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The Suffrage Postcard Project: Feminist Digital Archiving and Transatlantic Suffrage History

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THE SUFFRAGE POSTCARD PROJECT: TRANSATLANTIC SUFFRAGE HISTORY AND FEMINIST DIGITAL ARCHIVING

The Suffrage Postcard Project (SPP) <<https://thesuffragepostcardproject.omeka.net>> uses digital humanities methods to produce thematic analyses of its growing open-access digital archive of woman suffrage postcards. By developing a critical feminist digital humanities (DH) framework to explore the visual narratives that suffrage postcards produced during the 1900s and 1910s, especially in the United States and Britain, the SPP fosters critical approaches to feminist and transatlantic suffrage history and visual culture. It utilizes a range of digital tools, including Omeka and Python, to address the following research question: How can feminist digital humanities practices engender new visual historical narratives of the suffrage movement? Our aim is to better understand how gender and intersecting identity markers were deployed in suffrage postcards in ways that challenged, subverted, supported, and upheld hegemonic political structures.

The early twentieth century witnessed a proliferation of woman suffrage legislation across the globe. In 1893 and 1902 respectively, New Zealand and Australia began to extend the franchise to women. This had been preceded only by small communities on the Pitcairn Islands, the Isle of Man, and some western territories and states across the United States. At the turn of the twentieth century, women gained enfranchisement across the Scandinavian countries. Britain first passed qualified suffrage legislation in 1918; although this would only be extended to all British women a decade later in 1928, the Irish Free State extended voting rights to all women and men in 1922. The Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution also began the process of women's enfranchisement in the United States in 1920. Much of this early legislation constituted an important but nonetheless partial and exclusionary achievement; in particular, Indigenous women, colonized women, and women of African descent were rarely included in the parameters of this legislation and routinely faced judicial and extrajudicial methods of disenfranchisement.¹

The SPP's digital archive comprises suffrage postcards that were published for the international postcard market, especially in the United States and Britain. This article offers an introductory overview of the SPP, focusing on its interdisciplinary background and contribution to the fields of transatlantic suffrage history, visual studies, and archive studies. Coming from the disciplinary backgrounds of history and literary studies, we use an always evolving feminist digital humanities methodology to analyze the suffrage postcards in the SPP's digital corpus. Throughout this article, the phrase *suffrage postcards* will refer to postcards from both sides of the debate; when necessary, *pro-suffrage* and *anti-suffrage* will be used to articulate the political themes of discrete suffrage postcards.

As feminist scholars Alison Bartlett, Maryanne Dever, and Margaret Henderson note, technology has the potential to “make the feminist past become alive and accessible.”² Consequently, this

¹ Melanie Nolan and Caroline Daley, eds. *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1994); Ian Christopher Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall, and Philippa Levine, eds. *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation, and Race* (Oxon: Routledge, 2000); Jad Adams, *Women and the Vote: A World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

² Alison Bartlett, Maryanne Dever, and Margaret Henderson, “Notes Towards an Archive of Australian Feminist Activism,” *Outskirts: Feminisms Along the Edge* 16 (2007).

article seeks to offer a rationale for focusing on picture postcards in the context of the digital humanities and the emerging field of digital history.³ Yet as feminist digital historian Michelle Moravec emphasizes, it is equally important to recognize that “digitization has wrought concomitant problems.”⁴ Cognizant of such competing benefits and limitations, this article examines the relationship between digital archives and the digital humanities to interrogate this project’s theoretical and methodological development.

This article discusses the objectives of the Suffrage Postcard Project in three central ways: it demonstrates the SPP’s interdisciplinary value within historical, literary, and gender studies; it situates the Omeka-based archive within the framework of digital history; and it offers some preliminary digital humanities (DH) results. In the first section, “The Suffrage Postcard in Visual History,” we provide an overview of the history of the picture postcard in order to position this production format in the context of suffrage history and visual culture. In the second section, “The Suffrage Postcard Project within Archive Studies and Digital History,” we begin to theorize our Omeka-based archive of postcards, including its place in and contributions to digital history. Lastly, in the third section, “A Digital Humanities Approach to Suffrage Postcards,” we present some early results from our initial data visualizations and offer projections for future DH results.

The Suffrage Postcard in Visual History

The Albert M. Greenfield Digital Center for the History of Women’s Education at Bryn Mawr College held the second biennial Women’s History in the Digital World Conference in May 2015. Bringing together scholars of women’s history and gender studies, archives and libraries, and the digital humanities, this event led to the public debut of the Suffrage Postcard Project (SPP). Since 2015, the SPP has primarily used Omeka, a web application that enables humanists to exhibit images and metadata relating to cultural heritage, as a platform to enable its digital analyses. Our team has uploaded and thematically tagged a corpus of suffrage postcards—a process that continues as new postcards are ingested.⁵ To date, these postcards have largely been sourced from collections that have been digitized and made available online by both institutional and personal archives.⁶ The aim is to amass as complete a production run as possible of the suffrage postcards published at the beginning of the twentieth century. As of August 2020, the digital corpus

³ For the distinction between the digital humanities and digital history, see Claire Brennan, “Digital Humanities, Digital Methods, Digital History, and Digital Outputs: History Writing and the Digital Revolution,” *History Compass* 16, no. 10 (2018): e12492.

⁴ Michelle Moravec, “Feminist Research Practices and Digital Archives,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 32, no. 91–92 (2017): 187.

⁵ Our thanks to the Suffrage Postcard Project team for their contributions to the ongoing process of tagging and metadata creation, as well as to Hilton Bristow for his invaluable support with data visualisations. For more details about the SPP team, see <https://thesuffragepostcardproject.omeka.net/spp-team>.

⁶ Key institutions included the Library of Congress, LSE Library, Museum of London, People’s History Museum, Smithsonian National Museum of American History, and the Virginia Commonwealth University Libraries. The SPP team was also grateful to work with the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Georgia to digitize their suffrage postcard collections. We have particularly benefited from a series of specific private archives: Catherine H. Palczewski, *Palczewski Suffrage Postcard Archive*, University of Northern Iowa, 2020, scholarworks.uni.edu/suffrage_images/; Kenneth Florey, *Woman Suffrage Memorabilia*, n.d., womansuffragememorabilia.com/; *Women’s Suffrage Postcards: In Memory of Dr. Joan Iversen*, n.d., drjoaniversen.com/womens-suffrage-postcards/; Ann Lewis, *Ann Lewis: Women’s Suffrage Collection (Postcards and Stamps)*, 2015, lewissuffragecollection.omeka.net.

comprises more than 1,100 suffrage postcards, approximately two-thirds of which are available open access.

By the turn of the twentieth century, collecting postcards had become a popular international pastime. A product of an increasingly globalized society witnessing the ever-expanding dissemination of information, the picture postcard was dependent on earlier photographic and communications technologies. Developed during the 1840s, the earliest forms of photography were unlike language in that pictures presented what was perceived to be “factual” information.⁷ The daguerreotype, invented by Frenchman Louis-Jacques-Mande Daguerre in 1839, was the first commercially successful photographic process. It was complemented by calotypes and ambrotypes during the 1840s, and then superseded by stereographic images, the tintypes and *cartes-de-visite* of the 1850s and 1860s, the cabinet cards of the 1870s, and the roll film that was developed during the 1880s.⁸ Neil Postman suggests that photographs ultimately worked to decontextualize information from its original source, making “storyless information ... an inheritance of the nineteenth century.”⁹

The picture postcard can be understood as an “icon of modernity,” the popularity of which increased across the 1890s in conjunction with improving appearance, coloration, and printing techniques.¹⁰ However, the earliest postcards of the 1870s did not feature the photographs or images that would become the distinguishing feature of their successor. John Fraser suggests that picture postcards initially emerged in Germany during the 1880s as privately produced ephemera, with the addition of the picture giving the medium a new appeal to generate a mass market. Across Europe, picture postcards gained popularity as commemorative souvenirs but also quickly became propagandistic.¹¹ Soon, U.S. postal regulation changes at the turn of the twentieth century led to a thriving postcard market in the United States.¹² Historians’ estimates suggest that, in 1905, around seven billion postcards passed through post offices worldwide—a figure that does not include those never posted and kept as collectibles.¹³

It was during this era of increasing globalization and urbanization that picture postcards and their predecessors began to develop. Indeed, the picture postcard is believed to have been a vehicle for addressing the new urban proletariat.¹⁴ From the nineteenth century’s illustrated newspaper to the postcard at the turn of the twentieth century, the printed image could communicate information by

⁷ Neil Postman, *Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future* (New York: Vintage, 1999), 82–98.

⁸ See Peter E. Palmquist, ed. *Photographers: A Sourcebook for Historical Research* (Nevada City: Carl Mautz Publishing, 2000).

⁹ Postman, *Building a Bridge*, 82–98.

¹⁰ Bjarne Rogan, “An Entangled Object: The Picture Postcard as Souvenir and Collectible, Exchange and Ritual Communication,” *Cultural Analysis* 4, no. 1 (2005): 1 and 4.

¹¹ John Fraser, “Propaganda on the Picture Postcard,” *Oxford Art Journal* 3, no. 2 (1980): 39–47.

¹² Kenneth Florey, *American Woman Suffrage Postcards: A Study and Catalog* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2015), 4.

¹³ Rogan, “An Entangled Object,” 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39; Steven Dotterrer and Galen Cranz, “The Picture Postcard: Its Development and Role in American Urbanization,” *Journal of American Culture* 5, no. 1 (1982): 44–50.

addressing audiences at a time when literacy was by no means universal.¹⁵ The picture postcard had the potential to disseminate everything from holiday panoramas to the iconography of theatre, film, and the emerging “star system” of actors to political propaganda.¹⁶ Common themes included colonialism, empire, and international conflicts, such as the American-Spanish War of 1898, the Anglo-Boer War of 1899 to 1902, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 to 1905, the Mexican Revolution of 1910 to 1920, and the Great War of 1914 to 1918.¹⁷ Soon, not only were heads of state and military leaders being depicted on the picture postcard but also those who were leading the suffrage debate in the United States and Britain.

According to Bjarne Rogan, “It is not possible to explain the enormous popularity of this non-essential material item and the billions of [post]cards sold and mailed every year unless we also consider the card as an exchange object, a gift, and a message carrier.” Both sides of the picture postcard contained information: the imagery on the front circulated aesthetic cultural information, while the writing on the back—if any—communicated social information.¹⁸ David M. Henkin contends that postcards gradually “democratized the exchange of interpersonal information,” but being exposed to public view meant that they also “fit uneasily into familiar constructions of interpersonal intimacy.”¹⁹ Ultimately, in what they depicted as well as what they elided, postcards offer insight into the popular prejudices of an era.²⁰ Situating the emergence of the picture postcard in this context—as a product of technological transformation, a carrier of information, and an ephemeral item with considerable cultural import—creates significant interpretative possibilities.

