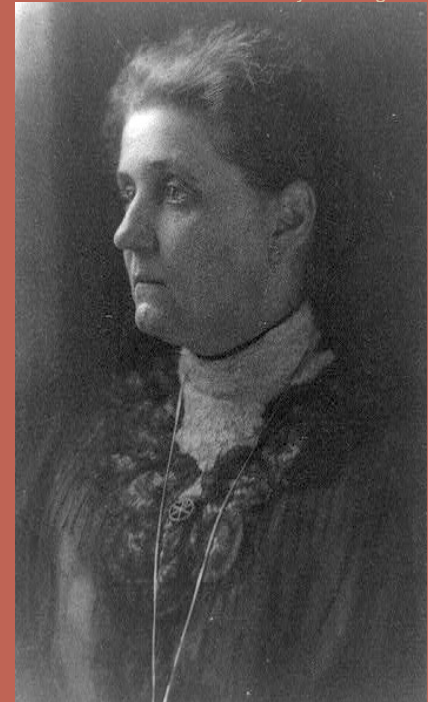


## Jane Addams

### “If Men Were Seeking the Franchise”

*Ladies' Home Journal* — June 1913



Jane Addams, 1907

LET US IMAGINE THROUGHOUT this article, if we can sustain an absurd hypothesis so long, the result upon society if the matriarchal period had held its own; if the development of the State had closely followed that of the Family until the chief care of the former, as that of the latter, had come to be the nurture and education of children and the protection of the weak, sick and aged. In short let us imagine a hypothetical society organized upon the belief that “there is no wealth but life.” With this Ruskinian foundation<sup>1</sup> let us assume that the political machinery of such a society, the franchise and the rest of it, were in the hands of women because they had always best exercised those functions. Let us further imagine a given movement when these women, who is this hypothetical society had possessed political power from the very beginnings of the State, were being appealed to by the voteless men that men might be associated with women in the responsibilities of citizenship.

National Archives



Woman's suffrage parade, Washington, DC, 1913. Banner reads: "Woman's cause is man's. They rise or fall together."

Plagiarizing somewhat upon recent suffrage speeches let us consider various replies which these citizen women might reasonably make to the men who were seeking the franchise; the men insisting that only through the use of the ballot could they share the duties of the State.

First, could not the women say: “Our most valid objection to extending the franchise to you is that you are so fond of fighting — you always have been since you were little boys. You’d very likely forget that the real object of the State is to nurture and protect life, and out of sheer vainglory you would be voting away huge sums of money for battleships, not one of which could last

more than a few years, and yet each would cost ten million dollars; more money than all the buildings of Harvard University represent, although it is the richest educational institution in America. Every time a gun is fired in a battleship it expends, or rather explodes, seventeen hundred dollars, as much as

Presented, and images added, by the National Humanities Center, Research Triangle Park, NC. 2005.

<sup>1</sup> John Ruskin, 19<sup>th</sup>-century British art critic and social reformer who advocated programs to moderate the excesses of capitalism. [NHC note]

a college education costs many a country boy, and yet you would be firing off these guns as mere salutes, with no enemy within three thousand miles, simply because you so enjoy the sound of shooting.

“Our educational needs are too great and serious to run any such risk. Democratic government itself is perilous unless the electorate is education; our industries are suffering for lack of skilled workmen; more than half a million immigrants a year must be taught the underlying principles of republican government. Can we, the responsible voters, take the risk of wasting our taxes by extending the vote to those who have always been so ready to lose their heads over mere military display?”

Second, would not the hypothetical women, who would have been responsible for the advance of industry during these later centuries, as women actually were during the earlier centuries when they

dragged home the game and transformed the pelts into shelter and clothing, say further to these disenfranchised men: “We have carefully built up a code of factory legislation for the protection of the workers in modern industry; we know that you men have always been careless about the house, perfectly indifferent to the necessity for sweeping and cleaning; if you were made responsible for factory legislation it is quite probably that you would let the workers in the textile mills contract tuberculosis through needlessly breathing the fluff, or the workers in machine shops through inhaling metal filings, both of which are now carried off by an excellent suction system which we women have insisted upon, but which it almost impossible to have installed in a man-made State because the men think so little of dust and its evil effects. In many Nations in which political power is confined to men, and this is notably true in the United States of America, there is no protection even for the workers in white lead, although hundreds of them are yearly incapacitated from lead poisoning, and others actually die.



