

**The Suffragettes: Breaking Ballot Box Barriers**

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## **Introduction**

It was August 26th, 1920; A day of celebration for women all over America. This was the day the 19th amendment was added to the constitution, giving all American women the right to vote<sup>1</sup>. Not only had 137 years gone by before they were given the much deserved constitutional right to vote, but eighteen amendments had also been passed. Though this was a day of celebration, less than one hundred years before, the very notion of women's suffrage (women getting the vote), was a vague one indeed. After over a century of dismissal regarding the women's suffrage movement, how did women finally break the ballot-box-barrier that had been in place for centuries?

### **What was life like for women?**

Throughout history, women have been considered second class citizens. Women only had access to soft domestic occupations, such as teaching, becoming a maid, or becoming a nurse. Worst of all, after marriage, women were expected to give up their jobs and become mothers and housewives. In a marriage, men were in charge by law. Men could legally beat their wives with a stick or lock them up as they pleased. Divorces were extremely uncommon and frowned upon. If a woman was to divorce her husband, he would get full custody of their children, which added a life-changing complication to a woman's decision to divorce her husband.

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<sup>1</sup> The United States Constitution, what it says, what it means.

Just as the Cult of Domesticity states, (the cult of domesticity is what historians call the strict gender roles of the time) a woman's place was in the home, cooking, cleaning, sewing, and caring for children. Women of the time were expected to be religious, virtuous, pure and obedient to their husbands, for better or worse.<sup>2</sup> Not only did women have almost no divorce or custody rights, married women had no rights to their wages or property. Another appalling fact: half of the United States population still faced taxation without representation, something so many lost their lives fighting against during the American Revolution. Women needed the vote for themselves, their children, and for the sake of their ancestors.

### **What was The Seneca Falls Convention?**

In 1840, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, two women's rights activists of the time, met at an anti-slavery convention but were both removed due to their gender. They spent the evening together, discussing women's place in society and forged a long lasting friendship. Soon after, Lucretia Mott asked Elizabeth Cady Stanton to a tea party. At the tea party Mott, Stanton and the other quaker women's activists in attendance decided they would hold a women's rights convention on July nineteenth and twentieth 1848 at ten o'clock A.M. This would be the first women's rights convention ever held in the United States, and would be held in Seneca Falls, New York. This convention would later be referred to as the Seneca Falls Convention. Three hundred women and forty men attended this groundbreaking gathering, "A convention to discuss the social, civil and religious condition and rights of women,"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "HISTORY". *Youtube*, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/user/historychannel>. Accessed 10 Mar 2020. (what happened at Seneca falls)

<sup>3</sup> The Declaration of Sentiments.

It was at this convention that the Declaration of Sentiments was drafted. This document stressed eighteen of the wrongs women suffered in their day to day life; wrongs such as:

- The lack of property and economic rights for married women.
- Almost no access to higher education.
- Exclusion from society (politics, law, business and other 'worldly matters' )
- Taxation without representation, (being taxed without having the right to vote, which is just why America started a rebellion against England)

All the sentiments were signed and put on the declaration, by sixty-eight women and thirty-two men, that is all except for that of women's suffrage. The sentiment of women's suffrage was brought up by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, but Lucretia Mott was worried that people wouldn't take them seriously; after all, Lucretia Mott was twenty two years older than Elizabeth Cady Stanton and was, perhaps, more cautious than her younger comrade. Though the suffrage sentiment was not added to the declaration of sentiments, Frederick Douglass, an abolitionist of the time did side with Elizabeth, he too wanted freedom for all people.

Though the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments were supporters of the suffrage movement, after the convention many of them withdrew their names from the document, due to society's ruthless ridiculing. Newspapers featured pictures and comics of women beating men and other false, unflattering images. One newspaper went as far as saying that " equal rights for women is a monstrous injury to all of mankind." Even with society's voiced disapproval, the suffragettes

kept fighting for their cause and held a larger convention, at which the declaration of sentiments earned another 107 signatures<sup>4</sup>.

### **The Fight Continues**

As the fight for women's suffrage continued, there were more accomplishments and set-backs. On March 19th, 1860, Elizabeth Cady Stanton went to the New York Legislature to speak about the women's suffrage movement. Nine years after, The Women's Suffrage association was formed, with Elizabeth Cady Stanton as the president. The same year, Wyoming became the first state to grant women full suffrage! Now only thirty five more states needed to ratify the amendment before it could start the officialization process. <sup>5</sup>

As I mentioned before, women were at the mercy of their often drunken, and even abusive husbands, for better or worse. Women and their children were not safe until women's rights laws changed and/or alcohol was banished. This is why the Women's Christian Temperance Union was founded in 1874. Women sang on the streets, burst into saloons and did everything they could to protect themselves and their children. This was important to the suffrage movement because women were standing up for their safety. The Temperance movement, although it was partially for women's rights it also had notable religious purposes as well.

