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- 1 Christine L. Ridarsky and Mary M. Huth, eds. *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights*. With an introduction by Nancy A. Hewitt
- 2 New York: University of Rochester Press, 2013. Pp. 256. ISBN: 9781580464253 (Hardback)
- 3 Stéphanie Durrans
- 4 As we are approaching the centennial of the 19th amendment that gave American women the right to vote, we would do well to remember that this hard-earned victory was the outcome of many decades of struggle against various forms of gender inequality led by committed women from all walks of life. Chief among these is Susan B. Anthony—a towering figurehead of female emancipation and a woman whose lifelong dedication to the cause of women’s rights caused her to be singled out as the artisan of a victory that took place 14 years after her death.
- 5 This volume tackles some of the fascinating issues raised by Anthony’s single-minded pursuits, extending this research to contemporary concerns and the way in which this iconic figure has been appropriated by activists of all stripes. The first part, entitled “Constructing Memory” and written by Lisa Tetrault, chronicles one of the most complex, formidable tasks ever undertaken by Anthony—that of writing and editing a three-volume *History of Woman Suffrage*. It retraces the genesis of the project in its various stages: collecting material across the country, putting it together into a coherent whole, defining the orientations of the project (from a mere collection of biographical sketches to the construction of an actual narrative), raising funds to keep the project afloat, organizing the work shared with her two co-authors Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Gage, dealing with the tensions that inevitably arose between them over the years,

etc. Most compelling is Tetrault's study of the way in which this allowed Anthony to lionize herself while belittling the achievements of the rival association chaired by Lucy Stone, the American Woman Suffrage Association. Anthony's attempts to shape and control the movement even led her to launch into a fourth volume more than a decade after the publication of the third one as she felt the need to cover the more recent developments, reassert her authority and once more impose her own interpretation of the woman suffrage movement.

- 6 The second part of the volume brings together two essays that focus on other aspects of Anthony's long career as an advocate of woman suffrage. In "To Bury the Black Man and the Woman in the Citizen," Laura E. Free tells how Anthony and Stanton came to found the American Equal Rights Association on the heels of the Civil War with a view to campaigning in favor of equal suffrage at a time when the question of blacks' voting rights came under the scrutiny of the New York Constitutional Convention. Free examines the wide array of strategies deployed by Anthony to convince the delegates and challenge the entrenched connection between manhood and voting ability—all to no avail since the 1867 Constitutional Convention denied women (be they white or black) the rights that it was willing to grant to black men.
- 7 The next chapter documents Anthony's complex relationships with religion and posits that Quakerism provided her with "a compelling model for a living faith" (88). She found in Quakers' egalitarian beliefs as well as in their rejection of the clergy to the benefit of the individual's inner light fertile ground for the development of her own views on gender equality. This did not stop her, however, from forging alliances with women whose religious convictions differed from hers when she thought that the cause of woman suffrage could be advanced. Anthony's ecumenical approach even caused a rift with her friend and collaborator Elizabeth Cady Stanton whose virulent critique of patriarchal institutions and institutional religion ultimately took the form of a *Woman's Bible* in 1895.
- 8 Although it might appear to swerve away from the initial focus on Susan B. Anthony, Part Three proves to be most compelling in that it highlights the welter of contradictions characterizing women's rights advocates when they had to grapple with racial, ethnic and class differences. Melissa Ryan shows that, instead of using the Indian question as a tool to challenge patriarchal hegemony, white women reformers adopted a motherly attitude and relied on the existence of the "savage" to reinforce their own civilized status. She uses the case of anthropologist Alice Fletcher, for instance, to argue that women's vision of Indians as radically "other" precluded any possibility of identification. And yet, Fletcher's findings make it clear that gender differences among the Omahas did not translate into legal disabilities since Omaha women enjoyed property rights that even marriage could not deprive them of—a situation that could have prompted Fletcher and others to some fundamental rethinking of the patriarchal system. Women's rights activist Matilda Joslyn Gage was caught up in similar contradictions when she depicted the Iroquois Indian both as an ignorant savage and as the member of a community resting on a matriarchal system that gave women and men equal rights, contradictions that she resolves by positing the existence of a gap between the noble heritage of the Indian and his present degraded status in contemporary US society. Gage's reverence for the "matriarchate" that she identified as the basis of Indian communities in ancient times led her to connect with these ancestors as founding mothers without undermining her

disparaging view of contemporary Indians as uncivilized brutes who should not be enfranchised.

- 9 In the next chapter, Alison M. Parker closely examines Frances Watkins Harper's career as an activist and her involvement with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, whose members were predominantly white. She argues that Harper's attempts to build interracial alliances met with increasing hostility in the last decade of the century as segregation was gaining federal approval, though Harper continued her fight for reform as part of the National Association of Colored Women after she lost her position in the WCTU. Harper was well aware that giving women the right to vote would not solve all problems since class and race would always prevail over gender considerations when the time comes to cast one's ballot.
- 10 The last chapter of this section focuses on the role of Irish-American women in the reform movement. Tara M. McCarthy shows how this traditionally conservative part of the American population was drawn into political activism by their involvement in the cause of land reform in Ireland in the 1870s. Although their leaders, like Fanny Parnell, did not contest the ideology of separate spheres and did not claim for women's rights, organizations like the Ladies' Land League gave women a unique opportunity to break out of the home and participate in public debates. Even after this organization was dismantled, more Irish-American women joined the ranks of activists to push for a broader social justice agenda in industrial America. Claiming for woman suffrage was the next logical step, though they did so using arguments that reinforced patriarchal conceptions of women as nurturing, benevolent creatures.
- 11 The last part of this book brings us back to Susan B. Anthony in a fascinating study of the way in which her image has been used and misused since she rose to national prominence. After examining a number of political cartoons reflecting the changing image of Anthony in the last two decades of the 19th century, Ann D. Gordon focuses on Anthony's first biographer, Ida Husted Harper, and on her literal appropriation of Anthony when she decided to destroy the records that she had been allowed to consult so that hers would remain "the only authentic biography of [Miss Anthony] that ever can be written, as the letters and documents will not be accessible to other historians" (212). The story of the controversial Susan B. Anthony dollar (1979-1999)—the first dollar coin featuring a woman—testifies to modern America's own contradictions at a time when the nation felt endangered by what they saw as the result of the disintegration of the family and the demise of patriarchal authority. And yet, in one of the most unexpected twists of its history, Anthony's image has also been used by pro-life advocates who have turned both Anthony and Stanton into early champions of the anti-abortion cause, though not a single mention of such concerns can be found in these two women's writings. As underlined by Gordon, "how Susan B. Anthony moved from being a bugbear for conservatives to becoming their heroine" (223) is one of the most intriguing developments in Anthony's long post-mortem career.
- 12 Not only does this book provide illuminating insights into little-known aspects of Anthony's work and personality, it can also be commended for shedding light on the role played by various other advocates of equal rights who have since been overshadowed by more prominent figures of the movement. Anthony's legacy is rich, complex and controversial, and the variety of angles from which these essays address such questions allows this book to counter reductive approaches and do justice to the intricacies of the woman suffrage movement.