

## Nineteenth Amendment

The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment marked the greatest expansion of democracy in U.S. history by granting women the right to vote as well as run for and hold office. The path to enfranchisement for all American women was long, enduring both group in-fighting and conservative political and ideological roadblocks. Once it passed in 1920, 26 million women voted in the Presidential election and by the 1980s, women outnumbered men in the voting booth.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment is now viewed in some circles as having been inevitable, but this is not so. Many women worried that in winning the vote they would lose protection as the weaker sex. Edith Wilson (1872-1961), wife of President Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), considered the suffragists repulsive, an ironic stance given that Edith Wilson functionally but illegally became the president after her husband's stroke in 1919. Anti-suffrage critics, both male and female, warned that women's duties were to family and home, not to political activism and that to give women the vote would destroy both the American family and female virtue. Other opponents, particularly in the South, feared the empowerment of black Americans, at the expense of white supremacy, that would result if Black women won the right to vote and thus doubled the number of black voters. Yet the supporters of suffrage have been distinguished. Abigail Adams (1744-1818), wife of second president John Adams (1735-1826), believed that women had no obligation to obey laws for which they did not have the right to determine.

The origin of the women's suffrage movement is tied to the abolition movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1840s Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) sought both freedom for the slaves and more civil rights for women. In 1840 she traveled to England to attend the World Anti-Slavery Convention only to be denied a seat because she was a woman. Stanton found a colleague and friend in Lucretia Mott (1793-1880), a Philadelphia abolitionist and suffragist. The two convened a Woman's Rights Convention in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York, where Stanton's husband had established a law practice. Among their agenda, the women who met in Seneca Falls wished to end slavery and the consumption of alcohol and promote peace. Some 300 people, women and men, attended the convention. Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) was among the attendees and gave a well-received speech. Stanton rose to demand the vote, which proved a more contentious line of discussion than any other at the convention. Two weeks later the women held a second gathering in Rochester, New York.

Teacher Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) read about these meetings. Not initially persuaded that women should vote, Anthony was surprised to learn that her parents and younger sister all supported extension of the franchise to women. Anthony befriended Stanton, who converted her to the cause of suffrage. Women, including former slave Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), petitioned President Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) to advocate suffrage, but his assassination ended this appeal. Some suffragists in the South, however, did not want black women or men to have the vote. Others worried that Irish and other new immigrants did not merit the vote.

In 1870 the National Suffrage Association convened its first meeting in Washington, D.C. conferees proposed that Congress pass and the states ratify an amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting suffrage to women. Only Senator Charles Sumner supported the suffragists. Victoria Woodhull won an invitation to testify before the House Judiciary Committee, where she advocated equal rights in general and the vote in particular. She believed that the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment granted women equality and therefore the right to vote. Congress replied that it lacked the power to extend the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to women.

In 1872 Anthony led a group of women to confront the men in charge of voter registration in New York, demanding that they be registered. The registrars complied, and these were the first women to vote in New York. The police arrested Anthony and her friends. Anthony wished that the U.S. Supreme Court would hear her case, though a state trial was held instead. Journalists covered the case sympathetically. Fined \$100, Anthony refused to pay. Public opinion held that the judge had mistreated her, denying her rights as a citizen. One woman, unlike Anthony, took her case to the Supreme Court in 1874. The court ruled that states, not the federal government, were charged with determining who could and could not vote.

The leaders of the suffragists could claim little success at the federal level, but some states, particularly in the West, granted women the vote. The People's Party, or Populists, were powerful in the west and promoted female suffrage. When the Populist movement faltered, Progressives took up much of the reform agenda, including women's suffrage.

By 1896 women could vote in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and Idaho. By 1910 this list extended to Washington, in 1911 to California, Oregon and Arizona, and in 1912 to Kansas. There are a number of reasons that western states were more likely to legalize the vote for women. First, westerners may have been more tolerant of expansions of liberty and more pro-women's rights than other parts of the country. Also, many western states were so sparsely populated that they could not ignore any potential voters, regardless of the state's relative feminism or lack thereof. The early enfranchisement of women in Utah, which was not a feminist outpost, is a good example of this theory.

In 1913 women organized a massive march down Pennsylvania Avenue to demand the vote, on the day before President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration. Helen Keller (1880-1968) was among the marchers. The crowd was full of hecklers, and when the police would not intervene, the Secretary of War dispatched the U.S. Army to protect the women. Even so, some 300 women were injured badly enough to require medical care. Alice Paul (1885-1977) the organizer of the parade drew criticism for catering to southern racism when black women were put at the end of the parade. Nonetheless, the parade was an immense success in that it garnered considerable attention for suffragists, so much so that Wilson arrived in Washington at an almost empty train station.

