

A Chronology and Primary Sources for Teaching about Jeannette Rankin

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Jeannette Rankin

Jeannette Rankin was the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress and to a national legislative assembly. Well known nationally and in her home state of Montana as an aggressive and effective suffrage campaigner, she used her unique position to vote with 56 other members of Congress against America's entry into World War I. She also worked for passage of a national woman suffrage amendment, better health care for women and children, and better conditions for women workers in Washington, D.C. and miners in Butte, Montana. After Montana refused to return her to Congress in 1918, she became a peace lobbyist and activist. With the U.S. poised to enter World War II, Rankin returned to Montana where she was elected to Congress for a second term in 1940. She cast the single vote against America's entry into World War II. The remainder of her long life was spent in pursuit of world peace and political reform. She lived in rural Georgia and traveled widely. As late as 1967, she continued to promote an anti-war agenda, speaking out against the Vietnam War. She died at a retirement home May 18, 1973, in Carmel, California, just a few weeks short of her 93rd birthday.

Below is an overview, arranged chronologically, of Rankin's life and selected primary sources, including excerpts from speeches, letters, unpublished documents, and newspapers. Questions for discussion and a list of references about Jeannette Rankin follow.

1880 Jeannette Rankin is born on a ranch just outside Missoula, Montana Territory, June 11, the eldest child of Olive and John Rankin. Her mother, who came to Missoula by train and stagecoach from New Hampshire, is the second teacher in Missoula; her father, from Ontario, Canada, is a rancher, builder, lumber mill operator, and businessman in Missoula. He builds the first house in Missoula with indoor plumbing and central heating. The Rankins have five other daughters, Philena (who dies in childhood), Harriet, Mary, Grace, and Edna, and one son, Wellington (the second child). The family is successful, close-knit, and haughty. They divide their time between the ranch and their home in Missoula.

1902-03 At her parents' urging, Jeannette Rankin earns a B.S. in biology from the new state university in Missoula. She teaches in a rural school near the family ranch but leaves after one year, because she "didn't like it." She teaches a second year at Whitehall, Montana, this time leaving because she does not pass the state certification examination. Frustrated in Montana and looking for an escape, Rankin writes in March, 1903 in her diary:

“Go! Go! Go! It makes no difference where just so you go! go! go! Remember at the first opportunity go!” (Jeannette Rankin, quoted in Ronald Schaffer, “Jeannette Rankin: Progressive Isolationist,” Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1959, 6.)

1904

John Rankin dies of Rocky Mountain tick fever and leaves an estate of \$150,000 (about \$3 million today). For the next fifty years, Jeannette Rankin’s only brother, Wellington, manages the family’s property and takes care of his sisters’ financial needs. After her husband’s death, Olive Rankin turns over household responsibilities to Jeannette, including raising her five younger sisters. She apprentices to a milliner, studies furniture making by correspondence course, and travels: to the east coast to visit her brother, a student at Harvard, and to the west coast to experience a San Francisco settlement house.

1908-09

Jeannette Rankin moves to New York City and completes a master’s-level program in social work at the prestigious New York School of Philanthropy. She experiences a “woman-centered” life. She and her colleagues believe that woman’s maternal instincts could have application outside the home. She adopts the new social science theory that a better society could be achieved through systematic investigation and fair economic policies, and that women have a special role to play in the improvement of society. This theory becomes part of Rankin’s future policy initiatives, as evidenced by the following speeches:

“[W]e should wish [the care of 150 orphans in the state asylum] to be a model for all women to follow. . . . [W]e could see that these children were given intensive study. . . especially along the line of preventing disease and of keeping health and happiness curves about normal. The principles of education, the effect of work and play and idleness on character building, could be studied watching the children 24 hours a day. . . . In time this institution would become a storehouse of information on child life and care. . . . In time we could standardize motherhood, as all service to society must be standardized. . . . A scientific course could be developed that would prepare women for scientific motherhood. . . . Is it too much to hope that in time. . . we have no ‘Topsies.’” (Jeannette Rankin, Montana Federation of Women’s Clubs, Lewistown, 4 June 1914, Jeannette Rankin Papers, Montana Historical Society.)

