

the growth of modern capitalism was starkly realised on 25 March 1911 when a fire broke out in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City and 146 workers, mostly women from immigrant backgrounds, were killed. Sylvia was in America when this took place and it would impact on her speeches and on this work.

The lecture tours of America provided Sylvia with the opportunity to explicitly situate the demand for women's political emancipation as a part of wider struggles against oppression and disempowerment which sustained capitalist exploitation. This approach is reflected in her manuscript's concern with the way working-class experience interacts with the oppression of women and with racism. In so doing, Sylvia begins to articulate her view of democracy as an instrument to dismantle inequality by providing all with an equal voice. On her return to Britain, Sylvia sought to apply these ideas to the militant suffragette movement, with profound political and personal consequences. This manuscript, which Sylvia did not complete and which has not previously been published, allows us to hear Sylvia's voice at a crucial moment of her political development. This introduction is about how Sylvia came to write the manuscript, her tours of America and how they impacted on suffrage history.

FROM AMERICA TO EAST LONDON: CHANGING THE COURSE OF SUFFRAGE HISTORY

If things had happened differently, Sylvia Pankhurst would have designed murals to adorn the walls of a chapel in a women's prison in Boston, Massachusetts. The project, worked out with the prison governor whilst Sylvia was engaged with her 1911 lecture tour, appealed to Sylvia's interest in the plight of prisoners and her belief in the emancipatory potential of art – the prisoners themselves would be trained to help in the work. During the 1912 lecture tour, Sylvia began to make plans: if she was offered a studio in Boston, she would stay for the summer, then embark on another series of lectures before returning home.⁷ Perhaps she would not return at all; towards the end of her 1911 tour she had told reporters in Philadelphia that she found the United States 'delightful', adding 'I would even like to live here. This desire, I must confess, is largely due to the lack of fog, which is so depressing at home in London.'⁸

She would later recall the way in which America captured her imagination: 'Life in the States seemed a whirl, with harsh, rude extremes,

rough and unfinished, yet with scope and opportunity for young people and with more receptivity to new ideas than is found in the old countries: I thought that some day I might become an American citizen.'⁹

Thirty years on from those tours, during the Blitz, when Sylvia was living in Woodford, in Essex, 'directly on the Luftwaffe's flight path to London', she reminisced about these years to her teenage son Richard.¹⁰ He later remembered, 'she recalled that had things been otherwise we might then have been American citizens.'¹¹ Had things been otherwise. But on 1 March 1912, stones flung in London reverberated around the world and changed everything.

Sylvia was in Ann Arbor, Michigan, when she heard the news. In Britain, the Conciliation Bill, which proposed to enfranchise around a million women who were heads of households, was now faced with a rival Reform Bill introduced by the government – with no mention of women's suffrage. The apparent possibility of a more democratic women's suffrage amendment in the Reform Bill served to justify government opposition to the Conciliation Bill. The actual prospect of a women's suffrage amendment was uncertain (and would eventually be ruled out), especially as Prime Minister Herbert Asquith was a well-known opponent. Sensing betrayal, the WSPU leadership announced an escalation of suffragette militancy: 'The argument of the broken pane is the most valuable argument in modern politics', declared Emmeline Pankhurst.¹² Two weeks later, at 4 p.m. on 1 March 1912, women strolling through London's West End pulled out hammers, clubs and stones and smashed the windows of the fashionable department stores. Emmeline Pankhurst threw stones through the windows of 10 Downing Street. An arrest warrant was issued for the WSPU's leaders; Emmeline and Frederick Pethick Lawrence and Emmeline Pankhurst were charged with conspiracy, but the authorities could not find Christabel Pankhurst.

A few weeks later, Sylvia found herself at the centre of the rumours concerning Christabel's whereabouts. Major George William Horsfield of the Essex and Suffolk Royal Artillery was certain he had seen her on the passenger liner bound for New York City: 'No one who has ever seen her aggressive-looking face, with its overhanging black eyebrows, could make a mistake; he told a reporter from the *New York Times*. The newspaper's front page announced 'Miss Pankhurst Is In Hiding Here', and continued that it 'understood' she had held a secret conference with Sylvia in New York, who gave her sister the proceeds from her tour before departing to direct the struggle in London.'¹³