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"The Map Proves It": Map Use by the American Woman Suffrage Movement

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Abstract

In the early twentieth century, American suffragists used "a suffrage map" showing the spread of women's suffrage on posters, pamphlets, and broadsides. The map was part of a shift in tactics used by the suffrage movement: leaving the parlours and taking to the streets, the suffragettes were claiming public space. This article explores the verbal and graphic rhetoric of these persuasive maps, as well as the politics of their placement, exploring how suffragettes moulded and used these traditionally masculinist ways of knowing to advance their cause while simultaneously marginalizing women of colour. Their adoption of maps represents an early example of critical cartography, an adoption of "the master's tools" to advance their own interests.

Keywords: persuasive mapping, critical cartography, suffrage, social work, visual rhetoric

Résumé

Au début du XXe siècle, les partisans américains du droit de vote pour les femmes se sont servis d'une « carte de suffrages » pour représenter la diffusion du suffrage féminin par les affiches et les dépliants de petit ou grand format. Cette carte a fait partie d'un changement stratégique du mouvement : les suffragettes sont alors sorties des salons privés pour descendre dans la rue et s'approprier les lieux publics. Dans l'article, on explore la rhétorique verbale et graphique de ces cartes persuasives, ainsi que les politiques associées à leur emplacement. De plus, on examine comment les suffragettes ont utilisé ces outils traditionnellement masculins pour faire avancer leur cause, tout en marginalisant les femmes de couleur. L'adoption des cartes par les suffragettes est un exemple de cartographie critique précoce, une utilisation des « outils du maître » pour faire avancer la cause de l'élève.

Mots clés : cartographie persuasive, cartographie critique, suffrage, travail social, rhétorique visuelle

“Look at New York State all in mourning,” pointing to the suffrage map with non-suffrage states black and the suffrage states white. “They say men paint [the] town red. We want to paint the United States white.”

—“One Minute Talks” (1915)

It appears that the less geography remains on a map, the more likely is the map to succeed in having the public perceive at a glance what it may fail to get in an hour of listening or reading.

—Speier (1941, 320)

In January 1908, the front page of The Woman's Journal featured a simple choropleth map, labelled “A Suffrage Map” (Figure 1). By the time American women received the vote in 1920, this map had ceased to be a suffrage map and had become the suffrage map, a powerful visual argument employed extensively in the campaign for women's
suffrage (see Figure 2). The suffragists’ use of this persuasive mapping represents the adoption of cartographic rhetoric by women to advance their social justice work. Recent research has highlighted the adoption of cartography to advance contemporary women’s social justice work (McLafferty 2005; Pavlovskaya and St. Martin 2007). Some have pointed to this and other work and termed it “critical cartography”: “the emancipatory and subversive effects of mapping practices (including digital mapping with GIS) that are emerging outside of the cartography traditionally controlled by the state and corporate interests” (Pavlovskaya and St. Martin 2007, 590). The suffrage map appears to be an early example of critical cartography, of women taking and exerting power through mapping.

I believe their use of the map over 12 years of campaigning represents the most extensive use of a single iconic map image for persuasive purposes in the United States, save perhaps the outline of the United States itself. To support this argument, I will begin by discussing the development of the suffrage map and its use in the suffrage campaign, arguing that the map became an important aspect of the rhetoric the suffragists were employing to advance their argument for the vote. I will also address the racial implications of “painting the United States.”

Figure 1. “A Suffrage Map,” The Woman’s Journal (11 January 1908): 1. This map by Bertha Knobe originally appeared as “Map of the United States Showing Status of Woman’s Suffrage Legislation” in Appleton’s Magazine in 1907, accompanying Knobe’s article on the suffrage movement at the national and international levels. Knobe begins by commenting, “Curiously enough, the average American entertains a vague notion that women dabble in politics in the indefinite ‘out West’” (1907, 772). She goes on to document the “uprising” of suffrage and its diffusion across the nation and the world, describing it with another Western reference: “the progress of feminine enfranchisement reads like a real-estate boom in Oklahoma” (778). Note that Oklahoma is depicted as “Oklahoma and Indian Territory”: they were not combined into the state of Oklahoma until 16 November 1907, and the map was first published in December 1907.
States white’’ and the ways in which American women not only used the map but became the map.

“Ocular Proof”: Creating and Disseminating the Suffrage Map

I wear it [the suffrage map] sandwich fashion, and walk about my crowded streets. It attracts everyone’s eye, and an explanation of the colors excites deep interest and makes a great impression. Men are much impressed by the ocular proof of our advance, and after little talks in groups of three to ten, many sign slips. The colored map is, I think, very valuable, as many people receive impressions more strongly through the eye than the ear.

—“Walks and Wins with Two-Ft. Map” (1913; emphasis added)

The woman suffrage movement in the United States is widely acknowledged to have begun with the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 (Wheeler 1995, 37). During the early decades of the movement, the primary activities were holding gatherings to increase membership and discreetly lobbying state legislators (McCammon 2003, 790). By 1900, after 50 years of labour, only four states had granted women the right to vote: Wyoming (1869), Colorado (1893), Utah (1895), and Idaho (1896). Beginning in the late 1890s, the movement had hit “the doldrums”: it was making no measurable progress, and its leadership was literally dying (Finnegan 1999, 115). But this was also a time of rebirth: new leaders arose who embraced new methods (McCammon 2003, 791).

These new methods, borrowed from the British suffrage movement and from the successful campaign for suffrage in California, infused tremendous energy into the American movement, taking suffrage from “the parlor to the streets” (McCammon 2003).3 The new methods relied on spectacle, drama, and cross-class appeal, using parades, pageants, and street speeches to allow the suffragists to reach a wider audience (Finnegan 1999, 6; McCammon 2003, 791). They adopted commercial standards of design and display, “acknowledging the overlapping boundaries between commercial and political culture … in an age of mass culture and consumerism” (Finnegan 1999, 2). This change in methods also allowed women to claim the streets as woman’s terrain, to redefine themselves as having a place in the public sphere and a right to participate in it through voting (McCammon 2003, 789). As women were claiming new space for themselves, they were arguing for the vote on every possible level – in terms of equal rights (when the only men who could not vote were “idiots, lunatics, illiterates, and criminals”), home protection (consumer protection laws, participating in national discussions that had home ramifications), and issues of social justice (such as poverty, child labour laws, and temperance; Knobe 1907, 772).

