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Women Winning The Vote: *Politics, Publications and Protests*



ARCHIVES

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Women Winning The Vote: Politics, Publications and Protests

So frequently, what might be seen as a relatively minor event becomes the pivot point in shifting the course of history. Mary Grew, an abolitionist and Quaker activist from Pennsylvania, was present at a June breakfast meeting between well-known Philadelphia abolitionist Lucretia Mott and Joseph Sturge, a British abolitionist and organizer of the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. The year was 1840. Mary Grew had accompanied her father, Henry Grew, a designated committee chair and delegate to the event being hosted by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. As would be reported in ***The Liberator*** later in the year:



Mary Grew, anti-slavery advocate

"When the committee just mentioned discovered that you had thought proper to appoint female delegates, (two of whom, Lucretia Mott and Sarah Pugh, were in attendance, and claimed an equal right with their brother delegates, to sit in the conference,) they sat in judgment upon your appointment, and decided that you had sent some representatives whom they could not recognize." [***The Liberator***, December 11, 1840.]

Not being recognized as delegates, the women were informed that they would not be seated with the larger body of delegates (as Mott's husband would be) but rather would be seated as spectators in the gallery. Ira Vernon Brown in writing Grew's biography tells the story this way:

*“On Saturday, 6 June, Joseph Sturge, who had masterminded the convention, breakfasted with the Pennsylvania women and begged them not to contest the decision of the London Committee denying them membership in the convention. “We endeavored to shew him the inconsistency of excluding Women Delegates,” Lucretia Mott wrote— “but soon found he had prejudged & made up his mind to act with our New Organization; therefore, all reasoning was lost upon him, and our appeals made in vain.” [Page 46, Mary Grew, *Abolitionist and Feminist, 1813-1896*, Ira Vernon Brown, Susquehanna University Press, 1991.]*

That relatively small indignity was sufficient motivation. Returning from that international event, Mott made the acquaintance of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the two women determined that they would plan and hold a women’s rights convention to make clear to the country the unfair treatment.

Eight years later, the following announcement appeared in the African American newspaper, **The North Star**.

“A Convention to discuss the Social, Civil and Religious Condition and Rights of Woman, will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel at Seneca Falls, New York, on Wednesday and Thursday, the 19th and 20th of July instant.

During the first day, the meetings will be exclusively for women, which all are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited to be present on the second day, when Lucretia Mott, of Philadelphia, and others, both ladies and gentlemen, will address the Convention.” [The North Star, July 14, 1848.]

Mott, writing modestly about her abolitionist work noted her attendance at that event in Seneca Falls in a public letter to **The Liberator**:

“While in Western New York, we attended two Conventions called to consider the relative position of woman in society—one held at Seneca Falls, the other at Rochester. The 'proceedings' have been published in the North Star and several other papers.

The attendance and interest manifested, were greatly encouraging; and give hope that this long-neglected subject will soon begin to receive the attention that its importance demands.” [The Liberator, October 6, 1848.]



Lucretia Mott, 1841

One particular line emerged from Mott's address at Seneca Falls, the sense of which would resonate over time, suggesting the amount of labor required before all women would be granted the right to vote in the United States, "We cannot expect to do much by meeting in convention, for those borne down by the oppressor, unless the oppressed *themselves feel and act*," It was a modest call to action, but one that would be supported over the following decades by a spectrum of activities, seeking to influence popular thought and culture via political organization, publications, and protests. The full text of the Seneca Falls manifesto was published in ***The National Era***, August 31, 1848.

