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Tea and Suffrage
ABSTRACT

This article explores the special relationship between tea and woman suffrage in the early twentieth century. It examines the use of tea by varied suffragists in the California woman suffrage campaign of 1911, showing how and why suffragists used tea as a tool for gaining the vote and why tea held a privileged position as a suffrage food. It explores the meanings and uses of tea in the United States at the turn of the century and argues that the feminine, domestic, and refined associations of tea made it particularly useful for suffragists. It shows how tea was extensively used by suffragists, who served it and sold it in aid of the cause, in order to make a claim for their domesticity and refinement, even as they made relatively radical political claims and fought a popular image of mannish, extremist suffragettes.

Keywords: gender, suffrage, tea, activism

Introduction

In 1912–13, the Lipton Tea Company ran a series of ads in The Woman Voter, linking tea drinking to suffrage activity with poems, including:

Dear Ladies: If you'd win the men
'Round to your way of thinking
Discuss the question now and then.
Across the table drinking
Lipton’s Tea.¹

Why did Lipton’s see a link between suffrage and tea, one strong enough to make it the basis of their advertisements? And why did other tea-related goods hold a special status in suffrage periodicals? “Votes for Women” cups and dishes from the Art China Import Co. and specialty tea biscuits, “Suffragette Crackers,” were among the very few commercial goods advertised in The Women’s Journal and The Woman Voter to be marked explicitly with a suffrage slogan. The other goods marked with suffrage slogans were typically political pins and postcards, and were made for suffrage organizations to sell as fundraisers, while these tea-related suffrage items were sold commercially, for profit.² Why did tea hold a special status in relation to the suffrage movement in the early twentieth century?

This article will explore this special relationship between tea and suffrage in the context of the 1911 California woman suffrage campaign. It will argue that suffragists made use, at times deliberately and at other times perhaps unconsciously, of the particular meanings of tea in the early twentieth-century United States. Suffragists’ use of tea was commented on by a
number of journalists. An August 11, 1911 article in the San Francisco Call, describing the use of tea by California suffragists, had the headline "Boston Tea Party is Far Eclipsed by California Women." In this article, and in a host of other articles in San Francisco papers, the New York Times, and suffrage periodicals, suffragists' love of tea was repeatedly proclaimed. Tea was constantly mentioned as part of suffrage parlor meetings, suffrage headquarters activities, suffrage fundraisers, and suffrage products, and was associated with women's suffrage in a way not paralleled by any other commodity or substance. California suffragists made use of tea in domestic contexts, serving tea in their parlors in the interest of the cause, as well as in commercial contexts, selling tea both by the cup in tearooms they managed themselves and by the box in department stores, trade fairs, and other commercial venues.

In their multiple uses of tea, California suffragists variously highlighted meanings that tea carried, including domesticity, femininity, whiteness, elitism, and even modernity.

**The California Woman Suffrage Campaign of 1911**

The successful 1911 California woman suffrage campaign was a significant victory for suffragists, who saw it as a "turning point for the national women's movement," which was working to get the vote on a state-by-state basis. Only five states gave women the vote prior to the California victory in 1911: Wyoming in 1890, Colorado in 1893, Utah and Idaho in 1896, and Washington in 1910, fourteen years after Utah and Idaho. Once California women won the vote, they immediately set out to share the secrets of their success with other suffragists, both through the publications *How We Won the Vote in California* and *Winning Equal Suffrage in California* and through the work of many California organizers on campaigns in other states. The California campaign helped to turn the tide, and California's 1911 victory was followed by Oregon, Kansas, and Arizona in 1912, Illinois in 1913, Montana and Nevada in 1914, and by several other states soon afterward. These state victories helped lead to the passage of the federal amendment in 1920.

The 1911 California campaign modeled important new methods of suffrage organizing and campaigning. Rather than being entirely dominated by the white, native-born, elite women who had long been the primary suffrage activists, the California campaign was run by a coalition of suffrage groups, ranging from the Club Women's Franchise League to the Wage Earners' Suffrage League, who used a wide variety of tactics to target a broad swath of voters, including immigrants, workers, and African Americans. The coalition also worked carefully on creating an image for woman suffrage in
California and diffusing it in a number of ways, including through newspapers, which were targeted by an organized press bureau that sent news items and photographs of suffragists to illustrate them. Their canny use of publicity was particularly influential with suffragists in other states, and was taken up with particular vigor by New York suffragists in 1915. California suffragists used several tactics explicitly borrowed from advertising, including creating a unified symbol, color, and slogan for the campaign and repeating them as often as possible, through a wide range of venues including store windows, an electric sign, posters, postcards, and stickers.

In constructing an image for themselves, the California suffragists had to work against two powerful existing ideas about suffragists. The first was an image of suffragists as masculine, “no longer like a woman” because interested in participating in politics. This image was epitomized by antisuffrage cartoons that used the trope of suffrage transforming the roles of the sexes in the home, as suited women went out to vote and aproned men were left in the kitchen with the baby. The second was the image of radical suffragettes in England, who were smashing windows and otherwise using aggressive methods that conspicuously did not follow the rules of proper deportment and often broke the law. Because of their desire to distinguish themselves from the English suffragettes, California suffragists, like many others in the United States, preferred to be called suffragists. This distinction was noted in a contemporary cartoon that contrasted thin, well-dressed suffragists in elaborate hats, holding a sign saying “Votes for Women (please),” and bowing to a policeman labeled “law and order” with wild-haired, broom-wielding, unattractive suffragettes, whose sign read “Votes for Women!!!!”, in the act of throwing a brick at the policeman’s head. Both of these images were used actively by antisuffrage forces, who argued that the women who wanted the vote were those too unattractive to be able to use traditional feminine wiles, and referred to their opponents as “manly and mud-slinging suffragettes.”

