

A SINGLE WOMAN

STUDY GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION TO
THE “A SINGLE WOMAN” STUDY GUIDE
By Viviane Dzyak Hahn, PhD

The United States of America inherited its legacy of war from its European forebears. Indeed, the history of Western culture can be, and often is, told as a story of never-ending war. Yet there is another story—one that is seldom told, but that is also a part of our human as well as our Western cultural inheritance. That story is the one that recounts a legacy of peace, and the countless ways that societies and individuals worldwide and throughout history have worked to circumvent the violence and destruction of war.

The name Mohandas Gandhi most readily comes to mind when we consider individuals who lived and taught non-violence. But there are women too—Lysistrata of Athens being one of them, who galvanized the women of her city to force their warring husbands to come to terms of peace by withholding their sexual favors. The American Jeannette Rankin, using quite a different method, successfully campaigned to become the first woman in the United States Congress and, from that vantage point, dedicated her life to peace. Growing up in rural Montana at the end of the 19th century, Congresswoman Rankin’s young mind was transformed by the awareness of the tragedies of the Indian Wars that destroyed Native American cultures.

The film *A Single Woman* was conceived with a similar vision that inspired Jeannette Rankin’s life-long commitment to pacifism—the possibility of a world without war. The film, which is an adaptation of the successful stage play about Congresswoman Rankin’s life, is the cornerstone on which the filmmakers’ intention to bring the legacy of peace to greater public awareness is based. The feature length film and accompanying Study Guide is suitable for both adults and high school and university age young adults. While the Study Guide is geared specifically toward academic audiences, it is nonetheless useful and relevant for any organization or individual dedicated to working for peace, freedom, and social justice. Social change begins with discussion and hopefully leads to action; the Study Guide’s projects and questions are designed to both evoke discussion and invoke action.

Every day the media report ongoing social conflict and the pervasiveness of violence. As a result, we are exposed daily to the legacy of war. Conversely, film media can and ought to play a central role in educating us about social justice and

peace, and provide us with alternative stories to the violent one that has dominated our world for far too long. While conflict resolution studies and post-conflict healing practices remain vital, the role that education can play— particularly with young people of elementary, high school, and college age— is invaluable in disseminating the lesser-known story of our human legacy of peace. The viewing of a film is primarily a passive process, and as inspirational as it is to learn about the life and work of one of America’s most amazing foremothers, it is the filmmakers’ primary intent, in offering the film and accompanying Study Guide, to foster social activism. As a visionary social activist, Jeannette Rankin’s life and pacifist political consciousness serve as examples to not only elicit our admiration, but to also catalyze a visionary activist consciousness in each and every one of us.

ABOUT THE FILM PRODUCTION

Written by Kamala Lopez

In the summer of 2005 I saw the play “A Single Woman” at The Culture Project, a small theater Off-Broadway in New York City. Learning about Jeannette Rankin for the first time that night, I was both amazed and inspired by her life story and shocked and appalled that I had never heard of her before.

Jeanmarie Simpson, the writer and star of the original play, told me how throughout their two year run, in hundreds of grassroots venues and theaters, audiences had been equally stunned by how a woman of such historical significance could have slipped through the cracks into obscurity. A repeated request from her audience that Ms. Simpson could not accommodate was: “Do you have a video of this? How can I share this story with my [sister, husband, mother, child, friends...]? “

I knew that a film about Jeannette Rankin would be an important project, and one that could potentially reach millions of people, but I had seen filmed versions of plays before and they never had the same impact as the live performance. Theater and film are such different worlds; the play would have to be adapted to serve this new medium if it were to reach a film audience and serve its purpose.

The major obstacle, of course, was financial. Even a low budget independent film can cost millions of dollars and we had none of those financial resources available to make our film. I felt, however, that if I concentrated on finding an innovative, creative way to take the two-actor stage piece and open it up as much as possible without trying to make the play into a full blown film epic, we would still be able to accomplish our goal – bringing the life and work of Jeannette Rankin to a broader audience.

Heroica Films, my production company, took on the production of “A Single Woman” and I luckily had a great many friends, resources and contacts that I could beg, borrow and barter with. One of my early philosophic allies and supporters was Richard “Sven” Shelgren, who was a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, and was attracted to the message of “A Single Woman.” Sven and his production company, RCR Inc., jumped in with production insurance while the Nevada Shakespeare Company and Cameron Crain, who had developed the play with Jeanmarie Simpson, their then artistic director, got the ball rolling with a small grant.

First off, I decided to take the Everyman character (who is the only other onstage character in the play besides Jeannette Rankin and who portrays fifty-seven different people) and divide the role into as many actors and actresses as I could afford. Even under the Screen Actors Guild Ultra Low Budget Agreement I obviously couldn't afford fifty-seven of them, so many of my actors play several roles.

I also felt that the parallel story within the film of the American Indians' confrontation with the settlers was critical and needed to be set apart from the rest of the movie. Besides being the only part of the story that moved forward chronologically in time, it functioned as both a fable and ultimately as a through-line that ties the whole piece together. I knew that I could not begin to afford to actually shoot the story, with horses and Indians and wagon trains! I began to envision the sequence more abstractly and came upon the notion that the segments should be rendered by an artist. I searched for a style that would best serve the film, looking at artists' work that included cartoons, watercolors, and even complete abstractions until Jeanmarie introduced me to the award-winning Nevada artist Paul Mellender. His meticulous and almost breathtakingly real drawings felt exactly right. He began the long task of drawing the extensive exquisite plates that illustrate the tale.

Then I decided that while the play takes place in one location, the kitchen of Jeannette Rankin's home, I would need to vary the visual experience for the audience or they would become bored. So while I didn't have the resources to actually go to Montana, or Georgia or India or any of the many places where our story takes place, I did have to come up with a low-budget solution.

We were able to secure a full blown 7,200 square foot soundstage, thanks to Mikel Elliott, owner of Quixote Studios, who donated the space to the production – with one caveat: we only had four free days to shoot the whole film – and that was the Thanksgiving weekend of 2006. This was great news, since that studio rented for tens of thousands of dollars a week! At least one major budgetary hurdle for production was surmounted; now I just had to figure out how to utilize that one location and inexpensively turn that into an illusion of many different places.

