

## The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire Online Exhibit



[Refugees in line at camp. Unidentified location.]  
BANC PIC 1905.05643—PIC  
The Bancroft Library

### Room Four: Surviving a City in Ruins

#### The Leveling of Society?

Vesta Daniels was one of the thousands of refugees who remained in the ruined city. Her discomfort and disbelief were reflected in a May 11 letter to her grandson Elton: "The time seems so long + everything here seemes [sic] so primitive + so like starting life over again. That I feel as if it is all a dream + that I would soon wake up at 843 Hyde again." Vesta's chief complaint was the loss of her house, but she also mourned a lack of clean underclothes and objected to the food that was available.

Like her fellow refugees, Daniels relied on the food supply doled out by the military. Those who stood in interminable lines to receive their rations represented all San Francisco neighborhoods and society, from Nob Hill swells to Telegraph Hill families to Mission District paupers.

In the refugee camps, everybody was generally in the same boat, receiving the same rations and using the same available materials to eke out a daily existence. It did not matter if one had been rich or poor before the calamity. Hallmarks of social class – material possessions – had been obliterated by the earthquake and fire. For the moment, virtue was what one did under the circumstances, not monetary wealth or social standing.