“[B]abies are dying from cold and hunger; soldiers have died for lack of a woolen shirt. Might it not be that the men who have spent their lives thinking in terms of commercial profit find it hard to adjust themselves to thinking in terms of human needs? Might it not be that a great force that has always been thinking in terms of human needs, and that always will think in terms of human needs,

has not been mobilized? Is it not possible that the women of the country have something of value to give the Nation at this time? It would be strange indeed if the women of the country through all these years had not developed an intelligence, a feeling, a spiritual force peculiar to themselves, which they hold in readiness to give to the world.” (Jeannette Rankin, “Woman Suffrage,” *Congressional Record*, 10 January 1918, JRP, MHS.)

1909-10 Jeannette Rankin works as a social worker in Missoula, where she tries to institute single-sex jails; in Spokane, where she works in a children’s home; and in Seattle, where she tries to find foster homes for abandoned children. She finds social work dispiriting, “I couldn’t take it,” and volunteers with the Washington campaign for woman suffrage. To become a more effective suffrage campaigner, Rankin studies economics, sociology, and public speaking at the University of Washington.

1910-15 In nation-wide suffrage work Jeannette Rankin learns from other suffragists how to organize at the grass roots, and she develops a distinctive speaking style. She works for three years for the New York Woman Suffrage Party as a sidewalk campaigner, lobbyist, and field organizer. Rankin becomes a member of Heterodoxy, the Greenwich Village women’s club of like-minded suffragists, authors, lawyers, peace activists, artists, journalists, union organizers, and utopians. They are interested in, among other things, birth control, socialism, communism, and prohibition. These women become her core group of life-long friends. She directs the Montana suffrage campaign, helping Montana become the 11th state to pass woman suffrage in 1914. Eventually, as field secretary for the National American Woman Suffrage Association, she organizes and lobbies in North Dakota, South Dakota, Missouri, Nebraska, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Tennessee, Alabama, and Florida. She becomes one of the “stars” of the national suffrage movement.

“All over the country women are asking for the vote. . . . We are a force in life, a factor which must be considered in all problems. . . . While we Montana women have broader opportunities than the women of any other part of the world, we want the ballot in order to give opportunity to less fortunate women. . . . Census reports show that there are eight million women engaged in manual labor in this country. They are not there because they don’t want to stay at home, but because they must work if they are to live.” (Jeannette Rankin, Woman’s Day speech, Missoula, Montana, quoted in *Daily Missoulian*, 2 May 1914, quoted in Katrina Rebecca Cheek, “The Rhetoric and Revolt of Jeannette Rankin,” M.A. thesis, University of Georgia, 1969, 150.)

“That Miss Rankin’s personal influence had much to do with this near triumph [in the New York legislature] cannot be doubted. She has worked day and night, heart and soul, for the measure, and always in such manner as to command the utmost respect of her opponents. . . . Her tact, her gentle feminine persuasion and her ever-ready logic have made many converts to Woman Suffrage.” (New York suffrage organizers to James L. Laidlaw, New York suffrage leader, 21 March 1912, JRP, MHS)

“Miss Rankin gave some 20 weeks of the most strenuous field work to New York for barely her expenses. She is one of the most unselfish volunteer workers I have ever known.” (Harriet Laidlaw, New York suffrage leader, to Harriet Upton, Ohio suffrage leader, 24 July 1912, JRP, Schlesinger Library.)

“We are busily at work in this state getting our preliminary organization in shape. This means the precinct organizations and the training of a corps of efficient workers. . . . We want a capable, efficient woman in every precinct in the state. . . . These precinct captains will form in each county the county committee, and the county committees in turn will elect their chairmen, who will form the state committee and will elect the state organization.” (Jeannette Rankin, quoted in *Anaconda Standard*, July 10, 1913, JRP, MHS.)

