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The Plight of the Suffragettes and their Enduring Legacy

The courageous suffragettes of the Women's Suffrage Movement of 1920 tipped over the first domino that led to an unstoppable force of female empowerment that spread across the world. Had women not rallied together to get the right to vote, the past 100 years would have been extremely different. Luckily, the protests and rallies of the suffrage movement were not only impactful, but also inspirational for years to come. While the amount of changes that resulted from the suffrage movement are vast, I will highlight three specific achievements which have greatly impacted today's culture.

1) Women Have the Ability to Stand Up for Themselves and Hold the Male Gender Accountable

We all know the suffrage movement spearheaded amazing things: women gained the right to vote, achieved a greater voice in politics, and were allowed more freedom in society. Perhaps one of the movement's greatest accomplishments was giving women the realization that they do not have to tolerate everything a man does. This enlightenment pushed women to demand justice for themselves and to hold men accountable for the lines they cross and laws they break. If the suffrage movement had never happened, women would not have had the influence nor the ability to hold assaulters accountable, much less have such a broad platform to encourage other women to do so. We see in books like *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne and *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller how throughout history, the male gender has been slapped on the wrist for their transgressions while women were shunned from society for doing the same or less. While laws have changed to keep men and women equal in places like the workplace, the social treatment of the two genders remains massively different.

Now, imagine: the year is 2020 and the Women's Suffrage Movement has never occurred. Finally, you can have a conversation without stumbling over your words to avoid accidentally saying "Me, too." In this hypothetical, those two words will no longer describe a powerful movement that let women have a voice about their experiences with sexual harassment and assault. When the #MeToo Movement rose to popularity, it showcased the enormous amount of men and women who had been sexually harassed or assaulted, as well as expressed to victims that they are not alone in their pain. This 2017 movement made people reconsider the definition of consent and empowered others to come forward about sexual crimes committed against them.

If women in the 1920s had never banded together to stand up for themselves, women in the 2010s might not have found the strength to either. This influential movement could have been nonexistent, which would have allowed sexual predators to wrongfully stay in positions of power. The suffragettes not only fought for their right to vote back in the '20s, but also for the rights of women in the future.

2) Women Are Able to Inspire Just as Much as They Accomplish

While there have been numerous strong female role models throughout history, the suffragettes from the Women's Suffrage Movement stand out the most to me. The women who campaigned for the vote were not academic geniuses or upper class socialites; they were regular, everyday women who decided to stand up for themselves. Their bravery and courage resonate with women today and show little girls that they have the power to do anything they set their mind to. Whether it be when Megan Rapinoe, a professional soccer player, fought to close the gender pay gap among athletes while simultaneously bringing home another FIFA Women's World Cup or when Sanna Marin, a 34-year-old Finnish woman, was sworn into office as the

youngest Prime Minister ever to date, girls can easily find abundant examples of female leadership in every part of our society. These role models would have otherwise been absent from our planet had women's suffrage never occurred.

Without the Women's Suffrage Movement, the world would have missed out on an incalculable number of leaders, scientists, writers, and athletes that have changed it for the better. One of whom is Swedish citizen Greta Thunberg, a climate activist whose valiant protests have brought attention to the deteriorating state of the planet. Having had "addressed heads of state at the U.N., met with the Pope, sparred with the President of the United States and inspired 4 million people to join the global climate strike on September 20, 2019, in what was the largest climate demonstration in human history", Greta has become the face of the worrisome issue of climate change (Time 2019). Her protests and calling out of political leaders for not sticking to their climate deals make her the main, if not the only, reason that climate change is such a big topic. At only 16-years-old, she has taken the world by storm, leading to her being named *Time's* Person of the Year and nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. "I will not beg the world leaders for our future. I will instead let them know change is coming whether they like it or not," Thunberg said. Unfortunately, like all successful women, Greta has received harsh criticism from those who think she should stop dealing with environmental legislation and do better things with her time that align more with the stereotypical teenage girl. Nevertheless, Greta remains undeterred as she continues to fight for the environment with a tenacity similar to that of a suffragette.

One of the things I admire most about the women of the suffrage movement is how they were able to keep a level head even when people around them did not. Even a simple walk down the street consisted of walls and windows filled with criticizing posters, detailing how insane and deluded a suffragette was. Those brave women had to listen to their own father, brother, or

husband tell them about how their ideas were unreasonable and a waste of time. It is safe to say that the suffragettes were more than familiar with being dismissed: a feeling that a lot of women still encounter today when doing things that men can do without question. However, no matter what they faced, the suffragettes persisted, and women today are more than ready to do the same.

3) Women Can Make a Big Impact in the Workforce

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg had a hard enough time becoming a lawyer in the early 1960s, even after graduating from Columbia University, tied for first in her class. Thus, you can only imagine how difficult it would be for a woman in the 1920s to enter into a similar profession. In fact, it was near impossible. Harvard Law School, where Ginsberg attended before transferring to Columbia, did not admit women until 1950. And when women were accepted into these schools, they were accused of taking a man's position only so they could get an MRS degree. Defined in the Urban Dictionary as "a marriage as a result of attending a 4-year university with the sole purpose of getting married", an MRS degree was the only reason most women went to college, seeing as there were not a lot of professions they would have been able to enter. A woman becoming a housewife and mother was the only career American colleges and society thought women were suited for. "Although women had other aspirations in life, the dominant theme promoted in the culture and media at the time was that a husband was far more important for a young woman than a college degree" (PBS News).

While women could not become lawyers in 1920, surely they could at least fulfill their civic duty and serve on a jury, right? Wrong. Only when The Civil Rights Act of 1957 was passed 37 years later were women given the ability to serve on federal juries. However, this was not the case in every US state until similar laws were passed in 1973 (AP News 2018).

While the suffragettes of the Women's Suffrage Movement did not gain full equality for women, they certainly played a huge helping hand in getting there. Yes, there are still a billion inequalities women encounter in the workplace in 2020 that probably either yourself or someone you know has faced. In fact, when my mom worked for her church as a children's minister in 2001, she was paid less than her male counterpart. When she shared this with me, she said that she did not think it was anything out of the ordinary until a friend encouraged her to fight for equal pay. Additionally, my grandma had to leave her job in the 1960s when she found out she was pregnant, being as that was a fireable offense in that era. If the suffrage movement had occurred a couple decades later than it did, the girls of today would have had to grow up in a world where blatant sexism was 100 percent backed by the law. Luckily, the suffragettes acted when they did, spearheading a change, albeit a slow one, that transformed the world into the one we live in today.

In conclusion, the spark lit by the suffragettes in 1920 has grown into a raging fire a century later. Now, sexual predators are being exposed and removed from positions of power, global issues are receiving attention that they originally would not have, and more women are entering the workforce, bettering the world, and inspiring young girls to do the same.

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