FRAMING FILM

THE HISTORY & ART OF CINEMA

16

Suffrage and the Silver Screen

AMY SHORE

In the 1910s, the American woman suffrage movement became a modern mass movement by using visual culture to transform consciousness and gain adherents. As part of this transformation, suffrage organizations produced several films and related cinematic projects, including four full-length, nationally distributed feature productions. This activist use was one of the first instances in the United States that a social movement recognized and harnessed the power of cinema to transform consciousness and, in turn, the social order. *Suffrage and the Silver Screen* discusses how the suffrage movement accomplished this formidable goal through analysis of the local and national uses of cinema by the movement. Amy Shore argues that these works must be considered as part of a political filmmaking tradition among feminists. The book contextualizes the films within the politics and practices of the suffrage organizations that produced them in order to understand and assess the strategic role of these films. By examining these works, the history of both suffrage and cinema is necessarily reconsidered and expanded. *Suffrage and the Silver Screen* is an essential resource for those studying early cinema, women and cinema, the woman suffrage movement, and the use of visual media in social movements.

"Amy Shore has uncovered a wealth of new information to document the enormous impact of early motion pictures on the campaign for women's suffrage. In doing so, she challenges conventional histories of the suffrage movement which have tended to view cinema and other visual media as, at best, footnotes to the larger campaign. A phenomenal study, *Suffrage and the Silver Screen* is essential reading for anyone interested in histories of feminism, activist cinema, and the role of visual culture in modern politics."

Shelley Stamp, Author of *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture after the Nickelodeon*

Amy Shore is Director and Associate Professor in the Cinema & Screen Studies Program at the State University of New York at Oswego. Shore holds a Ph.D. in cinema studies from New York University and a B.A. in Spanish literature from the University of Delaware. Her research on media and social movements has been published in *Camera Obscura* and *Afterimage* as well as in a 2010 collection of essays that re-examines the relationship between feminism, history, and feminist theory in film.

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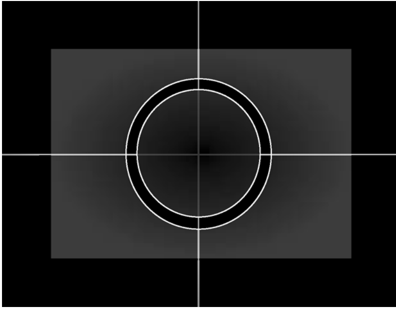
Suffrage and the Silver Screen



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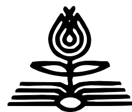

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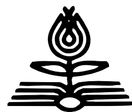

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Finally, my husband and daughter are the two funniest, most obsessive, adventurous and loving people in my life. I know without a doubt that should we need to march in the streets tomorrow for a cause as great as suffrage, they would be by my side. In fact, they would probably lead the way. To Philip and Maya, my eternal love and gratitude.

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Figure 1. Inez Milholland at the National American Woman Suffrage Association parade, March 3, 1913, Washington, D.C. (George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress, Reproduction Number: LC-DIG-ppmsc-00031)

Figure 2. National Woman's Party picketing the White House, Washington, D.C., 1917 (The Social Welfare History Project: http://www.socialwelfarehistory.com/organizations/national-womans-party/)

CHAPTER ONE

Suffrage and Cinema, A History of Visual Activism

Ladies in white marching down New York City's Fifth Avenue, Inez Milholland leading the first national suffrage parade dressed as the suffrage "herald" atop a white horse, silent females staring into cameras as they formed the first-ever pickets in front of the White House, images of Susan B. Anthony's profile in her signature black dress with white lace collar. These are some of the images of the American woman suffrage movement that were circulated in mass during the 1910s to help win the vote by transforming the American woman suffrage movement into a mass movement for the twentieth century. Through posters, plays, pageants and more, the American woman suffrage movement became a modern mass movement by using visual culture to transform consciousness and gain adherents to the cause. As part of this transformation, suffrage organizations produced several films and related cinematic projects in the 1910s. Most were produced in conjunction with a studio, two projects were made for local distribution, while four films were full-length feature productions for national distribution. The works were intended to fulfill the mandate that Harriot Stanton Blatch, leader of the Women's Political Union (WPU), described in adversarial, yet religious language: "The enemy must be converted through his eyes."[1]

