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FYI, JD Vance Isn't The First Man To Resent Cat Ladies — They've Always Been Politicized

Donald Trump's running mate should be afraid of childless cat ladies.

By **Brittany Wong**

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Last week, JD Vance doubled down on his comments about “miserable” “childless cat ladies” running the government while having no “direct stake in” the future of the country.

One voting bloc [JD Vance](#) seems completely disinterested in trying to court this election season? Childless cat ladies.

Last week, Vance – [Donald Trump's](#) running mate in the 2024 presidential election – [doubled down on his dismissive 2021 comments](#) about “miserable” “childless cat ladies” running the government while having no “direct stake in” the future of the country.

In a mild attempt at damage control, Vance, a father of three, [said last week on SiriusXM's “The Megyn Kelly Show”](#) that he was being sarcastic and has “nothing against cats.”

“People are focusing so much on the sarcasm and not on the substance of what I said. And the substance of what I said, Megyn, I’m sorry, it’s true,” Vance said, before [criticizing the low birthrate in the U.S.](#)

Vance’s alienating comments about childless single women may come back to hurt him; about [63% of unmarried women](#) voted for President Joe Biden in 2020. And according to a 2021 report from Pew Research Center, [44% of childless adults ages 18 to 49 don't want kids](#). Plenty of them love their cats *and* vote.

Vance’s weird pet peeves about childless women and their cats plays on a century-old trope: Unmarried, [“Grey Gardens”-esque](#) spinsters living with their cats and very little human contact.

And interestingly enough, this isn't the first time cats have gotten mixed up in [anti-feminist political discourse](#).



TOM WARGACKI VIA GETTY IMAGES

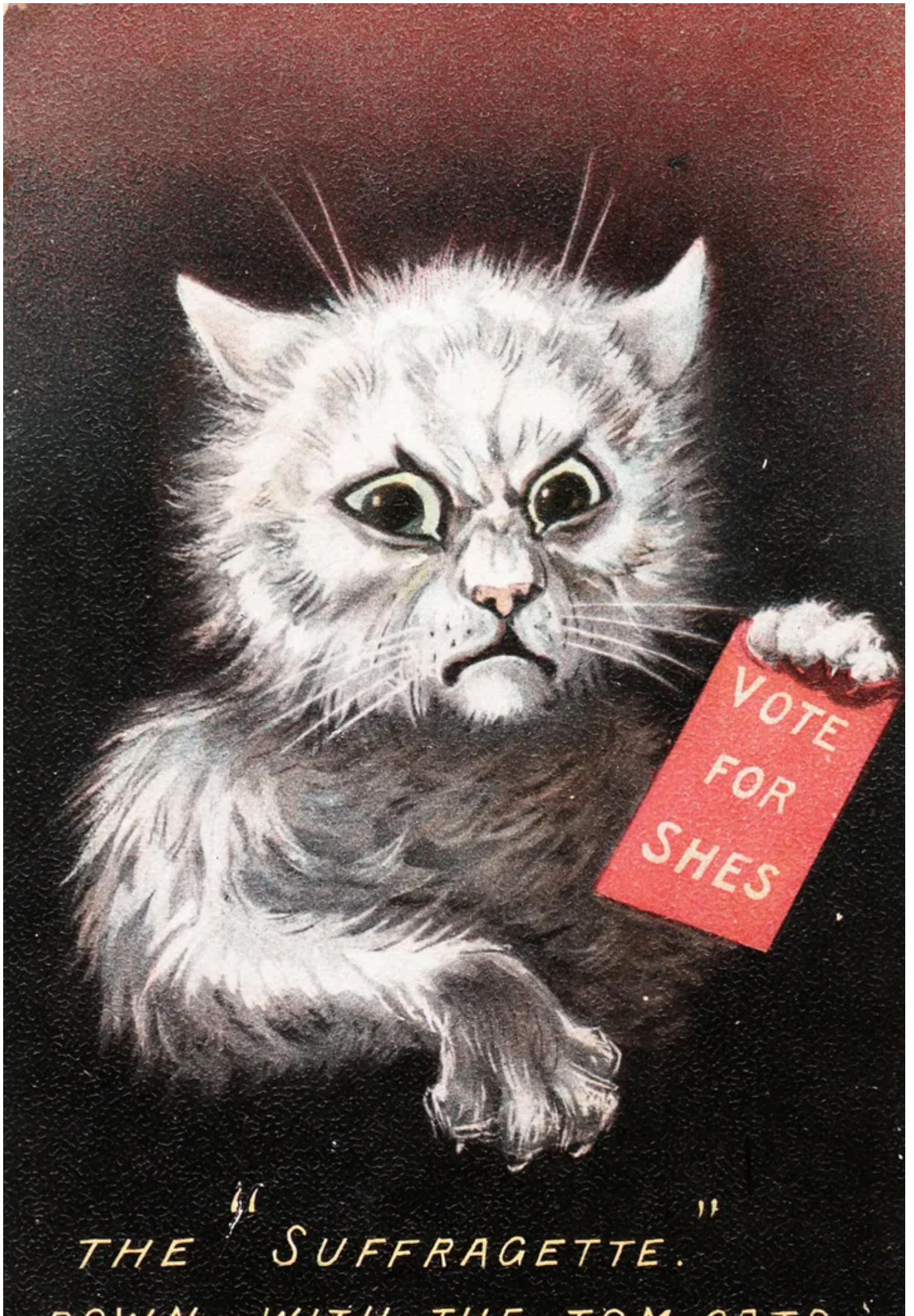
Edith Bouvier Beale -- first cousin of Jackie Onassis and notable cat lady -- at her home Grey Gardens in January 1972. A cult-favorite doc was made about Beale and her mother, who lived among many cats.

