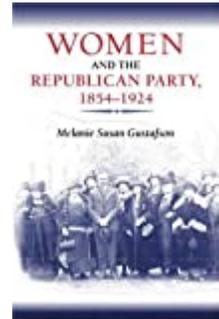




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Republican Women and the Gendered Politics of Partisanship, 1854-1924

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Melanie Gustafson successfully confronts the historical complexity of American women's partisanship in *Women and the Republican Party, 1854-1924*. Her work deepens and enriches the field of women's political history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by bringing together two seemingly disparate trends in women's politics. On the one hand, historians have long focused on women's nonpartisan identities in their altruistic reform and suffrage movements. Politics in these studies has been defined broadly to include the wide range of women's public activities and the formation of a women's political culture.[1] On the other hand, historians have more recently studied women's partisan loyalties and their roles in institutional politics. In these cases politics has been defined narrowly around electoral and party politics, a partisan culture long dominated by men.[2] Gustafson adds to this debate by utilizing both meanings of politics to show how women secured and advanced their own agendas while also striving to enter the machinations of party politics. In other words, dis-

franchised women were both partisan and nonpartisan players who sought access to the male-dominated institutions of political parties without losing their influence as women uncorrupted by such politics. The resulting portrait of women's political history, then, is more complex than previously realized. This book demonstrates how much of women's political history is about the gendered politics of partisanship.

Gustafson develops her analyses with a focus on the Republican Party at the national level. From its founding in 1854, through the Progressive Party challenge in the early twentieth century, to the height of its success in the 1920s, the Republican Party provides a chronological history that holds Gustafson's study of women's varied political activities together. With this focus Gustafson aims to demonstrate the depth of women's partisanship before women were enfranchised, to raise new questions about the significance of women's suffrage won in 1920 (including how disfranchisement shaped a "gendering of politics"), to explore the many ways women shaped their political strategies and identities before and after suffrage, and to explore the relationships between the Republican

Party and women's political culture (p. 2). Her work effectively addresses all these issues and more.

The first of seven chapters traces women's support for the nascent Republican Party in its founding years in the 1850s. White middle-class women played an important role in the formation of the Party through their influence as principled women. As guardians of virtue, women reinforced the new Party's moral standing by their association with it. Gustafson is especially effective in her discussion of Jessie Benton Fremont and Anna Dickinson. Fremont, the wife of the first Republican candidate for president, John Fremont, encouraged the Republican Party to recruit and rely upon women's partisan contributions by linking the new Party to abolitionist women. Dickinson was a political speaker hired by the Republican Party during the Civil War to "represent the party's moral consensus" (p. 27). Both women emphasized their morality as women uncorrupted by party politics to advance the popularity of the Republican Party.

The many tensions that arose between Republican men and women in the post-war era are developed in Chapter 2. By tracing the well-known contours of the split amongst abolitionists over the Fourteenth Amendment, Gustafson argues that the two organizations created out of this conflict, the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) and the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), were a significant factor in the development of women's nonpartisan strategy for suffrage. While members of AWSA remained loyal Republicans, those of the alternative NWSA asserted their independence from the Party to convey their disappointment in the Republican adoption of voting rights for African-American men but not for women. In asserting their independence, women of NWSA such as Susan B. Anthony tended to emphasize women's difference from men. This gender difference was reinforced in the suffrage states that emerged in the West in the late nineteenth century when suffragists stressed that women, as "proper voters," cleaned up politics without competing in partisan ways against men for elective office (p. 43). Pressured "to smooth their acceptance at a time when their allies were dwindling," suffragists encouraged enfranchised women to present themselves as nonpartisan voters and to avoid partisan loyalties (p. 43).

Chapters 3 and 4 reveal the growing debates within and amongst women's organizations over women's partisanship. While devoted suffragists pursued nonpartisan alternatives to the Republican Party, others like Judith Ellen Foster sought greater roles for Republican

women. Foster's work in the 1880s as the founder of the Woman's National Republican Association (WNRA) gave women a strong partisan identity and an active role in Republican campaigns. A partisan identity, however, did not preclude women's nonpartisanship. As Foster recognized, women could be loyal partisans to a major party while also working in the many nonpartisan reform organizations. But there existed yet another alternative for women: the rise of the Prohibition Party allowed women to be both partisan and moral reformer. Frances Willard of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) urged women to join the Prohibition Party where their "moral suasion" would be of political value. Willard believed the major parties had ignored women and their cause for temperance, and that nonpartisanship "would keep women at the end of the army, outside of positions of power" (pp. 68-69). The solution was a partisan commitment to a single-issue minor party.