To combat both the idea of suffragists as unwomanly and as violently radical, California suffragists worked to underline their femininity and propriety. They emphasized two very different aspects of femininity: youthful beauty and domesticity. The image of suffragists as young, beautiful, and fashionable was remarked upon in an article in the scrapbook of Fannie McLean, a San Francisco suffragist:

The “shrieking sisterhood” of suffragists is a thing of the past. No more shall man be compelled to defend himself against the short haired, vituperative enthusiasts of the last century. In contrast with the “old order that passeth” is the suffragette of the present day, who must be a dainty feminine creature with the prettiest of manners...
Articles and authors often remarked on the beauty and modernity of the young suffragists, who, according to the San Francisco Chronicle, "refute the popular impression that the cause is only espoused by the advanced and the unbeautiful." Similarly the San Francisco Examiner reported that the ushers at a meeting in the Scottish Rite Temple on September 29, 1911 were “a brilliant throng of beautiful women gowned in a style benefiting a gala occasion, and made a very pretty picture in itself an argument for equal suffrage it would take a mile of logic to overcome." The presentation of young, stylish women as one face of suffrage was a deliberate strategy; the official report of the committee that organized San Francisco public meetings argued that well-dressed ushers, wearing tailored costumes in the afternoon and “full afternoon dress” in the evenings, functioned as “a convincing argument against the claim that the suffragist is not essentially feminine.” The association of youth and beauty with suffrage was further underlined by the stylish image chosen as the emblem of the 1911 California campaign and reproduced in posters, postcards, and on stickers. Thisposter, the winner of a widely advertised competition, showed a young woman in front of the Golden Gate, with the setting sun creating a halo around her head. She wears a long straight dress and a robe reminiscent of the designs of Paul Poiret, with elaborate embroidery along the hem, and holds a scroll proclaiming “Votes for Women.” The overall style of the poster is reminiscent of the Vienna secessionists, and is very modern for 1911.

In addition to constructing an image of feminine youth and beauty, suffragists also worked hard to emphasize their domesticity and maternal femininity. Many of their arguments for the vote were based on women’s domestic role. Antisuffragists often based their arguments against suffrage on the ideal that women’s place was in the home, and argued that giving women the vote would threaten the centrality of the home for women and destroy the sanctity of the home. Suffragists countered by describing the vote as an extension of women’s duties in the home, a way for women to protect the health and morality of their children. They argued that in the modern world women needed the vote in order to fulfill their role as mothers, because how else could they control the purity of the milk their children drank or the cleanliness of the air, water, and streets they encountered every day? Suffragists also argued for the vote as a way of improving women’s power as municipal housekeepers. In the municipal housekeeping movement women’s clubs (largely white and middle- to upper-middle-class) organized downtown clean-ups, donated trash bins to relieve the problem of litter and teach citizens to keep the city clean, pushed for and often organized street cleaning, beautified cities through street furnishings.
and other measures, and educated decision makers and others by sponsoring lectures and plans by urban planning experts.\footnote{17} Many suffrage cartoons and postcards, including ones used in the California campaign, argued that women’s votes would make the city cleaner and more moral, showing suffrage women cleaning up dirty politics and the dirty city with brooms and vacuum cleaners.\footnote{18} In addition to making the political argument for the vote, these postcards also emphasized women’s domesticity, even as they extended it into the public realm.

As well as arguing for the relationship between domesticity and the vote, many suffragists emphasized their own domesticity through their modes of participation in the movement. They sold homemade jam, as in other states suffragists had sold cakes and other home-produced items, showing that they retained their domestic skills, even as they argued for their rights as full members of the public. As will be discussed at more length later in the article, many elite suffragists also held meetings in their parlors rather than public halls, further associating the suffrage movement with the home, the “proper” place for women. In both of these cases, women suffragists were in part simply continuing their common practices, such as selling jam and handiwork at charity fairs and entertaining other club women in their homes. However, these practices also functioned to emphasize their feminine domesticity, a trait which California suffragists were interested in highlighting.

The images of suffragists produced in the California campaign tended to be of elite women. The suffragists enacting domesticity in their campaign activities worked very much within the mode of club women, by entertaining in their homes. In addition the imagery of municipal housekeeping used within the campaign referenced the elite club women who were part of that movement. Similarly the image of young, beautiful suffragists is of distinctly elite and fashionable creatures. This helped to distinguish them further from the English suffragettes, who included working women, “mill women with the muscles of men and the strength of Amazons,” who were major players in assaults on the residences of cabinet members and other radical actions.\footnote{19} Working-class women were referenced in the arguments of the California campaign. For example they argued for the importance of the vote for nonelite women who were struggling to bring up their children in dirty cities and also for working women who needed the vote to have more control over their working conditions. However, for the most part the image California suffragists produced was of elite women working on behalf of more passive working women, except in their outreach to unions, which was done entirely by members of the Wage Earners’ Suffrage League.
Drinking Tea for Suffrage

Tea was used by many California suffragists as one element in the construction of their image. To present themselves as feminine and domestic, they made use of the existing meanings of tea in multiple ways, through tea parties, tearooms, and selling tea. In particular they harnessed the feminine and elite meanings that tea had come to have in America by the beginning of the twentieth century. Tea had a long history as a feminine drink, and was tied to femininity in England from its beginnings, as tea was linked to the person of Catharine of Braganza, of Portugal, who married Charles II of England in 1662. This marriage secured British trading routes with China, where tea was grown, and was celebrated in a poem by Edward Waller, “Of Tea, commended by her majesty.” In her book Consuming Subjects Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace argues this poem “publicly linked the drinking of tea to the queen” and “effectively promoted the drinking of tea as a definitively British, upper-class, feminine, and domestic activity.”

