politically engaged and committed to full disclosure and democratic debate" (p. 19). DuBois has strong feminist and socialist views

that she weaves through her writing, usually strengthening the material.

Chapter Two ("The Radicalism of the Woman Suffrage Movement: Notes Towards the Reconstruction of Nineteenth Century Feminism"), Chapter Three ("Politics and Culture in Women's History"), and Chapter Four ("Women's Rights and Abolition: The Nature of the Connection") evaluate the pre-Civil War suffrage debate. Rather than including all of the ways women used to challenge patriarchal society, DuBois focuses on their fight to obtain the ballot. She contends that "precisely by bypassing the private sphere and focusing on the male monopoly of the public sphere, pioneering suffragists sent shock waves through the whole structures that relegated women to the family" (p. 3). Radical in the period, woman suffrage challenged women's subordinate position within the entire culture. William Lloyd Garrison's brand of abolition played a special role in shaping woman suffrage, as he taught his female adherents how to shape their discontent into a social movement. In particular, Garrison regarded his female followers as human beings first, and

women second. This idea underlay many nineteenth century arguments in favor of suffrage, such as equitable taxation and equal treatment under the law, which stem from women's status as humans, rather than separate considerations because of their sex.

Chapter Five ("The Nineteenth Century Woman Suffrage Movement and the Analysis of Women's Oppression"), which originally appeared in *Capitalist Patriarchy*, provides insights into DuBois' attempt to reconcile the hyphen in social-ist-feminist, using, as DuBois admits, overly jargon-laden terminology. She begins to address working class women in the suffrage struggle with this piece, a theme she develops further in Chapter Ten ("Working Women, Class Relations, and Suffrage Militance: Harriot Stanton Blatch and the New York Woman Suffrage Movement, 1894-1909"). Here, she concentrates on the interplay of different classes within the suffrage struggle, using Harriot Stanton Blatch, the daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, as her foil. Blatch bridged the chasm between the classes, DuBois argues, coming from an elite background herself while working alongside lower class women's groups such as the Equality League of Self Supporting Women. Blatch further introduced the tactics of British suffragettes, more radical than their American counterparts, to New York, so that American women were "taking suffrage out of the parlors and into the streets" (p. 199). DuBois presents an important reinterpretation of an older view that only middle class women supported suffrage. More evidence including non-New York women's activism would strengthen her argument.

Chapter Six ("Outgrowing the Compact of the Fathers: Equal Rights, Woman Suffrage and the United States") and Chapter Seven ("Taking the Law Into Our Own Hands": Bradwell, Minor and Suffrage Militance in the 1870s") chronicle the influence of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments on woman suffrage. Rather than characterizing these amendments as a disaster for the

movement, DuBois reveals women benefited from them, attempting, albeit unsuccessfully, to win the vote under the citizenship clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Chapter Eight ("Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth Century Feminist Sexual Thought"), co-written with Linda Gordon, examines social purity in the feminist movement. In the nineteenth century, conservative female reformers denounced prostitution and attempted to impose chastity on both men and women. They claimed women possessed a "pure" view of sexual relations, which men should follow. "Pro-sex" feminists, a decided minority in this period, challenged the idea that sexual desire represented a purely masculine trait and sought to embrace their own sexual desires. The authors trace modern feminists who denounce pornography to the earlier, conservative wing of feminism. This chapter clearly reflects the activist stance DuBois takes towards history, placing modern issues within a broader historical context. It, coupled with the next chapter, evidences DuBois' mingling of advocacy with scholarship.

In Chapter Nine ("The Limitations of Sisterhood: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Division in the American Suffrage Movement, 1875-1902"), DuBois expands the dichotomy of conservative and radical strains within nineteenth century feminism, centering on the iconoclastic Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Stanton criticized Christianity for oppressing women, and she wrote the *Woman's Bible* to provide a feminist analysis of Scripture. The tepid response of the National American Woman Suffrage Association to this project indicated the growing conservative nature of the organization and its focus on the ballot. DuBois clearly sides with Stanton and the radicals in the sex debate of these two chapters, explaining "I find myself a good deal closer to Stanton's ideas about women's liberation, her focus on independence and egalitarianism, her emphasis on freedom rather than protection, than I feel to her so-

cial purity opponents" (p. 171) DuBois' emphasis on Stanton underscore the importance of the social purity feminists to the women's struggle. These women, regarded as conservative today, generated more followers than the radicals and helped enact legislation considered feminist in the period.

