The 19th Amendment: Women Get the Vote

Back in July 1776, the Declaration of Independence proclaimed that all men are created equal, but it didn't say anything about women.

That omission was surely not lost on Abigail Adams. A few months earlier, she had written her husband, John Adams, who was debating independence from England in the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, and urged him to "remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors." Otherwise, she warned from their home outside Boston, "we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation."

But it took another 144 years, until 1920, for America's women to be get that "voice or representation," in the form of a constitutional amendment that gave them the right to vote in all of the country.

The campaign for women's rights began in earnest in 1848 at a women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, N.Y., organized by 32-year-old Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other advocates. Stanton had drafted a "Declaration of Sentiments," patterned on the Declaration of Independence, but the one resolution that shocked even some of her supporters was a demand for equal voting rights, also known as universal suffrage.

Stanton was joined in her campaign by Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Lucretia Mott, and other crusaders. Some were militant. Many faced verbal abuse and even violence. Often women who were already active in the abolitionist movement and temperance campaigns (which urged abstinence from alcohol) enlisted in the fight for voting rights too.

But the suffrage movement was slowly gaining support. With more women graduating from high school, going to college, and working outside the home, many Americans began asking: Why couldn't women vote?

There was plenty of opposition: Democrats feared women would support the Republican Party, which was the more socially progressive party during this period. The liquor industry, concerned that many women supported Prohibition, also opposed women's suffrage.

However, in 1913, eight thousand suffragists marched from the U.S. Capitol past the White House. Most of the women, organized into marching units walking three across and accompanied by suffrage floats, were in costume, most in white. Organizers of the parade, led by suffragists Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, planned the parade for the day prior to Wilson's first inauguration in hopes that it would turn attention to their cause: winning a federal suffrage amendment, gaining the vote for women.

After the March suffrage parade put the issue of woman suffrage more prominently into the public eye, and after the public outcry over the lack of police protection helped increase public sympathy for the movement, the women moved ahead with their goal.

In 1918, after much cajoling and picketing by suffragists, President Woodrow Wilson changed his position and backed the amendment. The next year, both the House and the Senate approved the amendment, and it was sent to the states for ratification.

By then, 28 states had already amended their own constitutions to permit women to vote, at least for President, and supporters of the federal amendment predicted victory. Within a little more than a year, 35 of the required 36 states had voted for ratification.

Many of the other political and social changes sought by suffragists in the 19th century took longer. A proposed Equal Rights Amendment, stipulating equal treatment of the sexes under the law, failed to become part of the Constitution after it was passed by Congress in 1972 but ratified by only 35 of the necessary 38 states.
A Three-Part Strategy For Suffrage

The leaders of the suffrage movement tried three different approaches to achieve their objective. First, they tried to convince state legislatures to grant women the right to vote. They achieved a victory in 1869, when the territory of Wyoming granted the vote to women. By the 1890s, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho had enfranchised women, but after 1896, efforts in other states failed.

Second, women pursued court cases to test the 14th Amendment, which declared that states denying their male citizens the right to vote would lose congressional representation. Weren’t the women citizens too? In 1871 and 1872, Susan B. Anthony and other women attempted to get the Supreme Court to answer that question by making at least 150 attempts to vote in 10 states and the District of Columbia. When the Supreme Court ruled in 1875 on the relationship between the 14th Amendment and women’s suffrage, the justices agreed that women were indeed citizens – but citizenship did not automatically confer the right to vote.

Third, women pushed for a national constitutional amendment that would grant women the right to vote. In 1878, Anthony persuaded Senator Aaron Sargent of California to introduce an amendment that read, “The rights of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.” Although a Senate committee killed the Anthony amendment, women activists lobbied for the next 18 years to have it reintroduced. On the rare occasions when the bill reached the floor for a vote, the senators invariably rejected it.

Despite this three-pronged approach, the campaign for women suffrage achieved only modest success for a long time. Many people believed that the women should be satisfied with allowing each state to decide whether or not to allow women to vote. However, suffrage leaders knew that unless a law was passed at the federal level, women’s rights could continue to be limited. After the turn of the century, newly invigorated methods of promoting the cause finally succeeded in 1920 with the passage of the 19th Amendment.

