



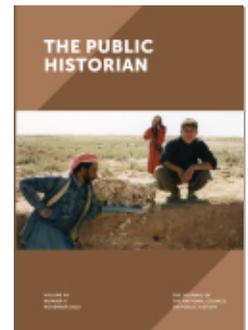
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Votes for Women: Celebrating New York's Suffrage Centennial
(review)

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descent. For Jose Velez, it meant joining Solidaridad, a local nonprofit advocacy group dedicated to helping Spanish-language speakers learn English—since local public institutions were often ill-equipped to perform this work. For Kevin Wong, it was selecting an American first name and graduating from college along with all his siblings.

Noticeably absent from both my tours was any discussion of the continued displacement of lower-income residents from the Lower East Side and the disappearance of rent-controlled and affordable apartments. Although the importance of garment unions to 103 Orchard Street's residents does receive attention, the tour did not address how the working-class immigrants who remain on the Lower East Side and in neighboring Chinatown are now far more likely to work in service economy jobs than in manufacturing. In addition, in its capacity as an employer, the Tenement Museum has opposed unionization campaigns by its own staff.⁴ As a result, it was hard not to be cynical when confronted with a narrative that praises the importance of labor unions—*for other workers*. The Tenement Museum's president, Kevin Jennings, has been an important voice in speaking out about how Americans misuse the concept of "illegal" immigration, a position that *Under One Roof* advances as well.⁵ But the museum should not shy away from difficult histories in which it is directly involved as an institutional actor. The museum can and should be transparent about gentrification and the conquest of New York City by financial and service economies, and encourage educators to engage visitors in these conversations. Dialogue is only as effective as its willingness to take on critical questions that are also self-reflexive.

Andrew Urban, Rutgers University, New Brunswick

4 For an account of staff members' unionization drive in 2008, see Sewell Chan, "At Tenement Museum, a Fight over Unionization," *New York Times*, March 4, 2008.

5 Interview with Kevin Jennings, "Why 'Legal Immigration' Doesn't Apply To Early Immigrants To The U.S.," *National Public Radio*, January 17, 2018.

Votes for Women: Celebrating New York's Suffrage Centennial. New York State Museum, Albany, NY. Jennifer A. Lemak, Chief Curator of History; Ashley Hopkins-Benton, Senior Historian and Curator; Nancy Kelley, Director of Exhibitions; Mehna Harders Reach, Exhibition Planner; Ford Bailey, Designer; Karen Glaz, Graphic Designer; Kathryn Weller, Director of Education and Public Programs. November 4, 2017-May 13, 2018.

On November 6, 1917, a state referendum was put before New York's male voters: Should women be granted the right to vote? Fifty-four percent said yes, and New York became the twelfth state and the first east of the Mississippi River to grant women suffrage. Nearly three years later, in August 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution was ratified. *Votes for Women: Celebrating New York's*

Suffrage Centennial, an exhibit at the New York State Museum, persuasively presents the many decades of effort that led to this achievement and the ongoing struggle for equality.



In 1917, New York became the first state east of the Mississippi to grant voting rights to women. (Photo courtesy of the author)

A presentation of the New York State Education Department and the Office of Cultural Education, *Votes for Women* features collections from various New York state agencies including the State Museum, State Library, and State Archives, and from an impressive list of more than forty historical institutions and private collections. Situated in the museum’s West Gallery on the ground level, the exhibit is well organized and carefully curated. As visitors enter, they pass through a wide hallway. To the left is a photomural along a timeline of women’s protests. A glass display case in the center of the hall displays artifacts from the 2017 Women’s March, including a couple of knitted pink “pussyhats.” To the right, there is an old voting machine.