This activist use of film was one of the first instances in the United States that a social movement recognized and harnessed the power of cinema to transform consciousness and, in turn, transform the social order. In *Suffrage and the Silver Screen,* I study how the suffrage movement accomplished this formidable goal. I claim that the cinematic works of the suffrage movement are an important part of the tradition of feminist filmmaking. I also argue that the study of these films as organizing tools can broaden the entire field of feminist

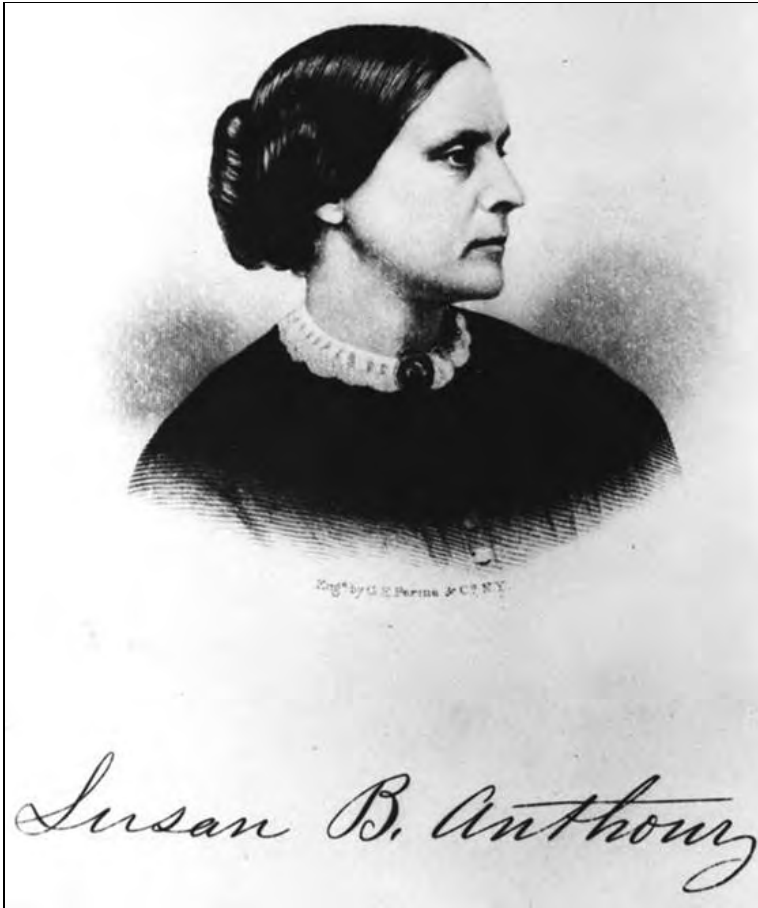

Figure 3. Susan B. Anthony circa 1860 (The Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, FRDO 1057: http://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/douglass /exb/womensRights/FRDO131.html)

film studies by reuniting questions of feminist filmmaking practice with questions of feminist film theory. Moreover, they extend our understanding of the woman suffrage movement by showing how suffrage organizations mobilized the power of cinematic identification to generate pro-suffrage identities among both local and national audiences. Indeed, suffrage and cinema formed a productive union in the 1910s in which cinema helped generate communities of supporters for the suffrage movement while the movement helped recruit moviegoers to cinema.

This productive union between suffrage and cinema is evident in a brief sketch of the works studied in this book. The movement's cinematic works ranged from lantern slide shows in New York City's nickelodeons to multi-reel

melodramas shown across the country. They included one of the only "sound" films made during the 1910s—a kinetophone entitled *Votes for Women* (1911) made at Edison Studios and distributed throughout the Northeast. They also included performances by well-known leaders of both the American and British suffrage movements, including Anna Howard Shaw, President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), Jane Addams, Vice-President of NAWSA and founder of the American settlement house movement, Emmeline Pankhurst, founder and leader of the militant British Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), and Harriot Stanton Blatch, head of the WPU. These leaders of the movement were transformed into "suffrage stars," headlining films distributed as far apart as Boston, New York, Baltimore, St. Louis, Los Angeles, Portland (Oregon), and Montreal.

The suffrage movement also made innovative use of cinematic melodrama to make sentimental appeals to national audiences. Early film critic Vachel Lindsay described one of the melodramas, *Your Girl and Mine* (1914), as one of the early masterpieces of propaganda films.[2] These films turned melodramatic heroines into suffrage heroines and in so doing presented to women across the nation powerful suffrage figures with which they could identify. This process of identification, I argue, was a central strategy by which suffrage and cinema came together to generate followers for the suffrage movement and audiences for cinema.