Some suffragists warned the congressional Democrats and President Wilson that women would not support them if they opposed female suffrage. Though identified as a Progressive, Woodrow Wilson, ex-president of Princeton University, governor of New Jersey and U.S. president in turn, was not eager to promote women's suffrage.

In 1916 suffragists created a new national party, the National Woman's Party (NWP), which was intended to be more radical than the existing National American Women's Suffrage Party (NAWSA). Seeking reelection in 1916 Wilson promised to support women in their quest for the vote, but after his election did little to make good on his promise. The NWP organized pickets at the White House in 1917. Called "Silent Sentinels," women stood quietly before the gates of the White House with signs promoting women's suffrage. Police arrested many of these women, who were then faced violence in jail. Women were jailed for long periods of time on the charge of "disturbing the peace." Some women went on a hunger strike to protest their treatment, and were force fed by authorities in a manner that can only be described as torture. Called "Iron Jawed Angels," the protesters mistreatment garnered increased support for the movement among the general public. These circumstances forced Wilson to move in the direction of women's suffrage. The House scheduled a vote January 10, 1918. The vote, 274 to 136 in favor of an amendment to the Constitution granting women the right to vote, was only a single vote above the two-thirds threshold.

The Senate set their vote on the nineteenth amendment for May 10, 1918. Paul calculated that women were two votes short of victory. On May 10 the Senate, aware that it lacked the votes, postponed it. On June 3, 1919 the Senate began in earnest to debate the House bill, passing it 66 to 30 the next day, two votes above the required two-thirds majority. On August 26, 1920 three quarters of the states ratified the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, when Tennessee voted, by one vote, to ratify the amendment. American women finally had the right to vote in local, state and federal elections.

Many of the women who were part of this movement did not live to see the enactment of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, but their work contributed to the success of the movement. With the vote American women came closer to having civil rights equal to American men, and America came that much closer to fulfilling it's promise of equality for all.

*Christopher Cumo*

**See Also:** Adams, Abigail; Anthony, Susan B.; Burns, Lucy; Catt, Carrie Chapman; Keller, Helen; Mott, Lucretia; National American Womens Rights Association; National Women's Party; Paul, Alice; Stanton, Elizabeth Cady; Seneca Falls Convention; Truth, Sojourner; Woodhull, Victoria; Women's Rights Movement

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## **Anti-Suffrage Movement**

The Anti-Suffrage Movement was an American and British late nineteenth century response to the national suffrage movement. The anti-suffrage movement had both male and female members. This political movement against women's suffrage began with the 1889 anti-suffrage petition created by British novelist Mary Ward. The predominantly female proponents who signed the petition were not against women having rights, but against women having the right to vote because they believed it would compromise their social reform and civic housekeeping activities.

In 1897, the New York State Association Opposed to Women's Suffrage was founded. Its followers were regularly updated with the movement's progress in the American newsletter *The Anti-Suffrage Review* and the British journal entitled *The Anti-Suffragist*, later known in the 1910s as *The Women's Protest*. The anti-suffragettes became serious opponents to the Susan B. Anthony Amendment (the bill proposing women's suffrage.) The movement became global with the creation of the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League in 1908.

Polls showed anti-suffragettes were in the majority during this era because they equated feminism with the doctrine of Socialism. They theorized that if women participated in the political sphere by having the right to vote would pull women away from their families, thus destroying the "natural" gender order and leaving the home unprotected. According to the counter movement participants, a woman's most important form of influence was her maternal role in the house. Helping the poor, influencing social change and focusing on womanly causes were activities accessible from the home and did not warrant the right to vote. Therefore, anti-suffragists contended that being a voting woman did not necessarily mean being a better wife or mother.

Since the ballot would allow women career opportunities and political power that could lead to less inequality, the anti-suffragettes also contended that these changes would result negatively impact women. Having the right to vote, they claimed, corrupted women rulers such as Catherine II of Russia and Mary, Queen of Scots. These anti-suffragettes believed women were biologically and fundamentally different from men and the world of politics was a dangerous space for women. The core belief of the anti-suffrage movement was that biology controlled each person's destiny: men needed to be active in the public space and women needed to work from the private or domestic sphere. Participants in the movement argued that the survival of the family, America as a nation and the human race depended on keeping the public and private spheres separate by gender.

