
We Never Will Be the Aggressor: Gender Ideologies, Suffrage, and the Pacific Northwest

by Jessica Derleth

History and Political Science

Honors College

Faculty Mentor: Daniel Pope

History

Through the voice of a fictional character, novelist Mary Murdoch Mason described women of the 1870s as fitting within three different categories: the “giddy butterflies,” the “busy bees,” and the “women’s righters.” “The first,” Mason wrote, “are pretty and silly, the second plain and useful, the third mannish and odious. The first wear a smile at you while waltzing; the second wear aprons and give you apple dumplings; and the third want your manly prerogatives, your dresscoat, your money and your vote.”¹ Though infinitely different from one another, each of these classes of women existed within, and interacted with, gender ideologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although Mason wrote as a middle class woman in Chicago, her words resonated around the country, sparking discussion as far as Oregon’s Willamette Valley.²

When superimposed upon the Pacific Northwest, Mason’s words shed light upon a region in transition. First-generation settlers of that western frontier had brought with them a set of ideals and standards by which men and women were to operate. The “busy bees” of second-generation Oregonians held fast to the ideals of their parents, becoming homemakers while husbands toiled in the office or field. “Giddy butterflies” redefined middleclass womanhood through their embrace of a growing consumer

culture. And a smaller, yet highly significant, portion of second-generation Oregon women stepped into the public sphere in their quest for political rights, becoming “women’s righters.”

As the move for female enfranchisement stirred the waters of gender ideology, these three proposed classes of women were most often discussed, defined, and debased within the suffrage debate. Histories and popular images of this political issue are often overly simplified in their imagining of suffragists and anti-suffragists. Women opposed to suffrage were not necessarily reactionaries who feared progress,³ while suffragists were not necessarily crusaders who overcame stagnant societal conventions. Each movement comprised people with different ideas about the exact nature and role of women. Despite a wide range of gender ideologies among suffragists and anti-suffragists, few, if any, challenged the belief of a fundamental distinction between the sexes; both suffragists and anti-suffragists manipulated and adapted the image of woman for their respective causes, making her into what they needed her to be.

Separate Spheres

As America moved into the nineteenth century, society saw the rise and propagation of a new set of gender roles, based partially on books such as Thomas Gisborne’s *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*. This trend was aided by the process of industrialization that sent men to work in factories, rather than in or near the home, while women’s production for the family—in the form of butter, candles, clothing—was less essential with the mass production of such items. With less of a clear role in the family, many women seized upon the idea of separate spheres, developing a philosophy in which men and women are destined to operate in separate spheres of action.⁴ Through a torrent of national newspapers, magazines, and novels the separate spheres ideology spread throughout the country.

A combination of authors and editors led to the eventual image of men as daring, aggressive, and intelligent, while women were constructed as submissive, dependent, and emotional. The new philosophy drew lines between what was deemed masculine and feminine, crafting standards that had not existed before.⁵

The “Modern Woman”

The suffrage movement brought forth a new “modern woman,” the fabled “women’s righter.” Many women had begun to gain a sense of their own disenfranchisement when they sought to participate in other reform movements—antislavery, labor, and temperance—but were excluded from male organizations.⁶ The second generation of Oregonians were ideologically diverse; some upheld older gender roles while others questioned current modes of thought. Abigail Scott Duniway, one of the leading suffrage organizers in the Pacific Northwest, was strongly influenced by her experience crossing the West on the Oregon Trail. During that rigorous passage, Duniway’s mother died and Duniway herself subsequently did much to care for her family. She saw women as living in an oppressed state as they had unequal treatment before the law, in politics and the work place. Though she never wholly rejected differing gender roles nor the notion of women’s character being innately different from men, she fought against many of the barriers put before women because of their sex. For Duniway, a true suffragist was one who based the right to vote “upon the broad basis of ‘equal right to all and special privilege to none.’”⁷ For many, however, the mere notion of a woman standing up and demanding greater equality stretched the boundaries of what a woman ought to be; a woman who stepped into the public realm challenged the notion that women belonged within the private sphere, tending to home and hearth.

In October 1895 the *Oregonian* reviewed an article, originally published in the *American Naturalist*, that considered the behavior and temperament of the “modern woman,” who also often filled the role of suffragist. This female could only be described as an entity that harkened back to barbaric, matriarchal systems that held no positive connotations. The article described matriarchy as “the necessary consequence of relaxed sexual relations of savage tribes’ wherein inheritance and descent followed the maternal line because of uncertain paternity.”⁸ The article defined the modern woman, she who sought greater independence and autonomy, as not only savage and backwards but as a sexual oddity. Its authors went so far as to state definitively that all equal-rights women have displayed evidence of both masculinity and femininity and are known to be “physically or psychologically degenerate, or both.”⁹ That argument expressed a concern not only about the possible effects of the ballot but also the quality of those who wished to obtain it. It was not the ballot that corrupted those women—they already possessed a defect. The article, and presumably those at the *Oregonian* who wished to reproduce portions of it, contended that any woman who went so far as to desire the vote was not only masculine in nature, but also suffered from some sort of degeneration.