1916

Running as a Republican, Rankin campaigns for and wins one of two at-large seats from Montana in the U.S. House of Representatives. She receives 6,354 more votes than the third-place candidate. Her election success can be attributed to her campaign skills, commitment, and energy; the at-large congressional district that allowed for two winners; the support of Montana’s newly enfranchised women; and her brother Wellington’s financial support and political skill.

“She was one of the ablest campaigners that I ever saw. If she heard of a vote a hundred miles up in the mountains [or] in some isolated canyon up there, she would go up and see them, drive up there and it didn’t make any difference about the roads. . . . She would go anywhere. Anywhere—a house of prostitution, it didn’t make any difference to her what it was—she would make herself at home. . . . She was a tough person; nothing phased (sic) her when she was after something.” (Tom Haines, former Montana legislator, interview by Helen Bonner, 8 July 1980, transcript, University of Montana Library Archives, 1, 2, 8, 9.)

“At first glance it appears that money is a great essential, but the money is helpful only when it represents energy in disseminating

ideas. If one had the energy to cover a district, it would not require money. No woman can be elected independently unless she has devoted at least two years on nothing else but working up an organization.” (Jeannette Rankin, to Miss Clara Park Oliver, 6 June 1936, JRP, SL).

Rankin’s stunning achievement was her election as the first woman to both the U.S. Congress and any national legislative body. She became the best-known woman in the U.S.—maybe the world—and a symbol of female achievement to many Americans.

“Your election means a recognition of the ideals for which Womanhood stands. You are the instrument used by a Higher Power through which to disseminate the spiritual force so necessary to the illumination of these ideals. . . . [M]y heart is with you in this great Hour of history; this Hour is read by the common people as a ‘recognition of women,’ but it is read by those who do understand as the Hour when the hands on the face of Time turn upward for the new Race being founded in this country.” (Mary O’Neill, to Jeannette Rankin, 23 November 1916, JRP, MHS.)

“Although I am a stranger to you I have written a piece of poetry and must confess I used your name:

And along comes good Miss Rankin
 She will win for us the fight
 She will win for us the battle
 Johnny Booze be put to flight.
 Long will ring her praise and glory
 As she takes her welcomed stand
 Just as did the good Saint Patrick
 Banish toads in Ireland.”

(Margaret Van Slate, Merrill, Wisconsin, to Rankin, 16 March 1917, JRP, MHS.)

1917

Jeanette Rankin travels to the east coast and gives a series of public lectures on Progressive political themes, none of which include an anti-war message. On April 17, President Woodrow Wilson calls a special session of Congress. Under intense pressure from national suffrage leaders to support Wilson, Rankin waveringly casts her first vote in Congress against the resolution to declare war on Germany. A Washington, D.C., newspaper describes the vote (which was one of 57) as follows:

“Her appearance was of a woman on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She clutched at her throat repeatedly. Her hands were alternately wrapped around each other. She sat upright, then dropped forward in her seat. Occasionally she threw back her head

and looked fixedly at the white lights shining through the stained glass ceiling of the house of representatives. She stroked her head tiredly. . . .Slowly Miss Rankin arose to her feet. . . .Every eye in the chamber was fixed upon her. There was no sound. As she came fully to a standing posture Miss Rankin threw back her head and looked straight ahead. Her hands groped for the back of the seat before her; they found it, and she gripped it hurriedly, nervously. ‘I want to stand by my country, but I cannot vote for war,’ she said. . . .A score of men called upon Miss Rankin to answer ‘aye’ or ‘no,’ not understanding that she intended to vote ‘no’ without actually using the word.” (*Washington Times*, 8 April 1917, JRP, MHS.)

Jeannette Rankin describes her vote:

“[The] hardest part of the vote was the fact that the suffragists were divided, and many of my beloved friends said that you will ruin the suffrage movement if you vote against war.” (Jeannette Rankin, interview by John C. Board, 29 August 1963, audio recording UML.)

