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## **“Feminists Leap Year Vol. 2”: The Portrayals of Gender in Early Twentieth Century Postcards**

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Collecting postcards extending from the start of the postcard craze at the turn of the twentieth century to postcards produced at the end of the twentieth century inevitably produces a wide variety of interesting themes and categories. Psychologist Dr. David P. Campbell amassed an extremely large collection of vintage and modern postcards covering topics from violence to fashion and locations as diverse as New Orleans and Russia. Located at the Drs. Nicholas and Dorothy Cummings Center for the History of Psychology archives in Akron, Ohio, the David P. Campbell Postcard Collection contains over 20,000 postcards organized by Dr. Campbell into an assortment of binders ranging from “African Americans” to “Women in Hats.” In addition to providing a deep resource of themes relating to race, fashion, geography, courtship, and nationality, the David P. Campbell Postcard Collection contains several binders addressing gender. The “Feminists Leap Year Vol. 2” binder contains postcards reflecting women in empowered, vulnerable, pitiful, and satirical situations. They appear in scenes of public activism, romance, and the once-mythologized American frontier. The postcards arranged by Dr. Campbell under the banner of “Feminist” reflect the stereotypes, themes, and gendered images that have remained attached to the feminist movement from its emergence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to its incarnation in the twenty-first century. Postcard images depicting women in courtship, suffrage, and the American West from Dr. Campbell’s “Feminists Leap Year Vol. 2” binder demonstrate the intersectionality of gender and feminism by juxtaposing postcards satirizing women as masculine or domestically negligent and women as commanding or powerful. Their selection highlights not just America’s self-image through the twentieth century in terms of feminism, gender, and the western frontier, but also our modern understanding of this past.

### **Shifting Social Norms and the Postcard Craze**

Economic, social, and political changes engulfed the nation at the turn of the twentieth century as the United States incorporated debates over women’s rights,

big business, mass consumption, urbanization, and racial and ethnic diversity into the framework of society. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, reform movements—such as suffrage, temperance, and progressivism—challenged traditional visions of American life, specifically the roles and social expectations placed upon women. In addition to reform movements, a shift away from rigid Victorian morals and customs offered women the opportunity to emerge from the bounds of the private, or domestic, sphere and into positions that directly challenged social expectations and perceptions of women.<sup>1</sup> In the 1880s and 1890s women such as Jane Addams, Frances Willard, and Susan B. Anthony represented the increasing role of middle-class white women in the public sphere, leading political, social, and urban reform efforts. Women of color, such as author Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Ida B. Wells, also entered the public sphere through participation in the suffrage movement and leading anti-lynching campaigns.<sup>2</sup> Although women of color and working-class women continuously engaged in the public sphere, middle-class white women remained the recognized public representation of the “new woman” and the women’s movement into the early twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

The popularity of postcards surged around the time that women increasingly entered the public sphere as activists, authors, and professionals. The United States Postal Service removed restrictive regulations in 1898 that ensured a rate of one penny for private cards, compared to the previous two cent rate, and the creation of the Rural Free Delivery system allowed Americans to send and receive mail, and specifically postcards, with greater ease.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, in 1907 government regulations eased again, leading to the introduction of the split-back, or “divided back,” which enabled the sender to place the message and address on

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<sup>1</sup> Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003) 45-53.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 201; Nell Irvin Painter, “Voices of Suffrage: Sojourner Truth, Frances Watkins Harper, and the Struggle for Woman’s Suffrage” in *Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited*, ed. Jean H. Baker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 46-47.

<sup>3</sup> Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 45-53.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Florey, *American Woman Suffrage Postcards: A Study and Catalog* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2015), 4-5.

the same side and the publisher to ensure a full image on the front of the postcard.<sup>5</sup> The United States was not the only location experiencing a postcard boom; European countries, especially Germany and England, led the surge in mailings, and Germany led the industry in the manufacturing of postcards. Although the decline of the postcard craze coincided with the start of World War I in 1914, resulting in the decreased production of postcards, German postcard producers noted as early as 1908 a decreasing demand for postcards in the US, moving from shipping order in the millions to rejoicing, “if they can get orders for as many thousands.”<sup>6</sup> The decreasing popularity of postcards did not prevent individuals from using the postcard as a convenient messaging system and to communicate personal messages, sometimes humorous or romantic, directly related to the image printed on the front of the postcard.<sup>7</sup>

Images ranged from paintings to photographs and from landscapes to political cartoons. As represented by the immense variety of themes contained within Dr. Campbell’s postcard collection, a postcard for every occasion, location, and opinion existed in the international postcard industry of the early twentieth century. Themes—including cities, landmarks, and landscapes—are interspersed with depictions of violence, incarceration, and derogatory racial stereotypes. While white women are frequently represented in images of fashion, beauty, and art with an occasional binder including satirical or negative portrayals, the depiction of African American courtship rituals and African American women included in Dr. Campbell’s collection adhere to early twentieth century racial stereotypes. In the “African American” binder, black men are depicted as lustful womanizers in the racist minstrel tradition, while black women are portrayed as unintelligent domestics recalling the imagery of the southern “mammy.”<sup>8</sup> Although black women participated in social movements, such as abolition, temperance, and suffrage, of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries alongside white activists, they are a glaring omission from the binder labeled “Feminists.” Racial diversity is a missing component to the “Feminists” binder

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> “Postcard Craze is Dying,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 27, 1908.

