

Johanna Neuman. *Gilded Suffragists, The New York Socialites Who Fought for Women's Right to Vote*. New York: New York University Press, 2017. Pp. 201. Hardcover. \$24.95.

Johanna Neuman, a historian and scholar in residence at American University, documents in her book an association of women who, because of their wealth and social status, appeared to be superficial and unorganized. These were women of privilege during the Gilded Age of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Propelled by their dedication and tenacity, New York socialites took the fight for women's suffrage into their inner social circles and beyond. Their work and influence in the suffrage movement was one of the major factors contributing to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment.

Neuman organizes the book as a time line chronicling New York socialites' influence on women's suffrage. By 1908 the movement had been relegated to a small body of academic demonstrators and lost its momentum for most ordinary women. The New York socialites were renowned for their wealth, fashion choices, social and celebrity status. Their personal and public lives were regularly reported on by the newspapers and were read about in a frenzy by the public. Centered around their prominence, they were able to reignite the fight for a woman's right to vote and advance the woman's suffrage movement into the mainstream.

It was very important to the New York socialites how the public image of the suffragists was personified. A demonstrator needed to look and act appropriately in order to avoid violence or any ill feelings by people who were against suffrage for women. Their influence on how a suffragist should look was unrivaled. The book masterfully illustrates this argument through Inez Milholland, who was considered one of the most beautiful women in the suffrage movement. She was front and center at a 1913 suffragist parade in Washington D.C., appropriately dressed in a long, flowing white dress sitting atop of a white horse.

At a time of racial, class, and gender division, the Gilded Suffragist's influence carried over to women of color and women of lower social class with the visionary ideal of suffrage for all women. Men were included in the movement with the organization of the Men's League for Woman Suffrage of New York. The league was not started by a man, but by a woman; Fanny Garrison Villard.

To emphasize the opulence and the force of the suffrage movement, Neuman includes twenty-nine pages of archival images and prints from various sources such as the Library of Congress and the *New York Tribune*. Among the images there are women in their expensive clothing walking down the street and their grand estates where meetings had taken place. There are photographs of women and men walking separately down a main city street in a parade promoting their support of the suffrage movement. The images are crucial in helping the reader visualize why these women were the “celebrities” of their day and the importance of their influence inside and outside of their social circle.

This is not a book primarily about women’s history, but it commemorates the social and cultural atmosphere of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of a nation divided by race, gender and social economic status. Neuman shows that the socialites were serious advocates of a woman’s right to vote. They didn’t just offer financial support for the movement but gave their time to organize meetings and demonstrations for all people in order to push for the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. The importance of the outward appearance could have been seen as superficial, but the book illustrates it as a stepping stone for suffrage. The book is a valuable addition to Women’s Studies as well as U.S. History and is appropriate to assign to undergraduate students.

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