

FLASHBACK

**PRIMARY
SOURCE**

Learn more about women's suffrage. Go to junior.scholastic.com for a document from 1848 calling for women's right to vote.

HOW WOMEN WON THE VOTE

A century ago this summer, American women gained the right to vote. The road to the ballot box was a relentless battle that spanned generations. BY BROOKE ROSS



As You Read, Think About: What strategies did women use to win the right to vote in the U.S.?

During the presidential election of 1872, more than 150 women across the United States attempted to break a law they believed was unjust.

In Connecticut and Ohio, women tried. In Battle Creek, Michigan, Sojourner Truth, a well-known abolitionist who had escaped slavery, tried. And in Rochester, New York, about a dozen women tried—and succeeded in—breaking that law. One of them, a former teacher named Susan B. Anthony, was arrested and put on trial for her offense.

What was her crime? She had dared to vote at a time when it was illegal for women in the U.S. to do so. Anthony, one of the pioneering activists in the decades-long fight to secure voting rights for women, was found guilty and fined \$100—which she refused to pay. Her arrest was a turning point in the campaign for women's suffrage, or the right to vote. After her trial, many Americans were inspired to join Anthony in her cause, including a new generation of women who would take up the *crusade*.

Still, it would take nearly 50 more years of arrests, jailings, and demonstrations—including picketing outside the White House—to achieve change. Finally, on August 26, 1920, the 19th Amendment, which guaranteed women the right to vote, was added to the U.S. Constitution.



Susan B. Anthony was an early activist for women's suffrage.

This summer marks the 100th anniversary of that key date in U.S. history. Yet it does not represent a century of voting rights for *all* women. It would take several more decades before many women of color gained access to the ballot box. And even today, while record numbers of women are enrolled in college, have

high-powered jobs, and hold seats in Congress, many people say more work needs to be done in the fight for women's equality.

"The 19th Amendment was a victory in terms of recognizing women as fully participating citizens," says Lisa Tetrault, a women's history professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. "That was a huge barrier to strike down, but the work isn't over."

"Remember the Ladies"

Women's rights in the U.S. were being debated as early as the American Revolution (1775-1783). In 1776, Abigail Adams wrote a letter to her husband, future president John Adams, at the Continental Congress in Philadelphia. She urged him to "remember the ladies" in any new laws that he and other leaders wrote.

Yet women had no voice in the government that the Founders formed. The U.S. Constitution, written in 1787, did not guarantee all citizens the right to vote. Instead, it gave each state control over elections. At first, most states allowed only property-owning white men to cast ballots. At the time, a lot of people—many men