<sup>7</sup> Katherine Parkin, “‘Glittering Mockery’: Twentieth-Century Leap Year Marriage Proposals,” *Journal of Family History* 37, no. 1 (2012): 85-87.

<sup>8</sup> David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 222.

which includes imagery of courtship, suffrage, and independent women, but reinforces the common assumption that the “new woman” and the concept of a “feminist” includes middle and upper-class white women exclusively. Dr. Campbell’s collection carries this stereotype through the organization and composition of the “Feminists Leap Year Vol. 2” binder.

The “Feminists Leap Year Vol. 2” binder includes a variety of postcards containing images associated with a range of topics from women in the West to courtship rituals. Postcards with imagery challenging gender stereotypes share the same pages as postcards reinforcing rhetoric of domesticity and motherhood. An examination of postcards depicting leap year, courtship rituals, the anti-suffrage campaign, and women in the American West demonstrates the complex and often contradictory imagery of women in the early twentieth century and the common themes which Dr. Campbell observed in order to organize the postcards in a binder he labeled “Feminists Leap Year Vol. 2.”

### **Leap Year Postcards: Courtship and Spinsters**

As the title of the binder suggests, leap year is a recurring subject of multiple postcards and messages Dr. Campbell included in the postcard collection. Many postcards from the early twentieth century in “Feminists Leap Year” portray women in an assortment of roles, from vulnerable to aggressive, in the pursuit of a leap year proposal. Tales of the origins of the leap year tradition, in which women enjoyed social permission to propose marriage to men during a full calendar leap year, vary from Ireland in the fifth century to a Scottish parliament law in the thirteenth century which declared that women of all classes can “speak,” or propose, to a man during leap year with the expectation that he will face a monetary fine if he refused her proposal.<sup>9</sup> Historian Katherine Parkin argues that, in the early decades of the twentieth century, the leap year tradition served to strengthen male authority and control of marital choices as it became the subject of satire portraying women as desperate, aggressive, or masculine.<sup>10</sup> Essentially, every four years newspaper articles, cartoons, literature, and postcards portrayed women in varying acts of courtship and male characters as victims of the leap year

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<sup>9</sup> “Everyday Questions. Why is Leap-Year Connected with Feminine Proposal of Marriage?,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 21, 1920, p. 14.; Katherine Parkin, “‘Glittering Mockery’: Twentieth-Century Leap Year Marriage Proposals,” 86.

<sup>10</sup> Katherine Parkin, “‘Glittering Mockery’: Twentieth-Century Leap Year Marriage Proposals,” 86-87.

female. The depiction of leap year proposals became an extension of social and cultural critiques of the changing role of women as progressively independent, vocal, and sexually expressive at the turn of the century.

Traditional courtship rituals shifted around the turn of the twentieth century, with increasing urbanization, industrialization, and consumerism. Chaperone parlor courtship, occurring within a young woman's home and managed by a female head of house, remained the norm until the 1900s. Historian Beth Bailey contends that by the 1910s youth in cities rejected traditional chaperoned parlor courtship for "privacy in the anonymous public," and dating emerged by the 1920s as a widely accepted form of courtship.<sup>11</sup> The increasing autonomy of young people through availability of regular employment, rising incomes, and migration to urban and industrial centers altered courtship rituals. In both chaperoned courtship and dating, the responsibility of wooing and marriage proposal remained with the man. Leap year postcards shifted the responsibility of wooing to the woman, depicted in a variety of actions, from romantic serenading to a frantic chase.

"Feminist Leap Year" includes multiple postcards from the 1908 leap year in which a series of photographs by L. Grollman show women in an assortment of courtship activities. A particularly interesting postcard, #148, consists of a photograph of a young woman sitting in a chair and holding a guitar as she gazes up at an attentive man seated on a rock above her. The postcard emphasizes the inversion of gender roles as the young woman is serenading the man and the man smiles and gazes down at the woman. The caption on the postcard reads:

If music is the food of love,  
As has been sweetly said,  
Look kindly on me from above,  
And let your soul be fed.

The verse suggests that the 1908 leap year woman is pursuing her love interest with the skillful use of her guitar.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 17-19.

<sup>12</sup> David P. Campbell Post Card Collection, "Feminists Leap Year Vol. 2," #148.



Image 148

Images such as this demonstrate how postcards emerged as an acceptable medium to provide satirical commentary of leap year proposals and reflect the fear of jeopardizing male control of female sexuality. As women increasingly entered the public sphere through political and reform movements, changes in leisure and courtship rituals also created an opportunity for women to become more sexually expressive and socially active. In the early twentieth century the emergence of increased leisure time enabled women to pursue pleasurable activities, including dancing, and marked a shift to a radical embrace of women as sexual beings.<sup>13</sup> The increasing exposure of women to public leisure activities and sexual awareness did not avoid satirical critiques on printed postcards. One “Feminists Leap Year” postcard, #103, sent during the leap year of 1912, depicts a woman with disheveled hair wearing a tight dress and suggestively dancing in front of a surprised male engaged in embroidery. The postcard suggests a breach of courtship and sexual norms and places the male as a victim of a voluptuous hyper-sexualized, and

<sup>13</sup> McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 253, 264.