Tea began as an expensive substance, as it was imported and highly taxed by the British government, both in England and its colonies. Not only was tea expensive, but so were the accoutrements required to properly brew and serve it, which typically included not just a teapot, often of silver, and porcelain teacups, but also a tea canister, a slop bowl, containers for cream and sugar, plus tongs for the sugar, spoons, and saucers. Tea began as a drink of the upper classes, and in the American context, this class association has to a large extent remained.

As Kowaleski-Wallace has argued, tea was also a particularly domestic drink—the feminine, domestic counterpart to masculine, public coffee. The tea table became a symbol of feminine, domestic refinement as well as of female consumption, of tea, of china (a major consumer craze in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century), and of gossip. The tea table was used as a symbol of feminine conversation, gossip, and bagatelles in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as expressed in the titles of many books of anecdotes for women published in both England and the United States.

Tea was associated with the domestic and the feminine in America as well. Richard Hooker, in Food and Drink in America, cites an English visitor who wrote that tea was the “darling” of New England women in 1740, who “sipped tea for an hour or more in the morning and again in the afternoon,” always using an elaborate China tea equipage. As in Britain tea was drunk primarily in the home, and always served by a woman, either the mother or eldest daughter, to family members and guests, as has been illustrated by Rodris Roth’s careful study of tea drinking in eighteenth-century America. This contrasted to coffee, which was commonly drunk by men in public coffeehouses, although during the eighteenth-century boycott of tea coffee...
often replaced tea in domestic rituals. Hooker mentions as well that American coffeehouses, like their British counterparts, did not serve tea, and suggests it was because tea was considered “too effeminate.”

One potentially feminine attribute of tea is its lack of alcohol, and it was often promoted as a temperance drink. Its nonalcoholic but caffeinated nature, which means that it “cheers, but does not inebriate,” combined with its association with the home, made it the perfect antiliquor. For example a circular quoted by Gideon Nye, in his 1850 pamphlet on tea and the trade, argued that “the man who enjoys a cup of good tea, and can get it, with its necessary concomitants, fire and comfort, at home, will not be in much danger of turning out after the labors of the day to seek the poisonous excitement of the gin house.” Gideon Nye himself argued for the “beneficial influences of the extended use of the leaf, as contributing to temperance and to the domestic and social comforts of the people, and hence to their refinement,” an argument which also underlines the class associations of tea as a drink of refinement. The association between tea and temperance became particularly salient in the context of the strong temperance movement in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. This particular meaning was a double-edged sword for suffragists, however, for although the Women’s Christian Temperance Union was an important power within the woman suffrage movement, the necessity of winning the votes of drinking men meant that the California suffragists in 1911 tended to play down their associations with the temperance movement.

In the nineteenth century, the meanings of tea in the British and American contexts began to diverge. In Britain, especially after tea began to be produced commercially in colonial India in the mid-nineteenth century, tea became a drink shared by all classes and both sexes, although the association of tea with the home, and with women, still remained to some extent. For example the feminine domestic association of serving tea is expressed by the phrase “I’ll be mother,” meaning “I will pour the tea.” In America hot tea never became as common as in England, although it was drunk quite widely in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Waverly Root and Richard de Rochemont, in Eating in America, argue that Americans tended not to drink much tea after the mid-nineteenth century because of problems with supply: during the war of 1812 tea was hard to get and Americans became accustomed to drinking coffee, while after the war the quality of tea available was terrible, while coffee was cheap and good. By the second half of the nineteenth century, America was the largest consumer of coffee in the world, while tea was much less common. In this context of rarity, in the United States tea retained its close ties to femininity and to upper-class refinement, in essence keeping its late eighteenth-century associations.
It is these associations—femininity, domesticity, and elite white refinement—that were harnessed by California suffragists when they decided to make active use of tea, such that their campaign became “a ‘tea fight’ with a vengeance.” As the California suffragists were a diverse group, not all of them were engaged with the use of tea. Not surprisingly, given the class and race associations of tea, it was the more elite women who used it most often. In addition the particular modes in which suffragists used tea, and the extent to which they were explicitly, implicitly, or at times probably unconsciously harnessing the meanings of tea to their cause, varied from group to group.

Elite women most often used tea in the context of tea parties, which, along with their close cousin the parlor meeting, had been the primary form of suffrage organization and recruitment in the 1896 California campaign and continued to be important in the 1911 campaign. These events, held in the homes of prominent suffragists, combined the rituals of domestic sociability with those of the political meeting. These teas were often described in the newspaper in the language of the social column, often actually in the social column, or at least on the women’s page of the paper. For example a paragraph in the New York Times describing a suffrage tea held by the prominent suffrage leader Carrie Chapman Catt described the decorations (in suffrage yellow), named nine of the prominent guests, and included the information that “Miss Mary Garrett Hay introduced the guests. Miss Flanagan assisted in receiving, and Mrs. May Dudley Greeley and Miss A.E. Cameron were at the tea table.” This language very closely paralleled the way women’s club meetings were covered in the social column. Coverage of meetings held outside the home, which typically closed with the taking of tea, often included similar details as to the ladies serving.