The social reforms of aiding the poor, women's suffrage and the abolition of slavery were closely related in the minds of these women. As one correspondent to Amelia Bloomer's publication, ***The Lily***, wrote in 1849, "*the interests of the whole human family are so linked together that whatever is done for the elevation of one class effects all.*" In response to other publications decrying the value or intent behind the Seneca Falls event, Elizabeth Cady Stanton held up Mott in her *History of Woman Suffrage, Volume I* as an example of a hard-working activist focused on improving the lives of all those living oppressed lives:

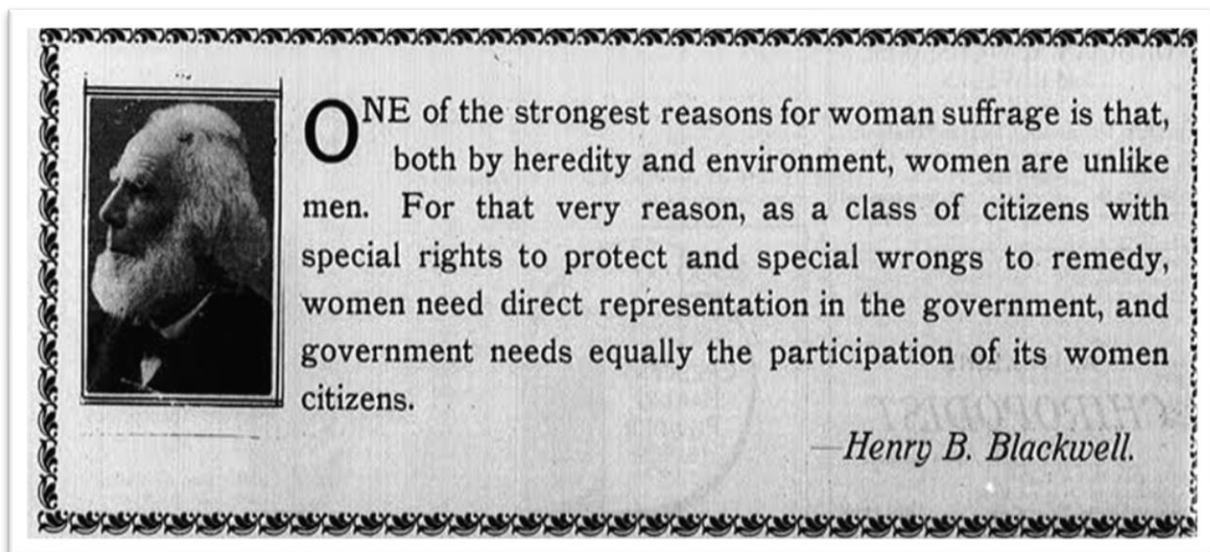
"The highly gifted Quakeress, Lucretia Mott, married early in life, and brought up a large family of children. All who have seen her at home agree that she was a pattern as a wife, mother, and housekeeper...Her husband and herself, having a comfortable fortune, pass much of their time in going about and doing good. Lucretia Mott has now no domestic cares. She has a talent for public speaking; her mind is of a high order; her moral perceptions remarkably clear; her religious fervor deep and intense; and who shall tell us that this divinely inspired woman is out of her sphere in her public endeavors to rouse this wicked nation to a sense of its awful guilt, to its great sins of war, slavery, injustice to woman and the laboring poor." [The *History of Woman Suffrage, Volume I*, Chapter IV, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Susan B. Anthony, 1881].

POLITICS

The Civil War (1861-1865) slowed the momentum of the early suffrage movement. In its wake, the expectation was that the movements, acknowledging equality before the law of women as well as enslaved African Americans, would move as a united group toward their goals. Political considerations however drove a wedge between the suffragists and abolitionists

when it became clear that the cultural opinion still saw the right to vote as being one extended to men, black or white, but not to women. One anti-suffrage article harshly mocked the work of Lucy Stone in one of her campaigns this way:

“Lucy Stone, in a recent dispatch from Kansas to her women's rights friends, said that the constitutional convention of that State then about to meet would establish "impartial suffrage, without regard to race, sex or color." Well, the convention has met— composed in part of negroes—and declared strongly against the right of white women to vote! So, Lucy and her friends are deceived in their new allies. The negroes don't consider white women entitled to the privileges they claim for themselves. Take your time, Lucy—don't get mad and throw stones at your new-fledged citizens and brothers. Perhaps you can coax something out of them when the weather gets warmer.” [**The 19th Amendment Victory: A Newspaper History, 1762-1922** from **The Vincennes Weekly Western Sun**, May 25, 1867].