The exhibit rooms are chronologically and thematically organized. Section 1, “Agitate! Agitate! 1776–1890,” begins its narrative at the time American colonists gain their independence. A focus here is on the rights women lacked; they “could not own property after marriage, did not have rights to their own children, and were barred from most education opportunities,” signage tells visitors. Without voting rights, petitions to government agencies were an essential political tool

utilized by women, and they increased in frequency in the aftermath of the Women's Rights Convention held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. Images and artifacts of key figures of this period are featured, including a rare photo of a younger (about thirty-three year old) Elizabeth Cady Stanton with two of her children. Another treat in this early section are two outfits: the first, a full Bloomer costume, c. 1855; the second, a dress owned by Susan B. Anthony, c. 1870.



A photo of Susan B. Anthony, c. 1870, a dress she wore, and a photo of Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, c. 1890. Right, a Bloomer costume, c.1855. (Photo courtesy of the author)

The anti-slavery and women's rights movements were closely aligned, and with the end of the US Civil War and passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, pressure for universal suffrage intensified. *Votes for Women* includes photographs and artifacts from Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, noting that the latter two were involved with the American Equal Rights Association, formed in 1866 "to secure Equal Rights to all American citizens, especially the right of suffrage, irrespective of race, color, or sex." But as signage states, "hope that women's suffrage and African American suffrage could be achieved simultaneously" ended with ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, recognizing only the voting rights of male citizens, regardless of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." For women who had campaigned for decades on behalf of women's rights, abolition, and universal suffrage, this was

a devastating and divisive blow. The exhibit presents the split over strategies: the National Women's Suffrage Association, led by Stanton and Anthony, focused on a new federal amendment that would grant the vote to women; the American Woman Suffrage Association developed a state-by-state strategy amid ongoing western expansion.

Section 2, "Winning the Vote: 1890–1920," explores New Yorkers' push for suffrage in the context of dramatic change brought on by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. In addition to suffrage, reformers were focused on labor issues and healthcare, even as a new wave of reformers emerged, including Carrie Chapman Catt, Ella Hawley Crossett, and Harriot Stanton Blatch, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter.



The advertised meeting took place at the Cayuga County Political Equality Club in Auburn, New York, c. 1915. (Photo courtesy of the author)

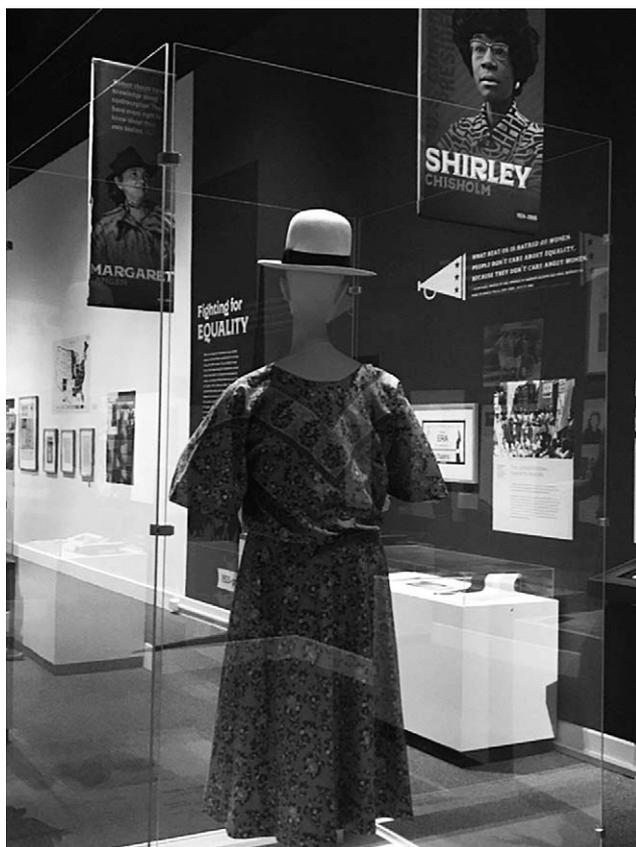
The remnants of this activism and items chosen for the exhibit are illuminating and diverse. A whimsical display entitled "Suffrage for Sale" offers some examples of early twentieth-century mass merchandising geared to supporters: hats, dolls, teacups, and even "Votes for Women" embroidered stockings, c. 1912. A fully stocked bag from Schenectady Visiting Nurses Association, c. 1920, contains an intriguing mix of tools and treatments. Also on display: a "Votes for Women" perpetual calendar, pins, medallions, and two glass plate slides, c. 1915, to be projected at movie houses in the earliest years of cinema. One reads: "Vote for