When, in their 1896 campaign, the California State Suffrage Organization moved their headquarters from a suffragist’s home to rented offices in the façade of a downtown department store, they still served tea and presented both their space and their serving of tea in terms of domestic sociability. The offices were decorated with flowers and plants to emphasize their femininity, and the decor of the office, including flowered wallpaper and small elaborate parlor tables, echoed that of a respectable domestic parlor. Newspaper coverage of their move to the new headquarters included a note stating that “the lady managers of the bureau desire to return special thanks to the kind friends who keep the rooms fragrant and lovely by means of their generous donations of flowers.” This emphasized the “lovely” and feminine quality of the office and downplayed any relation it may have borne to typical rational masculine office decor and function. Flowers were similarly used to feminize meeting halls and other public spaces, and were even used to decorate polling places the first time San Francisco women voted. In their headquarters office the suffragists regularly served tea during evening
receptions referred to as “at homes,” in which they treated the office as a parlor and the “hostess par Excellence, suffragist Miss Mary R. Hay,” as the lady of the house receiving visitors. Similarly in 1911 the Oakland Suffrage Amendment League announced weekly “at homes” to which “all their friends have been cordially invited ... and true hospitality in the shape of Equality Tea was dispensed by the receiving party.”

Many suffrage teas took on the format of the domestic social occasion, but others borrowed from its variant form, club women’s teas. These were typically held in polite public places such as hotels and high-end restaurants, including Techau’s in San Francisco, a regular meeting place of the exclusive Daughters of California Pioneers, or Sherry’s and Delmonico’s in New York City. Several upper-class suffrage supporters built on the tradition of using these locations for club meetings when they created suffrage organizations. For example in 1894 a group of New York “society women” who supported suffrage, but wished to have “no official connection with the professional ‘women’s rights’ agitators,” held weekly receptions at Sherry’s in New York City. This restaurant, one of the most prominent in the city, also served as a properly feminine space, as they were ensconced in “a feminine snugger separated by drapery from the rest of the main floor,” with “pretty gilded chairs,” and “the daintiest and most comfortable of divans, and the odors of chocolates and bonbons pervaded the room.” Not only was the furniture, with its daintiness, expressive of femininity, but so was the scent of chocolate. As Jane Dusselier has argued, in this time period chocolate was gendered female, and it was not until the early twentieth century, with the connection of chocolate and soldiers during the First World War, that chocolate took on a mixed-gender association.

Just as the New York suffragists used Sherry’s, in San Francisco the Club Women’s Suffrage League had their 1911 headquarters in the St. Francis Hotel, on Union Square, the most prominent hotel in the city. They served “Equality Tea” there every Saturday to “every man woman and child whose frame of mind is such that there is the slightest chance to enlist his or her services in the movement.” As with the announcements of teas in women’s homes, the article announcing the Club Women’s regular teas mentioned the names of the women serving tea, and was illustrated with a handsome portrait of “Mrs. Rufus Steele, who will dispense tea for suffrage.”

Suffrage organizations used their tea parties to try to win converts, combining hospitality with politics. In San Francisco the Club Women’s Franchise League had regular “pink teas” to which they invited antisuffragists. After the guests had been “made perfectly comfortable with tea, wafers, and conversation about their babies and their cooks ... a little suffrage [was] adroitly applied.” The San Francisco Call warned that a visitor to other teas hosted by the club women “must be prepared to get in addition to the tea a goodly round of equal suffrage, and, upon leaving the
quarters to find his pockets bulging with cards and literature arguing that women be given the ballot. Similarly in 1909 the New York Equal Suffrage League planned to “beguile its members and visitors with tea,” although, according to the New York Times, the one antisuffragist they had caught they were unable to convert because she didn’t drink tea.

With these tea parties suffragists were making use of the feminine and elite meanings not only of tea, but also of the afternoon tea party. Jane Pettigrew, in The Tea Companion, tells an apocryphal story of the invention of afternoon tea in the early nineteenth century by the Seventh Duchess of Bedford, who, because of the long gap between a light luncheon and a late evening meal, is said to have experienced what she called “a sinking feeling” in the middle of the afternoon. To satisfy her pangs of hunger, she asked her maid to bring a pot of tea and a little light refreshment to her room, and she found this arrangement so agreeable that she quickly started asking her friends to join her for afternoon tea.

This story encompasses the important elements of tea—a light meal, served with tea, eaten in the afternoon by women of leisure in a domestic setting. This nineteenth-century entirely feminine form of tea evolved from an earlier eighteenth-century form, in which both male and female guests were included. Nancy Shippen wrote in her 1785 diary of one such occasion, “at about 4 in the afternoon Dr. Cutting came in, and we spent the afternoon in the most agreeable chitchat manner, drank a very good dish of tea together, and then separated.” In this context tea as an occasion, like the tea table, its symbol, was a domestic gathering with a female host, characterized by the drinking of tea and light, “chit-chat” conversation. Eighteenth-century teas were sometimes held in the evening as well as the afternoon, but the feminine, domestic, and frivolous nature of the occasion continued into its incarnation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Tea as a social occasion reinforced the gender and class associations that were already tied to tea the drink. As an afternoon occasion, a tea could only be indulged in by women of leisure, not by middle-class men, more likely in the nineteenth century to be in the office in the afternoon, and also not by women without servants, who would be engaged in household tasks. The frivolity of the occasion, emphasized by the sweets and elaborate baked goods that typically accompanied the tea, further marked it as a ritual of pure leisure.

