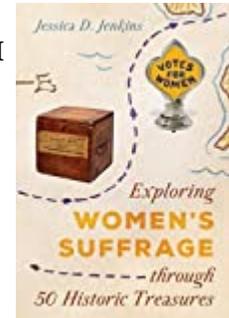


Jessica D. Jenkins. *Exploring Women's Suffrage through 50 Historic Treasures.* AASLH Exploring America's Historic Treasures series. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020. xxxvi + 305 pp. \$36.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-5381-1279-3.



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Jessica D. Jenkins's *Exploring Women's Suffrage through 50 Historic Treasures* features a remarkable array of objects and an expansive view of what constitutes both material culture and suffrage history. From towns to cuckoo clocks and cookbooks to cars, the book offers a diverse range of objects to tell a diverse range of stories. Jenkins is a curator and her text, structured like an exhibition, offers a variegated vision of American suffrage history, illustrated by fifty objects. Written for a general audience, as well as museum professionals, the text is both an introduction to the American suffrage movement and a demonstration of the variety of objects that can be used to tell new and old suffrage stories. Material culture scholars may lament the lack of direct engagement with material sources, but the book's real strength is in its array of objects and celebration of small, regional collections and public institutions. *Exploring Women's Suffrage* insists that local archives can tell national stories and that making these connections deepens and enriches our understanding of the texture of suffrage history.

Jenkins's text is neither a chronological survey nor a text organized around specific forms of material culture. Instead, *Exploring Women's Suffrage* is structured around nine themes intended to give an introduction to the contours of the suffrage movement, a narrative that Jenkins stretches from the late eighteenth century to 2017. These themes—"Early Years"; "Organizations"; "Symbols"; "Consumer Culture"; "Allies"; "Roadblocks and Setbacks"; "Tactics and Public Demonstrations"; "Milestones"; and "Legacy"—work to show the multilevel operation of suffrage politics, placing local and regional stories alongside national narratives. Each thematic section is broken into short chapters, snapshots illustrated by a single object. These snapshots often do not engage with the objects themselves, but use them to connect to a broader story. A crazy quilt sparks a story about the proliferation of state-level suffrage organizations and the particular efforts of the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association; a Norwegian head-dress and vest illustrates a chapter on the first national suffrage parade in 1913, presenting both the

internal variety of the parade and its organizers' interests in unified spectacle, resulting in exclusionary tactics along lines of race and class. The total effect is kaleidoscopic, unsettling tidy narrative arcs and nestling conventional objects alongside singular ones. This intentional strategy may make the text useful for teachers or other educational professionals interested in curating their own selections, but it can undermine close engagement with specific material strategies or rigorous outlining of each object's context.

The fragmentation of the text does make an implicit argument. This is not *a* story, but a collection of stories. In that way, it is responsive to broader historiographic shifts in suffrage scholarship. The field of suffrage history has been changing over the last forty years, though it is still often framed in relation to the narrative established by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and other leaders of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). This received narrative is overwhelmingly white and middle-class and focused on institutional politics, drawing a straight line from the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Jenkins's text is part of a historiographic trend away from these totalizing narratives and toward a history of pluralism, disagreement, and diversity. From Rosalyn Terborg-Penn's pioneering work on Black women's suffrage activism to Cathleen Cahill's and Martha S. Jones's recent texts, historians are increasingly pointing not only to the racism of the mainstream, white movement, but also to the essential labors of women of color in reshaping the meanings of the vote and the possibilities for women in politics and public space.[1] There has also been a general move to re-periodize, orienting histories away from the teleological progression from Seneca Falls to ratification. Instead, scholars have moved toward an expanded view that stretches back into the eighteenth century to grasp the roots of the liberal, rights-based theories that early suffragists claimed, and forward into the twentieth century

to articulate the failures of the Nineteenth Amendment to secure the rights of women of color, who continued to face discrimination and exclusion in the Jim Crow era. Jenkins's work reinforces this salutary trend by acknowledging and exploring the racism of white women's suffrage work, celebrating underrepresented ways in which women of color advocated for themselves within and outside of the movement, toggling back and forth between the national and the local, and reaching beyond the boundaries of 1848 and 1920.

Jenkins foregrounds the notion that multiple publics can access history through material culture. She argues that "people connect with recognizable items," making the case for displaying the everyday, often overlooked aspects of suffrage material culture (p. xvi). Jenkins's work is laudatory for its democratic tastes and it, in turn, demonstrates the integration of suffrage politics into almost every arena of life. This collection of material objects is a welcome entry into the field of suffrage material culture; although there is a plethora of information on the visual culture of American suffrage and the movement's embrace of consumer culture, there is a dearth of scholarship on the dizzying array of material strategies and tangible objects that American suffragists employed, made, collected, and debated over.[2] While there is yet to be a thoroughgoing analysis of the ways objects helped construct, mediate, and display individual and group identities within the movement, this book is a tantalizing compendium for scholars interested in addressing this lack. The sections on symbols and consumer culture deal most explicitly with objects, but there are many opportunities for more direct engagement. For example, a banner reading "Factory Workers" and featuring an icon of a sewing machine illustrates a chapter on the often fractious and tenuous alliances between mainstream suffrage organizing and the labor movement. The banner itself, carried in a National Suffrage Day parade in Hartford, CT, might provide a window into these complicated dynamics. Who made these banners?

