The Right to Vote - Draft Notes

Prof. Jonathan Cervas

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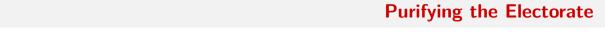
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 - generated recurrent conflicts, particularly between urban and rural areas
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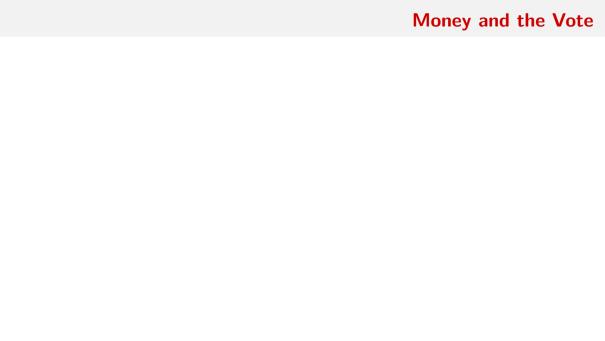
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- These were of two types.
 - First and most important were those that set out the fundamental qualifications that a man (or woman) had to meet in order to become an eligible voter
 - The second, of increasing significance, established the procedures that a potential voter had to follow in order to participate in elections
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- Economic qualifications continued to offer opponents of universal suffrage a direct and potentially efficient means of winnowing out undesirable voters
- The tax requirement had served two purposes
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- Overtly class-based economic restrictions were accompanied by legal changes expressly designed to reduce the number of "undesirable" immigrants who could vote
- Beginning in the 1890s, the nation witnessed the growth of a significant movement to restrict immigration altogether
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- Most states rejected alien suffrage proposals in the late nineteenth century
 - beginning with Idaho territory in 1874, states that had permitted non-citizens to vote began to repeal their declarant alien provisions
 - picked up steam in the wake of the depression of the 1890s and the assassination of President McKinley by an immigrant in 1901
 - it accelerated again during and after World War I, when concerns about the loyalty of the foreign-born contributed to a rare instance of wartime contraction of the franchise
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- Feared because of their willingness to work for low wages and despised for racial and cultural reasons, the Chinese had never been a significant political presence because they had almost always been treated as nonwhite and therefore ineligible for citizenship
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Educated Voters

A knowledge of the language of our laws and the faculty of inform- ing oneself without aid of their provisions, would in itself constitute a test, if rigorously enforced, incompatible with the existence of a proletariat.

- Charles Francis Adams, Jr. "Protection of the Ballot" (1869)

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Justifications for literacy tests

- illiterate men lacked the intelligence or knowledge necessary to be wise or even adequate voters
- 2 (aimed at new immigrants) English-language literacy was essential for the foreign-born to become properly acquainted with American values and institutions
- 3 tying voting to literacy would encourage assimilation and education, which would benefit American society as well as immigrants themselves

- An indirect and limited means of promoting a literate electorate was the adoption of the secret or Australian ballot.
- For much of the nineteenth century, voters had obtained their ballots from political parties
 - since the ballots generally contained only the names of an individual party's candidates, literacy was not required
 - all that a man had to do was drop a ballot in a box
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 - It was a standard ballot, usually printed by the city or state, containing the names of all candidates for office
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Increasing literacy tests in the North

- Opposition to literacy test was strong (outside of the South)
 - Northern Democrats, who counted the urban poor among their constituents, generally voted against education requirements
 - So too did politically organized ethnic groups, regardless of their party affiliation, which helps to explain why no English-language literacy tests were imposed in the Midwest
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- According to the census (which relied on self-reporting), there were nearly five million illiterate men and women in the nation in 1920
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Physical presence

-The notion that legal residence was tied as much to intention as physical presence inexorably led states to consider mechanisms for absentee voting + for men and women who were temporarily away from home but intended to return - The Civil War and the desire to permit soldiers to vote during the war severed the link between voting and physical presence in a community - World War I added a new urgency to the issue, since nearly three million men were inducted into the army - By 1918, nearly all states had made provisions for men serving in the military to cast their ballots, at least in time of war