¹⁵ Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790–1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). For illustrated newspapers, see also Toni Weller, “Preserving Knowledge through Popular Victorian Periodicals: An Examination of the *Penny Magazine* and the *Illustrated London News*, 1842–1843,” *Library History* 24, no. 3 (2008): 200–207; Laura Skouvig, “Broadside Ballads, Almanacs and the *Illustrated News*: Genres and Rhetoric in the Communication of Information in Denmark 1800–1925,” in *Information History in the Modern World: Histories of the Information Age*, ed. Toni Weller (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 89–107.

¹⁶ Fraser, “Propaganda on the Picture Postcard,” 39–47.

¹⁷ Christine Cane and Niel Gunson, “Postcards: A Source for Aboriginal Biography,” *Aboriginal History* 10, no. 1/2 (1986): 171–74; Paul J. Vanderwood and Frank N. Samponaro, *Border Fury: A Picture Postcard Record of Mexico’s Revolution and US War Preparedness, 1910–1917* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988); Patricia C. Albers and William R. James, “Travel Photography: A Methodological Approach,” *Annals of Tourism Research* 15, no. 1 (1988): 134–58; Q. David Bowers, “Souvenir Postcards and the Development of the Star System, 1912–1914,” *Film History* 3, no. 1 (1989): 39–45; David Prochaska, “Fantasia of the Phototheque: French Postcard Views of Colonial Senegal,” *African Arts* 24, no. 4 (1991): 40–47; Martha Lund Smalley, “Communications from the Field: Missionary Postcards from Africa,” *African Research & Documentation*, no. 104 (2007): 15–27; Jon D. Carlson, “Postcards and Propaganda: Cartographic Postcards as Soft News Images of the Russo-Japanese War,” *Political Communication* 26, no. 2 (2009): 212–37; Penny Farfan, “‘The Picture Postcard Is a Sign of the Times’: Theatre Postcards and Modernism,” *Theatre History Studies* 32, no. 1 (2012): 93–119; Daniel Gifford, *American Holiday Postcards, 1905–1915: Imagery and Context* (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 2013); Emily Rose Stevenson, “Home, Sweet Home: Women and the ‘Other Space’ of Domesticity in Colonial Indian Postcards, ca. 1880–1920,” *Visual Anthropology* 26, no. 4 (2013): 298–327; Rianne Siebenga, “A Visual Skirmish: The Use of Postcards in the Creation of an Indian Identity, 1895–1915,” *Pakistan Journal of Historical Studies* 2, no. 1 (2017): 4–23; Lauren O’Hagan, “‘Home Rule is Rome Rule’: Exploring Anti-Home Rule Postcards in Edwardian Ireland,” *Visual Studies* 35, no. 4 (2020): 330–46.

¹⁸ Rogan, “An Entangled Object,” 2–3.

¹⁹ David M. Henkin, *The Postal Age: The Emergence of Modern Communications in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 174–75.

²⁰ Brooke Baldwin, “On the Verso: Postcard Messages as a Key to Popular Prejudices,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 22, no. 3 (1988): 15–28.

The moment at which collecting postcards became an international phenomenon was also the decade when the passage of national suffrage legislation became increasingly likely in both Britain and the United States.²¹ Indeed, the 1910s overlaps with what scholars describe as the “golden age” of the picture postcard. Following postcard historian Susan Brown Nicholson, communications scholar Catherine H. Palczewski situates this “golden age” between 1893 and 1918, while Rogan views it as beginning in 1895 and fading away between 1915 and 1920.²² What postcard historian Kenneth Florey describes as the “Golden Age of Suffrage Memorabilia” was the period between 1908 and 1917.²³ Suffrage postcards were most widely produced during these overlapping periods by both commercial postcard publishers and organizations related to the suffrage movement. However, the picture postcard went into decline as a result of an increase in postal rates (and, in some places, customs duties) at the end of the Great War of 1914 to 1918.²⁴

The collation of the SPP’s preliminary data relating to publication date suggests that suffrage postcards were published with an increasing and then decreasing degree of frequency across nearly two decades between 1903 and 1921 (figure 1). This aligns with the “golden age” of the picture postcard in its broadest scholarly conceptualization. A particular peak in suffrage postcard production occurred between 1908 and 1909, and then in 1913. This era began with the publication of Walter Wellman’s “The Suffragette” series, which appeared across 1908 and 1909, and the Dunston-Weiler Lithograph Company of New York’s 1909 “Suffragette Series.” It concluded with multiple postcards series featuring photographs of the 1913 Woman Suffrage Procession in Washington, D.C., a parade organized by Alice Paul and Lucy Burns on behalf of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). This 1913 peak occurred just prior to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in June 1914, which brought about the beginning of the Great War only months later.²⁵

Considered ephemeral at their time of production, suffrage postcards were also numerous. Based on evidence from his personal collection and knowledge of other private collections, Florey estimates that more than one thousand suffrage-related postcards were printed in the United States and approximately two thousand in Britain.²⁶ The SPP includes postcards that were produced in the United States and Britain, as well as Germany, France, Sweden, Canada, and Russia, in English, French, and Cyrillic, which then circulated across the United States, Britain, and beyond. The production of suffrage postcards declined toward the end of the 1910s, both on account of a widespread decline in postcard production overall and because the franchise had been extended to some British and American women by the decade’s end. Indeed, propertied British women over thirty years of age were enfranchised in 1918 at the end of the Great War, although full suffrage

²¹ Florey, *American Woman Suffrage Postcards*, 4.

²² Catherine H. Palczewski, “The Male Madonna and the Feminine Uncle Sam: Visual Argument, Icons, and Ideographs in 1909 Anti-Woman Suffrage Postcards,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91, no. 4 (2005): 365; Susan Brown Nicholson, *The Encyclopedia of Antique Postcards* (Radnor: Wallace-Homestead Book Co., 1994), 196; Rogan, “An Entangled Object,” 1.

²³ Florey, *American Woman Suffrage Postcards*, 4. See also Kenneth Florey, “Postcards and the New York Suffrage Movement,” *New York History* 98, no. 3 (2017): 442–44.

²⁴ Fraser, “Propaganda on the Picture Postcard,” 43.

²⁵ Angela K. Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain During the First World War* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

²⁶ Florey, *American Woman Suffrage Postcards*, 7.

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# Histogram postcards by publication date.
# Filter the outliers that fall substantially outside the golden age.
all_dates = [postcard.date for postcard in postcards]
int_dates = [int(d) for d in all_dates if d and 1880 < int(d) < 1950]

