

Anti-Suffragists Lesson Plan

Central Historical Questions:

Why did people, including women, oppose woman suffrage?

Materials:

- Recommended: *Iron Jawed Angels* (HBO films)
- Transparency of Document A
- Copies of Documents A, B, C
- Copies of Woman Suffrage Graphic Organizer

Plan of Instruction:

NOTE: We recommend screening *Iron Jawed Angels* (HBO films) before this lesson, beginning at 1:12:23 (when Wilson announces U.S. entrance into WWI). *However, the movie is NOT essential to the lesson.*

1. Do Now: According to the movie, *Iron Jawed Angels*, why did so many people oppose woman suffrage?

[Alternative Do Now: Why did so many people oppose woman suffrage?]

Elicit student responses. [If students say that the public didn't think it was appropriate to question a wartime president, point out that opposition to suffrage preceded WWI].

2. TRANSITION: *You read the Declaration of Sentiments from 1848, which spoke about what life was like for women in the mid-19th century. By the beginning of the 1900s, many women were going to college, and many women, especially on the East Coast, were politically involved in Progressive causes—helping urban poor, Settlement Houses, temperance, muckraking, etc. Still, many people continued to oppose woman suffrage. Today we're going to ask: Why did people, including women, oppose woman suffrage?*
3. Hand out Documents A-C and Graphic Organizer.
4. Put transparency of Document A on overhead. Read Document A as a class.

Sourcing:

- Who wrote this?
- When was it written?
- What do you predict this person will say about suffrage?

Close reading:

- What is her argument?

- What evidence does she use to support her argument?
- What words does she use to make her point stronger?

Contextualization:

- What does this document suggest about the assumptions that people held about women in 1911?
- Do these assumptions line up with what you already know about women at this time (i.e., Jane Addams, Progressives, etc.)?

5. Students should fill in Graphic Organizer for Document A.
6. Have students work on Documents B and C in small groups and fill in Graphic Organizer.
7. Discussion:
 - According to these documents, why were people opposed to woman suffrage?
 - Try to see things from the anti-suffragist perspective—(let's assume that they're not just mean)—why is woman suffrage scary to them?
 - Are you surprised that many anti-suffragists *were* women?
 - Do you think the reasons for opposing suffrage were political (men didn't want to lose their political positions) or social reasons (ideas about women's place in society)?
 - What additional documents would you want to see to get a better picture of how people thought at that time?
 - Finally: do you think the movie did a good job of representing the views of anti-suffragists? Why or why not?

Citations:

Molly Elliot Seawell, *The Ladies' Battle*, 1911, 31-32, 113.

http://books.google.com/books?id=xSANAAAAIAAJ&printsec=titlepage&vq=inharmonious&source=gbs_v2_summary_r&cad=0

"The Woman's Protest Against Woman's Suffrage," *National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage*, October 1912.

http://books.google.com/books?id=560OiZIBSTIC&pg=PA589&lpg=PA589&dq=&source=bl&ots=0_4FF5LJ7y&sig=bIFNx1Ogcvcphi_siQfbi_GbqA&hl=en&ei=cotmSoidNojQtgP3wbnhDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2#v=onepage&q=%22Is%20it%20not%20clear%20how%20this%20hideous&f=false

Representative John A. Moon of Tennessee, Speech in House of Representatives, January 10, 1918.

<http://marchand.ucdavis.edu/lessons/suffrage/suffrage.html>

Document A: Molly Elliot Seawell (Modified)

It has often been pointed out that women should not pass laws on matters of war and peace, since no woman can do military duty. But this point applies to other issues, too. No woman can have any practical knowledge of shipping and navigation, of the work of trainmen on railways, of mining, or of many other subjects of the highest importance. Their legislation, therefore, would not be intelligent, and the laws they devised to help sailors, trainmen, miners, etc., might be highly offensive to the very people they tried to help. If sailors and miners refused to obey the laws, who would have to enforce them? The men!

The entire execution of the law would be in the hands of men, backed up by irresponsible voters (women) who could not lift a finger to catch or punish a criminal. And if all the dangers and difficulties of executing the law lay upon men, what right have women to make the law?

Also, there seems to be a close relationship between suffrage and divorce. Political differences in families, between brothers, for example, who vote on differing sides, do not promote harmony. How much more inharmonious must be political differences between a husband and wife, each of whom has a vote which may be used as a weapon against the other? What is likely to be the state of that family, when the husband votes one ticket, and the wife votes another?

Vocabulary

Devised: designed

Executing: carrying out

Inharmonious: unpleasant

Source: Excerpt from Molly Elliot Seawell, an anti-suffragist from Virginia who published the anti-suffrage book, The Ladies' Battle, in 1911.

Document B: Anti-Suffrage Newspaper in New York (Modified)

The Suffragists' ideal is a kitchen-less house. The Suffragist keeps writing and speaking about pots and pans, and denounces housekeeping as degrading. The Suffragists teach women to revolt against the daily task of tending child and house, and we sadly see the results in the nation's poor health and lowered physique. It is the Suffragist theory that women's sphere in life should be the same as the man's. Is it not clear how this hideous feminism is sapping our vitality as a nation? Is it too much to say that it lies at the root of half the sickness and disease in our country?

There are many wealthy women who support Suffragism, and who do a very dangerous thing in preaching to working women that housework is degrading. As long as a working woman keeps her home clean and well tended, she enjoys the high regard of her neighbors. Yet, now the more weak-minded have been influenced by the Suffragists' snobbish preaching. Such feminism is destroying our national character and warping the natural impulses and beliefs that make a woman's life such a beautiful work of art.

Vocabulary

Degrading: lowering one's character

Sphere: area of influence

Sapping: draining

Vitality: energy

Warping: twisting out of shape

Source: Article from an anti-suffrage newspaper, *The Woman's Protest Against Woman's Suffrage*, published in New York by the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, in October 1912.

Document C: Tennessee Representative John A. Moon (Modified)

It has been insisted that the real purpose of this amendment is to deprive the Southern States of representation in part in Congress....

In those Southern States where the colored population outnumbers the white, to double the number of ignorant voters by giving the colored woman the right to vote would produce a condition that would be absolutely intolerable. We owe something to the wishes and the sentiments of the people of our sister States struggling to maintain law and order and white supremacy....

We are engaged now in a great foreign war. It is not the proper time to change the whole electoral system... Patriotism, in my judgment, forbids the injection of this issue into national politics at this time.

Source: Representative John A. Moon of Tennessee, speech in House of Representatives, January 10, 1918, on the issue of the woman suffrage amendment.