The elite suffragists who held suffrage teas, as well as the female antisuffragists who held tea parties to argue against the vote, clearly evoked the feminine and elite connotations of tea parties, even as they replaced frivolity with earnest politics. However, it is unclear to what extent these women consciously evoked the meanings of tea or simply continued their
existing practices as club women, without the intent of using tea and tea parties as markers of feminine propriety. It is likely, however, that the use of tea was not entirely unthinking, as it was regularly remarked upon in the papers, as when antisuffragists met on a hot day, and the *Los Angeles Times* announced “Ices Temper Heat Sans Tea: Anti-Suffragists Forego the Cheering Beverage: Warmth of the Day and of the Occasion Causes the Hostess to Serve Ladyfingers, Macaroons, and Frozen Dainties Instead of the Anticipated Infusion of Leaves of Ceylon.” In addition tea was branded as an “equality beverage” both in San Francisco and in Los Angeles, as will be discussed in more detail below.

**Selling Tea for Suffrage**

While some California suffragists held tea parties, others, in somewhat less elite organizations than the Club Women’s Franchise League, opened commercial tearooms to serve women afternoon tea. By opening tearooms, suffragists moved into the commercial realm. Taking on the role of businesswomen, suffragists shifted their image away from that of society hostesses to something more professional, proprietors serving tea to customers, not guests. This shift was in keeping with many of the tactics engaging the commercial realm that were used in force by the California suffragists. They advertised through billboards, posters, broadsides, and electric signs; arranged window displays in department stores; showed slides before the show in nickelodeons and vaudeville theaters; and ran not only tearooms but also a suffrage shop and a lunchroom for working women. Rather than staying safely in the home or in homelike spaces, California suffragists made use of public commercial spaces, using commercial methods of selling. In their tearooms, they sold both tea and suffrage, making money while converting their clientele.

In San Francisco in 1911 the Woman's Suffrage Party served tea at ten every day in “a model tearoom in the club headquarters.” This room was organized on the model of a commercial tearoom, and much was made of its design. One article described the interior as a typical suffrage space, “tastefully decorated with yellow bunting, suffrage posters and bowls of flowers, which seem to have bloomed in yellow and purple for the express purpose of furthering the cause.” A later article declared that the tearoom would be decorated “in true Chinese style, with oriental decorations on the wall and far eastern tea sets on the tables.” This design emphasized the tea over suffrage, and closely approximates one typical mode of commercial tearoom design, the oriental. Whatever the final decorative scheme, the Woman’s Suffrage Party tearoom was described not as an ersatz parlor in which ladies gave teas, but as “a tearoom that will attract visitors to taste
some of the delights the suffrage party has in store for its adherents.\textsuperscript{57} Commercial tearooms were also opened by the Collegiate Equal Suffrage League in New York City, who "served suffrage arguments free to all who take tea," and by the Equal Suffrage Party in Georgia, whose 1917 Daffodil Tea Room and Shop sold not only tea and lunches, but also "exquisite needle work.\textsuperscript{58}

In creating commercial tearooms suffragists were making use of a highly feminized public space, and one which was typically owned and managed by women.\textsuperscript{59} The femininity of both tea the drink and tea the occasion were first harnessed by hotels and department stores, which opened tearooms in the late nineteenth century in order to provide women with a polite place to eat in public. Because hotels functioned as a temporary domestic space for their guests, their spaces, including women's and family dining rooms, parlors, and tea rooms, functioned as safe places where elite women might respectably spend time in public. Similarly department stores, which were imagined as entirely feminine worlds, and which also often included parlors that functioned as a grand counterpart to domestic parlors, were safe public spaces for white middle-class women. Ensconced within the domesticated space of the hotel or the feminized space of the department store, tearooms gave refined women a place to eat untouched by the masculine associations of the restaurant and the alcohol typically served there, replaced in these feminine haunts by temperance tea. In addition, at this time, unescorted women were often refused service in restaurants, so hotel and department store tearooms served an essential function for women who wished to dine alone or with other women.\textsuperscript{60} In the first decade of the twentieth century, hotel and department store tearooms were joined by freestanding tearooms, most of which were owned and run by women. By 1911 an article in \textit{Good Housekeeping} discussed the "vogue of the tea room," which continued unabated into the 1930s.\textsuperscript{61} Many of these tearooms were in suburban locations, visited by tourists out for drives or bicycle rides, but many more were urban. Urban tearooms served women of leisure, who went downtown to go shopping.

Tearooms had dainty and feminine interiors, which marked them as feminine space. Department store and hotel tearooms were often light, airy spaces reminiscent of gardens, decorated with ferns, palms, and wisteria.\textsuperscript{62} Many other tearooms were based on the model of a parlor, feminine touches reflective of the personality and refinement of the proprietress.\textsuperscript{63} Whether imitating a garden or a parlor, tearooms were decorated with feminine details, and the decoration was considered a vital aspect of the business by all the handbooks on tearoom management. The most commonly used word to describe tearoom furnishings was "dainty," and feminine flowers were joined by ruffled curtains, doilies, cretonne, chintz, and carefully chosen knick-knacks.\textsuperscript{64}
The femininity of tearooms was also expressed through their food, including "dainty sandwiches and salads, and ... desserts that have a little flavor of the home-made about them." They offered light meals, served by a waitress wearing a "nifty little apron instead of one of the all-enveloping variety," with "a mincing manner that indicates refinement."\(^65\) Just as the interior decoration indicated feminine refinement through its frills, so did the presentation of food:

The meat dishes are garnished with a bit of parsley or a lettuce leaf and the desserts rest upon small plates that are "underlined" with doilies; the china is dainty, the napkins have a bit of individuality about them; the ices and sherbets are finished with a luscious cherry.\(^66\)

The food in tearooms was not only feminine, but also aimed at elite patrons, who could afford high prices for a minimal meal or a frivolous snack.\(^67\) Men avoided tearooms as "entirely inappropriate and unsatisfactory for masculine needs" because of both the food and the decor.\(^68\) They found the food "canary bird food" served in "doll-sized portions," and saw tearooms as the equivalent of "a hermetically sealed lodge of some secret society of women which, moreover, held little appeal for men whether they could have successfully invaded its precincts or not."\(^69\)

The extreme femininity of tearooms helped to make them appropriate for women to run as well as to frequent. Tearooms were typically run by white, college-educated women, who brought their refinement as hostesses and decorators to bear on decorating their tearooms and creating menus.\(^70\) Elite women also entered the tearoom business through women’s exchanges, which raised money for women down on their luck by selling handicrafts and running tearooms.\(^71\) The norm of Anglo-American female proprietorship made tearooms an appropriate venue for woman suffragists to expand into the commercial realm without compromising their respectable feminine image. Running a tearoom was a way of making money as well as converts, and potentially a way to bring in a clientele less interested in suffrage who might not attend a tea party but would stop in at an attractive tearoom for refreshment. Other commercial spaces run by suffragists in San Francisco certainly did manage to attract visitors who were interested in the business rather than the cause. The cafeteria lunchroom run by the Votes for Women Club in the shopping district pulled in potential converts with the promise of good, affordable food, while the storefront suffrage shop opened on Market Street by the College Equal Suffrage League pulled in curious passers-by interested in their goods.\(^72\)

California suffragists also engaged with the commercial realm when they sold packaged tea. The Woman’s Suffrage Party in San Francisco created a new brand of tea, "Equality Tea," thus explicitly marking tea as a suffrage
substance. Equality Tea was packaged in boxes designed by the suffragists, “sold at their prices in the interest of the cause,” and “talked of, sold, and drunk wherever suffragists are gathered together.”73 In addition to selling the tea from their headquarters, the Woman’s Suffrage Party set up a booth in the Emporium, a prominent San Francisco department store, in which one of their members sold and served tea “and talks the advantages of political equality to all that will hear her,” as well as distributing 200 “Votes for Women” buttons to Emporium employees.74 This booth was kept running for a month, and then the sales were expanded to other San Francisco stores and stores throughout the state. The selling and serving of Equality Tea was also expanded beyond stores and suffrage headquarters to booths at Northern California fairs, including the pure food exhibition in San Jose, the California State Fair in Sacramento, the Cherry Festival in San Leandro, and the annual industrial fair of the Retailers Protective Association in San Francisco.75 Equality Tea was also served by other suffrage organizations, such as the Club Women’s Franchise League. In Los Angeles suffragists similarly sold “Votes-for-Women Tea.”76

The brand name Equality Tea is not without its ironies. At the most basic level, as I have argued, tea was a drink associated with elite white femininity, and its use commonly underlined the elite status of women suffragists, and thus the inequality between them and others. While California woman suffragists argued for political equality between men and women, they were by no means believers in equality between all men or between all women. In their arguments to fellow members of the white upper and middle classes, they commonly compared themselves to class, ethnic, and racial others, such as Chinese and Italian immigrant men, to make the argument that, as elite white women, they were more worthy of the vote than many men who did have the franchise. Because they needed the votes of immigrant men in order to carry the state, they also reached out to immigrants, through leaflets, postcards, advertisements in foreign-language papers, and foreign-language meetings.77 To these groups they emphasized equality and the importance of the vote for working women, not the inequity of allowing immigrant men to vote and not elite women. However, for many suffragists wooing immigrant men was at best a necessary expedient, and more than one suffragist admitted that “the bitter irony of the appeal to the ignorant immigrant to permit us a voice in the land of our forefathers made some of ... us grit our teeth.”78

In the creation of Equality Tea suffragists used the tactics of modern advertising. Rather than simply serving and selling tea, they created a new brand. In the 1911 California campaign, suffragists focused on asserting the need for woman suffrage, as well as arguing for it. They argued that “people are not all convinced through reason, and that although the proposition that women should vote is seriously and profoundly true, it will, at first, be
established ... much as the virtues of breakfast food are established, —by affirmation.” To this end they used the techniques of branding, explaining that “the psychology of advertising teaches us to repeat, with slight variations, a familiar design until the public eye is caught by the manifold repetitions of the same arresting idea.” The slogan “Votes for Women,” the color yellow, and the prize poster all helped to keep suffrage in the public eye on the streets of San Francisco and Los Angeles. Similarly Equality Tea made suffrage visible in private kitchens and parlors as well as in tearooms. More importantly, in creating a brand name for Equality Tea, suffragists not only encouraged its purchase and consumption, but also changed the meaning of tea more generally, marking it as the “equality beverage,” whether or not the tea drunk was actually of the suffrage brand.