possibly intoxicated, woman. The image suggests a critique of women engaging in masculine activities, such as proposing marriage and drinking alcohol. Additionally, the image offers a critique of women's expectations of male courtship with an inversion of gender roles by establishing a system of "etiquette" and asserting, "No Lady should ever enter the presence of any gentle man when under the influence of Lemonade, Pink Tea, or other intoxicating beverages."<sup>14</sup>

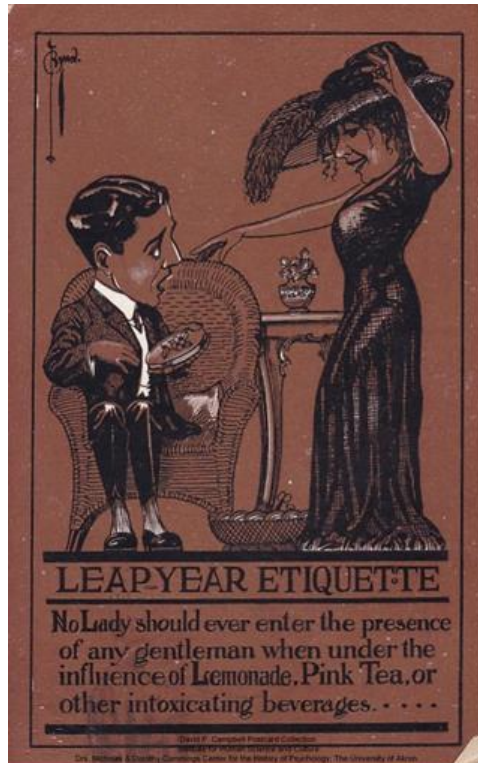


Image 103

In addition to an inversion of the gender norms of courtship and blatant critiques of female sexuality, Dr. Campbell includes postcards in "Feminists Leap Year" which portray women as aggressively pursuing men and desperate for a husband during leap year. The portrayal of women exhibiting aggressive behavior coincides with women challenging the male public sphere through politics, social reforms, and leisure activities. Feminists of the early twentieth-century sought to attain financial, professional, marital, and sexual liberation and equality with men,

<sup>14</sup> David P. Campbell Post Card Collection, "Feminists Leap Year Vol. 2," #103.



which created an inaccurate perception of an increasing masculinization of women.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, women who eagerly pursued a partner became labeled as “aggressive,” as the acceptable pursuer in courtship ritual remained the man.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the male is frequently depicted in leap year postcards as a victim or in direct avoidance or retreat from a female pursuer. This serves to emphasize the direct threat to masculinity and male authority represented by women proposing marriage to men.

The “Feminists Leap Year” binder includes one such postcard, #155, depicting a woman aggressively pursuing a man, which blatantly demonstrates male insecurities and an aversion or fear of marriage. The man is dressed in full body armor with spikes on his helmet and around his ankles, while a protective wagon wheel encircles him to keep the woman out of reach. Additionally, a flag stating, “Bachelors Protective League” emerges from the top of his head to demonstrate and further exaggerate a notion that men should be protected from the attempts by women to ensnare vulnerable bachelors into marriage. This leap year postcard was sent in 1908 and contains a message from the sender stating, “Poor ‘Jack’ had to lay his armour down,” suggesting a man succumbed to the courtship advances of a woman.<sup>17</sup> The theme of aggressive women appears in a wide range of images, from a woman on her knees begging a man for marriage after cornering him in a room to a group of women chasing a man in a suit with butterfly nets.<sup>18</sup> The intensity of the pursuit of a leap year marriage proposal varies dramatically and reflects the range of critiques labeled against women who challenged gender norms.

On the other hand, leap year postcards occasionally depict women as desperate for marriage. In addition to postcards that represent women begging men to accept a marriage proposal, the portrayal of older women as lonely spinsters or willing to take any man as a husband continuously occurs throughout the “Feminists Leap Year” binder. A postcard, #144, showing a masked burglar with a lamp and a club looking into a woman’s bedroom demonstrates the perceived desperation of older women. The female figure is sitting in bed and exclaims,

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<sup>15</sup> McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 266-267.

<sup>16</sup> Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> David P Campbell Post Card Collection, “Feminists Leap Year Vol.2,” #155.

<sup>18</sup> David P Campbell Post Card Collection, “Feminists Leap Year Vol.2,” #150, #151.

“Goody! A Man At Last!,” suggesting that the older woman, unable to find a suitable husband, determines the burglar is an acceptable husband since he entered the bedroom. The themes of spinster desperation and aggressive leap year women permeate the pages of Dr. Campbell’s “Feminists” binder. Challenging gender norms and courtship rituals reflects larger masculine insecurities around increasing female autonomy and influence, epitomized by the enthusiastic women’s suffrage movement.



