

Women’s suffrage poster, 1915

A primary source by Woman Suffrage Party of the City of New York

Opponents to women’s suffrage argued that voting would be detrimental to women’s character and to their families. This broadside, published around 1915 refutes those accusations. It declares that if a woman is responsible for taking care of her family, then she must have a voice in politics to protect them.

EXCERPT

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

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

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

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

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

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

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Read the document introduction, view the image, and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the questions that follow.

1. List and explain three reasons that had been given to deny women the right to vote.
2. How does the broadside contrast the contributions of women and men to households?
3. What did the Woman Suffrage Party mean when they wrote: “Let them (women) have a hand in the city’s housekeeping, even if they introduce an occasional house-cleaning”?

WOMEN IN THE HOME

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

SHE is responsible for the cleanliness of her house.

SHE is responsible for the wholesomeness of the food.

SHE is responsible for the children's health.

SHE, above all, is responsible for their morals, for their sense of truth, of honesty and decency, for what they turn out to be.

How Far Can the Mother Control These Things?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And who decides what the city government shall do?

FIRST, the officials of that government; and,

SECOND, those who elect them.

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

UNCLEAN HOUSES

UNWHOLESOME FOOD

RISK OF TUBERCULOSIS AND OTHER DISEASES

IMMORAL INFLUENCES OF THE STREET.

BAD PLUMBING

DANGER OF FIRE

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

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

WOMAN SUFFRAGE PARTY

OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Headquarters: 30 East 34th Street, Southwest cor. Madison Avenue



Woman Suffrage Party of the City of New York, Women in the Home broadside, ca. 1915. (Gilder Lehrman Collection)