Production designer Jefferey Macintyre and I designed the kitchen set as the primary location, the only one we could actually afford to “build” on the stage. I decided that scenes where Jeannette was either introspective or felt more “in control” of the situation would take place there. It also was where the ongoing

bread making, an important metaphor that I retained from the play, needed to occur. We decided that the kitchen décor would change throughout the film to reflect the time period so we spent a good deal of time and expense recreating kitchens from the 1970's all the way back to 1880.

We built two large windows into the kitchen set and had them “green screened” [i.e., outside the window was painted with a special green paint that the computer would later recognize and could remove cleanly]. Later we would replace the green in the windows with whatever we needed, be they images or people, stock footage, actors or animation. This would be very helpful in terms of giving us some flexibility as well as establishing an unusual visual style that would key the audience into the fact that this film was going to be a little different from what they were used to.

Next to the kitchen set was a large completely green screen area, which would have to substitute for any actual locations in post- production. I felt it was important to occasionally get out of the kitchen and into other spaces visually, even if we couldn't actually afford to actually be there in reality. Hence, for example, the scene with Judd Nelson that appears to be outside is completely filled in with environmental photographs that give the illusion of three dimensionality created in post-production. Again, there was a certain “surreal” quality to this decision that started to cement the particular visual language of this film.

Finally, we created a completely black area with strong theatrical lighting as another distinct visual “place” where we could set scenes, generally those where Jeannette Rankin is in confrontation with a hostile environment. Again, the clearly “unrealistic” visual language of these scenes re-emphasizes the theatrical roots of the production as well as the distinct film language being created. And so, within these three simple arenas, all in one actual place, we designed the visual palate of our entire film.

Most would say that shooting a ninety-minute feature film in four days is impossible. The making of a film normally occurs over the course of months -- but necessity is the mother of invention and if I couldn't pull it off in that time period, there would be no film – we just could not afford it. There were several factors that were critical to making a complete shoot even plausible, and I could at least make sure that these were in place in advance: shooting digitally instead of on 35mm (we used the SONY HD F900 camera), pre-rigging, pre-lighting, rehearsing and extensive storyboarding.

The logistics of executing this plan were daunting, to say the least. There were more than 80 scenes; each shot had to be filmed exactly as planned and rehearsed -- there would only be time for one take, or if absolutely necessary, two. The main character was literally in every scene and had to age 70 years over the course of the film, therefore time consuming prosthetic make-up effects were a critical factor in dictating the schedule; every moment that the lead actress was in make-up, production had to be shooting another actor, either in front of the green screen (for later plates) or in close-up. Each of the three areas were pre-lit and dressed prior to the first day of shooting and adjusted at the end of each day in anticipation of the first set-up of the following day. Essentially, the four-day shoot was a huge moving puzzle in which every piece had to be properly inserted at an exact moment or the whole picture would never be complete.

We pulled it off. The film was completed on time. The small crew, all of whom worked for well below their rates and over the entire holiday weekend (Thanksgiving dinner was shared by cast and crew on set) gave it their all and worked seamlessly together to make the impossible come true. Visitors familiar with typical Hollywood sets remarked that they had never been on a shoot with a more involved and positive group of people.

Then came time for post-production, and the speed with which the film was shot was in inverse proportion to the length of time it would take to complete.

By now, the small grant was long gone and the scrambling for funds began in earnest. I began the long editing process, first on an editing system borrowed from Sven and later, thanks to Virginia Bass, I was able to borrow funds to secure my own editing system. Editing took place in my breakfast nook and took over my life for more than two years.

One portion of the film that I struggled with was the reading of the letter by the Chinese child detailing what had happened to her family during the Rape of Nanjing. Initially I had wanted a black/white/red animation sequence to accompany the narration. I also cut together an extremely graphic war montage that would play immediately after the narration during earlier incarnations of the film. Both of these ideas were ultimately substituted for the very simple version that is in the final film -- just the actress recounting the story in Chinese with English translation on screen over black. I believe it is most powerful this way -- nothing added, just exactly what happened.

As post-production continued, it became obvious why there are so many names listed in the credits at the end of a movie - the entire process of completing a film is remarkable in its sheer depth and scope. Securing rights to photographs and stock footage was shockingly expensive and the legal aspects were painstaking. The green screen compositing was complex, time consuming and very hard to pull off with the resources we could afford. The sound aspect had so many separate, complex and costly elements; recording narrations, creating sound effects, designing and composing original music, getting licenses from existing music, mixing the tracks together, etc., etc.

All in all, it was a process that necessitated infinitely more funds and personnel than I had at my disposal. And yet, throughout this seemingly endless process, many people stepped up and lent monies, moral support and their talents, including the entire post-production team who worked for little or no money for the many months it took to animate, composite, design, build the website and do all the computer effects that usually cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and utilize teams of hundreds of people. And the list of well-known actors who wanted to participate and support the project kept growing: Patricia Arquette, Karen Black, Peter Coyote, Frances Fisher, Mimi Kennedy, Margot Kidder, Judd Nelson, Elizabeth Pena, Martin Sheen, Cindy Sheehan, Chandra Wilson... And in one of the many strokes of good fortune that "A Single Woman" has benefited from along the journey, Joni Mitchell agreed to donate the songs "Circle Game" and "Woodstock" to the film.

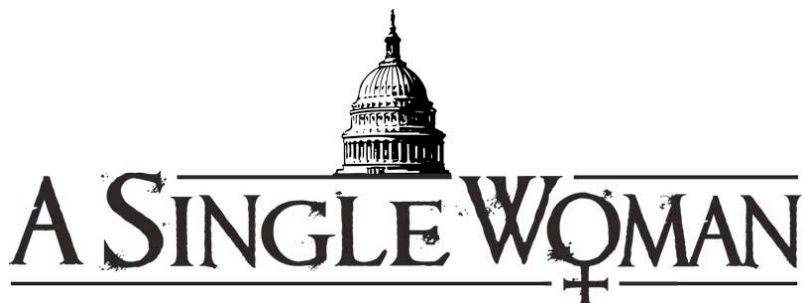
Making a film, especially a completely independent one, is a full immersion experience; not for the faint of heart or for those lacking in persistence or even perhaps a certain deranged stubbornness. There have been times when I have wanted to throw the whole thing over a bridge and move onto a job that might actually involve a paycheck. But somehow, even in the darkest of times on this long journey, the underlying truth, the seed that was planted when I first learned about Jeannette Rankin, kept me going and fighting to get the film out there. Jeannette Rankin deserves to be known. To be celebrated. To be taught. Especially now - her voice and her example are particularly needed.

