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**“The Artificial Advantage Money Gives”  
A Brahmin Reformer’s Use of Class Privilege**

**By**

**Jana Brubaker**

In February of 1914 wealthy Boston widow Elizabeth Glendower Evans led a delegation of working women who had an audience with President Woodrow Wilson. She and her working-class sisters had come to urge Wilson to support women’s suffrage, and one by one each woman made her statement. Evans had the last word, admonishing Wilson, “Mr. President, I am one of the people who believe in you tremendously, and expect great things from your Administration. I shall expect to hear from you in this matter.”<sup>1</sup> These were bold words from a woman who did not even have a vote to offer Wilson; however, Evans had arrived at a place in her life where her right to express her opinions in the public sphere seemed wholly reasonable to her.

Evans was a reformer, but not in the mold of settlement-founder Jane Addams or physician Alice Hamilton. Evans knew and admired these women and shared many of their beliefs about reform; however, she came to reform from a very different place. While Addams and Hamilton came from middle-class backgrounds, were college-educated, and relied on an alliance of women to achieve their reform goals, Evans was an independent, upper-class woman with no college education. In Evans we have a woman who used her wealth and class privilege to great advantage in achieving her reform goals. The role of class in Progressive-era reform has been addressed in scholarly literature

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Glendower Evans, “An Audience at the White House,” *La Follette’s Weekly*, 14 Feb. 1914, 15.

primarily in relation to lower and middle-class women; however, the reform activities of wealthy women are beginning to receive attention. In an effort to enrich our understanding of the role that class played in the reform movement as a whole, this essay will examine how Evans arrived at her commitment to social reform, and how her social and financial resources shaped her reform strategies and gave her a voice in the public sphere.

When we reflect on Evans' life over one hundred years after her birth we encounter a paradox. She was a member of the aristocratic Brahmin caste who made improving conditions for the lower class her primary mission in life. Her life was an unusual journey from the provincial world of the social and economic elite of Boston to the expansive world of the intellectual and political elite, not only of Boston, but also of the world. She counted among her friends William James, Louis Brandeis, Robert and Belle La Follette, Felix Frankfurter, Ramsay MacDonald, and other luminaries too numerous to mention.

Evans, born in 1856, was a product of the post-Civil War era and Brahmin Boston. As such, Evans was an unlikely promoter of social reform, her pedigree suggesting a much different destiny. She came from "old money" and aristocratic roots. Evans recalls in her memoir that "my father Edward Gardiner hailed from Boston, where he sprang from a conservative and very well-placed family, and my mother whose maiden name was Sophia Harrison Mifflin sprang from an equally well-placed and an equally conservative family in Philadelphia."<sup>2</sup> Indeed her great grandfather was Thomas Handasyd Perkins, a wealthy China trade merchant. Perkins was highly respected in Boston for his philanthropic deeds, making generous contributions to the Boston Athenaeum and the Perkins Institution for the Blind, as well as serving in the state legislature for nearly twenty years.<sup>3</sup> Evans' father died when she was three, and she and her family came under the protection of her

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Glendower Evans. Elizabeth Glendower Evans Papers. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Cambridge, MA (hereafter cited as Evans Papers) in *Women in America: Core Primary Sources for Women's Studies* (Brighton, Sussex, England, 1987), microfilm, memoir [1936?], reel 1, item 1, section 4, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Handasyd Perkins, *Memoir*, (1856, rpt. edn., New York, 1971), 206-227.

paternal grandfather, William H. Gardiner, described as “a brilliant social light in Boston.”<sup>4</sup> She recounted, however, entering a somber household where her grandparents were alienated from “proper” Boston society by their southern sympathies during the Civil War. Unaccountably, Evans reported that within her grandparents’ wealthy household she, her mother, and her siblings led an austere existence, her mother “sewing, sewing, sewing all day long and late into the night” to keep their “shabby clothes” in repair.<sup>5</sup> It is tempting to attribute her concern for the less privileged to the difficult circumstances of her childhood; however, Evans discounted that notion many years later when a newspaper reporter made that assumption. She countered by saying, “I always knew that my grandfather and uncles and aunts were very grand people and that I belonged to them, and it was only the accident of my father’s death that made me poor. I never felt myself an underdog.”<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, she also relates in her memoir that she suffered “I think severely from what is now known as ‘an inferiority complex.’ It was the fault of our position as poor relations and the way it worked out.”<sup>7</sup> These contradictory statements betray Evans’ conflicted emotions about her place in society. It is hard to imagine that her childhood experience had no bearing on her empathy for the less fortunate when she was an adult. Evans’ declaration that even as a child she had an affinity for the “underdog,” protecting a classmate from the bullying of her peers, does little to dispel this impression.<sup>8</sup>

The deprivation she referred to, however, disappeared when, as a young bride, she inherited a substantial estate from her paternal grandfather. Evans tended not to discuss her financial resources in her letters and diaries, and the degree of her wealth varied according to the

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<sup>4</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], reel 1, item 2, section entitled “The Labor Movement,” 2nd document, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], reel 1, item 1, section 4, p. 1-2; reel 1, item 2, section 8, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Evans Papers, Elizabeth Glendower Evans to Alice Brandeis, September 23, 1932, reel 2, item 33.