[**The New Citizen (Votes for Women)**, July 1, 1910.]

The abolitionists would abandon the suffragists entirely in their efforts towards passage of the 14th Amendment (abolition of slavery in the United States) in 1868 and subsequently, passage of the 15th Amendment in 1869 which extended the right to vote solely to black men. In 1869, deeply disappointed, the suffragists themselves split over strategies to win the vote for women. Long time campaigners Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton would form the National Woman's Suffrage Association (NWSA) in pursuit of federal legislation allowing women to vote, while Lucy Stone would form the American Woman

Suffrage Association (AWSA) which would pursue a strategy of winning women the vote on a state-by-state basis. While it would be another twenty years before the rift would be healed and the movement re-united in the National American Woman Suffrage Association, the two-prong approach towards achieving the vote for women would continue into the beginning of the twentieth century.

Some of the bitterness caused by the split can be sensed in Elizabeth Cady Stanton's memorial to Lucretia Mott at her death. Stanton praised Mott's steadfastness and her important role in the NWSA.

"In 1869, Lucy Stone, with a New England following, seceded from the old organization, but Lucretia Mott and her noble sister, Martha C. Wright, remained steadfast with those who had taken the initiative steps in calling the first convention, and with the larger and more radical division her sympathies remained, being a prominent officer of the National Woman Suffrage Association at the time of her death." [The History of Woman Suffrage, Volume I, Chapter VII, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Susan B. Anthony, 1881].

The dual efforts to encourage the vote for women would continue with varying success across individual states for the next two or three decades.

In 1910, Lucy Stone's daughter, Alice Stone Blackwell would write about the success that woman had in obtaining the vote in the western states and in other parts of the world:

Loyal Wyoming.

"When Wyoming came into the Union, in March 1890, women had been voting in the territory for 21 years. Great pressure was brought to bear upon her citizens to induce them to leave woman suffrage out of the new Constitution. It was threatened that admission would be refused unless this were done. Wyoming's delegate in Congress made a strong plea for woman's political freedom but fearing the result he sent a message to the Wyoming legislature stating that to insist on woman suffrage might keep the state out of the Union. The following telegram was sent in reply: "Wyoming will stay out of the Union a hundred years rather than come in without woman suffrage." After three days' debate, the state was admitted by a narrow margin of six votes. Utah women had been voting 17 years when Congress passed the Edmunds law depriving all the women of that territory of the ballot. Utah at once asked for statehood, and

when she was admitted adopted a Constitution again enfranchising her women citizens.”

English and Scandinavian Women Will Vote.

“Women now have full political rights in four states of the Union, in three nations and throughout one continent. Partial suffrage has been granted them in fifty more states and nations. A man must be fact-proof who does not realize that all the English speaking and all the Scandinavian women will win full political rights within the present generation.” [The 19th Amendment Victory: A Newspaper History, 1762-1922 from *The New Citizen (Votes for Women)*, January 1, 1910.]

Blackwell's article included a timeline demonstrating the progress between 1837 when Kentucky had first allowed school suffrage to widows with children of school age to 1910 when the four states to which she referred (Washington, South Dakota, Oklahoma and Oregon) had ensured full voting rights to citizens of both sexes. The timeline indicates the international acceptance as well in Europe of the idea that women should be permitted to vote.



One More Couple!

[Cartoon from Blackwell's January 1 article, *The 19th Amendment Victory: A Newspaper History, 1762-1922* from *The New Citizen (Votes for Women)*, January 1, 1910.]

However, by 1911, only six of the 48 states in the Union had passed state legislation allowing women to vote. Frustrated by the slow process seen in that approach, Quaker suffragist, Alice Paul, whose own mother had been a member of the NAWSA, adopted a more radical approach. In 1913, to emphasize the importance of there being a constitutional amendment to

ensure the right of women to vote, Paul organized a spectacular parade in competition with the inauguration ceremony for incoming President Woodrow Wilson. The impact of that parade would bring significant attention to the suffrage cause and provide impetus to a drive for national acceptance.