When the film finally premiered, on October 30th, 2008, at the United States Capitol for members of Congress, and its subsequent invitations to screen at the Smithsonian Institution, the United Nations and the National Arts Club started to roll in, I began to feel a load being lifted off my back. Perhaps all of the hardship and sacrifice that has gone into the creation of this film was worthwhile. We will

be able to achieve our main goal, which has never changed – give the public a tool with which to rediscover America’s Real First Lady – Jeannette Rankin.

I hope that, in the coming years, the film will have continuing impact through dissemination in our schools and libraries, our colleges and communities, among families and friends, to inspire debate and discussion about the principles that Jeannette Rankin stood for and how we can participate in keeping that legacy alive and continue her work into the future.

I thank you for being a crucial part of this journey that is really only just beginning. While “A Single Woman” is complete, its main purpose will only be fulfilled if it serves as a spark to ignite us in a continued struggle to achieve peace, equality, justice and non-violence throughout our world.



A SINGLE WOMAN

The Study Guide

Created by Dr. C. Elizabeth Raymond & Dr. Anita Watson

With additional input by Jim Cornelius (Reference Librarian - Jeannette Rankin Library Program at the United States Institute of Peace),

Dr. Nina Zaragoza (author and educational Expert),

Betsy Mulligan Dague (Executive Director of the Jeannette Rankin Peace Center),

Dr. Viviane Dzyak Hahn (writer and feminist scholar)

Kamala Lopez (filmmaker)

Themes: American peace movement, Women in politics, Women's suffrage, Women and social work, World War I, World War II, Vietnam War, Western labor conflict, Violence and the Media, Peace and the Media, Social Activism, Feminism.

Overview

This film recounting the life of Jeannette Rankin, the first woman elected to Congress, begins in 1972, the year before her death, and works backwards. Rankin was involved in a number of reform activities, but the peace movement dominated her life and dominates this film. As a congresswoman she voted against the U.S. entry into both World War I and II, and weeks before she died, Rankin was speaking out against the Vietnam War.

An important thread running through this work is the story of an overland party's encounter with Native Americans. As the men of the emigrant group circled the wagons and loaded their weapons, the women and children took cover. One woman, observing that the natives were just men, picked up her baby and walked toward them. As she passed her child around to the men, the tense situation was defused and violence avoided. Did a family story about a neighbor boy who was

that baby have such an impact on Rankin that she dedicated her life to the peace cause?

Rankin was not a typical woman of her time. She earned a college degree, had sufficient income to not work if she lived modestly, entered the men's club of politics in a time when women were not welcomed, and she never married. She incurred admiration and opprobrium throughout her life, but appears always to have adhered to her own moral code.

Jeannette Rankin Biography

Jeannette Rankin, the first woman elected to Congress, was a Montana native, born on a ranch at Grant Creek, near Missoula, in 1880. She attended the University of Montana, and received a degree in biology in 1902. After graduation from college, Rankin briefly taught school, then moved to Seattle and pursued social work. By 1909 she was attending the New York School of Philanthropy. She found her calling when she began working on suffrage campaigns in Washington, California and Montana. Women gained the vote in Montana in 1914 and Rankin successfully ran for the U. S. House of Representatives, where she served one term between 1917 and 1919.

In 1917 Rankin, in a public declaration of her pacifist convictions, voted against America's entry into World War I. Rankin spent the rest of her life working to promote global peace. Upon her father's death Rankin had inherited a modest monthly income that allowed her to pursue a variety of interests. Her brother Wellington also provided financial and political support. Rankin moved to Georgia in 1923, though Montana was her legal residence and she spent summers there. By living carefully, she was able to travel extensively around the United States, as well as to New Zealand, Turkey, India, South Africa, and Russia.

Rankin was elected to Congress once more in 1940, again representing the state of Montana. She again voted against a U.S. declaration of war. In 1917, Rankin's vote against the war was one of fifty, but in 1941 hers was the only negative vote. Rankin was harshly criticized for her opposition to World War II, a painful period in her life. She continued her work against war, and was interested in the nonviolent philosophies of Mohandas K. Gandhi. In 1968 she led the Jeannette Rankin Brigade in a peace march in Washington, D.C.

Jeannette Rankin continued working for her causes until weeks before her death. She died in her sleep just before her 93rd birthday, in 1973.

Group and Individual Projects

Projects Orientation:

Ensuring Successful Learning for Students/Participants

The most powerful and purposeful way to differentiate instruction is through projects and long-term work. Indeed, the one question to ask our students that will ensure deep differentiation is: “In what way will you show us how you connected to this material?” In this way, students have the power to choose the most personal way to respond.

A project is work that needs to be completed over time and so requires a level of commitment usually not necessary for daily activities such as filling in a worksheet, finish reading one more chapter, etc. This type of commitment can be inspired in the students when they are allowed to choose what they want to create. Just as in other areas of literacy, the teacher’s passion is a major key to success.

Group Projects

- ❖ As a class, work on developing a new political party, the New American Peace Party (NAPP). Based on information gained from the Rankin film as well as outside research on pacifism, write the details of your party platform. Additionally, design campaign buttons, bumper stickers, slogans, and text for a 30 second TV or radio commercial. Choose four class members to be primary candidates engaging in a brief debate and a press conference after the debate. Candidates will take questions from other class members in the roles of debate moderators, reporters and the audience.
- ❖ Jeannette Rankin characterized the Vietnam War as “stupid and cruel,” and believed, “the people really aren’t for war. They just go along, but war is evil and there is always an alternative.” Divide the class in half, have each group discuss the quote, and, drawing upon discussion in the film, answer one of the following two questions: Is war an inevitable part of modern society? Or was Jeannette Rankin correct in her belief that there is always an alternative to war?
- ❖ Have each individual student formulate his or her own question about war. Divide the class into small groups (4 or 5 participants) and have each student present his/her question and have a small group discussion about each

question. Finally, have each group choose a spokesperson who will give a synopsis of each small group discussion to the entire class.