<sup>7</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], reel 1, item 1, section 3, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], reel 1, item 2, section 8, p. 3.

circumstances of the one assessing it. Arthur D. Hill, a friend and Boston lawyer, recalled that Evans and her husband had “sufficient money to free them from preoccupation with sordid care without the burden of too great wealth.”<sup>9</sup> The ill-fated Italian immigrant Bartolomeo Vanzetti, who she later befriended, wrote that she was “a millionaire.”<sup>10</sup> Regardless of the extent of her wealth, Evans was firmly situated in Boston Brahmin society. Doctor Oliver Wendell Holmes, Boston aristocrat and father of the famous jurist by the same name, declared that “the Brahmin caste of New England” consisted of persons descended from “four or five generations of gentlemen and gentlewomen.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, to qualify one must meet certain commonly agreed upon thresholds of wealth, gentility, and heredity. Elizabeth Glendower Evans fit this definition by virtue of her grandfather’s fortune and bloodline, which extended back to the Revolutionary War. The Brahmin world into which Evans was born expected women to form “good” marital alliances and devote their lives to their families and charitable activities. Unlike the emerging middle-class, old-money families, such as Evans’, viewed higher education for women as unnecessary and even undesirable. Brahmin women were not expected to enter the workforce and most of Evans’ peers married well and did “good works.” Typically, they were members of one or more of the various organizations open to wealthy women such as the Vincent Club that staged theatrical shows to raise money for a hospital, or the Society for the Suppression of Unnecessary Noise whose purpose is self-explanatory.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Evans Papers, Arthur D. Hill, Speech at meeting in memory of Mrs. Glendower Evans, January 28, 1938, reel 1, item 22, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Bartolomeo Vanzetti to Luigia Vanzetti, April 4, 1922, quoted in Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht, *Justice Crucified: The Story of Sacco and Vanzetti* (New York, 1977), 280.

<sup>11</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes [no citation given], quoted in Feuerlicht, *Justice Crucified*, 59.

<sup>12</sup> P.A.M. Taylor, “Routines of Upper-Class Life in Boston 1887-1919: Two Women Diarists,” in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Volume 108, (Boston, 1998), 132, 141.

While Evans' expressed a vague early ambition to be a missionary, she followed a more traditional path when, in 1877, she fell in love with Glendower (Glen) Evans, a law student at Harvard. Glendower Evans was not of the Brahmin class, but rather came from a comfortably well-off Philadelphia family. This relationship was perhaps the single most important influence in her life. Elizabeth Evans never attended college, but she apparently received a thorough education from discussions with her husband. Glen saw marriage as a union between equals, writing to Elizabeth before their marriage that "you shall know my thoughts and feelings. The only perfect union between man and woman is founded upon complete mutual communication of thoughts and feelings; I would far rather die unmarried than marry a woman and treat her like a child."<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth described Glen as being "in the hey-day of an intellectual awakening" when she met him, and recalled that "he talked of only intellectual things, of his college studies and of a range of ideas far beyond my comprehension."<sup>14</sup> We know one of the things they discussed was religion.

Elizabeth Evans was deeply religious and regularly attended the Episcopalian church headed by prominent Puritan Bishop Phillips Brooks; however, Glen's religious beliefs had "dropped from him as an outgrown overcoat."<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth anguished over how she could marry a man who did not believe in God, but she overcame her apprehensions by vowing to convert him. She did not succeed in this endeavor, but instead reported that "it took years and years to bring his thought and mine together. Of course he had to grow on his side as well as I on mine."<sup>16</sup> By the time he died in 1886, four years after their marriage, Elizabeth had "formed a solution" to her religious questions.<sup>17</sup> Just exactly what arguments Glen used are unknown. Elizabeth related in her memoir that

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<sup>13</sup> Evans Papers, Glendower Evans to Elizabeth Glendower Evans, August 26, 1878, reel 1, item 1, section 2, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], reel 1, item 2, section 8, p. 10; reel 1, item 1, section 3, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], reel 1, item 2, section 8, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], reel 1, item 1, section 4, p. 2-3.

<sup>17</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], reel 1, item 1, section 4, p. 3.

she initially blamed Charles Elliot Norton, her husband's fine arts professors at Harvard, for molding Glen's religious views.<sup>18</sup> Indeed Norton was an agnostic who believed that enlightened people would find no answers in organized religion. Later, however, Elizabeth came to credit Norton rather than blame him for his influence on Glen. Elizabeth never explicitly stated her revised views on religion, but from her writings it is apparent that, while she never rejected God, she no longer had any use for organized religion. In fact, the energy that she had devoted to religion was later directed toward social reform, her new gospel. Elizabeth's altered beliefs influenced her reform activities to the extent that she sought solutions to seemingly intractable social problems on earth rather than from heaven.

In an 1893 letter from Greece, Elizabeth recalled the profound influence Glen had had on her:

I was realizing that of all places in the world this is probably one that my husband would most have cared to visit. And all his college days & the way in which he used to discourse to me, a meager little Puritan, about the significance of the Greek civilization & other things of which I had never heard & which I found very bewildering, came back to me, binding the present with the past. It was a blessed sort of companionship to meet his thought in this foreign land, & to find myself seeing with eyes that he had opened & thinking with a mind that he had almost brought into life. You can't imagine what an ignorant little chit I was; I don't see how he can have deigned to love me. It is a comfort for me to believe that I have grown more worthy, & that he would care for me more now.<sup>19</sup>

Glen introduced Elizabeth to the intellectual elite of Boston, including such people as philosopher and Harvard professor William James and

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<sup>18</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], reel 1, item 2, section entitled "The Labor Movement," 2nd document, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Evans Papers, Elizabeth Glendower Evans to Elizabeth Cabot Putnam, April 4, 1893, reel 7, item 117.

future Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. When Glen was alive, Brandeis often dropped by to discuss law, government, and philosophy. “In those days,” Elizabeth wrote, “I don’t think I ever talked at all. I used to sit by the fire and listen and listen and listen.”<sup>20</sup> Glen also exposed her to a world of ideas and ideals that were beyond her imagination. It is likely that he introduced her to Emerson and certain that he introduced her to the philosophy of William James. Shortly after Glen’s death following a brief illness, Elizabeth studied with philosopher Josiah Royce, a colleague of James at Harvard. Royce, unlike her previous mentor, Phillips Brooks, asserted that man must not be satisfied with merely being good, but must actively work to conquer evil. She wrote to a friend who was critical of her indulgence in the “luxury” of philosophical studies, that “it is so far from a luxury that it is stiff discipline, & a discipline that I believe will make me a better friend to the wretched & the down trodden.”<sup>21</sup>