How was their labor remunerated? How were women's relationships to textile production classed and how did the suffrage movement navigate these differences? The specific textures of cross-class organizing might appear in finer detail with a focus on the materiality of these ubiquitous banners.

American suffragists constructed themselves, their politics, and their images in fascinatingly material ways, and there are arguments about the nature of those material strategies embedded within Jenkins's text. One of Jenkins's early chapters is illustrated by the table upon which the Declaration of Sentiments was drafted in 1848. This table was gifted first to Elizabeth Cady Stanton and later to Susan B. Anthony (who was not present at the Seneca Falls Convention where the Declaration was presented and formalized). After Anthony's death, NAWSA kept the table with a copy of the Declaration pasted to its underside. Jenkins recounts that, upon the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, the Smithsonian displayed the table in an exhibition celebrating the suffrage victory. Jenkins writes, "by placing it on view, the institution made clear that this was not just another old table but an extraordinary piece of history" (p. 20). Jenkins's implicit argument is clear here: one cannot always tell that an object bears a suffrage story. It is the responsibility of institutions, curators, and scholars to bring out the stories hidden within the seemingly everyday. Suffragists embraced spectacle and symbolism and Jenkins chronicles aspects of that history, but she also shows that conventional, mundane objects are equally essential to telling suffrage stories. These objects can nuance our connection to dominant suffrage histories and render tangible our understanding of less publicized ones, such as suffragists' allegiances with boosters in the gold-mining West, efforts to establish an exclusively white movement in the South, and lunchrooms for working-class women opened by socialites in New York (all documented in Jenkins' text).

Through the structure and tone of her book, Jenkins is a clear advocate for the power of material objects to help viewers connect to histories that can feel abstract, distant, and opaque. Her prose is approachable and clear (aside from a few jarring copyediting errors, including the repeated misspelling of Barack Obama's name). The book is aimed at the general reader, but sits in conversation with historiographic trends in suffrage scholarship to present the movement as one fraught with contradictions, disagreements, and inadequacies. But the text bears its own tensions as well. Jenkins is working both to examine the failings of the movement and to look hopefully ahead to the fulfillment of its legacy. Her final entry examines Adelaide Johnson's *Portrait Monument to Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony*, sculpted in 1920 and stored out of view before its placement in the Capitol Building's Rotunda in 1997. This marble sculpture tells many stories, but Jenkins ends with a consideration of it as an unfinished invitation to the future. In the contrast between the smoothly shaped busts of Mott, Stanton, and Anthony, the solid marble of the base, and the rough protrusion behind the three figures, Jenkins reads the legacy of the past and hope for the future. She goes on to list women elected to office over the last one hundred years, rhetorically adding their names to the monument. She writes: "among those elected were women who identify as Native American, Latino, black, white, Asian American, immigrants, and refugees. Johnson's *Portrait Monument* represents all these women and encourages more to add their names" (p. 262). It's a false note at the book's close, a hopeful gloss on a monument that reveals the expensive, institutional, and undeniably material ways in which white suffragists cast themselves as the center of the movement. Instead, the monumental white marble might offer an opportunity to meditate upon the persistence of white supremacist narratives, the continuing solidity of their presence in contemporary life.

There is a meta-narrative shimmering through Jenkins's text and material culture scholars should work to draw it out. How have these objects been used to tell exclusive stories? How can material histories allow us to see those processes and unsettle those narratives? Suffragists themselves worked as lay curators and archivists, seeking to direct public memory through their careful management and display of objects. Susan B. Anthony used the Declaration of Sentiments table in an effort to amplify the importance of Seneca Falls and materialize her own connection to the movement's "origins." [3] Johnson's sculpture is another entry into this history of mythmaking. Efforts to represent suffrage history through objects have often obscured as much as they revealed. Jenkins's text works to insert new stories into the canon and to reframe old ones, but perhaps its most important message is the reminder of the key role that archives, museums, and other collecting institutions play in constructing what we remember and how we remember it.

Notes

[1]. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Cathleen Cahill, *Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2020); Martha S. Jones, *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

[2]. Allison Lange, *Picturing Political Power: Images in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); Mary Chapman, *Making Noise, Making News; Suffrage Print Culture and U.S. Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Margaret Mary Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). Kenneth Florey also has an encyclopedic compendium of suffrage memorabilia: Kenneth Florey, *Women's Suffrage Memorabilia* (Jefferson,

NC: McFarland, Inc., 2013). Susan Ware's *Why They Marched* is perhaps the closest analog to Jenkins's text, itself a sampler platter of stories and objects that aims to diversify our suffrage narratives and make them tangible. Susan Ware, *Why They Marched: Untold Stories of the Women Who Fought for the Right to Vote* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019).

[3]. The table was one of the objects preserved when Anthony and her biographer, Ida Harper Husted, destroyed many of the materials Anthony had collected over the years after finishing the sixth volume of the *History of Woman Suffrage*, a tome that emphasized NAWSA's (and Anthony's) role in the long history of the suffrage movement. When displayed at the Smithsonian, the table's caption suggested that Anthony had been the original owner of the table and, thus, had been present at the writing of the Declaration of Sentiments. Lisa Tetrault describes the importance of this object to Anthony's grip over the public narrative in Lisa Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

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