

The Women's Suffrage Movement

A Journey from Conflict to Compromise

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In the election of 2012, only 129.1 million people (around 53.6%) of all eligible voters in the US cast their ballot¹. Given this information it shows that only a little more than half of the people took advantage of the opportunity to make their voice heard. Nowadays voting rights are often taken for granted by people who have forgotten about the fight that was waged for women to be able to vote. Women struggled for nearly a century in a battle for equality at the ballot. The journey to get there was tirelessly and fearlessly fought by courageous and valiant men and women who dreamed of gender equality and a nation in which the opinions and beliefs of all are heard, respected, and taken into account. The suffragist movement was the first big step in the fight for equal rights, which led to the 19th amendment being passed. The success of the suffragists movement in 18th and 19th centuries was the first major accomplishment within the women's rights movement.

The suffrage movement lasted seventy two years and was the first successful non-violent protest movement in America². This movement was thought to be started at the first Woman's Rights Convention held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. The convention was the start of an astonishing journey that began in Seneca Falls and ended in Washington D.C. in 1920. During the Seneca Falls Convention meeting led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The Declaration of Sentiments" was written which outlined the plan for women's activism for the years to come³. The Declaration of Sentiments was a document much like the Declaration of Independence, which stated "We hold these

¹ Scotti, Monique. "U.S. Presidential Election 2016: Voter Turnout Drops to near 50 per Cent." *Global News*, 9 Nov. 2016.

² Navarra, Theresa. "The Impact of the 19th Amendment." *Herald Community*

³ "Women's Suffrage Timeline." *National Women's History Museum*

truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal⁴.” Elizabeth Cady Stanton spoke at the convention and she said “The rights is ours. Have it, we must. Use it, we will⁵.” This was a powerful start to an empowering journey.

During the next half a century suffragists educated the public about their cause through petitions and their desire to pass a constitutional amendment⁶. “When the Civil War began in 1861 the progress suffragists had been making came to a halt in order to put their energies towards the war effort⁷.” Then in 1876 “Susan B. Anthony presented the “Declaration of Rights for Women” to the Vice President⁸.” Then shortly after the “Declaration of Rights for Women” was presented as an amendment. Nine years later the Senate voted on woman suffrage and the vote was rejected. At the time two groups of suffragists had formed, one of them being the American Woman Suffrage Association lead by Lucy Stone and the other being the National Woman Suffrage Association lead by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

At the end of the 19th century, in year 1890, the two groups combined and became the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Elizabeth Cady Stanton acted as their first ever president. However, in the year 1895 Stanton published “The Woman’s Bible” and directly following its publication NAWSA separated themselves from Stanton in an act to preserve the suffrage campaign as they thought Stanton was too radical and would bring negative attention to the movement. Then at

⁴ “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription.” *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration.

⁵ *The Greatest American Speeches: the Stories and Transcripts of the Words That Changed History*. Quercus, 2006.

⁶ “The Woman Suffrage Movement.” *National Women's History Museum*,

⁷ “Women's Suffrage Timeline.”

⁸ “Women's Suffrage Timeline.”

the beginning of the 20th century the suffragist movement split into two separate organizations yet again, the first being the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), and the second being the National Woman's Party (NWP). Each group took a different approach to the movement. The NAWSA now lead by Carrie Chapman Catt produced suffragist campaigns on a state level and also attempted to get President Wilson to pass a constitutional amendment in support of women's voting rights. The NWP on the other hand lead by Alice Paul took more physical action by means of picketing the White House⁹. While these associations took fairly different paths they were notably made up of members from both Democratic and Republican parties each.

Throughout the entire suffragist movement there were always anti-suffragists, who were people opposed to the idea of voting rights for women. In the year 1911 the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS), was founded¹⁰ by Josephine Dodge. This organization had nationwide support and was fairly popular however the state of Massachusetts in particular was known for being the birthplace of anti- suffragists. In the same way the suffragists had been lobbying for women's rights, anti-suffragists lobbied against women getting the right to vote. Their argument was supported by the ideas that women did not have the intellectual intelligence to offer useful opinions to political matters and that most women were too busy with home life life to even want the opportunity to be able to cast their ballot.

In the years following the beginning of the NAOWS various parades, campaigns,

⁹ "The Woman Suffrage Movement."

