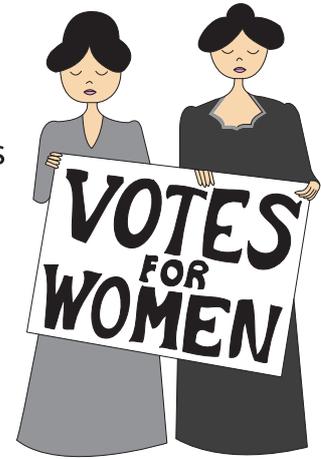


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# Women's Suffrage in the United States

by Liana Mahoney

When the United States became an independent nation with a democratic government, the people of the United States won the right to vote to elect their government leaders. This right to vote, however, did not extend to women. In the United States, women were not allowed to vote until the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was passed in August 1920.



The struggle to gain this right is referred to as the women's suffrage movement.

The suffrage movement went into full force with the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. About 300 people, including both men and women, attended this gathering in Seneca Falls, New York, to discuss the idea of women's rights. The convention was led by a Quaker reformer named Lucretia Mott, and 33-year-old Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Stanton and other reformers wrote a dignified speech that served as a declaration of women's rights. Entitled "The Declaration of Sentiments," it was modeled after the Declaration of Independence:

**We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...**

In the nineteenth century, American women were not allowed to own their own property, get a divorce, attend college, or vote. They were expected to get married, raise families, and be good housekeepers. Stanton wrote about these and other grievances in The Declaration:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world... He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise... He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she has had no voice... He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns... He has denied her the facilities for a thorough education - all colleges being closed to her...**

Although, at first, Stanton felt her voice shy and weak as she read aloud the Declaration, gradually her voice became stronger, as it would throughout the entire suffrage movement. There were five meetings during the two-day convention. At the last meeting, a vote was taken on each of the demands of the Declaration. All of them passed except for one - the right of women to vote. Many felt that this was just going much too far too soon. But when abolitionist Frederick Douglass spoke in favor of the right of women to vote, it also passed. Sixty-eight women and thirty-two men signed their names that day in support of the Declaration of Sentiments and women's rights.

The Seneca Falls Convention served to organize and propel the suffrage movement. One of the primary leaders of the suffrage movement, however, was not in attendance at this convention. Susan Brownell Anthony was a Quaker woman from Massachusetts. Quakers are members of a Christian group that opposes war and slavery and believes that men and women should be treated equally.

Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton met each other in 1851 and became friends for life. Susan was an excellent speaker. Since she was unmarried and had no

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children of her own, she was able to travel freely and plan gatherings to guide the women's rights movement. Meanwhile, Elizabeth, a wife and mother of seven, used her powerful writing skills to write articles, petitions, and speeches. Elizabeth knew how to find just the right words to motivate the masses of people who were now following and supporting women's suffrage.

Little by little, the suffrage movement reached new milestones. In 1854, Stanton and Anthony wrote a petition and presented it to the New York legislature to ask lawmakers to grant women equal rights. They were told no. But this did not stop them. They returned with more petitions over the next six years. Finally, in 1860, New York lawmakers passed a law granting married women in New York the right to own property. For the suffrage movement, this was a small step, but it was a step in the right direction.

Together, these two women continued fighting for women's rights, achieving many small steps along the way, and became the leaders of the suffrage movement. This movement would go on for another fifty years beyond the Seneca Falls Convention before finally realizing its goal of achieving the women's right to vote with the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony led a tireless movement in which they spoke to crowds, tolerated ridicules and name-calling, got arrested, wrote countless letters and circulated petitions, and continued to face many obstacles to gaining the right to vote. Neither Stanton nor Anthony lived to see the glorious passing of the Nineteenth amendment, but their hard work prepared other women to carry on with the cause, and ultimately shaped history. Today, Mott, Stanton, and Anthony are memorialized as the subjects of a statue in the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. The statue honors these courageous women who led the suffrage movement and worked for equal rights for women.

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## Women's Suffrage in the United States

- 1) What was the basic factor that inspired the 'women's suffrage movement' in America?
  - a. That, in all walks of life, women for long had been badly tortured by men.
  - b. That women are equal to men, and are endowed with equal rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
  - c. That women could play a more significant role than men in certain aspects of governance.
  - d. That men seldom consulted women while taking important decisions affecting their daily lives.

- 2) What does "Quakers" refer to?

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- 3) Describe the crucial roles played by Susan and Elizabeth in leading the suffrage movement and achieving equal rights for women.

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## Women's Suffrage in the United States

- 4) Complete the table delineating the important milestones, which ultimately led to the accomplishment of women's suffrage in the United States.

Year	milestone
1848	
1854	
1860	
1920	

- 5) Have you ever imagined what life would be like, if women were not as free as men? Write to illustrate this in a short paragraph.

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