



Susan Goodier. *No Votes for Women: The New York State Anti-Suffrage Movement.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012. 272 pp. \$25.00, ebook, ISBN 978-0-252-09467-5.

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Published on H-SHGAPE (October, 2014)

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On August 24, 1920, Tennessee officially ratified the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America, becoming the requisite thirty-sixth state to pass the amendment, which made it illegal to deny a citizen the right to vote based on sex. Two days later, on August 26, 1920, the U.S. secretary of state certified the ratification and the amendment became law. After the Nineteenth Amendment's passage, organizations originally formed to fight for or against women's right to vote either changed their names and purpose or ceased to exist. The cliché "To the victor goes the spoils" seemed, at least in this case, to apply. For many, the memory of those who stood against the movement faded as key suffragists claimed the right to put forward their versions of the history. In recent years, though, a number of women's historians have begun to ask questions and produce scholarship regarding the other side of the suffrage battle—the anti-suffragist movement.[1] Susan Goodier's recent book, *No Votes for Women: The New York State Anti-Suffrage Movement*, is an important contribution to this understudied era of conservative anti-women's rights activism.

In *No Votes for Women*, Goodier's primary goal is "to understand the movement for women's rights from the point of view of the women who opposed their enfranchisement in New York

State" (p. 7). Goodier definitely focuses on state-level history. As the author points out, however, New York was an important battleground for the woman suffrage movement for more than twenty years. Goodier therefore correctly places her New York-based research in the context of national suffrage and anti-suffrage history. In other words, *No Votes for Women* is an essential read for those interested in suffrage or anti-suffrage activism regardless of their local, regional, or national focus.

Another important aspect of the book is its deconstruction of gender history and of previous chronological misconceptions associated with anti-suffragist campaigning. Through the examination of anti-suffragist primary sources, and by not relying on the views and campaign rhetoric of suffragists, Goodier skillfully confronts two misconceptions about anti-suffragists: "First is that the rhetoric of men who opposed women's suffrage is synonymous with the rhetoric of all anti-suffrage, [and second] that the period of the most virulent organized anti-suffragism—after New York voters enfranchised women and until the mid-1920s—defines the entire anti-suffrage movement" (pp. 7-8). Instead, Goodier initiates her anti-suffrage timeline with a first chapter focusing on anti-suffrage activity in response to Susan B. Anthony's suffrage campaign leading up to the New York State Constitutional Convention in 1894. It

was at this point in the 1890s, Goodier argues, that women anti-suffragists started coming into their own, formed anti-suffrage organizations, and temporarily created public space beyond that of the traditionally male anti-suffrage activities. This first chapter is an excellent, often biographical, overview of elite white women and their families' involvement in speaking out against woman suffrage. These individual stories set the stage and the tone for understanding a mostly fractured series of individual acts predating the formation of a New York State anti-suffrage organization. Also important in this chapter is the establishment of the identities of nineteenth-century anti-suffragists. Most were from well-known families but were activists who had helped break barriers for women, for example, through employment or education activism. When it came to suffrage, however, these women expressed the view that the vote was different and needed to remain in the male sphere.

The following chapter examines the period between 1895 and 1911, when the most renowned anti-suffrage organizations in the State of New York arose. First came the New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage; out of its ranks and campaign office, the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage was created. The fact that the New York association was the most dominant influence on the national anti-suffrage organization and its campaigning says a lot about the limited nature of the methods and geographical perspectives of the movement. Yet, as Goodier's book shows, anti-suffragists' consistent presence at state legislative and congressional floor debates and committee hearings was impressive. Representatives consistently attended to give speeches and provide campaign materials to officeholders. Furthermore, evidence of their anti-suffrage pamphlets, campaign materials, and arguments existed in newspapers and other states' and local chapters' suffrage and anti-suffrage association files

across the nation. For a time, their organizational methods had influence and were effective.

In *No Votes for Women*, Goodier provides a gendered model of anti-suffrage activism different from that of many historians. The New York woman anti-suffragists rejected male involvement in their association, and they banned men from their group's activities. Hence the creation of the male-dominated New York State Association Opposed to the Political Suffrage for Women, also known as the Man-Suffrage Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, and subsequently Men's National Anti-Suffrage Committee (pp. 80-81, 110-111). Through their efforts to challenge the public perception that men were the only ones who opposed woman suffrage, these female activists carved space for an independent gendered identity: women opposed to receiving the right to vote. As Goodier points out though, carving this independent public space was likely an attempt to have a women's anti-suffrage activist identity *at all*. At times, the men's associations dominated the anti-suffrage platform to the point where women anti-suffragists chafed at their existence. Goodier's analysis and coverage of the complicated inner workings of a conservative, gender-normative movement is well executed.