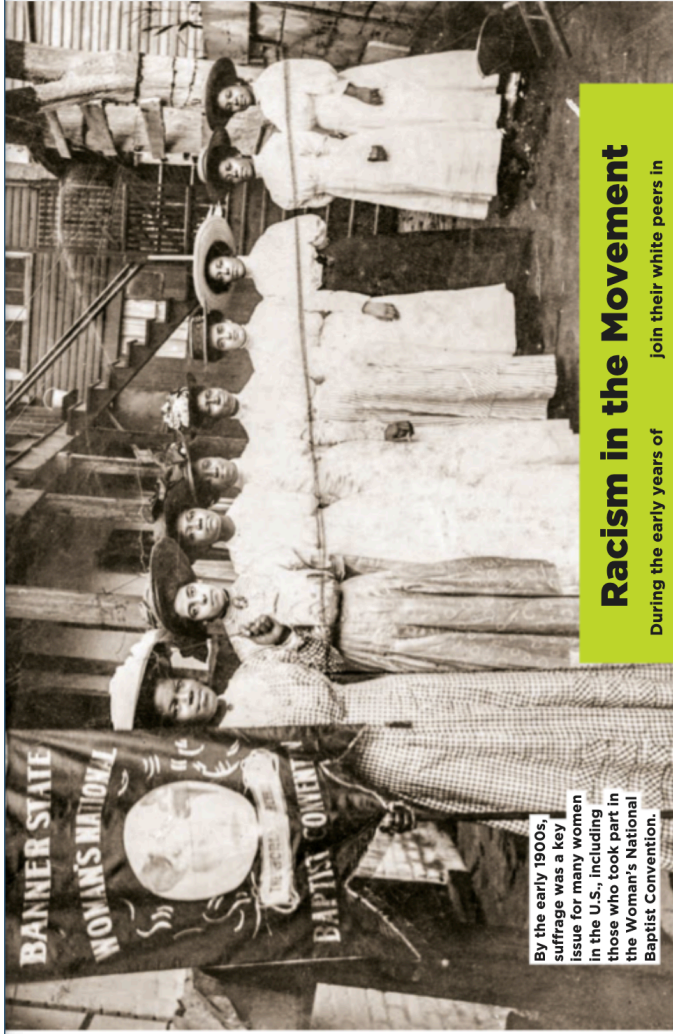


A group of women register to vote in Minnesota in 1923.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

NINETEENTH AMENDMENT

Added to the U.S. Constitution in August 1920, it says: "The right 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."



By the early 1900s, suffrage was a key issue for many women in the U.S., including those who took part in the Woman's National Baptist Convention.

and even some women—believed that women were unfit to participate in government. Some worried that if women could vote, they would neglect their families for politics.

A Complex Beginning

Women's suffrage started to gain public support in 1848, thanks to the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. There, the suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton made the first official call for women's right to vote. The suffrage movement that followed grew out of the campaign to abolish slavery. During the Civil War (1861-65), many suffragists, including Stanton and Anthony, worked closely with African American abolitionists like Truth and Frederick Douglass toward that shared goal. After the war, slavery was outlawed by the 13th Amendment. Now

Racism in the Movement

During the early years of the suffrage movement, African American women worked alongside white women to secure voting rights for all Americans. But after black men were guaranteed the right to vote under the 15th Amendment, that relationship began to splinter. No longer welcome in some of the larger suffragist organizations, black women formed their own groups, including the National Association of Colored* Women (NACW) in 1896. Through this organization, African American women campaigned for suffrage and other rights.

When African American women were welcome to

join their white peers in suffrage events, they often faced intense discrimination. For example, during a large suffrage parade in Washington, D.C., in 1913, event organizers told black women they had to march in the back of the parade. Ida B. Wells, a prominent journalist and NACW member, ignored the order. She defiantly marched with a group of white women from her home state of Illinois. Following the passage of the 19th Amendment, the fight for the right to vote ended for most white women. But African American suffragists continued their work to secure and protect voting rights for both women and men of color.

suffragists had a new mission: getting the vote for black men and *all* women.

But in 1869, Congress passed the 15th Amendment, which guaranteed black men the right to vote. This created a bitter division among suffragists. While many suffragists supported the 15th Amendment,

others, including Anthony and Stanton, were furious. They insisted that black men should not have received the vote before white women.

"It was one thing to oppose slavery but a very different matter to support the equality of African Americans," says Tetrault. "Many white people at the time who opposed slavery just thought slavery was evil. That didn't

mean they thought of African Americans as their equals."

Anthony and Stanton recommitted themselves to women's suffrage. They even drafted a suffrage amendment, which was sent to Congress in 1878.

Other suffragists, meanwhile, took a more radical approach. Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, founders of the National

But neither woman would live to see such an amendment pass.

The Fight Continues

By the turn of the century, a new generation of women had taken up the battle for the vote. Some of these suffragists, such as Carrie Chapman Catt, focused on achieving women's suffrage one state at a time by lobbying individual politicians. By 1914, women could cast ballots in 12 of the then 48 states. (This included Wyoming, which became the first state to permanently allow women to vote, in 1890.)

Other suffragists, meanwhile, took a more radical approach. Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, founders of the National



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KEY MOMENTS

Women's Suffrage



1848

Women's Rights Convention

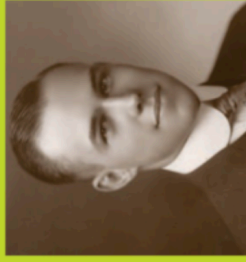
Organizers of the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, present the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions. It outlines several objections to the treatment of women in work and education, and calls for the right to vote.



