

# WOMEN'S LEAGUE SHABBAT 2016



## READING 1

### Belle Fligelman on the Role of Women (1915)

***Introduction:** This account is written by Belle Fligelman, a suffragist and an aide to Jeannette Rankin, the first woman to serve in the United State Congress. Fligelman – whose father was the owner of Fligelman’s New York Dry Goods Company in Helena, Montana – years later was heralded by her home state of Montana as one of its most influential suffragists and ardent protector of children. In this account of her mentor’s speech, Fligelman underscores the prevailing notion, already a century ago, that women were – and still remain to this day – their own most forceful advocates.*

The meeting at Lewistown was packed with women from all over Montana. When Miss Rankin came forward to speak the air became electric. She immediately dispelled the notion that suffragists were all middle-aged and masculine. Young, attractive, energetic, and glowing with friendliness and reason, Jeanette Rankin commanded attention as soon as she spoke. She wore a gold colored velvet suit, and the Lewistown editor said she looked like a young panther ready to spring.

In her speech, Miss Rankin attacked the defensive posture which some of the suffragists had assumed. Women should not have to give their reasons for voting, she said, for men were not called upon the explain theirs. She went on to point out that although people asked what women planned to do with the franchise if they won it, no one asked men to make any such defense.

Echoing many of the themes of Progressive thoughts about the role of women, Jeannette said there were many reasons why women must vote. Women had work to do with the vote, not because they wanted to be like men but because women *were different* and represented different interests. She pointed out to the club women that governmental actions directly affected their lives, but they had nothing to say about any of them. For instance, she noted, Montana’s infant and maternity mortality rates were among the highest in the nation.

She also emphasized the need to do something about the working conditions of women in factories and industry and the need for food and safety inspectors. Women need the vote because all of these are things which needed attention ...”