

Suffragettes' crowning moment marked
in cartoons by women that still stand up

The front lines

By Michael Kilian
WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON—American women won the right to vote 75 years ago this month, concluding a long, frustrating struggle waged not only with marches, protests and legislative debate, but also with—as with so much in political history—cartoons. In honor of the occasion, the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington is opening an exhibition of 23 of the drawings.

Covering the years of the women's movement's great final push for the vote—1911 to 1919—the cartoons are compelling not only for their wit, accomplished artwork and eloquence, but also for how topical they still seem in terms of continuing attitudes faced by women.

"They're very contemporaneous," said exhibition curator Tracy Schpero Fitzpatrick. "We didn't plan that. It's something that just naturally comes out of them."

For a long time, even after the turn of the last century, the leaders of the Women's Suffrage Movement were actually afraid to use cartoons, Fitzpatrick said.

As a political tool, cartoons have been around in this country since Benjamin Franklin whipped up his "Join or Die" dismembered snake in the 1750s to encourage a united Colonial front in waging the French and Indian War. And those opposed to the Women's Suffrage Movement had been using cartoons to fight the women's right to vote for decades, usually depicting Suffragists as

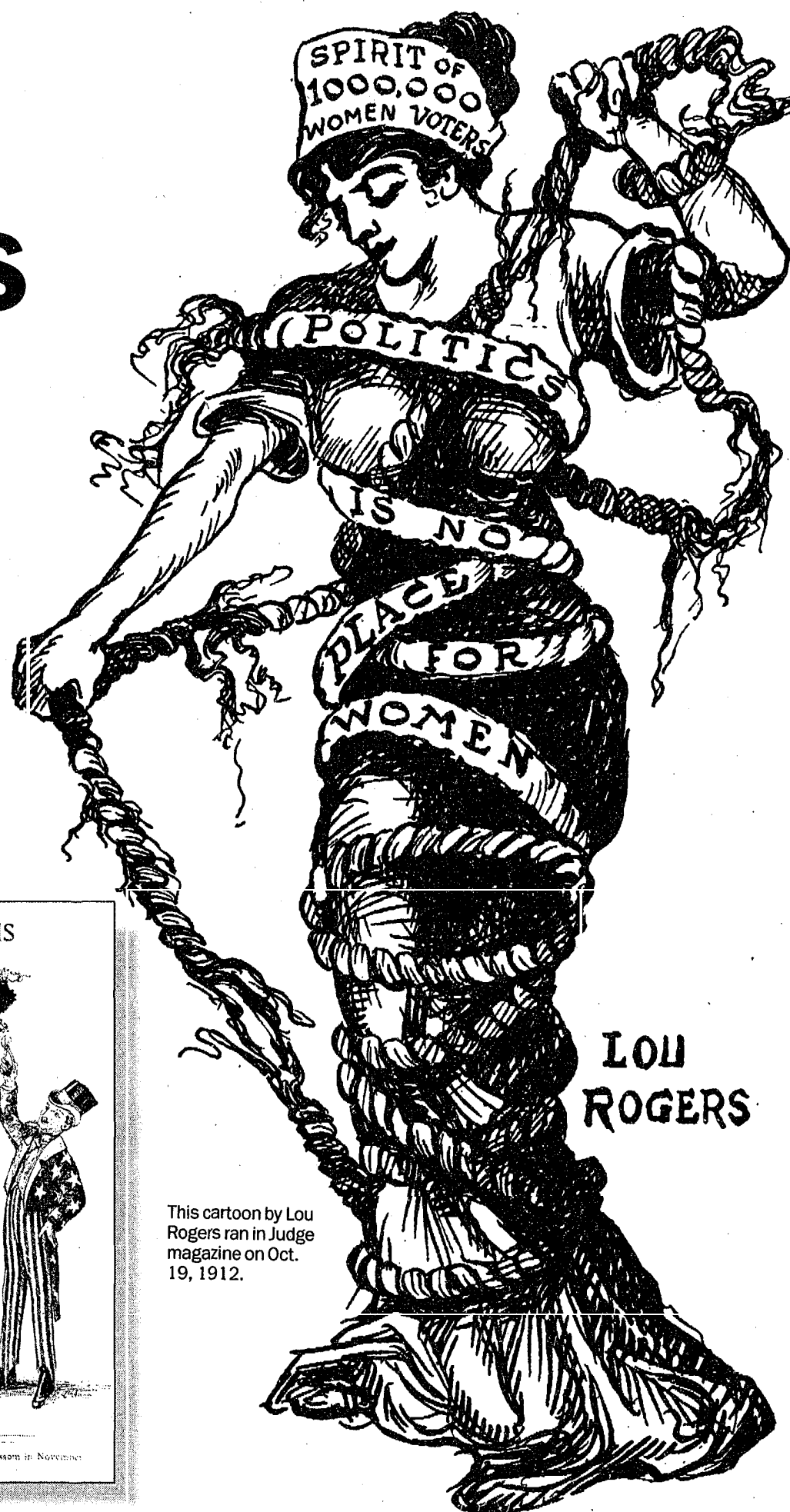
shrill harpies who neglected home, hearth, husband and most especially children to go off and stir up trouble.

"They were portrayed in caricature," Fitzpatrick said. "Ugly sorts of horrific, sinister-looking women who spent all their time trying to get the vote and neglecting their children. The anti-suffrage groups also used cartoons to show women as idealized figures, like 'Liberty,' 'Victory' or 'Justice.'"