In this reinvigorated suffrage movement we find the earliest suffrage map (Figure 1), created by Bertha Knobe.

Figure 2. “The Map Proves It!” (poster, 44 × 94 cm), 1914. From the American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries (800c-[1914?]).
to illustrate her article in *Appleton’s Magazine* (Knobe 1907). The map portrays the various forms of suffrage that women then had in the United States, ranging from full suffrage in black to no suffrage in white. Without knowing how Knobe created this map, I can imagine that she took an outline map of the United States and colourd the states that had granted suffrage, leaving the states without suffrage “blank” or white.  

Knobe’s map was reprinted a month later on the front page of *The Woman’s Journal* (see Figure 1). The text only remarks, “It is instructive to see in how large a part of our country women now have some share of suffrage.” Maps of this form invite readers to place themselves on the map, to reflect on their state, literally and metaphorically. The map’s publication began a debate in the journal on the origins of the map. Women from Illinois wrote in to say that the original map was “prepared by … Miss Anna Nicholes in our municipal campaign in Chicago” (McCulloch 1908); Bertha Knobe was prompted to respond, I think you will agree that a legal mind is not needed to note the essential differences in make-up … My map is altogether an enlargement of the idea, being an equal-suffrage map, with designations of the five kinds of suffrage obtaining in 28 States … As a matter of fact, I saw a copy of the original map in Chicago over one year ago, and it instantly gave me the idea for a number of suffrage maps … It is not strange that my subconscious mind absorbed the general scheme of using dark and light spaces, latitudinal and longitudinal lines, in marking my map, for such markings are universally employed in map-making, whether they illustrate prohibition or the corn crop. (Knobe 1908a, 42)  

Knobe’s remarks suggest a familiarity with maps and with map-making. 

Maps, as we know, are not just the “science of princes,” or even of governments, but are used as part of everyday lives, of living with and through our landscapes (Harley 1988, 281). This was true even at the turn of the last century (Monmonier and Puhl 2000). Geography in the late 1800s and early 1900s had a central place in school curricula, playing “a crucial role in student[s’] understanding of the wider world, helping them define their own place, and the place of their country in that world” (Zagumny and Pulsipher 2008, 413; see also Schulten 2001, 92–117). Women in increasing numbers were attending college and being exposed to the social sciences, including geography (Kelley 1996, 407). Beyond the schools, maps and geography texts were widely available, even in the form of games (Brückner 1999, 319). Magazines, both for general readers and for female audiences, included geographical articles and maps within their pages (Dando 2003). *National Geographic* found a growing audience after switching from a scholarly to a more popular focus, appealing to American’s interests in the world and America’s place in it (Schulten 2001, 46). I sketch out this broad view of the state of geography in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to argue that American women, at least in the middle and upper classes (to which many of the suffragists belonged), were well indoctrinated in cartographic culture, as Knobe’s comments suggest. They had been taught with maps in elementary school and possibly beyond; they had encountered maps in books and magazines in their daily lives, outside the educational realm. Was it so much of a reach for them to use maps in their own work?

Women’s social organizations began wielding cartography for their own ends by the close of the nineteenth century. In 1895, *Hull-House Maps and Papers* were published by the “residents of Hull House,” a community of women reformers, led by Jane Addams, working to improve quality of life in a community (Residents of Hull House 1895). In the early twentieth century, a “prohibition map” held a prominent position on the wall of the National Woman’s Christian Temperance Union president’s office in Evanston, Illinois, charting their progress (Gordon 2005 [1924], 263); it was eventually used in publications and on flyers. During World War I, “Mrs. Armour’s maps,” produced by the Women’s Commission of the Illinois Council of Defense, were distributed by the thousands so that those at home could follow the war (Burroughs 1918). It is quite possible that there are links between these instances of amateur cartography, as many women were involved in multiple organizations. For example, Anna Nicholes, credited with creating Chicago’s municipal suffrage map, was also active with settlement houses (Hull House and Northwestern’s Neighborhood House), the Women’s City Club, and the Women’s Trade Union League. These examples of mapping generated by women represent the adoption of cartography as part of women’s social work, carving out a public women’s space focused on issues that transcended the public/private divide, such as public sanitation, public schools, and tenement conditions, and applying “scientific methods of social service” (Flanagan 1990, 1034; Ryan 2003, 22–23). It is in this climate and location of early social work in Chicago that the suffrage map has its roots. 

Knobe, in defending her suffrage map, goes on to say that “I hope everybody in the country will assiduously take to the making of suffrage maps, for it is a most effective way to advertise the cause.” This did indeed prove to be a popular means of capturing the suffrage message. Within a month of the map’s appearance in *The Woman’s Journal*, the National Suffrage Headquarters was advertising a tract based on the map at $0.02 per copy (“New Leaflets” 1908). Six months later, a California suffragist wrote in to urge other suffragists to create their own wall-size versions of the map, directing them where to purchase outline maps and display sticks and how to watercolour or shade them, and noting that “a striking
The use of the map is obvious, both on the wall at Suffrage Headquarters, and as a portable object-lesson to display at meetings” (Park 1908).

The suffrage map is essentially a thematic map: a map depicting a subject or theme not normally visible (A.H. Robinson 1982, x). Thematic mapping developed relatively recently in cartographic history, in the late eighteenth century; the first choropleth map was created in 1826 to depict “the ratio of (male) children in school to the population of each department in France” (Crampton 2004, 43; see also A.H. Robinson 1982, 157; Friendly and Palsky 2007). Michael Friendly and Gilles Palsky comment that this map used shading to reflect the moral landscape: “a scale of moral values directly inspired the gradual gradings of the map. The shading gave the impression of light cast on the map, comparable to the light of knowledge” (2007, 240–41). As early steps were taken to map out populations and their characteristics, the method of shading areas based on political units proved simple to implement and easy to reproduce. The shortcomings of choropleth maps are now well established (Crampton 2004); at the turn of the twentieth century, however, this mapping technique was still extensively employed and could easily be used by amateur cartographers interested in population issues, including the abolition, prohibition, and suffrage movements.9

