



Selling Suffrage

By Margaret Finnegan



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Margaret Finnegan's pathbreaking study of woman suffrage from the 1850s to the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 reveals how activists came to identify with consumer culture and employ its methods of publicity to win popular support through carefully crafted images of enfranchised women as "personable, likable, and modern."

Drawing on organization records, suffragists' papers and memoirs, and newspapers and magazines, Finnegan shows how women found it in their political interest to ally themselves with the rise of consumer culture--but the cost of this alliance was a concession of possibilities for social reform. When manufacturers and department stores made consumption central to middle-class life, suffragists made an argument for the ballot by comparing good voters to prudent comparison shoppers. Through suffrage commodities such as newspapers, sunflower badges, Kewpie dolls, and "Womanalls" (overalls for the modern woman), as well as pantomimes staged on the steps of the federal Treasury building, fashionable window displays, and other devices, "Votes for Women" entered public space and the marketplace. Together these activities and commodities helped suffragists claim legitimacy in a consumer capitalist society. Imaginatively interweaving cultural and political history, *Selling Suffrage* is a revealing look at how the growth of consumerism influenced women's self-identity.



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Editorial Review

Review

In this innovative, original, and exciting study, Finnegan adds immeasurably to our understanding of the culture of politics and the politics of culture. Linking the struggle for women's suffrage to the culture of consumer capitalism in the Progressive Era, "Selling Suffrage" shows how politics is not just a struggle for power but also for social space and moral authority.

Review

Selling Suffrage explores the fascinating topic of how the suffrage movement in the United States, with great savvy though not without some qualms along the way, marshalled the tactics of design and display from consumer culture to the cause of gaining women the vote. Finnegan's astute and nuanced analysis of a range of artifacts--posters, sandwich boards, hats, badges--raises intriguing questions about the roles of women: as political agitators, as consumers, and as marketers.

(Cecile Whiting, author of *A Taste for Pop: Pop Art, Gender, and Consumer Culture*)

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(George Lipsitz, author of *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s*)

About the Author

Margaret Finnegan received a Ph.D. in history from UCLA. She has taught at various universities, and lives and writes in Los Angeles.

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