These multiple threads of women's partisanship extended into the 1910s when progressives departed from the Republican Party. Chapters 5 and 6 explore the significance of this development for women's partisan history. Importantly, many reformers—both women and men—found a new home in partisan politics with the rise of the Progressive Party. Gustafson's focus on Jane Addams reveals the ways her public image as a nonpartisan reformer symbolically enhanced the Progressive Party by linking women's morally principled politics to partisan politics. The Progressive Party "looked more principled with principled men and women in it" (p. 115). However, much of the public attention on women's visibility in partisan politics, as Gustafson points out, reflected a lack of "social memory of women's partisanship" (p. 122). Contrary to contemporary reports, women's partisan allegiance was not new. Even Addams had held partisan hopes and believed women would finally be included in the locus of party power by joining the Progressive Party. She was, in effect, both nonpartisan and partisan in her efforts to advance progressive reform and women's rights.

The value of women's nonpartisan image to the Progressive Party, however, ultimately resulted in women's exclusion from decision-making posts within the party. Gustafson points to Frances Kellor's work in the Party's Progressive National Service which aimed "to fight for principles, not for candidates" (p. 150). As Gustafson observes, "in off-election years, there was room to ignore the candidates and the partisan purpose of a political organization, and there was room for the emphasis on principles over candidates, but as the party geared up for the

campaigns ... women found themselves relegated to the sidelines” (p. 150). Organized into auxiliary clubs outside the mainstream of party structure, women found “a way for women’s voices to be heard in a partisan culture dominated by men” (p. 153). But they also found that their power and influence was limited. Despite promises to the contrary, the Progressive Party had fallen short of gender equality for women within the party.

As the national suffrage amendment gained momentum in the late 1910s, the major parties competed to recruit women into their ranks. As discussed in the final chapter, the Republican party formed the Republican Women’s National Executive Committee (RWNEC) in 1918, with promises that it would “be the partner of the Republican National Executive Committee” (p. 179). But women would meet once again with disappointment as men controlled the appointments of women to the committees, forcing many active Republican women to rely on their auxiliary women’s groups for influence. Women’s partisanship again became defined by their gender.

Gustafson utilizes a wide range of sources in her effort to discover the activities of the many political women before 1920. While she considers well-known historical figures like Susan B. Anthony and Jane Addams, she also brings to light heretofore unknown women by accessing both national and state archives to discover correspondence, organizational records of women’s groups and political parties, and published accounts written by contemporaries. Gustafson also integrates many secondary sources into her account, the result of which is an impressive narrative rich in detail and historical context.

The greatest strength in Gustafson’s book is her laudable treatment of the nuances of women’s partisanship. As her research and analysis make clear, no view of women in politics during this period is complete without the context of institutional, partisan politics. Women, furthermore, were widely diverse in their goals and strategies; this diversity of women is a consistent theme of the book. Gustafson extends the reach of this diversity beyond white middle-class women to address the political issues of partisanship faced by African-American women. She points out, for example, how African-American women, excluded from white women’s organizations, formed their own nonpartisan clubs but also expressed their loyalty to the Republican Party by organizing local women’s Republican clubs. Like white women, they pursued both partisan and nonpartisan strategies to accomplish their goals.

Gustafson also expands the picture of women’s partisanship to include views of women as candidates. For example, Susan B. Anthony opposed women’s ambitions for elective office in suffrage states, while Judith Foster supported this idea. Progressive-Republican Florence Collins Porter of California believed women should run only for lower-level offices where they could be most successful. Gustafson addresses these conflicting views about women candidates throughout her study.

Many of the issues and questions raised by Gustafson’s work can be applied to women’s influence in the Democratic Party and to politics on the state level. While Gustafson rarely mentions the Democratic Party, she does consider some state-level issues, especially in California where the Progressive Party took root in the 1910s. In scratching only the surface of these subjects, Gustafson underscores the significance of women’s partisanship beyond the national Republican Party and opens the way for further research.

By the time the Nineteenth Amendment passed in 1920, women had clearly been partisan actors walking a fine line between partisan and nonpartisan commitments. Gustafson’s work, significant on many fronts, restores this history of women’s partisan past. Just as gender has become an important tool of analysis in American political history, so should the history of American institutional politics—with all the complexities of partisanship—become an important consideration in women’s political history. This book is an excellent start in that direction.

Notes

[1]. These works have been important in revealing the connection between women’s suffrage movements, women’s reform organizations and progressivism. See for example William Chafe, *The American Woman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and the American Political Society, 1780-1920,” *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984): 620-47; Katherine Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation’s Work: The Rise of Women’s Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); and Gayle Gullett, *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women’s Movement, 1880-1911* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

[2]. See for example Robert Dinkins, *Before Equal Suffrage: Women in Partisan Politics from Colonial Times to 1920* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995); Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party*

Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Melanie Gustafson, *to Stay: American Women and Political Parties, 1880-1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999).
Kristi Miller and Elisabeth Perry, eds., *We Have Come*

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