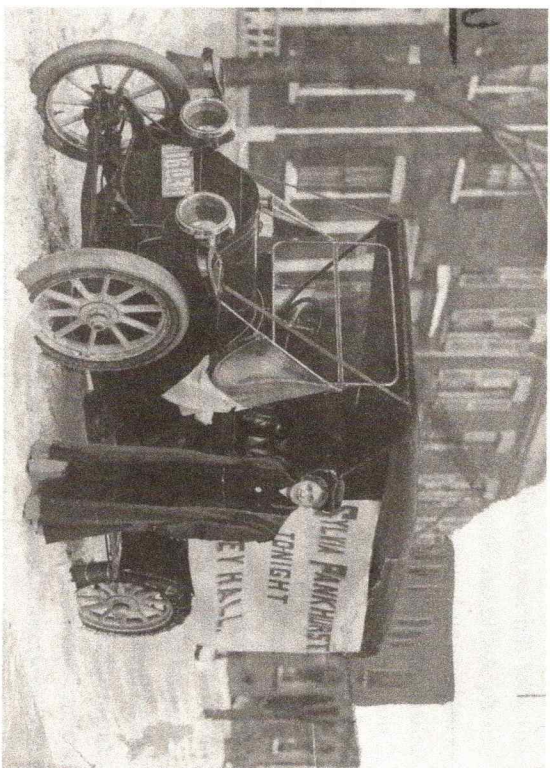


been vaunted by respective guides. Sylvia's estrangement from many of her hosts was politically informed, as she felt that their reforming zeal was limited by their lack of understanding of or empathy with those people whose lives they sought to change. For Sylvia, then, their efforts reproduced the problems of disenfranchisement against which she was seeking the suffrage.

Sylvia disagreed most sharply and openly with her hosts over racial politics. In this period, the dominant forces in the American women's suffrage movement were complicit with racism against black Americans. American suffragists not infrequently utilised racist depictions of black male voters to appeal to racist politicians to grant suffrage to white women, whom they portrayed as racially superior. Black suffragists resisted this trajectory but found themselves subject to discrimination by leading suffragists intent on winning the support of racist lawmakers, particularly those in the South. Thus, in the 1913 women's suffrage parade in Washington, black suffragists were told to march separately at the back and not with the suffrage organisations from their state – a command with which black suffragist Ida B. Wells-Barnett refused to comply.<sup>30</sup> It was in this context that Sylvia was warned by her hosts in



1. Sylvia Pankhurst in Toronto, Canada standing beside a car adapted to advertise her lecture in the Massey Hall on 11 February 1911. (Toronto Star Archives/Toronto Star; courtesy of Getty Images)

Tennessee not to speak at Fisk University, a college for black students (see the editor's introduction to Chapter 8). Sylvia defiantly went anyway and wrote about this in the last chapter of the typescript. That chapter deals extensively with racism as she observes the legacy of slavery and the racist violence of the prison authorities. Sylvia's actions in Tennessee and her written reflections afterwards reflect her identification of her struggle against women's disenfranchisement with the struggle against racial oppression – challenging the trajectory of the contemporary American suffrage movement. This work therefore testifies to Sylvia's increasingly independent choices and politically distinctive voice.

### *The challenges of suffragette celebrity*

As a member of the Pankhurst family and a suffragette who had experienced imprisonment, Sylvia was well-placed to capitalise on the phenomenon of 'suffragette celebrity'.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, she arrived as an experienced activist and was evidently a very effective public speaker. She had been one of the WSPU's earliest speakers, developing her skills in front of small audiences in halls, parks and on the streets; she had also spoken before the WSPU's largest audience on one of the platforms at the enormous demonstration in Hyde Park in 1908. Her lectures in America were booked for large venues in the middle of town, such as the Carnegie Lyceum in New York, the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee and the Pabst Theatre in Milwaukee. She spoke to audiences of hundreds, often holding their attention for around two hours with speeches that were compelling, funny and tear-jerking; in Detroit, Michigan, it was said she 'moved her audience from enthusiasm to laughter and from laughter to tears'.<sup>32</sup> She succeeded in winning overwhelming press endorsement of her skills as a speaker. Reports from her speech at Ottawa's Russell Theatre, which declared her 'one of the cleverest women speakers ever heard in Ottawa', and described her vivid accounts as 'a series of word pictures', were typical of the press response.<sup>33</sup> Sylvia was a confident, polemical and uncompromising speaker, of whom one listener, with a fondness for mixed metaphors, said: 'She hits straight from the shoulder, and calls a spade a spade. She does not mince matters. I went four miles and a half to hear her, and would go twice as far to hear her again'.<sup>34</sup>

Sylvia's intellectual and rhetorical skills were particularly evident when she was invited to St Louis, Missouri in March 1911. Arriving on the morning train, she gave interviews to the press before going on, at