Footnotes or Landmarks? The Place of the Suffrage Films in American History

Considering the innovative nature of the films, their focus on social change and their contemporary critical praise, one would assume that they would be among the most-studied works within cinema studies. In particular, one would expect that these works by the suffrage movement would be written about as constituent of the early years of feminist filmmaking. In fact, they remain little more than footnotes in the histories of cinema, feminism and social change. Only three scholars have given the films any measure of study, with Shelley Stamp's 2000 study of women and early cinema representing the first effort to incorporate the films into a specifically feminist history of American cinema.[3]

The reasons for the limited study of the suffrage films can be accounted for in several ways. First, all but two of the films are lost. Without the primary object of study—the film—most researchers simply move on to other objects. This is a prevalent problem within studies of early cinema since many of the films either deteriorated or burned because of the nitrate base in their production. In addition, without an appreciation for the long-term value of

films to society—they were seen for the most part as passing forms of entertainment—libraries, museums and other archival sources did not preserve films during the first decades of cinema.

Secondly, neither the field of cinema studies nor the field of women's history has understood the films to be of particular importance. In cinema studies, the films should be considered landmark works that integrated cinema and social movements. However, studies of early cinema and social movements have prioritized the works of male filmmakers, most often in other national contexts such as Russia. One need only think of the dozens of studies of Sergei Eisenstein to note the focus upon male film producers in other countries as exemplars of using film for social change.[4] This emphasis certainly reflects the bias towards male filmmakers as agents of social change that has marked the field of cinema studies. However, one would assume that the portion of the field aimed at challenging such patriarchal histories of the cinema, namely feminist film studies, would have included the suffrage films in their lists of canonical works. Yet, these scholars have tended to focus on second wave filmmakers as "feminist filmmakers," turning back to the early years of cinema to address broader issues of the field such as spectatorship and women's marginalization in Hollywood after the early years of cinema.

Recent collections on feminist film history are breaking ground in this area by reframing questions of purpose in relation to women filmmakers, critics, performers, audiences and activists. Collections such as *Reclaiming the Archive: Feminism and Film History* (Vicki Callahan, Ed.)[5] and *The Red Velvet Seat: Women's Writings on the Cinema* (Antonia Lant, Ed.)[6] open up new questions about women and early cinema (as well as later eras) by fundamentally questioning traditional historiographical approaches. Essays in such collections avoid strict periodization of social movements (e.g. "First Wave" and "Second Wave" movements), look at alliances and influences across national boundaries, examine previously neglected archives including the vast amount of writing on cinema produced by women, utilize transmedia approaches to understanding cinema and individual films, and much more. It is within this growing body of work on feminism, history and cinema that I propose *Suffrage and the Silver Screen* contributes by bringing these previously neglected films and the women who made them into the historical landscape.

In the arena of women's history studies more generally, the films have garnered even less attention than in feminist film studies. For example, in Kristi Miller's comprehensive biography of Ruth Hannah McCormick, co-producer of the largest suffrage film, *Your Girl and Mine,* the film does not even merit a footnote.[7] Suffrage films occupy two paragraphs in Ellen Carol DuBois's influential biography of Harriot Stanton Blatch, head of the WPU, which helped produce the Edison kinetophone, the suffrage comedy *Suffrage and the*

Man (1912), as well as the only extant melodrama, *80 Million Women Want ____?* (1913). In studies of suffrage and popular culture, such as Margaret Finnegan's *Selling Suffrage,* the films are mentioned several times, but only in general terms.[8] They are included as one among a range of tactics through which the suffrage movement mobilized the emerging consumer culture's capitalist address to women in order to convince them to support suffrage. Similarly, Susan A. Glenn provides a critical background to the American suffrage movement's use of stage theatre for organizing purposes in *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism,* but she does not mention the films despite the fact that she extends other portions of her study into cinematic productions.[9]