Evans occupied herself after her husband’s death as a volunteer trustee of the Massachusetts State Reform School, an institution that provided housing and education for delinquent youths. Insecure in this role at first, she became more confident over time and took her duties very seriously. Glen’s aunt did not approve of Evans’ involvement, and she declared that Elizabeth would be better off doing church work. In response, Evans wrote facetiously to Elizabeth Cabot Putnam, senior trustee of the school, “so you may expect my immediate resignation, on my return.”<sup>22</sup> She had no intention of resigning, but rather continued with this work until 1914. Evans’ obligations to the school, however, did not prevent her from responding to a suggestion from Louis Brandeis in 1908. She was 49 when Brandeis sent her to England for the purpose of studying socialism, an experience that was to have almost as profound an impact on her life as her relationship with her husband. This was not an uncommon pilgrimage among progressive Americans. European countries, such as England and Germany, were addressing social problems associated with industrialization such as unemployment, industrial accidents, and an impoverished elderly population, and many

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<sup>20</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], reel 1, item 1, section 4, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Evans Papers, Evans to Putnam, December 1, 1898, reel 7, item 117.

<sup>22</sup> Evans Papers, Evans to Putnam, August 7, 1886, reel 7, item 117.



liberal Americans went there looking for answers. Jane Addams had preceded Evans, travelling to England in 1887 to study settlement houses, and the seeds for Hull House were planted. Most progressives were especially attracted by the fact that countries such as England had ameliorated these problems without adopting a socialist government. Social reformer Florence Kelley, on the other hand, found her answers in Germany, a country that averted revolution by creating a welfare state.<sup>23</sup> Like these Americans, Evans came away with a belief in the ability and the duty of federal and state government programs to effectively address social problems. Unlike most, with the exception of Kelley, she also embraced socialism.

During her stay in England, Evans was primarily interested in studying two programs: feeding school children and pensions for the elderly and disabled. She visited a variety of settlement houses that were largely funded by private charitable contributions. Many of the settlement workers were critical of governmental programs, such as the London County Council, that were running feeding programs for children. One worker claimed that under the government program “the school feeding has been so irregular that its chief function was to upset the digestion of the children.”<sup>24</sup> In contrast, socialists who supported such governmental programs were critical of the Charity Organisation Society (COS), one of the leading private charitable organizations in England. One of her friends told Evans that the COS “investigated with a point of view that applicants were probably unworthy & in the majority of cases, having investigated, did no more.”<sup>25</sup> Socialists believed that private charity provided little assistance and “many decent folks would rather starve than apply to it.”<sup>26</sup> Evans was distressed at the poverty she saw, and concluded that the poor obviously needed some kind of aid,

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<sup>23</sup> Benjamin R. Beede, “Foreign Influences on American Progressivism,” *The Historian* 45, no. 4 (1983): 514, 529-36.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Glendower Evans, trip diary, 1 January 1909, Elizabeth Glendower Evans Papers, in Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Cambridge, MA (hereafter cited as Evans Trip Diary), in *History of Women* (New Haven, 1976), microfilm, Reel 970.

<sup>25</sup> Evans, Evans Trip Diary, March 7, 1909, Reel 970.

<sup>26</sup> Evans, Evans Trip Diary, December 29, 1908, Reel 970.

stating that, “the English Socialists can make out a strong case of physical degeneracy under the industrial system.”<sup>27</sup> Evans apparently found the socialists’ case so convincing that she joined the Fabian Society within a month of her arrival in England writing, “I joined the Soc. -- somewhat rashly perhaps, but on the whole I think I stand with them.”<sup>28</sup> One can gain some insight into Evans’ socialistic beliefs by examining the tenants of the Fabian Society. The Society was established in 1883 as “an association...whose ultimate aim shall be the reconstruction of Society in accordance with the highest moral possibilities.”<sup>29</sup> This vague mission was reinterpreted over the years; however, the Fabian’s belief in the communal use of the resources of production remained constant.

New members were required to subscribe to the “Fabian Basis,” a statement of the Society’s principles. These principles included a commitment to gradualism, which called for persuasion and education rather than revolution to achieve socialism. The document was ambiguous on the issue of compensation for individuals who would lose property rights during the socialization process, but over time a consensus formed around compensation rather than confiscation. They agreed with Marx’s materialistic conception of history, that economics determines the political condition of society, and believed that the path of economic progress would lead inexorably to socialism. Far from viewing socialism and democracy as antithetical, Fabian thought asserted that democracy would be the political platform from which socialism would spring. Additionally, the Society had a middle-class bias, only admitting members who were educated and comfortable with middle-class culture. Evans was one of the wealthier members, joining George Bernard Shaw, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, and others better known for their intellectual gifts than their affluence.<sup>30</sup>

Although Evans found a great deal to admire in socialism, her life experiences were steeped in capitalistic ideology, and thus she struggled

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<sup>27</sup> Evans, Evans Trip Diary, January 9, 1909, Reel 970.

<sup>28</sup> Evans, Evans Trip Diary, December 31, 1908, Reel 970.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Cole, *The Story of Fabian Socialism* (Stanford, 1961), 4.

<sup>30</sup> Cole, 31-29.

with conflicting feelings during her stay in England. One ardent young socialist suggested to her that the “Tired Tims and Weary Willies,” common stereotypes of members of the lower class, were no worse than idlers in the upper class. Evans wrote in her journal, “I thought that most unfair, but next night when I discussed the point with Miss Ward, Miss Longman & Miss Phillips, all 3 agreed vehemently -- said each class was living off society & giving no adequate return & that the idle rich were much the more demoralizing element.”<sup>31</sup> Evans seemed to remain dubious of this comparison, but she thought highly of the aforementioned progressive settlement workers, and therefore could not dismiss it entirely. At a lecture the following evening, Evans reported, she felt compelled to defend capitalists by arguing that “whether overpaid or not they were as a matter of fact conducting the business of the country which the people as a whole had neither desire, interest nor capacity to undertake.”<sup>32</sup> The next day Evans wrote in her journal that she experienced “inward chaos, -- no capacity to direct my life or thought.”<sup>33</sup> Evans was surely struggling to reconcile these ideas with her long-held assumptions regarding appropriate class relations. The following day she had the opportunity to test her incipient beliefs when she dined with an aristocratic English woman. Her English friend’s harsh views about the lower class lead Evans to chastise the woman in her journal for “the inhumanity of her point of view! It’s intolerable patronage! & the, it would seem impossible discrepancy, between the standard she applies to her `class’ & to the poor.”<sup>34</sup> Apparently Evans had come to terms with the argument that the lower class should not be judged by a different standard than the upper class.

