

Podcast: Two Students Discuss Women's Suffrage — and Anti-Suffrage — in Dayton

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[Marie] Hi, my name is Marie Poinatte, and I'm a senior history student at UD, and I'm here with my classmate Emilee Zoog.

[Emilee] Hi, I'm Emilee and I'm a fifth-year, just have a couple classes to finish up in the fall — a biology major pre-med student with a second major in history.

[Marie] So, Emilee and I took Dr. Caroline Waldron's historiography class last year, and she turned us on to the suffrage archive at the Dayton Metro Library downtown. And what a great time to be turned on to suffrage because this year, 2020, is the centennial of the 19th Amendment, which we know prohibited restrictions on the right to vote on the basis of sex. So some dates for fun: June 4, 1919, Congress passed the 19th Amendment; June 6, Ohio was the sixth state to ratify; and Aug. 18, 1920, Tennessee was the 36th state to ratify, so it went to law, and that's why we celebrate the centennial in 2020. So what Emilee and I are hoping to talk about a little bit today are the radical roots of first-wave feminism in the suffrage movement, and also the suffrage movement's opponents, the anti-suffragists, which, if you're anything like me, maybe you didn't even know there were people actively opposing suffrage, but of course there were because the suffragists just had to fight against somebody. I don't

know, it was news to me. Emilee why don't you tell us a little bit about your experience at the archive.

[Emilee] Sure, so I started studying the Dayton women's suffrage collection in the Dayton Metro Library — it's at the main branch — in about this past February, and it was in Dr. Waldron's seminar class on the vote, so everyone chose different topics about enfranchisement, and I chose women's suffrage. So at the archive I mostly studied the 1912 referendum campaign organized by the Dayton women's suffrage party and so this was a campaign to address the suffrage amendment, which was proposed at the constitutional convention — the Ohio constitutional convention — and in the archive there's a lot of recorded history on this referendum campaign including scrapbooks put together by the suffragists and minutes diaries detailing their meetings and photographs.

[Marie] That's so interesting. That's so funny that you were studying that there. So what I was studying — when I went there, I discovered anti-suffragism there was a Dayton anti-suffragist — her name was Katharine Talbott — and I was just really interested by her comments — and she and many others. There were a lot of people who were not did not think that women's suffrage would be good for America. They thought it would actually be damaging, that women would drift away from their homes, men would not have a responsibility to women if women became more independent, and maybe it wouldn't stop at the vote, they, you know, who knows what would happen? So there were some concerns about the family, really, but also a lot of anti-suffragists would say most women do not want to vote because if you round up,

about 3 million women in the United States were part of national suffrage organizations — like the National American Women's Suffrage Association and the National Women's Party are those groups that are part of the national narrative of the women's suffrage movement. But an anti-suffrage comment would be, “Most women do not want to vote,” because obviously 3 million is not the population of American women. So, I was on the Library of Congress's website, and I found this article published in Boston — it was a women's suffrage leaflet, and there was an article by Henry B. Blackwell. If you know anything about Blackwell, he's an abolitionist and a suffragist, and he wrote this article responding to anti-suffrage comments, so in response to, “Most women do not want to vote,” Blackwell says, “Except in years of presidential election, a majority of men in Massachusetts do not vote. This is shown by statistics. The right to vote for governor, state legislature, municipal, town and county officers often calls out less than half the male voters in spite of public opinion, party machinery, torchlight processions, newspaper articles, expenditure of money, and personal efforts of candidates,” so it's hard to get men to vote and to when they are encouraged to as part of their citizenship responsibilities, so to say that no women wanted to vote because they didn't all leave their homes and take to the streets and rally is silly to me. I don't know, what do you think Emilee?

[Emilee] Yeah, definitely. So just because that not every woman wanted the right to vote for herself didn't mean that it wasn't, like, a class need, like a need for women as a class to be enfranchised and I think it's interesting that you took so much interest in anti-suffrage because i noticed that, like, in both the suffragist activities and the activities and arguments of

the anti-suffragists, like, both of those things sort of reflect the radicalism of the suffrage movement and the first wave of feminism itself. So, for example, just to start off, the fact that women had to fight for the right to vote as women, like, they were disenfranchised based on sex, that is radical in the sense that it goes to the root of sex-based oppression of women, like as a class, so even though, I don't know, the the first wave has been generally viewed as really, like, not close to radical feminism at all — totally different — sometimes even not appreciated as really that feminist because it's sort of been viewed as focused on one thing — suffrage — and a movement only by and for middle-class white women because of the racism that was just inherent at the time and that women did like, partake in, but really, the movement that I saw on the local level did reflect a lot of radical feminist ideas and like the roots of radical feminism in the first wave because, like you said, the arguments about women's role in the family and women needing to argue against that in order to become enfranchised reflects their, like, sex oppression and it also — that reflects a focus on them as the class like the (unintelligible) for just focus on women as a class and then also the fact that I noticed that sometimes the Dayton women's suffragists would refer to themselves as the Dayton Women's Suffrage Association but sometimes they would refer themselves as the Dayton Women's Suffrage Party, which has a much more ideological connotation and it implies that they're focused on a lot more than just one thing, which would be suffrage — they're focused on the ideology, and they're focused on a class analysis almost.

