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Review of *Jeannette Rankin: America's Conscience* By Norma Smith

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Jeannette Rankin: America's Conscience. By Norma Smith. Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2002. 234 pp. Photographs, index. \$17.95 paper.

Norma Smith's posthumously published biography of Jeannette Rankin offers a welcome addition to scholarship devoted to this early feminist, Congresswoman, and peace activist. Rankin's life story intersects with several major developments in Western politics and US public life. Rankin began her political career lobbying for woman's suffrage in Washington, eventually heading up the successful 1914 suffrage campaign in her home state of Montana. Rankin's suffrage work positioned her to run for national office; in 1916 she became one of Montana's two members of the

House of Representatives and the first woman to serve in the United States Congress. Rankin ran on a platform that emphasized woman's rights, maternal and child welfare, progressive farm legislation, and pacifism. It was pacifism and feminism, however, that came to define her work and her life—pacifism because of her increasing devotion to it, and feminism because of her unique position as the first woman in Congress.

In recounting the details of Rankin's life, Smith echoes themes explored in two previous Rankin biographies, Kevin S. Giles's *Flight of the Dove: The Story of Jeannette Rankin* (1980) and Hannah Josephson's *Jeannette Rankin: First Lady in Congress* (1974). After telling the story of Rankin's 1916 election and her vote against World War I, Smith reflects on the remaining months of Rankin's term in Congress, her ill-fated 1918 run for the US Senate, her work as a lobbyist and peace activist, her second term in the House of Representatives in 1941, her lone vote against US entry into World War II, her retirement to the state of Georgia, and her rebirth as a contested heroine to second wave feminists and activists protesting the Vietnam War.

Smith's account, however, is distinctive, reflecting the unique relationship the two women shared. Smith first encountered Rankin in 1961 when Rankin was receiving an honorary doctorate from Montana State College and Smith was "in the audience, waiting for [her] master's degree in history." Fascinated by Rankin's story, Smith fixed upon writing her biography. She introduced herself shortly thereafter and the women forged a deep friendship. In the book's introduction, Kathryn Anderson acknowledges the significance of this friendship, noting that Rankin "seemed particularly open to Smith, offering hospitality to her and her daughter on several long weekends in Georgia and Montana." From this trusting relationship emerges a sympathetic yet balanced account of Rankin's life and work.

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