As acceptance of the idea grew, publications such as **Frank Leslie's Weekly** (now owned and operated by Mrs. Frank Leslie) also covered the political shifts in a positive light. Noting that women were working their way through college degrees, at institutions such as Vassar, the **Weekly** cheered on the state-by-state efforts in 1915:

Women's Suffrage - Why Not?

Suffrage Fight in Four States

"WOMAN suffrage campaigns have been carried on this year in four Eastern States, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, where constitutional amendments granting the franchise to women have been submitted to the voters. New Jersey has already voted on the amendment with results not known at the time of this writing. The other three States will pass judgment on the question on November 2. In Pennsylvania the policy of the suffragists has been to work as quietly as possible. In the other three States they decided to concentrate their efforts on arousing the interest of the indifferent by all the agitation and education possible. Besides months of quiet house-to-house canvassing and the sending of millions of leaflets through the mail to voters, there have been hundreds of meetings held weekly and a steady succession of publicity "stunts." [The 19th Amendment Victory: A Newspaper History, 1762-1922 from Frank Leslie's Weekly, October 28, 1915.]



It was critical to the movement that educational efforts continue. Informing the public of the contributions made by women in American society, outside of what had for so long been considered the natural sphere, was clearly evident in these and other publications.

PUBLICATIONS

Newspapers were the form of media most influential for those advocating the rights of women to vote. As early as February of 1850, **The Lily** (which Amelia Bloomer had primarily launched in support of local temperance campaigns) was pointing out the inequity under which women were living. In an article headlined as Civil Rights for Women, ordained Unitarian Universalist minister Lydia Jenkins wrote:

“Women have always been deprived of as great a degree of civil liberty as has been enjoyed by men. But in the establishment of a government like that of our country, where “No taxation without representation” is a cherished motto, a government which claims to allow perfect civil liberty to all its citizens, it is a matter of surprise that the rights of women were not taken into consideration; at least that property held by them should be subject to taxation, while they are not permitted to exercise the right of suffrage—to exercise a choice to some extent in the appropriation of such taxes.” [**The Lily**, February 1, 1850.]

Without access to the ballot box, it was felt women would not be able to push through support for temperance and thereby eliminate a significant source of society's ills, contributing to poverty, domestic violence, and abuse.

Susan B. Anthony had launched her own publication in 1868, **The Revolution**, with equally high hopes of supporting the temperance movement alongside support for the suffrage movement. Her refusal to accept the advertising of alcohol and other spirits in the pages of **The Revolution**, however, meant that the newspaper closed after only two years of publication.

In 1876, when the country was moving to celebrate its centennial, an anonymous letter to the **National Citizen and Ballot Box** in its inaugural issue read:

“I was most glad, yes, fairly exultant, to learn that the Woman Suffragists of this vicinity are again to have an organ—not merely a department in some otherwise independent and non-committal newspaper, but an entire publication under their control. And what also very much pleases me is the knowledge that this new organ is to be under the same editorial management as was the old.

Every reform must, in order to succeed, have some means of communicating with the people at large. So long as this remains, the work will progress; but

without it, ground will be steadily lost. Neither books nor public lectures in behalf of a reform can supply the place of a newspaper devoted to its interests; for every number of such an organ will enchain the attention of its thousands of readers just when they are not fortified against its influence; and the aggregate of all its issues will be a power impossible to resist.” [**National Citizen and Ballot Box**, April 1876.]

Published through the Toledo Woman Suffrage Association, the success and value of this particular paper was quickly seized upon by the National Woman Suffrage Association as a means of influencing public opinion. Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote to inform the women of Toledo that:

“...I have found Western and Southern women deeply interested in our new demands, and all asking for some paper advocating our principles. As we had no really liberal, national journal, taking a fair view of the situation, without local prejudices and partialities, I could not heartily respond in recommending any until I saw the first number of the BALLOT BOX. Now, said I, here is a paper to meet the demands of Western women, and for those associations in the East that have no organ to herald what they do and say. We have decided, in the Executive Committee, to make the BALLOT BOX the organ of the National Woman Suffrage Association...” [**National Citizen and Ballot Box**, August 1876.]

