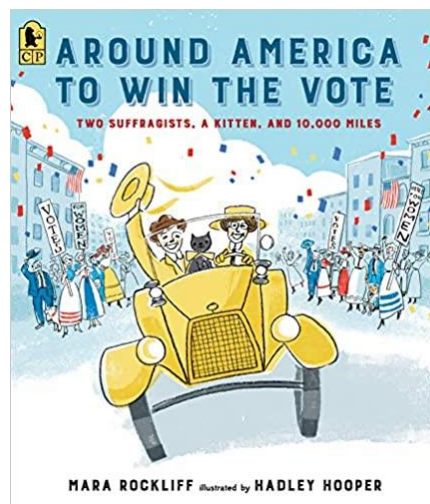


First Opinion: *Around America to Win the Vote: Two Suffragists, a Kitten and 10,000 Miles*

Rockliff, Mara. *Around America to Win the Vote*. Illustrated by Hadley Hooper. Somerville: Candlewick, 2016. Print.

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The year, 2020, marks the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment, which guaranteed and protected women’s constitutional right to vote. While the global pandemic may have dampened celebrations, Mara Rockliff’s narrative nonfiction book *Around America to Win the Vote: Two Suffragists, A Kitten, and 10,000 Miles* offers children and adults alike the chance to look back and cheer on two of the lesser known voices that helped move the women’s suffrage movement forward. Some names of the movement are familiar: There was Abigail Adams who pushed her husband John Adams to “remember the ladies” (Rockliff unpaged) at the dawning of our country’s independence in 1776, as well as organizers Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony and Ida B. Wells at Seneca Falls some 70 years later. This picture book, however, highlights what will be new names to most readers: Nell Richardson and Alice Burke.

Picking up in 1916, four years before the 19th Amendment was ratified, readers climb into the back of a golden Saxon and go on a 10,000 mile—bumpy, muddy, pot-holed—trip with

Nell and Alice at the wheel, traversing the country to spread the message of women's suffrage. In addition to spreading the message verbally, their trip was intended to prove that "women could do anything" (Rockliff unpagged), as only a few people had traveled across the US by car at that point and none as far as Nell and Alice.

A 10,000-mile journey presents a challenge for a picture book format, but Rockliff's writing style allows her to highlight intriguing, often humorous details of this trip while moving the narrative along quickly. At key stops along the way, Rockliff shares how Nell and Alice took up unique ways to meet local folks: attending fancy dinner parties in Maryland, joining a parade in Georgia, sipping tea in Alabama, attending a fair in California. The two women engaged in conversation with everyone they met, even those who did not initially take kindly to their cause. If folks said women were not smart enough to vote, Nell pulled out a typewriter from the back of the golden Saxon to compose a poem. If folks said women should stay home to cook and clean and leave running the nation to men, Nell pulled out a sewing machine to use while Alice gave a speech, proving that women could do both. A map at the midpoint allows readers to slow down and look more closely at Nell and Alice's journey so far and how much more remained. The final pages of the book offer several notes that add historical context to the story, including some insight from the author describing her research process of piecing together the story of Nell and Alice across hundreds of old newspaper clippings.

Hadley Hooper's whimsical illustrations have a hand-drawn quality, with black outlines for key elements, providing a rich and lively background to the words. Although white may be the color most associated with the suffragists, in the early 1900's, yellow/gold was also considered an important color. The National Women's Party (1913) felt that that yellow/gold was "the color of light and life, is as the torch that guides our purpose, pure and unswerving" (National Park Service). In this spirit, illustrator Hooper made yellow/gold the primary color on nearly every page in the book, with blue, red, and green taking on more secondary and complementary roles.

Ultimately, the power in this book lies not only in making Nell and Alice's story and the larger suffragist movement more visible, but in creating space for children to ask questions about voting rights 'back then' and now: Does everyone in the US have equal access to voting now? If women were prevented from voting for nearly the first 140 years of our country, in what other ways has our country perpetuated unequal access to voting (or education, housing, school,

etc.)? What voting rights issues face our country now on the eve of the 2020 presidential election? Critically, the fight for voting rights is not just part of our country's history.

By centering these women's story, Rockliff and Hooper bring to life the often unheralded role(s) that women have played throughout the history of our country. Nell and Alice remind us that our country was equally built by brave women who fought, and continue to fight, despite a muddy, bumpy, seemingly 10,000-mile journey, for a more perfect, more equitable union for

Works Cited

“Symbols of the Women’s Suffrage Movement” *National Park Service*.

[.https://www.nps.gov/articles/symbols-of-the-women-s-suffrage-movement.htm](https://www.nps.gov/articles/symbols-of-the-women-s-suffrage-movement.htm)

About the Author

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