In 1911, a gifted woman artist named Lou Rogers produced the first pro-women's suffrage cartoon. It showed a pompous man standing on a ballot box in an aggressive, imperious way, and carried the caption: "The ballot box is mine because it's mine!" Rogers, admired for her magazine and newspaper work, took the cartoon to the headquarters of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in New York for publication in their periodicals, but the group's president, Anna Howard Shaw, turned her down.

"She thought it was too radical," said

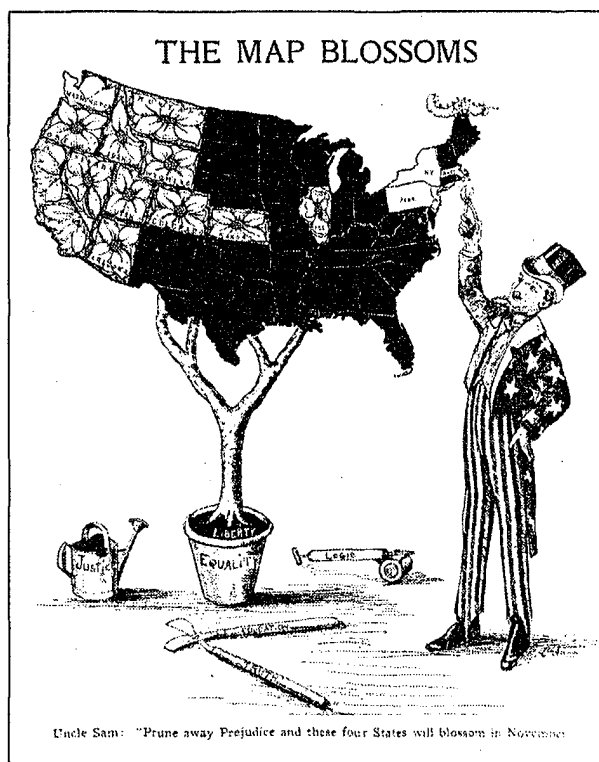
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LOU
ROGERS

This cartoon by Lou Rogers ran in Judge magazine on Oct. 19, 1912.

TEARING OFF THE BONDS.



This cartoon by Blanche Adams appeared in The Woman's Journal on May 22, 1915, with a caption that read, "Uncle Sam: Prune away Prejudice and there four States will blossom in November."



By Nina Allender, this cartoon ran in The Suffragist on June 16, 1917, with the caption "Crumbs from the Rich Man's Table."

Suffrage

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Fitzpatrick. "They didn't want to be thought so antagonistic."

So Rogers went to a large-circulation daily newspaper, the New York Call. "The editor hugged her, and it came out on the front page of the next edition," Fitzpatrick said. "That was the first. After that, they began appearing all over—in the two major suffrage periodicals, the Suffragist and the Woman's Journal—but also the New York Tribune and Judge. That was a really popular magazine, with a circulation exceeding 100,000. Rogers' cartoons appeared in a section of the magazine called the Modern Woman."

The capital's Women's Museum has become well known around the world and is a major tourist attraction because it features artwork done only by women and often organizes exhibitions around female concerns. Though the museum has avoided becoming a feminist symbol and outlet, the staff wanted to stage a show to commemorate the anniversary of the women's vote on Aug. 26, the date the 19th Amendment to the Constitution took effect in 1920.

In serendipity, last year a Mrs. Pauline Plimpton came to them asking if they'd be interested in the work of her late mother, Blanche Ames. Among Ames' paintings and drawings were a few suffrage cartoons, and Fitzpatrick seized upon them as the nucleus for this cartoon show.

One of Ames' drawings in the exhibition seems calculated to disarm the shrill, strident image given the suffrage movement by its opponents. The work shows an idealized housewife reading to her two angelic children, and bears the caption: "Double the power of the home; Two good votes are better than one."

More biting is a 1912 Rogers work called "Tearing off the Bonds," in which an idealized but rather irritated woman-as-Columbia figure undoes a length of "Perils of Pauline"-like rope, labeled "Politics is no place for women," that has been wound around her.

Another by Rogers, which ran in Judge in 1914, throws an old argument back in the faces of smug men. It shows a round, very male, humanized bomb, labeled "Mr. Average Man," sitting grouchy at a dinner table before an empty plate. A nice-looking housewife is standing behind him, lighting his fuse with a burning stick labeled "Burnt Beef-Steak." The caption is, "You women are too emotional to vote," but—oh you men folks!"

Also featured in the show are works by artist Nina Allender, who did covers for the Suffragist and cartoons such as one showing a butler, labeled "Rules Committee," stepping outside with a tray bearing a very small cup labeled "Suff" on it. Inside sits an Uncle Sam at a huge groaning board



This cartoon by Lou Rogers ran in Judge in 1914 with the caption " 'You women are too emotional to vote,' but—oh, you men folks!'"



This cartoon by Lou Rogers ran in Judge in 1913 with a caption reading "Another inaugural ceremony."

labeled "Government Table." Outside, by the smug butler, is a pretty woman with a protest placard saying, "Thanks. We want to sit at the Table."

"These women would be first-rate cartoonists today," said Fitz-

patrick.

"Artful Advocacy: Cartoons from the Women's Suffrage Movement" will be exhibited at the museum, 1240 New York Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. (202-783-5000), from Aug. 25 through Jan. 7.