fig, ax = plt.subplots()
ax.hist(int_dates, bins=max(int_dates)-min(int_dates), color='mediumvioletred')
ax.set_xlabel('Year of Publication')
ax.set_ylabel('Rate (Count per Year)')
ax.set_title('Publication Rate of Suffrage Postcards')

```

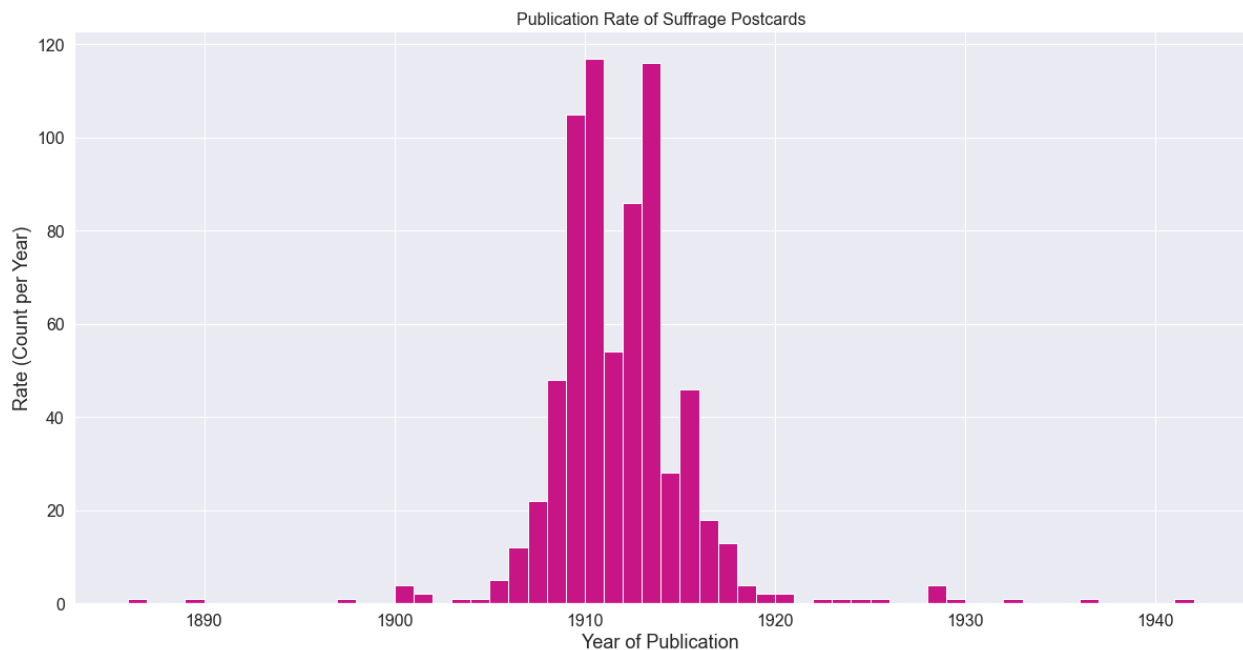


Figure 1. The top image captures part of our code: plotting “Year of Publication” on the x-axis and “Count per Year” on the y-axis. The bottom image is the histogram produced by the executed code. This histogram identifies 1909 and 1913 as the height of suffrage postcard publication. However, our metadata captures the publication date of some postcards as an estimate: for example, *circa* 1909 and *circa* 1913. To develop the data visualization in Python means that we have to strip the data of “ca.,” which in turn creates a fixedness that is appropriately approximate but still slightly misleading. Data visualization therefore flattens the multiplicity of possibilities for which “ca.” allows in the metadata, especially when there is an impetus to consider how historical events and political causes coincided with publication dates. Thus, while the SPP aims to take the affordances of the digital into account, we also seek to consider these limitations.

had been able to vote as early as 1869 in Wyoming and then 1870 in Utah, with a small number of other states enfranchising women across subsequent decades. In 1919, individual states began to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, which was then passed in August 1920.²⁷ Yet significant exclusionary measures remained. African Americans continued to be subject to various legislative and extrajudicial methods of disenfranchisement, while Native Americans only gained full citizenship with the Snyder Act of 1924. Although the Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibited racial discrimination at the federal level, various mechanisms of voter suppression continue today.²⁸

²⁷ Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, ed. *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement* (Troutdale: NewSage Press, 1995).

²⁸ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Daniel McCool, Susan M. Olson, and Jennifer L. Robinson, *Native Vote: American Indians, the Voting Rights Act, and the Right to Vote* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

The interdisciplinary scholarship about the visual culture associated with the suffrage movement examines national and transatlantic trends between the 1880s and the 1920s, while also recovering and recentering historical analysis around women's contribution as cartoonists and artists, especially in the United States and Britain.²⁹ Alice Sheppard contends that, because feminist art became more ubiquitous and popular during the 1910s than it had ever been before, the decade's visual culture specifically demands analysis.³⁰ Mary Chapman and Angela Mills emphasize that the artistic contributions and responses to the suffrage movement encompassed everything from photography, cartooning, and mapping to suffrage art, banners, and postcards; the significance and variety of these "creative tactics," they note, require greater attention.³¹

Although picture postcards helped circulate suffrage visual culture in both national and transnational contexts, this communications medium and its cultural influence has often been subsumed into broader analyses of suffrage visual culture.³² Important historical insights have nonetheless emerged, one of the most significant being the distinction between the postcards officially produced by suffrage organizations and those produced by commercial postcard publishers. The former, scholars suggest, were unabashedly propagandistic and ideological in their intent. Relying on what Florey describes as "evocative images" and certain imaginings of the "allegorical woman," suffrage postcards ultimately "raised questions, made statements, and answered arguments." Commercial postcards could encompass both pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage sentiments but tended towards the latter. Anti-suffrage commercial postcards, however, conveyed the negative stereotypes that were assumed to reflect public attitudes. These postcard publishers

²⁹ See Alice Sheppard, "Political and Social Consciousness in the Woman Suffrage Cartoons of Lou Rogers and Nina Allender," *Studies in American Humor* 4, no. 1/2 (1985): 39–50; Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–14* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Ian McDonald, *Vindication! A Postcard History of the Women's Movement* (London: McDonald/Bellow, 1989); Gail H. Landsman, "The 'Other' as Political Symbol: Images of Indians in the Woman Suffrage Movement," *Ethnohistory* 39, no. 3 (1992): 247–84; Alice Sheppard, *Cartooning for Suffrage* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994); Mariea Caudill Dennison, "Babies for Suffrage: 'The Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture by Women Artists for the Benefit of the Woman Suffrage Campaign'," *Woman's Art Journal* 24, no. 2 (2003): 24–30; Christina Elizabeth Dando, "'The Map Proves It': Map Use by the American Woman Suffrage Movement," *Cartographica* 45, no. 4 (2010): 221–40; Katharina Hundhammer, *American Women in Cartoons 1890–1920: Female Representation and the Changing Concepts of Femininity during the American Woman Suffrage Movement: An Empirical Analysis* (Pieterlen: Peter Lang, 2012); Kenneth Florey, *Women's Suffrage Memorabilia: An Illustrated Historical Study* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2013); Sarah Gibson Walker, "Ruby Lindsay: A Professional Artist of the Suffrage-Era," *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* 23 (2017): 23–33; Elizabeth Crawford, *Art and Suffrage: A Bibliographical Dictionary of Suffrage Artists* (Francis Boutle, 2018); Miranda Garrett and Zoë Thomas, eds. *Suffrage and the Arts: Visual Culture, Politics and Enterprise* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018); Ana Stevenson, "'Cast off the Shackles of Yesterday': Women's Suffrage in Walt Disney's *Mary Poppins* (1964)," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 33, no. 2 (2018): 69–103; Allison K. Lange, *Picturing Political Power: Images in the Women's Suffrage Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); Ana Stevenson, "'Tearing Off the Bonds': Suffrage Visual Culture in Australia, New Zealand and the United States, 1890–1920," *Gender & History* (forthcoming).

³⁰ Alice Sheppard, "Suffrage Art and Feminism," *Hypatia* 5, no. 2 (1990): 135.

³¹ Mary Chapman and Angela Mills, "Eighty Years and More: Looking Back at the Nineteenth Amendment," *Canadian Review of American Studies/Revue canadienne d'études américaines* 36, no. 1 (2006): 1–15.

³² Lisa Tickner discusses the circulation of pro-suffrage propaganda largely in the context of posters, see Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 45–52. For notable exceptions, see Florey, *American Woman Suffrage Postcards*; Palczewski, "The Male Madonna," 365–94; Gwyneth H. Crowley, "Tropes in Women's Suffrage Postcards" (master of arts thesis, Southern Connecticut State University, 2014); Florey, "Postcards and the New York Suffrage Movement," 441–64; Lauren Alex O'Hagan, "Contesting Women's Right to Vote: Anti-Suffrage Postcards in Edwardian Britain," *Visual Culture in Britain* 21, no. 3 (2020): 330–62.

routinely relied “less on the ideological and more on the emotive,” were “reactive rather than proactive,” and, most importantly, “appealed to a public that had already made up their minds on the topic, responding to what the commercial producer of [post]cards assumed to be a common reaction to suffrage, one that bonded all people of common sense together.”³³ If an anti-suffrage worldview was assumed to be the public’s standard opinion, then picture postcards must be seen as a significant communications technology for contributing to—as well as responding to—the dissemination of such political information.

Digital humanities methods offer the opportunity to both challenge and corroborate existing scholarly interpretations of the visual trends across transatlantic suffrage postcards. To our knowledge, no digital humanities or computer-aided approaches to postcards, much less to suffrage postcards, have yet been developed. Suffrage postcards are unique: unlike other suffrage imagery, postcards frequently captured a relationship between the image and personal commentary, thus providing an opportunity to analyze individual reactions to certain historical moments prior to the digital age. Coloration, for example, is one of the most identifiable markers in distinguishing between pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage postcards. While received wisdom holds that anti-suffrage postcards, more so than pro-suffrage postcards, relied on bright, eye-catching colors as part of their visual rhetoric, computational analysis of saturation versus luminosity over a large data sample can indicate the extent to which the visual arguments implied by color circulated with political information. Such digital humanities methods enable us to test previously stated scholarly hypotheses about suffrage postcards, both discretely—as in, from the points of view of pro-suffragists and anti-suffragists—as well as collectively.

The Suffrage Postcard Project within Archive Studies and Digital History

The Suffrage Postcard Project, which methodologically engages with archive studies, visual history, and women’s history, is uniquely positioned to contribute to contemporary debates about the nature of the “digital archive.” This section, which consists of two subsections, explains how the SPP leverages feminist digital humanities (DH) methodologies to offer new insights into archive studies and digital history. The first subsection uses Victoria Haskins’s idea of the “replica archive” to explore the significance of a digital archive that can never produce a final product to digital history. The second subsection argues that the complexity of archiving suffrage postcards raises methodological issues and insights relevant to the creation of any digital archive.