Image 155

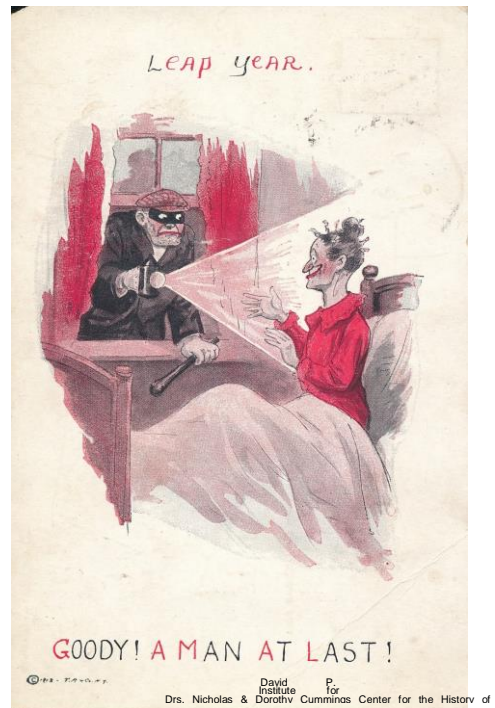


Image 144

### Masculinity and the Suffrage Movement

The feminist movement developed a large and vocal following in the aftermath of the iconic 1848 Seneca Falls convention and the signing of the Declaration of Sentiments organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. Along with Stanton and Mott, the suffrage movement encompassed many notable women, including Susan B. Anthony, Carrie Catt, Lucy Stone, Sojourner Truth, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. The suffrage movement represented a path to

additional rights including property rights, access to a university education, and equal pay.<sup>19</sup> The suffrage movement suffered setbacks and a slow march toward nation-wide women's suffrage.

After the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, a divide between women's rights advocates supporting black male suffrage and advocates calling for both black men and women's suffrage emerged. The American Woman Suffrage Association, organized by Stone, and the National Woman Suffrage Association, formed by Stanton and Anthony, eventually merged in 1890 into the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and accepted a state-by-state suffrage strategy.<sup>20</sup> By 1896, women's suffrage had gained ground in Western states, including Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming, and gained the backing of local or state laws increasing women's property rights and participation in school elections, but fell short of nationwide enthusiasm needed to gain full suffrage.<sup>21</sup>

Although the women's suffrage movement had many male allies, a general discomfort over shifting gender roles and threats to the domestic sphere emerged as women increasingly entered the public sphere through activism or employment. Opponents of the suffrage campaign believed the entrance of women into the political arena threatened male authority, the home, and the family. National women's organizations formed to fight the move for women's suffrage, specifically the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, which viewed suffrage as a threat to women's control of the domestic sphere and the strength of the nation.<sup>22</sup> With a slogan, "Home, Heaven, and Mother," anti-suffrage organizations depicted suffragists as anti-marriage and averse to motherhood, while also providing male legislators with a convenient excuse to oppose suffrage.<sup>23</sup> It was not until Carrie Chapman Catt shifted the suffrage strategy from

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<sup>19</sup> Jean Baker, "Introduction," in *Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited*, ed. Jean Baker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3-5.

<sup>20</sup> Lois Scharf, "The Women's Movement in Cleveland from 1850," in *Cleveland: A Tradition of Reform*, ed. David D. Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1986), 74.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Baker, "Introduction," 5-6.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Jablonsky, "Female Opposition: The Anti-Suffrage Campaign," in *Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited*, ed. Jean Baker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 118.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-123.

the state-by-state approach to a national amendment that the anti-suffragists lost support of male political leaders, including Woodrow Wilson.

The feminist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reached its apex with the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1920, then shifted its attention toward other political and social efforts, including the Equal Rights Amendment and the promotion of birth control. Although tensions over the divide between masculinity and proper gender roles remained well into the twentieth century, women's roles in public emerged with a force in the 1920s during the freewheeling excess of Prohibition.<sup>24</sup> Many of Dr. Campbell's "Feminists" postcards date to the first decade of the twentieth century when tensions remained high between suffragists and anti-suffragists, as suffragists claimed slow but steady state-by-state victories in Washington, California, and New York. Suffrage and anti-suffrage propaganda flooded the images of postcards, often portraying a satirical view of suffragists. Additionally, postcards with images of women in masculine poses or clothing echoed fears of masculinity and male authority but remained consistent themes among postcard imagery.

An association between suffrage or feminism and masculine or "improper" women is a trend which carries throughout Dr. Campbell's "Feminists Leap Year Vol. 2" binder. Like the classic leap year tradition, the movement for women's rights was perceived by many as liable to bend or even reverse the roles of men and women in American society. Nowhere in the binder is this notion more apparent than in the collected postcards of the "Suffragette Series," a line of images marketed in the early decades of the twentieth century. In an analysis of this series, specifically, Catherine H. Palczewski notes the way in which these postcards twisted the gendered attributes associated with popular icons such as Uncle Sam or the Madonna.<sup>25</sup> The suffragettes of these postcards, Palczewski asserts, violated the boundaries their gender in both subtle and overt ways

Take, for example, the suffragette depicted in "Suffragette Series No. 9," numbered #038 in Dr. Campbell's binder. Though feminine in appearance, her actions betray a disregard for the gendered norms of

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<sup>24</sup> Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 98-105.

<sup>25</sup> Catherine H. Palczewski, "The Male Madonna and the Feminine Uncle Sam: Visual Arguments, Icons, and Ideographs in 1909 Anti-Woman Suffrage Postcards," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91, no. 4 (2005): 373.



Image 038

society. She stands alone and openly flaunts a cigarette. Smoking was generally regarded at the turn of the twentieth century to be an act which made women “undesirable” to men. Marlboro would not begin to market to women until the 1920s, and it was not until that “roaring” decade that many, including historian George K. Holmes, would come to accept the sight of women smoking “in certain places and times.”<sup>26</sup> In addition, her role as a “district leaderess,” a title she proudly displays on her breast, is implied to be actively pushing male leaders out of their positions. The campaign signs behind her aim to elect primarily women, with men such as Bill Sykes reduced to running for “Keeper of the Zoo.” One sign even aims to elect as treasurer the wife of another candidate.