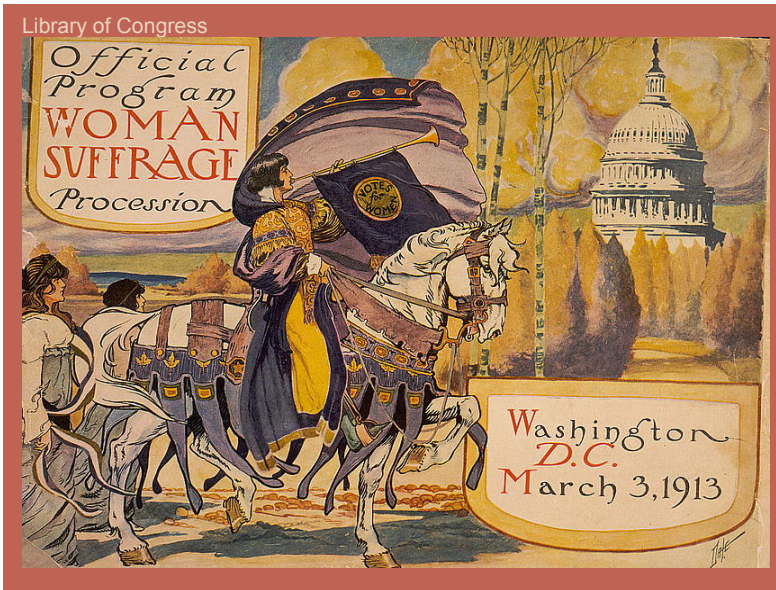
The image shows the front page of 'WOMAN'S JOURNAL AND SUFFRAGE NEWS' from Saturday, March 8, 1913. The masthead is at the top, followed by the volume and issue information. The main headline is 'PARADE STRUGGLES TO VICTORY DESPITE DISGRACEFUL SCENES'. Below this, there are several columns of text and three distinct photographs. The top photo shows a woman in a Pilgrim costume. The middle photo shows a woman in a white dress leading a parade. The bottom photo shows a large crowd of people. The text on the cover is arranged in columns around the images.

Women's Journal and Suffrage News [Boston], 18 March 1913, reporting the March 3rd women's suffrage parade in Washington, DC

States, in order to save the paltry price of a guard which would protect a dangerous machine, men legislators allow careless boys and girls to lose their fingers and sometimes their hands, thereby crippling their entire futures. These male legislators do not make guarded machinery obligatory, although they know that when the heads of families are injured at these unprotected machines the State must care for them in hospitals, and when they are killed, that if necessary the State must provide for their widows and children in poorhouses.”

“We have also heard that in certain

These wise women, governing the State with the same care they had always put into the management of their families, would further place against these men seeking the franchise the charge that men do not really know how tender and delicate children are, and might therefore put them to



work in factories, as indeed they have done in man-made States during the entire period of factory production. We can imagine these women saying: "We have been told that in certain States children are taken from their beds in the early morning before it is light and carried into cotton mills, where they are made to run back and forth tending the spinning frames until their immature little bodies are so bent and strained that they never regain their normal shapes; that little children are allowed to work in canneries for fifteen and seventeen hours until, utterly exhausted, they fall asleep among the debris of shells and husks."

Would not these responsible women voters gravely shake their heads and say that as long as men exalt business profit above human life it would be sheer folly to give them the franchise; that, of course, they would be slow to make such matters the subject of legislation?