Evans’ attraction to socialism did not make her an extremist, although there were those who believed so. Roger Baldwin, Evans’ friend and founder of the American Civil Liberties Union, wrote that some people “dismissed her as a `Red.’” He went on to say, however, “If she was not an economic radical in any precise sense, she was

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<sup>31</sup> Evans, Evans Trip Diary, March 7, 1909, Reel 970.

<sup>32</sup> Evans, Evans Trip Diary, March 8, 1909, Reel 970.

<sup>33</sup> Evans, Evans Trip Diary, March 9, 1909, Reel 970.

<sup>34</sup> Evans, Evans Trip Diary, March 10, 1909, Reel 970.

anyhow a rebel against injustice; and rebellion against injustice takes on popularly the attributes of radicalism.”<sup>35</sup> She believed that injustice was inherent in a society where there were great disparities in the economic resources of its people. When she lost a letter of credit for \$105 while in England in 1908, she wrote, “I realized the artificial advantage money gives one when I went to Barings & was simply supplied with a new letter of credit & more cash!”<sup>36</sup> Socialism appealed to her sense of fairness and justice, and she believed that it offered hope of improved conditions for members of the lower class. Evans would never be able to totally overcome her unconscious class bias, but she also would never again be ignorant or tolerant of the ill treatment the poor often received. She had discovered a new philosophy and a course of action in England that she was anxious to apply to social problems in the United States. Evans wrote to a friend in the first blush of her infatuation with socialism:

Talk of Rip Van Winkle -- I expect to come home, not like one awakened from a sleep, but one who has experienced transfiguration, not upon a mountain top but in the throbbing life of the people, & when I come home, I shall hope the clouds of glory will come with me. Truly, I have had just a wonderful time, having seen not only the dark side of life here, -- which is *very* dark, -- but having seen also the new idealism, the new conception of citizenship, the new realization of human brotherhood, which is sweeping across this land, & which I believe will spread across the Atlantic & rededicate our own country to its primal meaning.<sup>37</sup>

Evans came away with an understanding of the importance of social and economic class on one’s abilities to flourish in a capitalistic society.

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<sup>35</sup> Roger Baldwin, “The contributions of Mrs. Evans to civil liberties,” n.d., Evans Papers, reel 1, item 21.

<sup>36</sup> Evans, Evans Trip Diary, January 22-23, 1909, Reel 970.

<sup>37</sup> Evans Papers, Evans to Putnam, February 24, 1909, reel 7, item 118.

After her return to the United States, she often revealed class self-consciousness in relation to her reform activities.

Evans' ideas about class were particularly evident in her writings about women's suffrage. Historian Ellen Carol DuBois analysis of the dynamics of class within two generations of Progressive-era reformers can provide some insight into Evans' attitudes. DuBois argues that the first generation, to which Evans belonged, saw reform in terms of the family where motherhood was its symbolic center. Motherhood, in Victorian America, represented the locus of women's authority and this construction of class relations cast poor women in the role of dependent children in need of protection by middle- and upper-class reformers. The second generation, born in the 1870s, centered their reform paradigm on the woman worker. The worker crossed class lines, as middle-class women entered the professions; however, an unequal relationship still existed, with professional women casting themselves as the experts while working-class women became the clients.<sup>38</sup> Both models rely on the intricate link between reform and class for their interpretive significance. If Evans' reform activities are examined within this framework, we can see that her views on suffrage reveal a deeply protective attitude toward poor working women that bears out DuBois' characterization of the first generation of reformers. Before, and even during, her 1908 trip to England, she opposed suffrage for women. She wrote much later that "strange as it may seem, as a girl and as a young woman I was always against `votes for woman.' I can understand now that the lack of a vote was not any disadvantage to me. I said `If I vote the servant girls will vote and what would be the advantage in that?'"<sup>39</sup> Evans recognized that she possessed a degree of agency by virtue of her social and economic status, and that the servant girls might, in effect, cancel out her vote. While she was in England, she observed suffragists speaking to crowds

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<sup>38</sup> Ellen Carol DuBois, "Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Transformation of Class Relations Among Woman Suffragists," in *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*, eds. Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye (Lexington, KY, 1991), 163-164.

<sup>39</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?] (suffrage essay), 1936 (?), reel 1, item 2, section 12, p. 1.

on the street and dismissed it as “thoughtless tomfoolery,” an opinion she soon revised.<sup>40</sup>

Shortly after Evans returned to the United States, in 1909, she was persuaded to attend a suffrage meeting with a friend and heard a prominent suffragist give a speech that convinced her to join the movement. According to Evans, the suffragist argued that “it is all very well for a well-placed woman to say she does not need the vote, but how about the woman in the factories? How about the woman on the streets?” Evans went on to relate that this triggered a memory of “how at the State House I had seen women, other employees going at 5 o’clock, and they would be on their hands and knees scrubbing up the floors! I remember saying to myself and my thinking, often times before, ‘If these women had the vote they would not be treated with such indignity. Where would they find a man to do the work that they do?’”<sup>41</sup> Later a suffrage leader asked Evans to go to Fall River, Massachusetts, and speak for the rights of the women textile workers there. Evans recalled that she thought to herself “so self-righteously, ‘Do you think I’m going to do that kind of work? I tell you I am far too well born.’” Thus, Evans’ concern with engaging in behavior inappropriate to her class almost prevented her from becoming involved in the suffrage movement. In 1910 she finally agreed to speak, conceding “that they who were not well born had to work long hours in the factories and that the vote would be a help to them....” Evans points with embarrassment, however, to evidence of her class bias when she later recalled her arrival in Fall River and that “as I left the train there was a woman, dressed in a [sh]abby white dress and carrying a big yellow banner. ‘Oh God!’ I said, ‘have I got to be associated with her?’”<sup>42</sup> Evans’ account of the evolution of her thoughts on suffrage revealed a maternal strain that fits in well with DuBois’ construct of first-generation reformers; however, they also reflect Evans’ discomfort with her entrenched attitudes regarding class behavior and relations.

