

Immoral Mothers and Depraved Children?:
Warnings of Social Calamity from Early Twentieth Century Anti-Suffragist Newspapers

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, women across United States engaged in the Woman's Rights Movement, fighting either for or against women's suffrage with newspapers as their main mouthpiece to the public. As a movement full of mothers, children were an often-mentioned topic from both pro- and anti-suffragists. While suffrage was the greater overall debate, both sides pulled children into their activism, as proof of their argument's merit

Due to their obvious historical importance, pro-suffrage publications, like Lucy Stone's *The Woman's Journal*, which included a monthly "Children's Corner," often receive the most critical attention; however, an aggressive contention of anti-suffrage newspapers also existed, including *The Woman Patriot*, which offers a dramatically different depiction of childhood. With the tagline of being "dedicated to the defense of womanhood, motherhood, the family and the state, against suffragism, feminism, and socialism," writers and editors of *The Woman Patriot* ruthlessly portrayed woman's suffrage as a dangerous and depraved prospect that would negate all childhood and social stability. In articles like "Moral Conditions Among Girls and Boys Whose Mothers Vote," for example, *The Woman Patriot* presents the children of suffragists as "immoral" and responsible "for the wave of juvenile crime sweeping the country."

In their debate over how to best protect and raise their children, children became the unsuspecting pawns of the suffrage movement. By comparing *The Woman's Journal's* celebration of free and independent children, this paper will ultimately explore how the anti-suffrage *The Woman Patriot* portrayed children as predestined to devious behavior

due to their mother's political belief, in turn using children as agents of their political argument.