Absentee voting (i.e., mail-in ballots)

- By the end of World War I, more than twenty states had provided for absentee voting on the part of anyone who could demonstrate a work-related reason (and in a few cases, any reason) for being absent on election day.
- Concerns about fraud generally were alleviated by tight procedural rules and requirements that absentee ballots be identical to conventional ones
- A conservative estimate would be that 5-10 percent of the nation's adult
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Keeping Track of Voters

- Before the 1870s in most states, there were no official preprepared lists of eligible voters
- Men who sought to vote were not obliged to take any steps to establish their eligibility prior to election day
- Between the 1870s and World War I the majority of states adopted formal registration procedures, particularly for their larger cities
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The devil is in the details:

- How far in advance of elections did a man or woman have to register?
- When would registration offices be open?
- Did one register in the county, the district, the precinct?
- What documents had to be presented and issued?
- How often did one have to register?
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 - when the Republicans were able to, they passed laws closing the polls at sunset on the grounds that illegal voting was most likely to occur after dark
 - the Democrats protested that "sunset laws" kept workers from voting, and when in power, they extended the hours into the evening
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Early Nineteenth Century Democracy

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 - depending on the state or city in which he lived, a man could be kept from the polls because:
 - he was an alien
 - a pauper
 - a lumberman
 - an anarchist
 - did not pay taxes or own property
 - could not read or write
 - had moved from one state to another in the past year
 - · had recently moved from one neighborhood to another
 - did not possess his naturalization papers
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- In the South, the abolition of slavery, coupled with the beginnings of industrialization and the com-pelling need for a docile, agricultural labor force, created pressures that overwhelmed fledgling democratic institutions
- In the North and West, the explosive growth of manufacturing and of labor-intensive extractive industries generated class conflict on a scale that the nation had never known
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 - What transpired in the southern states was far more draconian, sweeping, and violent
 - The disfranchisement was massive rather than segmented, the laws were enforced brutally, and they were always administered with overtly discriminatory intent
- In New York and Massachusetts, an illiterate immigrant could gain the franchise by learning to read; for a black man in Alabama, education was beside the point, whatever the law said
- That the redemption of the North was far milder than the parallel movement in the South was testimony not only to the significance of race but also to differences in the regions' social structures and political organizations

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 - Moreover, the existence of an already competitive party system, with elite and middle-class elements supporting each party, meant that efforts at wholesale disfranchisement (as was contemplated in New York in the 1870s) were certain to encounter fierce resistance and likely to meet defeat
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- Millions of people (most of them working class and poor) were deprived of the right to vote in municipal, state, and national elections
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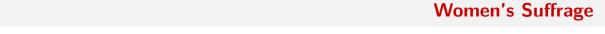
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Skipped pages 127-136



Why woman should vote?

Women did not seem (to men) to be endangered by their inability to vote Nowhere did the enfranchisement of women seem likely to vest Republicans or Democrats with any discernible partisan advantage Legal structure >- In 1872, Virginia Minor sued a St. Louis registrar who prevented her from registering to vote. She Claimed: > + Thev infringed on Virginia Minor's right of free speech, which was protected by the First Amendment > + they contravened the Fourteenth Amendment's command that states not abridge the "privileges or immunities" of citizens of the United States. >- Voting, the Minors claimed, was one of those privileges. >- Although the argument was a coherent one, the justices of the Supreme Court unanimously disagreed. >- Upholding a lower court decision, they ruled in 1875 that suffrage was not coextensive with citizenship and thus that states possessed the authority to decide which citizens could and could not vote

The era of maturity

- Suffragists lived in an era when a righteous cause—the abolition of slavery— that had triumphed over ferocious, entrenched opposition
- They had witnessed not only the end of slavery but also an extraordinary transformation of popular views and laws regarding Black suffrage
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No Federal Action