“[T]he pressure might have pushed me in if I hadn’t realized that the first woman has to take the first stand.” (Jeannette Rankin, quoted in John C. Board, “The Lady from Montana: Jeannette Rankin,” M.A. thesis, University of Montana, 1964, 111)

Many react to her vote:

“[I]t would have been so much better and easier for you if two or more women had been the inaugurating element of our sex. . . . [R]esponsibility would have been divided and you would not have stood for womanhood, but only for Miss Rankin.” [Anna Garlin Spencer, Pennsylvania, to Jeannette Rankin, 12 May 1917, JRP, MHS.)

“It is a common conviction that Representative Rankin missed, for herself and for the cause with which her name is closely identified, a golden opportunity when, the other day, she had her vote recorded in opposition to the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the people of her country; but while this act cannot be recalled, Miss Rankin will not be denied other opportunities perhaps equally golden. . . . [I]t seems reasonable to believe that, when the roll shall be called upon them, Miss Rankin’s voice will ring out clear and firm on the right side.” (*Christian Science Monitor*, 11 April 1917, JRP, MHS.)

Subsequently, Jeannette Rankin advocates for reform legislation on behalf of women and children, introduces a federal suffrage amendment, and supports the U.S. war effort, including conscription into the military and the resolution to declare war on Austria. Rankin investigates worker abuse and is successful in bringing about change for workers at the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing. The United Press reports on the investigation:

“Miss Jeannette Rankin, during a speech in the House Monday, plans to ask for a congressional investigation of working conditions among women at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing [and] of the hours that women in the [Bureau work] daily. Washington has been stirred for a week by Miss Rankin’s exploit in going on a three-hour tour of the Bureau - as simple ‘J.Rankin.’” (United Press, Washington, D.C., 6 July 1917, JRP, MHS.)

The Masses, a Greenwich Village publication, writes about Jeannette Rankin’s findings:

“Many girls work fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen hours. Workers not reporting for work Sundays were demoted and put on night shifts. . . Girls helping printers on power presses (making bank notes, Liberty Bonds, etc.) lift their arms 6,000 times in a day.” (*The Masses*, September 1917, JRP, MHS.)

Jeannette Rankin is successful in pressuring the Bureau to improve working conditions, including instituting an eight-hour day:

“With regard to the complaints which you drew to my attention of alleged excessive overtime said to be required of the women employees of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, I have appointed a committee to make immediately a full, frank and important investigation and report to me the facts, together with their recommendations.” (William G. McAdoo, Secretary of the Treasury, to Jeannette Rankin, 6 July 1917, JRP, MHS.)

Jeannette Rankin, however, is not successful in attempts to mediate a bitter strike and impasse between Industrial Workers of the World-inspired miners and the Anaconda Copper Mining Company in Butte. She is seen as sympathizing with radical labor activists.

Mary O’Neill, a political activist and one of Rankin’s staunchest allies, urges Rankin to go to Butte:

“[H]ighest duty is to come instantly to investigate these conditions and methods first hand. This knowledge will force Congress and others to immediate action and a new note shall be sounded in the

industrial world. You can take the people here into your confidence at a great mass meeting and win cooperation in bringing peace here and power in Congress My plan demands big courage, big comprehension, and close discrimination. . . . It is a tremendous opportunity for even the biggest man in the nation. The workers here trust you. . . . This is the hour to prove the quality of your courage and your justice. All is ready.” (Mary O’Neill, to Jeannette Rankin, 6 August 1917, JRP, MHS.)

Jeannette Rankin’s brother, Wellington Rankin, worries about negative political consequences and characteristically urges restraint in a telegram to his sister:

“Hope you will present Butte situation in non partisan manner if you address House. Present facts that will warrant investigation but do not prejudice. No doubt that the IWW are in some instances endeavoring to harass the government and should be stopped. The capitalist should also pay wages.” (Wellington Rankin, to Jeannette Rankin, 7 August 1917, JRP, MHS.)