Would not the enfranchised women furthermore say to these voteless men: "You have always been so eager to make money; what assurance have we that in your desire to get the largest amount of coal out of the ground in the shortest possible time you would not permit the mine supports to decay and mine damp to accumulate, until the percentage of accidents among miners would be simply heartbreaking? Then you are so reckless. Business seems to you a mere game with big prizes, and we have heard that in America, where the women have no vote, the loss of life in the huge steel mills is appalling; and that the number of young brakemen, fine young fellows, every one of them the pride of some mother, killed every year is beyond belief; that the average loss of life among the structural-iron workers who erect the huge office buildings and bridges is as disastrous in percentages as was the loss of life in the Battle of Bull Run. When the returns of this battle were reported to President Lincoln he burst into tears of sorrow and chagrin; but we have never heard of any President, Governor or Mayor weeping over the reports of this daily loss of life, although such reports have

Library of Congress

## WOMEN IN THE HOME

We are forever being told that the place for women is in the HOME. Well, so be it. But what do we expect of her in the home? Merely to stay in the home is not enough. She is a failure unless she does certain things for the home. She must make the home minister, as far as her means allow, to the health and welfare, moral as well as physical, of her family, and especially of her children. She, more than anyone else, is held responsible for what they become.

SHE is responsible for the cleanliness of her house.  
 SHE is responsible for the wholesomeness of the food.  
 SHE is responsible for the children's health.  
 SHE, above all, is responsible for their morals, for their sense of truth, of honesty and decency, for what they turn out to be.

### How Far Can the Mother Control These Things?

She can clean her own rooms, BUT if the neighbors are allowed to live in filth, she cannot keep her rooms from being filled with bad air and smells, or from being infested with vermin.

She can cook her food well, BUT if dealers are permitted to sell poor food, unclean milk or stale eggs, she cannot make the food wholesome for her children.

She can care for her own plumbing and the refuse of her own home, BUT if the plumbing in the rest of the house is insanitary, if garbage accumulates and the halls and stairs are left dirty, she cannot protect her children from the sickness and infection that these conditions bring.

She can take every care to avoid fire, BUT if the house has been badly built, if the fire-escapes are insufficient or not fire-proof, she cannot guard her children from the horrors of being maimed or killed by fire.

She can open her windows to give her children the air that we are told is so necessary, BUT if the air is laden with infection, with tuberculosis and other contagious diseases, she cannot protect her children from this danger.

She can send her children out for air and exercise, BUT if the conditions that surround them on the streets are immoral and degrading, she cannot protect them from these dangers.

ALONE, she CANNOT make these things right. WHO or WHAT can?

THE CITY can do it—the CITY GOVERNMENT that is elected by THE PEOPLE, to take care of the interest of THE PEOPLE.

And who decides what the city government shall do?

FIRST, the officials of that government; and,  
 SECOND, those who elect them.

DO THE WOMEN ELECT THEM? NO, the men do. So it is the MEN and NOT THE WOMEN that are really responsible for the

UNCLEAN HOUSES	BAD PLUMBING
UNWHOLESOME FOOD	DANGER OF FIRE
RISK OF TUBERCULOSIS AND OTHER DISEASES	
IMMORAL INFLUENCES OF THE STREET	

In fact, MEN are responsible for the conditions under which the children live, but we hold WOMEN responsible for the results of those conditions. If we hold women responsible for the results, must we not, in simple justice, let them have something to say as to what these conditions shall be? There is one simple way of doing this. Give them the same means that men have. LET THEM VOTE.

Women are, by nature and training, housekeepers. Let them have a hand in the city's housekeeping, even if they introduce an occasional house-cleaning.