1. An always-incomplete replica archive.

Digital history presents complexities regarding how to conceptualize such a digital corpus of primary sources, raising questions in relation to the nature and meaning of the “archive” versus the “digital archive.” For historians, the archive itself has increasingly been interpreted as a contested space. “What is at issue in historiography,” Keith Jenkins notes, “is what can be derived and constructed from the *historicized* record or archive.”³⁴ Across the humanities disciplines, historians, art historians, literary scholars, and feminist scholars, as well as library and archive scholars and professionals, have very different understandings of what constitutes an archive. “In

³³ Florey, *American Woman Suffrage Postcards*, 213, 2. See also Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 30–42, 151–67; Palczewski, “The Male Madonna,” 366, 378; Florey, “Postcards and the New York Suffrage Movement,” 450–51.

³⁴ Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991), 21.

a digital environment,” Kenneth M. Price concludes, “*archive* has gradually come to mean a purposeful collection of surrogates.”³⁵ It is important, Kate Theimer argues, for digital humanists to understand the differing ways in which archivists approach what constitutes “archive” and how collections are created in consequence.³⁶ One example of how to address Theimer’s concerns comes from Michelle Moravec, who adopts the term “digital archival environment” to assess the process of “accessing online digitized surrogates of materials taken from archives.”³⁷

Reflecting on traditional historians’ personal engagement with the archive offers yet another useful way to interpret the curated nature of the digital archive. Australian historian Victoria Haskins reflects on the methodological issues surrounding writing transnational histories from archives produced by settler-colonial nation-states. Her research is concerned with the Indigenous girls and women placed in the domestic service of white women in Australia and the United States. The lives of these women, Haskins notes, often prove difficult to uncover in the archives. Digital technology, however, has fundamentally changed the relationship between historians and the archive, especially for scholars who travel internationally to access primary sources. Following hours and hours of archival research over a number of years, historians amass copious photographs and photocopies. Personally, Haskins notes, she prints out hard copies of her archival materials and files them into an “individually constructed archive,” which features—even centralizes—the voices of the Indigenous women otherwise relegated to the periphery of the settler-colonial nation-state’s archival records. When viewed together beyond the archive, Haskins contends, these “records take on not just a different voice, but a new shape, recast as a major collection of documentation on the placement and regulation of girls [and women] in domestic service.” Bringing together these printed fragments from many archives effectively creates a new archive—a “replica-archive,” as Haskins describes it.³⁸

These insights are useful in the context of the SPP; indeed, Haskins’s concept of the “replica-archive” can productively be interpreted as a “digital archival environment” that produces a replica archive. Ultimately, the SPP is a constructed collection of suffrage postcards, created from primary sources available digitally and expanded through our active and ongoing digitization of new primary sources. As a replica archive, the SPP centers upon suffrage postcards in a way that fragmented archival and personal collections cannot. Importantly, suffrage archival collections are often derived from an individual suffragist’s own collection; postcards usually feature as one of many types of primary source in such collections. The SPP therefore centralizes pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage postcards in a way that enables new analytic and interpretive departures. Our research results are always considered subject to change because new postcards are continually being added to our replica archive.

³⁵ Kenneth M. Price, “Edition, Project, Database, Archive, Thematic Research Collection: What’s in a Name?” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (2009).

³⁶ Kate Theimer, “Archives in Context and as Context,” *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2012).

³⁷ Moravec, “Feminist Research Practices and Digital Archives,” 186. This discussion began in a blog post; see Ana Stevenson, “The Suffrage Postcard Project: A Replica Archive,” *JHIBlog: The Blog of the Journal of the History of Ideas*, October 9, 2017, <https://jhiblog.org/2017/10/09/the-suffrage-postcard-project-a-replica-archive/>.

³⁸ Victoria Haskins, “Decolonizing the Archives: A Transnational Perspective,” in *Sources and Methods in Histories of Colonialism: Approaching the Imperial Archive*, eds. Kirsty Reid and Fiona Paisley (London: Routledge, 2017), 55–61, esp. 58–59.

Haskins does note that there are some downsides to her personal archiving process, as she strives to be on “constant guard not to be consumed . . . by [her] own replication of disorder masquerading as order.”³⁹ However, this particular limitation may not be true of all primary sources, as bringing suffrage postcards together has significant benefits. Indeed, the production process meant that postcards could actually originate collectively from publishers—often as a postcard series. Placing this ephemera into a wider dialogue, moreover, underscores that which might be overlooked when observing the characteristics of individual postcards, especially as it pertains to thematic considerations relating to class and race. Haskins’s concept of the “replica-archive” can similarly help reconcile the disciplinary, methodological, and conceptual differences between library and archive professionals and scholarship on the one hand, and digital humanities and digital history scholarship on the other. Most importantly, it forces practitioners’ cognizance of the created and curated nature of the digital archival environment.

All postcards in the SPP’s Omeka replica archive are accompanied by provenance metadata.⁴⁰ Since metadata directly influences research results, we attempt to include as much relevant information as possible. Guided by Dublin Core, the metadata we create is derived from a postcard’s original provenance, in addition to the institutional or personal collection from which the digitized postcard hailed. The SPP attempts to include information relating to publisher, publication date, and publication place. While the SPP’s metadata derives from the known contextual information relating to the production of a suffrage postcard, all this information is not necessarily available in every case.

2. From the archive to the digital replica archive.

Suffrage postcards were numerous and intended for public consumption, meaning that such ephemera is neither inscrutable nor irrevocably hidden in the archives. Many libraries and archives, especially those centered upon women’s history, hold large collections of suffrage propaganda, including postcards. But the partial nature of such collections, together with the geographical dispersion of the archives themselves, means that scholars can only ever gain a fragmentary perspective of this one particular aspect of the transatlantic suffrage movement and its visual campaigns. Though many do have partially digitized collections of suffrage postcards, the archives themselves can be difficult to access, often requiring time and funding for travel as well as specialized research knowledge, and much material remains undigitized. The SPP allows us to place all these collections side-by-side to avoid a fragmentary perspective and instead create a robust, ever-expanding digital corpus from which to analyze suffrage postcards.

Digitally archiving images of suffrage postcards is a complex process that raises methodological issues and insights relevant to the creation of any digital archive. We start from the idea that we cannot know everything about what we are archiving: the case of digitized suffrage postcards is such that we do not always have access to both sides of every postcard. This means that we cannot necessarily see the verso, which would include more details about the publisher’s location and the date of publication, as well as where the sender would record their message to the recipient. This information is vital to answering some of our research questions, particularly those that attempt to

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁰ For feminist methodological approaches to metadata, see Moravec, “Feminist Research Practices and Digital Archives,” 193–94.

assess how postcards circulated in service to the suffrage campaign. Access to such information would ideally provide the researcher additional context for more accurately archiving the image.

Additionally, suffrage postcards contributed to the material culture of the movement; they were meant to be touched, held, shared, and engaged with. For instance, the way we understand a postcard to have been touched, held, shared, and engaged with—and how it circulated as a pro-suffrage or anti-suffrage message—necessarily influences data visualizations and search results. Consider how the anti-suffrage sender’s use of a pro-suffrage postcard might influence how irony circulated. Additionally, side-by-side digital collections can now influence our understanding of individual postcards. Situating a postcard alongside another or within a series, SPP digital archivists evaluate the meanings of an image not within the individual context of a singular postcard but within the larger context of suffrage history and visual culture. This new contextualization of an individual postcard needs to be accounted for in the archiving process. Thus, the digital nature of the SPP raises two issues that are significant to the field of archive studies and digital history: How does one do the “work” of archiving a potentially unknowable item? And how does the larger meaning of the archive change when the meaning of individual items can also change?