- ❖ In Georgia, Jeannette Rankin lived off the land and saved resources. Given the current environmental crisis and the need for increased ecological awareness, plan and implement a group project that focuses on the conservation of resources and the importance of local sustainability.

Individual Projects

- ❖ Women gained the right to vote in Montana and Nevada in the same year, 1914. Jeannette Rankin was elected to Congress in 1916. Research the life and activities of Anne Martin, a Nevada suffrage activist who ran for the U.S. Senate in 1918. Write a brief essay comparing and contrasting the lives of the two women.
- ❖ Research and write a report on the Anaconda labor strife in Butte, Montana, during WWI as well as the 1906 labor conflict in Goldfield, Nevada. Are there similarities in the conflict between labor and management? What about government involvement? Can you find connections within the labor movement to the peace movement?
- ❖ There were similarities in interests in the early 20th century reform movements that Jeannette Rankin championed. Make a poster advertising a town hall meeting featuring speeches by leading figures of the following movements: suffrage, prohibition, socialism, union activity, social work, and pacifism.
- ❖ Using your knowledge of Jeannette Rankin and the social justice causes she believed in, choose a contemporary social justice issue that both you and she might support. Find an appropriate organization or knowledgeable persons and explore how both you and they might work together to transform the issue.
- ❖ “A Single Woman” film was released in 2009. Very few Americans are aware of Jeannette Rankin and her lifelong dedication to civil rights, social justice and the legacy of peace. Write a 250-word letter describing Jeannette Rankin’s many accomplishments in political, public, and private life, highlighting the need to build her legacy back into American history. Send

the letters to your school board, local newspapers and local government offices.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Jeannette Rankin pursued what would be considered “traditional” women’s work: teaching, social work, and a job as a seamstress. She moved on, however, into politics and peace activism. Does this seem to be an inconsistent shift in interests? Or a natural progression? What, if anything, did her active professional role in the suffrage movement contribute to her transformation?
- ❖ Jeannette Rankin was convinced that President Franklin Roosevelt betrayed European Jews during World War II. Research the topic and discuss the main points both supporting and refuting Rankin’s point of view.
- ❖ On December 8, 1941 Jeannette Rankin declared to Congress, “As a woman, I can’t go to war, and I refuse to send anyone else.” Was she a traitor for voting against the war, as many declared? Or was she a patriot for not betraying her convictions?
- ❖ Throughout the film, there is a secondary story line about contact between a wagon train and Native Americans. Discuss the possible connection between this incident and Jeannette Rankin’s opposition to war.
- ❖ Jeanmarie Simpson, author and star of the play and film *A Single Woman*, is also a peace activist. Before students view the film, initiate a discussion about the possible impact a pacifist point of view would have on the film. Do the students believe this film will have an anti-war bias? Why or why not? After viewing the film, how would the students answer those questions?
- ❖ Rankin was born and raised in Montana, a western state and the first to elect a woman to Congress. Wyoming was the first territory to grant women the right to vote, Colorado the first state to do so. Most of the states where women gained early suffrage were in the west. Were western women more “liberated”? Discuss possible reasons that the western United States was ahead of the rest of the nation in granting women suffrage.

- ❖ Jeannette Rankin was concerned about treating everyone equally - race, gender, class. Her focus on peace arose from her respect for all humanity. Identify a contemporary social justice issue and discuss how both you and Jeannette Rankin might effectively champion it.
- ❖ Jeannette Rankin spent most of her adult life working for an end to war. Obviously, mankind still engages in wars. Consider the question, “Was Jeannette Rankin a failure?”

Research Topics

People

Jane Addams

Susan B. Anthony

Katherine Anthony

Carrie Chapman Catt

Mohandas K. Gandhi

John Fitzgerald Kennedy

Coretta Scott King

Fiorello LaGuardia

Harriet Laidlaw

Frank Little

Lucretia Mott

Alice Paul

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

John D. Ryan

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Henry David Thoreau

Ida Wells

Organizations

American Civil Liberties Union

Anaconda Copper Mining Company

America First Committee

American Friends Service Committee

Georgia Peace Society

Good Government League

International Congress of Women

International Workers of the World (IWW)

National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)

Non-Partisan League

Women's Peace Party

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Events

Wounded Knee

World War I

Sheppard-Towner Act

Treaty of Versailles (1919)

International Conference of Women for Permanent Peace

Wilson's 14 Points

Ratification of the 19th Amendment

Nanking Massacre

1938 Ludlow Amendment

Pearl Harbor Attack

World War II

The Espionage Act

Rankin-Robinson Bill

The Jeannette Rankin Brigade

Further Reading

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- Woelfle, Gretchen, *Jeannette Rankin: Political Pioneer* (Calkins Creek Books, 2007)

Wolpert, Stanley. *Gandhi's Passion: The Life and Legacy of Mohatma Gandhi*. (Oxford University Press, 2001)

Wyman, David S. *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945*. (New Press, 1998)

On the Web

Jeannette Rankin Peace Center:

<http://www.jrpc.org>

Jeannette Rankin Foundation:

<http://www.rankinfoundation.org>

Jeannette Rankin Oral History:

<http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/projects/suffragist>

A Jeannette Rankin Biography:

<http://www.lewrockwell.com/bender/bender7.html>

United States Senate:

http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Jeannette_Rankin.htm

“A Single Woman” film:

<http://www.asinglewomanmovie.com>

JEANNETTE RANKIN, FIRST CONGRESSWOMAN
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
written by Jeanmarie Simpson

The book, *Jeannette Rankin: America's Conscience*, by Norma Smith, is wisely titled. It is agonizingly clear that Jeannette Rankin's conscience is missing in today's political and socio-economic climate – in the overtly political, certainly, but also in the personal, the private and the intimate. Our choices are forever linked to their consequences and to the ripples that affect others in myriad ways.

When Jeannette Rankin was 11 years old, she learned of and was haunted by the massacre at Wounded Knee. She was heartbroken by the slaughter and disappearance of the friendly Indians who had surrounded her Missoula, Montana home.