A choropleth map also embodied the state-by-state approach of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), capturing the state-by-state progress of the movement, in which each state represented a markedly different battleground. Mapping became part of this state-by-state approach beginning with California. Like The Woman’s Journal, the California campaign used a map depicting states with suffrage in black, forms of suffrage in patterns, and states without suffrage (including California) in white. This map offers a clear message to California voters, clarified in the text beneath the map: “California women have no votes.”10 It was designed for a California audience, not a national audience, driving home the message that California was not “on the map.” California was the first state to use the tactics of public spectacle and of propaganda, “reaching large numbers of people with brief messages” (Buechler 1986, 14); California women won the vote in 1911.11

The propaganda version of the suffrage map was picked up by the national movement and, in the process, was further refined to communicate the suffrage message in a more compelling way. In a 1911 map published in The Woman’s Journal, the colours are reversed, with full suffrage states depicted in white rather than in black (see Figure 3).12 By switching from highlighting in black the states with suffrage to highlighting the states without, the map shifts from documenting success to identifying areas
in need of work. As a result, the map offers a visual form of the suffrage argument that the vote emancipates women (white associated with purity, virtue, freedom) while the lack of full emancipation keeps women shackled and “in the dark” (black as uncleanness, unclarity, slavery). This “simple” map was not just easy to produce and easy to read – it also literally boiled the message down to black and white. For some publications, the various categories were in fact reduced to black and white alone – suffrage or no suffrage – most likely in consideration of the medium, printing method, and budget. But by reducing the categories to black and white, these maps eliminated the “grey shades” of suffrage – the municipal, school, and tax votes that women did have (see Figures 5, 9, and 11 below). They also lumped all women into one category, sidestepping the tricky issue of minority voting. But this “lumping” served a greater purpose, uniting the great diversity of women in the United States, crossing all possible boundaries to create a truly united states. In addition to recasting the map, suffragists also began to employ it in the public pageantry. In 1912, for example, it took the form of a float, drawn by horses, being pulled through the streets as part of the victory celebration for Kansas’s ratification of woman suffrage; the map appears with the slogan “9 states of light among 39 of darkness” (see Figure 4 above). A map float also appeared in the important 1913 suffrage parade in Washington, DC (“Parade to Glow” 1913, 62; “Order of March” 1913). The use of the broadsheet, poster, and float media points to the practical nature of the suffrage map, “better suited to action, movement, and the management of space in real time” (Jacob 2006, 81). In the quickly evolving context of political activism, the map is made to be mobile, to be taken to the streets, to be handed out, displayed, and explained at/in the moment.

Map placement was very significant. Maps were not just displayed in shop windows and newspapers to persuade male voters. In New Hampshire, a “large, illuminated suffrage map was framed and put in the State House and

Figure 4. “Celebrating the ‘Ratification’ by the Ninth State,” parade float in Omaha, 1912, from Carrie Chapman Catt Photograph Album (Catt2.13.1b). Carrie Chapman Catt Papers, Special Collections Department, Bryn Mawr College Library. The “Ninth State” was Kansas. If you look closely, you can see the horses and drivers to the right of the float.
other public places” (Harper 1922b, 405); it was also placed in the West Virginia capitol (Harper 1922b, 688). State capitals, the halls of power, are the places of maps, where maps belong. By placing their maps in these landscapes, the suffragists were wisely making the political argument for the vote with the tools of rulers and leaders. Yet the map as a NAWSA publication is a bit of a black box – an image that is at once both fixed and easily moveable across space (Latour 1987). It is a map made moveable, disposable, yet also for the collective gaze – so that all may share in this collective view. Publications in general were very important to the suffrage movement, tying women across the country into a single social movement (Solomon 1991, 15). I argue that the suffrage map was part of a mechanism to both motivate and unite not only American suffragists but also Americans, as well as serving as an anchor: “It provides geographical discourse with a referent by anchoring it in a visible reality. Without the map, this discourse is purely ideal, the object – formless and indefinite – of a postulation rather than of knowledge” (Jacob 2006, 30).

The suffrage map, of course, invokes the outline of the continental United States as a familiar symbol of nationalism and unity, as in the billboard version across the street from the Republican Party’s 1916 presidential nominating convention (Figure 5). Outlines of the United States have long been mobilized in education and in informing the public as well as promoting a sense of nationalism (Francaviglia 1995, 19); while invoking nationalism, the map integrates the commodity being sold – in this case suffrage – and it becomes a logo (16). In this case, the suffragists are tying nationalism and identity to their political position, capturing the “divide” between suffrage and non-suffrage states, creating or recreating an East–West divide for a population that still remembers a North–South divide. As a result, the suffrage map represents a call for unity.

A significant element of this second wave of the suffrage campaign was the commercial aspect. The suffragists were well aware of the power of repetition from contemporary retail practices and repeated certain designs or logos, such as the map, in a variety of media (Sewall 2003, 92–3). In the “Empire State Campaign of 1915,”

Suffragists covered the visual landscape with advertisements. They distributed 149,533 posters – “thousands” hung from trees, on fences, and in the windows of houses, apartments, and storefronts. Other posters decorated the interiors of banks, moving picture and vaudeville theaters, and other businesses. (Finnegan 1999, 61–63)

It is impossible to gauge how many of these advertisements might have featured the suffrage map. However, I have found references in reports on the “Empire State Campaign” to the suffrage map’s being printed on

- 35,000 paper fans (Harper 1922b, 471)
- drinking glasses (“Wives of Soldiers” 1916)
- map calendars (“Big Suffrage Party” 1915)
- baseball programs (“Suffrage Leaders” 1915)

The suffragists used these items to target the audience needed to get the vote: the drinking glasses were given to soldiers, the map calendars to railwaymen, and the maps in the baseball programs would also be directed at men. And these examples are just from the New York campaign: 26 state campaigns were conducted using the “new” media methods. The suffragists, as consumers, were well acquainted with the commercial rhetoric of advertising. Women were seen as primary consumers by advertisers, marketers, consumer manufacturers, and retailers, who targeted them with ads and displays (Finnegan 1999, 10). Having been the target of advertisers, women were aware of the power of advertising.