Hard on the heels of what Alice Stone Blackwell had written in **The New Citizen** in 1910 about the campaign in Washington State to give women the vote, **The Western Woman Voter** in 1911 applauded the passage of the suffrage amendment in every county:

“Thirteen constitutional amendments have been submitted to the people of Washington. Five of these have been passed. The affirmative vote on three of them was about one-third the total vote and on the fourth about one-eighth. The woman suffrage amendment, however, carried by the largest vote ever given an amendment in the state. It received 52,299 votes in a total of about 138,000, the largest favorable percentage any amendment to our constitution can boast.”

A paragraph or two further down the page appears a counter-view:

“Mrs. Charles B. Penrose, leader of the Pennsylvania Association Opposed to Suffrage, is not at all disconcerted by the accession of suffrage in the State of Washington. “What the Western people think or do matters very little in America,” she states. “If it were Pennsylvania, that would be another story.” From **The 19th Amendment Victory: A Newspaper History, 1762-1922** from **The Western Woman Voter**, January 1, 1911.]

Even the advertisements in these publications emphasized awareness of the suffrage movement.

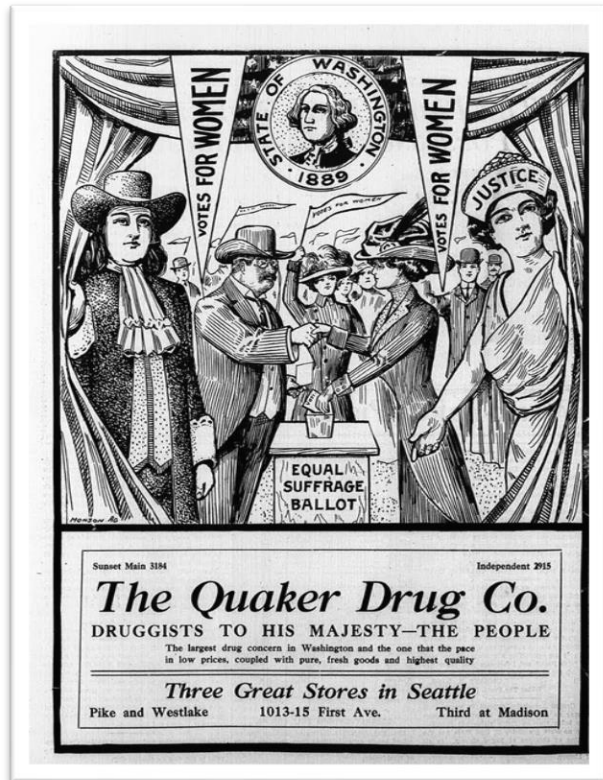
As might be imagined, the anti-suffrage movement was also using the media to campaign against women's suffrage at both the local as well as the national level. As national legislation began to develop momentum, **The Remonstrance** in 1913 took delight in explaining to suffragists the challenges that lay before them in attempting to get an Amendment passed through the House and the Senate, claiming:

“THE suffragists have allowed themselves to become unduly exuberant over the favorable report of the Woman Suffrage Committee of the United States Senate upon the proposed suffrage amendment to the federal Constitution.

This favorable report had no significance.

The Senate Committee did simply what it was appointed to do. Five of the nine members—Senator Thomas of Colorado, Senator Chamberlain of Oregon, Senator Ashurst of Arizona, Senator Sutherland of Utah and Senator Jones of Washington—are Senators from suffrage states, and it was a foregone conclusion that they would vote for the suffrage amendment. So far as their votes are concerned, the hearings before the Committee might as well have been dispensed with. But before woman suffrage can be incorporated in the Constitution of the United States, it must receive

First, the favorable vote of two-thirds of the members of the House of Representatives.



[**The New Citizen**, October 1, 1910.]

Second, the favorable vote of two-thirds of the United States Senate.

Third, the approval of three-fourths of the state legislatures.