“As the Indians came out of their tents, the American soldiers shot them - shot the Medicine Man and anyone who came out. It was a most disgraceful act, the most outrageous thing that could happen. What Calley did at My Lai was nothing to what they did, the American army.”¹

At 22, Jeannette Rankin had a degree in Biology from the University of Montana. She spent the next ten years tending her ailing mother, her dying father, her surviving five siblings, the family's ranch in Grant Creek and the homestead in Missoula. She also traveled to Boston, New York, Chicago and San Francisco and observed the inequality between the masses who lived in crippling poverty and the privileged few who enjoyed economic and personal freedom. She threw herself into social work, attending the New York School of Philanthropy (now Columbia University's School of Social Work), where her practical studies took her into personal contact with the poor – children, mothers, working fathers, orphaned youngsters by the hundreds, night police courts and women who had turned, in desperation, to prostitution. At 29, Jeannette had earned a second degree, this time in Social Work.

“I will never forget it,” Jeannette said sixty years later, her eyes darkening with pain. “There wasn't enough money. There were too many children; only a few could be placed. Half of them returned

¹ Suffragists Oral History Project, *Jeannette Rankin: Activist for World Peace, Women's Rights, and Democratic Government* (1974). Section 191.

when people changed their minds. They had suffered so much from poverty, were in such ill health, had such bad habits, that nobody wanted them. They came back and wept in my office.”²

By April of 1910, as Jeannette approached her 30th birthday, she avidly volunteered for women’s suffrage, scrubbing floors and taking work as a seamstress in order to pay the rent and other basic expenses. She believed that the sweeping reforms needed to make a difference in the lives of the women and children she had witnessed living in misery and squalor would only happen when women achieved the right to vote. She was one of the stars of the Washington State women’s suffrage campaign, rising to a position of recognition and prominence in the old-fashioned way, with talent, common sense and an exceptional moral compass.

Jeannette worked for several months without pay. No service was too commonplace, difficult or disagreeable. All this was enhanced by her singularly sweet personality....³

Although known for her fierce temper, Jeannette Rankin had the heart of a true diplomat and made friends easily through graciousness and her “ladylike” style.

...Asked about the behavior of the English Suffragettes, she said it was hard to get unbiased news, implying their behavior was probably not as bad as it had been painted. But, she said, “I do not want to be understood as advocating violence. I am thankful that in this country we do not even have to think of it, for the men are so chivalrous and sensible and so imbued by the sense of justice, that all we have to do to win is appeal to their common sense.”⁴

While on the stump, Jeannette often said:

“It is beautiful and right that a woman should nurse her child through Typhoid Fever. But it is also beautiful and right that she should have a voice in regulating the milk supply from which the Typhoid resulted.”⁵

Jeannette worked assiduously for suffrage during the decade from 1910 to 1920. Once the vote had been won in Montana (1914), Jeannette turned for inspiration to the rest of the world, working her way as a seamstress to New Zealand on a Pacific-Orient Express ship. When she arrived, Jeannette studied the social conditions in

² Jeannette Rankin, *America’s Conscience*, Norma Smith (2002) Montana Historical Society Press p. 55.

³ Jeannette Rankin, *America’s Conscience*, Norma Smith (2002) Montana Historical Society Press p. 64.

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 70-71.

⁵ *Flight of the Dove*, Kevin S. Giles (1980) The Touchstone Press, p. 60.

New Zealand, where women had been voting since 1893. The country was young and progressive and Jeannette thrived in that society where there were pensions for the elderly and for mothers, worker's compensation and labor arbitration laws, and child welfare and labor laws. Rejuvenated and inspired, she returned to the States determined to run for Congress in the 1916 election.

Jeannette maintained throughout her life, "I was never a Republican...I ran on the Republican ticket."⁶ The success of her 1916 campaign for Congress may be attributed to several things, not the least of which was her uncompromising insistence that the rhetoric remain nonpartisan.

Of the 177,000 votes cast for three candidates in Montana in 1916, 76,932 were cast for Jeannette, including thousands by women and Democrats, who were the majority in the state at the time. Besieged by companies wanting her to endorse products (for considerable amounts of money) and by reporters clamoring to interview her, Jeannette kept to herself, releasing only a simple statement.

"I am deeply conscious of the responsibility resting upon me. I earnestly hope that I may be of some substantial service, however slight, to the men and women of Montana, my native state, and of the nation."⁷

In the early hours of Good Friday morning in April of 1917, as a flock of white doves encircled the Capitol,⁸ the first woman ever elected to the major legislative body of a free country cast her first vote. President Woodrow Wilson had called for a vote on the resolution for the United States to go to war with Germany. Breaking the tradition of a simple "Yay" or "Nay," Jeannette said, "I want to stand by my country. But I cannot vote for war. I vote NO."^{9, 10}

Controversy immediately erupted around her every move. She was drawn in the media as a weak woman who had cast a weak vote, shaming the suffrage movement. According to much of the hate mail she received, Jeannette had disgraced the people of her state by voting like a dove and not like the hawk majority she represented (The mail she received about the vote actually supported

6 Suffragists Oral History Project, Jeannette Rankin: Activist for World Peace, Women's Rights, and Democratic Government (1974). Section 60.

7 Jeannette Rankin, America's Conscience, Norma Smith (2002) Montana Historical Society Press. p. 104.

8 Flight of the Dove, Kevin S. Giles (1980) The Touchstone Press, p. 89.

9 Jeannette Rankin, America's Conscience, Norma Smith (2002) Montana Historical Society Press p. 112.

10 Flight of the Dove, Kevin S. Giles 1980) The Touchstone Press, p. 94.

her position, sixteen to one.¹¹). However, Jeannette remained steadfast in her commitment to listen to her conscience as she moved forward into her service in the House. She supported measures that assisted the “war effort,” hoping they would help carry the conflict to a speedy end.

She did, however, vote against the War Espionage Act of 1917, an act that became a vehicle for baiting aliens and suppressing dissent. When the question of the declaration of war against Austria-Hungary came up, she said:

“I still believe war is a stupid and futile way of attempting to settle international difficulties. I believe war can be avoided and will be avoided when the people, the men and women in America, as well as in Germany, have the controlling voice in their government. Today special privileged commercial interests are controlling the world... This is a vote on a mere technicality in the prosecution of a war already declared. I shall vote for this as I voted for money and men.”¹²

The War Espionage Act was the measure that sent peace activist, Eugene Debs, to prison for nearly three years, because he made a speech that “obstructed recruiting.”¹³ Jeannette Rankin recognized and rejected the unconstitutionality and the profound moral and ethical injustice of the Act.

