

BOOK REVIEWS

Fashion and Twentieth-Century Feminism

Rabinovitch-Fox, Einav. *Dressed for Freedom: The Fashionable Politics of American Feminism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021. xii + 248 pp. \$110.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0252044014; \$24.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0252086069.

Nora Ellen Carleson

University of Delaware, Newark, DE, USA

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In *Dressed for Freedom: The Fashionable Politics of American Feminism*, Einav Rabinovitch-Fox provides a compelling exploration into how American feminists used fashion and fashionability as tools to advance their missions across the long twentieth century. In so doing, the author adds to a growing body of scholarship underscoring the significance of fashion, clothing, and dress in providing new insights into the past while simultaneously challenging the myth of the antifashion feminist.

A strength of *Dressed for Freedom* is its use of interdisciplinary methodologies to tell political, social, and cultural history. One of the best of these methodological approaches is the author's use of the body: the author reinforces the importance and implications of the connection between fashion and the body throughout the text. Whether discussing health, race, liberation, or work, the body wearing the clothes often plays as significant a role as the fashion itself. Another methodological strength is the author's use of visual and material culture. Though at times this evidence tends to be more illustrative than evidentiary, the images support the text and strike a refreshing balance between iconic and novel.

Over the course of five chapters, Rabinovitch-Fox expands on well-known tropes of American feminists: the New Woman, suffragists, flappers, the postwar working woman, and the radical feminists of the 1960s and 1970s. While such a choice of figures is unsurprising, the author complicates expected narratives by centering fashion as an everyday feminist practice affecting *all* women. While acknowledging fashion's problematic nature, Rabinovitch-Fox shows how women—white and Black, elite and working class, “old stock” and immigrant, liberal and conservative, working and not—all found strategies to express politics and challenge racist, gendered, and classist beliefs through fashion.

In chapter one, Rabinovitch-Fox sets the tone for the rest of the book by taking a fresh look at the racial iterations of an enduring icon: the Gibson Girl. Rabinovitch-Fox expands the usual narrative by highlighting how, for white women, this image posed little threat to traditional notions of femininity but still managed to allow greater physical and social movement and encourage new roles in education, athletics, and sexual expression. But Rabinovitch-Fox pushes this traditional image of the Gibson Girl further by exploring how Black women adopted the fashion. In addition to the stereotypical white Gibson Girl, we see how influential Black women like Mary Church Terrell, Emma Azalia Hackley, Nannie Helen Burroughs, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett embraced the style to express middle-class refinement through the politics of respectability. However, as the author points out, Black women often shifted the image to suit their needs, wearing more lavish and ornamented versions of the ensemble to combat the sexualized athleticism of the white Gibson Girl figure that played into problematic stereotypes about young Black women and their bodies.

As she does throughout the book, the author considers class as well as race in this opening chapter. Moving beyond middle- and upper-class women, she notes that the fashion for shirtwaists found popularity across racial and class boundaries. Simple enough to be mass-produced or sewn at home, and mutable to a variety of materials and ornamentation, it could be made or sold at a wide variety of price points. In many ways, the shirtwaist became a symbol of American womanhood writ large. For many young immigrant women, purchasing and wearing this object was the first step toward assimilation (29). Yet, as the author shows, it was also a powerful symbol for garment trade workers, who could clothe their bodies in their work while striking and fighting for economic and political rights.

Chapter two traces how suffragists cemented an enduring connection between feminism and fashion in the 1910s. Fashion became a tool wielded by some to unite disparate people and by others to express independence and individuality. As suffragists created the suffrage suit and used all matter of white garments to send sartorial messages of solidarity, bohemians in Greenwich village found acts of resistance by adopting Japanese and Chinese garments, including kimonos, which were comfortable, healthful, allowed for greater mobility, and added connotations of individual expression, creativity, and an artistic nature.

In the third chapter, the author moves the flapper away from the sexy, smoking, jazz-baby stereotype to reveal her also as a complex symbol of the urbanization, economic independence, political consciousness, and sexual freedom of American women in the 1920s. The author traces how the flapper embraced the independent, mobile, and daring elements of the bohemians alongside suffragists' claims that fashions were not markers of impropriety, but rather sartorial symbols of freedom.

The final two chapters examine the often complicated and contradictory uses of fashion by feminists between the 1930s and 1980s. We see how some women embraced fashion as a gendered career, reshaping the cultural definitions of womanhood with their designs and their professionalization. Nevertheless, as before, fashion was only sometimes a liberating or an empowering force. It could and was used by some women to exclude and disenfranchise others. As the author moves through the second half of the twentieth century, she uncovers a diverse history. A wider array of meanings, uses, and attitudes as well as differences in class, religion, and agendas continued to multiply how politically active American women used or decried the use of fashion during the tumultuous decades of the 1960s and 1970s. Racial differences, for example, were underscored in the fashions of Black designers who primarily made

evening and afternoon wear, compared to white American designers who centered their work on everyday clothing and sportswear. A distinction that echoed the adaption in Gibson Girl fashion between the white New Woman and the Black New Negro.

In *Dressed for Freedom*, the author has written a book of interest for dress scholars, cultural historians, and the general public. Though many of the ideas and historical actors in the book will not be new to scholars of dress or costume, groups like the Rainy Daisies or the author's argument of an extended shared visual language of feminist liberation may be. For historians and general readers, Rabinovitch-Fox convincingly shows that fashion was far more significant to the development of feminism in the twentieth century than previously recognized.

Centering Women of Color in Suffrage History

Cahill, Cathleen D. *Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2020. 376 pp. \$32.50 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1469659329.

Elizabeth Garner Masarik

State University of New York Brockport, Brockport, NY, USA

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The year 1890 is a critical moment in the traditional historiography of the suffrage movement. That year, the two suffrage factions that had split over the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments joined to create the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Catherine D. Cahill begins the first chapter of her book, *Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement*, during this pivotal year, not to rehash well-trod histories of the NAWSA but to provide a fresh perspective of the suffrage movement. Cahill argues that if we look at the year 1890 from South Dakota and the West, we see how questions about Native suffrage and Native citizenship intersected and drove discussions about white women's voting rights. During that year, South Dakota's white, male voters were faced with two referendums: one supporting women's suffrage and one supporting Native American suffrage. Less than a month after the vote, U.S. cavalry troops claimed the lives of three-hundred Lakota men, women, and children in the Wounded Knee massacre. That same year, Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, also known as Zitkala-sa, visited her mother on the Yankton Sioux Reservation after being separated for seven years while at a boarding school. Although seemingly unrelated in mainstream suffrage historiography, Cahill shows how these events were connected. Issues of Native sovereignty and violence against Native peoples were very much linked to women's suffrage in the minds of white