Jeannette Rankin gives an interview in which she does not heed her conservative brother’s advice:

“I think I know perfectly well what the Amalgamated will try to do to me. They will try to do to me just what they have done to everyone who ever tried to oppose them in and out of Montana. They own the state, they own the government, they own the press. First, I will be roasted from one end of the state to the other. Every newspaper will print my shortcomings, real and fancied in the largest type in the composing room. All the mud and all the bricks in the state will come in my direction. . . . Their methods are gradually becoming more refined. Now they use political ruin, social ostracism, financial ruin, in fact all the things which usually go to make life worthwhile to the average person. Years ago they used to put people out of the way that tried to organize the miners. Now, as you read in the daily press, they simply deport them. The result is the same. They’ll do everything to discredit me, both here in Washington and in my own state.” (Jeannette Rankin, quoted in, *Washington Times*, 8 August 1917, JRP, MHS.)

The Montana press editorializes on Jeannette Rankin’s involvement in the Butte strike and her political future:

“We hold Miss Rankin wholly sincere in her [war] vote and this should relieve her of any unnecessarily harsh criticism. . . . [But] Miss Rankin has been gravely concerned over the I.W.W. situation in Butte and her sympathies appear to have been altogether in

favor of that lawless element. . . . If Miss Rankin should come back to Montana, she would find that the doctrines of the I.W.W. are held in loathing by every law abiding, loyal citizen. . . . If she has been advised to champion the cause of the most lawless and dangerous set of men who ever infested this state in the hope of attracting to her support the organized labor forces of Montana, we would suggest that she immediately change her staff of counselors for they are giving her a very inferior brand of political advice.” (*Lewistown Democrat-News*, Montana, 11 August 1917, JRP, MHS.)

1918

The Montana Legislature reapportions the state’s at-large congressional district into two districts, eastern and western. Jeannette Rankin’s congressional colleague warns her that the western district is his turf and she decides against carpet bagging in the eastern district. She runs for Democrat Thomas Walsh’s U.S. Senate seat and is defeated in the Republican primary. National suffrage leaders do not support her. She runs in the general election as a National Party candidate and is defeated by Walsh.

“Jeannette Rankin has introduced a resolution declaring that this government ‘recognize the right of Ireland to political independence’ . . . [She] is obviously lacking in loyalty and in common sense. . . . [S]he has lent aid and comfort to the enemy [by her] activity in behalf of the I.W.W. [and] now she openly cooperates with British traitors and German spies.” (*Adrian Daily Telegram*, Michigan, 20 January 1918, JRP, MHS.)

“Whatever she had done or will do is wrong to somebody, and every time she answers the roll call she loses us a million votes.” (Carrie Chapman Catt, National American Woman Suffrage Association President, to *Helena Independent*, Montana, 18 April 1918, JRP, MHS.)

“[T]he Democratic candidate is Senator Walsh, who. . . fought our resolution through in the [Democratic Resolutions] Committee and on the floor of the convention. . . . We have never had a better friend, more willing to fight for us on all occasions, than Senator Walsh. Now Miss Rankin has announced that she proposes to run independently. The Republicans are . . . hoping and praying that she will run because they believe she will draw the labor vote which normally would go to Senator Walsh. . . . For her sake as well as ours it is most advisable that she should quit at this stage.” (Carrie Chapman Catt, to Harriet and James Laidlaw, 11 September 1918, JRP, SL.)

“There is no finer young woman in all Montana than Jeannette Rankin, personally speaking. . . . But Jeannette went down east and listened to all the White House pickets and the women socialists. . . . She listened to the Wobbly leaders in Butte. . . . She has a brilliant future behind her.” (*Helena Independent*, Montana, 17 November 1918, JRP, MHS.)

1919 Jeannette Rankin leaves Congress. She travels as a Women’s Peace Party delegate to the Women’s International Conference for Permanent Peace in Zurich with activists Jane Addams and Florence Kelley. Jeannette Rankin is greatly influenced by Addams’ personal friendship and pacifism, especially Addams’ idea that war is ineffective in solving social problems.

