

time of increasing state repression of the campaign, the book uncritically reproduced the heroic narrative propagated by the leaders of the militant suffragettes' Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), Sylvia's mother Emmeline and older sister Christabel Pankhurst. Sylvia suppressed any expression of her own misgivings about the growing elitism of the campaign, its marginalisation of working-class women and its increasing hostility towards the socialist and labour movements from which it had sprung. The two voyages to North America removed Sylvia from the intense political and personal pressures of the British suffragette movement – and it was here that she began to conceive of a very different book.

In 1911, Sylvia's tour took her from New York, Boston and Philadelphia on the East Coast, through the states of the Midwest as far south as Kansas, before travelling north to Canada where she spoke in Ottawa and Toronto, and then through New York State to Washington, DC. These were followed by more engagements on the East Coast and then a journey across the country to Colorado and California. After this she returned to New York, speaking in Kansas, Michigan and Maryland on the way. Sylvia was feted by some of America's wealthiest suffragists and her lectures were booked into the largest venues in the towns and cities she visited. She was put up in grand, modern hotels but she also spent days travelling on sleeper trains which broke down in the middle of the night, disrupting carefully planned itineraries.

The 1912 tour was organised around a sparser series of engagements; the novelty of the first tour could not be replicated and the escalation of militancy in Britain was alienating some former supporters. This afforded Sylvia a greater opportunity to determine her own schedule and to explore beyond the elitist boundaries in which much of the American suffragist movement was contained. Wanting to 'see a Socialist city', Sylvia spent a week in Milwaukee, Wisconsin where a socialist mayor had recently been elected.³ Since touring British suffragettes had not yet been to the South, she also decided to go to Tennessee, where she encountered the legacy of slavery and challenged racial segregation. This time there were fewer elegant hotels. In her writings and letters, she described staying in a shabby, provincial hotel in Lebanon, Tennessee, to speak to a group of socialist students; in Canada's St John, she stayed in the home of the progressive Hatheway family and in the early morning was driven to the railway station in a sledge across the snowy landscape; in Chicago, she stayed with her cousin's family (her father's brother, John

Pankhurst, had emigrated to America in his youth) only to find herself frustrated with the 'empty headed' wife of the household.⁴ Significantly, it was the more challenging 1912 tour that provided most of the material for Sylvia's writings on America.

In her later memoirs of this period, published in 1931 as *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals*, Sylvia would record a breathtaking (though selective) list of public speaking engagements and exciting personalities. These features are not, however, present in the manuscript she produced at the time; the reader will search in vain for the names of so many of the pathbreaking reformers and radicals of this era that Sylvia met: Jane Addams, Crystal Eastman, Rose Schneiderman, Lillian Wald, Alice and Irene Lewisohn – none of them are mentioned by name, though their presence lingers just below the textual surface. Sylvia herself endeavours to join these figures in the margins, remaining true to her stated intention in the Preface not to provide 'a chronicle of my travels' but instead to write of 'experiences of people, places and institutions'; she briefly introduces herself as 'a militant suffragette' as a means of explaining her access to such a range of American society (p. 65). She avoided detailing her own extensive itinerary, writing instead about other people, most of them anonymous, who taught her about contemporary America.

Sylvia's lecture tours took place at an exciting time in American history, later termed the 'Progressive Era'. Aggressive, capitalist expansion and innovation saw huge fortunes amassed by a few through the exploitation of the many. The American working class was developing rapidly as women, African Americans, Native Americans and immigrants were increasingly dragged into its ranks. At the same time, this process produced growing resistance to inequality. The ideas of feminists, socialists, trade unionists and reformers provided hope to those embroiled in bitter, desperately fought battles to shape the future.⁵ Sylvia was deeply struck by the disparity between what was possible and the reality in modern America. She explored this contrast in her speeches: 'As I have gone through your country, I have been filled with admiration for its ingenuity and its wonderful progress and enterprise. But everywhere I see such poverty, such overcrowding of cities, such wretchedness of many.'⁶

Sylvia echoed these words in the Preface here, contrasting the 'endless possibilities of new growth' in America with its 'cruel waste of precious human energy' (p. 66). The disregard for human life that accompanied