DuBois goes on to argue that wealthy women found the radicalism of the suffragist style appealing and liberating. These women saw

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<sup>40</sup> Evans, Evans Trip Diary, March 26, 1909, reel 970.

<sup>41</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], reel 1, item 2, section 12, p. 1

<sup>42</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], reel 1, item 2, section 12, p. 1-2.

enfranchisement as an opportunity to protect their own interests and exert individual power.<sup>43</sup> Evans, however, was tremendously reluctant to enter the fray, clinging in most respects to Victorian gender ideals. For example, she derived a great deal of her identity from her status as a widow, wearing black widow's garb for over twenty years after her husband's death and taking his first name, Glendower, as her middle name.<sup>44</sup> This role also provided her with an uncommon degree of freedom, allowing her to control her own finances and travel freely. Thus, Evans had perhaps less need for liberation than many other women. It is true, nevertheless, that Evans relished the personal authority she claimed while agitating for reform. In 1913 she wrote to a friend, "I enclose a carbon of a letter I have just written to Wilson!!! Don't you think me *sassy*?"<sup>45</sup> She also enjoyed having access to politically powerful men like Robert LaFollette and Louis Brandeis, never hesitating to inform them of her perspective on matters where they had influence.

Women like Evans had strong opinions about the path that American society should follow in order to address the problems brought about by industrialization, and they sought a venue to promote their ideas. The anthology *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy, and Power* argues that Progressive-era reform activities afforded women a platform from which to exercise their authority and advance their social goals. This collection of essays explores, in part, the role of class and money in women's philanthropic and charitable activities during the Progressive Era. Editor Kathleen D. McCarthy argues that women used their charitable, social, and political movements to create and shape a role for themselves in the public sphere.<sup>46</sup> Evans' approach to social

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<sup>43</sup> DuBois, 171.

<sup>44</sup> Evans Papers, Fola La Follette, Eulogy in memory of Mrs. Glendower Evans, January 28, 1938, reel 1, item 22, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth Glendower Evans to Jessie Donaldson Hodder, February 19, 1913. Hodder, Jessie Donaldson, 1867-1931. Papers, 1873-1931 (A-23), Box 1, Folder 13. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Cambridge, MA (hereafter cited as Hodder MSS).

<sup>46</sup> Kathleen D. McCarthy, "Parallel Power Structures: Women and the Voluntary Sphere," in *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy, and Power*, Kathleen D. McCarthy, ed. (New Brunswick, 1990), 2.

reform provides an illuminating example of a wealthy woman's self-conscious use of class privilege and wealth to exert power and influence. Men controlled most of the wealth in this country, and therefore it was unusual for a woman to wield economic clout. While wealthy men like Andrew Carnegie were free to distribute their wealth as they saw fit, wealthy women seldom controlled the family purse strings, with the exception of wealthy widows such as Evans.

Evans made frequent use of her ability to provide financial assistance, but the causes she supported were unusual by upper-class male standards. When we compare Carnegie's attitudes toward philanthropy with those of Evans the difference is clear. While Carnegie worried about the "proper administration of wealth,"<sup>47</sup> Evans often expressed discomfort with the possession of wealth, as she did when she wrote to a colleague who was soliciting funds that "I cannot send you money until about Oct. 15, as along with everybody else I am a good deal stripped in what I call my 'income.' Why I should have the income is what I can't understand, but such is life, at least life as we know it. It is up to us to make life different."<sup>48</sup> Another time she wrote to a friend, "I send you the enclosed gladly. It goes to reconcile one to an unreasonable control of money to be able to hand it over to people one loves -- it goes generally in impersonal & often in apparently unfruitful ways."<sup>49</sup> Although both Carnegie and Evans sought to improve society through their largesse, Carnegie, like many wealthy men, including Evans' own grandfather, often directed his philanthropy toward buildings which bore his name and stood as concrete symbols of his generosity for generations to come. Evans, almost without exception, channeled her resources into causes, suggesting that she was less concerned about receiving recognition than with promoting her social and political agenda. Over the years she contributed to the Consumers' League, the Socialist Expansion Fund, the American Civil Liberties Union, and

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<sup>47</sup> Andrew Carnegie, *The Andrew Carnegie Reader*, Joseph Frazier Wall, ed. (Pittsburgh, 1992), 130.

<sup>48</sup> Evans Papers, Elizabeth Glendower Evans to Mary E. Driscoll, September 23, 1932, reel 7, item 111.

<sup>49</sup> Evans to Hodder, November 4, 1913, Hodder MSS, Box 1, Folder 13.



socialist Norman Thomas' campaign for Congress. When Margaret Bondfield and Maude Ward, two suffragists from England whom she met in 1909, came to the United States, Evans thought it would be a perfect opportunity for them to speak for suffrage. Evans made this possible by offering to pay the women \$25.00 a week to defray their expenses.<sup>50</sup>

While financial assistance was a useful approach to promoting her reform ideas, Evans' words and actions illustrate that she understood that there were less obvious, equally potent strategies that she could employ. In 1912 Belle La Follette, wife of the liberal Senator Robert La Follette from Wisconsin, wrote:

Mrs. Evans was among the first to recognize the responsibility of wealth for the way in which dividends are earned, as well as for the way in which incomes are spent. For twenty years she has advocated the principle, now beginning to be everywhere recognized as ethical, that corporation stockholders should not be absentee landlords.<sup>51</sup>

There is little evidence that Evans recognized the incongruity inherent in her status as a shareholder and a socialist, beyond her expression of a general discomfort with her wealth. To her credit, however, she was fully aware of the power she wielded as a shareholder in textile mills, and used it to agitate for improved conditions for the people who worked there. In 1907 Evans, like many women reformers, was interested in the abuses of child labor. Carrying a letter of introduction from H. P. Meikleham, agent for the Massachusetts Mills in Georgia, informing the reader that the bearer of the letter was "one of our stockholders," Evans set off to study conditions in a number of textile mills.<sup>52</sup> When Evans ran into an uncooperative mill boss, she wrote to Meikleham that "of course it has been annoying to him to have a woman come 'blowing' into

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<sup>50</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir (suffrage essay), reel 1, item 2, section 12, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Belle Case La Follette, article in *La Follette's Magazine*, February 17, 1912, Evans Papers, Reel 1.