1920-25 The Women’s Peace Party becomes the U.S. branch of the Women’s International League, and Jeannette Rankin serves on its executive board and as a paid lobbyist. Their agenda includes hunger relief programs and releasing war and political prisoners. She argues that women have a unique role in attaining peace and that war could be outlawed:

“Disarmament will not be won without their aid. . . . Half of the human race does not fight and has never fought. . . . [W]hy should men not learn something. . . . from the non-fighting female.” (Jeannette Rankin, quoted in Joan Hoff Wilson, “Jeannette Rankin,” speech to the Montana History Conference, Helena, 4 April 1977, audio recording, UML.)

“Instead of laws about war, we should have laws against war.” (Jeannette Rankin, quoted in Schaffer, “Progressive,” 165.)

Jeannette Rankin resigns from the WIL in 1925 in a disagreement over political tactics. In particular, the WIL does not allow her to pursue grassroots organizing:

“I wouldn’t go on because they just wanted me to go and speak, and then go and speak. . . . and [there was] no organization, no purpose, no definite thing.” (Jeannette Rankin, interview by Malca Chall, 1974, audio recordings and transcripts, Suffragists Oral History Project, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 102.)

1921-24 Jeannette Rankin lobbies on behalf of the National Consumers’ League. From a base at Hull House in Chicago, Rankin travels the Midwest to urge state legislatures to adopt reforms such as minimum-wage and maximum-hour legislation. Rankin leaves the NCL because she believes peace work is fundamentally more important than social reform.

- 1924** Jeannette Rankin moves to rural Georgia. She buys 64 acres near Bogart and builds a one-room house. Over the next ten years she adds rooms to her rural dwelling that lacks electricity and indoor plumbing. When it burns down in the mid-1930s, she buys a 45-acre plot near Watkinsville and occupies a sharecropper's cabin with a pit toilet and tin bathtub. She organizes the Georgia Peace Society. She helps her brother, Wellington, with his unsuccessful U.S. Senate primary campaign in Montana (he runs for office nine times and is successful only once as Montana's Attorney General).
- 1929-39** Jeannette Rankin continues to espouse radical policies, including high taxes on war profits and a constitutional amendment to outlaw war. She promotes eugenics, communal living, and economic equality. She supports the radical economic and social justice ideas of Huey Long, Dr. Francis Townsend, and Reverend Charles Coughlin, while she calls Franklin Roosevelt "the Dictator." She works part-time and intermittently as a lobbyist for the National Council for the Prevention of War, the nation's largest antiwar organization. She leaves the NCPW after a dispute with the director over lobbying tactics. She travels several times to Europe.
- 1939** Frustrated by the bureaucracy of national peace organizations, Jeannette Rankin decides to fight the battle for peace as a member of Congress. She returns after an absence of 21 years to Montana with the disguise of starting a peace society in western Montana.
- 1940** Jeannette Rankin campaigns and is elected as a Republican to the U.S. House of Representatives. Obstacles to be overcome are her long absence from Montana (except for summers spent at Wellington Rankin's ranch), her age (sixty), and the perception that she is a political has-been. But her toughness and near-limitless energy, her identification with pacifism as the nation faced another war, and her brother's wealth and political connections help her win Montana's western-district seat. In particular, Wellington strikes a deal with the politically-powerful Anaconda Company: they will support Jeannette Rankin's 1940 election if she agrees not to run in 1942 when Mike Mansfield plans to run.
- 1941-43** Jeannette Rankin's second term is dominated by war. On December 8, 1941, she casts the single vote in Congress against the resolution to declare war on Japan. Many years later, she recalls the event:

"I knew it was coming. . . .Roosevelt was deliberately trying to get us in the war. . . .I didn't let anybody approach me. I got in my car and disappeared. Nobody could reach me. . . .I just drove around Washington and got madder and madder because there were soldiers everywhere I went. . . .I don't remember whether I

thumbed my nose at them or not, but I resented them.” (Jeanette Rankin, interview by Chall, 9.)

