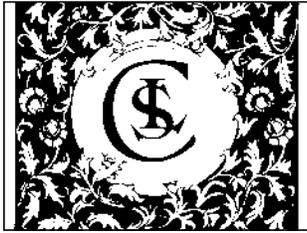


Bulletin





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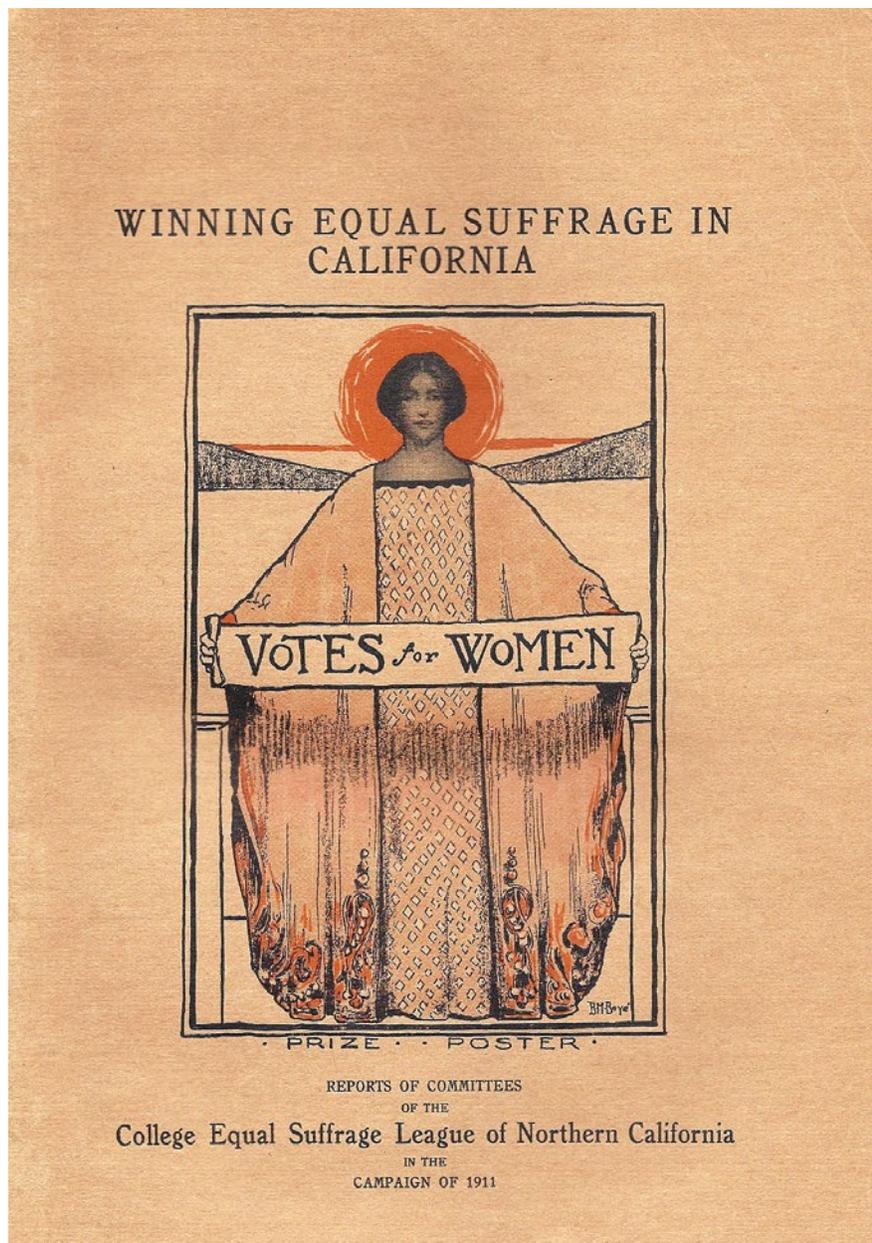
California } Suffrage }

A Game-Changer in the National Votes-for-Women Campaign

By Jennifer Robin Terry, Ph.D.

In August of 1920, American women won the right to vote. Winning the vote was a significant milestone, not only for women, but also for the nation because the federal government recognized roughly half of its citizens as autonomous political beings for the first time in the country's history. In so doing, the nation took a giant step toward political maturation. In commemorating the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, this article highlights the diversity, innovation, and material culture of California's 1911 woman-suffrage campaign—a crusade that helped to turn the tide and reshape other states' strategies on the way to constitutional change.