<sup>52</sup> H. P. Meikleham to G. Gunby Jordan, October 1, 1907, Evans Papers, Reel 3.

his office, asking questions about matters which he thought were not her concern, but he should have realized that in asking these questions I was within my rights....”<sup>53</sup> Evans was disturbed that the mill boss failed to recognize that she felt that it was her prerogative and duty, as a stockholder, to ask whatever she deemed necessary.

In 1919 Evans demonstrated that her understanding of the power of economic influence had fully matured. That was the year that she went to Lawrence to participate on the side of labor in their textile mill strike, and it was front-page news in the Boston newspapers. This was the kind of publicity that a Boston Brahmin participating in a controversial activity could generate. On March 20, 1919, the *Boston Evening Globe* reported that “Mrs. Glendower Evans of Brookline, who said she was a holder of stock in the Arlington Mills, announced today that she would head the picketing activities at the mill gates tonight.”<sup>54</sup> The following day the headline in the *Globe* read, “Brookline Woman, Stockholder in a Lawrence Mill, to Help the Strikers.”<sup>55</sup> Her status as a stockholder acting on behalf of the laborers also provoked a response from some members of her class who were unsympathetic to labor’s plight. The president of the Lawrence Woman’s Club declared in the press:

Does she perchance, as a wealthy woman and a stockholder in our mills, sympathize rather with an organization which is openly opposed to hours of labor, which has no patriotism in its makeup, because led by non-patriot agitators, which seeks only for its own personal profits, which is a part of that ugly monstrosity which we have dignified with the name of bolshevism?...[W]e shall have to consider her a mere dabbler in the study of sociology; a woman of the idle

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<sup>53</sup> Elizabeth Glendower Evans to H. P. Meikleham, October 18, 1907, Evans Papers, Reel 3.

<sup>54</sup> “Terror In Lawrence by Attack on Houses,” *The Boston Evening Globe*, March 20, 1919, p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> “Mrs Glendower Evans on the Picket Lines: Brookline Woman, Stockholder in a Lawrence Mill, to Help the Strikers,” *The Boston Daily Globe*, March 21, 1919.

rich class, with too much leisure to stay where she belongs, in her own beautiful [sic] prosperous Brookline.<sup>56</sup>

Some among the social and economic elite may not have supported her activities, but Evans, recognizing that her financial stake in the mill was an important dimension to her participation in the strike, made certain that reporters understood the context of her involvement. She chose to risk her reputation among the Brahmin caste in order to orchestrate a public relations campaign that ultimately benefited labor's cause.

In addition to publicity, her economic status enabled her to speak to officials who were inaccessible to members of lower classes. She reported that she "talked to the judge about the assault [at the 1919 Lawrence strike] by the [police] officer which had aroused my indignation, and later I discussed it with the City Marshall, the Commissioner of Public Safety and with others."<sup>57</sup> The labor movement also benefited from her financial assistance. During the 1912 and 1919 Lawrence textile mill strikes, she contributed to the relief fund and bailed strikers out of jail. Evans reported one incident that occurred at the 1919 strike after many strikers had been beaten and arrested:

The next day I went to the Lawrence court and this striker was brought in along with several others, all with cuts in their heads patched up by plasters, and they were charged with breaking the peace. I rose and told the judge what I had seen. He answered: "Your testimony would be important if the arresting policemen were on trial," and then he sentenced the man I had seen struck down to a term in jail. I said: "I go bail for that striker, I go bail for all the strikers," which made me quite a heroine in the court for the moment.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> "Opens Attack on Mrs. Evans," *The Boston Herald*, March 27, 1919.

<sup>57</sup> ACLU Forward Supplement, April 1919, in American Civil Liberties Union Archives, Princeton University Library, Princeton, NJ, in *American Civil Liberties Union: The Roger Baldwin Years* (Wilmington, DE, 1996), microfilm, Reel 11.

<sup>58</sup> Evans, article in *La Follette's Magazine*, August 1929, Evans Papers, Reel 11.

Of course, only someone with substantial financial resources could make such a dramatic gesture, and Evans' wealth allowed her to work within the system to promote her concept of justice.

Evans' strategy for participating in the picket line in Lawrence is particularly revealing. The brutality of the police toward the picketers had had the desired chilling effect. The picket line had become extremely thin when Evans let it be known that she would be taking a "walk" later in the day. One labor organizer described what happened:

She appeared and started to walk on the street along the mills where picketing was by then forbidden. One by one, strikers appeared and walked quietly behind her in single file—a handful, dozens, presently hundreds, thousands. The police heads were furious. They expressed surprise and horror to Mrs. Evans that a person of her standing should "aid and abet lawlessness." They insisted that picketing was forbidden. She replied that she was only taking a walk and was not aware that citizens in the United States were forbidden to use the streets. The strikers followed quietly "taking a walk with Mrs. Evans" and throwing a great human chain about the mills....<sup>59</sup>

Evans was willing to challenge the status quo, but framed it in a socially acceptable activity. She brought to the labor battle her notions of appropriate behavior, and lent credibility to the cause with her "ladylike" approach. Evans joined the labor protest in mid-March, and the strike was settled in early June. One reporter years later maintained that "the mill employers of Lawrence could not stand up for long in the spotlight of this publicity -- and that is why many people, even those important in the textile business, believe that it was Mrs. Evans who won this second Lawrence strike."<sup>60</sup> Evans had used every strategy at her disposal, as a

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<sup>59</sup> Evans Papers, A. J. Muste, Remarks at meeting in memory of Elizabeth Glendower Evans, n.d., reel 1, item 22, p. 3-4.