Our larger goal as feminist scholars is always to interrogate how gender, race, and class operate within structures of power. However, the feminist methodologies the SPP employs to answer these research questions vary according to the section of the project that we are working on. For example, when creating the archive by uploading and cataloging postcards, the SPP team generally considers each image together, although there are times when researchers work independently. These cases are usually followed later by collaborative quality control. As we analyze the visual rhetoric of each individual postcard, we pay close attention to how gender, race, and class operate in the postcard alongside other signifiers like domestic items, emotions, spaces, activities, and animals. Our digital archiving methodology responds to these issues by creating tags for what we term “influx data”—data whose “signifier” and “signified” is constantly subject to an individual researcher’s or a group of researchers’ interpretation of the “sign.” Our discussions around interpretation aim to draw out the nuanced gendered, raced, and classed historical context that brings us into consensus about the meaning of the picture postcard’s image. Such consensus leads to definitions in terminology, which then leads to the wording we choose for our tags. This process is recorded in what we call our palimpsest dictionary, a collaborative, evolving compendium of definitions and terms that we draw upon to tag postcards and then reference or update in later sessions. Since the SPP is a digital humanities project, it is, by nature, an evolving project. Thus, its public-facing site changes when new postcards, tags and definitions, or researchers are added to the project. The project and its methodologies, therefore, evolve with the project. The more frequently the palimpsest dictionary is updated, the more frequently we perform “quality control” on our tagging systems: revisiting our images and updating them with the most recent tags.

Four key features define our palimpsest dictionary. First is agreement that there exists an historical significance to the entity (theme, idea, item, moment, figure, etc.) being tagged. To date, for example, the item “umbrella” appears in over 50 pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage postcards. The umbrella holds historical significance in suffrage imagery because of its association with Susan B. Anthony, a leading suffragist who was famously pictured with an umbrella in several popular

cartoons.⁴¹ Theodore Wust's 1873 cartoon, entitled "The Woman Who Dared [To Vote]," featured Anthony leaning on an umbrella, thus associating the umbrella with the "crime" of voting after she placed a ballot illegally in 1872.⁴² More than two decades later, the umbrella again appeared in an 1890s cartoon that depicted Susan B. Anthony chasing after President Grover Cleveland, in which Anthony again used an umbrella to fight for women's right to vote.⁴³ The umbrella, then, can have a pro-suffrage connotation if one associates it with Anthony herself and the rights for which she fought. However, it can also have an anti-suffrage connotation if one associates it with the negative public persona such cartoons sought to portray—an angry, hostile, even violent Anthony. How then do we tag "umbrella" to signify our intended historical interpretation when the item itself can be considered historically significant from more than one perspective?

The second feature of the palimpsest dictionary addresses this concern. This involves agreement that such an entity holds scholarly significance to our digital project in that our tagging systems make use of digital affordances that further feminist methodologies of analyzing key themes in suffrage visual culture. To this end, an umbrella that is co-tagged with "pro-suffrage" holds a different meaning from the umbrella that is co-tagged with "anti-suffrage," "weapon," or "violence." Tags, in most cases, can only be properly understood within the context of their co-tags. This system nuances meaning and ultimately allows for more enriching data visualizations. The third feature is an agreement that such meaning can change as our research evolves and new historical context emerges for tagging. We cannot always "know" the item we are archiving and the meaning of that item, as the research team knows it, changes frequently within the digital archival environment. Our palimpsestic dictionary therefore provides a methodology to account for variability, allowing nuance in our account of the suffrage debate and offering transparency in our digital archiving practices.

Lastly, the dictionary takes its cue from palimpsestic documents: we trace the history of meanings we have attributed to postcard images and the evolving ecosystem of our digital environment since the inception of the project. This means that we hold discussions and aim to document when a researcher overrides a previous researcher's definition of an image in the dictionary. This allows us to account for how such an override influences the larger digital archive, which has, ideologically, been based on pro-suffrage versus anti-suffrage images. The definitions, then, become palimpsestic in their own right: with meaning layered upon meaning as the definition of the image changes over time.

This approach to thematic tagging is not unprecedented even prior to the emergence of digital humanities research. It is significant that comparable attempts emerged in earlier scholarship about feminist visual culture, specifically a *long durée* analysis of the representation of women in July Fourth cartoons in the United States. A 1980 study sought to codify the visual trends that emerged across cartoons published in a number of American newspapers between 1870 and 1976, based on two categories: "appearance" and "role." Each category had three subcategories: for appearance,

⁴¹ For more historical context on cartoons of suffragists and Susan B. Anthony in particular, see Lange, *Picturing Political Power*, 83–86.

⁴² Thomas Wurst, "The Woman Who Dared," *Graphic Statues* no. 17 (United States, 1873), *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/95512461/>.

⁴³ Charles Lewis Bartholomew, "What I know about women's clubs" (United States, ca. 1892–1896), *Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2016678242/>.

“glamorous,” “matronly,” and “lifelike”; and for role, “traditional,” “non-traditional,” or “representational” (i.e., allegorical symbolism).⁴⁴ Although undertaken prior to widespread access to computers or the emergence of the digital humanities as a field of inquiry, this study used methods that are comparable to the tagging processes the SPP embraces. However, it made scant reference to the American suffrage movement, noting only that between the 1890s and 1930s “female images were used mostly to depict the abstract qualities of liberty and independence,” while the frequency with which women appeared in July Fourth cartoons began to decline following the Nineteenth Amendment.⁴⁵ Consequently, there is much scope for a more rigorous thematic tag-based analysis of the suffrage postcards of this era.

Tagging the visual themes that occur across the suffrage postcards has therefore become one of the SPP’s key initiatives. Our preliminary response was to consider how to apply thematic tags such as “public” versus “private,” “domestic space,” “wife” or “woman” versus “mother,” “husband” or “man” versus “father,” and the subtle but nonetheless significant semantic differences associated with each individual choice. However, as we began this process, even the application of seemingly clear-cut concepts such as “pro-suffrage” and “anti-suffrage” could, in some cases, appear to be nebulous. It quickly became clear that an expanded and more thematically comprehensive set of tags would be needed to encapsulate the many and often interrelated themes that emerged across the corpus.

Importantly, the process of tagging the themes that we, as feminist researchers, interpret as being significant necessitated finding the language to describe visual themes. Similar approaches have been extended by feminist researchers engaged in other digital humanities projects. Our tagging methods are influenced by the feminist digital humanities approach of Jacqueline Wernimont and Julia Flanders, whose research developed while encoding literary texts for Northeastern University’s Women Writers Project (WWP) <<https://www.wwp.northeastern.edu/>>. Founded in 1986 and dedicated to pre-Victorian women’s writing between 1400 and 1850, the WWP textbase was first made available online in 1999. For Wernimont and Flanders, “Digitizing women’s writing requires a new paradigm, and in this sense it has a direct impact on feminist scholarship, digital humanities, and literary scholarship simultaneously.” When encoding the WWP, they were confronted with “many of the same difficulties encountered when reading.” Since women’s writing “often confounds the processes of categorization, explication, and description central to digital text markup,” digitization and encoding engages scholars “in a reflexive process that forces us to interrogate those genres and any genre-tags that we may use in creating the textbase.” Indeed, issues relating to “categorization, explication, and description [are] central to digital text markup, forcing the digital scholar to grapple consciously with formal issues that might otherwise remain latent.”⁴⁶

For the SPP, it was likewise within such moments of being “confounded” that we could begin to create the palimpsestic dictionary that underpins our tagging process. Together we were able to reflect upon this “reflexive process” and consider how tags and categorizations engendered new

⁴⁴ Katherine Meyer, John Seidler, Timothy Curry, and Adrian Aveni, “Women in July Fourth Cartoons: A 100-Year Look,” *Journal of Communication* 30, no. 1 (1980): 21–30.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 27–28.