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<sup>26</sup> Martha N. Gardner, “Risk, Pleasure, and Change: Using the Cigarette to Teach U. S. Cultural History,” *The History Teacher* 47, No. 1 (2013): 13; George K. Holmes, “SOME FEATURES OF TOBACCO HISTORY,” *Agricultural History Society Papers* 2 (1923): 407.



The idea of women forcing their way into the place of men was often exaggerated into violent imagery by the satirical artists of this era. Women were portrayed as not only assaulting men's dominance in politics, but as physically assaulting men themselves. Take, for example, postcard #031,



Image 031

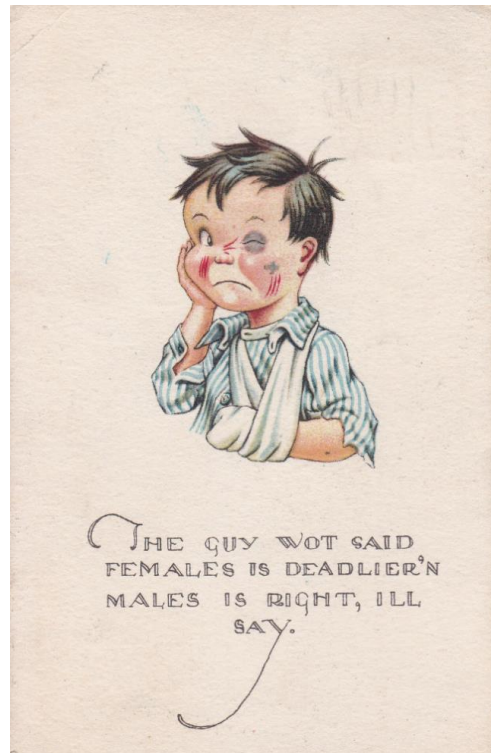


Image 009

which features the attack of a well-dressed man by two umbrella-wielding women. Despite their feminine dress and appearance, the two women look on uncaringly as the man cowers beneath them. The image's caption, "When Women Get Their Rights," hints comically at the disorder that might be wrought should women be given an equal place in society. Paralleling this is postcard #009, which depicts an infant-like boy who is bruised and cut, and is wearing a cast around his arm. These injuries, the caption below him indicates, were caused by a woman. The key difference between these cards is that #009 makes no reference to the cause of women's rights, feminism, or suffrage. The inclusion of this card in the "Feminist Leap Year" binder by Dr. Campbell reveals the implicit significance of violence against men in modern understandings of women's activism. With no direction

from the card itself, Dr. Campbell saw some element of feminism in the assault, however comical, of a man by a woman.<sup>27</sup>

Interpreting such violent acts as feminism makes some degree of sense if one sees feminism as a complete inversion of gender norms. The view of women as caregivers was firmly ingrained in early twentieth century understandings of gender and persists to this day. Postcard #062 in this binder, originally mailed in 1909, reflects this in the form of a poem. Titled “Women’s Rights,” it reads:

If, instead of ranting of Woman's Rights,  
You tried to look after some poor, sickly mites,  
And talk of their rights, long, strong and loud,  
You would then be a woman of whom we'd be proud.

Printed below the image of a short-haired woman with distinctly masculine posture and features, the poem’s message is clear. What makes a good woman, it asserts, is a selfless devotion to the uplift of others. A woman who diverges from this ideal and pursues her own rights and advancement is, according to this card, akin to a man in drag.

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<sup>27</sup> Though #009 is was postmarked for 1924, a Leap Year, there is no indication that either of these cards were produced with the Leap Year in mind.



Image 062

As the above cards demonstrate, women involved in the campaign for suffrage were routinely depicted as violent, masculine, and, ultimately, undesirable. Though the association made by Dr. Campbell between feminists or suffragettes and leap year traditions can be interpreted as an association based primarily on the inversion of gender norms, it carries another subtle implication. Implicit in many of the leap year postcards contained here is the notion that women who would engage in such a tradition would be otherwise unable to find a suitor by any other means. By combining with the feminist movement a tradition commonly interpreted in turn-of-the-century society as appealing to unwanted or undesirable women, Dr. Campbell has perhaps unwittingly played into the notion of feminists and suffragettes as themselves an undesirable class of women.

This is evidenced further by his inclusion of postcards such as #022 and #080. Both of these cards feature images of older women, near-identical “spinster” archetypes, who appear desperate for male companionship. The woman depicted in the former card holds a lantern of hopes of illuminating, as the caption comically states, “an honest man.” The latter card features a similar scene, depicting woman and the caption, “Oh! How lonesome I do feel.” Puzzlingly, the woman here stands



next to a clothesline adorned with men's socks and trousers. The woman may be longing for a former partner, an imagined man, or perhaps even a neighbor whose clothes have been left out. Nonetheless, this detail cements that her predicament is the result of an inability to find male companionship.