The minimal study of the suffrage films within the arena of women's history can in part be attributed again to the lack of availability of the objects of study. However, because women's history has been one of the models by which cinema historians have learned to reconstruct lost historical objects through contextual and secondary sources, this does not fully explain the oversight. In terms of the overall development of the field, the lack of attention to the films may be due to a predisposition to see film as an entertainment medium and a marginal arena for social change efforts. This is affirmed by the suffrage movement's own lack of attention to the films. In the multi-volume *History of Woman Suffrage,* the historical tome of the suffrage movement, the films only receive marginal references.[10] Similarly, Harriot Stanton Blatch does not even mention her organization's three films in her own autobiography.[11] The histories produced by suffragists during and immediately following the suffrage movement focused on either organizational reportage (detailed accounts of conventions, campaigns, etc.) or individual leadership. For example, page upon page of the *History of Woman Suffrage* account for the proceedings of national suffrage conventions. This mode of history writing folds the production of the films within lists of hundreds of other national suffrage activities. At the same time, biographies and autobiographies, in their efforts to encompass the life work of an individual account for film-related work as one of numerous acts on behalf of the movement. The suffrage leaders did not see themselves as "filmmakers"; instead, they saw filmmaking as one of a range of strategies that they oversaw during their leadership of suffrage organizations. In addition, as filmmaking was generally a collaborative effort and biographies/autobiographies are intended to illustrate the leadership of an individual, extensive discussion of the films would run counter to their narrative purpose.

The absence or marginalization of suffrage films in either cinema or women's history is an oversight that must be corrected in order to appreciate the place of these works within traditions of women producing social change through the use of media. These films must be embraced as a part of a feminist filmmaking legacy, albeit a legacy that the suffragists themselves may not have

perceived themselves to be pioneering. Doing so will allow us to see how, since the early years of cinema, women have harnessed the power of visual media to advance social movements.

As I mentioned, in the three instances in which the films are studied in depth, only one includes the works as part of a larger tradition of feminist filmmaking. The first significant study of the suffrage films came in 1986 when Martin F. Norden looked at the films as part of what he considers a genre that "sank into morbundity after only one incarnation."[12] Included in Norden's definition of this "one-cycle" genre of woman suffrage films were those films made by studios as travesties upon suffrage as well as those made by the movement to challenge such negative images of the movement and its adherents. Norden catalogs a number of the studio-made suffrage films, noting that they fell within a broader terrain of silent era films that made fun of women's efforts to move outside of the Victorian roles as mother, wife and caregiver. Women's movement outside of the home became the basis for comedies that emphasized gender role reversal through such tactics as swapping of traditional jobs or cross-dressing. For example, Norden points to *For the Cause of Suffrage* (Méliès, 1909) as an example of the cross-dressing phenomenon in suffrage films. In this film, a man, dressed as a woman, goes to a suffrage meeting and heckles the speaker, who is a woman dressed as a man.[13] In describing *When Women Win,* Norden notes that when women step out of the home and into the public sphere, they invert gender on social and biological levels. The film showed women after winning suffrage taking on roles as postal workers and business leaders, while a pregnant man is in the hospital delivering the baby while his wife paces anxiously outside.[14] [15]

Norden provides catalog descriptions of more than a dozen anti-suffrage comedies of the era. These descriptions form the context within which Norden sees the pro-suffrage films made by emerging suffrage organizations. He explains that the suffragists recognized in the anti-suffrage films the power of cinema for their cause: "Quite aware of the medium's formidable didactic and propagandistic powers, the feminists seized the opportunity and began making films themselves."[16] The descriptions that Norden then provides for the pro-suffrage films illustrate their juxtaposition to the anti-suffrage films. He notes in particular that films such as *80 Million Women Want ____?* focused on the process of gaining the vote, whereas many of the anti-suffrage films focused on the social disorder that might result if women did indeed gain suffrage.[17] In addition, he credits the melodramas for balancing political messages with entertainment: "It is worth noting that the feminists who made this film [*80 Million Women Want ____?*] and others were shrewd enough to couch their suffrage statements within traditional melodramatic frameworks, and thus were

able to get their messages across without alienating the more conservative members of their audiences."[18]

Norden closes his essay on the suffrage films by noting that by the time that the last suffrage film was produced and distributed (*Your Girl and Mine* in 1914) the early film industry had grown to include women in all aspects of the filmmaking process. However, he also notes that these women within the industry were "hampered by the constraints of the male-dominated, profit-oriented business in which they worked," and thus left the work of creating socially-challenging films to their sisters outside of the industry, such as the suffragists.[19] In Norden's opinion, it is this marginalization of women's social concerns to outside of the industry that accounts for the end of the woman suffrage film cycle before the end of the suffrage movement.