Her historic term in Congress, from April of 1917 through December of 1918, was deeply marked by the struggle of miners in Montana to win fair pay and safe conditions. When, on June 8, 1917, Anaconda Copper Company’s Speculator mine’s Granite Mountain Shaft went up in flames, taking the lives of 167 men, all hell broke loose. The surviving miners walked off the job within a few days. Soon after, union organizer, Frank Little, was dragged from his boarding house bed and lynched. Around his lifeless neck hung a sign “Others Take Notice. First and Last Warning.”¹⁴

The miners of Montana, furious and terrified, sent hundreds of telegrams to Jeannette’s office in Washington, begging her to travel to Montana and intervene. As their representative in Congress, it was Jeannette’s duty to demand that the

11 Jeannette Rankin, *America’s Conscience*, Norma Smith (2002) Montana Historical Society Press p. 114.

12 *Ibid*, p. 114.

13 *Don’t Know Much About History*, Kenneth C. Davis (2004). Revised ed., New York: Perennial, p. 314.

14 Jeannette Rankin, *America’s Conscience*, Norma Smith (2002). Montana Historical Society Press p. 129.

Company immediately cease the intimidation and take responsibility for prioritizing war profiteering over the lives of the men who toiled long hours under ruthless conditions to extract the metal from the earth.

In 1916, twenty percent of the world's copper was coming out of the Anaconda mine in Butte. From Anaconda's perspective, the high wartime price of copper, used in the manufacture of weapons, meant that a labor strike would deeply imperil profits. When Jeannette arrived in Butte on August 14, a gathering of 5,000 supporters cheered for her at the train station. The police quickly pushed her into a cab ("abducted me!" she said later.¹⁵) not allowing her to address the crowd. She would speak to the workers, however, and did so on August 18, to a multitude of some 10,000 at Columbia Gardens.

"It is unpatriotic for labor to strike without just cause, especially in time of war. But it is equally unpatriotic for capital to take advantage of men whose patriotism causes them to continue to work under conditions which mean the daily, unnecessary risk of lives... I pledge you my word that I shall always do my utmost to bring about better conditions."¹⁶

Do her utmost Jeannette did, throughout her congressional term, in spite of the fact that she knew the company controlled many of the news outlets in Montana and would work voraciously to ensure that she never returned to Congress.

Louis Levine, a Montana economics professor, effectively described the press campaign against Jeannette in a November 2, 1918 article in the *The Nation*:

"Miss Rankin voted against the declaration of war. That is used effectively against her. But the real cause of bitter opposition to her on the part of those whose views are voiced by the *Butte Miner*, the *Anaconda Standard*, the *Helena Independent* and similar newspapers is her economic radicalism. Nominally a Republican, Miss Rankin has championed the cause of the workers of Montana and attacked the mining companies of the State.... the *Butte Miner* falsely brands her as a 'rabid Socialist of the IWW [Industrial Workers of the World]

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 131.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 131-132.

type."¹⁷

Throughout her term in office, Jeannette diligently sat on the House Committee for Women's Suffrage, gracefully rejecting the role of Chair, insisting that a member of the Democrat majority hold that position. John Raker (D-California) served as Chairman as the proposed 19th Amendment, guaranteeing women the right to vote, was discussed time and again, finally passing in the problematic 66th Senate in June of 1919, after she had left office.

Following her term, Jeannette Rankin embarked on her long journey of peace activism that included the pursuit of social justice for workers, women, children and immigrants.

In the spring of 1919, Jeannette traveled with Jane Addams, later a Nobel Peace Prize laureate (1931), to Zurich for the Second International Congress of Women for Permanent Peace (renamed the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom – WILPF). It took no crystal ball for the women in Zurich to recognize that the Treaty of Versailles created the conditions for, among other terrible things, a future war.

“This International Congress of Women expresses its deep regret that the terms of peace proposed at Versailles should so seriously violate the principles upon which alone a just and lasting peace can be secured, and which the democracies of the world had come to accept.

By guaranteeing the fruits of the secret treaties to the conquerors, the terms of peace tacitly sanction secret diplomacy, deny the principles of self-determination, recognize the right of the victors to the spoils of war, and create all over Europe discords and animosities, which can only lead to future wars.

By the demand for the disarmament of one set of belligerents only, the principle of justice is violated and the rule of force is continued.

By the financial and economic proposals, a hundred million people of this generation in the heart of Europe are condemned to poverty, disease and despair, which must result in the spread of hatred and anarchy within each nation.

17 Ibid, p. 137.

With a deep sense of responsibility this Congress strongly urges the Allied and Associated Governments to accept such amendments of the Terms as shall bring the Peace into harmony with those principles first enumerated by President Wilson upon the faithful carrying out of which the honour of the Allied peoples depends.”¹⁸

Back at home,

The war unleashed an unprecedented wave of intolerance, repression and violence. Free speech and due process were swept aside as government officials and private citizens led a national crusade to enforce patriotism and political conformity.¹⁹

In 1920, along with Roger Baldwin, Crystal Eastman, Albert DeSilver and many others, Jeannette Rankin was one of the founders of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). American citizens sat in jail for holding anti-war views. U.S. Attorney General Palmer ordered police squads to drag from their homes thousands of immigrants suspected of being “communists.” Racial segregation was legal and violence against blacks occurred every day. Gender discrimination was deeply rooted, in spite of the ratification of the 19th Amendment on August 20. Constitutional rights for homosexuals, the poor, prisoners, mental patients, and other special groups were unimaginable. Additionally, the Supreme Court had yet to uphold a single free speech claim under the First Amendment. The ACLU was the first organization of its kind, and immediately began the work of transforming the principles included in the Bill of Rights into realities. In its first year, the ACLU worked at ending the deportation of immigrants for their radical beliefs, opposing assaults on the rights of unions to hold meetings and organize, and securing release for hundreds sentenced to prison for expression of antiwar sentiments during the war.²⁰