Even without having the vote, the women fighting for the temperance movement succeeded; the eighteenth amendment was ratified on January 16th, 1919 banning the trading and shipment of alcohol in America. Though this amendment was an accomplishment for the women's rights movement, the amendment went against the freedom that America stood for. The

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<sup>4</sup> "Seneca Falls Convention". *HISTORY*, 2020, <https://www.history.com/topics/womens-rights/seneca-falls-convention>. Accessed 24 Apr 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Sullivan, George. *Day the women got the vote*. Scholastic, 1994.

amendment was eventually repealed by the twenty first amendment to the Constitution on December 5th, 1933.

Over the course of the next forty six years, the suffragettes would continue their fight for the vote, convincing the other thirty five necessary states to grant women suffrage for the amendment to be voted on.

### **A Change For Women**

Women had started a reformation in the 1850s (they wore knee length dresses with pants under, they were called 'bloomers' and caused a scandal. That change in dress only lasted about three years), but this was a new and more powerful one. This time, women were taking their place in society and keeping it.

At this time, America wasn't the only country with active suffragettes, England was too. Though I have called all the early women's rights activists 'suffragettes', the actual suffragettes' society, founded by Emmaline Pankhurst, had not been invented yet. The suffragettes started in 1903, when Emmaline Pankhurst founded the Women's Social and Political Union: a group of women who used extreme tactics during their demonstrations, such as chaining themselves up to government building fences, breaking famous art and doing everything they could to get society's, and the government's attention. When the suffragettes were arrested they would go on hunger strike, refusing to eat and were force-fed (fed through a tube, straight down their throats). American suffragettes also took up the more extreme methods their British sisters used . Society was appalled by the harsh treatment of the women, they suddenly felt slightly sympathetic for them, these women were being scandalized, and in such a manner, it was unthinkable.

These women, these 'new suffragettes' were incredible. I quote my school librarian, Mrs. Thompson, "These women were not your average good girls." <sup>6</sup> It wasn't just the suffrage movement that was changing, women were proving their place in society by working; because of the Industrial Revolution, more jobs as typists were opening up. The typewriter opened new doors for women by providing them jobs. With women providing a new amount of labor to the workforce, they were proving that they were a valuable part of society. In other words, they were getting closer and closer to gaining a place in society and the right to vote.

As the suffragettes continued their demonstrations, more and more states granted women full suffrage. By 1915 twelve states had ratified the amendment.

### **August 26th, 1920**

This was the big day, the day the nineteenth amendment was added to the constitution, One woman, a supporter of the women's suffrage movement, asked her husband to leave her deathbed to vote for the amendment. The final tally for the women's suffrage amendment was 274 in favor and 136 people against it.<sup>7</sup> This is a brief overview of the accomplishments and landmarks in the suffrage movement:

1. 1848- Is when the Seneca Falls Convention and Declaration of Sentiments.
2. 1860- Is when Elizabeth Cady Stanton made a visit to New York's State Legislature to speak about women's suffrage.

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<sup>6</sup> Thompson, Nicole. Personal Interview. 2020.

<sup>7</sup> The day women got the vote- By- george sullivan, copyright 1994.

3. 1869- Is when the National Women's Suffrage Association was formed, with Elizabeth Cady Stanton occupying the presidential position. Wyoming gives women the right to vote.
4. 1874- The Women's Christian Temperance Union was founded.
5. Gradually, more and more states adopted women's suffrage.
6. 1915 twelve states had given women full suffrage.
7. 1917- Twenty thousand women marched for women's suffrage in New York City.
8. 1920-The nineteenth amendment is added to the constitution giving all American women the right to vote! <sup>8</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the suffrage movement was a long fight, filled with both challenges and eventually, glory. Fueled by the wrongs women had suffered throughout history, (and still suffer today), the suffragettes braved the dangers of breaking all the gender barriers in their way and eventually succeeded. They underwent force feeding, ridiculing and even imprisonment, but they persisted until they met their goal. They broke the gender and ballot box barriers of their time, and have shaped the future of all of America.

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<sup>8</sup> Sullivan, George. *Day the women got the vote*. Scholastic, 1994.



## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources

**Citation- Wilms, Jamie. "What Would Margaret Do-Women's Rights". *Molly Brown House Museum*, 2017, <https://mollybrown.org/margaret-womens-rights/>. Accessed 9 Mar 2020.**

This source was made in the middle of the suffrage movement, it shows the progress of the suffrage movement by 1913. It had lots of good facts, dates in which different states got the vote.