Conclusion

The extensive use of tea by suffragists was not exclusive to California; their example was continued in force by suffragists in New York and elsewhere, such that the *The Woman Voter* commented in 1913 that at suffrage gatherings, “there was tea on the first floor, tea in the hallway, tea in the back parlor, tea in your hat, tea in your lap—and homemade cake everywhere else.” This combination of tea and homemade cake underlines the connection of tea with domesticity, and the domestic and feminine meanings of tea were always central. Tea was even used by women who had won the vote to feminize their electoral activities. A 1912 *New York Times* article entitled “The Suffrage and Tea” wrote that Colorado women, who had won the vote in 1893, “have afternoon tea and talk over the candidates, finding out everything they can about their fitness for office.” The article praised the use of tea, writing “economical, social, mildly stimulating, how could one devise a better form of that eupeptic pleasure which invariably should accompany the performance of duty?” Tea, femininity, and suffrage were so tightly tied that, according to the *New York Times*, many suffragists who did not care for tea drank it on principle. As Miss Florence Guernsey told the *Times*, “I don’t like it at all, but you know, being a suffragist, I have to take it to appear womanly.”

Tea was a useful symbolic substance for suffragists precisely because of its “womanly” attributes. Tea was womanly because it was connected to the home, but tea was also marked by its use by elite women. It helped to reinforce both the femininity and the gentility of suffragists as they argued for a significant expansion of the social and political role of women. In the American context, tea evoked not only the home, but also privileged white femininity, whether in the parlor at tea parties or in public in tearooms. In every context in which suffragists used tea, it helped to mark them as...
feminine and refined, counteracting antisuffrage images of them as masculine and revolutionary. As consumers of tea, suffragists made use of their traditional association with the home and the tea table to feminize and domesticate political meetings and political talk. Elite suffragists reinforced both their elite status and their femininity by serving tea at tea parties. As servers of tea in tearooms, suffragists also made use of a feminized commercial space, one often run by women, as well as patronized by women, to raise money and gain converts. Suffrage tearooms were typically run by middle- and upper-class suffragists with a reform-minded bent, and they borrowed a form that was feminine and genteel even though it was commercial. As peddlers of tea suffragists engaged fully in the commercial realm, associating their political organization with the feminine qualities of tea, rebranding tea as an equality beverage, making money for their cause, and providing their adherents with the tea to fuel more tea-table conversations aimed at converting fellow tea drinkers into suffragists.

Notes

1. The Woman Voter, December 1912, 21, and January 1913, 23. One of the other ads in this series presented Lipton's as something to be voted for by newly enfranchised women:

When women get the right to vote,
And help to run the nation
There is no doubt this rally shout
Will win by acclamation
Lipton's Tea
Honest tea is the best policy. The Woman Voter, September 1912, 13.

The motif of women voting for products was common by the 1910s, and is discussed in Margaret Finnegan, Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 128–31.


5. The primary suffrage organizations in the coalition were the College Equal Suffrage League, the Club Women's Franchise League, the Woman's Suffrage Party, the California State Suffrage Association, and the Wage Earners' Suffrage League. An article announcing the coalition also mentioned the Susan B. Anthony Club, the Equal Suffrage League, and the Votes for Women Club. "Battle for Woman Suffrage Now has Board of Strategy," San Francisco Call, August 7, 1911, 5.

6. Finnegan, Selling Suffrage, 56, 63.
7 “Women Freely Give Money for Ballot Battle,” San Francisco Call, August 20, 1911.


9 “Suffragists’ and ‘Suffragettes’,” in Susan B. Anthony Memorial Collection, Huntington Library, Clippings, Volume 18, 71.


11 “Mrs. Maud Wood Park Compares Short Haired Enthusiasts and Dainty Advocates,” clipping in Fannie McLean Scrapbook, McLean Family papers, Bancroft Library of the University of California.


13 “Suffrage Cause is Boosted at Three Rallies,” San Francisco Examiner, September 30, 1911.

14 “Report on San Francisco Public Meetings,” College Equal Suffrage League, Winning Equal Suffrage in California. (Equal Suffrage League of Northern California, 1912). The idea that suffragists were deliberately using young stylish women was even remarked upon in a 1910 cartoon, illustrating a news item that stated “up-state women urge that pretty girl should plead suffrage case before Solons.” The cartoon shows a long-lashed improbably thin woman in a hobble skirt, high heels, and enormous hat standing in front of a dowdy, bespectacled suffragist all in black. The older, plainer suffragist holds a sign saying “Votes for Women,” while the cartoonishly attractive suffragist holds her hands together in supplication as she says “Please do.” “The Trump Card,” in Susan B. Anthony Memorial Collection, Huntington Library, Clippings, Volume 18, 25.

15 They were described as “the official ‘Votes for Women’ posters with the pretty girl upon them” by one speaker. “Women Freely Give Money for Ballot Battle,” San Francisco Call, August 20, 1911. The poster image was reproduced on 15,000 stickers and 15,600 postcards. College Equal Suffrage League, Winning Equal Suffrage, 48.

16 The most prominent exponent of this argument was Jane Addams, whose writings on the subject were circulated in pamphlets in the California campaign.


18 For example see the postcard “The Dirty Pool of Politics: Can We Clean It? Give Us a Chance!”, which was published by the Votes for Women Publishing Company in San Francisco in 1911 (California Clippings, Vol. 5, p. 38, Susan B. Anthony Memorial Collection, Huntington Library). See also Alice Sheppard, Cartooning for Suffrage (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994).