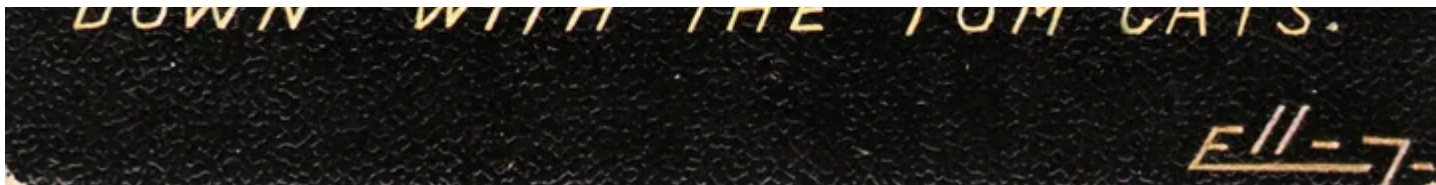
Before women gained the right to vote – in 1920 in the U.S. and in 1918 in the U.K. – [anti-suffrage propaganda used cats](#)

to emphasize that women would not be effective voters “because of their naturally more docile, weak, and feline-like tendencies,” according to Kelly L. Marino, a lecturer in the department of history at Sacred Heart University and the author of “Votes for College Women Alumni, Students, and the Woman Suffrage Campaign.”

The idea was that a woman voting would be as pointless and comical as a cat casting a ballot.

In one anti-suffrage postcard from the time, a surly, bedraggled cat – a stand-in for a no doubt frumpy suffragette – holds a card with the text, “Vote For Shes.”





KEN FLOREY SUFFRAGE COLLECTION/GADO VIA GETTY IMAGES

J.D. Vance isn't the first to disparage cats and women at the same time. In postcards and other propaganda, anti-suffrages compared giving rights to women with giving rights to cats.

In another piece of propaganda from 1915, an emasculated, put-upon man washes laundry and cares for his child alongside a cat. “I want to vote but my wife won’t let me,” the caption reads, driving home the domestic role reversal.

SUFFRAGETTE SERIES N^o II.

EVERYBODY
WORKS BUT
MOTHER:
SHE'S A
SUFFRAGETTE



I WANT TO VOTE, BUT
MY WIFE WON'T LET ME



TRANSCENDENTAL GRAPHICS VIA GETTY IMAGES

In a 1915 lithographic postcard promoting an anti-suffrage sentiment, a husband washes clothes and watches the baby and cat at home.