It is one thing that a handful of Senators from suffrage states should frame a report favorable to suffrage, and quite another that two-thirds of both houses of Congress and three-fourths of the state legislatures should be ready to incorporate so revolutionary a change in the federal Constitution. At present, only nine states out of forty-eight are committed to woman suffrage. The combined population of all nine is considerably less than that of the cities of New York, Chicago and Philadelphia.” [The Remonstrance, April 1, 1913.]

Frustrated by the lack of action, the suffrage movement began to seek greater notoriety through protests and picketing.

PROTESTS

In 1911, the National Woman Suffrage Association encouraged suffragists to respond to all charities importuning them for funding in the following way:

“Until women are enfranchised, efforts to ameliorate social conditions can be at best but crippled. Therefore, I have decided to give such time and money as I can spare to those causes only that will bring about the political freedom of women.” [The 19th Amendment Victory: A Newspaper History, 1762-1922 from The Remonstrance, October 1, 1911.]

The Association told its members that this slip, “if used in large numbers will have a marked moral effect,” and “will serve for propaganda.” The point was to boycott all philanthropic endeavors, however worthwhile the religious, charitable or humane cause might be until women were granted the legal right to vote. However, as women were still not in full control of their own financial security, the pinch could not have been as painful as was truly needed.

Another activist, Alice Paul, adopted a far more radical approach than had the earlier Quaker, Lucretia Mott. In 1913, to emphasize the importance of there being a constitutional amendment to ensure the right of women to vote, Paul organized a spectacular parade in competition with the inauguration ceremony for incoming President Woodrow Wilson. Roughly 8,000 to 10,000 women marched. Contemporary photographs of the parade show floats and bands with a closing set of tableaux to be performed in front of Memorial Continental Hall (just two blocks from the White House).



Alice Paul, American suffragist, 1918

The Remonstrance again took exception:

“For 125 years, the inauguration of a President of the United States had been conducted without any attempt to use that event for the furtherance of political propaganda. It remained for women who promise by their votes to show a more excellent way in government, to convert a time of serious dignity into spectacular parades. It was as a protest against this method of procedure that the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage established itself at Washington to direct public attention to some of the arguments against the enfranchisement of woman.” [The Remonstrance, April 1, 1913.]

Throughout President Wilson’s first term, the attempt was made again and again to force his administration to move on the question of woman’s suffrage. Wilson, distracted by the death of his wife and economic concerns for the country, proved impervious to such pressure. In 1915, Alice Paul issued this warning to members of Congress:

“The individual stand taken by any Senator or Representative, or any candidate for that office, does not affect our attitude in this contest. We are going to make it plain that it is political suicide for any party to ignore our demands or oppose the cause. We think we will make such a conclusive showing in the nine suffrage states that no party after that will oppose us.” [The Remonstrance, January 1, 1915.]



**Magnificent Parade of Women New York's
Great Suffrage Demonstration**

[Illustration from: **Women's Suffrage** collection, *The 19th Amendment Victory: A Newspaper History, 1762-1922*, from *Frank Leslie's Weekly*, November 11, 1915]

Fearful that winning a second term would allow Woodrow Wilson to again downplay the need to support and work for women's suffrage as World War I raged on in Europe, in 1916, Alice Paul took a step calculated to embarrass the President. Amid protests that such behavior was inappropriate and unpatriotic during a time of war, members of Paul's small political arm, the National Woman's Party, began to publicly picket the White House.

Initially, these "Silent Sentinels" were treated gently by the legal system, but as American engagement in the First World War continued, the treatment of the protesters became more harsh. Still, the women persisted.

In January of 1918, the U.S. House of Representatives began debate of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. The vote was a clear victory; 274 votes in favor of the amendment with 136 against. In June, the bill went to the Senate but failed. In November of that year came the Armistice, ending the war.

In a special address before Congress, Woodrow Wilson spoke before Congress and expressed support for legislation that would extend voting rights to women. However, it made clear that this was still not his chief priority as immediately he left for Europe with the intent of building support for his proposed League of Nations. The women were again left on their own to drive support for the Amendment. A vote in the Senate failed in February of 1919, but another vote held early in June pushed the Nineteenth Amendment to final approval, 66-33.