⁴⁶ Jacqueline Wernimont and Julia Flanders, “Feminism in the Age of Digital Archives: The Women Writers Project,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 29, no. 2 (2010): 428, 432, 427–28.

visual understandings from the suffrage postcards, particularly in terms of the representation of sexuality. Specific words and phrases have since been developed to identify frequently repeated visual themes, collected in an ever-expanding master list. This included, for example, images of courting and married couples, “feminized” men, “masculinized” women, motherhood and fatherhood, adultized children, and non-human animals. Such digital methods enable scholars to ask unprecedented research questions about the early-twentieth-century suffrage movement and its many detractors. This provokes the reconsideration of old assumptions about such visual culture, yet it also necessitates that the process of tagging be attentive to the historical context in which suffrage postcards were originally produced. Indeed, Catherine D’Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein argue that it is imperative for feminist researchers to be attuned to historical injustice in order to use the possibilities of feminist data science to overcome this injustice.⁴⁷ The judicious choice of tags contributes to this ethos.

The myriad complexities in existing studies suggest that the process of tagging is by no means straightforward. Thus, at three major moments in the development of the SPP, the creation of a definition to add to our palimpsestic dictionary occurs:

1. When a new postcard is ingested into the archive and the research team talks through the addition of a new tag based on that image;
2. When a researcher works on the archive individually and outside of a team effort and adds a new tag based on their new observations; and
3. When any given research team works through an entire round of quality control on the definitions of existing tags.

When tagging, a set of questions and issues arise for the researcher: How does one—and should one—capture all the different concepts at play in an image? How does one ensure historical accuracy in capturing those concepts, and employ terminology that is intelligible to both the team members and the users of the replica archive? And perhaps most importantly, how does one tag in such a way as to take account of possible misinterpretations?⁴⁸ All of these questions are incorporated into the methodology behind the creation of our palimpsestic dictionary. As Lev Manovich writes of new media, the SPP is not “something fixed once and for all, but something that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions.”⁴⁹

In addition to the complexities introduced by digital archiving, we are continually aware that our project and any of the research results it produces will be incomplete. This is because, while the earlier research by postcard historians tells us approximately how many suffrage postcards were produced, we invariably do not have access to them all. Thus, our methodological aim is to take this limitation into account and make visible to users that the SPP can indeed “exist in different, potentially infinite versions” and such versions inevitably affect research results (data visualizations, search results, etc.). As we treat “in-flux data,” our methodology necessarily evolves and so too does the archive itself. The evolution of the digital archive is significant in

⁴⁷ Catherine D’Ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, *Data Feminism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020), Chapter 1.

⁴⁸ Some of the researchers’ experience of this process is laid out in more detail in Kristin Allukian, Allison Duque, and Alexander Cendrowski, “Decentering Digital Discomfort: Research Consciousness in the Feminist DH Lab,” *Hybrid Pedagogy* (October 29, 2020), <https://hybridpedagogy.org/digital-discomfort/>.

⁴⁹ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 36.

archive studies in that we are able to demonstrate, through the palimpsestic dictionary, that an archive itself is not stable. A digital archive is similar to other forms of electronic literature in that it “is not finished just because it has reached its public—it could change right before the reader’s eyes.”⁵⁰

Preliminary Research Outcomes: Data Visualizations and Projections

Digital humanities (DH) methods enable the SPP to amass metadata and thematic tags relating to suffrage postcards, making it possible to generate new historical and methodological insights about early-twentieth-century suffrage visual culture. Since the estimated total of published suffrage postcards amounts only to thousands, this constitutes a small-scale but nonetheless statistically and historically significant approach to big data. Identifying key visual and thematic trends can both corroborate and challenge the findings of existing scholarship. This section will offer preliminary analyses of the SPP’s first data visualizations.

Certain trends are palpable in the historiography about suffrage visual history. However, a digital humanities approach provides stronger evidence for the persistence of certain thematic presences and absences. As the SPP’s preliminary results attest, DH offers the opportunity to test the hypotheses that scholars have previously developed about transatlantic suffrage postcards. The SPP is particularly concerned with thematic trends relating to gender, class, race, and sexuality. Its interpretative framework uses insights from feminist and queer theory, as well as the digital humanities and digital history. These preliminary findings draw upon the SPP’s current corpus of more than 1,100 postcards. Our own interests as interdisciplinary feminist scholars inevitably shape the research questions we ask, which are in turn elicited by the digital corpus itself. Some research questions lend themselves to postcards either for or against woman suffrage, whereas others pertain to the corpus as a whole.

1. Data visualizations.

Data visualization is one of the DH methods that the SPP uses to test previous scholarly hypotheses relating to what might be considered the *visual appeal* of the suffrage postcards. Created with these principles in mind, our data visualizations are primarily concerned with coloration, which we have visualized based on the degree of saturation versus luminescence across the digital corpus. These data visualizations attest to the significance of coloration in relation to those postcards produced by pro-suffrage organizations and by anti-suffrage commercial postcard publishers.

Our coding practices seek to align with the feminist principles undergirding the project. When writing code for data visualizations, the SPP aligns with feminist codes of programming; we are attuned to the ways that politics are embedded in algorithms.⁵¹ Self-reflexive conversations around the power of language when naming delegates, for example, question the use of delegations that

⁵⁰ Scott Rettberg, *Electronic Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 7.

⁵¹ For in-depth discussions about how algorithms are not neutral but rather reflect, reinforce, and reimagine oppressive relationships, see Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018); Virginia Eubanks, *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2018); Cathy O’Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (New York: Crown Books, 2016).

signify circumscribed meanings, strict hierarchies, or binaries.⁵² Our code is accompanied by comment lines, demarcated by a hashtag (#), to offer transparent explanations of coding decisions for fellow SPP researchers. The more transparent our coding decisions, the better situated future coders will be to build on the work. Our data visualizations, then, are dependent on both how we tag a postcard and how we write and annotate our code.

Visual appeal is an amorphous and historically situated concept. During the 1910s, the use of color in mass media was a new frontier. In his retrospective on Technicolor, its founder Herbert Kalmus explained the appeal and apprehension about color technology in language tinged with excitement and danger, alluding to the “excursions” of Technicolor as a “chance of danger or loss; the encountering of risks; a bold undertaking, a daring feat; a remarkable occurrence or experience, a stirring incident; a mercantile or speculative enterprise of hazard; a venture.”⁵³ Colorful suffrage postcards constituted just one ephemeral commercial product within an increasingly technologically advanced consumer culture.⁵⁴ Margaret M. Finnegan argues that a faction of suffragist women leveraged consumer culture in service of the woman suffrage movement. Whether portraying suffragists as “good consumers” or commercializing the movement itself through products such as badges, Kewpie dolls, and memorabilia, these suffragists understood their engagement with consumer culture as a campaign tactic that “not only made them savvy but also put them at the forefront of an emerging, commercialized style of politics.”⁵⁵

The *visual appeal* of a suffrage postcard has routinely been interpreted in terms of the dynamism of its text-based argument and accompanying illustrations or photographs. Scholars reflect that the success of each often correlated with whether or not a postcard was in support of or against the suffrage movement, with most concluding that the degree of visual appeal was directly related to the degree of coloration. As one scholar observes, various suffrage organizations issued “many postcards, unfortunately of an uninspiring nature,” whereas commercial companies published numerous anti-suffrage postcards, “often with quite vicious cartoons, which were of a far more lively kind.”⁵⁶ The Dunston-Weiler Lithograph Company’s full-color, 12-postcard “Suffragette Series” of anti-suffrage postcards, for example, has been described as particularly “noteworthy for its graphic appeal.”⁵⁷ This suggests that anti-suffrage postcards were likely to have been more colorful and eye-catching than their pro-suffrage counterparts. There were, of course, outliers; indeed, some anti-suffrage postcards were less colorful than others, and some fully monochrome pro-suffrage postcards have a high degree of saturation. Moreover, some of the NAWSA postcards, particularly those that Kenneth Florey describes as their “‘art’ cards,” did use color to “enhance both their beauty and collectability.”⁵⁸ However, scholars repeatedly suggest that pro-