Jeannette’s agenda, as she worked for protective legislation, was almost as hectic as had been her traveling schedule while working for suffrage. She rarely slept in the same bed two nights in a row, moving from community to community. She spoke to social organizations, unions, schools, churches and universities. She also lobbied members of Congress to support protective measures, including the Sheppard-

18 Resolutions of the Zürich Congress, 1919. WILPF International Archives, University of Colorado.

19 In Defense of American Liberties, A History of the ACLU. 2nd ed., Samuel Walker (1999). Southern Illinois University Press, p. 12

20 In Defense of American Liberties, A History of the ACLU. 2nd ed., Samuel Walker (1999). Southern Illinois University Press, pp. 11-15

Towner Act, providing the first ever social welfare funds for maternal and child health.²¹

In 1924, Jeannette bought land in rural Georgia and lived simply, off the grid, protesting the private utilities that gouged the consumer and underpaid the workers. She labored continuously for peace, for justice, for the rights of everyone to live plain lives unencumbered by the crippling social and economic burdens war culture heaps upon a society. As a field organizer for WILPF, Jeannette supported and promoted Salmon O. Levinson's "outlawry of war" plan, proposing that war be outlawed by making it a crime and that a World Court be established to deal with such crimes. Jeannette moved always in the direction of her ideals, persistently working to realize in personal practice her theories of the power of non-violent negotiation and self-determination.²²

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt took the oath of office for his first term on March 4, 1933, Jeannette and other compassionate, thinking people including Jane Addams and her ACLU colleagues, felt the cold winds of fascism blowing across the seas from Europe, where Adolph Hitler had been sworn in as Chancellor of Germany on January 30 of the same year. On September 10, in Washington D.C., Jeannette et al met and addressed President Roosevelt, urging him to revise American immigration laws to admit religious and political refugees, particularly to offer asylum to victims of the Nazi regime in Germany.²³

Urging the nation to become "educated to the ideals of peace" and, at the same time, urging Congress to expand the Navy, Roosevelt ignored the pleas of Jeannette and her peers. Immigration during Roosevelt's tenure as president dipped, rather than increased, in spite of the number of profoundly endangered refugees, especially from Nazi occupied Europe.²⁴

Alarmed by the increasing militarism in Germany in the 1930's, Roosevelt's enthusiasm for amplified Naval development and the insistent aggressiveness of nations including Italy, Russia and Japan, American peace societies organized emergency campaigns throughout the decade.²⁵

21 Jeannette Rankin, *America's Conscience*, Norma Smith (2002) Montana Historical Society Press pp. 143-148.

22 *Ibid*, pp. 157-160.

23 Roosevelt Asked to Aid Refugees, Civil Liberties Union Urges Broader Asylum for Nazi Victims and Others. Revision of Hoover Executive Order Suggested by 36 Signers of Memorial (Sept. 11, 1933). *The New York Times*.

24 Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy 1932-1945, Robert Dallek (1979). Oxford University Press, pp. 446-448.

25 Jeannette Rankin, *America's Conscience*, Norma Smith (2002). Montana Historical Society Press pp. 168.

Jeannette was 60 years old in 1940. She was energetic, attractive and driven as ever. Running for Congress again, this time on a peace platform, she continued her grueling schedule, lecturing on college campuses, speaking at luncheons, teas, labor meetings, business meetings, churches, women's clubs, high schools and on radio. Understanding that a speaker must use the language of the listener, she spoke of "defense" and "enemies" to crowds throughout Montana, believing that "You take people as far as they will go, not as far as you would like them to go."²⁶

"The first necessity in national defense is to have loyal citizens.... education, health and economic security must be available.... Facilities for communication and transportation and modern industries to develop our resources are needed to defend our Nation against all enemies, including such enemies as ignorance, disease, and poverty.

We also need a highly modernized, mechanized military defense.... The most tragic problem is unemployment.... [and] an increasing number of old people fearful of their future.... No adjustment of our economic institutions will be satisfactory unless based on the astonishing fact that an abundance can be made available.... There are people in the United States who, year in and year out, never taste wheat flour products, children everywhere who would be happier with better woolen clothes, and yet Montana farmers are not producing to their full capacity.... Wasting is the crime, not spending.... By voting for me... you can express your opposition to sending your son to foreign lands to fight in a foreign war, and by voting for me you will also express your determination to prepare to the absolute limit to defend this country."²⁷

On Election Day, Jeannette garnered more than 9,000 votes over that of her opponent. Insisting that no one would pay special attention to her, since six women now sat in the House and two in the Senate, she faced her new term resolved to convince more representatives in Congress to join her in her anti-military, humanitarian agenda.²⁸

Tension was high in 1941 as Europe was at war and Roosevelt ordered the American navy to "shoot on sight" in American waters. Russia was offered \$1

²⁶ Suffragists Oral History Project, Jeannette Rankin: Activist for World Peace, Women's Rights, and Democratic Government (1974). Section 63.

²⁷ Jeannette Rankin, *America's Conscience*, Norma Smith (2002). Montana Historical Society Press pp. 175-176.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 178.

billion in Lend-Lease munitions/military information (without Congressional authorization).²⁹ Jeannette said later, "Everything Roosevelt did was a step toward war."³⁰

"On Sunday, Pearl Harbor was attacked; I had an engagement to speak in Detroit on Monday afternoon. I couldn't get hold of anyone at the Capitol, to find out what the program was going to be. I felt the only thing I could do was to start going to Detroit because it wasn't possible then to get there in such a short time. I took the train Sunday night, and I took a radio with me, and from the conversation on the radios after the train got started, I knew that the vote was coming the next day. I got off at Pittsburgh and went back. I was traveling all night, and when I got there and they said it was coming at 12 o'clock, I got into my car, left the office, and left everything, and no one knew where I was. No one could get after me; no one could bring any pressure on me, because I knew what I was going to do. It was very simple, at last.

The thing hasn't ever been brought up since - at the time it was mentioned - at the First World War vote, James Mann came to me afterwards and said, "If I had known you were going to vote against it, I might have had the courage." I decided then, that *never* would I wait to prepare a speech, that I'd speak out any time, and so when they read the resolution, I asked to have it referred to committee.