The portions of this book that captivated this reviewer most, though, were those in the last chapters, which provide an afterward view of anti-suffragism. The actions and political identities of anti-suffragists following the Nineteenth Amendment's passage have often been a mystery. Yet Goodier provides a fascinating examination of the variety of activities in which these women participated through the 1920s and into the early 1930s. After the Nineteenth Amendment passed, former anti-suffragists often altered their stance and began to vote. Goodier provides examples of anti-suffragists and their families taking public pride in their female family members taking civic responsibility and being among the first to register to vote. Others discussed in the book, though,

had a difficult time accepting their newly enfranchised status. This dichotomy provides an excellent look at the individual psychological effects of loss for participants in the decades-old movement

Eventually, Goodier argues, many New York anti-suffragists became active and supportive members of the Republican Party, the majority political party in the state. During the 1928 presidential campaign, “the Women’s National Republican Club held a mock convention to poke fun at the men who refused to let women into their inner sanctums of real power” (p. 165). The purpose was to chastise the continuance of exclusionary male-dominated party politics; through their public performance and display, however, these conservative women also mocked women’s rights icons and ridiculed pro-suffrage activism. They also criticized other prominent women for less-political activities that appeared to uphold more traditional gender values. Readers will thoroughly enjoy Goodier’s detailed retelling of this 1928 mock convention. The author’s other examples, associated with larger patterns of former anti-suffragists’ political engagement during this decade, are an excellent addition to the existing scholarship discussing women’s activism in the era following passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

For all its good qualities, the book’s overall conclusions are somewhat overzealous. One example is when Goodier claims that the change in suffragists’ rhetoric over the years was solely in reaction to anti-suffragists campaign messages or to convince anti-suffragists to change sides. She concludes that “from this point of view female anti-suffragists ironically provided the impetus for the ultimate success of the woman suffrage movement” (p. 11). Instead, this reviewer finds it likely that both women anti-suffragists and suffragists were curtailing their messages to suit and attract the support of the same groups—male voters and officeholders. The women anti-suffragists were neither the reason the suffrage movement was successful nor the barrier which

kept woman suffrage from passing earlier. The fact is, women did not have the right to vote in most states before the Nineteenth Amendment. Those who had the ability to extend enfranchisement were almost exclusively elite white men, and thus they were the audience and the gatekeepers for woman suffrage.

Finally, the book suffers from relying on limited and somewhat dated historiography on the effect of the Nineteenth Amendment on women’s political mobilization and impact after 1920. Goodier’s argument, that “the vote was not to be as powerful a tool for reform for women as the suffragists argued it would be” because “women never did vote as a bloc” (p. 171), runs counter to recent decades of suffrage studies. Works by historians Lorraine Gates Schuyler, Judith N. McArthur, Harold Smith, and others confirm the opposite, as does the existence of the anti-suffragists.[2] Women in the United States, before and after gaining the right to vote, occupied different sides of political issues. Women did not vote or lobby or side as a solid bloc because they were women; if they did, all women would have either been anti-suffragists or suffragists. Before gaining the vote and after, women approached politics from a variety of perspectives and with a plethora of arguments. Thus, to judge suffrage as an ineffective tool due to the lack of bloc voting is a misinterpretation. Conservative women before were conservative after; moderate and liberal women before were moderate and liberal women after, and so on. Furthermore, during both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, woman suffragists often solidly identified with a political party *before* gaining the right to vote.[3] The difference after the Nineteenth Amendment was that, like men, they were individuals with a vote.

Overall, though, Goodier deserves congratulations for the detective work and primary research it took to produce this study. As the author points out, “There are no major archival collections for the New York State Association Opposed to Wom-

an Suffrage or the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage. Papers are scattered in woman suffrage collections, historical societies, and libraries.... Anti-suffragists generally did not collect their papers or write autobiographies; once women won the vote, most anti-suffragists fell silent on the topic” (p. 237). Thus, this book incorporates records and manuscript collections from more than twenty-eight repositories in the northeastern United States, including the Library of Congress. Even so, the personalities of certain anti-suffragists come to life, and the narrative does not suffer from the scattered puzzle pieces the author had to put together. This book not only speaks to historians of conservative women’s movements and gender but also to history of memory scholars looking to broaden their interpretations of the effect of political loss on activists, and those interested in the history of public forgetting.

Notes

[1]. For examples of previous works examining the woman anti-suffrage movement, see Elna C. Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Susan E. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign against Woman Suffrage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

[2]. Lorraine Gates Schuyler, *The Weight of Their Votes: Southern Women and Political Leverage in the 1920s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Judith N. McArthur and Harold L. Smith, *Minnie Fisher Cunningham: A Suffragist’s Life in Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Harold L. Smith, “‘All Good Things Start With the Women’: The Origin of the Texas Birth Control Movement, 1933-1945,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 115 (January 2011), 253-283; and Judith N. McArthur and Harold L. Smith, “Not Whistling Dixie: Women’s Movements and Feminist Politics” in *The Texas Left*, ed. D.

Cullen and K. Wilkison (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010).

[3]. For discussions of women with political party alliances prior to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, see Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Jessica S. Brannon-Wranosky, “Southern Promise and Necessity: Texas, Regional Identity, and the National Woman Suffrage Movements, 1868–1920” (PhD diss.: University of North Texas, 2010).

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Citation: Jessica Brannon-Wranosky. Review of Goodier, Susan. *No Votes for Women: The New York State Anti-Suffrage Movement*. H-SHGAPPE, H-Net Reviews. October, 2014.

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