Norden's essay filled a void within cinema studies and women's history. By presenting such a catalog of both anti- and pro-suffrage films, Norden broke ground on fertile soil for feminist inquiry. He also introduced a set of films that begged many questions outside of the scope of his study: Who initiated the pro-suffrage films—the industry or suffrage organizations? What other films, if any, did the suffrage movement make during the era? How did audiences respond to these films? What kind of effect did they have on the organizations that made them and the movement as a whole?

Kay Sloan picked up where Norden left off in 1988 when she included the films in her study of social problem films of the silent screen era. Sloan also set up her study as a juxtaposition between anti-suffrage and pro-suffrage films, positioning the films made by the suffrage movement in part as a response to the negative images proffered by earlier studio films. Sloan describes: "When the suffragists answered the silent accusations of these films with melodramas of their own making, the women attested to the rising power of film."[20] Sloan shows through archival research that the accusations made by the anti-suffrage films came from multiple sources, not just comedies: "Newsreels sensationalized the movement while comedies featured the antics of man-hating suffragists, bumbling husbands, and confused or neglected children. Melodramas warned of the sweeping perils of suffragism, when their film heroines ruined family life and devastated their communities."[21] Sloan argues that the threat posed by anti-suffrage films—the threat that suffrage organizations had to debunk in their own films—was a threat to the whole of society. For example, she claims that newsreels from Britain covering the country's militant suffrage movement gained publicity for the movement, but sensationalized it in such a way as to serve as a cautionary tale to American audiences who had not seen the American woman suffrage movement turn to such violent militant tactics.[22] Sloan positions the suffrage films as oppositional images to studio films and newsreels; in producing

their own films, suffragists had to reverse the understanding of suffrage to show that it was a *progressive* cause, not a *regressive* cause.

Sloan argues that fissures within the anti-suffrage films created openings for the pro-suffrage films to present their point of view. She notes that in many anti-suffrage films, such as *When Women Win* (Lubin, 1909), *Will It Ever Come to This?* (Lubin, 1911) and *Was He a Suffragette* (Republic, 1912), anti-suffragists are portrayed as hysterical along with suffragists.[23] She argues that in those anti-suffrage films that depicted suffragists as negligent mothers, the ridiculous images of mothers almost reversed the anti-suffrage message in their over-the-top delivery. The films seem to inadvertently invoke a sense of irony, leaving their message ambiguous. Sloan describes that in *A Cure for Suffragettes* (Biograph, 1912), the closing title card reinforced such ambiguity: "but even a suffragette can be a mother."[24] Sloan notes that such anti-suffrage films, in their ambiguity and fissured messages opened room for suffrage organizations to launch a pro-suffrage campaign in the movies. The anti-suffrage films had created a "formula of 'packaging' suffragism to movie audiences" that could be harnessed by suffrage organizations.[25]

However, the anti-suffrage films participated, in Sloan's opinion, in the creation of an overall mood of anxiety about woman suffrage. To harness the power of the cinema that the anti-suffrage films introduced, Sloan argues that suffrage organizations had to "appease the public's anxiety over votes for women."[26] In Sloan's account, the pro-suffrage films were a direct response to the anti-suffrage films. A form of image warfare was taking place: "Portraying suffragists as deeply moral, attractive women who were devoted to their families or to their sweethearts, the movement's fiction films presented their heroines as sympathetic characters to audiences accustomed to seeing masculine or hysterical suffragette characters."[27] In Sloan's opinion, such positive images were designed to counter the negative images of the anti-suffrage films.

This framework of positive/negative image warfare leads Sloan to examine the pro-suffrage films strictly in terms of the types of positive images that they portrayed. For example, in discussing *Suffrage and the Man*, the pro-suffrage comedy made by the WPU, Sloan points to its reversal of the images from anti-suffrage comedies. The film depicts a man who leaves his girlfriend because she is a suffragist, becomes involved with an anti-suffragist who tries to trick him into marriage, is sued by the new girlfriend for breach of contract (because he will not marry her), and ends up saved in court when his ex-girlfriend, who is now enfranchised, is the head juror and convinces the jury of his innocence. They reunite in the end, but only after the boyfriend is ridiculed for his poor choices. Sloan's assessment of the film's success is set in comparative terms: "It was, perhaps, appropriate that the movement's only comedy should ridicule a

man for disrupting a romance. *Suffrage and the Man* responded to the numerous comedies in which suffragists left their husbands or sweethearts."[28]

