The U.S. Women’s Jury Movements and Strategic Adaptation

When women won the vote in the United States in 1920, they were still routinely barred from serving as jurors, but some began vigorous campaigns for a place in the jury box. This book tells the story of how women mobilized in fifteen states to change jury laws so that women could gain this additional right of citizenship. Some campaigns quickly succeeded; others took substantially longer. The book reveals that when women strategically adapted their tactics to the broader political environment, they were able to speed up the pace of jury reform, whereas less strategic movements took longer. A comparison of the more strategic women’s jury movements with those that were less strategic shows that the former built coalitions with other women’s groups, took advantage of political opportunities, had more past experience in seeking legal reforms, and confronted tensions and even conflict within their ranks in ways that bolstered their action.

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The U.S. Women’s Jury Movements and Strategic Adaptation

A More Just Verdict

HOLLY J. McCAMMON
Vanderbilt University
For John, with love
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Preface

A good number of years ago, I showed the film 12 Angry Men, the original black-and-white version starring Henry Fonda, to my Law and Society class. A student asked why all of the jurors in the film were men. At the time I had no answer to the question, but I told the student I would do some investigating and report back. I found that little had been written about women and jury service, and I had to dig to learn that in many states in the first half of the twentieth century, women were legally excluded from serving as jurors. Women responded to this restriction by waging campaigns to convince state lawmakers to let them serve. In some states, these efforts were quickly successful, but in others they did not succeed until the 1950s and 1960s. It turns out that once women won the right to vote in 1920, their activism for greater gender equality died down until they began a concerted push for the Equal Rights Amendment. This, however, is a misconception. From the 1920s up through the 1960s, women led often sizable and publicly visible campaigns to gain an additional citizenship right: a place in the jury box.

This book tells the story of a number of these organized campaigns, and we can learn quite a bit about women’s collective and strategic efforts from these mobilizations. Scholars who study social movements often pay little attention to the strategic actions of political activists. This book looks closely at when and how organized women pressing for gender-inclusive jury laws revised their tactics in order to increase their chances of winning legal reforms. I call the movements engaged in these kinds of tactical adjustments strategically adaptive movements. As this volume reveals, many of the jury activists were highly strategic in their collective pursuit of a place in the jury box. In the end, all of the campaigns examined here engaged in strategic action and were successful in convincing lawmakers to broaden women’s citizenship rights.

Many individuals and organizations offered support while I was writing this book, and their aid took a myriad of forms – all of it indispensable. I worked with a team of talented graduate students who helped gather the archival...
Preface

materials that underpin the study. I thank Soma Chaudhuri, Lyndi Hewitt, Courtney Muse, Harmony Newman, Carrie Smith, and Teresa Terrell for their travels and willingness to ferret out those many bits and pieces of information that helped piece together the larger narratives presented here. I also thank Clair Dawson and Terrie Spetalnick for their important and helpful research assistance later in the project. It was a joy to collaborate with all of these students during this early stage in their careers.

We visited nearly fifty different archives in fifteen states, and the archivists and librarians were always gracious and generous in response to our many requests. The patience and care with which they assisted in our searches, made photocopies, and answered e-mails are deeply appreciated. Historical scholars benefit immeasurably from the ministrations of archival librarians. They provide an invaluable service that makes our research possible. I also thank Vanderbilt University’s interlibrary loan staff for locating a variety of sometimes obscure materials, and Phil Nagy in Vanderbilt’s Special Collections for help in reproducing the photos included in the volume.

I greatly appreciate the year-long leave granted by then Dean (now Provost) Richard McCarty. Without this extended and uninterrupted time, I would not have been able to draft the manuscript. I also thank Associate Provost Dennis Hall and the Vanderbilt Research Scholars Program for extensive funding that aided in gathering data for this book. A grant from the National Science Foundation was pivotal in supporting graduate students and funding the necessary travel for the project. I owe a special thanks to the American Association of University Women, whose postdoctoral research fellowship very early in the project allowed me to extend a leave and complete the data collection. I am also indebted to the Texas Woman’s University Library Woman’s Collection for funding to visit its wonderful collection.