<sup>60</sup> Evans Papers, W. Thacher Winslow, "A Fight for the Under Dog-Elizabeth Glendower Evans," May 1, 1932, reel 1, item 24, p. 8.

wealthy woman, to claim authority during the rough and tumble strike, and undoubtedly her presence helped pressure the mill owners to resolve the conflict.

If, however, Evans is remembered for anything, it is for her substantial contributions to the defense of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. These two Italian immigrants from Boston were accused of murder in 1920. They were found guilty and were eventually executed in 1927. The Sacco and Vanzetti case was seen by many as a symbol of an anti-immigrant impulse that had infected the United States at that time, particularly Boston. Boston had a long and complicated relationship with the immigrant community that warrants examination if we are to understand how far Evans had strayed from her Brahmin roots when she participated in the Sacco and Vanzetti's case. Barbara Miller Solomon in her book *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* argues that many of the ideas used to justify anti-immigrant activities from 1850 to 1920 were conceived in New England, and that the Boston Brahmin caste had a disproportionate influence. In the 1850s the Brahmin population largely supported abolition, but when industrialization attracted large numbers of immigrants, primarily from Ireland, but also from Germany and other parts of Europe, their tolerance was tested. By the 1880s, the power of the Brahmin caste had eroded. The Irish were no longer poor, ignorant peasants, and they resented the New Englanders' claims that descendants of the Puritans were the only true Americans. In 1882, Benjamin Butler, a champion of the oppressed Irish, was elected governor and "proper" Bostonians were appalled. The Brahmins embraced their Anglo-Saxon heritage with renewed vigor, never doubting that eventually the Irish and other European immigrants would be assimilated into it. The Irish, however, refused to be molded into Americans in the Yankee image. To add to upper-class Bostonians' fears, the birth rate among the immigrant population was much higher than among "native" Americans (as they referred to themselves). The growing power of organized workers in the 1880s alarmed them. The very idea of trade unions was alien to Brahmins, who valued individual achievement. Distrust of the foreign-born mounted after the Haymarket affair in Chicago, where a bomb explosion in May 1886 was attributed to immigrant anarchists.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Barbara Miller Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* (Cambridge, MA, 1956), 72-74.

In the spring of 1894, a handful of young people from the best families in Boston formed a committee called the Immigration Restriction League of Boston. They argued that free immigration would ruin the national character.<sup>62</sup> The majority of Brahmins wanted policies enacted that would limit immigration to the “better class” of immigrant (that is, literate, western Europeans). By 1912, those who believed in free immigration were a distinct minority in the New England community. The passage of the 1924 Immigration Act, a national policy aimed at restricting the immigration of southeastern Europeans such as Italians, was the culmination of the successful dispersal of New England anti-immigrant ideas, according to Solomon. Post-World War I Bolshevik hysteria merged with the stereotype of the radical foreigner in the trial of the two Italian anarchists accused of murder in 1920. Many now believe that the only crime that Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti committed was emigrating from Italy, but at the time Brahmin leader A. Lawrence Lowell spoke for most of his class when the committee he headed to review the case found that “race feelings” had not played a part in the outcome of the trial.<sup>63</sup>

He did not speak for Evans. She was willing to lend her “good name” to causes in which she was interested, and the Sacco and Vanzetti case fell into this category. Evans spent considerable time in England over the years, and had been living there the winter of 1919 and most of 1920. While there, she read reports of anti-Communist hysteria in the United States. She wrote that “I read all this like a thing I could not understand. `Surely,’ I said, `the United States has gone mad!’”<sup>64</sup> Upon her return to the United States, a friend who had become interested in the plight of those arrested in the “Red Raids” approached Evans, and Evans willingly accompanied her to a trial. There, she reported that “I took a seat in the back of the room, and presently the judge said, `Mrs. Evans,’ and I said to myself, `Oh dear, are they putting me out?’ Oh no. The judge, Judge Anderson, gave directions that I should be given a seat in the front where I could see and hear. He was a friend of Mr. Brandeis’

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<sup>62</sup> Solomon, 102-5.

<sup>63</sup> Solomon, 205-6.

<sup>64</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], Reel 1, item 2, section 13, p. 1.

and I had met him before.”<sup>65</sup> Roger Baldwin recalled after Evans’ death that she was in a good position to help Sacco and Vanzetti because she was “a gentlewoman with the proper Bostonian connections, she had access to such liberals as were willing to buck the tide of prejudice.”<sup>66</sup> It, no doubt, delighted the defense attorneys to have this wealthy widow publicly support their defendants.

Virtually every account of the case lists Evans as Sacco and Vanzetti’s biggest supporter. Roger Baldwin told his biographer that “she devoted herself completely to the Sacco-Vanzetti case. She financed a lot of moves in it.”<sup>67</sup> Aldino Felicani, organizer of the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, provided a more complicated description of Evans’ involvement:

People always thought, from 1921 to the end, that Mrs. Evans was financing the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee, which was not actually true, because I paid every cent back. She was very generous. She put out pamphlets. She put out all kinds of things. But that was the arrangement. From time to time she made an outright contribution.<sup>68</sup>

Felicani also revealed, however, that “Mrs. Evans offered to turn her home in Brookline over to the bereaved Sacco family and me if we would all come there and live.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, while it is unclear to what extent

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<sup>65</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, memoir [1936?], Reel 1, item 2, section 13, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> Roger Baldwin, “The Reminiscences of Roger Nash Baldwin,” in Columbia University Oral History Collection, Columbia University, New York City, NY, in *New York Times Oral History Program* (Sanford, NC, 1979), microfiche, pt. 1, no. 12.

<sup>67</sup> Peggy Lamson, *Roger Baldwin: Founder of the American Civil Liberties Union* (Boston, 1976), 169-70.