¹⁰ "Opposition to Suffrage." *History of U.S. Women's Suffrage*.

and conventions were held throughout the country. None of which had major impacts on the movement, but acted as stepping stones for the important events which would later influence the passage of the 19th Amendment. During the year 1919 in late May a U.S Republican Representative from Illinois named James R. Mann who also acted as the chairman of the Suffrage Committee, proposed the House resolution to approve the Susan Anthony Amendment granting women the right to vote¹¹.” The Susan Anthony Amendment got its name because it was in fact worded exactly the same as when Anthony had presented it to Congress back in 1878, however, it is now referenced not as the Susan Anthony Amendment but just as the 19th Amendment. The amendment passed “the House 304 to 89, a full 42 votes of the required two thirds majority¹².” Then on June 4, 1919, the U.S. Senate passed the 19th Amendment by two votes over its two-thirds required majority, 56-25¹³. In March of 1920 35 states had approved the amendment, just one state short of two thirds majority that would then allow the amendment to be ratified¹⁴. Seven states had already rejected the amendment, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Virginia. The deciding state was Tennessee. The vote came down to a tie with Republican Representative Harry T. Burn with the final say. Burn voted in favor of the amendment and with Burn’s vote 36 states had approved the amendment, two thirds majority was achieved, and the amendment was ready to be ratified and set into action. On August 26, 1920 the 19th amendment was officially ratified and women finally achieved the right to be able to

¹¹ History.com Staff. “19th Amendment.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2010.

¹² History.com Staff. “19th Amendment.”

¹³ History.com Staff. “19th Amendment.”

¹⁴ History.com Staff. “19th Amendment.”

vote in the United States.

The passage of the 19th Amendment allowed over 26 million women to have their voices heard on a political level and have their opinions be considered during governmental decision making¹⁵. As soon as the amendment was passed 8 million women voted in the election that year¹⁶. The amendment being passed was a monumental step in women's history in more ways than justification for women's right to vote. Women were suddenly empowered and strengthened. "Women saw their full integration into society as a way of making the nation better¹⁷." Women were finally able to advocate for a good education and reproductive rights. According to an article from the Center for American Progress "The 19th Amendment also played a pivotal role in promoting reproductive rights for women, ushering in a new voting population with a political agenda that would ultimately legalize contraception and abortion¹⁸." Having the amendment ratified has opened numerous doors for all women and paved many paths all leading towards true equality for women. However not all women realized there equality at the same time or in the same form.

Black women were affected by the ratification of the amendment slightly differently. Prior to and during the suffragists movement, black women had to worry not only about their gender but also their race¹⁹. The 19th Amendment was especially significant for black women because it was not only knocking down a gender barrier but

¹⁵ Williamson, Heidi. "Women's Equality Day: Celebrating the 19th Amendment's Impact on Reproductive Health and Rights." *Center for American Progress*, 8 July 2014.

¹⁶ History.com Staff. "Women's Suffrage." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2009.

¹⁷ Williamson, Heidi.

¹⁸ Williamson, Heidi.

¹⁹ Williamson, Heidi.

also a racial one. It was an important step in empowering the African American community.

The 19th Amendment event in history has had an extensive impact on our world today. It was viewed by some that once political equality was achieved, social and economical equality would come after²⁰. Unfortunately true equality across all areas of life still exists only as a desire and not a reality. Gender discrimination against women is still present and is a major issue. Women struggled for nearly a century in a battle to achieve equality at the ballot. Their journey to get there was extraordinary, powerful and empowering. Those women wore their passion like a shirt and didn't stop until their dream became their reality. They had dreamed of gender equality and a nation in which the opinions and beliefs of all are heard, respected, and taken into account. Those people made our nation not only a place where all people had the right to vote, but also proved that our nation is a place where when you are driven by your goal you can achieve it. It is now that people are able to see the effects of these suffragists and what they did and are able to learn from their fight and begin to lead their own. Because of the suffrage movement, people now realize the importance of gender equality and are continuing their legacy by making the United States a more gender equal and improved country. The success of the suffragists movement in 18th and 19th centuries was the first major accomplishment within the women's rights movement and with the work still left to do it is in the best interest for all women that it certainly not be the last. We need to continue what those strong and valiant men and women started and recognize their

²⁰ Ritchie, Jason. "The Power of the 19th Amendment, Then and Now." *The Huffington Post*, TheHuffingtonPost.com, 26 Aug. 2014.

nearly a century of tireless work by using our hard won vote to bring upon the changes that are still needed in our society.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

"The 19th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution." *National Constitution Center – The 19th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution*.
constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendments/amendment-xix.

I used this website to find and gather information about the 19th Amendment. This helped me understand the language that they used when writing the amendment.

"Declaration of Independence: A Transcription." *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration,
www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript.

I used this website to find and use the text from the Declaration of Independence. I quoted the Declaration of Independence to relate the Declaration of Independence to the 19th Amendment.

The Greatest American Speeches: the Stories and Transcripts of the Words That Changed History. Quercus, 2006.

I used this book to find a quote by Elizabeth Cady Stanton that she said at the Seneca Falls Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. I also used this book to gather notes on Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Secondary Sources

"Congress Passes the 19th Amendment." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks,
www.history.com/this-day-in-history/congress-passes-the-19th-amendment.