Political Cartoon: “How It Would Be If Some Ladies Had Their Own Way”
WOMEN IN THE HOME

We are forever being told that the place for women is in the HOME. Well, so be it. But what do we expect of her in the home? Merely to stay in the home is not enough. She is a failure unless she does certain things for the home. She must make the home minister, as far as her means allow, to the health and welfare, moral as well as physical, of her family, and especially of her children. She, more than anyone else, is held responsible for what they become.

SHE is responsible for the cleanliness of her house.
SHE is responsible for the wholesomeness of the food
SHE is responsible for the children’s health.
SHE, above all is responsible for their morals, for their sense of truth, of honesty and decency, for what they turn out to be.

How Far Can the Mother Control These Things?

She can clean her own rooms, BUT if the neighbors are allowed to live in filth, she cannot keep her rooms from being filled with bad air and smells, or from being infested with vermin.

She can cook her food well, BUT if dealers are permitted to sell poor food, unclean milk or stale eggs, she cannot make the food wholesome for her children.

She can care for her own plumbing and the refuse of her own home, BUT if the plumbing in the rest of the house is unsanitary, if garbage accumulates and the halls and stairs are left dirty, she cannot protect her children from the sickness and infection that these conditions bring.

She can take every care to avoid fire, BUT if the house has been badly built, if the fire-escapes are insufficient or not fire-proof, she cannot guard her children from the horrors of being maimed or killed by fire.

She can open her windows to give her children the air that we are told is so necessary, BUT if the air is laden with infection, with tuberculosis and other contagious diseases, she cannot protect her children from this danger.

She can send her children out for air and exercise, BUT if the conditions that surround them on the streets are immoral and degrading, she cannot protect them from these dangers.

ALONE, she CANNOT make these things right. WHO or WHAT can?

THE CITY can do it: the CITY GOVERNMENT that is elected BY THE PEOPLE, to take care of the interest of THE PEOPLE.

And who decides what the city government shall do?
FIRST, the officials of the government; and
SECOND, those who elect them.

DO THE WOMEN ELECT THEM? NO the men do. SO it is the MEN and NOT THE WOMEN that are really responsible for the

UNCLEAN HOUSES    BAD PLUMBING    UNWHOLESOME FOOD    DANGER OF FIRE
RISK OF TUBERCULOSIS AND OTHER DISEASES
IMMORAL INFLUENCES OF THE STREET.

In fact, MEN are responsible for the conditions under which the children live, but we hold WOMEN responsible for the results of those conditions. If we hold women responsible for the results, must we not, in simple justice, let them have something to say as to what these conditions shall be? There is one simple way of doing this. Give them the sane means that men have. LET THEM VOTE.

Women are, by nature and training, housekeepers. Let them have a hand in the city’s housekeeping, even if they introduce an occasional house-cleaning.

National American Woman Suffrage Association

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Why We Oppose Votes for Women

BECAUSE suffrage is not a privilege to be enjoyed, but if imposed upon women it becomes a duty to be performed.

BECAUSE we believe the men of the State capable of conducting the government for the benefit of both men and women; their interests, generally speaking, being the same.

BECAUSE women are not suffering from any injustice which giving them the ballot would rectify.

BECAUSE political equality will eventually deprive women of many special privileges hitherto accorded to her by man-made law.

BECAUSE the ballot in the hands of men has not proved a cure-all for existing evils, and there is no reason to believe it would be more effectual in the hands of women. It has not been in the States where it exists. In Colorado after a test of twenty-two years the results show no gain in public and political morals over male suffrage States.

BECAUSE equality in character does not imply similarity in function, and the duties and life of men and women should be different in the State, as in the home. Man's service to the State through government is counterbalanced by woman's service in the home.

BECAUSE woman now stand outside of politics, and therefore are free to appeal to any party in matters of education, charity and reform. We believe it would be to the disadvantage of the State and of woman to put this non-partisan half of society into politics.

BECAUSE the woman suffrage movement is a backward step in the progress of civilization, in that it seeks to efface natural differentiation of function, and to produce identity instead of division of labor.

ISSUED BY
The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage
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