Laws of Nature

The laws of nature were integral to the arguments of many suffragists, especially when confronting the division between the genders. Most women who were anti-suffragists did not accept the idea that women were in any way inferior to men, but simply built for a different purpose in life. The separate spheres of man and woman were, in fact, believed to be part of an evolutionary process. As one Oregon anti-suffragist explained the point: “We believe that God has wisely and well adapted each sex to the

proper performance of the duties of each.”¹⁰ Nature had provided men with the physical attributes necessary to provide for and protect a family, while women were designed to care for and continue the species. Moving such a theory into a modern world meant that men entered the workforce while women maintained the family. That view accordingly saw woman’s assignment to the home not as a form of confinement but as a blessing, a place she inhabited. A woman’s sphere, as one anti-suffragist explained, was an “atmosphere of home, of wide and intelligent sympathy, of tender charity and ministry to others, of influence beyond all computation.”¹¹

To go against this natural divide between man and woman was thought to have potentially devastating consequences. Abigail Scott Duniway did much to lead the movement and was, consequently, viewed by some as the negative outcome of defying convention. Through her Portland newspaper, *The New Northwest*, she gained her reputation, advocated enfranchisement, kept readers abreast of women’s news, discussed other reform movements, and found herself many opponents. One *Oregonian* opposed the newspaper’s publication because the “teachings of the *New Northwest*, unsettling in the minds of women and sacredness of the marriage relation” will bring them out of their homes and “into the ways of men, where their modesty must become unsexed, and their virtue be constantly assailed.”¹² Many expressed the fear that if women obtained the ballot, a heretofore masculine task, she would not be able to retain her feminine qualities.

While Abigail Scott Duniway worked on the *New Northwest*, her brother Harvey Scott was editor and part owner of the *Oregonian*. Like many Oregon newspaper editors, Scott expressed great concern over what would occur were women to vote, and how they would be affected by the process. Scott’s greatest fear appeared to be the change women would go through, in thought and action. He once wrote:

if she becomes a voter with determination really to govern... then to become a governing, forceful woman she must become a masculine woman, which ultimately means a desheltered, desexed woman, a political fishwife abroad and a kill-joy in the home.¹³

Many spoke as though such results were an obvious result of female suffrage. In a pamphlet issued by the Oregon Association Opposed to the Extension of Suffrage to Women, the authors stated that “because female suffragists will not heed the voice of nature they are unsexing themselves.”¹⁴ Such straightforward language conveyed the idea that one naturally led to the other.

[Not] the Normal Girl

The arguments of anti-suffragists were not always centered on gender ideologies or quick assumptions. In fact, great diversity existed among those who spoke out against suffrage. Some feared that moralistic women would infringe upon the liberty of working men. Others felt that a woman would vote in line with her husband, rendering her vote irrelevant. Still others felt that a woman was more effective working within all-female organizations, thus creating change in an arena separate from men.¹⁵ Yet despite the nuances of many arguments, some simply could not overcome the adaptation to gender ideology that was necessary for the reform to succeed. Alongside those who feared a blending of masculinity and femininity were those for whom the issue boiled down to what was normal. An Oregon anti-suffrage pamphlet, for example, talked about the instinct for women to remain in the home and “the natural expectation of every normal girl should be that sooner or later she will marry and leave her work.”¹⁶ That claim echoed the sentiments of many national anti-suffragists who recognized that women often had to work outside of the home, but maintained that it was not the preferred, normal, or natural

situation. Critics of suffrage often acknowledged that for practical reasons a woman had to become a paid worker because she was not yet married and the family needed the extra monetary support, she was helping to pay for her education, or was merely biding her time until the proper suitor came along. In any case, most did not expect a young girl, maturing into womanhood, to maintain a job for more than a few years. Agreeing with the Oregon anti-suffragists, one national pamphlet explained that “the instinct of the normal woman is not to work for somebody for wages, not to compete with men in business or the professions, but to form a life partnership with some man and raise a family.”¹⁷ To go against a force as powerful as nature risked corrupting womanhood itself.

Corrupting Power of the Ballot

Those speaking out against extending the ballot may have worked against the furthering of women’s rights, but they often extolled the “fairer sex.” As one Oregon newspaper put it, “women in their true state are pure, honest, devoted, and reliable.” That elevated position of women, however, was not easy to maintain for, as the article continued, “once debased, whether by politics or other cause, [women] are indeed most vicious creatures.”¹⁸ Some anti-suffragists developed their view of their opponents based on a few select individuals. A rival editor of Duniway once wrote that “while we must acknowledge that women are angels at home, we much fear that at the polls as in the printing office they will be more or less under the influence of the devil.”¹⁹ This pointed attack on Duniway was likely in response to her harsh newspaper tactics. She was not afraid to air unpopular opinions and to compete with the newspaper men of Oregon. Women traveling between the two spheres crossed a line between heavenly and devilish influences. In the home woman possessed a beneficial and uplifting quality, but when “ambition or accident have carried her beyond

her sphere, the transfer has wrought evil to man, and wreck to woman."²⁰ The alteration of gender ideologies was not only threatening to the division between the sexes but the family and society at large.