In 1882, both houses of Congress appointed select committees on women's suffrage, each of which recommended passage of an amendment. The amendment was finally brought to a vote on the Senate floor, where, to the great disappointment of suffragists seated in the galleries, it was decisively defeated in January 1887 by a margin of thirty-four to sixteen (with twenty-six abstentions), a far cry from the two-thirds positive vote required for passage No southern senator voted in favor of the amendment, while twenty-two voted against it After 1893, no congressional committee reported it favorably until late in the Progressive era

State action

Although the issue was debated in numerous constitutional conventions, and referenda were held in eleven states (eight of them west of the Mississippi) between 1870 and 1910, concrete gains were few The territory of Wyoming enfranchised women in 1869, a policy affirmed at statehood in 1889; Utah did the same in 1870 and 1896 (interrupted by a brief period when the federal government stripped Utah's women of the suffrage as a curious step in its effort to rid the territory of polygamy); and Idaho and Colorado granted suffrage to women in the mid-1890s

Partial enfranchisement

A significant number of locales—states, counties, and municipalities—where partial suffrage was adopted, permitting women to vote in municipal elections, on liquor licensing matters, or for local school boards and on issues affecting education The most common form of partial enfranchisement involved schools: legislatures, recognizing women's responsibility for childrearing, as well as their education experience, responded to pressure from the suffrage movement by permitting women to vote on matters affecting schooling Nearly all state legislatures considered adopting laws of this type, and by 1890, more than twenty states had done so

Challenges for the Suffragists

Many women themselves were either opposed, or relatively indifferent, to their own enfranchisement. The demand for suffrage was most resonant among middle-class women, women from families engaged in the professions, trade or commerce, and educated women who lived in cities and developing towns These were the women whose experiences and desires clashed most directly with traditional norms and who were most likely to seek the independence, autonomy, and equality that enfranchisement represented Farm women, living in greater isolation and in more traditional social structures, were less responsive to calls for suffrage as well as more difficult to mobilize into collective action

Additional challenges

The political pressure that suffragists could exert thus was limited by their numbers, too limited to overcome the entrenched ideological and psychological resistance of many male voters and politicians. The campaigns for suffrage generated organized opposition from some interest groups Machine politicians also were dubious about women's suffrage—in part for cultural reasons and in part because they always sought to keep the electorate as manageable as possible Conservative members of the economic elite who took seriously the proposition that women would promote egalitarian social reforms

- The South was particularly resistant to enfranchising women
- But, the West was unusually receptive.

 All of the states that fully enfranchised women in the nineteenth century were west of the Mississippi, as were most states that held referends on the issue Western suffrage.
- What seems to have tipped the balance in a handful of western states (as well, perhaps, as in western states that dominated the first twentieth-century wave of suffrage victories) was a combination of several additional ingredients.

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Western suffrage

Most western states between 1850 and the 1890s did not experience the massive growth of an industrial working class that triggered such an antidemocratic reaction in the East and Midwest The region's swing against democracy was more mild and emotionally focused on the largely male Chinese population

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Essentialist theme

Essentialist emphasis was reinforced by the increasingly common claim that women had distinct economic and social interests that could only be protected by possession of the right to vote. White middle-class suffragists placed new weight on the argument that the enfranchisement of women would compensate for and counterbalance the votes of the ignorant and undesirable

Changing strategies

In the South, of course, the American Republic was thought to be threatened not by immigrants but by Blacks It was argued that "the medium through which to retain the supremacy of the white race over the African" In both the North and South, the notion that women were the antidote to undesirable voters led many suffragists, including Stanton, to join the conservative chorus calling for literacy tests as a means of shaping the electorate Suffragists effectively abandoned the principle of universal suffrage in favor of increasingly popular class-based limitations on electoral participation

"the doldrums"

The period from 1896 to 1910 came to be known among suffragists as "the doldrums" Although the issue was raised repeatedly in state legislatures and constitutional conventions, there were no new additions to the suffrage column. In the South, the statistical argument was simply no match for the frenzied political circus that was disfranchising Blacks and poor whites in one state after another In the North, the parallel push for suffrage for educated women collided head-on with the powerful middle-and upper-class desire to shrink the electorate

