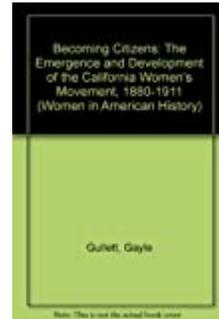




Gayle Gullett. *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women's Movement, 1880-1911.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000. xiii + 272 pp. \$18.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-252-06818-8; \$42.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-02503-7.



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Politics Transformed: The Womens Movement in California, 1880-1911

Gayle Gullett begins her important book about the emergence and development of the California women's movement with the state's 1911 woman suffrage victory. That victory was certainly critical to the national woman suffrage movement, yet very little historical scholarship has been published regarding California activist women. Gullett's book, *Becoming Citizens*, provides the first extensive treatment of the California women's movement from the 1880s to 1911. The book adds to a growing literature in United States women's history that has, over the last two decades, analyzed the participation of diverse groups of women in social reform (including the creation of the welfare state) and partisan politics during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It contributes to recent scholarly discussions of the ways in which women activists defined feminism, maternalism, partisanship, and citizenship. The book supports the argument that the progressive movement cannot be fully understood without examining women's central role in its construction and implementation. This study helps us to understand the nature of the California women's movement and California progressivism in new ways.[1]

Gullett examines the ways in which women activists, whom she defines as "predominantly" white and elite (in terms of both class and political ideology), organized a mass movement in order to expand women's social roles and political power. Their assumption that women shared the "ties of womanhood" led to efforts to build a diverse and united movement, but also one led by the white and affluent (pp. 2-3). Gullett develops her account of the rise of the California women's movement in two stages, focusing primarily on urban activism in the Bay Area and Los Angeles.

The first two chapters analyze women's efforts to create a mass movement in the late 1880s and 1890s. Gullett pieces together an episodic story of regionally-based women's activism, encompassing the work of temperance advocates, club women, college-educated women, and professionals. The women's movement they created by the mid-1890s sought to empower women and increase their influence in society by advancing "women's work" – a term that included domestic labor, wage earning, social service, and political activism (p. 3). Their activism both challenged and reinforced traditional notions

of womanhood. As they expanded notions of women's proper roles, they linked the expansion both to women's presumed "moral domesticity" and to political citizenship traditionally reserved for men. While left-wing activists achieved a measure of influence within some organizations, especially the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, women's activism generally reflected white, Protestant, and elite backgrounds and orientations of the participants. By 1894, the California women's movement coalesced in the form of a Woman's Congress, an umbrella organization with yearly conventions that united women across the state. Just two years later, this movement conducted a vigorous, but unsuccessful, campaign for woman suffrage within the larger context of Populist insurgency and decline.

Gullett argues that when the women's movement finally won woman suffrage in 1911, its members did so as "civic reformers," in coalition with labor movement activists, "organized into the women's wing of social reform progressivism" (p. 102). She begins her second stage of women's movement development in 1900, as club women rebuilt the movement, dashed by the 1896 suffrage defeat, by focusing on expanding women's influence on public life through "civic altruism." They defined civic altruism as the building of a public space in which citizens of both genders could construct a "moral, humane, harmonious" society (p. 107). Led by the California Federation of Women's Clubs, founded in 1902, women reformers rejected radicalism for class mediation and nonpartisan social reform. They self-consciously sought alliances with male civic leaders and became engaged in with them in "boosterism," as well as reform. Efforts to construct a romantic regional history (by restoring the El Camino Real) and the "City Beautiful" (through preserving historic neighborhoods, saving trees, and building playgrounds) promised to promote social harmony and boost urban growth and economic development. Gullett examines women's clubhouses as social spaces, arguing that lavish clubhouses symbolized the fitness of elite, white women for civic leadership. Club women also adopted a policy of racial exclusion (except of California women who seemed to embody an intermediate racial position) that confirmed their elite class and racial status.

After 1906, affluent women and men joined together politically in the good government movement, a precursor to progressivism. Between 1906 and 1909, women played visible and important roles in good government municipal campaigns in both Los Angeles and San Francisco. Male reformers no longer simply supported orga-

nized womanhood's civic altruism, they sought women as political allies and eventually supported woman suffrage. After male progressives gained command of the Republican Party and then won control of state government, they put a constitutional amendment for woman suffrage on the ballot in 1911. Another critical linkage suffragists developed after 1906 was to the labor movement. The Los Angeles women's movement, through its socialist leaders, had established links to labor in the late nineteenth century, but in San Francisco cross-class relations were more problematic. Nevertheless, during the successful 1911 campaign for woman suffrage, a heterogeneous coalition of groups worked for the amendment in "diversity and unity" (p. 181). Gullett highlights the critical importance of the alliance between the women's movement and male good government reformers to both the suffrage victory and progressive reform in California.