Woman's position in the family was important because of the impact family was said to have on a child. The morals and behavior of a child's caregiver were seen as a map to where the child would go. At times, that line of thought was the basis of arguments that suffrage was unnecessary. If men were raised properly, then they would accurately represent their families through the vote. Furthermore, if women did their jobs properly, then they could raise children who would make appropriate political decisions thereby voiding a woman's need to have a direct vote. With family being of the utmost importance, some anti-suffragists feared that the "more sacred duties of home, religion, and education, will be sacrificed to the more engrossing excitement of politics; [sic] and we will have a grotesque, ill-informed nation, where women are never mothers."²¹ Woman was the basis of family upon which stood the lives of children, high morals, correct political action, and society itself. Many women argued against their own enfranchisement because they felt their lives and duties were great enough and of sufficient difficulty that another duty should not be added. Oregon anti-suffragists feared not only the changes that would be brought to women but also men and the greater good. One anti-suffragist explained that "the courtesies and amenities of life which are now felt to be due from man to woman would soon cease to exist, resulting in the practical unsexing of **men** and women by destroying the sanctity and privacy of the family circle and home life, upon which depend the virtue and welfare of humanity" [emphasis added].²²

Building up the Suffragist Image

As the suffrage debate continued into the twentieth century, arguments about the nature of woman and her interaction with the ballot flourished.

American society at that time was composed of various types of women who seemed to live conflicting lifestyles; some enjoyed the arts and education, others desired work, and some settled into married life. Many saw the different groups of women as being at odds with one another, but one suffragist explained that the groups could, in fact, be reconciled. Another way of looking at different groups of women "has developed within the last few years; one that does not bar out the creative joy of work, nor the aesthetic satisfactions of art, nor the emotional satisfactions of marriage. It may easily include all three; it often does. Women may become suffragists."²³ Against charges of being desexed, masculine women, suffragists had to reassure the public that women could operate in multiple domains that included the workplace, academia, and the traditional institution of marriage. Suffragists often reminded a skeptical public about the large contributions women had made to virtually every field of human activity. Women had taken on many tasks during times of war, often at great personal risk. Literature and the arts were full of female accomplishments. The protection of the home and children was left in the hands of mothers, a task that often involved facing the challenges of insufficient goods and inadequate sanitation. One suffragist argued that "there has never been any question of her readiness to undertake new and larger activities, as long as they have left her dependent."²⁴ Suffragists pushed the public to recognize the abilities of women, what they had done and what they may yet be capable of doing. Perhaps by highlighting the accomplishments of the "fairer sex," it was possible to show what women had accomplished while maintaining their femininity.

Lucy Stone

Beyond showing what women of the past had accomplished while maintaining their femininity, suffragists wanted to show that modern

suffragist leaders continued that tradition. In the national movement, Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony were two of the leading suffragists whose gender and sexuality came under intense scrutiny. Much of the criticism directed towards Lucy Stone resulted from her decision to refuse many marriage proposals (though she eventually married Henry Blackwell after his assurance of an equal partnership). Further public criticism derived from her adoption of the reform dress, otherwise known as the bloomer. Along with a good number of women at the time, Stone chose to wear trousers underneath a skirt several inches shorter than traditional fashions. Stone and others found the style to be comfortable and practical, especially when traveling the lecture circuit. Her choice in clothing, as well as her short hair, left many with the impression that Lucy Stone was one of the fabled masculine suffragists. Historian Joelle Million has noted that such fashions sparked much debate within the movement, and that newspapers expressed surprise that Stone appeared quite feminine despite her choice of attire.²⁵ Those helping to run the campaigns that Stone spearheaded worked to assure the public that suffragist leading ladies were of the feminine sort. Many reform papers, for example, described Lucy Stone as a political, yet womanly, being. The *Pennsylvania Freeman* wrote that “her manner was not only free from offensive boldness, but gentle, calm, dignified, earnest,” and that during her speech she “had not in any degree compromised the modesty belonging to her sex.”²⁶ Stone may have pushed the boundaries of societal conventions but, as the movement hoped to emphasize, she was a lady in every sense. And though her advocacy was of the utmost importance, the suffrage movement worked to assure the public that her words and thoughts were “exceedingly chaste and beautiful.”²⁷

Susan B. Anthony

Perhaps more of a threat to femininity than Lucy Stone was Susan B. Anthony. She not only toured the country giving public lectures but also

did so alone for many years without entering into matrimony. Along with the typical charge of masculinity, Anthony faced a great deal of ridicule for remaining single. As Anthony toured the Pacific Northwest with Duniway in 1871, the editor of Oregon City's *Weekly Enterprise* commented:

what a fine looking and useful woman she [Anthony] would have been had she got married years ago and would now be sitting in her parlor surrounded by family of children, grandchildren and perhaps great grandchildren. She would then consider herself the peer of any woman. We wish she had been more fortunate in her younger days.²⁸