Sloan provides important details about the production of several pro-suffrage films, but limits her assessment of their role as "social problem films" in relational terms. She sees them as in debate with the anti-suffrage films, a debate that they would only partially win. While suffrage was gained in 1920, Sloan notes that post-suffrage films continued to depict women as problematic when they left the domestic sphere, thus continuing to invoke the anti-suffrage arguments but in more general terms.[29] As with Norden's essay, Sloan's chapter on the suffrage films introduces a wealth of information about the films but introduces a number of questions that fell outside of her comparative analysis framework: How did audiences receive the pro-suffrage films? Did they see them as in debate with the anti-suffrage films as does Sloan or did they experience them inside of other cinematic contexts? If women formed the primary audience for the pro-suffrage films, would they be more receptive to the "positive images" that Sloan describes?

In her 2000 study of women's films and female audiences in the 1910s, Shelley Stamp offers answers to several of these questions. *Movie-Struck Girls: Women and Motion Picture Culture After the Nickelodeon* paints the landscape of early cinema as one defined by gender. In its early years, cinema was under close scrutiny by politicians and Progressive Era activists as an illicit form of entertainment that could corrupt the masses. During the 1910s, Stamp shows that the film industry courted middle class female viewers—considered arbiters of cultural taste—in order to help transform cinema into a legitimate form of entertainment. They created a "ladies culture" at the cinema through various marketing techniques as well as films such as serial dramas that were intended to appeal to the desires and interests of women.

It is within this framework of early cinema's efforts to recruit bourgeois female viewers that Stamp sees the suffrage films emerging. Following the cycle of anti-suffrage comedies, Stamp sees the pro-suffrage films as turning to film to "mobilize new recruits for their cause" by harnessing the power of emerging female fan culture.[30] She explains that suffrage organizations built upon the "ladies culture" being cultivated by Hollywood at the movie theatres, but shifted the goal from one of generating ticket sales to generating support for the cause: "Suffrage organizations thus viewed moving picture patrons as potential agents of social change, rather than pitiable targets."[31]

Stamp's understanding of the films as part of a larger cultural shift in relation to cinema allows her to move beyond descriptive analysis of the films. Instead, she looks at how the films made by the suffrage movement created modes of address to turn moving picture patrons into "agents of social change." This perspective allows her to look at such elements as suffrage

speeches within the films as more than just interesting presentations of suffrage leaders in cinema. Instead, she finds them to be indicative of a strategic goal related to the audience: "Direct appeals to viewers remind us that suffrage films not only hoped to attract female customers; they also aimed to rally *feminist* viewers."[32]

The overall appeal that the films made, in Stamp's assessment, was a conservative appeal based on a "civic housekeeping" argument for woman suffrage. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, the civic housekeeping argument presented women's right to the vote as an extension of Progressive Era reform work by women that focused on cleaning up corrupt governments and improving the living conditions of the urban poor. Civic housekeeping presented women's role in the public sphere as an extension of their role in the private sphere—women could "clean up" the urban environment just as they did the domestic environment. With the vote, society could be assured that the health and well-being of the civic environment would be maintained by women. Stamp argues that the films made by the suffrage movement presented, for the most part, narratives that embodied this civic housekeeping argument, thus containing any threat to public order that woman suffrage might pose. Stamp explains: "Suffrage-sponsored films usually yoked demands for the vote to traditional representations of femininity, juggling the need to broaden expectations governing womanly conduct—in order to encompass full citizenship and suffrage—with the desire to appease the pronounced alarm that such proposals inevitably provoked."[33] Pointing to the emphases upon mothering and heterosexual coupling in such melodramas as *Your Girl and Mine* and *80 Million Women Want ____?,* Stamp shows how the films introduced woman suffrage through a conservative lens that continually pulled any claims to the public sphere back into the private sphere. For example, in *80 Million Women Want ____?,* the heroine takes to the streets to make suffrage speeches and helps to expose an invisible underworld of political corruption. However, the film ends with her returning to the domestic sphere to marry her boyfriend, a socially progressive lawyer. Stamp sees in such narrative development and resolution an ultimately conservative appeal to female viewers: "*Eighty Million Women Want ____?* appears caught between an impetus to evoke new freedoms available to women—which the suffragists sought to solidify and advance through the vote—and an inability to figure sexual difference apart from the trope of separate spheres."[34]

Stamp's analysis of the pro-suffrage films provides unique insight into how the suffrage movement made use of the transforming cinema of the 1910s. She accurately finds that the civic housekeeping argument for suffrage imbued the narratives and images of a majority of the films made, thus marrying suffrage and cinema around the common effort to legitimize their organizations/institutions and recruit females to their cause/business. Stamp

is able to make this analysis because she expands her frame for understanding the films beyond the realm of cinema to the realm of social movement. She incorporates analyses of other forms of suffrage visual culture from the era, including posters, parades and street speeches. She forms an understanding of the broader appeal made by the movement through civic housekeeping arguments in visual culture and then brings this to her analyses of the films and their relationship to cinema.