The suffrage movement got into full swing in the mid-19th century when advocates called on Americans to recognize an expansion of women's rights. However, proponents faced opposition on several fronts. Socially, the nation subscribed to the notion that men and women were fundamentally different, and as such, must occupy separate spheres of life. Men occupied a socially elevated public world of law, politics, and economics, while women were limited to the private domestic realm of family and home. Culturally, Americans had always accepted politics to be a homo-social affair where men gathered to pontificate, posture, and—on election day—party. Polling places were crowded, rowdy, and sometimes violent as men of all classes gathered to vote. Free-flowing whiskey and public ballots (until 1890) ensured that voter intimidation and undue influence skewed the vote toward the precinct's favorite candidates. It



This contest-winning design by Bertha Boyd was mass produced on campaign materials like posters, flyers, and playing cards. It appears here as the cover art for the College Equal Suffrage League of Northern California's 1911 report.

was, therefore, reasoned that the political scene was simply too coarse an environment for women's sensibilities.

However, by the late 19th century, a significant number of middle-class women began to engage in home protection campaigns in which they voiced opinions and acted on civic issues that brought them precariously close to the political realm. Women pressured local politicians for things like cleaner city streets, purer food and milk supplies, and the prohibition of alcohol. Urban political machines and the liquor industry chafed at women's interference and were especially concerned at the growing association of such issues with pro-woman suffrage support. Hence, urban politicians and industrialists formed a powerful opposing force as they knew that enfranchising such women could spell the end of business as usual.

Anti-woman suffrage interests capitalized on men's fears that granting women the vote would upend society. Using newspapers to great effect, they cast aspersions on suffragists, claiming that they were neglectful wives and mothers who were intent on subverting gender roles. Some claimed concern for women's well-being, asserting that the excitement and strain of politics was detrimental to their health.



Nerves in Politics? Or Nerve?

Women who assume the responsibility of Suffrage must either add it to present duties, or lay down those duties to take up this one.

The strain and emotionalism of politics—"which is war"—is a dangerous addition to the effect upon women of the physical strain and excitement of modern life, already deplored by physicians, both men and women, throughout the country.

The frequent low state of health among American women is a fact as undeniable as it is deplorable.

In this condition of things, what do certain women demand for the good of their sex? To add to the excitements that are wasting them, other and greater excitements, and to cares too much for their strength, other and greater cares.

When women generally vote and hold office, nervous prostration, desire for publicity and "love of the limelight" will combine to produce a form of hysteria already increasing in the United States. Nerve seems to be more needed in politics than nerves, and Sylvia Pankhurst herself has declared that the minority demanding the Suffrage "is striving for it knows not what."

Issued by the Southern California Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, 322 Exchange Building, Hill Street, Los Angeles.

Anti-suffrage arguments rested on a binary understanding of gender roles, responsibilities, and capabilities. This statement, issued by the Southern California Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, warned that women's health would deteriorate into nervous hysteria if they engaged in voting and politics.

Even as the suffrage movement was in its infancy, women's literary magazines like San Francisco-based *The Hesperian* informed women's political opinions on topics as wide-ranging as fashion, childcare, natural science, physical exercise, and capital punishment. Though short-lived (1858 – 1863), *The Hesperian* was notable for its female editorship, first under Mrs. A.M. Schultz and then Hermione Day.

The suffrage movement got into full swing in the mid-19th century when advocates called on Americans to recognize an expansion of women's rights.

Dr. Jennifer Robin Terry is a historian of 19th and 20th century social and cultural United States history with particular focus on women, children, and popular culture. She is an award-winning author from the Sacramento region who holds degrees in history from the University of California, Berkeley, and Sacramento State University. For more information, please visit www.jennifer-robin.com.



SUFFRAGE
COMMITTEE
MEETING

VOTES FOR WOMEN!



WOMAN SUFFRAGE MASS MEETING
VALENCIA THE

Suffragette Headquarters Campaign "Votes For Women"
Have negative # 4428 (5x4)

Busy suffragists paused for a photo opportunity at the San Francisco headquarters in 1911. Notice their suffrage ribbons pinned to their clothing as well as the many campaign tools present: telephone, flyers, petitions, a banner, and poster.

One article that circulated in various forms around the country from 1909 – 1911 warned men away from the fictitious “Suffrage Cocktail,” the consumption of which would convert men into household drudges and suffrage missionaries. The *San Francisco Call* cautioned, “two or three of the new drinks make a man go home and relinquish his position as head of the household.”

Despite the general opposition, by the late 19th century, support for woman suffrage grew in the West. This is attributed in part to an unconventional pioneering mindset. But, perhaps a more practical explanation is that political representation at the national level stemmed from the number of each state’s eligible voters. The greater the number of voters, the greater the representation. Hence, the sparsely populated

new western states gained representation when they enfranchised women. Seeking a national amendment, California Senator Aaron Sargent first introduced Susan B. Anthony’s woman-suffrage bill in Congress in 1878—42 years before it finally passed.