**"Image 2 Of National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection Copy". *The Library Of Congress*, 1852, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbnawsa.n7548/?sp=2>. Accessed 19 Feb 2020.**

This primary source was very helpful for direct quotes in the Seneca falls convention section, and to know the wrongs women of the time suffered. It was important to my website for the voices of the suffragettes to come through.

### Secondary Sources

**"Crash Course #31". *Youtube*, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/user/crashcourse>. Accessed 10 Mar 2020.**

This video was very informative and gave me a new take on the timeline of the suffrage movement, and on the government's views on prohibition. I would highly recommend it for any women's history project.

**"Eighteenth Amendment To The United States Constitution". *En.Wikipedia.Org*, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eighteenth\\_Amendment\\_to\\_the\\_United\\_States\\_Constitution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eighteenth_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution). Accessed 23 Apr 2020.**

Before reading this, I wasn't clear on when the amendment existed and when it was abolished, but after reading I understood. The facts from this source gave the Temperance section in my paper more information and depth.

**Fathers, Founding and Justicelearning.org. *The United States Constitution, What it Says, What it means*. Oxford, 2005.**

This source gave me a good explanation for what each amendment means. I also learned when each amendment came to be, and if it was repealed, when.

**Fritz, Jean. *You want women to vote, Lizzie Stanton?*. Putnam's, 1995.**

This source gave me a renewed perspective on Elizabeth Cady Stanton's life story. I also learned lots of good facts about her accomplishments, when she was born and others.

**"Gender Roles In The Nineteenth Century". *Youtube*, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnsuljxdW9I>. Accessed 21 Apr 2020.**

This video was very helpful for the 'what was life like for women' section. It not only tells you of the attributes expected in women's work, but also the traits women of the time were expected to have. It was a short, but informative video

**Gustafson, Melanie S. "Pankhurst, Emmeline Goulden." *World Book Student, World Book, 2020* [www.worldbookonline.com/student-new/#/article/home/ar412920/suffragettes](http://www.worldbookonline.com/student-new/#/article/home/ar412920/suffragettes). Accessed 17 Feb. 2020.**

This source was extremely clear cut and informative. I would recommend it if you are researching the suffrage movement in the UK or Emmaline Pankhurst.

**"History Of The Women's Movement". *Youtube*, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhMatTjdgZE>. Accessed 10 Mar 2020.**

This video was jam packed with facts about the women's rights movement, not just the suffrage movement. It gave me lots of specific dates that were important in my project.

**"HISTORY". *Youtube*, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/user/historychannel>. Accessed 10 Mar 2020. (what happened at Seneca falls)**

This video helped me a lot with the Seneca falls section of my paper. This video also gave great background information on gender roles in history to set you up to learn about the Seneca falls convention, which was very helpful for both the gender roles and Seneca falls sections of my paper.

**"Mytypewriter.Com - Your Source Of Classic Typewriters, Supplies, Accessories And Information.". *Mytypewriter.Com*, 2020, <http://mytypewriter.com/explorelearn/>. Accessed 9 Mar 2020.**

This source gives me information on the Industrial Revolution. Typing was a job many working women in the 1900s took up, therefore, knowing about typewriters is very important to my project.

**Sullivan, George. *Day the women got the vote*. Scholastic, 1994.**

This source was very helpful timeline-wise. The timeline in the back of the book gave me many of my important dates for the project and gave me a new perspective on the events that led to women's suffrage. The entire book was filled with information about the suffrage movement and the women's movement in general.

**"The Cult Of Domesticity". *Youtube*, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUZis01JaQo>. Accessed 21 Apr 2020.**

This video not only informs you of the cult of domesticity, but splits it up into sections. This gave me a deeper understanding of the cult, what it means and what was expected of women at the time.

**Thompson, Nicole. Personal Interview. 2020.**

This conversation gave me an even better perspective on how the suffragettes broke barriers. I quoted part of the conversation on page four paragraph two.

**"Lucretia Mott". *Biography*, 2020, <https://www.biography.com/activist/lucretia-mott>.**

**Accessed 23 Apr 2020.**

This source told me when Lucretia Mott was born. It gave me more background information on a key historical figure in the women's suffrage movement. It also helped me see her perspective because of age compared to Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

**"Civil War Facts". *American Battlefield Trust*, 2011,**

**<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/civil-war-facts>. Accessed 23 Apr 2020.**

This source gave me facts on when the civil war ended. It helped me be historically accurate on my paper.

**"Women In The 19Th Century: Crash Course US History #16". *Youtube*, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fM1czS\\_VYDI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fM1czS_VYDI). Accessed 21 Apr 2020.**

This video is very informational, and gives you the sides of many different groups of people on women's rights. It helped put historical context in my website in the lines of how radical the idea of women's suffrage was.