A large part of the campaign for suffrage necessarily focused on creating and maintaining the reputation of its leaders, especially in response to the masculine stereotype. As the twentieth century approached, women found it more acceptable to speak in public and demand the franchise but could not entirely avoid being accused of lacking the traditional womanly virtues. Recognizing that situation, Ida H. Harper, a suffragist and Anthony biographer, sought to address the issue by showing the softer side of the famous suffragist in "Miss Anthony at Home," an article for *Pearson's Magazine* in 1903. Harper described her subject as looking "like a lovely grandmother...it wrenches the imagination to think of her standing on a platform and daring a mob, or rising in a court room and defying a United States Judge. She is womanly in every instinct."²⁹ Upon her first stay in Anthony's home, Harper could not help but observe "what a housekeeper is Susan B. Anthony, domestic in every fiber of her body!"³⁰ After years of working with and studying Anthony, Harper expressed confidence that though this woman is bold and accomplished in the public realm, she is as much a womanly woman as any other.

By 1903, Ida Harper was working on her third, and final, volume of a biography of Anthony, a work that totaled more than 1,600 pages. In all

of her documentation, Harper recognized Anthony's accomplishments but maintained that "Miss Anthony never has suggested ways for repairing the damages of society with one-half the skill she employed in teaching her nieces her wonderful method of darning rents in garments and household linen."³¹ After starting various women's organizations, speaking before government bodies, traveling the nation, and spending a life on campaign trails, Anthony's greatest skill, according to Harper, was the darning of towels. Perhaps Harper wrote with full sincerity of this skill and maybe Anthony took great pride in that domestic task. Either way, first and foremost Harper wanted the readers of *Pearson's* to see the domestic ideal in Susan B. Anthony. In fact, Harper noted that Anthony enjoyed the domestic sphere so much that she wished she had nothing to do "but to sit quietly down in my own home and darn stockings and hem towels, and gather my friends about me and have one read while the rest of us listen and then all discuss it."³² Though Anthony was absorbed with the public sphere, Harper worked to rebuild the suffragist image by showing Anthony as a woman who would love nothing more than to stay at home and engage in purely feminine activities.

Suffrage Renaissance

Wise to the fears of the public and the attacks of the opposition, suffragists did much, rhetorically and symbolically, to mold the image of the New Woman. On another level, however, suffrage organizations actively recreated their image through organizational change, new political tactics, and promotion. Many studies of the suffrage movement consider the years from 1895 to 1910 to be a period of inactivity, during which the movement failed to make any ground or win a single state. The "doldrum" period, however, was actually a period of systematic change within the movement that, according to historian Sara Graham, basically amounted to

a "Suffrage Renaissance." Not only did suffragists begin to recognize the need for a new public image, "in response to anti-suffrage propaganda that characterized them as fanatics...[they] attempted to win respect for their cause and legitimize their organization through a variety of tactics."³³ The genesis of change came with modifying the images of suffragist pioneers, such as Susan B. Anthony, and by developing a sanitized version of the past, one free from hints of radicalism. To the displeasure of some founding suffragists, the reinvigorated movement called for the implementation of the Society Plan, one element of which became the goal of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) to enlist the support of middle to upper-class women. To gain the support of such women was to obtain their time, money, and, more importantly, respectability. Movement members generally understood that to counter the image of the radical, masculine, desexed woman, they needed to become more appealing to the average person and women of the upper classes who had money and stature. In short, suffragists had to find the way to obtain both respectability and, ultimately, public approval. By 1910, thanks to the Society Plan and other changes, the radical image of those who pioneered the movement was replaced by a safe, respectable program run via middle class club meetings. This stage of development comfortably brought a wealthy, 'respectable' class of women into the movement, and was seen by NAWSA leaders as necessary for a movement that would eventually win the vote.³⁴

The Most Beautiful Suffragist

To create a new image for women's suffrage, it became important to show the overwhelmingly male voting public what the true New Woman looked like, that she could combine intelligence and grace. As the fervor of suffrage parades and pageantry gained momentum, the movement found a weapon for their cause in the extraordinary beauty of Inez Milholland.³⁵ To

the public eye, Milholland was everything a woman of the early twentieth century ought to be. She combined a more traditional idea of woman that focused on grace, beauty, and femininity with the idea of the New Woman who exhibited outstanding intelligence, self sufficiency, and independence. Placed at the head of parades and marches, Inez Milholland was deemed "The Most Beautiful Suffragette." Historian Ann Marie Nicolosi has argued that Milholland was a "constructed model of acceptable white heterosexual femininity, thereby helping to bring women into the movement who might fear the taint of masculinity and gender transgression."³⁶ Milholland, in fact, garnered a following and celebrity status. Newspapers throughout the country announced her arrival in one city or another, tracking her every move. While the most beautiful suffragette was idolized for her beauty and grace, the public was exposed to the suffrage issue that suddenly seemed much more acceptable.