<sup>68</sup> Aldino Felicani, Columbia University Oral History Collection, in Columbia University, New York City, NY, in *New York Times Oral History Program* (Sanford, NC, 1979), microfiche, pt. 4, no. 74.

<sup>69</sup> Evans Papers, Aldino Felicani, Tribute to Elizabeth Glendower Evans, n.d., reel 1, item 21, p. 7.

of she financially supported the defense of Sacco and Vanzetti, everyone seemed to agree that Evans was extremely generous to their cause. Evans' commitment to Sacco and Vanzetti may be seen as the culmination of her evolution from Brahmin matron to social activist; however, the case had more complex implications for Evans. She had a deep and abiding reverence for democracy, declaring that "it is on the people, on their capacity for progress, for self-government that we must rely....We must believe that this thing is true because it ought to be true and we must give our lives to make it true to create the fact which does not yet exist but in whose potential existence we nevertheless believe -- such is our obligation, such is our life."<sup>70</sup> Despite her conviction that the United States was in need of much improvement, Evans continued to believe in its perfectibility, and was certain that the justice and compassion that lay at the core of American society would prevent Sacco and Vanzetti from being convicted of a crime that she did not believe they had committed. Much to Evans' dismay the two men were found guilty and sentenced to death.

Tragically, Evans' social connections ultimately had an adverse effect on the fate of the immigrants. Her friendship with then Supreme Court Justice Brandeis became a factor shortly before Sacco's and Vanzetti's executions when their lawyers asked Brandeis to issue a stay of execution, thereby allowing the Supreme Court to consider whether the defendants civil rights had been violated. Brandeis was the only liberal on the Supreme Court other than Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Holmes had already turned them down. Brandeis was privately sympathetic to Sacco and Vanzetti, but also sensitive to the appearance of impropriety. Therefore, he told their lawyers that he was disqualified because of his friendship with Evans and other supporters of the pair.<sup>71</sup> Thus, Sacco and Vanzetti were denied their last opportunity for justice, in part because of the support of their wealthy patron. Evans was devastated, not only because these men that she had grown to care for deeply had lost their lives, but also because her strongly-held faith in democracy and justice was shaken. She stated after the execution that "as one who attended their trial throughout and who later made careful

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<sup>70</sup> Evans to Hodder, November 8, 1916, Hodder MSS, Box 1, Folder 13.

<sup>71</sup> Feuerlicht, *Justice Crucified*, 398-99.



review of the evidence, I can affirm that the case for the prosecution was so weak and that for the defense so weighty as to make the verdict a patent miscarriage of justice.”<sup>72</sup> Aldino Felicani recalled that “everything she held sacred -- justice, the law -- was forfeit.”<sup>73</sup> Not only had Evans seen the limits of justice, but her experience in this shameful chapter in American history revealed to her the limits of the power her social and economic status afforded her.

In 1932, near the end of Evans’ life, a young friend asked her if she had seen any progress in the world since her youth. She responded pessimistically, “Why the world I live in is such a different world that one can make no comparison [sic]. Of course when I was young I believed in substantial progress as a step in the evolutionary program. Now I see no evidence that that was more than flair of our opinions.”<sup>74</sup> Later, however, she wrote philosophically that “I think that the Jane Addams’ way and Alice Hamilton’s way, and well, what has come in my heart to be my way, is the best -- `To speak the truth whether it brings peace or war, but to be content to go more slowly.”<sup>75</sup> Evans’ admiration for these middle-class women led her to find commonality in their approach to reform, and in many ways that was true. In addition to the fact that Evans embraced many of the same causes as Jane Addams and Alice Hamilton, she also used some of the same strategies, such as uniting with other women to create change and the use of maternal rhetoric. Employing this language, Evans explained in her will her commitment to the people and causes she embraced:

And to those who may feel that I am too strange in  
ranking people not of my blood with my own family,  
may I plead that had I children of my own, no one would

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<sup>72</sup> Elizabeth Glendower Evans, “Sacco and Vanzetti Case: Latest Developments,” [before August 1927], Evans Papers, reel 11.

<sup>73</sup> Evans Papers, Aldino Felicani, Tribute to Elizabeth Glendower Evans, n.d., reel 1, item 21, p. 7.

<sup>74</sup> Evans Papers, Elizabeth Glendower Evans to Dickinson Miller, September 27, 1932, reel 7, item 111.

<sup>75</sup> Evans Papers, Elizabeth Glendower Evans to Felix Frankfurter, September 19, 1934, reel 4, item 59.

have criticized me for leaving all that I had to them. Now these children not of my blood and these causes which seem so remote to most of the well-to-do, should be ranked as my very own, as children who are the issue of my very life.<sup>76</sup>

She also joined with other women as a member of the Women's Trade Union League and was a delegate, along with Jane Addams, to the International Congress of Women in The Hague prior to World War I.

Evans, however, brought to bear the tools uniquely at her disposal as an independent, wealthy Brahmin reformer -- financial support, and economic and social influence. While middle-class reformers had always to be sensitive to the wishes of their benefactors, Evans had no such constraints. She was free to use her financial resources in any way she wished. Although Evans would at times ally herself with women's groups, she just as often acted independently as she did in the Lawrence strike and the Sacco and Vanzetti case. She could have concentrated on creating a comfortable life for herself as many wealthy widows did; however, she chose instead to use her wealth and influence to promote her values and, in the process, to assert her authority in the public sphere. Her actions, tempered by her Victorian Brahmin attitudes about appropriate female behavior, lent her reform efforts credibility because they usually were palatable to all but the most staid members of "polite" society. This did not negate the very real power that she managed to accrue through her strategic use of her wealth and status. She realized that her advantageous social and economic position could be used not just for philanthropy, but also to give her a voice in the public debate over the conditions of those less blessed. Evans' story reminds us that the role of class is central to our understanding of Progressive-era women reformers. It remains a subject ripe for exploration.

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<sup>76</sup> Evans, Evans Papers, Last Will and Testament, nd., Reel 1, item 10.