A number of colleagues generously read and commented on the manuscript or offered invaluable conversations about the book’s direction. Their sage advice made this work better than it would have been otherwise. I am very grateful to Paul Burstein, Dan Cornfield, Rachel Einwohner, Richard Lloyd, David Meyer, Suzanne Staggenborg, Verta Taylor, and Nella Van Dyke. I owe special thanks to Larry Griffin who first taught me about qualitative comparative analysis and who for many years has been a mentor and friend. Scholars have exceedingly full schedules, and I feel privileged to have colleagues who share both their valuable time and their clear and careful thinking.

Various scholars in a variety of colloquia and workshops provided exceedingly valuable feedback during both the early and later stages of this project. I thank especially: The Power, Politics, and Social Movements Colloquium participants in the Vanderbilt Department of Sociology; the Vanderbilt University Warren Center’s Strategic Action: Women, Power and Gender Norms Seminar Fellows; the Democracy Fellows at the Center for the Study of Democracy at the University of California, Irvine; and those who attended the Reitman/DeGrange Memorial Lecture in the Department of Sociology at Dartmouth College.
Preface

I am grateful to Lew Bateman and Anne Lovering Rounds at Cambridge University Press for all of their assistance in moving through the publication process, especially their patient replies to my seemingly endless questions. I also thank the Cambridge University Press readers for their discerning and insightful comments. Additionally, I thank the American Journal of Sociology for publishing an article in 2008 in which I began to articulate some of the ideas I present in this book.

This volume would never have happened without the encouragement and support from my family. I thank Jack and Cherie Stark for always asking how the book was coming along. My son Seth appeared at my home-office door with cups of coffee or tea at perfect moments every time. My daughter Hadley left happy, colorful notes on my desk that never failed to brighten my day. My husband John for more than thirty years has never wavered in his enthusiasm for my scholarship, and while, on the one hand, he deserves a medal for maintaining this level of interest for so long, on the other, the thirty years has gone by in the blink of an eye because it is such a joy to be his life partner.

I close this preface with gratitude and respect for the individuals I study in this volume, women who fought for equal citizenship for women. Theirs is an important story that need not be relegated to the dustbins of history. There is so much to be learned from these women and their willingness to stand up for a just cause.
Organizational Abbreviations

CA-FWC  California Federation of Women's Clubs
CA-WLC  Women's Legislative Council of California
CCL    California Civic League
CO-BPW  Colorado Business and Professional Women’s Clubs
CO-FWC  Colorado Federation of Women’s Clubs
CO-LWV  Colorado League of Women Voters
GA-FWC  Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs
GA-LWV  Georgia League of Women Voters
GAWL    Georgia Association of Women Lawyers
IL-FWC  Illinois Federation of Women’s Clubs
IL-LWV  Illinois League of Women Voters
IL-WBA  Women’s Bar Association of Illinois
MA-BPW  Massachusetts Business and Professional Women’s Clubs
MA-LWV  Massachusetts League of Women Voters
MA-NWP  Massachusetts National Woman’s Party
MD-CWJS  Maryland Committee for Women’s Jury Service
MD-FWC  Maryland Federation of Women’s Clubs
MD-LWV  Maryland League of Women Voters
MD-NWP  Maryland National Woman’s Party
MO-LWV  Missouri League of Women Voters
MO-WBA  Missouri Women’s Bar Association
MT-FWC  Montana Federation of Women’s Clubs
MT-LWV  Montana League of Women Voters
NE-BPW  Nebraska Business and Professional Women’s Clubs
NE-LWV  Nebraska League of Women Voters
NY-BPW  New York Business and Professional Women’s Clubs
NY-LWV  New York League of Women Voters
NY-NWP  New York National Woman’s Party
SC-BPW  South Carolina Business and Professional Women’s Clubs
SCCCG  South Carolina Council for the Common Good
SC-FWC  South Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs
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<td>TN-BPW</td>
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<td>TX-AAUW</td>
<td>Texas American Association of University Women</td>
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<td>TX-BPW</td>
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<td>WI-NWP</td>
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<td>WS-TBA</td>
<td>Women’s Section of the Tennessee Bar Association</td>
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