The creation of national suffrage maps was largely handled by NAWSA through their publishing wing, which allowed them to control content. Ironically, this caused some financial problems for NAWSA:

Figure 5. 1916 suffrage billboard. Susan B. Anthony Ephemera Collection, Huntington Library, (eph SBA Vol. 14). This item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
the company was "bankrupted" trying to supply "suffrage maps" up to date, for as soon as a lot was published another State would give Presidential or Municipal suffrage and then the demand would come for maps with the new State "white," and thousands of others would have to be "scrapped." (Harper 1922a, 531–32)

But these changes in the suffrage map represented advancements long fought for.

The suffrage map became so pervasive in the American landscape that writers and speakers could refer to it without its being present. An essay by Adella Hunt Logan on "Colored Women as Voters" notes, "The suffrage map shows that six states have equal political rights for women and men, and that a much larger number have granted partial suffrage to women" (Logan 1912). Logan’s essay did not print the suffrage map: by then it was so widely known that it was not necessary to publish it. Similarly, Crystal Benedict, addressing the suffragists’ approach to politicians, stated in 1914,

Our plea is simply that you look at the little suffrage map. That triumphant, threatening army of white States crowding rapidly eastward toward the center of population is the sum and substance of our argument. It represents 4,000,000 women voters. Do you want to put yourselves in the very delicate position of going to those women next fall for endorsement and re-election after having refused even to report a woman suffrage amendment out of committee for discussion on the floor of the House? (Harper 1922a, 429)

The suffragists had been successful in “branding” their commodity — their “logo” was now so familiar that audiences were familiar with its shape and message.

For those against suffrage, the map was also an opportunity to reflect. A Massachusetts gentleman wrote to the New York Times after it published the suffrage map in 1913,

The map showing the status of woman suffrage in the States, published in the Sunday issue of THE TIMES, was most instructive. It presents a little bit of “education” which I am glad to see emphasized … What I am referring to is the fact that not a single State east of the Mississippi River had adopted woman suffrage: every ‘white’ State on the suffrage map is in the weird and woolly West … Woman suffrage has been adopted only by the crude, raw, half-formed Common-wealths of the sagebrush and the windy plains, whence have come in endless procession foolish and fanatical politics and policies for a generation or two. (Taylor 1913)

Not only has the writer not been persuaded by the map, he is using it to argue against suffrage.16

While the Massachusetts gentleman was not persuaded, the suffrage map can be considered both a persuasive map and a propaganda map. Geographer Judith Tyner has coined the phrase “persuasive cartography” to describe maps created to change or in some way influence the reader’s opinion or conclusion (1982, 140). Persuasive cartography can be found in many forms, including advertising, teaching, theology, politics, and, at its most extreme, propaganda. In other words, they are found in our daily lives. Persuasive maps manipulate the message through a variety of cartographic processes, such as distortion, selection/omission, symbolization, colours, and choice of projection, text, and title, to make the point and drive home the argument (Tyner 1982; Burnett 1985, 61, 71). Propaganda maps draw on the same techniques but take persuasion a step further, beyond “accepted norms of accuracy and truth” (Pickles 2004, 37). The persuasive mapping done in Germany and Italy around World War II is often seen as the epitome of propaganda mapping (Herb 1997; Minor 1999; Boria 2008). While propaganda is often treated as a negative, it is by definition “the systematic propagation of a doctrine or cause” (Boria 2008, 297). Hans Speier writes that the goal of such mapping is not the “truth of an idea but its successful communication to a public” (1941, 313). I consider the suffrage map a persuasive map and an example of a propaganda map. It is a persuasive map, playing on familiar outlines, tied to rich traditions, but moulded into a tool of suffrage rhetoric; it is also a propaganda map, given the suffragists’ agenda to use it to achieve their goal of changing the cultural and political landscape on a national (but also on a global) level.18 The suffragists had workshops on propaganda at their national conventions and provided a pocket-sized “Blue Book,” which included the map, to assist suffragists in arguing for the vote (Bjorkman and Porritt 1917, 132). Their reports are filled with references to the quantity of “suffrage propaganda” produced and the variety of means they used to distribute this propaganda. I realize that not all readers may agree that the suffrage map is a propaganda map; however, as the suffragists considered the map propaganda, I do also.

In incorporating a map into their propaganda, the suffragists were wielding not only maps’ communicative power but also the ways in which they are imbued with power by their readers/users. Norman Thrower writes, “The authority of the map and globe, which is emblematic of and synonymous with education, is invoked, even though some persuasive maps contain intolerable errors” (1996, 217). The American public has long been taught to trust the map (Francaviglia 1995, 20). In fact, readers/viewers can be described as having “cartographic hypnosis” — the “universal phenomenon of blind trust in map representations”; as S.W. Boggs writes, “map-conscious people … usually accept subconsciously and uncritically the ideas that are suggested to them by maps” (1947, 469; see also Bar-Gal 2003, 2). Despite the rejection of the notion of maps as “scientific,” “objective,” “mirror[s] of reality” by academic geography and cartography, the public con-
continues to view maps as objective and objectifying: “[a map] simply reports factual, geographic information” (Churchill and Slarsky 2004, 22–23). Or, as the suffragist put it, “ocular proof” (“Walks and Wins” 1913). Mark Monmonier writes that “people trust maps, and intriguing maps attract the eye as well as connote authority” (Monmonier 1991, 87). A Nazi propaganda map dropped on Allied troops in Belgium in 1940 urged them to “Look at this map: it gives your true situation!”

The text states what most seeing humans instinctively do: look at the map. It is this power of maps that the suffragists employed in their campaign.

The Last “Black Spot”: The Map, Race, and the Suffrage Movement

The suffrage map, while looking to advance women’s rights, was not necessarily looking to advance the rights of all women. The simple black-and-white graphic is tied into complex metaphors as well as the into racial landscape of early-twentieth-century America. The association of white with light and good and black with darkness and evil has roots back at least to the Christian Bible (Dalal 2002, 140–44). Over time, in European cultures, white became an indicator of cleanliness, favour, and honesty or legitimacy, while black indicated dirt, immorality or illegality, evil, and death (153–57). The first choropleth map wielded black and white to convey the “unenlightened and enlightened regions of the country,” creating a moral cartography (Crampton 2004, 43). An interest in “moral statistics” – crime, literacy, suicide – resulted in the creation of more moral maps through the 1860s (A.H. Robinson 1982, 156–70). Eventually, this moral cartography was used in the classic colonial discourse of bringing culture and civilization to “even the darkest and most barren reaches of the empire,” terms which referred in particular to the African continent (Minor 1999, 149). British explorers and missionaries were bringing the light of science, democracy, Christianity, and capitalism to a place associated with “darkness” on many levels – skin, savagery, paganism, wildness (Jarosz 1992, 106–7). Well-educated American women would have been aware of this use of metaphor from the accounts of the explorers, such as Henry Stanley’s, as well as from popular fiction, such as the works of H. Rider Haggard (Brantlinger 1985).