Gullett's research on the white and elite sector of the women's movement is exhaustive. She mines the organizational papers and publications of California women's groups and the personal papers of women activists and their male progressive counterparts. She also examines a variety of popular newspapers in San Francisco and Los Angeles for information on women's campaigns and their relationship to male-dominated reform and partisan politics. Exploring the ways in which popular newspapers, aligned with different political parties, responded to women's activism also tells us much about the ways their campaigns were perceived. Gullett not only analyzes the editorials and reportage of the newspapers, but also deconstructs (and reprints) political cartoons for their humorous treatment of "vital, unsettling, and unsettled" issues related to gender relations (p. 7).

While her sources allow Gullett to construct the trajectory and impact of the elite, white women's movement, they do not permit her much access to the personal and private lives of her subjects. I wanted to know more about the relationship between the personal and political for these women activists, about the process by which they constructed their political beliefs, and about the ideological conflicts among them and with their male counterparts. But I know from my own research on socialist women in California, for which similar kinds of sources were available, that the somewhat "disembodied" nature of Gullett's book comes from from gaps and silences in the sources themselves.

Gullett's book provides a model for other state and local studies of women's movements in terms of the breadth of her research. She examines many different

women's organizations and campaigns -encompassing temperance and woman suffrage, civic work and social welfare reform, nonpartisan coalitions and electoral politics. Her research provides an excellent window into the political work of the white and elite, and furnishes some information on socialist, white working class, and ethnic-racial activists. Gullett also makes fine use of the research of other historians who have recently analyzed the records and papers of radical, labor, and African-American women. [2] Given the nature of her sources, it makes sense that elite women would occupy a central place in her narrative and shape her arguments. But Gullett's identification of the elite as the "dominant" strand within the movement tends to marginalize "other" women. While present, they ultimately remain peripheral to her analysis of the movement's ideology, activism, and relationship to the broader world of reform, especially after 1900.

Gullett's discussion of the relationship of populist women to the 1890s suffrage coalition provides the most effective integration of different ideological and strategic perspectives. Gullett argues that a "significant" group of women's movement activists aligned themselves with populism in the 1890s and that the populist insurgency helped to put woman suffrage on the ballot. The majority of suffragists, identified with the Republican Party, attempted to distance the issue from radical reform, linking it instead to increased social stability. During the 1896 suffrage campaign both voices were present, and the radical contingent worked to reach working-class and immigrant voters, while mainstream activists focused on recruiting prominent club women (pp. 92-100).

Another strength of the book is Gullett's focus on her subjects' relationship to progressive reform in the early twentieth century. She argues that women activists were critical to the construction of California progressivism and that their alliances with male progressive reformers helped them to achieve woman suffrage and other reforms. Gullett provides a very interesting analysis of mainstream club women's involvement in "good government" campaigns prior to 1911, showing how much their politics of moral authority dovetailed with the male reformers' desire to purge cities of machine politics and corruption. Gullett demonstrates how the class and ideological interests of male and female reformers converged, and how clubwomen's claims to morality legitimated the good government movement. But some questions remain unanswered. How did the gendered visions of the two groups differ, conflict, and converge in other, less congenial, ways? What kinds of alliances did women's move-

ment activists build with other male-dominated reform movements of this period, especially with the socialist and labor movements? Did differing partisan alliances create conflict among women? By casting a wider net encompassing the relationships of women activists to many strands of male politics and reform, a more complicated story of alliances and coalitions, convergence and conflict may have emerged.

Becoming Citizens reflects an enormous amount of research and makes new and important contributions to our understanding of the development of the women's movement and progressivism in California. This book provides an essential source for a new synthesis regarding women's activism and social reform in California during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Notes

[1]. Recent work on women in social reform and partisan politics in the United States is voluminous. See, for example, Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991); Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Leacock, eds., *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Melanie Gustafson, Kristie Miller, and Elisabeth Israel Perry, eds., *We Have Come To Stay: American Women and Political Parties, 1880-1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999). For a helpful review of the literature on women and the welfare state, see Patrick Wilkinson, "The Selfless and the Helpless: Maternalist Origins of the U.S. Welfare State," *Feminist Studies* 25:3 (Fall 1999), 571-597. For a synthetic analysis of women and progressivism, see William Chafe, "Women's History and Political History: Some Thoughts on Progressivism and the New Deal," in Hewitt and Leacock, 101-118. For recent scholarship on California progressivism, see William Deverell and Tom Sitton, eds., *California Progressivism Revisited* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

[2]. See for example, Sherry Jeanne Katz, "Dual Commitments: Feminism, Socialism, and Women's Political Activism in California, 1890-1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1991); Susan Englander, *Class Conflict and Class Coalition in the California Woman Suffrage Movement, 1907-1912: The San Francisco Wage Earners' Suffrage League* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992); and Rebecca J. Mead, "Trade Unionism and Political Activity Among San Francisco Wage-Earning Women, 1900-1922" (Master's Thesis, San Francisco State University, 1991).

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