But California was not the first western state to enfranchise women. In fact, it was the sixth. However, the California suffrage campaign of 1911 was recognized by suffragists elsewhere as thoroughly modern and game changing. This was because California suffragists were the first to engage in a truly cross-class, multiethnic statewide campaign that engaged with and drew on the state’s economic and demographic diversity. In the process, California suffragists deployed modern technology and marketing in publicity campaigns that encouraged

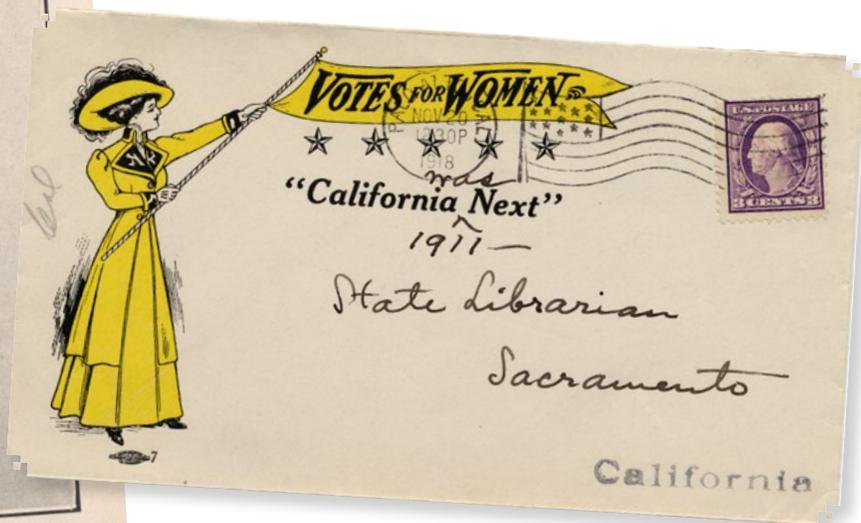
outspoken women. The fresh approach to woman suffrage corresponded with California’s Progressive political reform ethos of 1911.

The 1911 campaign was the second concerted attempt to bring women into the California electorate. Having failed to do so with their 1896 campaign, suffrage leaders came to recognize that systemic elitism and an over-reliance on direction from the national suffrage organization had significantly limited activists’ efficacy. To be successful in the new century, California leaders knew that they needed to draw on the interests and talents of California’s diverse groups of women. To that end, branches of the Votes for Women Club were established in every county (both urban and rural). Suffrage rallies and meetings were held at various

In 1910, Selina Solomons
 founded a Northern California Votes
 for Women Club in San Francisco
 with the intent of recruiting
 working-class women.



MISS SELINA SOLOMONS



This custom printed suffrage envelope was mailed to the California State Librarian in November 1918.

times throughout the day so that working-class women could attend (unlike the prior midday-only meetings). The state's suffrage association galvanized support among male working-class voters when it declared itself in favor of their highly contentious eight-hour-workday campaign. Black suffragists spread the message through African American churches, community groups, and Black-owned newspapers. In Los Angeles, Maria de Lopez, president of the College Equal Suffrage League's Southern California branch delivered her speeches in Spanish at rallies in the Los Angeles Plaza. Suffragists published articles and public event notices in ethnic newspapers and informational flyers in Spanish, French, Italian, and German.

Additionally, San Franciscan Selina Solo-

mons attributed the 1896 loss to women's tendencies toward culturally conditioned timidity and an excess of manners. Women suffragists, she believed, were just too polite. This made it easy for ostensibly supportive politicians to placate them with "doses of 'soothing syrup' of their own legislative brand, *not* guaranteed by the food and drug act!" To win, women had to become unapologetically bold in their assertion of rights.

The timing could not have been better as the young suffragists of the early 20th century had been brought up in the era of the New Womanhood. Funded by the wealthy wives and widows of California entrepreneurs, moguls, and railroad barons, New Woman suffragists embarked on state-long automobile tours. Throughout 1911, representatives of the College Equal

Suffrage League traversed the state in the Blue Liner, an open-air roadster that drew the attention of male voters wherever the women stopped to campaign. Whether in rural towns, alongside country roads, or in urban parking lots, young suffragists stood in the back of the car and stumped for suffrage. Aside from the automobile, suffragists also employed other modern technologies such as telephones, electric signs, billboards, and lantern slides projected at vaudeville houses, keeping the message ever present.

In addition to print media (posters, flyers, and newspaper columns), California suffragists also recognized the power that consumerism held for disseminating the suffrage message. Activists sold suffrage paraphernalia at rallies, picnics, flower