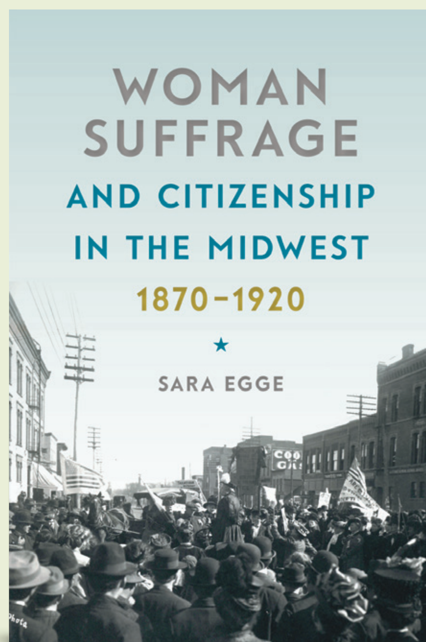
BOOK REVIEWS

Woman Suffrage and Citizenship in the Midwest, 1870–1920

Sara Egge

(Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018, 242 p., Paper, $85.00.)



Historian Sara Egge traces the constellation of gender, midwestern social cultures, ethnic plurality, and women's civic engagement to investigate how women's rights activists influenced changing notions of community and citizenship in their quest for the vote. Through decades of civic engagement, midwestern women participated in voluntary associations, established community institutions (such as schools and libraries), and contributed to patriotic efforts in support of World War I—efforts all demonstrated here to be hallmarks of midwestern Anglo-American gender culture. Viewed collectively, this engagement served as powerful evidence to recognize women as citizens deserving suffrage.

What emerges from Egge's research is a multidimensional history about the combined effects of citizenship, gender, and ethnicity on the development of midwestern women's arguments for suffrage. Ethnic immigrants were initially welcomed into midwestern culture; however, while Protestants, Norwegians, and Swedes quickly assimilated into the dominant culture previously established by Yankee emigrants, others—most notably Germans and Catholics—remained culturally isolated. Town-farm divides and anti-German sentiments spurred by nationalism during World War I exacerbated this exclusion. Ultimately, a social and political culture defined by conformity emerged, fracturing the region's tolerance for ethnic plurality while elevating Yankee women's work as active citizens. This promotion of one group at the expense of another allowed midwestern Yankee suffragists to leverage arguments about native-born women's contributions to state and society, and to ask for expanded definitions of women's citizenship while definitions were narrowing for others, especially foreign-born Germans.

The study's comparative approach focuses on Clay County in northwestern Iowa, Yankton County in southeastern South Dakota, and Lyon County in southwestern Minnesota to contextualize local activities within the larger environment of state and national suffrage activism, and Egge's is one of the first studies to simultaneously leverage gender, ethnicity, and citizenship as categories of analysis. This is a difficult task, and she does an admirable job, especially by investigating how the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) "came to harbor a grudge" against midwestern ethnic populations, showed a particular "resentment of Germans," and "ultimately characterized Midwesterners as ignorant and disinterested people who cared little about gender equality" while also contrasting those national attitudes with the initial midwestern preference for ethnic inclusion. Without inclusion, regional activists believed "NAWSA guaranteed its own defeat," and this appears to be the case in the early examples analyzed here.

Minnesota's long history of woman suffrage activism moved in fits and starts. An 1898 change to state law made it harder to pass constitutional amendments, which had been the primary focus of early suffragists. Readers interested in Minnesota's suffrage history will find the Lyon County analysis is not as strong as the analyses of the Iowa and South Dakota counties, likely due to its lower level of activity and, therefore, fewer sources. Additionally, the study's consideration of the later period of Minnesota suffrage activism focuses on the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association and its connection to NAWSA, which results in a portrayal of one group of women as most central to the movement. The book thus misses an opportunity to consider the impact of ethnic suffrage organizations unique to Minnesota. The Scandinavian Woman Suffrage Association, for example, was composed of members who resisted assimilation, who employed their ethnic identity to strengthen woman suffrage work among a diverse membership, and who also faced anti-immigrant backlash during World War I.

