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Madeline McDowell Breckinridge and Woman Suffrage Primary Source Analysis Activity

Primary sources can come in several forms: personal papers like journals and diaries, and first-hand accounts of events are just a few examples of primary sources. Newspaper articles can also be examples of primary sources. In this activity, students can analyze a newspaper article written by Madeline McDowell Breckinridge and published in *Lexington Herald* in November of 1915.

did not respond to the appeal for funds. Kentucky went without a building at the Exposition. She was one of the few states unrepresented and unadvertised, as I have heard Kentucky visitors relate with mortification. Kentucky women are not idiots—even though they are closely related to Kentucky men. You can't ignore them and treat them as if they were kindergarten children, and then when work is needed expect them to do a man's share—or a woman's, as you please to state it; it has amounted to about the same thing since the world began, only sometimes the woman's share has been and still is the heavier.

Wouldn't it be better for the Democrats of Kentucky to wake up to the fact that women are one-half the people of Kentucky, that neither Kentucky nor the nation can get along without their help, and hereafter to ask it on a self-respecting basis. To take the position of the anti-suffragist that women do not need to protect themselves because men perfectly protect them, and then at the first rumor of war to call on them to do their part in the plans for defense, is not really self-respecting. Can't you assure me that you and the Democrats whom you represent will give proof at the next Legislature that you are no longer in so inconsistent a position?

Sincerely yours,
MADLINE McD. BRECKINRIDGE,
 Campaign Chairman Kentucky Equal Rights Association.

Open Letter Sent Governor By Campaign Chairman of Equal Rights Association

The following open letter has been sent to Governor McCreary by the campaign chairman of the Kentucky Equal Rights Association:

Lexington, Ky., Nov. 12, 1915.
 Governor James B. McCreary,
 Frankfort, Ky.

My Dear Governor McCreary:

The morning paper states that you have appointed a committee to interest the women of this state in the program of "Preparedness" outlined by President Wilson. The committee named consists of some eighty-five Kentucky women.

Does it strike you as consistent that you should expect the women of Kentucky to have any interest in or any concern for the preparedness of their country, while you deny them a voice in its government? If there are any functions of government that are purely masculine they must surely be those of offense and defense. The most ancient and honorable argument of the antis is that women can not fight and therefore should not vote. And surely no man who feels that women should have no voice in deciding whether war is to be made or not, can feel that any part of the burden of war or the preparedness therefor should be thrown upon women—not even the burden of forming public opinion to that end. What have women to do with public opinion anyhow?

We suffragists of course know that it is impossible for men, however much they would, to prevent the burden of war from falling upon women, or the burden of preparedness from falling on the whole people in taxation, women well as men. We know that every state and every country in time of war as in time of peace must and should have the help of its women. But for men who deny women the vote, even to take one eye out of the sand on this question is dangerous.

Do you remember that the last Legislature, a Democratic legislature, defeated the bill for submission of woman suffrage to the voters. And that the same legislature failed to appropriate for a Kentucky building at the Panama Exposition? Thereafter you appointed a commission to try to raise the funds for such a building by private subscription, and this commission made a special and wide-spread appeal to the women of the state to come to the rescue and see that the dignity of Kentucky was upheld. You appointed on the commission men who had opposed the woman suffrage bill in the legislature, and one man, in particular, whom the women all remembered not only for the fact that he had opposed full suffrage when offered and school suffrage for women through three previous sessions, but especially for the inexcusable manner in which he had opposed these measures. The women



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Wouldn't it be better for the Democrats of Kentucky to wake up to the fact that women are one-half the people of Kentucky, that neither Kentucky nor the nation can get along without their help, and hereafter to ask it on a self-respecting basis. To take the position of the anti-suffragist that women do not need to protect themselves because men perfectly protect them, and then at the first rumor of war to call on them to do their part in the plans for defense, is not really self-respecting. Can't you assure me that you and the Democrats whom you represent will give proof at the next Legislature that you are no longer in so inconsistent a position?

Sincerely yours,

MADLINE McD. BRECKINRIDGE

Campaign Chairman Kentucky Equal Rights Association



Questions for Document Analysis

Reading Comprehension

1. On what day was this letter sent?
2. Who was the sender of this letter and who was the recipient?
3. Who was the President of the United States when this letter was written?
4. How many women in Kentucky were named to the state “Preparedness” program committee?
5. At what Exposition was there no Kentucky building?
6. According to the article, what part of the population did women represent in Kentucky?
7. What was Madeline McDowell Breckinridge’s job?

Historical Analysis

1. When McDowell Breckinridge mentions “antis” in her letter, who is she talking about?
2. What is a suffragist?
3. What is an anti-suffragist?

Discussion

1. How have women's' roles in society changed since this letter was written? How have they stayed the same?
2. Explain this quote: “You can’t ignore them and treat them as if they were kindergarten children, and then when work is needed expect them to do a man’s share.”
3. Knowing what you know from reading Madeline McDowell Breckinridge’s bio, what about her life made it easier to fight for women’s suffrage? What about her life made it more difficult?



Answers to Document Analysis Questions

Reading Comprehension

1. On what day was this letter sent?
 - a. November 12, 1915
2. Who was the sender of this letter and who was the recipient?
 - a. Sender: Madeline McDowell Breckinridge, Recipient: Governor James B. McCreary
3. Who was the President of the United States when this letter was written?
 - a. Woodrow Wilson
4. How many women in Kentucky were named to the state “Preparedness” program committee?
 - a. Eighty-five
5. At what Exposition was there no Kentucky building?
 - a. The Panama Exposition
6. According to the article, what part of the people of Kentucky did women represent?
 - a. One-half
7. What was Madeline McDowell Breckinridge’s job?
 - a. Campaign Chairman of the Kentucky Equal Rights Association

Historical Analysis

1. When McDowell Breckinridge mentions “antis” in her letter, who is she talking about?
 - a. Anti-suffragist
2. What is a suffragist?
 - a. A person who advocates for voting rights, especially for women
3. What is an anti-suffragist?
 - a. People who believed it was against the laws of nature for women to seek the vote

Discussion

4. How have women's' roles in society changed since this letter was written? How have they stayed the same?
 - a. Use this is an opportunity to discuss change over time. How far have we, as a society come? How far are we from reaching full equality? What milestones have been met? What milestones are women still yet to reach?
5. Explain this quote: “You can’t ignore them and treat them as if they were kindergarten children, and then when work is needed expect them to do a man’s share.”
 - a. Give your students the opportunity to share their interpretations.
6. Knowing what you know from reading Madeline McDowell Breckinridge’s bio, what about her life made it easier to fight for women’s suffrage? What about her life made it more difficult?
 - a. Her pursuit of this goal was made possible by her wealth and social status. Her physical limitations often held her back, however.