the Suffrage Amendment Nov 2, 1915,” adding, “Give the Women a Square Deal.” This 1915 referendum in New York failed, but two years later, when New York granted women full suffrage, it signaled a major shift in the political landscape. Three years later, the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution was ratified.



Bag from the Schenectady Visiting Nurses Association, c. 1920, from the collection of the Bellevue Alumni Center for Nursing History Archive. (Photo courtesy of the author)

A strength of this exhibit is that the story does not end there. Section 3, “Fighting for Equality: 1920-present,” focuses on the “many women [who] continued to slowly chip away at the many disparities in an effort to realize the intent of the Seneca Falls convention, that ‘men and women were created equal.’” This section includes an interesting blend of artifacts, many from the 1970s and 1980s, including Bella Abzug’s day dress; buttons and T-shirts from the National Organization for Women (NOW); and banners of Bella Abzug, Gloria Steinem, and 1972 presidential candidate Shirley Chisholm. There is also a corner devoted to Margaret Sanger and others who recognized early in the twentieth century the importance of birth control to women’s independence and consequently faced imprisonment rather than adhere to laws prohibiting it. A hooked rug, lent by Smith College, shows a woman with eight children and a dog, with lettering that reads, “Cupid Sir! Please sheath your arrow! I do not wish to act so rude but please regard my present brood!”



Bella Abzug's day dress and one of her hats. Also visible within the image is exhibit signage about Shirley Chisholm and Margaret Sanger. (Photo courtesy of the author)

In creating any exhibit, choices need to be made, but there were two omissions in this final section that seem worth mentioning. The first is the years of activism that led to passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a southern struggle but one in which many New Yorkers were involved. The other was the near absence of Hillary Rodham Clinton. Appropriately, Shirley Chisholm is featured in this exhibit as the first black woman to run for president (1972); Victoria Woodhull is also here, as the first woman to run for the office (1872). But Clinton, who served as a junior US Senator from New York (2001–09) and as US Secretary of State (2009–13), was the first woman to receive a major party endorsement for her campaign in 2016. The exhibit's planning was underway at that point, so it is possible it was too recent to effectively incorporate. I imagine that others visitors, like me, felt her presence anyway.

The University at Albany, and especially the graduate program in public history (which I direct) has enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship with the New York State Museum and its staff, including Lemak and others involved with this exhibit. The quality and educational value of *Votes for Women* and its companion catalogue,

Votes for Women: Celebrating New York's Suffrage Centennial by Jennifer A. Lemak and Ashley Hopkins-Benton, help to explain why the museum is such a valuable resource not only to the university but to the Capital Region overall.

Sheila Curran Bernard, University at Albany, State University of New York

EBOLA: People + Public Health + Political Will. David J. Sencer CDC Museum, Atlanta, Georgia. Louise E. Shaw, Project Director and Curator; The National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Diseases, The Center for Global Health, and *The CDC Foundation*, Sponsors. June 19, 2017—June 15, 2018.

The worst outbreak in Ebola history occurred between 2014 and 2016 in West Africa, with 29,652 suspected, probable, and confirmed cases, including 11,235 deaths. Although the initial response to Ebola by West African governments and the international community was slow, the Ebola outbreak marshaled the largest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) response in history, involving over four thousand people. The severity of the outbreak, the global public health response, and the many lives affected by Ebola are the focus of the exhibit



Installation photo of the entrance to *EBOLA: People + Public Health + Political Will*. (Photo courtesy of the David J. Sencer CDC Museum)