The response to Jeannette Rankin’s vote is varied:

“This time Germany has a chance to conquer the world. . . .[D]on’t stick to your ideas because you’ve had them since the last war. This situation IS different, I tell you.” (Maury Maverick, mayor of San Antonio and supporter of Jeannette Rankin’s 1917 vote, to Jeannette Rankin, 12 November 1940, JRP, SL.)

“ I always knew you were like the Rock of Gibraltar. And so you are. I feel proud to know you and prouder that I can say that we are friends. What you have done today will go down in history. . . .[Y]ou have made an impression on the whole world. . . .”
 “Katherine Anthony, close personal friend, to Jeannette Rankin, 8 December 1941, JRP, SL.)

“You have turned the clock back for women! . . .Thank God our country does not have to depend on such unrealistic persons as you! You doubtless flatter yourself on standing by your ‘principles,’ but inflexible principles like yours would put us under the Nazi heel. You will not hold an enviable position in the history of our times.” (Mary B. Gilson, to Jeannette Rankin, 8 December 1941, JRP, SL.)

Jeannette Rankin continues to hold a deep, long-standing hatred of Franklin Roosevelt that began when he was dismissive of her suffrage work in New York:

“I have been pretty quiet, . . . but evidently enough people are reading my speech to worry some of the ‘super’ patriots. Perhaps some day the people will learn that every country loses every war, and then they will hang all the dictators, including Roosevelt and Churchill.” (Jeannette Rankin, to Gerald F.M. O’Grady, 16 August 1943, JRP, SL.)

Jeannette Rankin is not successful in passing bills to limit the effect of the war. She becomes associated with the America First Committee, an isolationist organization notorious for its fascism and anti-Semitism. As agreed, she does not run for re-election in 1942 and leaves Congress. By 1943, she considers running again, for the seat now held by Mike Mansfield. She believes women’s anti-war support could outweigh pro-war sentiments. Because her brother will not back her, she decides not to run.

1942-68 Jeannette Rankin enters an agreement with Wellington that she will be their mother's principal caregiver and, in exchange, he will continue to provide her money for travel and other needs. Olive Rankin dies in 1947. In 1955, Wellington Rankin buys his sister the Weiglow Ranch. Jeannette Rankin tells her friend, Flora Belle Surles, about the purchase:

“ Did I tell you that I'm buying a ranch ten miles toward Helena from 71 (one of Wellington's ranches)? Of course Wellington is going to run it and make the payments but I have 100 cows and a brand. . . 'Lazy one O one.'” (Jeannette Rankin, to Flora Belle Surles 29 July 1955, Flora Belle Surles Papers, SL.)

Jeannette Rankin summers in Montana, winters in Georgia, and travels across the U.S. and internationally, including Mexico, Turkey, Europe, Asia, the U.S.S.R., and nine trips to India. She travels alone, with friends, with study groups, and with her sister, Edna Rankin McKinnon, a birth control lobbyist and international field representative for the Pathfinder Fund.

1966 Jeannette Rankin's brother, Wellington, one of the richest men in Montana, dies with an estate of \$9 million and leaves her a bequest of \$75,000. She designs and begins construction on her Watkinsville, Georgia, land of a communal cement-block structure called “the roundhouse.” She intends to rent rooms to elderly women to “live like a family” but the building has no tenants and is never finished. In letters to prospective tenants, Rankin describes her ideas:

“ [T]en small bedrooms. . . on the perimeter of the circular house [provide]each woman a measure of privacy, while the large central living area offers opportunity for companionship and communal activities. There is one shower and one full bathroom. . .and there is a community kitchen. . . .Each woman has a half bath that is a toilet and hand basin. . . .Exterior landscaping and beautifying would be left to the occupants. There is also ample space for vegetable gardening. . . .The house has electricity and can have a phone. . .[and is] within walking distance from the country store.” (Jeannette Rankin, to Mrs. M.A. Evans, 7 March 1967, JRP, SL.)