Chapter Eleven ("Making Women's History: Historian Activists of Women's Rights, 1880-1940") and Chapter Twelve ("Eleanor Flexner and the History of American Feminism") provide a historiography of the writing of woman suffrage. The former piece charts the dissolution of the feminist coalition in the 1920s and 1930s, as different factions competed for glory and respect through autobiographies and biographies. A secondary, yet important, theme in the chapter highlights the need to preserve women's papers, so that scholars can discover more about pioneering women. In the latter article, DuBois finds her historical foremother in Eleanor Flexner, who, during the conservative 1950s, wrote a seminal and, as DuBois demonstrates, quite radical account of woman suffrage. While DuBois considers herself the "fictive daughter" of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (p. 16), she easily could trace her lineage back to Flexner as well.

The most broadly conceived of the pieces, "Woman Suffrage and the Left: An International Socialist Feminist Perspective," returns to an investigation of the hyphen around which socialist-feminist revolves, trying to blend the two criticisms of the dominant culture. DuBois investigates the interplay between socialism and feminism primarily in Europe and the United States. For most of the nineteenth century, the two ideologies had an imperfect fit, as socialists denounced "bourgeois feminism" and espoused "anti-collaborationism" with middle class women (pp. 267, 263). Under the Second International, the two movements coalesced into a common fight to expand voting rights for men without property and women of all classes. The First World War

shattered this tenuous hold, and the Third International lacked a feminist component. Rather than demonstrating how the two political movements are linked, this piece demonstrates mostly the antagonisms between them.

The final chapter ("A Vindication of Women's Rights"), written for the book, traces the meaning and development of "women's rights" and "feminism" in the United States, starting with Mary Wollstonecraft in the eighteenth century. DuBois contends "women's rights" has the more radical connotation. She compares the modern abortion rights debate to the discussion about coverture laws in the nineteenth century. In the 1800s, married women could not legally own property in most states. Similarly, women's bodies today are regarded as the property of the men and, presumably, women who seek to criminalize abortion. DuBois contends abortion is "a potent symbol for women's revolt against marital dependence and female subordination" (p. 294). She concludes with a call to arms to renew the battle for women's rights in the United States.

Ellen Carol DuBois admits that "A reasonable critique of my work is that often, when writing of 'suffrage' or 'women's rights,' I am really referring to [Elizabeth Cady] Stanton and the women who shared her ideas" (p. 16). She liberally peppers her articles about nineteenth century feminism with quotations from Stanton, which gives the work a decided Northern view. Although she writes her move from SUNY Buffalo and moved to U.C.L.A. in 1988 gave her a more multicultural, even global, perspective about feminism and women's rights, DuBois still ignores the South in much of her approach. Except for the expatriate Grimke sisters, Southern women provide an uneasy fit to many of DuBois' views, such as the reliance on socialism to invigorate woman suffrage in the early twentieth century, and the working class components of the movement. Southern women also tended to be more conservative in their approach to challeng-

ing male hegemony than DuBois' examples, especially regarding suffragette tactics.

In the course of her work, DuBois all but dismisses the final years of the suffrage battle, maintaining "that too close attention to the drama of suffragism's last years, both between activists and the Wilson administration and between dissenting camps of suffragists, [which] leads to an exclusive focus on tactics, to questions that I did not think were fundamental, and to a narrative line climaxing with the Nineteenth Amendment and concluding in 1920s" (p. 18). Downplaying the struggle for the Nineteenth Amendment in the woman suffrage story reminds this reviewer of leaving a play before the final act. Perhaps some of DuBois' dismissal of the War years stems from her emphasis on the radical nature of woman suffrage. Conservative and moderate women, from the Daughters of the Confederacy to the General Federation of Women's Clubs, supported suffrage in its final battles. By 1920, woman suffrage had moved into the mainstream and out of the fringe, losing its radical nature in the process.

In addition, while suffragists themselves continued to engage in political and social activities after 1920, the achievement of their goal affected the women's movement, especially those people outside the core group of leaders whom DuBois cites in her work, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch. Women's activism lacked the cohesion of the woman suffrage struggle once the Nineteenth Amendment had been ratified. After 1920, the vanguard of the women's revolution continued its struggle, but many of the followers laid down their arms and went to work within the dominant political culture.

Such matters aside, Ellen Carol DuBois has assembled a very useful array of her work in *Woman Suffrage and Women's Rights*, providing a highly readable and entertaining account of these events. For scholars already familiar with DuBois' work, the book will provide a convenient refresher to her points. To younger scholars, the book

demonstrates how to combine historical scholarship with political advocacy without damaging either.

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