⁵² Delegates are used when a coder wants to assign a responsibility or action to an object. Instead of having the object perform an action, a coder can provide that object with a delegate. The delegate will be called when the object needs to perform the responsibility or action that is beyond the scope of the object.

⁵³ Herbert Kalmus, “Technicolor Adventures in Cinemaland,” *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers* 31, (1938): 564.

⁵⁴ Suffrage organisations in Britain and the United States also developed their own colour schemes; see Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 32, 93; Florey, *Women’s Suffrage Memorabilia*, 80, 104.

⁵⁵ Margaret M. Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture & Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 7.

⁵⁶ Fraser, “Propaganda on the Picture Postcard,” 40.

⁵⁷ Palczewski, “The Male Madonna,” 366.

⁵⁸ Florey, *American Woman Suffrage Postcards*, 19.

suffrage postcards were bland, monochromatic, and, broadly speaking, visually unappealing, whereas anti-suffrage postcards were colorful and graphically innovative.

Thus, our hypothesis asks: To what degree does a greater intensity of coloration, based on saturation versus luminance, align with the political messaging on suffrage postcards?

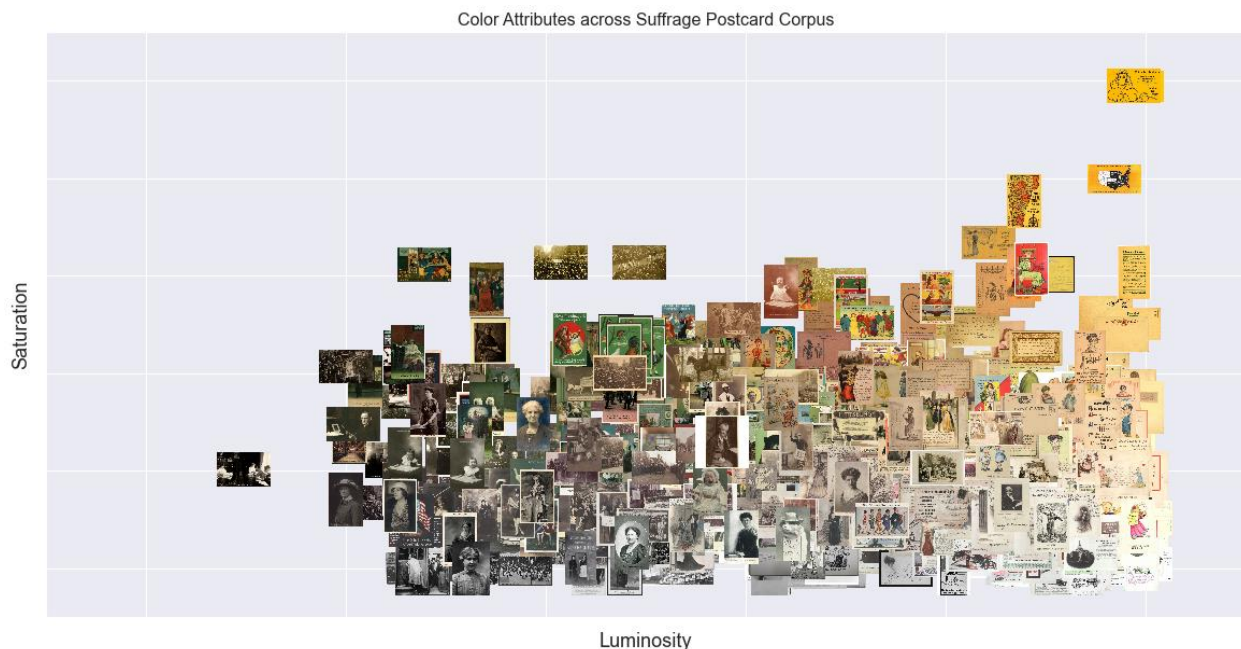


Figure 2. The degree of coloration is visualized by plotting saturation along the y axis against luminance on the x axis. Each individual suffrage postcard is not clearly visible because more than 1100 postcards end up layered on top of one another.

Using our digital replica archive, the SPP has developed data visualizations that provide more nuanced analyses of the use of color in pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage postcards. The coloration of a postcard is based on its colorfulness in terms of a higher density of colors versus a higher density of whites, greys, or subdued tones. The degree of coloration can be analyzed through saturation and luminosity. By exporting the SPP's digital corpus from Omeka into the Python programming language, it is possible to explore our data using standard data visualization libraries. One such visualization (figure 2) reveals differing degrees of saturation and luminosity across both pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage postcards. Our knowledge of the digital corpus and familiarity with its postcards enable us to offer a preliminary analysis of this data visualization. This suggests to us that the majority of the pro-suffrage postcards, including the layer upon layer of postcards located underneath, are clustered in the bottom right-hand corner, where all the images with the least saturation and luminance appear. In contrast, the anti-suffrage postcards—some of which have full-color foregrounds and backgrounds—fan out around this cluster, thus indicating a greater degree of saturation and luminosity. This would suggest that pro-suffrage postcards are largely more monochrome and that anti-suffrage postcards are more colorful, which broadly aligns with the conclusions of previous scholarship.

Overall, the above data visualization and analysis correlates with and brings nuance to the theories advanced by scholars like Fraser, Palczewski, and Florey. The extent to which our interpretation of figure 2 verified existing scholarly hypotheses appears quite remarkable. We might, therefore, tentatively attribute this disparity in coloration to the differing financial situations of suffrage organizations in comparison to postcard publishers. The postcards clustered in the bottom right-hand corner of figure 3—the majority of which were pro-suffrage—were likely to have been produced far more cheaply than those with a greater intensity of color. However, wanting to test this hypothesis further, we created a series of other data visualizations to analyze the use of color on a level that could not be evaluated with the naked eye. Continued interrogation into the use of color via data visualization may challenge previous scholarly conclusions to a degree.

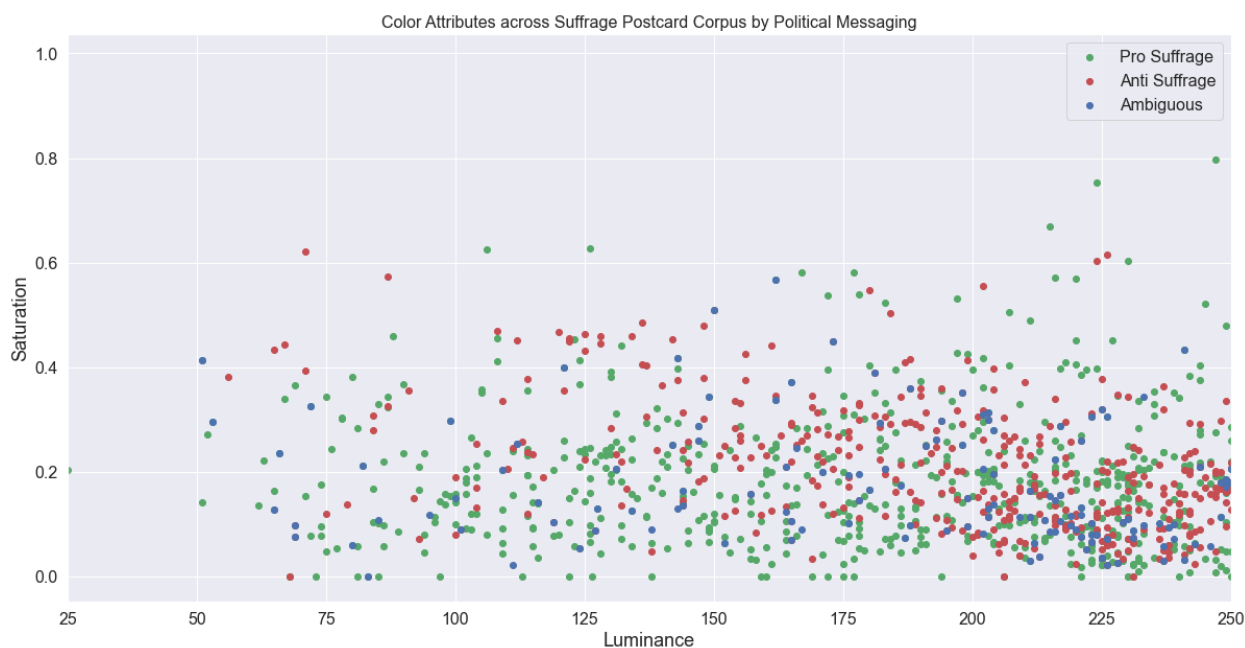


Figure 3. The dots in the scatter plot represent each individual postcard based on political messaging: pro-suffrage, ambiguous-suffrage, and anti-suffrage.

This resulted in a data visualization wherein a scatter plot revealed the actual distribution of saturation versus luminosity (figure 3). However, instead of visualizing the postcards themselves, we used a dot which aligned with a postcard's political messaging via tagging. This enabled us to see exactly where pro-suffrage, anti-suffrage, and ambiguous-suffrage postcards appeared based on saturation versus luminosity. This visualization indicated a distinction that was far less clear in terms of a relationship between coloration and political messaging, a conclusion opposite to that of our interpretation of the previous data visualization (figure 2). The addition of a linear regression line on this scatter plot again demonstrated an insignificant difference in the degree of coloration between the pro-suffrage and ambiguous-suffrage postcards and the anti-suffrage postcards (figure 4). This suggests that, rather than any clear distinction existing between political messaging and saturation versus luminosity, the overall difference in coloration is negligible.

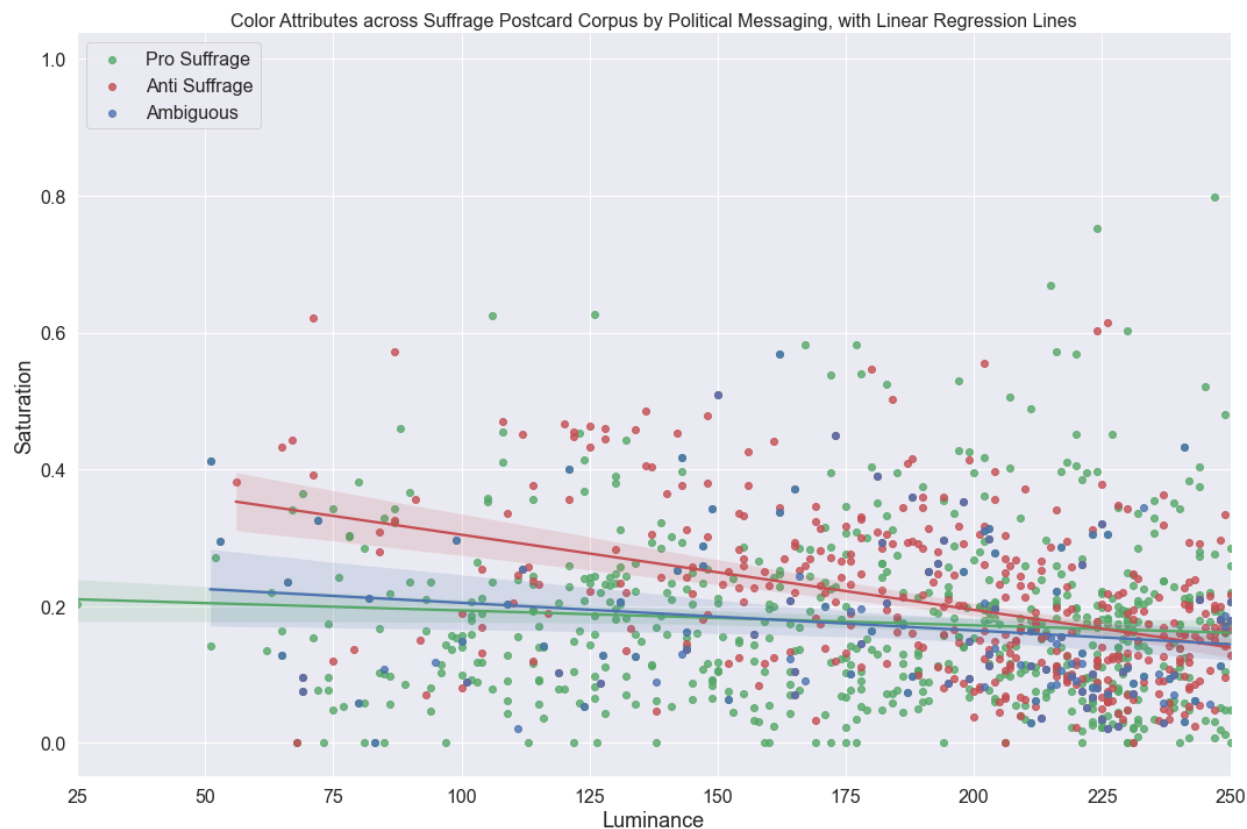


Figure 4. The linear regression line indicates a slight increase of saturation across anti-suffrage postcards, a difference that is only distinctive in the section of the graph where fewer postcards are plotted.

Since these data visualizations—figure 2 versus figure 3 and figure 4—gave rise to completely different interpretations, we decided to test the original hypothesis further. If most postcards were actually in the more monochrome color range and therefore had visual tones that were far more similar than they were different, then this would somewhat undercut arguments about the degree of distinction between the coloration of anti-suffrage and pro-suffrage postcards.

Thus, we undertook another data visualization, which synthesized what we have termed the “average” postcard. The “average postcard” was created by integrating all the postcards in the database into two single composite images, distinguished only by their portrait or landscape orientation (figure 5). In essence, this entailed placing all the postcards in our digital replica archive on top of each other and merging them as if they were a single image. The results suggest that gray might, in fact, be the dominant color feature across the whole digital corpus. However, this did not demonstrate how the postcards may be distinguished in terms of political messaging. When we split the “average” postcard into pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage, the latter becomes marginally more colorful, yet gray remains the dominating feature (figure 6).

The "Average" Postcard

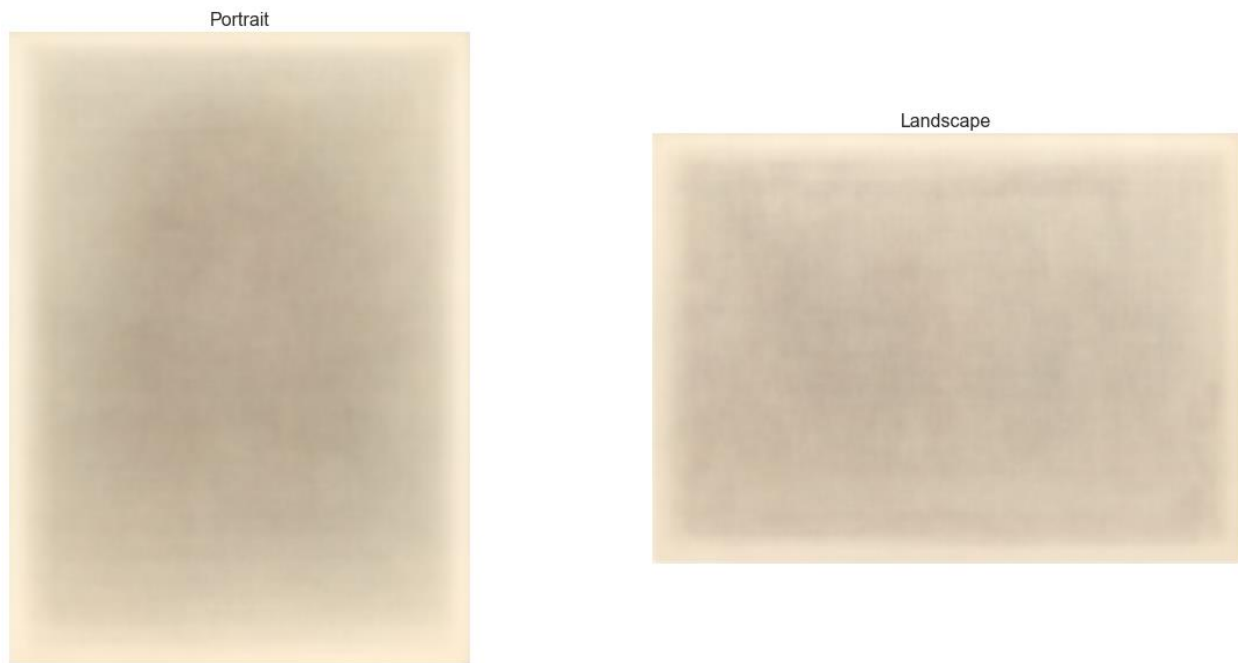


Figure 5. The “average” postcard produces two composite suffrage postcards that are far more monochrome than they are colorful.

The "Average" Postcard

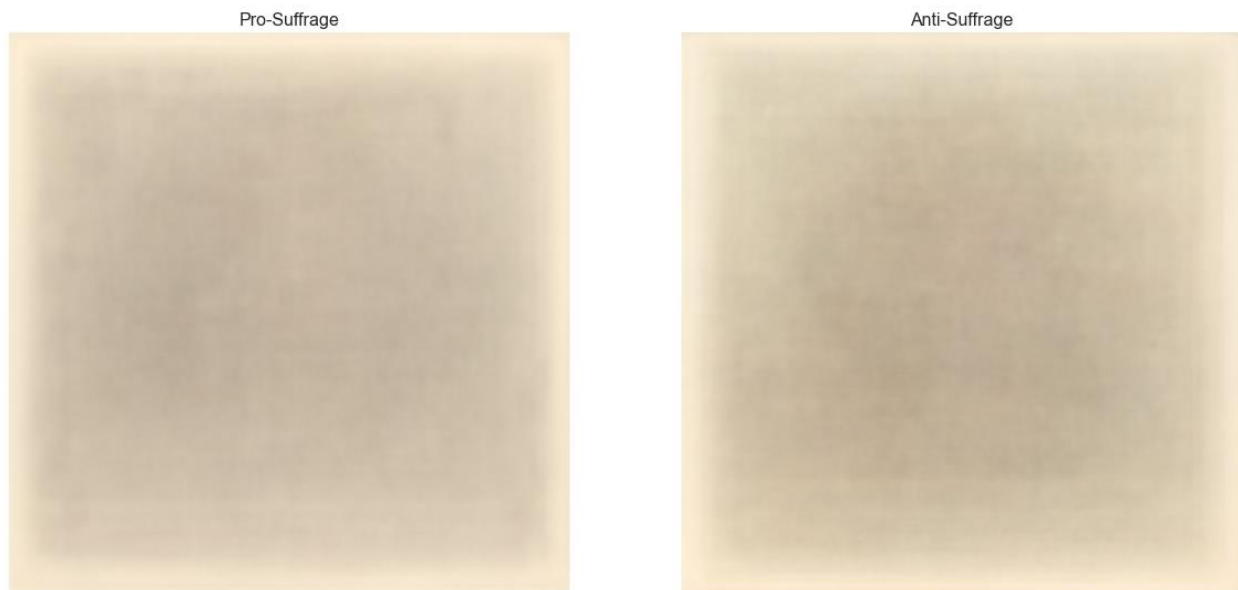


Figure 6. When split by political messaging, the “average” anti-suffrage postcard becomes slightly more colorful and the “average” pro-suffrage postcard remains gray.

To test these outcomes further, we decided to remove the most monochrome postcards from the digital corpus. A final data visualization based only on the postcards with a higher degree of saturation—in essence, those that were the most colorful—reveals a difference between pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage postcards (figure 7). Only at this point did an “average” suffrage postcard distinguished by political messaging reveal any significant difference between monochrome and colorful coloration. However, it is essential to emphasize that this distinction only manifested in a data visualization after we had tampered with the dataset significantly. Consequently, these conclusions (figure 7) were born of a smaller sample that does not incorporate SPP’s full database of postcards.

The “Average” Postcard, with Light Monochrome Postcards Removed

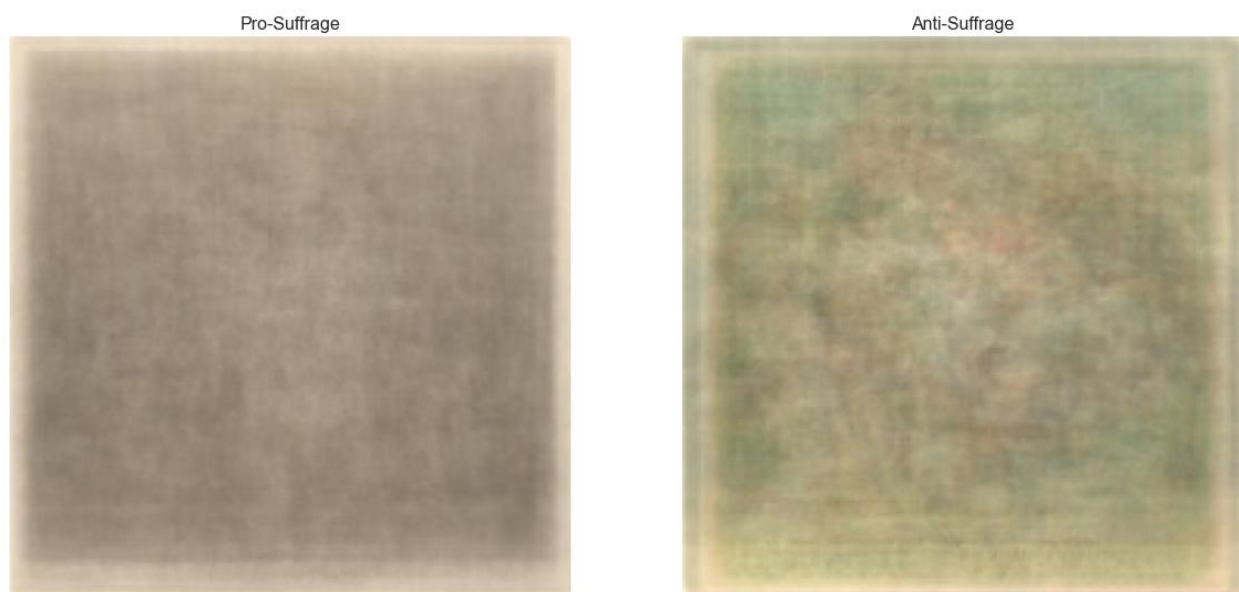


Figure 7. Only when the light monochrome postcards are removed from the digital corpus does the “average” anti-suffrage postcard become truly distinguished from the “average” pro-suffrage postcard.

How, then, do we make sense of the seemingly contradictory results of these last two data visualizations? To what extent are previous scholarly hypotheses about a correlation between coloration and political messaging correct?

We suggest that some prestige series—including the Dunston-Weiler Lithograph Company’s “Suffragette Series,” E. Nash’s cockerel series, and Walter Wellman’s “The Suffragette” series in the United States, as well as the Birn Brothers’ “Just by Way of a Change” and Raphael Tuck & Sons’ “The Suffragette” series in Britain—may have dominated previous scholarly interpretations of anti-suffrage postcards. Each prestige series and its ilk were indeed highly colorized, sometimes to the point where the postcard’s whole recto (front) was printed in color. Often available in large sets of six to twelve, these postcard series were, presumably, far more expensive to print and purchase as a consequence. If more anti-suffrage postcards appear to have been more monochrome than most scholars have previously concluded, then these prestige series may have warped interpretations of the data to a degree. Overstating the colorfulness and appeal of anti-suffrage postcards may also overstate the influence of anti-suffrage political messaging.