Internal contradictions

Whatever its statistical validity, the anti-Black, anti-immigrant, and anti-working class argument in favor of women's suffrage was inescapably weakened by its own *internal contradictions* An **antidemocratic** argument in favor of enlarging the franchise could neither overwhelm nor outflank the simpler, more consistent conservative view that the polity should be as *narrowly circumscribed* as possible

Coalition building

The first decade of the twentieth century proved to be less a period of failure than of fruitful stock-taking and coalition building The movement became socially and ideologically more diverse, attracting both elite and working-class supporters to complement its middle-class base Female workers By 1900, roughly one fifth of the labor force was female, and many of these women held poorly paid, semiskilled jobs; in 1905. there were 50,000 women in New York's garment industry alone New emphasis on working women had both ideological and pragmatic attractions for suffragists. Female workers were described as "exemplars of independent womanhood" They were also vulnerable and exploited victims of industrial capitalism whose plight readily tapped the broad impulses of Progressive-era social reform

Class and gender

That suffrage would never be achieved until it had gained the electoral support of working-class men—which meant emphasizing class as well as gender issues Working women themselves, as well as their activist leaders, displayed new interest in acquiring the right to vote This arose in part because of their difficulty unionizing and winning workplace conflicts They were convinced that state intervention could ameliorate their working conditions and that such intervention would be forthcoming only if they were enfranchised

State-level Victories

Thanks in part to this convergence of working-class interest in suffrage with the suffragists' interest in the working class, the campaign for women's suffrage became a mass movement for the first time in its history after 1910 The movement also began to win some new victories. Washington permitted women to vote in 1910, followed by California in 1911, and Arizona, Kansas, and Oregon the following year; Illinois, in 1913, decided to allow women to vote in presidential elections and for all state and local offices not provided for in its constitution; and the next year, Montana and Nevada adopted full suffrage. In 1912, Congress expressly authorized the territory of Alaska to enfranchise women if its legislature so chose

New allies

In 1910, President William H. Taft agreed to address the annual convention of NAWSA That same year, a petition favoring a federal amendment, signed by more than 400,000 women, was presented to Congress In 1912, the Progressive Party endorsed women's right to vote, and in March 1913, Woodrow Wilson's inauguration was partially eclipsed by a suffrage parade of 5,000 women in Washington The following year, a Senate committee reported favorably on a federal amendment, and for the first time in decades a draft amendment was brought to the floor of Congress for a vote But, opposition remained strong, particularly in the eastern half of the country.

Southern resistance

By the latter years of the Progressive era, African Americans had been successfully disfranchised throughout the South, and most whites were intent on keeping it that way Politicians were loath to tinker at all with electoral laws, and they feared that Black women might prove to be more difficult to keep from the polls than Black men -because Black women were believed to be more literate than men and more aggressive about asserting their rights, and also because women would be unseemly targets of repressive violence Many Southerners were convinced that a federal amendment would open the doors to Washington's intervention in elections, to enforcement-so glaringly absent-of the Fifteenth Amendment and any subsequent amendment that might appear to guarantee the voting rights of Black women

The Nineteenth Amendment

President Woodrow Wilson declined to endorse women's suffrage, evasively reiterating his view that suffrage was a state issue The national Democratic Party was similarly unresponsive The Republican platform of 1916, in contrast, endorsed the cause, albeit in watered-down language 1916 election >- The 1916 elections set in motion two distinctive partisan dynamics that had surfaced periodically in suffrage struggles since the 1840s > + the first resulted from the partial enfranchisement of women: **some** women already could vote in all elections, and many could vote in some **elections** > + such circumstances gave women leverage to reward or punish politicians because of their (or their party's) stance on the Nineteenth Amendment > + The second dynamic was that of the "endgame," the dynamic of possible or impending victory: once it seemed likely or even possible that women's suffrage eventually would be achieved, either nationally or in an individual state, the potential political cost of a vote against enfranchisement rose dramatically

World War I

In 1917, the United States entered World War I The most critical impact of the war was the opportunity it gave suffragists to contribute to the mobilization The age-old argument that women should not vote because they did not bear arms was no longer applicable "essential to the successful prosecution of the great war of humanity in which are engaged. . . . We have made partners of the women in this war. Shall we admit them only to a partnership of sacrifice and suffering and toll and not to a partnership of privilege and of right? This war could not have been fought . . . if it had not been for the services of women."

