

# The Woman Suffrage Movement 1848 - 1920

August 26, 2012, marks the 92nd anniversary of the Woman Suffrage Movement's great victory, certification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. This courageous political campaign, which spanned 72 years, was carried out by tens of thousands of persistent women and men.

The significance of the woman suffrage campaign and its enormous political and social impact has been largely ignored in the telling of American history. It is a story that needs to be told.

It is a story of women creating one of the most remarkable and successful nonviolent civil rights efforts the world has ever seen. It is all the more remarkable when one considers the barriers the suffragists had to overcome.

With little financial, legal or political power of their own, and working against a well financed and entrenched opposition, women fought for their rights of citizenship, the right to vote.

When they first organized to gain political power, women were a virtually powerless, disenfranchised class. Yet without firing a shot, throwing a rock, or issuing a personal threat, women won for themselves the kind of political power that revolutionaries elsewhere have launched violent rebellions to achieve.

To win the right to vote, women circulated countless suffrage petitions and gave speeches in churches, convention halls, meeting houses and on street corners. They published newspapers, pamphlets, and magazines.

They were frequently harassed and sometimes attacked by mobs and police. Some women were thrown in jail, and when they protested the injustice they were treated brutally. Still they persevered. Finally, on August 26, 1920, their goal was achieved. Women had won the right to vote and to hold elective office.

Carrie Chapman Catt, the last president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, reported that suffragists had undertaken:

"Fifty-six campaigns of referenda to mail voters; 480 campaigns to get Legislatures to submit suffrage amendments to voters; 47 campaigns to get state constitutional conventions to write woman suffrage into state constitutions; 277 campaigns to get state party conventions to include woman suffrage planks; 30 campaigns to get presidential party conventions to adopt woman suffrage planks in party platforms; and 19 campaigns with 19 successive Congresses...

It was a continuous, seemingly endless, chain of activity. Young suffragists who helped forge the last links of that chain were not born when it began. Old suffragists who forged the first links were dead when it ended."

The American Woman Suffrage Movement stands as a lasting affirmation of our country's democratic promise for it re-emphasizes the importance of the most fundamental democratic value- the right to vote.

## Suffragists You Should Know

**Lucy Stone (1818-1893)** An eloquent speaker, founder of the American woman Suffrage Association and leading spirit in New England, Stone published and edited the influential weekly, *The Woman's Journal*, for 21 years.

**Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906)** Symbol of the suffrage movement, Anthony was a strategist with sharp political instincts, the driving force behind the National Woman Suffrage Association, and single minded champion of a federal amendment.

**Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)** Brilliant women's rights leader and forceful writer, Stanton authored the 1848 "Declaration of Sentiments" declaring "all men and women are created equal." She and Anthony were political partners for 50 years.

**Sojourner Truth (c.1797-1883)** Born into slavery, Isabella Van Wagener changed her name in 1843 and began preaching against slavery and for women's rights. She is best remembered for her dramatic "Ain't I a Woman?" speech at the 1851 Woman's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio

**Carrie Chapman Catt (1859-1947)** With Anthony, Catt reorganized the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1890, and then unified the movement in 1916 with her secret "Winning Plan." Catt called for the formation of a League of Women Voters in 1919.

**Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931)** Wells-Barnett founded the first suffrage club of African-American women, the Alpha Suffrage Club of Chicago. She

marched in the 1913 Washington, D.C. parade and led a contingent of Black suffragists in the famous 1916 Chicago parade.

**Alice Paul (1885-1977)** Chief strategist of the militant wing, Paul founded the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage and the National Woman's Party. Organizer of the White House pickets in 1917, she was jailed three times and force-fed. Paul authored the Equal Rights Amendment.

**Nina Otero-Warren (1881-1965)** Her fluency in Spanish and English persuaded women in New Mexico to become suffrage activists through the militant Congressional Union, of which she was the advisory council's vice president.

## What do you know about women's right

- 1) In what year did women in the United States win the right to vote?
- 2) How many years of constant effort had supporters devoted to the woman suffrage campaign?
- 3) What suffrage leader was arrested, tried, and fined for voting in the 1872 election?
- 4) Which was the first state to grant women the vote in presidential elections?
- 5) Why were women arrested and force-fed in prison in 1917?
- 6) What was the margin of victory when the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was finally passed by the U.S. Congress?

### Answers:

- 1) 1920
- 2) 1848-1920=72 years
- 3) Susan B. Anthony
- 4) Wyoming, in 1890
- 5) They were arrested for peacefully picketing the White House for woman suffrage
- 6) Two votes in the Senate and forty-two votes in the House of Representatives.

## Want to Learn

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For specific information related to the Women's Rights Movement, visit the Resource Center section of our website and click on the Women's Rights Movement.

For more information about women's history, sign up on the home page of our website to receive women's history emails or order a free **2012 Women's History Gazette** available in our Webstore.

*The National Women's History Project is committed to recognizing and celebrating the diverse and historic accomplishments of women by providing information and educational materials and programs.*



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## Celebrate



**WOMEN'S**  
**Equality**  
**Day**  
**August 26**

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