Selling Suffrage: Sunflowers and Babies

By and large, Milholland functioned as a commodity, something to present and sell to the public as the face of suffrage. Milholland was among a generation of women's advocates who began to truly sell their ideas to the public consumer. According to historian Margaret Finnegan, suffragettes used their status as female consumers to move into the public space, first as department store customers and later as lecturers, aiming to incorporate themselves into traditionally male-centered rituals of active citizenship.³⁷ Pioneer suffragists had pushed their way into the public sphere, but the later generation of reformers swept onto the streets in full parade regalia, highlighting their commitment to traditional standards of femininity. The suffrage parade was the ideal way to combat charges of masculinity and combine a male space with a feminine appearance. A writer with the *Woman's Journal* tried to explain that the parade provides

“a chance to show that woman’s method of accomplishing a purpose may be distinctively and instinctively her own.”³⁸ Though a woman may lack political experience, the author asserted she could contribute by becoming one of many marching along the parade route. Though the movement may not always have women trained to march, “we have women who are trained to teach, who are trained to appeal, who are trained to think...who are gifted with beauty or graciousness.”³⁹ The parade was, to a certain extent, an acknowledgment of the differences between men and women and an assertion that, although women may be of a different nature, they can be brought (beautifully) into the public sphere.

Though the parade functioned on many levels, its main purpose was to show that the suffragette had many virtues: not only was she intelligent, but she was beautiful as well. Knocking down stereotypes was of the utmost importance and often came with the pageant. “As people viewed the parade; they realized for the first time that intelligent, level-headed women are suffrage advocates.”⁴⁰ Grand processions with participants numbering in the hundreds or thousands took place on the streets of New York and the nation’s capital. Smaller towns and communities also realized the value of public display. In late October of 1912, not long before the election granting them suffrage, Oregon suffragists marched through the streets of Medford, Oregon. Capitalizing on the popularity of the county fair, over 100 women marched in the “Made in Medford” parade for the right to vote.⁴¹ Much like their eastern counterparts, the suffragists of Medford realized the necessity of counteracting negative stereotypes and how that could be accomplished by a well-planned march. The short article covering this event emphasized the feel and femininity of the procession and noted that “the suffragists were led by Miss Gladys Heard, secretary of the Medford organization, who drove an automobile decorated with sunflowers and filled with the babies belonging to the Medford suffragists.”⁴² Much like

the beautiful Milholland who led women through the streets of New York, babies and sunflowers ushered suffragettes through the streets of Medford; both served as symbols of femininity, a reassurance to the public that the women who followed were truly womanly women.

Dealing with Duniway

For women of the suffrage renaissance, recreating the image of the New Woman within the Pacific Northwest was sometimes a difficult thing to do, especially when confronted with a stubborn regional leader who preferred the more aggressive, less feminine, rules of engagement. For many successive elections, for example, Duniway worked for enfranchisement through a narrower, more traditional method that focused on giving speeches and gaining the support of high-ranking politicians and newspapermen, rather than rallying the public with marches and events. Also, when running the *New Northwest*, she actively employed the "Oregon style" and joined other editors as they freely and often slanderously attacked one another.⁴³ While such aggressive tactics proved fruitful, though controversial, in the world of journalism they did not fit with the reforms necessary for the "suffrage renaissance." Duniway, however, was adamant in her approach, showing little approval for building up lists of supporters, aligning with upper-class women, and utilizing local clubs and organizations. By 1900, the unwillingness of Duniway to adapt the tactics of the national movement led many, including Susan B. Anthony, to believe that she was the reason for the lack of progress towards suffrage in Oregon. The beginning of the century brought with it an attempt by the national leaders to unseat Duniway from her position of control within the region. Such efforts were spurred on by Duniway's inability to project the proper image of the non-radical, feminine suffragist. She continued, for example, to use harsh, blunt language: "A woman who doesn't like men is

always a vinegary, cross-grained creature, who owes an apology to men for living. She ought to steal away and die.”⁴⁴ NAWSA had decided to focus on state-by-state campaigns to gain suffrage with special emphasis on the progressive Northwest. Therefore, “NAWSA knew that it was absolutely necessary to establish a new and cooperative Oregon leader.”⁴⁵ Though Duniway continued to participate in the suffrage movement of Oregon, the national leaders took on a much greater role in steering the state toward its 1912 adoption of female suffrage.

Introducing Emma Smith DeVoe

To steer the suffrage movement more effectively in the western United States, those from the national organization saw to it that a few of the right people were in place to run campaign drives. Emma Smith DeVoe, who lived by the motto “always be good-natured and cheerful,” was sent to the West Coast to be an example of the proper suffragist. Her initial step into the region occurred because a national organizer, Carrie Chapman Catt, felt that DeVoe’s feminine political style would be popular among the citizens of Idaho. DeVoe was indeed well received across the country and the Pacific Northwest because she shared the ideals of many suffragists, as well as those skeptical of the movement. DeVoe, for example, believed strongly in the idea that men and women were different. Because gender divisions were important, she painstakingly created a feminine image for herself, helping to counteract the negative caricatures of suffragists.⁴⁶ Like many others in the Northwest, DeVoe felt that if women ought to enter the world of politics, they should do so in a feminine fashion, avoiding any method too aggressive and unladylike. After moving to the Northwest, DeVoe became involved in the 1906 Oregon woman suffrage campaign. National leaders assigned her to work in small, rural, Oregon towns where her womanly manner would not alienate men at the voting booths. Overall,

her methods were extremely popular with Oregonians, especially those of the middle and upper classes.⁴⁷ Those of a wealthier status often clung to traditional gender roles, and DeVoe, with her feminine appearance, singing voice, and non-aggressive speaking style, was able to reassure them.