In addition to literary references, American women were likely exposed to the notion of colour reflecting moral values through moral cartography. As the early suffrage movement was deeply connected to the abolition movement, these women may have been familiar with abolition’s use of black/white imagery, as exemplified by the 1847 “moral” map “which Northern abolitionists had used to illustrate the white moral purity of the free states compared to the black evil of the Southern slave states” (Reynolds 2005, 40; see Figure 6).

Women active in social work were aware of social/moral mapping projects, such as those of Charles Booth and William Stead. Booth’s maps of London poverty (1889–1902) used dark blue and black to represent criminality, roughness, and disorderliness (Kimball 2006, 370–1). Participants in the Hull House project were very much influenced by Booth’s maps, as they acknowledged in the introduction to Hull House Maps and Papers (Residents of Hull House 1895, 57). Stead was encouraged to visit Chicago by Jane Addams and other social reformers and became a frequent late-night visitor to Hull House (Churchill 2002, 10; Downey 1987, 155). His If Christ Came to Chicago (1894) featured a map of a block in Chicago’s First Ward, delineating in black, grey, and red the locations of saloons, pawnbrokers, and brothels, juxtaposed with an image of Christ ejecting the money changers from the temple.

Booth’s and Stead’s maps could be called large-scale choropleth maps on which the units mapped are city blocks (Booth) and buildings (Stead). Intriguingly, Stead may have mentored Bertha Knobe (“Bertha Damaris Knobe” 1976 [1914]).

The suffragists’ use of black and white to convey moral values on a map is complicated by the underlying issue of race and suffrage in the United States. The subject
of black voting rights had divided suffragists since the Fourteenth Amendment, enfranchising black male voters only, was proposed in 1866 (Buechler 1986, 5–6). Black women believed, just as white women did, that they needed the ballot in order to help themselves and their communities (Terborg-Penn 1998, 79). White southerners were concerned about black voting in general, some fretting that the “moral superiority” of black women would result not only in their voting but also in their resisting overtures to having their votes bought. For the most part, black women were excluded from the predominantly white suffrage organizations (Dumenil 2007, 22). In the name of political expediency, suffragists were turning their backs on former allies, compromising on their approach (moving from equality of the sexes to the vote’s being necessary for “women’s work”), and in general, using all the tools in the toolbox, including racial rhetoric, to advance their cause.

This racism is apparent on a 1913 broadside (see Figure 7). Produced by NAWSA and distributed by the Austin Woman Suffrage Association, the map is captioned “Won’t you help us make Texas white?” This loaded statement refers to the map’s colours, as well as to racial concerns over African American women voting, but also to cleanliness/housekeeping. Southern suffragists argued that giving the vote to white women could help to maintain white supremacy (“The Movement Comes of Age” 2005). This broadside makes a simple argument: “Votes for Women a Success. The map proves it. Would any of these states have adopted equal suffrage if it had been a failure just across the border? Imitation is the Sincerest Flattery!”

This image/argument creates the impression that the spread of woman’s suffrage is natural, flowing without effort from West to East. But the point is hammered home with text, lest viewers not get the (visual) message. The text is a proclamation, telling us what the map alone cannot. The various media of the map (see Figures 2, 4, and 5) combine visual and verbal components to craft their persuasive message. The map also takes a passive image, a snapshot in time, and adds motion to it, indicating via text that the white states demonstrate past progress and suggest the inevitability of suffrage spreading all the way across the United States. Through this shared, stable reality, the suffragists were looking to gain allies.

Another play on black and white, employed in other states, combines the colour metaphors and the racial issues. An account of the suffrage campaign in Nevada states that “the suffrage map showing Nevada as the last ‘black spot’ in the West was printed in every newspaper and on every leaflet, put in public places and on large banners hung in the streets” (Harper 1922b, 398; see Figure 8). The Suffragist reported that “women all over the country desire that the offensive black spot be removed from the center of the white field on the suffrage map,” incorporating domestic metaphors of cleanliness into the rhetoric (Vernon 1914, 6). Nevada passed the suffrage amendment, thus becoming “white,” in 1914. Nevada was not the only state to consider itself the “blackest spot”; Missouri and Georgia both employed this rhetoric, which, like that used in Texas, invokes race (Harper 1922b, 343). In Georgia, in particular, it reads as a racial statement: “Georgia’s complexion on the suffrage map

Figure 7. “Won’t you help make Texas white?” broadside, Austin Woman Suffrage Association, [1913?]. Archives and Information Services Division, Texas State Library & Archives Commission. Reproduced courtesy of Texas State Library and Archives Commission.
has been pot black” (“Georgia vs. Connecticut” 1919). These references to the “black spot” tie back to the abolition movement. The genesis of the phrase “black spot on the map” has not been pinpointed, but it is not hard to imagine that as the colour black became more and more closely associated with the dirty and the illegal, a “black spot” on a map would be seen to indicate “bad” places (Dalal 2002, 157–60). The 1847 “Moral Map of the United States” (see Figure 6) has a caption reading, “It is a dark spot on the face of the nation; such a state of things cannot always exist – LA FAYETTE.” The map and the text play on the classic dichotomy of white as good, black as bad, but they also refer to the colour of the slaves: “The map’s linking the putative color of slaves with the evils of slavery was an injustice so ingrained in the American political unconscious that it remained invisible, even to abolitionists” (Reynolds 2005, 40). But the “Moral Map’s” caption and its use of black and white are strikingly similar to the suffrage map’s black/white colouring and its rhetoric.

