



Cathleen D. Cahill. *Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. 376 pp. \$27.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-4696-5932-9.

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Cathleen D. Cahill's *Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement* provides a cogent examination of several suffragists of color who "demanded their democratic rights as Americans while also fighting for equality as women of color" (p. 3). The book makes an important contribution to the historiography of women's suffrage by expanding the frame beyond the better-known stories of white feminists and national suffrage organizations to show how the broader suffrage movement was shaped by issues of race and class.

Cahill argues that suffragists of color remain understudied in part because they complicate the narrative of middle-class white suffragists and the fight for the Nineteenth Amendment. The struggle of women of color for equality went well beyond our conventional understandings of the suffrage movement, bridging voting rights with issues such as tribal sovereignty, immigration rights, racial violence, desegregation, language rights, and the self-determination of communities of color.

Cahill focuses on the lives and work of six activists: Gertrude Simmons Bonnin (Zitkala-Ša), a Yankton Dakota writer, artist, and activist; Mabel Ping-Hua Lee, a Chinese immigrant to New York who advocated for Chinese American women's rights and connected the American suffrage movement with republican revolutionaries in China;

Carrie Williams Clifford, an African American writer and clubwoman involved in the NAACP and Niagara Movement; Adelina "Nina" Luna Otero-Warren, a New Mexico politician and advocate of bilingual culture and education; and Laura Cornelius Kellogg, an Oneida author and tribal sovereignty activist. In addition, Cahill also includes a fascinating chapter on Dawn Mist, a fictional Blackfeet woman suffragist used by the Great Northern Railway to boost tourism along its routes. All of these women (barring the fictional Dawn Mist) faced intense racism within the suffrage movement but nevertheless actively shaped the movement and its priorities.

The book is divided into four parts. Part 1 focuses on the time period from 1890 to 1913, highlighting the backgrounds of the book's central figures and how they came to see voting rights as a tool in broader struggles for civil and human rights. Part 2 covers the period from 1913 to 1917, during which the rise of white supremacy in the federal government led many suffragists of color to reconfigure their activism to focus on citizenship rights for their communities. Part 3 focuses on the changing political landscape of the World War I era, during which suffragists of color increasingly called on the United States to live up to its ideals of democracy and equality both at home and abroad. Part 4 covers the decade following the

passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, a period “marked by great possibility and crushing disappointment” for suffragists of color (p. 7). Although voters could no longer be denied on the basis of sex, many states restricted suffrage in other ways and suffragists of color continued their fight. The epilogue follows the legacies of the book’s six central figures, exploring why they have been so often excluded from the histories of the suffrage movement by both white suffragists and (to a lesser extent) historians.

Cahill is careful to note that while struggles for voting rights and broader rights for communities of color were related, women of color did not form a coherent group within the suffrage movement and did not necessarily see themselves as a united interest. Instead, their engagement was shaped by “their position in America’s racial hierarchies, their citizenship status, and their class standing” (p. 262). Cahill delves into several different subfields to provide a full picture of these activists, a task she approaches with compassion and expertise.

Throughout the narrative, Cahill highlights the sometimes-strained relationships between white suffragists and suffragists of color. In addition to their fights against misogyny, suffragists of color frequently faced racism from their would-be allies. As Cahill notes, white suffragists often “could not separate their racial privilege from their gender disadvantage,” perpetuating racial inequality even as they fought for gender equality (p. 19). White suffragists often blamed people of color for the failures of state-level suffrage amendments, and when such amendments did pass, they often only guaranteed voting rights to white women. Consequently, suffragists of color had to be strategic in their dealings with white suffragists, sometimes “appealing to white women’s better nature as a way of holding them to a higher standard than they were living up to in reality” (p. 19).

Cahill makes an important intervention into a historiography that is still largely focused on

white women, and calls on historians to expand the geographic and temporal bounds of suffrage narratives. Many suffragists of color were active in what is often considered the “periphery” of American empire, and the book provides a fascinating look at how the subjects of empire fought for expanded rights in the early twentieth century. This fight for equality did not end with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, as it fell short of universal enfranchisement for many people of color and marginalized communities. Instead, Cahill frames 1920 as a “pivot” in a longer struggle for voting rights.

Recasting the Vote is an important book not only for historians of suffrage but also for those interested in histories of gender, social movements, and empire. The book would work well for upper-level undergraduate or graduate gender history courses. Cahill calls on readers and historians to “take a broader view of political activism and to confront the many racisms in American history” (p. 278). We can hope that other historians continue to answer that call.

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