This focus upon the context of the social movement in Stamp's methodology is what allows her to expand beyond Norden's catalog descriptions and Sloan's positive/negative image analysis. In *Suffrage and the Silver Screen,* I propose to take this methodology a step further by embedding analysis of the pro-suffrage films inside of other forms of suffrage visual culture from the era as well as the specific contexts of each suffrage organization that produced a film or cinematic project. I contend that in order to understand how these films attempted to recruit viewers—both female and male—to support the suffrage movement requires understanding how suffrage organizations recruited members through their full range of strategies and tactics.

By embedding analyses of the films within the specific policies and practices of the organizations that produced them, we can see that recruiting strategies varied from organization to organization. Some invoked the civic housekeeping argument to recruit local women to advocate municipal suffrage as a means to improve the conditions of their urban environment. Others invoked women's status as self-supporting women (by the 1910s the number of women in the workforce was at record highs) to claim their right to the vote *not* as an extension of their domestic role but as an acknowledgement of their full participation in the public sphere. These two very different arguments for women's right to the vote formed opposite ends of a suffrage continuum that was embodied in conservative appeals at one end and militant appeals at the other end. Once we understand these specific contexts of the suffrage organizations, we can see that some films embodied the conservative civic housekeeping appeal as Stamp describes, while others embodied a militant equal rights appeal. Still others mobilized both arguments within the space of a single film to recruit a wide spectrum of viewers to the cause. This was particularly the case as suffrage organizations moved beyond producing locally-distributed films for discrete audiences to producing nationally-distributed films for widely heterogeneous audiences.

Thus, much of *Suffrage and the Silver Screen* is dedicated to plotting out where the suffrage films fell within the policies and practices of the organizations that produced them. I paint pictures of the various arenas within which the films attempted to recruit viewers in order to allow us to descend into the world in which the viewers came in contact with the films. I contend that contemporary

viewers' perceptions of the films were shaped as much by these suffrage tactics and strategies as they were by the conditions and practices of early cinema. In prior studies, the context of cinema has been privileged. In my study, I reverse this trend to fill out our understanding of the relationship between suffrage and the silver screen.

Chapter Overview

Suffrage and the Silver Screen consists of eight chapters that follow four main narrative arcs:

- Rise and spread of visual culture, including film, in the suffrage movement.
- Transformation of cinema and the suffrage movement from local to national entities.
- Development of a continuum of suffrage "identities" within the movement that ranged from the conservative "civic housekeeping" suffragist to the militant suffragette.
- Advance of an identity-based movement for suffrage that led to the rise of modern feminism.

Each chapter introduces different objects of study—lantern slide shows, a kinetophone, a suffrage comedy and several melodramas. These objects serve as the material through which the four narrative arcs are thread. For example, in Chapter 2, I demonstrate how a local suffrage organization in New York City presented themselves as "suffrage saints" to attendees of the Lower East Side's nickelodeons in order to advance a civic housekeeping notion of suffrage. I pick this thread up again in Chapters 4 and 5 when I discuss the shift towards the national within the 1910s suffrage movement and the rise of the civic housekeeping image in the first nationally-distributed pro-suffrage film, *Votes for Women,* which starred the ultimate civic housekeepers, Anna Howard Shaw and Jane Addams. The purpose of this structure is to allow chapters to stand alone as discussions of specific cinematic objects and suffrage tactics as well as cohere as a broader set of arguments about suffrage, cinema and the rise of modern feminism.