According to the rules of Congress, a resolution, once introduced, has to be referred to a committee if anyone asks for it to be referred to a committee. I hoped that by voting No and refusing unanimity to the vote, and by asking that it be referred to a committee, I could remove the war vote from the passion of the moment and have it at least considered so both sides of the issues could be brought out. I asked, and they wouldn't let me talk. They proved that we haven't free speech. The only free speech we have is the filibuster in the Senate, and that's about to be taken away. So, we have no free speech. You *can't* speak out with an audience in this country. That was the most important vote that we've ever taken. I think the First World War was

29 Jeannette Rankin, *America's Conscience*, Norma Smith (2002). Montana Historical Society Press, pp. 182-183.

30 Suffragists Oral History Project, *Jeannette Rankin: Activist for World Peace, Women's Rights, and Democratic Government* (1974). Section 9.

at that time the most important. But to repeat the same mistake was a *terrible* mistake.”³¹

Contemporary writers of American history insist that Jeannette Rankin voted against US entry into the Second World War because she was a pacifist. Even Walter Cronkite, in a post-9/11 report on National Public Radio, incorrectly accused her of being “paralyzed by principle.”³²

On December 8, 1941, Jeannette Rankin asked that the War Resolution be sent to committee. Hers was a lawful request made by a duly elected member of the House of Representatives. She had many concerns about the resolution that she believed should have been addressed before the vote was taken. The speaker, Sam Rayburn, broke the law by choosing not to recognize her on the floor that day. She voted appropriately. A shamefully dishonest history paints her as nothing but a wide-eyed pacifist. Jeannette Rankin was a great, pragmatic, clear-headed stateswoman whose role in American history has been jaded by jingoist reductionism.

Had her voice been heard, the entire trajectory of American history and the harsh socio-economic realities today may have been softened by her compassionate common sense.

Since Wounded Knee, more than 260 million civilians have been massacred worldwide. That is more than six times the number of persons who died in combat in all the foreign and internal wars of the 20th century.³³

Today, the United States has the most dismal social statistics of any “developed” nation, while half of our tax dollars still fund the military, with only a tiny percentage paying for active military and veteran’s benefits. The lion’s share of the military budget is allocated to the Pentagon, where hundreds of billions of dollars are spent building stealth bombers that aren’t used and defense shields that don’t work.³⁴

Meanwhile, 15 million American children live in poverty. Poor funding and political tug-of-wars between ideologue parents, educators and community

31 Suffragists Oral History Project, Jeannette Rankin: Activist for World Peace, Women’s Rights, and Democratic Government (1974). Section 10.

32 The Lone War Dissenter, Walter Cronkite, All Things Considered, December 7, 2001. National Public Radio.

33 Statistics Of Democide R.J. Rummel, (1997). Second ed., Charlottesville, Virginia: Center for National Security Law, School of Law, University of Virginia.

34 Office of the Secretary of Defense - Budget Materials Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller). Directorate for Program and Financial Control (2007)

activists have broken our schools. In the United States of America, there are more than 800,000 homeless persons today, the average age of whom is nine. Our elders are having increasingly difficult times living on fixed incomes, including Social Security, and many must choose between paying their utility bills and paying for their prescription medications. 47 million Americans, including 9 million children, do not have access to regular health care. Medical bills bankrupt nearly a million Americans each year.³⁵

It must have been cold comfort to Jeannette, in the twilight of her life during the Vietnam War era, when millions of Americans finally agreed with her tenets of non-violent resistance. However, she was spotted more than once wearing love beads and dancing with the young activists at peace gatherings in the San Francisco Bay Area where the flower children were embracing ideals of peace and love and communing with nature – the antithesis of militarism.³⁶

Ironically, on June 11, 1970, a 90th birthday celebration was organized for Jeannette and held at the Rayburn House Office building in Washington D.C. Having broken her hip three months earlier, a generally robust Jeannette had to attend in a wheel chair. But she wore a dazzling gold silk dress that she had sewn on one of her seven trips to her beloved India, where she had studied Gandhi’s works and legacy for the last 30 years of her life.

Jeannette Rankin was a magnificent human being who never rested on her laurels, nor felt comfortable with past achievements. As Gandhi had done, she viewed her life as a work of art and continued gracefully to sculpt it until the day she died, May 18, 1973.

With few exceptions, such as Ohio’s Congressman Dennis Kucinich, Independent Congressional Candidate Cindy Sheehan, Green Party Presidential Candidate Cynthia McKinney and Independent Presidential Candidate Ralph Nader, America’s 21st Century political landscape is devoid of voices the likes of Jeannette Rankin’s.

To paraphrase Jeannette herself, when she described Gandhi and the potency of his message, “She was the greatest philosopher of our time. If her ideas don’t take hold, we’re lost.”

35 MarketWatch: Illness And Injury As Contributors To Bankruptcy, David U. Himmelstein, Elizabeth Warren, Deborah Thorne, and Steffie Woolhandler (2005). Harvard Law School, Harvard Medical School.

36 Flight of the Dove, Kevin S. Giles (1980). The Touchstone Press, p. 226.

Jeannette Rankin Timeline

1880 Born on June 11, in Missoula Montana, the eldest of seven children.

1902 Graduates from the University of Montana with a degree in Biology.

1904 Father John Rankin dies of Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

1908 Leaves Montana to study at the New York School of Philanthropy.

1909-1914 Works for Suffrage in Washington, California, Ohio and Montana.

1914 Montana women win the right to vote.

1916 Runs successfully for a seat in the U.S. Congress and becomes the first woman ever to be elected.

1917 Is one of 56 members who votes against declaring war on Germany (WWI).

1918 Runs unsuccessfully for the US Senate.

1919-1939 Moves to Georgia and works as a lobbyist for Peace. Founded Georgia Peace Society.

1940 Returns to Montana to run successfully for Congress on an anti-war platform.

1941 Is the only member of Congress to vote against declaration of war against Japan. This ends her political career but not her activism.

1946 Drawn to the work of Mohandas K. Gandhi, she travels to India.

1948-1971 Gandhi is assassinated. Rankin travels the world and to India six more times.

1968 Marches with 5,000 women in Washington D.C. to protest the Vietnam War under the banner "The Jeannette Rankin Peace Parade." She was 88 years old.

1970 Honored on her 90th birthday in Washington D.C. and given a standing ovation.

1973 Dies on May 18, in Carmel, California.

1985 A bronze statue of Rankin is placed in the U.S. Capitol.