Playing on this use of black/white, backward/enlightened, dirty/clean, was suffrage rhetoric about “cleaning,” part of women’s domestic duties. Much anti-suffrage rhetoric was based on the notion of separate spheres: that men’s place was in public and women’s in the home. It was feared that if women were given the vote, they would become “manly,” while men would become feminized (Buechler 1986; Palczewski 2005). Women in suffrage parades often marched with brooms tied with yellow ribbons (Sewall 2003, 93; “Big Suffrage Party,” 1915). Proclaiming “A Clean Sweep for Suffrage,” the brooms transformed the streets from public space to domestic space. Domestic cleaning was part of “women’s duties,” and the use of brooms emphasized that granting women the vote was not about women stepping out of their “place” but, rather, about acknowledging the ways in which political decisions had ramifications in the home – what some have termed “municipal housekeeping” (Buechler 1986, 27, 166). The rhetoric of removing “offensive black...
spots,” then, played on this domestic imagery: as good “housekeepers,” the suffragists would of course want to make the nation “spotless.”

By itself, the suffrage map appears elementary, easy to make and reproduce, seeming to convey a simple message. It is clear, however, that the suffrage map was anything but simple, embodying a complex set of cultural and political messages. But we have one more form of the suffrage map to address: the human suffrage map.

The “Human Suffrage Map”

Suffragists used truly inventive methods to get their message out. NAWSA commissioned films on suffrage in 1912, 1913, and 1914, “all starring beautiful suffragist heroines who combined political activity with romantic and family interests” (Sloan 1988, 100). The suffrage map makes an appearance in the melodrama Your Girl and Mine, the story of a troubled marriage between a wealthy young woman and an abusive husband (see Figure 9). The scene with the map appears to summarize suffrage progress and identify where work was needed, with the map’s colours reversed so that it would be clearer in this context. The film captures another manifestation of the suffrage map: some of the seated women in Figure 9 are representing states that had passed women’s suffrage at the time of the film.

A popular aspect of suffrage parades and pageants was to have women representing states, wearing dresses that reflected their suffrage status. This is perhaps a little clearer in an image from a 1916 pageant in St. Louis (see Figure 10): women representing states with full suffrage are dressed in white and have shields, those representing partial suffrage in grey, while those representing states with no suffrage are shackled and dressed in black.

Figure 9. Still from the silent film Your Girl and Mine, 1914, from Carrie Chapman Catt Photograph Album (Catt1.6.2b). Carrie Chapman Catt Papers, Special Collections Department, Bryn Mawr College Library.
The pageant can show that the extent of this women’s movement is world-wide. It can present pictorially the countries that have equal suffrage, the countries in which women have municipal suffrage, and those where bills for woman suffrage are now before the Legislature. It can and will show woman’s struggle for freedom in this country, and the assured success of her efforts today. It will show that man and woman serve together in all human activities that make the State, yet that man alone rules the State. It will also try to show that the virtues and principles for which women have always stood, and will continue to stand – since they cannot change the nature of their being – are Justice, Charity, Liberty, Peace and Hope. (Tinnin 1913, 50)

The language Tinnin uses – for example, “show the extent” and “present pictorially” – suggests a bodily cartography. In parades and pageants, women became the suffrage map; they embodied virtues such as liberty, freedom, and democracy – the state – but also the states. A report on South Dakota’s successful suffrage campaign describes a parade in Sioux Falls with “a human suffrage map” (McMahon 1918, 508). In the 1913 Washington parade, the suffrage map appeared at least twice. Included in the parade line-up was a map float showing “nine States of light and thirty nine of darkness” (likely similar to the image in Figure 4). At the end of the parade, this light and dark was repeated, embodied by “9 women dressed in white representing ‘light,’ and others walking around dressed in black, representing the 39 States which have no suffrage. This float will carry a banner with the words of Lincoln ‘No country can exist half slave and half free’” (“Parade to Glow” 1913, 62). This description is deeply ironic, considering that black women were marginalized in the parade, shunted to the end and not allowed to participate in the pageantry (Frost-Knappman and Cullen-Dupont 2005, 296). The Washington parade culminated with a pageant on the Treasury steps, replete with both virtues and states personified by white suffragists.

Women representing states are similar to women personifying continents, as on the title page of Ortelius’ *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1573), used by Brian Harley to illustrate his essay “Maps, Knowledge, Power” (1988). In this image, the continents are personified as women, with only Europe fully clothed. In addition to personifying continents on maps, women also embodied ideals such as victory, justice, or liberty, all of which were usually portrayed as women of European ancestry (see Figure 11 with Lady Liberty). There was also a sixteenth-century European tradition of parades in which the king, duke, or princess (for example) rode into the city with an immense entourage,
including some costumed as allegories, such as the continents (Le Corbeiller 1961, 209). Harley suggests that female sexuality as depicted on maps was “often explicit for the benefit of male-dominated European societies,” objectifying women for the sake of the patriarchal gaze (1988, 76). Whether continents or virtues, these women can be interpreted as either in the need of men’s security/protection or as a body to be “taken,” and both interpretations assume women’s vulnerability (Petto 2009, 68).

With “the living suffrage map,” American women were playing a dual role as both objects of the gaze and the observers of spectacle (Finnegan 1999, 66). Through pageants and parades, and even by walking around wearing the map on a sandwich board, suffragists were controlling the gaze, “inviting spectators to view the women as they wanted to be seen” (Borda 2002, 44; emphasis added); they were embracing this personification and objectification, willingly embodying these ideals, but using them for their own ends. They also seem to have been subtly, or perhaps not so subtly, suggesting that if white women are tied to the representation of nation, freedom, democracy and our United States, shouldn’t they have the vote? Would we really deny the vote to Lady Liberty? Or to America?

Part of the power of maps comes from their association with power, with knowledge, control, mastery, with the gaze (Jacob 2006, 318–20). And the suffragists were certainly wielding this power. But this also is about what Christian Jacob terms the “performative power” of maps, the idea that the experience of walking “through” a map confers “a feeling of symbolic mastery that often mirrors the power of kings and administrators” (Jacob 2006, 44). Non-suffragists could explore this performative power through the “Hopperie game” at Luna Park, where they could follow the progress of women’s voting rights as they hopped from one state to another.  

