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The Illustration, the Image, and the Archive: Feminist Digital Humanities Approaches to Caricatures and Cartoons of Woman Activists and Authors, 1850-1920

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Title: “The Illustration, the Image, and the Archive: Feminist Digital Humanities Approaches to Caricatures of Parenthood in Suffrage Postcards, 1909-1920”

Abstract:

Our project looks at illustrations and images of transatlantic white motherhood and fatherhood that circulated in early twentieth-century pro- and anti-suffrage postcards and utilizes a range of digital tools including Omeka, ImagePlot, and emotional data visualization tools to explore how feminist digital humanities practices engender new visual historical narratives of masculinity and femininity within the institution of parenthood. The images we are primarily concerned with were published between 1909 and 1919, the decade leading up to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Much work has been done on visual representations of women in suffrage postcards and cartoons more generally. Broadly speaking, scholars discuss how the strictures of white heteronormative femininity and the expectations of motherhood were important tropes in suffrage imagery. Much less, however, has been said about how depictions of masculinity and fatherhood operated in suffrage postcards. The preliminary results from this digital humanities approach have revealed the degree to which representations of fatherhood and masculinity were central to the construction of both the pro- and anti-suffrage debate. As we move forward, we will consider the tension between men and women, motherhood and fatherhood, the family, and the family of the nation that was central to suffrage postcards. Since our project is interdisciplinary in scope, crossing both history and literary studies, we consider how these images influenced and interacted both with political discourse and the women’s writing of the period.