Though DeVoe fit the image of femininity, she was a shrewd political operator who strategically capitalized on her appearance and the methods of the reinvigorated suffrage movement. While working in Washington, DeVoe called a meeting of women from various influential women's clubs to discuss the formation of a local branch of the Equal Suffrage association. DeVoe clearly utilized the Society Plan. Attracting the support of wealthy society women, as a local newspaper reported, "lends more prestige to the movement which is comparatively new in Spokane."⁴⁸ DeVoe made it clear to all those who listened to her that she was asking for the vote, not demanding it. She explained that such tactics, befitting a lady, were necessary and that all campaigns will "be carried on in a woman's way." DeVoe continued to explain that "we do not seek in any way to usurp the privileges of men. We are womanly and the more womanly we can be the better for our cause."⁴⁹ While she was clearly seeking the widening of women's power, DeVoe wanted to reassure the public that there was no desire to challenge the role and position of men. Perhaps directly addressing anti-suffragist concerns, she said "we will work with the men, not against them, just as the different members of a family work in different ways for the same end—the happiness of all." DeVoe projected herself not only as feminine and womanly but also as one who valued the status quo of the family, its composition, and its functions. In all, DeVoe directed much of her work toward reforming the image of suffragists. She may have even felt her work was necessary because of how earlier suffragists had conducted their campaigns. "While the early women suffragists did not carry on their work as we are doing," she commented, "we are thankful

for what they did, even though it has evoked much adverse criticism and has caused some to look on all women suffragists as unpleasant people.”⁵⁰ With those words, DeVoe responded to the claims of masculinity from the anti-suffragists and rejected the efforts and tactics of the suffragists who fought prior to the “Suffrage Renaissance” and its emphasis on femininity. In this new method of fighting for suffrage, it was no longer acceptable to demand the vote or scream before a crowded lecture hall.

Suffragists and Gender Ideologies

The fight for suffrage was not always solely about the advancement of women’s rights, and those fighting for the cause were sometimes as different from one another as they were from the anti-suffragists. By the turn of the twentieth century, suffrage had truly become a diverse movement as the renaissance women and the more conservative women of the temperance movement joined the “pioneer” suffragists. At the national level, those supporting the push for female enfranchisement expressed a variety of ideas about men, women, and proper behavior. A popular strand within the movement held that women ought to enter into politics so that they might work as a cleansing agent. Women were, after all, considered by many to be the protectors of morality and purity. Many women seeking to enter the public arena hoped to do so not to challenge male dominance but to clean up the mistakes left by their fathers and husbands. Oregon Governor Oswald West believed in suffrage and felt that women would be nothing but a positive influence:

Did you ever notice that women are always cleaning up? They are either cleaning the house, cleaning up the baby, or cleaning up after their husbands. Well, when they get the ballot I think we have every reason to believe they will help clean up politics, and conditions generally in their State, county and city.⁵¹

Purity and cleanliness, those womanly virtues, were reasons that many encouraged the political inclusion of women. For example, even when pushing to enter the male sphere some said it was for the purpose of providing feminine care. Women asserted that the work of the fathers would always be needed, but also needed was “the power of the mother to take care of the world, which is what we are here for.”⁵² Although that author may have been deemed progressive in many ways, she still held to the notion that women are meant to care for others (or even the world). Another author, writing for a national suffrage publication, described the unchangeable nature of her sex as exhibited in a parade that “will also try to show that the virtues and principles for which women have always stood, and will continue to stand—since they cannot change the nature of their being—are Justice, Charity, Liberty, Peace and Hope.”⁵³ That suffragist, along many others, agreed with anti-suffragists in subscribing to the idea that God created men and women with different but complementary character traits (though that did not bar them from political participation).

Whereas some suffragists and anti-suffragists alike would describe this situation as ideal, many spoke out against the tendency to turn a woman into an “ignorant Goddess, that pedestalled, uncrowned Queen of the Home, half angel and half child.”⁵⁴ Many held the belief that women belonged on the same plane as men in every way. Some thought that the “true nature” of women was merely a societal construct. The idea, for example, that women lacked the capacity to participate in or conduct a war was a notion based on assumptions and tradition, not truth or ability. One national suffragist asked, “if there had not been something interesting and exciting and stimulating about war, wouldn’t we women have had to do it long before this—at a reduced wage?”⁵⁵ Many such national suffragists rejected the idea of an essential “womaness” and held that they were capable of just about anything they were allowed to attempt. They were

those who demanded equal suffrage primarily as human beings, not as women.⁵⁶

Perhaps the greatest evidence of women's capabilities came from looking at what they had already done:

Women—real women, men's mates—have throughout the ages done strenuous, hard, cruel, toilsome, productive work. In our own land they have born and reared children, kept their homes, wrestled with wilderness and the desert, loaded guns, outwitted Indians and done a thousand heroic things without stopping to ask, 'Is it ladylike?'⁵⁷

The author of that sentiment, writing in a national publication, pointed to the West and the example of pioneer women to show exactly what her sex is capable of doing. Though women were often expected to remain passively in the home, experience and history had shown that she was capable of great and difficult things. Such was the situation from which Abigail Scott Duniway arose to become a major leader in the Pacific Northwest. Perhaps as a combination of pioneer spirit and a strong personality, Duniway was a strong woman. For years she actively engaged in the suffrage movement and published many frank, harsh opinions in her newspaper. Duniway often had a difficult time maintaining the image and behavior of a "true woman" as readers and editors not only attacked her message but her personal life, questioning whether she was doing right by her family while dallying in the public sphere.⁵⁸ Duniway, however, maintained that every woman is "an individual, complete and sovereign in herself."⁵⁹ She did not believe that a woman had an essential nature, but that a woman's capabilities were based on her individual characteristics not simply on her gender. The demand for suffrage, Duniway said, should come only from one's right to possess political equality. "Whenever she demands the ballot, not simply because it is her right to possess it, but because by its use, she expects to

reconstruct the genus man by law, on the basis of her own choosing, she only succeeds in driving nails into the closed coffin lid of her own and other women's liberties."⁶⁰ Suffrage must be fought, she said, on behalf of political equality, not female moral superiority.

Though Duniway was certainly progressive in many ways, she was not completely free from the gender ideologies of her time. Like many others involved in the movement, Duniway often had to defend her femininity and her actions. A fan of the "Oregon style" of journalism, she debated with and slandered other newspaper editors. She defended her harsh language as necessary retaliation. "God Almighty," she said, "gave us combativeness with which to defend womanhood, and though we never will be the aggressor, we stand to rend an antagonist when he deserves it—if the encounter does make us sick."⁶¹ Here Duniway backed her right for a certain level of self-defense, yet she did not put her sex on the same level as men. Women are given a power, she said, but never to take an aggressive role. Women are ready to fight, but only to fight back. And, though Duniway took action, she hastily explained how physically taxing such an act actually was.

When Oregon was faced with hard economic times, Duniway wrote a series of articles advising the public on how to survive the hard times. Though her advice was economic in nature, it revealed a great deal about her conception of proper gender roles. One of the more thorough recommendations was an arrangement in which groups of men and women would pool resources and establish their own community for financial and emotional support, a proposal that basically amounted to a commune. As she described that ideal arrangement, Duniway envisioned jobs for certain kinds of persons. "The clerk and treasurer of the board should be a woman," she said. "The work is neat, and easy on the brain and muscles and requires much care and comprehension as to details."⁶² In her proposal,

she valued the work of women but believed women capable only of tasks that were “easy on the brain and muscles.” Though Duniway advocated greater appreciation and recognition of her sex, she remained unwilling to move women out of their sphere of natural duties.⁶³

Conclusion: Complexities of the Suffrage Debate

Abigail Scott Duniway serves as an example of the complexities of the suffrage movement with its defiance of cultural norms, emphasis on femininity, and expectations of greater power and autonomy while consigning women to delicate tasks. The history of the Pacific Northwest as the frontier cannot be forgotten, as the first generation of Oregonians who crossed the trail would be the first to truly confront the issue of woman suffrage. Time on the trail created strong women such as Abigail Scott Duniway and proved to others that women were capable of facing such harsh conditions. But, though it was necessary to function outside of specific gendered tasks, the first generation of Oregonians fought hard to maintain separate spheres and traditional gender ideologies. Therefore, as the suffrage debate developed, Oregon society was a combination of those wishing to maintain traditional, Eastern gender roles and those who were inspired to seek autonomy after the settling of the West.

The battle over suffrage was not simply a clash between right and wrong, or the progressive and the traditional. Anti-suffragists sometimes felt women were incapable of the mental vigor necessary for political participation. Others felt God had ordained that women stay within the confines of the home. Many, however, felt that a woman was just as capable as any man, but ought to continue focusing on women’s organizations that were already established and had proven to be beneficial to society. Some suffragists often defended their right to enter any sphere of action, admiring, for example, the military action of Joan of Arc or Cleopatra.

Many felt that women ought to marry but should not be kept from exploring their abilities through work or education. Still others, regional leaders for example, believed women to be independent creatures but not able to act aggressively or handle many professions. Gender ideologies existed in one form or another among all reformers and every member of the opposition, with little challenge to the belief of a fundamental distinction between the sexes.