Is color, in itself, a feminist issue? If we understand color as a data point and understand that data is never neutral, then it is. Color can also be historicized within visual and material culture. When it comes to the process of postcard production, colored ink, color printing, and photographic coloration (including deeply saturated sepia photographs) would have been more expensive than printing in black and white or grayscale. Color printing was expensive in the early twentieth century and remains so today. We might therefore ask: Who, in these early decades, had the money to print in color and was also politically opposed to women's right to vote? Which publishers were involved in printing these anti-suffrage postcards? And, if we were to "follow the colored ink," so to speak, what financial investments in other political causes might we find linked to investors? Finally, what might the answer to these questions tell us about the relationship between money and politics in the early twentieth century?⁵⁹

Hand in hand with the role of colorful suffrage postcards in visual and material culture is the role of colorful suffrage postcards in consumer culture. Colorful postcards were not just eye-catching; in fact, they were historically aligned with an increasingly technologically advanced consumer culture that would include a new technicolor film industry. To consume the mass media in its most recent technological format held—and continues to hold—a certain cultural cachet. To apply color to anti-suffrage would suggest knowledge of a certain spirit-of-the-age. The catchy marketing practice of color for anti-suffrage publishers, then, becomes one method of attempted diversion from philosophical debates about voting rights. Color, it could be argued, may have diverted contemporary scholars as it did consumers of the 1910s.

2. Visualizing absence.

Suffrage visual history also suggests that pro-suffrage postcards appear overly moralistic, that anti-suffrage postcards seem deeply misogynistic, and that upper-middle-class adult white women are the primary subjects of suffrage cartoons.⁶⁰ However, when these analyses are considered across hundreds of postcards, other key trends emerge: men appear surprisingly often as the subject of debate; children and animals are ubiquitous; white working-class people are depicted with some regularity; ethnic stereotypes, especially about immigrants, are evident, although rare; and white Europeans figure at the center of all the suffrage postcards.

In consequence, people of African, Asian, and South Asian descent as well as Indigenous people are conspicuous due to their absence across the original corpus of suffrage postcards. This dearth of racial diversity means that the SPP is at risk of reproducing the whiteness of the digital archive.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Lisa Tickner suggests that British suffrage artists such as the Suffrage Atelier used the monochrome woodcut method "for ease of production, cheapness, speed and boldness of effect." Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 25–26. For finances and money in the British and American suffrage movements, see Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 42–45; Joan Marie Johnson, *Funding Feminism: Monied Women, Philanthropy, and the Women's Movement, 1870–1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

⁶⁰ Florey, *American Woman Suffrage Postcards*, 1–2; Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women*, 167–226; Palczewski, "The Male Madonna," 366.

⁶¹ See Tara McPherson, "Why Are the Digital Humanities So White? Or Thinking the Histories of Race and Computation," in *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Matthew K. Gould (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Nicole M. Brown, Ruby Mendenhall, Michael L. Black, Mark Van Moer, Assata Zerai, and Karen Flynn, "Mechanized Margin to Digitised Center: Black Feminism's Contributions to Combatting Erasure within the Digital Humanities," *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing* 10, no. 1 (2016): 110–25.

To address this absence, we decided to expand our vision of what might constitute a “suffrage postcard.” We actively sought early-twentieth-century postcards that could have been read as having a pro-suffrage or anti-suffrage political message in terms of the parameters of the woman suffrage debate.⁶²

An early-twentieth-century postcard reprinted an iconic photograph of Sojourner Truth, which had originally appeared on a *carte-de-viste* during the 1860s and 1870s.⁶³ We decided to include this postcard in the SPP’s corpus because of Truth’s personal commitment to universal suffrage.⁶⁴ Similarly, another early-twentieth-century postcard featured abolitionist and suffragist Frederick Douglass and the celebrated poet Paul Dunbar Lawrence. It is important to recall, however, that these postcards were not specifically affiliated with woman suffrage. Indeed, neither of these postcards referenced Truth or Douglass’s well-known advocacy of universal suffrage—enfranchisement for African American men and all women—especially following the Civil War

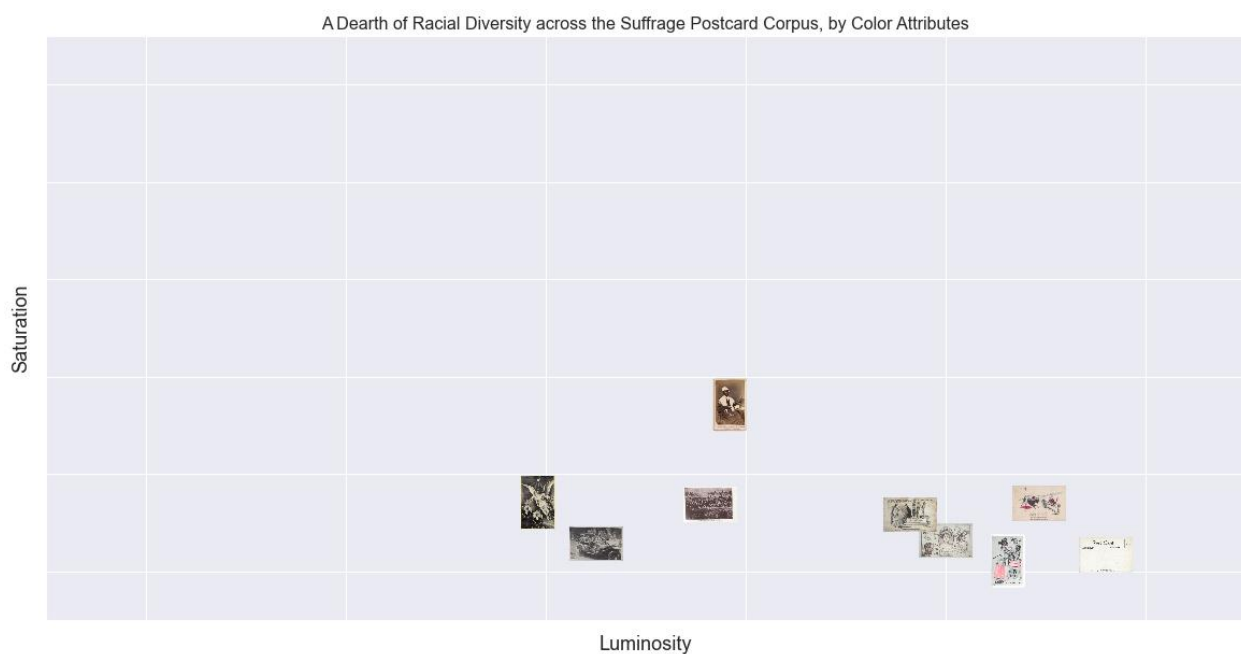


Figure 8. The two postcards we identified as implicitly supporting women’s enfranchisement featured three famous African Americans: Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and Paul Dunbar Lawrence. The few other anti-suffrage postcards that embraced racist stereotypes did so comparatively rarely.

⁶² Other postcards promoted racist stereotypes, particularly of African Americans, while racist iconography featured on postcards depicting colonialism, see Baldwin, “On the Verso,” 15–28; Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 89–96.

⁶³ Kathleen Collins, “Shadow and Substance: Sojourner Truth,” *History of Photography* 7, no. 3 (1983): 194, 201. We are actively continuing our attempts to locate digitized postcards that depict women such as Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and other African Americans who supported woman suffrage.

⁶⁴ See Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

of 1861 to 1865.⁶⁵ Rather, our rationale for including these postcards in the SPP’s digital corpus is that a pro-suffrage message might have been read into these postcards when they were produced and circulated during the early twentieth century.

Even despite these efforts, a data visualisation centered upon the representation of African Americans in both pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage postcards (figure 8) demonstrates just how infrequently people of color appeared across the entire digital corpus.⁶⁶ In contradistinction to the data visualization which features the entire SPP digital corpus (figure 2), this strongly suggests that neither pro-suffrage nor anti-suffrage postcard publishers could conceive of a future which embraced a racially diverse electorate.

Conclusion

Since much large-scale digital archiving has heretofore oriented itself around canonical—read, male—figures, the Suffrage Postcard Project instead offers an important middle ground.⁶⁷ It features picture postcards centered around women and questions of gender, race, and class, offering perspectives from both sides of the suffrage debate. Thus, the digital humanities offer the opportunity to consider and reconsider previous scholarly hypotheses about suffrage postcards, as well as to develop new insights into the visual trends in feminist and anti-feminist visual culture at the turn of the twentieth century.

A rich and robust tagging system and historically based palimpsest dictionary of tags allows us to consider the wide range of themes and topics as well as the questions our digital replica archive asks of us. While working-class people do appear across the corpus, the question of racial diversity was—except for a very few postcards—largely conspicuous due to its absence. Changes that occurred in visual representations of gender and sexuality prompt questions about how campaigns chose to respond to such public representations. The postcards sometimes celebrated and often denigrated the achievements of rank-and-file reformers, as well as prominent women leaders. Gender, sexuality, class, race, non-human animals, and celebrity were all key elements in the visual trends developed across suffrage postcards. Future data visualizations will offer insight into trends associated with gender, sexuality, parenthood, and childhood; the historical connections between coloration, humor, and emotion as rhetoric; how the working classes were engaged in the suffrage debate; what type of animals contributed to these arguments; and the relative prominence of women suffrage leaders versus misogynistic anti-suffrage messaging.

By focusing on the interrelatedness of such themes through our tagging system and our palimpsest dictionary, we aim to develop an intersectional approach to these suffrage postcards, remaining as

⁶⁵ See Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote*, esp. 13–53; Faye E. Dudden, *Fighting Chance: The Struggle over Woman Suffrage and Black Suffrage in Reconstruction America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁶⁶ Our feminist data visualization of “absence” was inspired by Catherine D’Ignazio, “What Would Feminist Data Visualization Look Like?” *Medium*, January 23, 2017, <https://medium.com/@kanarinka/what-would-feminist-data-visualization-look-like-aa3f8fc7f96c>.

⁶⁷ Jessica Enoch and Jean Bessette, “Meaningful Engagements: Feminist Historiography and the Digital Humanities,” *College Composition and Communication* 64, no. 4 (2013): 634–60.

aware of their cultural achievements as their pitfalls.⁶⁸ Bringing such digital humanities methods together with the historical and social framework in which these postcards were produced and circulated offers crucial context for making sense of such ephemera from the perspective of feminist digital archiving and transatlantic suffrage history.

⁶⁸ See Roopika Risam, “Beyond the Margins: Intersectionality and the Digital Humanities,” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (2015).