Woodrow Wilson

Federal success The suffragists' able handling of the war crisis, coupled with continuing political pressure on Congress and the president, was rewarded in January 1918 The president, in an extraordinary address, announced his support of a federal suffrage amendment "as a war measure" The next day, the House of Representatives voted in favor of the Nineteenth Amendment: the victory was won by one vote, with the Democrats splitting almost evenly while more than 80 percent of Republicans voted favorably.

Convincing the Senate

The Senate, where antisuffragist southern Democrats constituted a proportionally larger bloc, took an additional year and a half to endorse the amendment After months of relentless political pressure and careful targeting of Republican and Democratic holdouts, the Senate-by a large Republican majority and a small Democratic one- finally came on board in the summer of 1919 State Ratification Ratification depended on winning virtually every state outside of the South and the border states Antisuffragists geared up for battle, denouncing the Nineteenth Amendment as a violation of states' rights and a giant step toward socialism and free love To no one's surprise, the South remained recalcitrant On August 18, 1920, Tennessee, by a margin of one vote, became the thirty-sixth state to vote positively on the amendment; a week later, after ratification had been formally certified, the Nineteenth Amendment was law

The Nineteenth Amendment

The Nineteenth Amendment Section 1: 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 Section 2: Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation

After ratification

It is a well-known irony in American history that politics did not change very dramatically after women were enfranchised The electorate nearly doubled in size between 1910 and 1920, but voting patterns and partisan alignments were little affected Women, moreover, did not rush out to vote in huge numbers: electoral turnout was even lower among women than among men

How things changed

Political life in the 1920s was not nearly as vibrant or energetic as it had been in the 1890s or the latter years of the Progressive era; despite the identification of women with social reform, reforms were few during the first decade that women could vote New issues, particularly those affecting women and children, were injected into the political arena, even if concrete reforms were slow to materialize The social welfare programs of the 1930s were colored by the concerns of the female electorate and often promoted by women who had cut their political and organizational teeth in the suffrage movement Franklin Roosevelt's appointment of Frances Perkins as secretary of labor (and as the first woman to hold a cabinet position) would not have happened without the Nineteenth Amendment

Southern power

The suffragists' prediction that the enfranchisement of women would not jeopardize white supremacy in the South proved to be on the mark Although some (but not many) Black women were able to register to vote, the Democratic Party remained firmly in power, segregation and Black disfranchisement persisted, and the federal government steered clear of voting rights issues for another four decades **Sex**, **thus**, **did not prove to be a significant dividing line in the American electorate**: some gender gaps in voting did occur in the early years (as well as more recently), but they were not large, and few issues sharply divided men and women.

How life changed

Women certainly were empowered by enfranchisement, and their lives consequently (if gradually) may have changed in a host of different ways, but they tended to vote for the same parties and candidates that their husbands, fathers, and brothers supported Class, race, ethnicity, and religion remained the more salient predictors of a person's voting behavior Why was there opposition The very absence of dramatic change after 1920 inescapably leaves one wondering what the adamant resistance was all about Why, given the rather placid outcome, did so many men oppose women's suffrage for so long? Why did it take women seventy years after Seneca Falls to become enfranchised?

TOWARDS UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE – AND BEYOND THE QUIET YEARS CHAPTER 7 TO BE ADDED Racial Tensions The South was a cauldron of racial tension in the 1950s African Americans pressed forward against the boundaries of America's caste system, demanding an end to social segregation and second-class citizenship Fighting for Rights Black citizens marched, rallied, boycotted buses, wrote petitions, and filed lawsuits to challenge the Jim Crow laws that had kept them in their place for more than half a century The widespread resistance to integration only underscored the Black community's need for political rights, but throughout the 1950s