

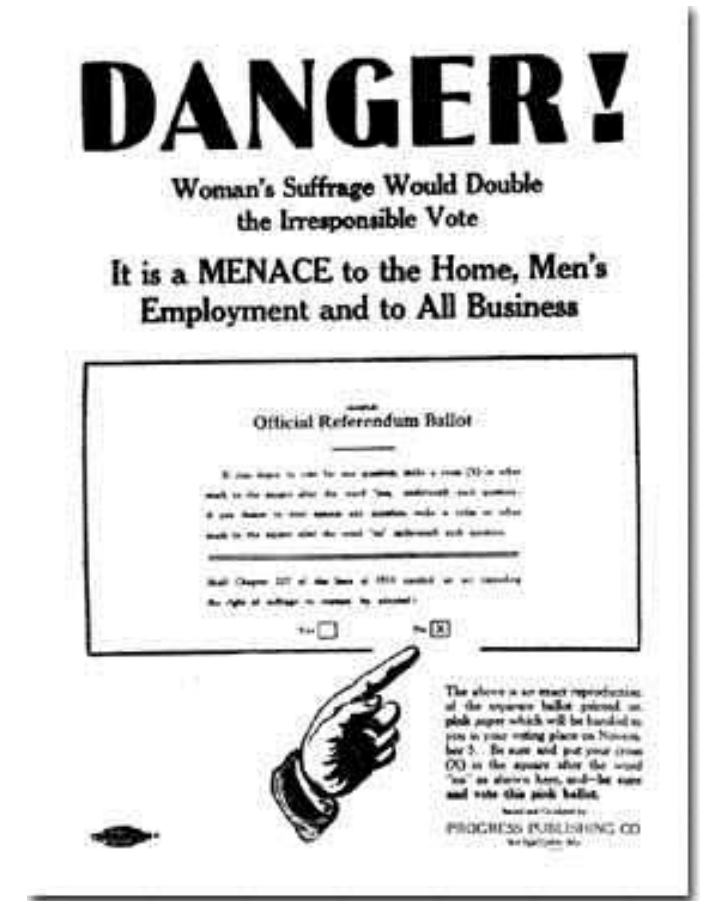
RURAL VOICES ON THE PATH TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

ANTI-SUFFRAGE SENTIMENT

WE BELIEVE IN WOMAN'S RIGHTS

Primarily in her **RIGHT** to be exempt from the responsibility of government.

The majority of the women of New York State do not want to vote. They depend upon the men not to thrust suffrage upon them.



The fight against women's suffrage was waged by both men and women. Some argued from fear of change, others from their firm moral belief that women and men had been ordained different duties and abilities. The women who led the arguments against suffrage were largely well to do, content in their comfortable lives. In the northern states, they were urban philanthropists; in the south, the wives and daughters of the planter class. The anti-suffragists believed that women were better off not getting entangled in politics. They believed in domestic feminism; that women had the right to complete freedom within the home and didn't need the vote. On April 18, 1894, the New York State Association Opposed to the Extension of the Suffrage to Women was founded in Brooklyn Heights. The roster of ladies included: Mrs. William A. Putnam, Mrs. Sturgis Coffin, Alice Hill Chittenden, Mrs. Theodore L. Cuyler, Mrs. Lyman Abbott, Mrs. John Tasker Howard, Mrs. Charles Cuthbert Hall, Mrs. William C. Beecher, and Mrs. Tunis Bergen, among many more.

Author Kate Douglas Wiggin, noted for her work with the Kindergarten Association in New York spoke strongly against women's suffrage. Her fellow anti-suffragist, socialite Josephine Jewel Dodge, worked for the establishment of 'day nurseries' to provide care for the children of working women. Both thought women were stronger and more effective when they kept out of the political frontlines. In 1911, she formed the National Association Opposed to Women Suffrage (NAOWS) in New York City. Women "should serve the state in every way possible without jeopardizing the home by entrance into active politics," Josephine Jewel Dodge told the Louisville Courier-Journal in 1913. She thought suffrage would damage women's power to reform society, that the move from the moral world of philanthropy to the corrupt world of politics would cost women their voice. Besides, in states where women had the right to vote, little to no advance in reform had been seen. Prohibition, arguably the greatest campaign of the reform movement, was no closer to reality. If women's votes had accomplished so little, what was the point of women voting?



Josephine Jewel Dodge

In addition to seeing suffrage as a threat to the reform movement's momentum, many of the anti-suffragists sought to preserve the social order. In the north, they feared the results of giving the vote to the poor, the uneducated, and the "fallen women" of the cities, while in the south the suffrage split fell along racial lines. White women voting was one thing. Black women voting was another matter altogether. The suffragists accused their opponents of snobbery: "They could not bear the thought of political affiliation with the laboring woman, or with the woman engaged in domestic service. Shall we, they urged, contaminate our skirts by going to the same poll with the cook, the laundress, the chambermaid, the dressmaker?"

Another branch of the anti-suffrage movement dreaded prohibition. They believed that if women gained the vote they would succeed in banning the sale of alcohol, and they urged their fellow men to deny women the vote so that alcohol could continue to flow freely. Other anti-suffragists argued that world of politics was too rough for women. The language and heated arguments created a decidedly masculine environment. Never mind that elections in Wyoming had been conducted in a decorous manner since 1869. It was simply not ladylike for a woman to engage in politics. Perhaps the most democratic argument used was that the majority of women did not want suffrage. Why should the state or the nation grant the demands of a vocal few against the wishes of the many? This was not how government by the people and for the people was supposed to work.



Kate Wiggin

However, most arguments of the anti-suffrage party rested on the belief that men and women had been ordained different roles in the society, and that life would no longer run smoothly if these roles were changed. A woman's world was in the home and the school, while a man's world included business and politics. Catherine Beecher, an educator writing in 1842, declared that men and women were most equal when they were engaged in their separate spheres. Should women be given the vote, those sacred spheres would collide and rupture. Households, it was feared, would be turned upside-down. Cartoons showed men in aprons caring for infants while their wives bustled out of the house in business attire, armed with the ballot.

