

Fall 2019

University Scholar Series

Hosted by Provost
Vincent J. Del Casino, Jr.

Wendy Rouse

Her Own Hero:
The Origins of the Women's
Self-Defense Movement, 1890-1920

November 13, 2019

12:00-1:00 pm

SJSU King Library 225/229

Free & open to the public.
Lunch will be provided.



Wendy Rouse is an Associate Professor in the Department of History. Her research focuses on the history of women and children in the Progressive Era. Her most recent book, *Her Own Hero: The Origins of the Women's Self-Defense Movement, 1890-1920*, was published by New York University Press in 2017.

At the turn of the twentieth century, women organized to demand greater social and political freedoms like gaining the right to vote. However, few realize that the Progressive Era also witnessed the birth of the women's self-defense movement. Some women were inspired to take up boxing and jiu-jitsu for personal reasons that ranged from protecting themselves to rejecting gendered notions about feminine weakness. Women's self-defense was both a reflection of and a response to the broader cultural issues, including the women's rights movement and the campaign for the vote. The discussion surrounding women's self-defense deconstructed powerful myths about the source of violence against women and opened up conversations about family violence. Through self-defense training, women debunked patriarchal myths about inherent feminine weakness, creating a new image of women as powerful and self-reliant. Whether or not women consciously pursued self-defense for these reasons, their actions embodied feminist politics and a collective action demanding emancipation from the constrictions that prevented women from exercising their full rights as citizens and human beings.

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