

# The 1915 map that helped all women get the vote

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This illustration, titled "The Awakening," shows a torch-bearing woman labeled "Votes for Women" which symbolized the awakening of the nation's women to fight for the right to vote. Courtesy of Library of Congress

You might have seen what today's electoral map would look like if only women voted. Well, here's another version of that map—a "suffrage map" from early 20th century America. Suffrage maps played an influential role in the fight for women's suffrage, and "The Awakening," above, is one of the most striking examples.

Published in Puck Magazine in 1915 and illustrated by German-born artist Henry Mayer, the map depicts women with faces turned to the light that Lady Liberty is bringing east. Her flowing robes are emblazoned with the words, "VOTES FOR WOMEN."

By 1915, the Western states marked in white had already given women the vote; another suffrage map of the time was labeled “9 States of Light Among 39 of Darkness.” In this map, you can see the desperation on the women’s faces and in their movements, as they stretch themselves toward the votes that ought to be theirs.

It’s a case of women using cartography—a field long controlled by elite Western men for imperialist purposes—for their own purposes: equality and social justice.

The map appeared during the Empire State Campaign, which was fighting to amend New York’s gender-based voting restrictions, which it accomplished in 1917.

“Are political rights to be a question of geography?” one campaign committee flier asked. “The women of New York will be eligible to vote for the next President if the men of the Empire State are as generous-minded as the men of the West have been.”

Maps like this one were printed on posters, pamphlets, paper fans, banners, and broadsides to be handed out across cities and communities, snowballing into powerful movements that broke free of family parlors and spread to the streets.

Suffrage maps were painted on walls and positioned in prominent public places, such as state buildings, banks, and businesses. They showed up on drinking glasses, baseball programs, parade floats, and sandwich boards.

In a 1913 essay called “Walks and Wins with Two-Ft. Map,” one suffragist noted that “Men are much impressed by the ocular proof of our advance”:

I wear it (the suffrage map) sandwich fashion, and walk about my crowded streets. It attracts everyone’s eye, and an explanation of the colors excites deep interest and makes a great impression.

Impressed, perhaps, but not always convinced by the actions of other states—a man from Massachusetts wrote to The New York Times in 1913, after it published an earlier suffrage map, “...not a single State east of the Mississippi River had adopted woman suffrage: every ‘white’ State on the suffrage map is in the weird and woolly West.”

Additionally, the coloration of the map is problematic in its treatment of race, with its focus on white women only. (Black women did not get the vote until 1920, no matter which coast they lived on). The women pictured in “The Awakening” belonged to an upper-middle-class movement—if you peer closely, you’ll see their hairstyles and headpieces are finely fashioned.

Yet maps like this one were a shared anchor between women across the country, as well as a powerful form of media and advertising. The suffrage maps were soon pervasive, broadly referenced, and cited in publications across the country.

If you look closely under the map itself, you’ll see a poem echoing many of the thoughts and fears women voters still experience today. It is a work by Alice Duer Miller, a novelist, playwright, screenwriter and feminist whose work includes “Are Women People? A Book of Rhymes for Suffrage Times.”

Here are the final verses of Miller’s poem:

The came from toll and want, from leisure and ease, Those who knew only life,  
and learned women of fame, Girls and the mothers of girls, and the mothers of  
these. No one knew whence or how, but they came, they came.

The faces of some were stern, and some were gay, And some were pale with the  
terror of unreal dangers; But their hearts knew this: hereafter come what may,  
Women to women would never again be strangers.

## Quiz

- 1 Which of the following paragraphs from the article BEST represents the CENTRAL idea that suffrage maps effectively advanced the cause for women's suffrage?
- (A) It's a case of women using cartography—a field long controlled by elite Western men for imperialist purposes—for their own purposes: equality and social justice.
  - (B) Maps like this one were printed on posters, pamphlets, paper fans, banners, and broadsides to be handed out across cities and communities, snowballing into powerful movements that broke free of family parlors and spread to the streets.
  - (C) Suffrage maps were painted on walls and positioned in prominent public places, such as state buildings, banks, and businesses. They showed up on drinking glasses, baseball programs, parade floats, and sandwich boards.
  - (D) I wear it (the suffrage map) sandwich fashion, and walk about my crowded streets. It attracts everyone's eye, and an explanation of the colors excites deep interest and makes a great impression.
- 2 Which of the following sentences from the article supports the MAIN ideas that suffrage maps were influential in securing women's right to vote and that voting rights united women?
- (A) The map appeared during the Empire State Campaign, which was fighting to amend New York's gender-based voting restrictions, which it accomplished in 1917.
  - (B) "The women of New York will be eligible to vote for the next President if the men of the Empire State are as generous-minded as the men of the West have been."
  - (C) Yet maps like this one were a shared anchor between women across the country, as well as a powerful form of media and advertising.
  - (D) If you look closely under the map itself, you'll see a poem echoing many of the thoughts and fears women voters still experience today.

- 3 Each of the following topics is acknowledged in both the article and the suffrage map "The Awakening" EXCEPT:
- (A) women's desire to obtain voting rights
  - (B) geography's role in women's voting rights in 1915
  - (C) the Eastern states' resistance to granting women voting rights
  - (D) the lack of voting rights for black women in all states prior to 1920
- 4 Who would likely find the suffrage map "The Awakening" MOST useful?
- (A) A woman from Florida in 1915 showing it to her state senator.
  - (B) A woman from Wyoming in 1915 showing it to her state senator.
  - (C) A woman from Kansas in 1915 showing it to women from New York.
  - (D) A woman from Texas in 1915 showing it to women from California.