Image 022

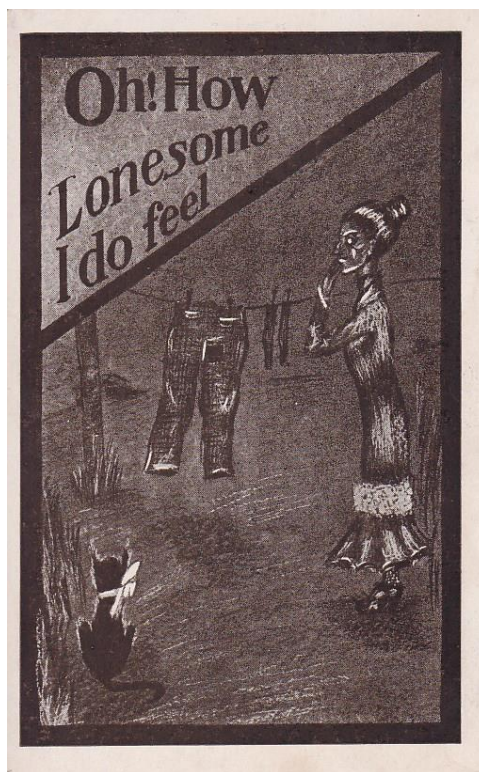


Image 080

It is impossible to tell whether Dr. Campbell intended images like these and the similar depictions of lonely women mentioned earlier to reflect women's participation in the leap year tradition or in feminist movements. Neither card seems to fit the theme of subverted gender norms that carries through the binder. To associate such cards with feminism plays rather overtly into the argument of those prominently opposed to women's suffrage—that those engaged in such a movement were of an unwanted class of women. It is not merely lonesome spinsters that Dr. Campbell included, but also the young single women of cards such #048 and #085. Whether coyly or desperately, these women seek out male suitors but exhibit no indication that they might be involved in any public activism. Yet their apparent undesirability has been linked inexplicably to the cause of

feminism. As such, there is an implied association between women who would partake in the public sphere of political activity and those who have been deemed outcasts by society.



Image 048



Image 085

Indeed, historians of the era primarily represented in these cards have emphasized the idea of “separate spheres.” The emergence of women’s involvement in campaigns such as the women’s suffrage or temperance movements seemed to spell the end of Victorian notions that a woman’s place was within the private “sphere” of the home. This notion has been greatly contested by the recent scholarship of historians such as Linda Kerber, who have sought to add more nuance to understanding the ways in which women during and after the

Victorian era asserted agency.<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, a cultural notion of women as homemakers was prominent at the turn of the twentieth century. Those opposed to women's suffrage seized upon this in their desire to depict woman voters as upending the norms of gender.

This trend can be seen in postcards such as #035, which depicts a man labeled "The Suffragette Hubby." Dressed in a floral robe and slippers, the man appears frustrated as he holds, at arm's length, his crying child. Once again, the caption here takes the form of a short poem, reflecting the efforts of this apparently domesticated man to comfort the infant.

Hush my little baby—  
 Papa's little pet!  
 Ma's out lookin' for her rights—  
 Ma's a Suffragette.

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<sup>28</sup> Rebecca Edwards, "Women's and Gender History," in *American History Now*, eds. Eric Foner and Lisa McGirr (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 336.



Image 035

From the man's dress and demeanor, viewers can easily interpret his displeasure at being forced to perform traditionally feminine domestic duties. His masculine facial features are positioned in sharp contrast to the floral, effeminate robe that he wears. Further, the man holds his child, who is also clearly displeased with the situation, at a distance, leading viewers to question whether the man, domesticated as he may be, is actually capable of proper childcare. The public activities of his spouse have thus created an unnatural and improper home for their child. While "ma's out lookin' for her rights," she has left her home, the private sphere over which she should be exercising control, in a state of disarray.

Postcard #040 from the binder features a similar theme. Once again, the card depicts a man, here labelled the "Suffragette Madonna," performing the duties of childcare while his spouse is presumably engaged in public activities. A notable difference between this image and that of



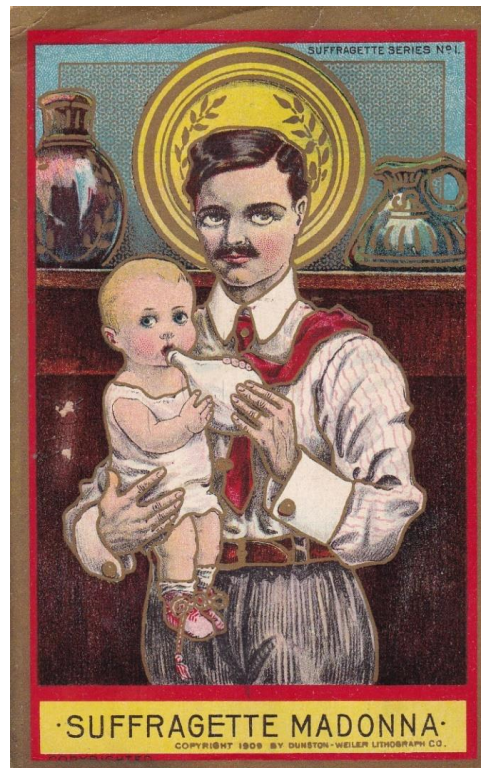


Image 040

Postcard #035 is that this man, unlike the previous card's henpecked husband, appears naturally suited to the task of childcare. Well-dressed and positioned before a background reflecting middle-class affluence, the man bottle-feeds his apparently satisfied infant. Further twisting the gender norms of the early twentieth century, the man appears with exaggerated feminine features, including noticeable eyelashes and rosy cheeks.