In Oregon and across the nation, suffrage was not only an ideological clash but also a political battle. People voiced true concerns about the natural role of men and women and legitimate fears about the structure of the family. But moving beyond schools of thought, both sides of the debate used the questions surrounding gender as ammunition. Anti-suffragists preyed on public fears by predicting the downfall of society, the loosening of morals, or merely the possible changes to everyday normalcy. Suffragists, realizing what they were up against, worked to change their public image. Duniway, too harsh for the image of womanly suffragists, was pushed to the side as others formed parades, with beautiful women in front and babies by their sides. In some respects, the suffrage debate had less to do with whether women naturally belonged in the public or private realm but more with what she ought to do in each arena. Neither side truly challenged gender ideologies or a fundamental distinction between the sexes, but each used and manipulated the image of womanhood for the advancement of their respective causes.

Notes

1. Cynthia Culver Prescott, *Gender and Generation on the Far Western Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007).
2. See *Albany Evening Democrat*, 20 January 1876.
3. See Manuela Thurner, *Better Citizens Without the Ballot: American Anti-suffrage Women and Their Rationale During the Progressive Era*. 1993. *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement*. Ed. Marjorie Wheeler (Portland: Newsage Press, 1995).
4. Joelle Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place: Lucy Stone and the Birth of the Woman's Rights Movement* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003).
5. Ibid.
6. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her: Volume I; A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Paperback, 1989).
7. Roberta McKern. *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Oregon and the Oregon Press* (Thesis, University of Oregon: 1975).
8. *Oregonian*, 20 October 1895, 4.
9. Ibid.
10. "An Appeal to Voters and Arguments Against Equal Suffrage Constitutional Amendment" issued by Oregon State Association Opposed to the Extension of Suffrage to Women (Portland: 1906).
11. Ibid.
12. Ruth Barnes Moynihan, *Rebel for Rights, Abigail Scott Duniway* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).
13. *Oregonian*, 28 May 1900, 4.
14. "An Appeal to Voters and Arguments Against Equal Suffrage Constitutional Amendment" issued by Oregon State Association Opposed to the Extension of Suffrage to Women (Portland: 1906).
15. Thurner, *Better Citizens Without the Ballot*.

16. "An Appeal to Voters and Arguments Against Equal Suffrage Constitutional Amendment" issued by Oregon State Association Opposed to the Extension of Suffrage to Women (Portland: 1906).

17. "Woman Suffrage" National Anti-suffrage Association. Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1916.

18. *Northwest News*, 2 June 1884, 2.

19. *Plaindealer* (Roseburg, Oregon), 14 July 1871, 2.

20. "An Appeal to Voters and Arguments Against Equal Suffrage Constitutional Amendment" issued by Oregon State Association Opposed to the Extension of Suffrage to Women (Portland: 1906).

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. National Woman Suffrage Association, "Twenty-five answers to antis; five minute speeches on votes for women by eminent suffragists." (New York, 1912?).

24. Ibid.

25. Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place*.

26. As quoted in Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place*.

27. Ibid.

28. *Weekly Enterprise*, 15 September 1871.

29. Ida Husted Harper, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony* (Indianapolis: Hollenbeck Press, 1908).

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Sara Hunter Graham, *The Suffrage Renaissance: A New Image for a New Century, 1896-1910. One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement*. Ed. Marjorie Wheeler (Portland: Newsage Press, 1995).

34. Ibid.

35. Ann Marie Nicolosi, "'The Most Beautiful Suffragette': Inez Milholland and the Political Currency of Beauty" *Journal of Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 3 (2007): 286-309.

36. Ibid.

37. Margaret Finnegan. *Selling Suffrage* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1999).

38. Glenna Smith Tinnin. "Why the Pageant?" *The Woman's Journal* (15 February 1913): 50.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. "Sunflowers and Babies in Oregon Campaign," *The Woman's Journal*, 26 October 1912: 342.

42. Ibid.

43. Roberta McKern, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Oregon and the Oregon Press* (Thesis, University of Oregon: 1975).

44. Duniway Scrapbook 1, Duniway Collection.

45. G. Thomas Edwards, *Sowing Good Seeds: The Northwest Suffrage Campaigns of Susan B. Anthony* (Portland, OR: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1990).

46. Jennifer Ross-Nazzari, "Emma Smith DeVoe: Practicing Pragmatic Politics in the Pacific Northwest," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 2 (2005): 76-84.

47. Ibid.

48. *Evening Chronicle* (Spokane, Washington), 22 February 1908: 9.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. "Oregon Honors Mrs. A.S. Duniway: Pioneer Mother of Suffrage in Northwest Honored in Birthday Anniversary—Tributes from Enfranchised States" *The Woman's Journal* [Boston] (9 Nov 1912): 355.

52. National American Woman Suffrage Association, "Twenty-five answers to antis."

53. Glenna Smith Tinnin, "Why the Pageant?" *The Woman's Journal* (15 February 1913): 50.

54. National American Woman Suffrage Association, "Twenty-five answers to antis."

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Moynihan, *Rebel for Rights*.

59. *New Northwest*, (16 September 1880).

60. Abigail Scott Duniway, *Pathbreaking* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).

61. *New Northwest*, (26 April 1872).

62. *Pacific Empire* (21 November 1895).

63. See also *New Northwest* (15/29 December 1871) in which Duniway recommends that women take up the "thousand light and easy occupations which are now monopolized by men who are out of their 'sphere.'"

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