Suffragist organizers needed to maintain their momentum to ensure a rapid process of ratification by three-quarters of the States currently in the Union. Thirty-six states had to vote in their state legislatures to accept the proposed Nineteenth Amendment if that success were to be achieved. Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Kansas, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Texas, Montana, Nebraska, Minnesota and New Hampshire had all agreed to the ratification by the end of September, while efforts in Georgia and Alabama had failed. By the end of December in 1919, Utah, North Dakota, South Dakota and Colorado had also voted to accept the Amendment. The most readily obtained votes to accept had been gathered in. Eleven more states would ratify the amendment in the first half of 1920, but the legislatures of South Carolina, Virginia and Maryland all rejected passage. Lobbying became raucously intensive in persuading six more states to ratify, but at the last and most unexpectedly, it was the State of Tennessee that finalized ratification.

Victorious at last, the following text was added to the United States Constitution:

“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. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”

It had taken women eighty years to achieve the right to vote. Lucretia Mott and Mary Grew had been fighting for the rights of others in 1840 when organizers refused to seat them as formal delegates at an anti-slavery event. Subsequent efforts by women working for their own needs and the ultimate good of the wider community made the victory possible in 1920.

PRINT WORKS CONSULTED

History of Woman Suffrage, Volume I, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Ida Husted Harper, Fowler & Wells, 1881.

Mary Grew, Abolitionist and Feminist, 1813-1896, Ira Vernon Brown, Susquehanna University Press, 1991.

ACCESSIBLE ARCHIVES COLLECTIONS USED IN PREPARING THIS WHITE PAPER

Accessible Archives provides diverse primary source materials reflecting broad views across American history and culture have been assembled into comprehensive databases. The following collections were utilized in composing this white paper.

African American Newspapers

This collection of [African American newspapers](#) contains a wealth of information about cultural life and history during the 19th and early 20th century and is rich with first-hand reports of the major events and issues of the day. The collection also provides a great number of early biographies, vital statistics, essays and editorials, poetry and prose, and advertisements all of which embody the African-American experience. These newspapers are included: ***The Christian Recorder, Weekly Advocate/The Colored American, Frederick Douglass' Paper, Freedom's Journal, The National Era, The North Star, Provincial Freeman, The Freedmen's Record***, and ***The Negro Business League Herald***.

The Liberator:

[This collection](#) comprises the complete collection of the weekly abolitionist newspaper printed and published in Boston by William Lloyd Garrison and Isaac Knapp. Religious rather than political, it appealed to the moral conscience of its readers, urging them to demand immediate freeing of the slaves. It also promoted women's rights, an issue that split the American abolitionist movement. Despite its modest circulation of 3,000, it had prominent and influential readers, including Frederick Douglass and Beriah Green. It frequently printed or reprinted letters, reports, sermons, and news stories relating to American slavery, becoming a sort of community bulletin board for the new abolitionist movement that he, more than anyone else, created.

Women's Suffrage Collection:

The [19th Century women's rights movement](#) built upon the principles and experiences of other efforts to promote social justice and to improve the human condition particularly the Abolitionist Movement. After the Civil War, many abolitionist activists joined the Temperance and Women's Suffrage movements. This collection covers much of the eighty years from the Seneca Conference to the ratification of the 19th Amendment. It includes newspapers that had some overlap between the temperance and women's rights movements, as well as an anti-suffrage paper -- ***The Lily***, 1849-1856; ***National Citizen and Ballot Box***, 1878-1881; ***The Revolution***, 1868-1872; ***The New Citizen***, 1909-1912; ***The Western Woman Voter***, 1911-1913; ***The Remonstrance***, 1890-1913; ***The National Standard: A Women's Suffrage and Temperance Journal***, 1870-1872; ***The 19th Amendment Victory: A Newspaper History***, 1762-1922; and, ***The 19th Amendment Victory: Books***, 1812-1923

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