While the anti-suffrage movement was generally a conservative effort, other forces played an important part in the movement. Socialist Emma Goldman and other radical thinkers contended that the inequalities between the sexes were such that voting would not solve the problem. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who rewrote the Bible as the Women's Bible, began to believe much the same in her later years. Because the Temperance Movement had so much

female support, brewers and saloon based organizations also opposed women's suffrage, reasoning that if women had the vote they would vote to ban alcohol sales. Other anti-suffrage activists pointed to Utah Territory, which had given women the vote, not as a nod to female political equality, but to increase the number of Mormon voters. Other critics worried that women's suffrage simply function to double married men's votes because their wives would vote as they were told.

Nonetheless, American women gained the right to vote with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 and the anti-suffrage movement's dire predictions of national disaster came to naught. Nonetheless, some anti-suffrage activists recast themselves as keepers of American conservatism, seeing suffrage as a dangerous plank of liberalism. This faction particularly opposed pacifists, or anti-World War I activists, instead embracing a fervent brand of patriotism that did not allow for dissent.

*A. H. Forss*

**See also:** Anthony, Susan B.; Women's National Anti-Suffrage League; Cult of True Womanhood; Equal Rights Amendment; National Women's Suffrage Association

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### **Ruffin, Josephine St. Pierre (1842-1924)**

Suffragist, philanthropist, journalist, entrepreneur and civil rights activist Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin was a champion of African American women's rights during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her impressive record of social justice work makes her one of the most under-appreciated women in American history.

Ruffin was born August 31, 1842 in Boston, Massachusetts, the fifth daughter and youngest of six children to John and Eliza Matilda (Menhenick) St. Pierre. Ruffin's mother was native of Cornwall, England. Her father John St. Pierre had a mixed ancestry of African, French and Native American. The St. Pierres were light skinned, but defined themselves as black Americans.

Though the St. Pierre family was well off, Ruffin encountered racism early in her life. She was originally enrolled in a private school, but six months later her racial background was

discovered and she was expelled. Refusing to accept racial segregation, Ruffin's parents enrolled her in integrated schools in neighboring Salem, Massachusetts. The state would sign legislation desegregating public schools in 1855 and Ruffin enrolled in Bowdoin Finishing School in Boston. In 1858, she married George Lewis Ruffin, the son of another prominent African American Boston family. The newlyweds left for Liverpool, England, but returned to the United States after the outbreak of the Civil War. During the war years, George attended Harvard Law School and Ruffin bore five children: Huber, Florida, Stanley, George Lewis, and Robert (who died during infancy).

During the war, Ruffin recruited African American soldiers and worked with the Sanitary Commission, a predecessor of the American Red Cross. In 1869, George Lewis Ruffin became the first African American to graduate from Harvard Law School. His career advanced as he served in the state legislature, Boston Common Council, and in 1883 he was appointed judge of Charlestown municipal court making him the first African American judge in the North. In 1870, Ruffin became a member of the Massachusetts Suffrage Association, and served on the executive board of the Massachusetts Moral Education Association. In 1879 she founded the Kansas Relief Association, an organization that provided economic assistance to former slaves who moved west.

Ruffin developed a national reputation amongst social reformers for her work. She caused many reformers to recognize the injustice of excluded black women from suffrage organizations. After her husband's sudden death in 1886, Ruffin dedicated herself full-time to the empowerment of African American women. In 1890 she began the *Woman's Era*, the first newspaper by and for black women. Ruffin financed, operated, and served as editor from 1890-97.

In 1894, together with her daughter Florida, Ruffin organized the Woman's Era Club, the first organization for African American women in Boston and the second of its kind in the country. The club promoted improvement for African Americans and provided scholarships for young African American women. In 1895, Ruffin organized the first national convention of African American women, in part to support Ida B. Wells-Barnett for her anti-lynching campaign. During the meeting the women created the National Federation of Afro-American Women. In 1896, this group merged with the Colored Women's League to create the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), with Ruffin serving as the first vice president. The NACW was the first of its kind predating groups such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Ruffin continued to fight for equality as she attempted to desegregate the General Federation of Women's Club (GFWC) in 1900. Despite the GFWC maintaining its segregationist position due to influential resistance from southern white delegates, Ruffin never gave up on her mission to create bridges between African American women and their white counterparts.

During her later years Ruffin helped found the Boston branch of the NAACP, the League of Women for Community Service, the American Mount Coffee School Association in Liberia, and the Association for the Promotion of Child Training in Atlanta, Georgia. She died in 1924 in

Boston. Ruffin's legacy is one of many firsts accomplished by an African American woman. She was able to forge unlikely alliances regardless of class, gender, or racial background to benefit all Americans.

*Robert L. Thornton*

**See Also:** National Association of Colored Women (NACW); Ovington, Mary: U. S. Sanitary Commission; Wells-Barnett, Ida B.

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