“We see the poor henpecked husband, at home with the cat, because if women could go vote men would of course be the loser; the bedraggled cat, a defeated battle scarred suffragist,” said Ann F. Lewis, a former communications director for President Bill Clinton and the owner of a substantial collection of [suffragette art and paraphernalia](#).

Smartly, those in the women’s rights movements reclaimed cats as symbols of quiet strength, Marino said.

“In no time, suffragists responded to their opponents by adopting the cat image in the propaganda and instead associating it with strength, confidence, and independence,” she said.

Lewis thinks both sides seized onto these animals because they’re associated with independence and autonomy.

“Some people react badly to the idea of an independent woman,” she told HuffPost.

“That was true when women fought for the right to vote, to have all the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy, and it is true today, when the two political parties present such different views of what women can do, like whether women can be trusted with the right to decide about our own lives and bodies.”



BETTMANN VIA GETTY IMAGES

Smartly, those in the women's rights movements reclaimed the image of the cat as a symbol of quiet strength, said Kelly L. Marino, the author of "Votes for College Women Alumni, Students, and the Woman Suffrage Campaign."

Women with cats – and cats themselves – were maligned long before the suffrage movement, though.

Cats are strongly associated with superstitions and demons, said Diane Purkiss, a professor of English Literature at Oxford University and the author of “The Witch in History.”

“In many witch trials, people report seeing demon cats,” she told HuffPost. “The very first English witch trial for which we have a proper record, the Chelmsford trial of 1566, focuses on women and their cats.”

At Salem, the women targeted for witchcraft were nearly all older than those who complained about them. In England, 90% of the accused were women of menopausal age or older, Purkiss said.

“At the time of the witchcraft persecutions, women without husbands and children were viewed as likely to be a drain on the community, because they actually were often poor and they didn’t have families to pick up social care,” Purkiss said.

Their attachment to animals was seen as problematic — an uncomfortable, unnatural substitute for both husband and children.

“To those persecuting them, the women were seen as devoting themselves to the wrong thing. The stereotype of the crazy cat

lady is itself a repetition of the stereotype of the witch as a postmenopausal woman, living alone.”



Susanna Trimmings and Goodwife Walford.

MIKROMAN6 VIA GETTY IMAGES

A engraved illustration by Suzanne Trimming showing [Jane Walford](#), a woman who was accused of witchcraft in Puritan New England.

For many on the right – Vance included – the relationship women have with their cats is still threatening today, said [Corey Wrenn](#), a senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Kent and the author of “A Rational Approach to Animal Rights.”

“It’s a direct threat to the unfair bargain that patriarchy has traditionally forced on women, necessitating that the human-nonhuman bond be admonished by male institutions,” Wrenn said, noting the stereotype about [lesbians owning cats](#) (admittedly, *that* [has a lot of truth to it](#)).

“In general, owning cats is still strongly associated with women and choosing to be child-free, which is still stigmatized by many as abnormal and unnatural,” she said.

Still, Vance’s cat lady comments probably feel little a outdated to some, especially younger generations. These days, you’re just as likely to hear [about a “cat dad”](#) (and the more neutral “cat parent”) spoiling their pet.



RAYMOND HALL VIA GETTY IMAGES

Taylor Swift, pictured here with one of her cats in 2014, is a childfree cat lady icon.

Taylor Swift is the owner of three cats — Meredith Grey, Olivia Benson and Benjamin Button. The pop megastar is also held up as a “childfree” (as [opposed to childless](#) — the terminology change speaks to how beliefs are slowly shifting) icon. So naturally, the Swiftie community has [taken up arms over Vance’s remarks](#): “Hell hath no fury like a certain childless cat lady who has yet to endorse a presidential candidate,” as one X user posted [in response](#).

And just like the suffragettes of yore, cat ladies today are having some fun with the trope while using it to mobilize politically.

“There is now a Facebook group called ‘Cat Ladies for Kamala Harris,’ so my sense is that this has gone over remarkably badly,” Purkiss said.

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