1917

The Night of Terror

While picketing near the White House, about 30 suffragists, including Lucy Burns (above), are arrested and sent to a jail in Virginia. On November 14, guards savagely beat the women. Newspaper reports of the horrific treatment help win support for their cause.



1920

Harry Burns Votes for Suffrage

With one more state needed to ratify the 19th Amendment, the vote comes to a deadlocked Tennessee. Representative Harry Burns gets a letter from his mother urging him to vote yes. His vote breaks the tie, winning women suffrage.



Passage of the 19th Amendment made national headlines (left) and led to huge celebrations across the country (above).



Woman's Party, led thousands of women in parades in U.S. cities to draw attention to their cause. They also picketed in front of the White House, demanding that President Woodrow Wilson support them.

In these and other demonstrations, suffragists were pelted with food and harassed by angry mobs. Many women were arrested and jailed, and some were even beaten by guards.

Meanwhile, despite their forward-thinking efforts regarding the right to vote, some suffrage

organizations excluded black people. African American women were often forced to create their own groups, in which they too could fight for the vote—despite the increased barriers they faced. (See "Racism in the Movement," p. 17.)

Women across the U.S. took to the streets in celebration. And in the election that November, millions of women cast ballots for the first time.

Women Get the Vote

The tide finally started to shift in suffragists' favor in 1917, when the U.S. entered World War I (1914–18). As men went to fight, women took over their jobs on railroads and in factories.

Women's value to society was suddenly undeniable. Now President Wilson also endorsed women's suffrage. In 1919, Congress passed an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would guarantee women the vote.

But as with all amendments, three-fourths of the states had to ratify it. Some Southern states were opposed, but by August 1920, 35 states had approved the measure—one fewer than the 36 required. Finally, Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the 19th Amendment. It was signed into law on August 26.

While the 19th Amendment was a huge victory for women, it didn't break down voting barriers for everyone. For decades after, millions of African American women—and men—particularly in the Jim Crow South, were blocked from casting ballots. (White lawmakers often added obstacles such as difficult literacy tests and high poll taxes to keep black people from voting.)

Many people of color would not be able to fully exercise their voting rights until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which prohibited racial discrimination at the polls. And even today, some barriers to voting remain,

More Work to Be Done

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such as prohibiting former felons in some states from voting.

Still, women have come a long way since getting the right to vote. Today, women consistently cast more ballots in most elections than men. And they hold about a quarter of seats in Congress—a record high.

Overall, however, they are still under-represented in public office. The inequality doesn't end there. Although women make up about half of the U.S. workforce, they earn, on average, about 80 cents for every \$1 that men earn for similar work.

That's why, many people say, there is still more to be done in the struggle for women's equality.

"We often remember social movements as having triumphant finishes," Tetrault says. "One obstacle was struck down in 1920, but the fight isn't over." ♦

Write About It! Choose a woman mentioned in the article or one of the sidebars to research. Write an essay about her life, including the challenges she faced in the fight for suffrage.

PIC
FROM
THE
PAST

The ERA Battle



For nearly a century, millions of Americans have campaigned for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). That's a proposed addition to the Constitution that would guarantee equal treatment of men and women. In January, Virginia became the 38th state to ratify, or approve, it—a key milestone. (At least 38 states must ratify an amendment for it to be added to the Constitution.)

But the ERA's victory was only symbolic. The proposed addition is nearly 50 years old, and the deadline for ratifying it was in 1982. Battles over the deadline's legality are being waged in court. The ERA was

first proposed in Congress in 1923. Support for it grew in the 1960s during a movement to end discrimination against women. At the time, women were kept out of many jobs and many women couldn't get credit cards. Congress approved the ERA in 1972. Supporters pushed for its ratification, including at a 1981 rally, above. But only 35 states approved it in time. In recent years, three more states ratified it.

Some people say the ERA is no longer needed, as other laws now help protect women's rights. But most Americans support it and say the Constitution should specifically guarantee equality for women.