

1920: WOMEN GET THE VOTE

by *Sam Roberts*



Women who led the suffragette movement and fought for the right to vote

In 1776, Abigail Adams warned the Founding Fathers to "remember the ladies." Or, she warned, "We are determined to foment a rebellion. We will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation."

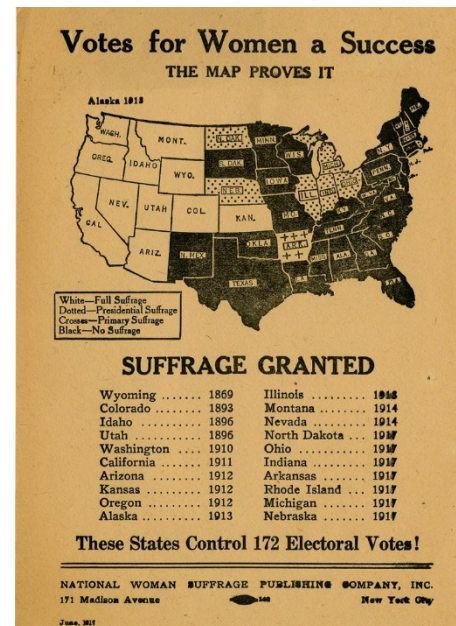
That summer, the Declaration of Independence was passed. It said all men are created equal. But it did not say anything about women's equality. It took another 144 years before in 1920, the 19th Amendment was passed. The 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote in every state. This amendment said the right to vote cannot be denied because of gender, and it was a long time coming.

"We are determined to foment a rebellion. We will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation."

"WOMANIFESTO"

In the mid 1800's, the movement for women's rights gained momentum. Women met at a women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York.

There, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote a "Womanifesto," which was patterned on the Declaration of Independence. It demanded equal voting rights, also known as universal suffrage. This shocked even Stanton's supporters, who were more focused on specific rights like equal pay. "I saw clearly," Stanton said, "that the power to make the laws was the right through which all other rights could be secured." Others helped Stanton fight for women to be able to vote. It wasn't easy. Women fighting for the vote experienced hardship, but they persevered.



This flyer was used by suffragists in 1919 to help gain support for the Nineteenth Amendment. The map it depicts shows the different levels of suffrage held by women in different states.

WYOMING IS FIRST

Women staged demonstrations and pressed their case state by state. In 1869, the Wyoming Territory gave women the vote. This likely occurred because there were very few women residing there. Hence, there was little danger that women could force their will on the many men that lived there. But this did add fuel to the movement for women's suffrage.

In the 1870s, a constitutional amendment was introduced in Congress supporting women as voters. After years, in 1887, the Senate voted against it. Women had not gained the right to vote nationally, so women across the country organized in protest. They protested each year and sent requests to Congress for a suffrage amendment. It forced Congress to keep talking about women's suffrage. Yet laws were not

passed requiring all women be given the vote. The women's voting movement was steadily gaining support. More women were graduating and working. Many Americans began asking: Why couldn't women vote? But numerous people were against it too.

In 1918, after many protests by suffragists, President Woodrow Wilson decided to support the amendment. He introduced new efforts to help the country pass the amendment. Both houses of Congress voted to change the Constitution, which then meant states had to approve. 35 of the required 36 states approved quickly, leaving the last vote to Tennessee in 1920. The vote was tied until Harry Burn, the youngest member, switched sides. Women celebrated.



Suffrage advocates threw the very first White House picket protest. For two and a half years, six days a week, they held up signs saying, "How long must women wait for liberty?" and "Mr. President, what will you do for woman suffrage?"

GRADUAL CHANGE

In 1920, women across America had the right to vote in a presidential election. But newly enfranchised women voted in much smaller numbers than men. Change came slowly. In 1972, Congress passed an Equal Rights Amendment that made it law to treat women and men equally. This amendment failed, though, after being approved by only 35 of the necessary 38 states. By 1980, however, women surpassed men for the first time in turnout for a presidential election. In fact, by 2024, 49 women had been governors, 151 women were members of the Congress, and the first woman was serving as vice president of the United States. Today, though, women continue to be paid less than men in many jobs. This means that women's rights organizations remain a powerful force for change that fight for the rights of women.

END