**National American Woman Suffrage Association**

Headquarters: 505 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

Natl. American Woman Suffrage Assn., 1910

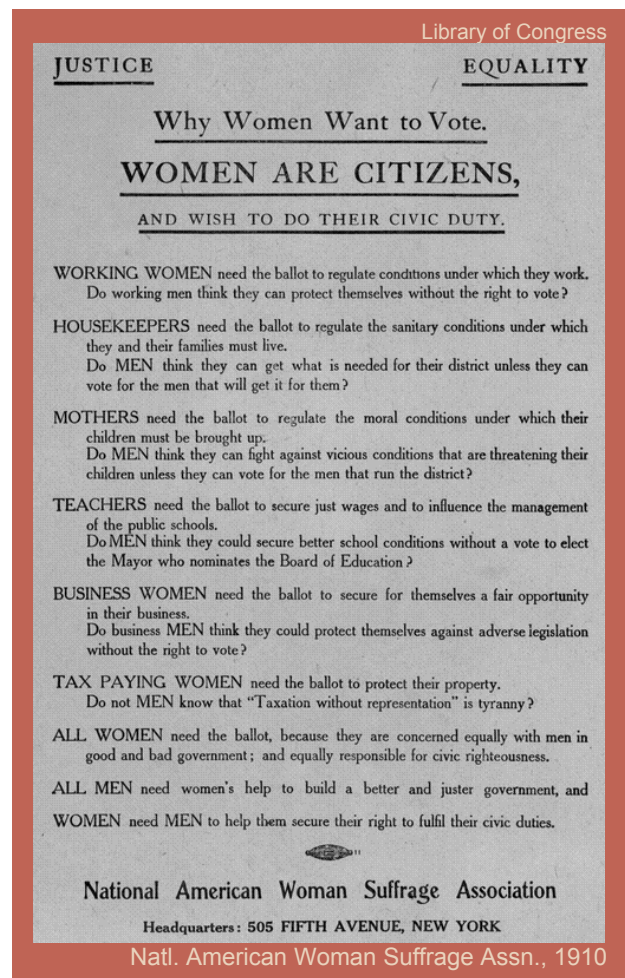
been presented to them by Governmental investigators; and this loss of life might easily be reduced by protective legislation.”

Having thus worked themselves into a fine state of irritation, analogous to that ever-recurrent uneasiness of men in the presence of insurgent women who would interfere in the management of the State, would not these voting women add: “The trouble is that men have no imagination, or rather what they have is so prone to run in the historic direction of the glory of the battlefield, that you cannot trust them with industrial affairs. Because a crew in a battle-ship was once lost under circumstances which suggested perfidy the male representatives of two great Nations voted to go to war; yet in any day of the year in one of these Nations alone — the United States of America — as many men are killed through industrial accidents as this crew contained. These accidents occur under circumstances which, if not perfidious, are at least so criminally indifferent to human life as to merit Kipling’s characterization that the situation is impious.”

Certainly these irritated women would designate such indifference to human life as unpatriotic and unjustifiable, only to be accounted for because men have not yet learned to connect patriotism with industrial affairs.

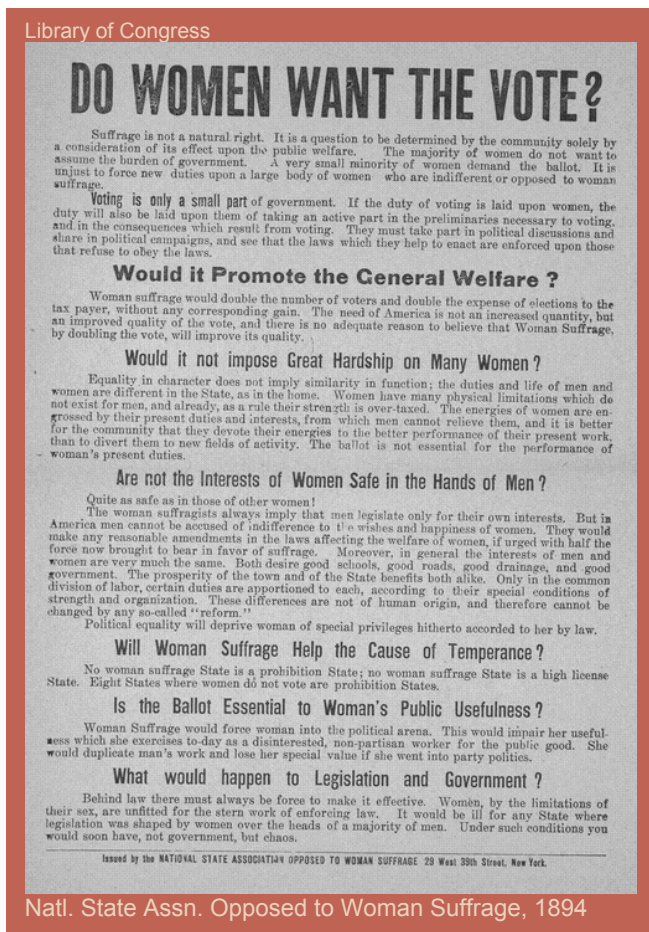
These conscientious women responsible for the State in which life was considered of more value than wealth would furthermore say: “Then, too, you men exhibit such curious survivals of the mere savage instinct of punishment and revenge. The United States alone spends every year five hundred million dollars more on its policemen, courts and prisons than all its works of religion, charity and education. The price of one trial expended on a criminal early in life might save the State thousands of dollars and the man untold horrors. And yet with all this vast expenditure little is done to reduce crime. Men are kept in jails and penitentiaries where there is not even the semblance of education or reformatory measure; young men are returned over and over again to the same institution until they have grown old and gray, and in all of that time they have not once been taught a trade, nor have they been in any wise prepared to withstand the temptations of life.

