

**Kenneth Florey, *American Woman Suffrage Postcards:
A Study and Catalog***

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- 1 Kenneth Florey, *American Woman Suffrage Postcards: A Study and Catalog*
- 2 Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2015. ISBN 978-0-7864-9846-8. RRP \$55.00 (paperback).
- 3 Ana Stevenson
- 4 *American Woman Suffrage Postcards: A Study and Catalog* is a comprehensive scholarly collection and guide to the woman suffrage postcards produced in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. It reproduces a wide variety of both pro- and anti-suffrage postcards, thus demonstrating the breadth and variety of illustrations and photographs that became part of the public debate. In discussing questions such as publication, production, and distribution, Florey brings to light aspects of early-twentieth-century postcard culture that are far less evident when researchers encounter woman suffrage postcards as part of ephemera collections in the archives.
- 5 Professor Kenneth Florey is formerly of the English Department at Southern Connecticut State University. This book follows Florey's previous work, *Women's Suffrage Memorabilia: An Illustrated Historical Study* (2013). His personal collection of suffrage memorabilia and postcards forms the basis for much of his woman suffrage research. Through this book, it is Florey's intention to make a numerous collection of American woman suffrage postcards available to scholars. He ephemera collections of the Schlesinger Library of Women's History in America at the Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, for example, encompass only small groupings of woman suffrage postcards within other collections. "One of the difficulties that American scholars face," he emphasises (1), "is that they lack easy, direct access to large collections of cards, unlike their English counterparts, who have available to them the repositories of the Museum of London and the British Museum." Florey emphasises the limitations of an approach based on small sample sizes (1): is working from a limited collection of postcards representative, and is it sufficient for sustaining definitive criticism? This book amply succeeds in its goal of reproducing a corpus of woman suffrage postcards, accompanied by astute historical analysis. Of the

approximately 1000 American woman suffrage postcards Florey estimates to have been published, this book reproduces 700 postcards. These images are sourced from his personal collection as well as that of other extensive collections of American suffrage memorabilia (1).

- 6 *American Woman Suffrage Postcards* divides this corpus into six major categories (2): Official Postcards, produced by suffrage organisations and their supporters; Real Photo cards, featuring images developed from a photographic negative; Printed Photo cards, a commercial printing strategy that proved cheaper than the former; Holiday Cards, featuring holiday imagery pertaining especially to Valentine's Day and Christmas; and Commercial Suffrage postcards, one subset of which was produced individually and the other as a set of postcards with an overriding theme.
- 7 In spite of the focus on American woman suffrage postcards, this book frequently contextualises the American examples in terms of their British counterparts. Acknowledging the transatlantic communication of the woman suffrage movement, Florey even concedes (7) that, in their strategies for creating suffrage memorabilia, it was generally the "English rather than their American counterparts who were most innovative." Moreover, while Florey views American suffragists as less adept at monetising suffrage memorabilia than their British counterparts, his analysis of the production and distribution of woman suffrage postcards nonetheless speaks to Margaret Finnegan's argument about the movement's gradual embrace of consumer capitalism. The breadth of this corpus of woman suffrage postcards demonstrates the prominence of certain themes, some of which have not previously been noted by scholars. Pro-suffragists, for example, visually imagined women in positions of power (278-280), even going so far as to embrace women driving automobiles (105-106) and horses and carts (160-162) alike. For anti-suffragists, postcards were used to communicate community or satirical perspectives toward the woman question (106-108) as well as more insidious and misogynistic themes such as veiled anti-lesbian subtexts (214-215) and the condemnation of role reversal in marriage (216-217). The contemporary currency of the suffrage question meant it was even embraced by advertisers in the 1910s (220).
- 8 However, consideration of issues surrounding other exclusionary elements of the woman suffrage movement – evident in the postcards themselves due to the overwhelming visual focus on privileged white women – is somewhat lacking. The book acknowledges the existence of some racial stereotypes on postcards. Florey further suggests (21) that, because African American men were theoretically enfranchised, in depicting "those who could not cast a ballot rather than those who could," American postcards "avoided racist controversy over Black male-voting rights established by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments." Yet the visual absence of women of colour, and the sense that pro- and anti-suffragists alike imagined the future electorate to be white, warrants further consideration with reference to these postcards and their visualisation of enfranchisement.
- 9 *American Woman Suffrage Postcards* presents a thought-provoking new picture of role played by postcards in the woman suffrage debate of the 1910s. For pro- and anti-suffragists alike, postcards became a site of artistic stimulus, technological innovation, and political debate in the first decades of the twentieth century.