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Review of *Creating the New Woman: The Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas* by Judith N. McArthur

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Creating the New Woman: The Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas, 1893-1918. By Judith N. McArthur. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998. Photographs, notes, index. x + 199 pp. \$39.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

This book is another significant contribution to the growing list of scholarly studies of the history of Texas women. Within the larger contexts of southern culture, the Progressive Movement, and the history of feminism, McArthur has produced a convincing chronology of the transformation of middle-class, white Texas women from members of a "patriarchal, evangelical culture that discouraged the formation of independent women's networks" to "volunteerists" who worked openly for social and political reform through their own clubs and associations. Between the 1890s and World War I, women's increasing use of "maternalist politics" challenged male dominance of the public sphere, thereby opening a door through which Texas women ever-so-carefully moved to carve public niches in which they then successfully agitated for and won civic, social, and political reforms that benefited themselves and their families.

McArthur describes the following evolutionary stages of this process: in the 1890s, women expanded their public roles through women's clubs and federated voluntary associations like the General Federation of Women's Clubs. These groups introduced women to progressivism and offered them a

female-centered public space similar to the space men enjoyed in political parties. Increasingly, club women used the new "sciences" of home economics and child development to "manipulate traditional images of femaleness and subvert gender roles." Women sought opportunities to become "municipal housekeepers" by establishing settlement houses, working to eliminate prostitution and secure prohibition, and running for school boards. They also learned how law discriminated against them and "adopted domestic arguments, asking for the ballot as mothers on behalf of children and as housekeepers on behalf of the public." Winning the vote forced women to hone their skills of organization, persuasion, and public speaking, and wartime mobilization offered women additional opportunities for public work through federally funded agencies.

In addition to shedding light on specific women and various organizations active in Texas, McArthur skillfully parses differences among Texas women and three other groups—southern and northern Progressive women and white male Texans. She also pays attention to interracial relations, or the lack thereof, throughout her chronology. Her assertion, however, that Mexican American women "lacked a female public culture and voluntary association tradition" raises some concern. Mexican American women in fact have a long tradition of founding schools, churches, and towns in Texas. Their involvement in *sociedades mutualistas* (mutual aid associations) during precisely this period was widespread; in the 1890s an all-female society was active in Laredo. Finally, McArthur's contextualization of Texas women's progressive activism within southern women's culture is surely overgeneralized, for Texas, despite having been a member of the Confederacy, is not simply a southern state. It is geographically multicultural as well, encompassing western, southwestern, Great Plains, and Mexican sensibilities that make it one of the most culturally complex states. Progressive women were active throughout Texas, and while the

women of San Antonio and El Paso, for example, may have considered themselves southern, McArthur does not explicitly establish this. Nevertheless, *Creating the New Woman* is an important contribution to our understanding of what Progressive women in Texas were doing, and it provides a clear, persuasive description of their evolution into activists.

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