

Module 02: Should Women Vote? The Politics of Suffrage

Evidence 4: Mrs. Humphrey Ward, "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage," *The Nineteenth Century*, 1889

A

Introduction

Mrs. Humphrey Ward's article is an appeal to "the common sense and the educated thought" of men and women.

Questions to Consider

- What arguments does she advance to counter the position taken by the suffragettes?
- Who is she trying to persuade?
- What additional information might you need to understand the source?

Document

We, the undersigned, wish to appeal to the common sense and the educated thought of men and women of England against the proposed extension of the Parliamentary suffrage to women. While desiring the fullest possible development of the powers, energies, and education of women, we believe that their work for the State, and their responsibilities to it, must always differ essentially from those of men, and that therefore their share in the working of the State machinery should be different from that assigned to men. . . .To men belong the struggle of debate and legislation in Parliament; the working of the army and navy; all the heavy, laborious, fundamental industries of the State, such as those of mines, metals, and railways; the lead and supervision of English commerce, the service of that merchant fleet upon which our food supply depends. . . .At the same time we are heartily in sympathy with all the recent efforts which have been made to give women a more important part in those affairs of the community where their interests and those of men are equally concerned; where it is possible for them not only to decide but to help in carrying out, and where, therefore, judgement is weighted by a true responsibility, and can be guided by experience and the practical information which comes from it. As votes for or members of School Boards, Boards of Guardians,

and other important public bodies, women now have opportunities for public usefulness which must promote the growth of character, and at the same time strengthen among them the social sense and habit. But we believe that the emancipating process has now reached the limits fixed by the physical constitution of women, and by the fundamental difference which must always exist between their main occupations and those of men. The care of the sick and the insane; the treatment of the poor; the education of children: in all these matters, and others besides, they have made good their claim to a larger and more extended powers. We rejoice in it. But when it comes to questions of foreign or colonial policy, or of grave constitutional change, then we maintain that the necessary and normal experience of women does not and can never provide them with such materials for sound judgement as are open to men. . . We are convinced that the pursuit of mere outward equality with men is for women not only vain but demoralizing. It leads to a total misconception of women's true dignity and special mission. It tends to personal struggle and rivalry, where the only effort of both the great divisions of the human family should be to contribute the characteristic labor and the best gifts of each to the common stock.

Source:

Mrs. Humphrey Ward, "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage." *The Nineteenth Century* (1889).