Catherine Palczewski includes this postcard in her larger analysis of the "Suffragette Series," focusing heavily upon the anti-Catholicism inherent in its depiction of a gender-bending Madonna. Many Protestant voters, she explains, were particularly opposed to the women's suffrage movement out of fear of a "nightmarish march of a female Catholic army descending upon the polls."<sup>29</sup> An image such as this, with its disturbing and perhaps sacrilegious depiction of a proudly effeminate man taking the role of the Virgin Mary, served two purposes. To Protestants and others opposed to what they perceived as a greater papal

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<sup>29</sup> Palczewski, 382

agenda, the image might further enrage them against a movement embodying a particularly distasteful form of Catholicism. To Catholics who might otherwise find themselves supportive of women's suffrage, the image might lead them to reconsider engaging in activities that would associate them with such offensive imagery. As such, the "Suffragette Madonna" served as an effective weaponization of both religious and domestic norms against the women's suffrage movement.

### **The Possibilities of the Western Frontier**

Breaking through the notion of women as mere caregivers has been a challenge for both the evolving feminist movement and those who hope to teach or study women's history. Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller have written about the long shadow cast by works such as Dee Brown's *The Gentle Tamers*, which explored the history of women in the American West while simultaneously perpetuating the idea of women as a domesticating class.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, it is during the turn of the twentieth century, long before the release of Brown's book and in the era depicted by much of the "Feminists Leap Year Vol. 2" binder, that the "tamed" West began to make its debut in the popular culture. Bolstered by an increase in women's migration from the rural West to the region's urban centers, popular narratives began to exist that put women at the center of frontier life and development.<sup>31</sup>

With the West of this era, Dr. Campbell has continued his trend of depicting feminism as the antithesis of the "Gentle Tamer." Postcards chosen for his "Feminist Leap Year" binder that depict women in the American frontier do so without reducing them to a domesticating force. Rather, they depict women basking in the wild, lawless atmosphere that defined the American West prior to the twentieth century. Postcards #075 and #105 continue the theme of violence, depicting varying scenes of western women brandishing guns at men. The scene in #075 is a comical one, as both figures smile, and the man wags his finger toward the woman. The image on #105, however, depicts a more dramatic confrontation,

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<sup>30</sup> Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review* 49, No. 2 (1980): 173-174.

<sup>31</sup> Hilary A. Hallett, "Based on a True Story: New Western Women and the Birth of Hollywood," *Pacific Historical Review* 80, No. 2 (2011): 179-180.

as a woman aims her pistol at a man, apparently due to a game of poker. Not only is the woman here engaged in a threat of violence, but she takes part



Image 075

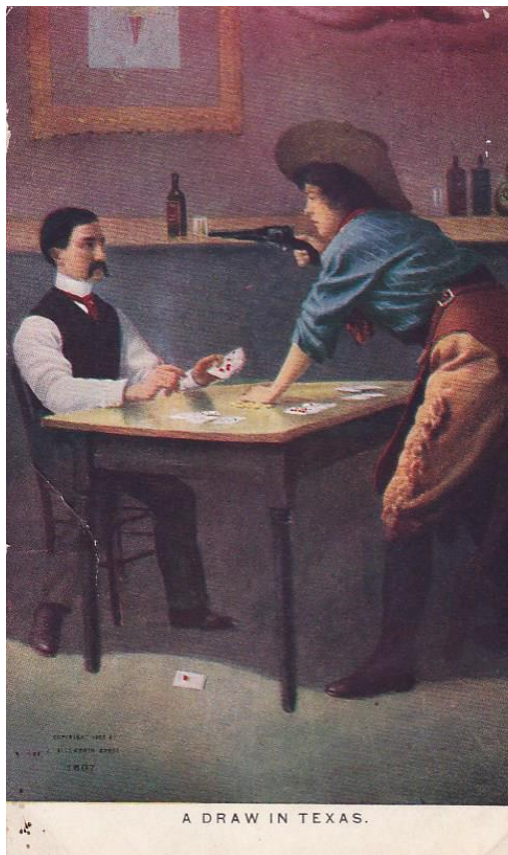


Image 105

in the masculine activity of gambling. The caption seems to attribute the warped gender norms on display to the lawless nature of the West, describing the scene merely as “A Draw in Texas.” However, the inclusion of these cards in a “Feminist” binder alters their meaning. Tongue-in-cheek depictions of a wild frontier become generalized portraits of women’s defiance.