This source had similar information to passed sources I had already used, but helped me find diverse ways of getting my message across and explaining the very complex subject that is women's suffrage. I also learned from this article that both Democratic and Republican parties were in favor of women's right to vote.

History.com Staff. "19th Amendment." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2010,
www.history.com/topics/womens-history/19th-amendment

I used the information in this article to reinforce the key points and dates from the beginning of the movement that other sources had introduced me to. I also used this source to get a better feeling for how individual people made a difference. In addition this source gave me insight as to the final struggle for the right to vote. I used several quotes from this passage to help the reader understand names and numbers that brought the 19th amendment to finally being ratified.

History.com Staff. "Women's Suffrage." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 2009, www.history.com/topics/womens-history/the-fight-for-womens-suffrage

I used this article to get some fairly basic information about Women's Suffrage and the journey of going from conflict to compromise. I also used this article to get a specific statistic about the voting turnout for women during the first election after the 19th Amendment was passed. I also used a statistic about the number of women that voted in the very first election directly following the ratification of the amendment. This helped me understand the short-term impact of the 19th Amendment.

Navarra, Theresa. "The Impact of the 19th Amendment." *Herald Community Newspapers*, liherald.com/stories/the-impact-of-the-19th-amendment,27204.

I used this article to understand how the 19th amendment being passed lead to feminist movements that are happening in the 21st century. I learned about how women achieving the right to vote opened doors for so many important opportunities for women to be able to have. Knowing the 19th Amendments historical significance helped me get the message of how people need to keep opening doors for women, that I mention in my concluding paragraph.

"Opposition to Suffrage." *History of U.S. Women's Suffrage*, www.crusadeforthevote.org/naows-opposition/.

I used this article to understand how there were people who were against the suffrage movement and how those people will have an effect on the movement. I also used this source to learn about the National Association Opposed to Women's Suffrage (NAOWS) and why anti- suffragists were such an important part of the suffrage movement.

Ritchie, Jason. "The Power of the 19th Amendment, Then and Now." *The Huffington Post*, TheHuffingtonPost.com, 26 Aug. 2014, www.huffingtonpost.com/jason-ritchie/the-power-of-the-19th-ame_b_5718395.html.

I used this article to understand the present day idea of equal rights for women, which is of course what the 19th amendment was all about. I specifically got information about how the topic of women having equal rights has not yet actually come to a complete compromise and that there is still a ways to go.

Scotti, Monique. "U.S. Presidential Election 2016: Voter Turnout Drops to near 50 per Cent." *Global News*, 9 Nov. 2016, globalnews.ca/news/3054505/u-s-presidential-election-2016-voter-turnout-drops-to-near-50-per-cent/

I used this article to get a statistic from the presidential election of 2012. This statistic showed me that just over 50% of all eligible voters in US actually voted. This helped me make my point in the end of my paper that people need to take advantage of their rights, and specifically voting rights given that women fought so hard and for so long to achieve even a chance to cast their vote.

Terry, Lea. "Women's Voting Rights: 7 Events That Led Up to the 19th Amendment." *Newsmax*, Newsmax Inc. Newsmax Inc., 14 Nov. 2015, www.newsmax.com/fastfeatures/womens-voting-rights-19th-amendment-events/2015/11/14/id/702199/.

I used this article to focus on the big key moments and turning points throughout the movement. This source helped me to make the outline for my paper so that I could make sure I covered the basic structure of the movement. From this article I also formed questions that I went on to research for more detail on those seven main events.

Williamson, Heidi. "Women's Equality Day: Celebrating the 19th Amendment's Impact on Reproductive Health and Rights." *Center for American Progress*, 8 July 2014, www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/news/2013/08/26/72988/womens-equality-day-celebrating-the-19th-amendments-impact-on-reproductive-health-and-rights/.

I used this article to learn about the historical significance of the passage of the 19th amendment. I used information about how many women got the opportunity to vote and how different women felt about having a right to vote from this article.

"The Woman Suffrage Movement." *National Women's History Museum*,
www.nwhm.org/resources/general/woman-suffrage-movement.

I used this article to learn about how each individual organization took its own path and had different ideas about how women's suffrage should be achieved. From this source I learned about the different views and opinions of suffragists and how the separation and joining together of these people lead to the movement being successful.

"Women's Suffrage Timeline." *National Women's History Museum*,
www.nwhm.org/resources/timeline/womans-suffrage-timeline.

I used this article to find many important details throughout the movement and I have included several quotes from this article in my paper. I also found specific dates and events that contributed to the 19th Amendment in this article. I also used this article to gather the basic outline of the suffrage movement.