

Jeannette Rankin

1880–1973



WHY SHE MADE HISTORY Jeannette Rankin was the first woman to be elected to the United States Congress and the only member of Congress to vote against going to war with Japan in World War II.



As you read the biography below, think about how Jeannette Rankin's courage helped her stand firmly for her beliefs.

Jeannette Rankin was born and raised in Montana, the eldest daughter of a developer and a school-teacher. Rankin was said to have had a strong sense of responsibility, even at a young age. This strength carried her into her adult life, when she became the first woman to be elected to the United States Congress.

After graduating from the University of Montana, Rankin moved to New York. She attended the New York School of **Philanthropy** and became interested in social work. She later moved to Washington and began her work promoting women's suffrage. In 1910 Jeannette Rankin became the first woman to speak to the Montana state legislature. This led to relationships with many important women activists and other reformers interested in women's rights.

Rankin enjoyed great success as a leader of the suffrage movement. As hostilities increased in Europe, however, Rankin turned her attention to the United States's involvement in the coming war. Rankin identified herself as a **pacifist**, or a person opposed to war or violence as a way to resolve disputes. She was elected to United States Congress in 1916 on a platform that included votes for women, child protection legislation and worldwide peace.



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VOCABULARY

philanthropy the effort to increase the well-being of humankind

pacifist a person opposed to using war or violence to resolve disputes

After only four days in office, Rankin's immense popularity was overshadowed by her vote against the United States' entry into World War I. "I want to stand by my country, but I cannot vote for war," she declared.

In 1919 Jeannette Rankin failed to be reelected to a second term in Congress. But years later, in 1940, Rankin again served the United States, earning a seat in the House of Representatives. She staunchly maintained her pacifism in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. Rankin bravely stood by her beliefs and was the sole member of Congress to vote against war with Japan. She stated with her vote, "As a woman I can't go to war, and I refuse to send anyone else."

Rankin lived a full, active life devoted to women's rights and pacifism. In 1968 she formed the Jeannette Rankin Brigade and marched in protest of the Vietnam War. Rankin died a few weeks before her ninety-third birthday in 1973. A statue of Rankin stands inside the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What principles did Jeannette Rankin stand for?

2. **Make Judgements** Do you think it was easy or difficult for Jeannette Rankin to accomplish all that she did? Explain your answer.

ACTIVITY

Write a poem about Jeannette Rankin's passion for peace and equality. Use concrete details from your reading.