

Pushing Snowballs Uphill: Women's Work for World Government

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Between 1900 and 1950, thousands of Americans were engrossed by the problem of creating a global government and convincing the nations of the world to join it. In 1905 a Boston journalist named Raymond Bridgman published [World Organization](#), in which he envisioned an international system based on the American federal model, with legislative, executive, and judicial branches. Spanish ambassador [Salvador de Madariaga](#) argued in 1930 for a stronger version of the League of Nations, with universal membership and a greater relinquishment of national sovereignty. Perhaps the most famous plan was that of journalist [Clarence Streit](#), whose [Union Now](#) laid out a path by which a regional federation of North Atlantic democracies would evolve into a world union. Streit's book was a bestseller in 1939.

But while many scholars have examined the popularity of world government in this period, few have recognized that women were as engrossed by the idea as men. Numerous recent histories of the world government movement as well as of intergovernmental organizations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations and of international law and politics in general, have been written as though women were at best bit players on the global stage. My book, [Citizens of the World: U.S. Women and Global Government](#), aims to rectify this situation.

Here are a few examples:

[Lucia Ames Mead](#), a New England suffragist and peace activist, was one of the best-known proponents of world government in the decade before World War I. In 1903 she announced her "[Practical Program for World Organization](#)," a six-step process to create mechanisms for international disarmament and dispute resolution and establish a world parliament. Few of her ideas were original, but she synthesized prevailing theories and brought them to new audiences, especially teachers and schoolchildren. She publicized her program in pamphlets and lesson plans designed to help integrate the promotion of world government into school curricula.

In the wake of World War I, New York reformer and socialite Florence Guertin Tuttle took it upon herself to educate middle- and upper-class women about the underlying principles of world

organization so that they could more judiciously support the creation of the League of Nations and consider how it might be strengthened and expanded. In [Women and World Federation](#), published in 1919, she advocated for a genuine world government, not just a loose confederation of states like the League. She echoed Mead's demands for a world parliament and called for a system of proportional representation to make that parliament as democratic as possible. Throughout the 1920s, Tuttle's organization, the Woman's Pro-League Council (later part of the League of Nations Association), lobbied the U.S. government to join the League.

One of the most radical plans for world government was that of [Rosika Schwimmer](#) and [Lola Maverick Lloyd](#). Their 1937 pamphlet, [Chaos, War, or a New World Order?](#), laid the groundwork for an "all-inclusive, non-military, democratic Federation of Nations." Schwimmer, a Hungarian feminist and pacifist exiled to the United States, and Lloyd, a wealthy feminist and activist, envisioned a federal system, governed by a world constitution, in which nations would retain sovereignty over their domestic affairs but would cede authority over international matters to the world government. It would be all-inclusive, with every nation in the world immediately invited to join and provisions made for the fair representation of colonized peoples. It would be nonmilitary; the central body would abolish all standing armies, end all weapons manufacturing, and outlaw state-sanctioned violence. All disputes among nations would be settled by the world government through negotiation and arbitration. And it would be democratic, based on an equitable system of voting and direct representation. Schwimmer and Lloyd's plan became the blueprint for some of the best-known plans for world government after 1945, such as that of the United World Federalists.

These women did not agree on the design or elements of a world government, nor were their ideas particularly distinct from those of men or inherently gendered. But I want to make three key points about plans like Mead's, Tuttle's, and Schwimmer and Lloyd's.

First, women brought the idea of world government to new audiences. Mead and her colleague [Fannie Fern Andrews](#) wrote lesson plans and curricula to introduce schoolchildren to the principles of world federalism and world citizenship. As a prominent member of the [Women's International League for Peace and Freedom](#), Lloyd got world government on that group's platform.

Second, women had more at stake in demanding a world government that promoted equal world citizenship and equal participation in the global polity. These women knew they were not full citizens of their own country, even after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. They asserted their right to participate in shaping the global polity because they knew such opportunities would not be automatically granted to them. Examining U.S. women's particular arguments for world government and their assertion of world citizenship not only provides a more complete understanding of the kind of world these women envisioned and the ways in which they claimed membership in the global community. It also draws attention to the ways in which they were excluded from international institution-building and to the critiques many of them leveled at those institutions.

Finally, like so many of women's ideas, these plans were often ignored or dismissed, even by other world government proponents. Schwimmer and Lloyd, for instance, got little credit from

post-WWII world federalists for key aspects of their plan, such as an equitable system of direct representation.

Tuttle captured this state of affairs near the end of her life. Looking back on the 1920s and 30s from the perspective of the post-World War II atomic era, she noted that she and others dedicated years to the idea of “one world” that many Americans seemed to have discovered only recently. “For twenty years,” she wrote, “our American organization, the League of Nations Association, worked to establish One World before magnetic [Wendell Willkie](#) thought he coined the phrase. I myself wrote, spoke, and...[tried] to inform public opinion that we live in ‘one world.’ It was like trying to push a snowball uphill. Two wars and countless losses of human lives were necessary before one world would become even partially accepted.” Tuttle did not say it, but it is also clear that the notion did not command widespread public attention until it was promoted by men. It is time she and other women world government theorists get their due.