1967 The U.S. House of Representatives honors Jeannette Rankin on the 50th anniversary of her entering Congress. Rankin speaks out against the Vietnam War. She advocates immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam and criticizes women for lack of activism against the war:

“The draft could be abolished if women spoke loudly enough to be heard. But they don't. Women remind me of the cows on our ranch in Montana. A cow has a calf and after a while some man comes

along and takes the calf away. She bawls for a while, then goes on and has another calf.” (Jeannette Rankin, quoted by Associated Press, unidentified newspaper, April 1967, JRP, MHS.)

1968 Jeannette Rankin leads the Jeannette Rankin Brigade war protest in Washington, D.C. She once again considers, but decides against, running for Congress from Montana a third time.

1971-72 Jeannette Rankin travels across the nation, speaking in person and on television on behalf of her two long-standing election reform ideas: direct preferential election of the president and multi-member congressional districts. She believes the Electoral College limits the voter’s choice to the two “men” nominated by the major parties and multiple-member districts promote a winner-take-all approach that favors better-known male candidates.

“Under the current arrangement. . . only a single man and a single set of ideas represent each district. With multiple member districts, each voter could elect at least two representatives and differing points of view could find a vote in Congress. . . [W]omen are reluctant to participate in the balloting because they feel their ideas and perspective are not represented. . . [I]f they feel their needs will find effective voice through the ballot, they will seek expression through our democratic processes.” (Jeannette Rankin, speech to the Georgia Senate and House of Representatives, October 1971, JRP, MHS.)

“Everybody knows the Electoral College is a sham. What we need is a participatory democracy through a preferential election.” (Jeannette Rankin, quoted in *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 May 1972, SOHP.)

[In her plan, all presidential candidates would get on the popular ballot through petitions and each voter would list] “the candidates in order of individual choice, from first to last. . . . [T]he computer counts all the 1st choice votes; any candidate with a majority of votes is President. If there is no 1st choice majority, the 2nd choice votes are counted as equal to the 1st, and the candidate with the highest number of votes and a majority is President. If there is still no majority, the 3rd choice votes are counted as equal to the 1st and 2nd and, etc.” (Jeannette Rankin and John Kirkley, “Case for the Direct Preferential Vote for President,” unpublished paper, 1972, MHS, 264.)

Ralph Nader writes in his column:

Her “stamina behind these ideas and ideals is absolutely staggering.” (Ralph Nader, *Capital Times*, September 11, 1972.)

The National Organization for Women honors Jeannette Rankin in 1972 as “the world’s outstanding living feminist.” Despite their praise, Rankin is critical of modern feminists:

“I tell these young women that they must get to the people who don’t come to the meetings. It never did any good for all the suffragettes to come together and talk to each other. There will be no revolution unless we go out into the precincts. You have to be stubborn. Stubborn and ornery.” (Jeannette Rankin, quoted in *Life*, March 3, 1972.)

1973 Jeannette Rankin buys a retirement condominium in Carmel, California, and spends her last days watching the Watergate hearings on television. She dies on May 18, just short of her 93rd birthday. She is cremated and her ashes are spread over Monterey Bay. Her estate is valued at \$162,000 (about \$720,000 today).

Questions for Discussion about Jeannette Rankin

1. What motivated Rankin as a suffragist? As a peace activist? As a political reformer?
2. What were her fundamental beliefs? What were the sources of her ideas?
3. How did her family, especially her brother, influence her?
4. What were Jeannette Rankin’s personal traits?
5. How did the woman suffrage campaign prepare her as a politician?
6. Why was she successful in her election campaigns of 1916 and 1940?
7. How did women see her after her election to Congress in 1916?
8. Why did she vote against U.S. entry into World War I? World War II?
9. Why did national suffrage leaders not support her in the 1918 election?
10. Why did she lose the 1918 election?
11. In what ways was she radical?
12. What were her two specific political reform ideas and what are the arguments for and against those ideas?
13. Which do you think Rankin would prefer to be remembered as, a suffragist or a pacifist? Why?

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