19 Anna Shaw, quoted in “Why Suffragettes Cannot Be Strictly Ladylike,” 1910 clipping in Susan B. Anthony Memorial Collection, Huntington Library. This distinction can also be seen in the cartoon contrasting suffragists and suffragettes discussed above. The suffragists
are very stylish, with enormous hats and very narrow skirts. In contrast the suffragettes wear shirtsleeves and old-fashioned, plain, full skirts and either very simple hats or no hats at all, and are thus marked as working-class women.


22 Jan Whittaker, Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn: A Social History of the Tea Room Craze in America (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002), 18. The main exception is with immigrants from Ireland and the British Isles, who brought with them a broader, cross-class consumption of tea.

23 Kowaleski-Wallace, Consuming Subjects, 23.

24 These include: Eliza Haywood, The tea-table, or A conversation between some polite persons of both sexes, at a lady’s visiting day (London: J. Roberts, 1725); A new tea-table miscellany, or bagatelles for the amusement of the fair sex (London: H. Slater, 1753); The Intellectual Regale, or Ladies’ Tea Tray (Philadelphia: Mrs. Carr, 1815); Mrs Mathews, Tea Table Talk, Ennobled Actresses, and Other Miscellanies (London: T.C. Newby, 1857).


28 Hooker, Food and Drink, 92.

29 Literary World, quoted by Nye, Tea, 40.

30 Nye, Tea, 42.

31 Nye, Tea, 34.


34 “Boston Tea Party is Far Eclipsed by California Women: Equality Beverage Used to Attract Recruits and Raise Suffrage Funds,” San Francisco Call, August 11, 1911.

35 “Suffragist or Suffragette.”

36 “Friends of Suffrage,” San Francisco Call, July 30, 1896.


38 Solomons, How We Won the Vote, 70.

39 “Suffragist ‘At Homes,’ New Social Feature to be Inaugurated During the Present Week,” San Francisco Call, August 18, 1896.


42 “Working for Woman Suffrage.”

44 “Equality Beverage to Coax Votes at the St. Francis,” San Francisco Call, Aug 11, 1911.

45 “Equality Beverage to Coax Votes.”

46 “Pink Tea in Extensive Use for Winning Over Antis,” San Francisco Chronicle, August 18, 1911.

47 “Equality Beverage to Coax Votes.”


49 Pettigrew, Tea Companion, 18.


51 Roth, “Tea-Drinking.”

52 Los Angeles Times, July 29, 1911.


54 “Boston Tea Party.”

55 “Boston Tea Party.”

56 “Equality Beverage.”

57 “Boston Tea Party.”


59 Whitaker, Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn, 5, 30–3.

60 Whitaker, Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn; Cynthia Brandimarte, “To Make the Whole World Homelike: Gender, Space, and America’s Tea Room Movement,” Winterthur Portfolio 30(1) (1995): 3.


62 The popularity of flowers was such that one hotel manager told the New York Times in 1910 that the flower bill for the tearoom was larger than the cost of the staff to run it (Whitaker, Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn, 22). The use of flowers to feminize public space was also very popular in the suffrage movement, and women decorated polling places with flowers when they first voted in California.

63 The Ware School of Tea Room Management, Lesson III: Interiors and Exteriors, Side Lines (New York: Ware School of Tea Room Management, 1927), 3; R.N. Elliott, Tea Room and Cafeteria Management (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1926), 29–36.

64 Ware School, Lesson III, 10.


67 Whitaker, in Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn, 26, also points out that the food in tearooms was “Anglo-American to the core” and thus would have been unappealing to recent immigrants, who would not have been welcomed in any case.

68 The Tea Room and Coffee Shop (Scranton, PA: Woman’s Institute of Domestic Arts and Sciences, 1932), 7.

Whitaker, *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn*, 30–5. Whitaker states that ‘those in the tea room business believed that it took ‘a gentlewoman to run a successful tea room,’ a notion that was closely allied with the belief that only a lady of refinement could—or should—make a salad” (p. 30).


Caroline Singer, “What Working Girls Do With Their 60 Minutes at Noon: Imbibe Votes for Women Arguments as Side-Dish to ‘Just Home Cooking’," clipping in Selina Solomons collection, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. College Equal Suffrage League, *Winning Equal Suffrage*, 33, describes a typical visitor to their storefront: ‘the pretty High School student who gushingly asks for a button. ‘I saw a girl with one,’ she says, ‘and I thought it was a fraternity pin. It is so cute. Only five cents? Ain’t they sweet? She told me I could get them in this building ... I think they’re awful cute. Oh no, I don’t want to join. I just want a pin.”

“Boston Tea Party.”

“Boston Tea Party.”


*Western Woman Voter*, September 1911.

California suffragists published leaflets in French, German, Italian, and Portuguese, and also one leaflet, “Extracts from the Speeches of Father Gleason,” that was aimed at convincing Catholics. They also chose mass-market postcards to appeal to Spanish, Italian, and Chinese tastes and printed an argument for women’s suffrage on these in those languages. Most of the foreign newspapers in San Francisco and Oakland—French, Italian, Swiss, German, Portuguese, and Chinese—were approached about printing suffrage articles and advertisements. Meetings were held in Italian and French, and delegations spoke at German clubs. One meeting was also held for the African American population. College Equal Suffrage League, *Winning Equal Suffrage*, 45, 49, 86–7, 39–40. “Mrs. Julia S. Sanborn Will Work Among Local Colored Folk,” *San Francisco Call*, August 24, 1911, 7.

Solomons, *How We Won the Vote*, 38.


“The Suffrage and Tea.”

“Tea for Converts.”