[Marie] Yeah.

[Emilee] And then finally, I noticed in, like, the Dayton Archive that the Dayton women really were interested in reaching women across class and race lines and across religion. They, for example, invited Rose Schneiderman, from New York. She was a Jewish immigrant, working woman. She worked as a shirtwaist factory worker and rose to be the president of the New York chapter of the Women's Trade Union League. She helped them find out how to reach working-class women, immigrant women, and she really guided their work a lot, and then also, in the newspapers that Dayton women published, they talked about their efforts at Black churches and the work of Black women in the suffrage movement, and so even though on a national level there was definitely racism within the movement, and it was definitely focused on middle-class white women, in Dayton, I definitely saw women wanting to reach as many women as possible, like they wanted to reach womankind in order to really get this referendum campaign going, and to me, that struck me as like a precursor of radical feminism almost.

[Marie] Yeah, certainly. I mean, it's — when you compare the suffrage movement to, like, the second- or third-wave feminism, yeah, it doesn't appear as radical, but it is a radical thing, and it had to have been to inspire such intense opposition, and that's really, I'm really glad that you found that at the Dayton archive — that local example with Schneiderman and others — because sometimes those microhistorical examples demonstrate intersections — that intersectionality that gets lost in, you know, macro narratives. I mean there's there's that story of the National Women's Party in their 1913 march in Washington, and they wouldn't let Ida B. Wells march with them. She had to sneak her way into the parade. She, like, snuck in there

in the middle. You know? Like things like that that become macro narratives that — it's cool to find local examples where that's not the case. Something else I found — I did some more reading since we last spoke — and I found this *Century of Struggle* book — it's a historic (pause) monograph — that's the word I wanted — written by Eleanor Flexner, and it was historiographically significant in the suffrage history it was published in 1959 and she talks about some Southern suffragists who became anti-suffragists at the time of the 19th Amendment because some of these Southern women were hoping to achieve suffrage by state so that — because this is still the era of Jim Crow — they would be able to restrict Black voters, so it essentially achieved white women's suffrage and not Black women's suffrage. So these are these are some Southern chapters of the National American Women's Suffrage Association that are breaking away to now be anti- against the federal amendment — even as the National —the NAWSA —is trying to accommodate them and trying to let them know that they're not against (quote) “ensuring white supremacy,” as Flexner has it. So, yeah, I'm glad that you found that local example where that's not always the case, because sometimes it is on the national scale.

[Emilee] Yeah, and it's it's interesting to, like, talk about those things, too, because, you know, it wasn't all radical feminism in the first wave or, you know, not all feminism is real good, like, going-to-the-root, reaching-womankind feminism. Obviously that wasn't — they wanted to include Black women.

[Marie] Right. Something else I think that really points to the radical nature of the suffrage movement that was happening in that decade of the 20th century was because it was during World War I. They were — some suffragists said, “OK, we're going to support the war effort and then, you know, expect we're going to push for suffrage after.” And the National Women's Party with Alice Paul said, “No, we are not waiting for the war to end. Suffrage needs to happen now.” So they would — they were picketing at the White House. Signs — they would hold up signs that said “Kaiser Wilson” and “Mr. President, How long must women wait for liberty?” And they picketed every day for years — during the war. I mean, if that's not a radical thing to do, I don't know what is, really.

[Emilee] Yeah. Yeah, and it definitely pointed to their awareness of the importance of enfranchisement as a class of, like, they — so, because they're a class, they really need enfranchisement, so —

[Marie] It's the responsibility —

[Emilee] They weren't going to give it up. They had to fight for it.

[Marie] It's the responsibility of citizens to give their consent to be governed. We can't claim to be representative government if there are, you know, 50 percent of the population is not represented, so it's really interesting, and it's really fun — fun, I think it's fun — to try to put yourself in the mindset of these historical people and imagine what they were thinking and what their concerns were and, like, I loved reading the anti-suffragists and trying to imagine

how afraid they were of women's suffrage because it's something that we're taught to value. Voting is sacred in the United States, so it's just — it's just really interesting how those ideas change so quickly. It's only been 100 years of women's suffrage. So, yeah, if you are interested in suffrage like Emilee and I are, you should check out PBS's documentary *The Vote*. It's about an hour and a half, and its main point is that women took the vote — they were not granted the right to vote. They had to radically protest for years and years and years, and they also have a really interesting discussion of the state suffrage movements because not everybody had to wait for the federal amendment. Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho and Utah had female suffrage since the 1890s. So yeah check it out it's on pbs.org and it was really interesting. But thanks for listening to the two of us. This is Marie.

[Emilee] Thank you. This is Emilee. Bye!