Other postcard depictions of women on the Western frontier subvert the notion of the “Gentle Tamer” even further. Postcards #006 and #008 leave behind both the feminized West and the trappings of satire entirely, depicting women independently embracing the idealized freedom of the frontier. Both women, dressed as feminine “cowgirls,” ride horses upon open plains. While the woman in #006 charges ahead of a male rider in the background, the woman in #008 is



depicted alone, sharing the scene with only a distant herd of cattle. The exclusion of a notable male figure or voice makes the depiction of feminism here one of genuine female independence. Poignantly, the message written on the back of #008 and sent in September of 1910 is one between two sisters. “How is this for a



Image 006

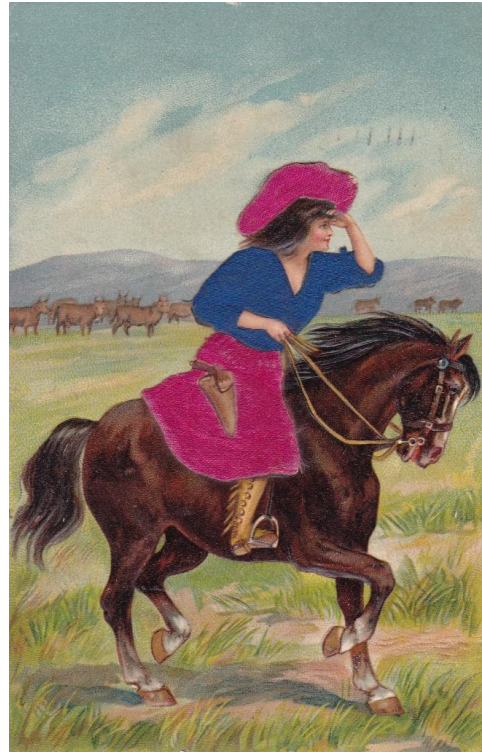


Image 008

cowboy girl,” writes Lizzie, the sender, to her younger sister. “Would you like to be with her out riding[?]” In his inclusion of these two images, Dr. Campbell perhaps recognized why some women first turned to suffrage and activist movements, rather than why others turned away. They highlight an ideal of independence not diminished by disapproving or victimized male figures.

In depictions of the “taming” of the American West, however, one must acknowledge the racial elements of westward expansion. The Native Americans who inhabited this region were often depicted by white settlers in such a way as to emphasize their separation from the norms of “civilized” eastern life. At the turn of the twentieth century, the rapidly shifting gender norms of American society prompted many to see Native Americans as a last bastion of traditional gender roles. Elizabeth Cromley writes that, for white males, Native American



society “promised the hope of resisting feminized culture.” Their imagery and décor took on an ironic importance among white men, who sought to celebrate the ideals of masculinity and femininity purportedly exemplified by Native Americans without ever actually interacting with Native American individuals. Mass marketed images of Native Americans contributed to conservative notions of gender while erasing the misdeeds of the white settlers who transformed the West.<sup>32</sup>

Dr. Campbell’s organization of his postcard collection includes two complete binders, labelled “Native Americans,” which are dedicated primarily to such images. It is interesting, however, that a single image of a Native American woman made its way into the “Feminists Leap Year Vol. 2” binder. Postcard #005



Image 005

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<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Cromley, “Masculine/Indian,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 31, No. 4 (1996): 279-280.

depicts a side profile of a woman that is fairly standard in its portrayal of Native American clothing and appearance. The woman's expression appears serene, her features feminine. Notably, she is wearing a cross necklace, likely included as a sign of European influence and, thus, "civility." She is, therefore, an almost precise blend of the traditional "civilized" and "native" femininities that were assigned to Native American women at the turn of the twentieth century. Why Dr. Campbell might have chosen this image as the sole nod to diversity in his "Feminists" binder is puzzling. Though printed during a leap year, it displays no obvious reference to the tradition. Perhaps the perfect example of the binder's contradictions, this image seems to allude to the exact notions of gendered performance that many turn-of-the-century conservative critics of feminism sought to restore.

Dr. Campbell's "Feminists Leap Year Vol. 2" binder thus functions as a puzzling depiction of both of the themes referenced in its title. Though it includes many straightforward postcards overtly depicting leap year traditions, it also contains a wide array of postcards that seem to exist purely as portraits of women's loneliness. Its depiction of the feminism, whether in reference to the women's suffrage movement or women's rights in general, seems to center primarily around images produced by those directly opposed to the movement. Perhaps a more fitting title would be "Gender Satire," as the binder does nothing quite as well as it depicts early twentieth century satire of gender and sex-based norms and traditions.

To label such a collection as "Feminists," however, raises questions regarding how historical movements are portrayed in modern society. Though Dr. Campbell's own thoughts on women's activism are unknown, he has nonetheless chosen to depict feminism almost entirely from an outsider's perspective. Little attention is paid here to how women engaged in such movements viewed themselves or sought to portray their cause; rather, the focus is kept squarely upon the works of the movement's opponents. Is it possible to portray such a movement primarily through satire, exaggeration, and opposition?

Modern viewers may be able to distance themselves from the criticisms on display here. For example, though the argument no doubt persists in some form, it is unlikely that a modern audience would seriously believe the criticism of woman's suffrage as turning all men into such effeminate beings as the "Suffragette Madonna." However, even after distancing ourselves from the biases inherent in these images, do these images convey a sense of what feminism was

and continues to be about? Those who created these images, who sought to portray the movement as nothing more than a bid to destroy gender norms, clearly did not engage with the very real concerns held by the suffragettes and other woman activists. In compiling this binder, did Dr. Campbell, too, fail to engage with these concerns? The “Feminists Leap Year Vol. 2” binder does not merely depict the stereotypes that surrounded women’s activism in the early twentieth century, but rather perpetuates such stereotypes and reflects their continued presence in modern discourse. Women’s involvement in public activism is no doubt one of the major themes in the history of the United States and the world in the twentieth century. The binders compiled by Dr. Campbell serve as a reminder of the ideas, labels, and exaggerations that have surrounded such women in the twentieth century and beyond.

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