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3rd Place Contest Entry: "Make it a Woman's World": The 1911 California Woman's Suffrage Campaign

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Essay:

My research for this project began one year ago, when I chose my senior thesis topic in my junior seminar class. While I knew I wanted to do something connected to the woman suffrage movement in the United States, I was unsure of what path I wanted to take. One of my first steps in narrowing my topic was to search Leatherby Libraries' catalogue for interesting books and journal articles on the general topic. I also searched through JSTOR and Project Muse for inspiration. At the end of this initial research, I decided that I wanted to research the internal politics of the 1911 California woman suffrage campaign, looking particularly at how suffragists negotiated gender roles and expectations in their attempt to win the right to vote.

After initial research, it became clear to me that access to primary sources would be an important factor in determining my final research topic, as I was expecting to do much of my research online through the Leatherby Libraries. I exchanged a few emails with Special Collections and Archives librarian Rand Boyd at the outset of my research on what primary source materials were available at the Leatherby Libraries, though he also directed me to several online-based databases that were available through the library that would support my research. In particular, the UC Berkeley Bancroft Library had primary sources that would contribute to my research, from photographs of suffrage events to pieces of advertising and propaganda.

My research was also benefitted by several newspaper databases, including the Los Angeles Times ProQuest database, the California Digital Newspapers Collection, and the Library of Congress "Chronicle America" database. When using these databases, I first limited my search parameters to articles written between 1910 and 1912, hoping to find enough commentary before, during, and after the campaign. More often than not, this produced too many results, so I then searched for the specific term "woman suffrage" and "enfranchisement" during the year 1911. This produced the most helpful results, as I was able to comb through articles both on the pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage points of view. I also used the Library's search function and WorldCat to find pamphlets published by the suffragists in the months immediately following the campaign detailing their campaign efforts, and these really proved invaluable to my research.

Moving beyond primary source research, I also utilized the Interlibrary Loan program to great effect. I requested several books which Leatherby Libraries did not carry, including *A Shared Experience*:

Men, Women, and the History of Gender edited by Laura McCall and David Yacovone and *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* by Margaret Mary Finnegan, and this was extremely helpful to my research. I also borrowed books from the Leatherby Libraries' collections. Aileen S. Kraditor's *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1820-1920* was especially valuable to my research, as it helped form the bulk of my argument regarding the California suffragists' use of various ideological frames and how it contributed to how they thought about gender and the vote. I also utilized the Libraries' eBook collections, as I was able to peruse *How the Vote Was Won: Women Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* by Rebecca Mead and Susan Englander's article in *California Women and Politics: From the Gold Rush to the Great Depression*.

Once I found enough primary and secondary source material, I evaluated my materials to see how they could be used to support my thesis. I paid especial attention to sources that discussed political rights for women in terms of gender and how suffragists utilized different arguments in order to reach specific audiences. I synthesized various historians' analysis of the suffrage campaign in order to create my own analysis. I considered historians' backgrounds, and how this might impact their credibility and the validity of their analysis. I used similar techniques in the analysis of primary source material; I considered whether or not newspapers were supportive of suffrage or not, and looked at the backgrounds of specific authors and how this contributed to their perspective on the suffrage issue. I crosschecked arguments and statements against official literature published by suffrage organizations, as well as with secondary scholarly materials.

Through all the steps of my thesis, I have discovered that research, while at first daunting, can become much easier when one is organized and has good tools to conduct such research. I learned that beginning with historiography and secondary materials could guide me to valuable primary sources, and this made the research process much smoother. These skills will be useful during my summer internship as a researcher and writer with the Richard Nixon Library, as well as future plans for graduate studies.

Summary and Bibliography:

Operating within respectable notions of femininity, California suffragists created a successful cross-cultural mass campaign to achieve their political goals in 1911. The decentralized nature of the 1911 campaign allowed for greater flexibility of tactics and ideology, ultimately allowing California suffragists to frame suffrage in economically, politically, and socially attractive terms. Despite the fact that the movement was large and decentralized, California suffragists across political and class boundaries created a cross-cultural alliance to ultimately secure their unifying goal of universal suffrage for women. By adapting to American political traditions typically associated with male politics and to the growing visual consumer culture of the early twentieth century, activists manipulated public perception of suffrage so as to conform to socially acceptable notions of femininity, while simultaneously maintaining the assertion that suffrage was women's natural right as citizens. Despite differing beliefs on why women deserved the vote, women from diverse backgrounds stood behind suffrage as a political goal, successfully integrating economic, social, political, and historic arguments for their enfranchisement.

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