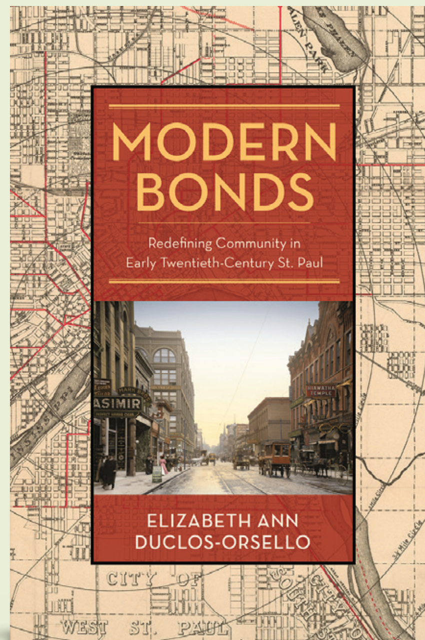
Egge's analysis excels by establishing the thesis that woman suffrage activism in the Midwest was far more complex than it appears at first glance, and that midwestern suffrage activism reveals sociopolitical approaches particularly characteristic of the region. As a result, *Woman Suffrage and Citizenship in the Midwest* is essential scholarship that adds to our understanding of midwestern suffragism and political culture by carefully considering the links between gender, civic activism, and ethnicity to uncover their influence on the problematic but ultimately successful definitions of citizenship created by suffragists.

—*Kristin Mapel Bloomberg*

Modern Bonds: Redefining Community in Early Twentieth-Century St. Paul

Elizabeth Ann Duclos-Orsello

(Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018, 240 p., Paper, $36.95.)



What is community in urban America? In this recent contribution to scholarship about Minnesota's capital city, Elizabeth Ann Duclos-Orsello, professor and chair of interdisciplinary studies and coordinator of American studies at Salem State University, addresses widespread perceptions—both popular and academic—that "community" has been in decline in the United States since the early twentieth century. In this context, *community* is defined as the intimate relationships among people who live in the same geographic region, usually a small town. Duclos-Orsello chose to focus on St. Paul for its "ordinariness." Unlike Chicago, St. Paul never became a thriving metropolis, and it lacked the cultural life and the commercial-industrial energy of its next-door neighbor, Minneapolis. By focusing on midsized St. Paul, Duclos-Orsello was able "to investigate the experiences of the majority of Americans without losing the nuance and detail of a case study."

The influx after 1900 of African Americans from the South and a more varied mix of European immigrants made the city of St. Paul increasingly heterogeneous. While initially this may have challenged residents' sense of community, community did not wane; rather, it reconfigured itself into a network of smaller groups within the urban realm. A new definition of community emerged based on cultural affinities, those "shared aspects of life, among members of society that [stretched] ever outward from the location of daily living . . . to the whole world."

To exemplify these two interpretations of community, Duclos-Orsello bookends *Modern Bonds* with two familiar Minnesota topics: in chapter one, about shared interests and community in Sinclair Lewis's most famous novel, *Main Street*; and in the last chapter, the extravagant 1916 and 1917 Winter Carnivals (then called the Winter Festivals) organized by James J. Hill's son Louis. She elucidates the ways in which Lewis and Hill, intentionally or not, constructed a new, complex definition of community characterized not by "physical or political unity among *all* [her emphasis] residents of a geopolitical locale," but rather by smaller, self-selected groups regardless of geographic location. These self-defined communities offered the potential of tighter bonds through shared affinities, whereas the larger geographic community could be fettered by a unity more imagined than real. Of course, both types of communities can exist simultaneously, as the 1916 and 1917 Winter Carnivals demonstrated.

In the three middle chapters, Duclos-Orsello explores the ways in which the definition of community became more fluid with the rise of modernity. In chapter two, the African American Gardner family constructs their own version of community, reflected by what they chose to include—and not to include—in their family photo albums. In chapter three, which focuses on the built environment, readers learn that Archbishop John Ireland believed that a grand building like the Cathedral of St. Paul should mirror the design of Cass Gilbert's 1905 state capitol, thereby linking ecclesiastical architecture with civic architecture, and also gesturing toward ecclesiastical and civic unity for all St. Paulites. Chapter four describes the transition from St. Paul's municipal focus on large parks to smaller neighborhood parks as a way of retaining smaller communities within the larger, heterogeneous one. These three chapters illustrate the ways in which residents of St. Paul contested and defined new understandings of community.

Duclos-Orsello successfully takes an interdisciplinary approach to her analysis, playing the role of art historian, literary and social critic, sociologist, and architectural historian, and she clearly engages with the literature of community studies as an academic subject. For the most part, Duclos-Orsello avoids jargon, though her invocation of "network theory" early on risks putting off general readers. One cannot help but wish that the photographs, which are all wedged together in one place, were interspersed throughout the chapters. In sum, however, the book is an accessible, engaging read for a wide audience, while also appealing to academics, who will appreciate the scholarly rigor. *Modern Bonds* is a welcome addition to research on the urban history of Minnesota's very ordinary, endearing state capital.

—Eric Hankin-Redmon

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