

Sarah Eppler Janda and Patricia Loughlin, editors. 2021. *This Land is Herland: Gendered Activism in Oklahoma From the 1870s to the 2010s*. University of Oklahoma Press. 303 pages.

Herland is volume 1 in the University of Oklahoma Press series on Women and the American West series. The first premise is that although Oklahoma is influenced by Southern demographic and racial attitudes it is now a solidly western state with rural and urban political histories shaped by Oklahoma women whose impact from the 1870s into the twenty-first century resonated regionally and nationally.

If you think that you understand the basic trajectory of women's political history in this country, fasten your seat belts folks, because readers are in for an enlightening ride that will shatter pre-conceptions while expanding conceptual possibilities. The thirteen historically successive scholarly but readily accessible political biographies show how the activism of women shaped Oklahoma by questioning who, in fact, should navigate futures. The title comes from the Charlotte Perkins Gilman 1915 utopian feminist novel, *Herland*. The stories reflect the diverse movement of Indigenous, African American, and white women whose activism often provoked change and/or broadened understanding.

As a state characterized by fluctuating and contentious notions of who spoke for Oklahoma, what constituted power or the ability to control some aspects of the future coupled with the nature of change, from the 1870s and through the 2010s, the gendered political activism of the state's women is formative. The highly sophisticated, exceedingly well educated and respected, Lilah Denton Lindsey, as rendered by Rowan Faye Steineker, was the first Mvskoke woman to earn a college degree. She immersed herself in Progressive reform struggles such as temperance, women's suffrage, and orphan welfare, founding a home for orphaned and neglected girls. She worked nationally in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and locally with the Tulsa Women's Indian Club.

Mattie Mallory, introduced by Heather Clemmer, was devoted to the Holiness movement and as an educator became an entrepreneur founding institutions for orphans in Oklahoma City, purchasing property in Bethany she and instilled city ordinances following Nazarene religious principles. Amy L. Scott introduces us to Alice Mary Robertson who while opposing women's suffrage managed to be the second woman elected to the 1920 United States Congress and the first woman to preside over a Congressional session.

A striking figure and advocate for women, children and all working people, Kate Barnard, ignored women's suffrage activism yet was active in the state's Constitutional Convention and became the first woman elected in 1907 to statewide office before the women in Oklahoma could vote. It was here, as recounted by Sunu Kodumthara, that she became a virtual power broker, determining who would run for public office.

The first Cherokee woman obtaining a Ph.D. in the state graduated from the Cherokee National Female Seminary, a powerful educational institution with many esteemed alumni, in Tahlequah. Rachel Caroline Eaton, a direct descendant of Nanye'hi (Nancy Ward), wrote a 1914 biography, *John Ross and the Cherokee Indians*, as recounted by Farina King, the first major tribal-specific history on Cherokee nationalism.

Fifty Black founded towns appeared in Oklahoma between 1865 and 1920, giving voice to the call for Oklahoma membership in the union as an all-Black state. Living within a dynamic that rotated between power and suppression, Black women and some white women confronted segregation. The research that Melissa Stuckey carried out to introduce us to California M. Taylor is a lesson in itself. Taylor, as a Black middle-class woman from prosperous Boley, was an entrepreneurial social activist, establishing a chapter of the NAACP, pushing back against segregation and disenfranchisement, while challenging limiting local social strictures.

Cheryl Elizabeth Brown Wattley recants the pilgrimage from Tulsa, following the 1921 Massacre, of Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher's family to Chickasha. Ada Lois volunteered to be a plaintiff in the NAACP mid-1940s lawsuit to integrate the College of Law at the University of Oklahoma by calling for equal protection of the Fourteenth Amendment in higher education. Successful in the end, Ada Lois and her family were subject to hate mail and death threats. Rachel E. Watson takes an uncommonly in-depth look at Clare Luper as a mother, teacher, and NAACP Youth Council sponsor whose pedagogy included Black feminism and decolonization.

Sarah Eppler Janda writes about Rosalyn Coleman Gilchrist, a white acolyte of Clara Luper, who planned to sell her Warr Acres home to a Black physician when her ex-husband, Gordon, the Warr Acres police chief, Nelson Beckett, the town's Mayor and leading real estate developer, Eldon Lawson, and a local minister, Garrell Dunn, along with Judge Harold Theus conspired to have her committed to Central State Hospital for what became five years. She was declared insane not only for preparing to sell her residence, but also for attending a Negro church, inviting colored people to her home, holding gatherings for Negro children, her arrests at Negro protests, and riding in a bus filled with "coloreds night and day" to Washington, D.C. and back. Medical records recovered by Rosalyn's children show that she received no treatment while confined. Effectively she was incarcerated for her activism.

From the 1970s through 2010, the nation considered liberalized political change and then lurched to the right. Amanda Cobb-Greetham explores the Comanche values and customs of LaDonna Harris as a matriarch who worked to establish state and national leadership programs for indigenous youth through rematriation, "thus foreclosing colonial erasure and generating – not terminating – a distinctly Indigenous future." This is a carefully crafted in-depth essay worthy of serious study and reflection.

When Wanda Jo Peltier Stapleton unexpectedly declared that she was a “radical American feminist” this unlikely English professor from rural Oklahoma married to a Baptist preacher suddenly “broadened the notion of what it meant to be a feminist in Oklahoma” by supporting both reproductive and LGBT+ rights. The ERA was defeated but Peltier, as recounted by, Chelsea Ball, emphasized how that the proposed amendment “would support women without a separate income and protect property rights and social security benefits.”

Lindsay Churchill takes up the life and work of Barbara “Wahru” Cleveland, founder of *Herland Sister Resources*, a Oklahoma City based lesbian feminist activist group that responded to the need for a “womyn only space” in the increasingly conservative and reactionary state of Oklahoma. As a woman welcoming safe space with a positive lesbian focus, the bookstore became a lending library and gathering place for tolerant political engagement seeking an end to sexual violence. Today the collection of literature and a painting of Wahru are accessible in the University of Central Oklahoma in “The Center”, the combined Women’s Research Center and the BGLTQ+ Student Center. The active lending library holds the largest book donation in the university’s history with rare, lesbian fiction and nonfiction it is a trove of “rare books and materials, many with only a few copies in existence.” The legacy of *Herland* is alive and serves as a continuing tribute to Wahru and the members of *Herland*.

Mary Fallin’s rise from a public servant working in state government to elected official holding two terms as Governor of Oklahoma are cast in the context of Republican maternalist politics by Patricia Loughlin. The candidate who ran for office and won while pregnant continued to argue that as the mother of two children she was equipped to make crucial policy decisions for Oklahomans would align herself with the American Legislative Executive Council or ALEC, a national nonpartisan legislative policy setting entity. She successfully promoted conservative politics including

right to work legislation by speaking widely throughout the state.

This is a good book to read in a group setting with students or among library patrons as it readily lends itself to wide discussion. As you work your way through the biographies you may be, as I was, amazed, appreciative, enlightened, and appalled. Some of the biographies may be fulcrums for larger considerations. Sarah Eppler Janda's excellent study of Rosalyn Coleman Gilchrist, for example, could be recast within the context of civil rights activism starting in the 1950s when whites in other parts of the country began to sell their homes to Black citizens in an effort to kick start residential integration initiatives.

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