Chapter 2. Suffrage Saints on the Lower East Side

Chapter 2 begins by describing the local aspects of both suffrage and cinema in the early 1910s. Both organizing events (parades, rallies, etc.) and spectatorship were profoundly local experiences that took place in the city streets,

nickelodeons or vaudeville theatres. In this chapter, I look at the lantern slide shows of the New York Woman Suffrage Party (WSP), which were presented in New York City's nickelodeons in 1911. I examine the content, circulation and news coverage of the lantern slide shows to demonstrate how they were used to advance the WSP's civic housekeeping model of suffrage. I argue that the lantern slide shows were constructed through hagiographical narratives that depicted suffragists as saintly, domestically-inclined martyrs to society who only wished the vote in order to improve the lives of the urban poor—the very people who populated the nickelodeons where they presented the lantern slide shows. This sentimental narrative drive was aligned with the WSP's political strategy. The WSP developed a political machine structure aimed at enlisting "new elite" women for financial backing of a systematic lobbying campaign to demonstrate women's right to vote as an extension of their role as civic housekeepers. The lantern slide shows were aimed less at the audiences in the nickelodeons than the readers of the city's newspapers, which covered the work of the suffragists who presented the slide shows in discourse akin to missionary work. I argue that the lantern slide shows were acts of civic housekeeping that demonstrated to the newspaper readers the reasons women should be able to vote: if suffragists could convert the bawdy nickelodeons into spaces of civic virtue, then they surely were capable of cleaning up corrupt municipal government with the vote.

Chapter 3. Making More than a Spectacle of Themselves

Chapter 3 explores a second local use of cinema to build social group arguments for suffrage, but from the other end of the continuum: militant suffrage. The 1913 suffrage kinetophone, *Votes for Women,* attempted to give voice—literally—to the cause and in so doing generated strong negative responses from audiences. The film was one of Edison's sound film experiments of the 1910s in which spectacles such as sports stars and musicians "spoke" to the audiences of vaudeville theatres. I argue that the film, which was "hooted, jeered and hissed wherever shown,"[35] embodied the political strategy of the organization that helped produce it, the Women's Political Union (WPU). The WPU was a New York-based suffrage organization that broke away from the more traditional, civic housekeeping organizations such as the WSP in order to build upon the labor movement's coalitions of working class women. The WPU staged open air speeches, parades and other public spectacles to make women's role in the public sphere physically visible (and audible). I argue that the WPU harnessed the power of female spectacle that moved from the street to the stage to the screen in the 1910s in order to provoke audiences into awareness of the

changing role of women in the twentieth century from passive to active, from disenfranchised to civic leaders. They embraced the ridicule that came with such militancy and attempted to harness it into an intersubjective framework that agitated audiences, as did the kinetophone in 1913.

Chapter 4. Inventing National Pastimes: Nationalizing Suffrage and Cinema

Whereas Chapters 2 and 3 focus on local uses of cinema for organizing, Chapter 4 shows the move towards national organizing that took place in the 1910s and that was assisted by cinema's growing national circulation systems. By the 1910s, leaders of the suffrage movement recognized that the only way to win universal suffrage would be to focus on gaining a federal amendment. NAWSA, the national suffrage organization, shifted gears from serving as an umbrella to state and local organizations and into an organization capable of advancing a unified national campaign. This shift resulted in dramatically different organizing tactics that included national distribution of creative forms of representing the movement, including plays, songbooks and films. I argue that such nationally-distributed forms of entertainment were intended to foster a coherent national image of suffrage and suffragists. I show that narratives within these works used tropes such as traveling characters, references to national events and correspondence with fellow members across state boundaries to connect local environments with an imagined national community. These nationalizing strategies aligned with the movement of cinema from a local, passing amusement to a national pastime in the 1910s. Through nationally-distributed suffrage films, which are discussed in the following chapters, suffrage recruited audiences for early cinema while cinema fostered national, imagined communities for suffrage.

Chapter 5. Suffrage Stars

In 1912, Anna Howard Shaw and Jane Addams took to the screens to advance the suffrage cause in a pro-suffrage melodrama titled *Votes for Women*. The choice to present Addams and Shaw as headliners of a film seems like an innovative and logical strategy to entice audiences into a melodrama that sent a pro-suffrage message. However, it contradicted another current within the philosophy and work of many suffragists. Only a few years earlier, Shaw had declared movie theaters to be "recruiting stations of vice,"[36] and Addams had launched campaigns for nickelodeon reform in Chicago. In this chapter, I outline why this choice to become "suffrage stars" did not constitute a break with their prior ideals. In fact, it was a strategic effort to harness the power of cinema as a national institution to advance suffrage as a mass movement. I