“A homeless young girl looking for a lodging may be arrested for soliciting on the streets, and sent to prison for six months, although there is no proof against her save the impression of the policeman. A young girl under such suspicion may be obliged to answer the most harassing questions put to her by the city attorney, with no woman near to protect her from insult; she may be subjected to the most trying examination conducted by a physician in the presence of a policeman, and no matron to whom to appeal. At least these things happen constantly in the United States — in Chicago, for instance — but possibly not in the Scandinavian countries where juries of women sit upon such cases, women whose patience has been many times tested by wayward girls and who know the untold moral harm which may result from such a physical and psychic shock.”



Then these same women would go further, and, because they had lived in a real world and had administered large affairs and were therefore not prudish and affected, would say: "Worse than anything which we have mentioned is the fact that in every man-ruled city the world over a great army of women are so set aside as outcasts that it is considered a shame to speak the mere name which designates them. Because their very existence is illegal they may be arrested whenever any police captain chooses; they may be brought before a magistrate, fined and imprisoned. The men whose money sustains their houses, supplies their tawdry clothing and provides them with intoxicating drinks and drugs, are never arrested, nor indeed are they even considered lawbreakers."

Would not these fearless women, whose concern for the morals of the family had always been able to express itself through State laws, have meted out equal punishment to men as well as to women, when they had equally transgressed the statute law?



Did the enfranchised women evoked by our imagination speak thus to the disenfranchised men, the latter would at least respect their scruples and their hesitation in regard to an extension of the obligation of citizenship. But what would be the temper of the masculine mind if the voting women representing the existing State should present to them only the following half-dozen objections, which are unhappily so familiar to many of us: If the women should say, first, that men would find politics corrupting; second, that they would doubtless vote as their wives and mothers did; third, that men's suffrage would only double the vote without changing results; fourth, that men's suffrage would diminish the respect for men; fifth, that most men do not want to vote; sixth, that the best men would not vote?

I do not believe that women broadened by life and its manifold experiences would actually present these six objections to men as real reasons for withholding the franchise from them, unless indeed they had long formed the habit of regarding men not as comrades and fellow-citizens, but as a class by themselves, in essential matters really inferior although always held sentimentally very much above them.

Certainly no such talk would be indulged in between men and women who had together embodied in political institutions the old affairs of life which had normally and historically belonged to both of them. If woman had adjusted herself to the changing demands of the State as she did to the historic mutations of her own house-hold she might naturally and without challenge have held the place in the State which she now holds in the family.

When Plato once related his dream of an ideal Republic he begged his fellow-citizens not to ridicule him because he considered the cooperation of women necessary for its fulfillment. He contended that so far as the guardianship of the State is concerned there is no distinction between the powers of men and women save those which custom has made.