For suffragists, enacting the suffrage map and its evolution meant that they embodied the change they were working for. By becoming the map, they took it from a two-dimensional representation to an interactive experience. This has its positives and negatives. Certainly, by becoming the map in public, women could be empowered; but they could
also appeal to their audience. Viewers might see familiar faces – family members, neighbours, respected members of their community – in the roles of states without the vote, in black and perhaps shackled. To take on the role of a state could definitely be a risky venture, however: some parades were attacked, and the women not only berated but assaulted.34

A "Moving" Map

A 1913 report in The Woman’s Journal and Suffrage News describes a “moving” suffrage map of the United States:

The first map will be as black as Egypt. Then two little gray specks will show the beginning of school suffrage. The first glow of dawn will come in the West – first in Wyoming. The whole western part of the United States and the Pacific Coast will gradually be illuminated with the golden light of victory. Succeeding maps will show the gold extending in great floods of color after the elections of 1913, 1914, and 1915, until, at the beginning of 1920, only one black spot is left – namely, Vermont, where a constitutional convention is possible only once in ten years, and where the constitution cannot be amended except at a convention. The United States at the end of 1920 will have a cloudless map, all gold and no black, with a border of red, white and blue. (“Moving Map” 1913)35

The moving map was a prediction that came true: in 1919, Congress approved the woman suffrage amendment, and by 1920 the amendment had been ratified by the required three-fourths of the states (Sims 1995, 333). Women had won the vote.

The suffrage map was well integrated into the suffrage rhetoric and into the public imagination, part of the iconography of suffrage. In a 1915 illustration titled “The Awakening” (Miller 1915), the familiar suffrage map is presented as reverse Manifest Destiny (see Figure 11).36 Liberty marches from West to East, bringing the torch of enlightenment. In the East, the shading of the states is composed of a mass of women reaching out, waiting to receive the torch. This is a fitting image to conclude on, I believe, for it captures the iconography of the suffrage map yet takes it one step further to capture the point of the suffrage map, but also the problem: that what the suffrage map literally represents is white American women. The abstraction of the basic suffrage map becomes a richly detailed mass of white bodies. We have the colour morality of the white of enlightenment versus the darkness of enslavement. The map is composed of women, just as suffragists became the map to advance their cause. But minority women are excluded from this picture, wanting the vote but being cut out.

Through the map, suffragists were giving “tangible form to their beliefs” (Finnegan 1999, 8). Eventually, the pervasive image of the suffrage map was familiar enough to be invoked verbally, without having to be seen, and even remembered as suffragists looked back on their struggle: “I remember that there was a suffrage map reproduced from time to time” (Bompas 1942, 175). But it was not just a suffrage map, it was multiple suffrage maps, capturing the changing political terrain, as well as the inventive media on which the map appeared – posters, fans, glasses, parade floats. The suffragists even had the gumption to donate copies to the American Geographical Society’s collections, thus placing their maps in the largely masculine world of the geographical society.37 I cannot imagine a single map that was produced, reproduced, or displayed as much as the suffrage map. From its earliest version in 1907 through the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, suffragists took the map to the streets, into people’s homes, into ball games and horse races, into the halls of government.

Maps have long been communicators of “an imperial message … used as an aggressive complement to the rhetoric of speeches, newspapers and written texts” (Harley 1988, 57). Women in the early twentieth century were well acculturated in cartographic culture and map use (Richards 2004; Dando 2007). As they worked on social justice issues and sought to achieve political ends, they adopted political means to advance their cause, including maps, as well as devising their own methods, drawing on consumer culture and changing the practice of politics in the United States. They crafted the image of the map to bring it in line with the suffrage rhetoric. In this example of cartographic culture, we see “lay cartographers” using a fairly simple thematic map to make a compelling argument, then disseminating this image nationwide. Jeremy Crampton writes, in considering maps and political participation, “the approach here is ‘map or be mapped’ … or perhaps more appositely ‘don’t hate the media, become the media’ (attributed to Jello Biafra)” (Crampton 2009, 845). After being subjected to mapping (mapped, as it were, though some might argue that women were “invisible” on maps at this point in history), women were employing simple mapping, on paper and with their bodies, to advance their own agenda. Furthermore, they were wielding the masculinist gaze of mapping while provoking that gaze: look at the map, look at us being the map. While critical cartography may be associated with today’s inexpensive software and the Internet, it can be found earlier in history if we look for it.38 Work on mapping related to abolition, prohibition, and other social issues will enrich our understanding of both history and cartography, particularly the practice of cartographic culture outside the halls of academia and government.

The radical feminist Audre Lord famously wrote that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde 1984, 123). But in this case, the suffragists are clearly using the tool of cartography, wielding this instrument of power to question social norms and to argue for
a greater role in American society as equal citizens and equal claimants of public space (Finnegan 1999, 49). The map marked steady progress while it argued for diffusion of suffrage eastward.

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Notes

1. *The Woman's Journal* was the longest published and most widely distributed suffrage journal in the United States.

2. I use the term “suffragist” throughout this article to refer to American women who campaigned for women’s voting rights. “Suffragette” was associated with the more militant British campaign for woman’s vote, which employed methods viewed as “revolutionary” within the movement but seen outside it as violent. Americans preferred the term “suffragist” to distance themselves from the negative connotations associated with suffragettes. (See Sewall 2003, 97.)

3. While the American suffrage movement was influenced by the tactics employed by British suffragettes, I have not yet found a British equivalent to the suffrage map.

4. Two women later wrote to *The Woman's Journal* to explain how they made maps in a manner similar to what I imagine Knobe may have employed (see Park 1908; “Walks and Wins” 1913).

5. I have not yet located the Chicago example to compare it to Bertha Knobe’s map.

6. To date, only one scholar has addressed any of these instances of amateur cartography (Sklar 1998).

7. I have not yet been able to locate a copy of this map, but its existence is documented by Gordon (2005 [1924], 263), who also comments on the “prohibition map” growing from black to white.

8. The tract was published by the National Woman Suffrage Publishing Company, which produced tremendous amounts of material for the movement. I have found very little written about the National Woman Suffrage Publishing Company, but it deserves to be explored.

9. For an example of abolition mapping, see Figure 6. Descriptions of prohibition maps suggest that they were also choropleths, a hypothesis substantiated by the one prohibition map located (see “Prohibition Map of the United States” 1912). A 1913 Good Housekeeping illustration features a choropleth map of food safety laws.

