

Republican Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage through the Rise of the New Right.

By Catherine E. Rymph.

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Catherine E. Rymph, a history professor at the University of Missouri, frames much of her study around the dilemma facing activist women after they won the vote in 1920. Should women seek integration within the political parties on the same terms as men, or should they organize separately as women? Would women more readily gain power for themselves and attention to their issues by working as insiders within party institutions or by forming women's attention to their issues by working as insiders within party institutions or by forming women's clubs and acting independently of party leaders?

Rymph shows that both strategies operated among women in the Republican Party. "Party women" promoted integration, loyalty and compromise, while "club women" prized separation and uncompromising independence. Before the 1970s, a few women obtained official party posts. The majority of Republican women, however, put their energies into separate women's clubs, displaying a political style associated with women's pre-suffrage activism. This style was based on women's differences from men: their superior morality, their lack of self-interest, and their sense of women's politics as a moral crusade.

While this form of politics drove progressive causes in the early years of women's enfranchisement, in the 1960s and beyond it characterized the movement of right-wing Republican women led by Phyllis Schlafly. Women simultaneously organized Republican women's clubs at the local and state levels, which numbered in the thousands by the 1930s. Some were little more than elite social clubs and some were controlled by male party leaders, but many were genuine grassroots groups independent of the party leadership. These clubs provided familiar and unthreatening environments for women to gain their political feet, and they tended to engage in politics in crusading, uncompromising, moral terms.

Republican National Committee (RNC) appointed Marion Martin to a new position, assistant chairman in charge of women's activities. A former Maine legislator and dedicated to the advancement of women in politics, Martin was a "party woman," but one of her key responsibilities was to bring the disparate local clubs together as force that would work for—not independently of—the party. To this end she established the National Federation of Women's Republican clubs and for the next ten years struggled to turn "club women" into "party women." *Republican Women* reveals what went on at club meetings in members' living rooms as well as what transpired in negotiations among men and women in the party elite. Narratives about key individuals help the reader understand larger trends. Rymph is careful to note connections to past practices and links to national developments beyond women's history and partisan politics. Her analyses of such questions as the relationship between feminism and Republicanism are thorough and sensible. In all, this book demonstrates the necessity for and the rewards of integrating women's history with political history.