10. The suffrage map used in the California campaign is illustrated in Wheeler (1995, 184) and Cooney (2005, 85).

11. California suffragists used a national map in their campaign. I have found a few examples of “regional” suffrage maps; Robert Cooney’s *Winning the Vote*, for example, shows a postcard with a map of the Pacific Northwest and the message “Oh Oregon! Why Not Fill the Gap?” (Cooney 2005, 173). Oregon is the holdout, Washington, Idaho, and California all having passed women’s suffrage. Another example reproduced by Cooney is from the Oklahoma campaign.

12. In cartography, dark colours are considered to be “perceived better by the reader of the map, and will, thus, leave a greater impression than elements colored in paler shades” (Bar-Gal 2003, 2).

13. This was also true of the parades, in which women of all ages, classes, and ethnicities marched together to create a united front, emphasized not only by coordinated outfits but also by coordinated marching (Borda 2002, 37). However, black women were often excluded from these marches or forced to march at the end.

14. My research is informed by the writings of Bruno Latour and other proponents of actor-network theory; however, an actor-network analysis is beyond the scope of this article. I do perceive a network of civically active women mapping in Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century. Exploring this network and their use of cartography in their social justice work is my next project.

15. While there is well-documented information on the “suffrage shops” where women could purchase suffrage goods (sashes, umbrellas, outfits, etc.), I have found no reference to women’s being given “freebies” – only men (Finnegan 1999; Sewall 2003).

16. A caption accompanying the “Prohibition Map of the United States,” published in *The Woman’s Protest Against Woman Suffrage* (1912), suggests that anti-suffragists were comparing a prohibition map to the suffrage map to argue against suffrage. To date, it has not been possible to determine which map came first, the suffrage map or the prohibition map. References to prohibitions maps include Whitson (1910), Stelzle (1918), and Gordon (2005 [1924]), but these documents only refer to the maps and do not reproduce them.
17. For work on propaganda mapping see Quam (1943), Burnett (1985), Pickles (1992), and Herb (1997).
18. I have not included any examples of continental or global suffrage maps, but examples of both are readily available. For example, Bertha Knobe (1908b, 20–21) produced a world suffrage map for an article in Harper’s Weekly that appeared four months after her US map publication.
19. For work on the visual propaganda used to argue for and against suffrage, see Ramsey (2000); Palczewski (2005). No work has addressed the suffrage map to date.
20. Illustrated in Speier (1941, 329, Fig. III). See also Pickles (2004, 38, Fig. 2.2).
21. The explorer Henry Stanley published two books whose titles made reference to the “dark continent”: In Darkest Africa (1878) and Through the Dark Continent (1890).
22. I have unfortunately found little published research on abolition maps. Marcus Wood begins his fascinating examination of slavery imagery (such as slave-ship configurations and illustrations from Uncle Tom’s Cabin) with a discussion of Thomas Clarkson’s “abolition map” (1808), which is best described as a genealogy in the form of a watershed (Wood 2000, 1–4). However, he does not address any other maps in the book.
23. It is difficult to assess the relationship between Stead’s work and the Hull House maps. Both were working on their projects at essentially the same time; who was influencing whom? Thanks to Sharon Wood of the Department of History, University of Nebraska–Omaha, for bringing Stead to my attention.
24. Knobe was working for the Chicago Tribune when Stead would have been in Chicago. Her entry in Women’s Who’s Who of America reads in part, “Was professional protégée of William T. Stead of London, who lately lost his life on the Titanic” (1914/1976).
25. A 1914 cartoon depicting Lady Liberty painting two states white is titled “Two More Bright Spots on the Map” (Osborn 1914).
26. In chapter 5 of Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest, titled “Soft-Soaping Empire,” Anne McClintock addresses soap advertisements as embodying “emergent middle class values” – monogamy, Christianity, class control, and the imperial civilizing mission (1995, 208).
27. Yellow was adopted as the colour of American suffrage, while the British movement used purple, white, and green (Sewall 2003, 91). Some Americans did use the British colours, but as the British became more militant, more yellow was employed by American suffragists.
28. Tickets to Your Girl and Mine were given to New Hampshire legislators (Harper 1922b, 405). Most of the suffrage films have been lost; what we know about them comes from articles in newspapers and magazines (Sloan 1988; Shore 2006).
29. No photograph has been located to date, only text references (“Parade to Glow” 1913, 62; “Order of March” 1913, 72).
30. See Annette Kolodny’s groundbreaking study The Lay of the Land (1975), in which she explores the land-as-woman metaphor in American literature and argues that this view was essential to the colonization process. See also the work of Gillian Rose (esp. Rose 1992).
31. To my knowledge, only the continent of Africa was ever portrayed as a black woman (Le Corbeiller 1961).
32. Ironically, as women had embodied or personified land to be conquered, Europe was conquered by women: “Enormously elated at having secured Finland and Russia without the need of a military victory, Germany is now turning her attention to woman suffrage in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden with excellent prospects of success. She can then take the suffragists’ map of Europe and with scarcely a correction show it as a map of her conquests” (M. Robinson 1918, 12).
34. The most famous incident was the 1913 Washington parade: suffragists later complained that the DC police stood by as they were attacked and did nothing (Borda 2002, 46; Moore 1997, 101).
35. I believe that this text is from a speech Dr Anna Shaw gave at Carnegie Hall. Her lecture, according to the program, was titled “A Cloudless Map in 1920” (“Moving Map” 1913). Published collections of her speeches do not include “A Cloudless Map in 1920,” and it is not among her papers at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.
36. Although “The Awakening” was published in Puck, a humour magazine, I can find nothing humorous about the image or its accompanying poem … unless I am missing the point. For another incorporation of the suffrage map into art/cartoon, see Osborn (1914).
37. Stamps (“Gift from Publisher”) on two suffrage map posters in the collections of the American Geographical Society (one is depicted as Figure 2) indicate that the posters were donated to the AGS by the National Woman Suffrage Publishing Company, a subsidiary of NAWSA.
38. I am not suggesting that the critical cartography of the past is the exactly same as the critical cartography of today. Today’s critical cartographers are “aware of gender and other dimensions of power (e.g., class, race, heterosexuality) and advocate progression politics that destabilize these power hierarchies” (Pavlovskaya and St. Martin 2007, 592); in the case of the suffrage movement, while suffragists were aware of power differences and generally advocated progressive politics, a conscious political decision was made to exclude any race other than white in order to achieve the goal of suffrage for the majority of the movement’s constituents.
References


