

The Women's Suffrage Movement

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The women's suffrage movement had a lasting impact on the United States, giving women rights and opportunities that changed the future of the country. Many do not often realize that the movement was not solely focused on voting rights. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, author of the Declaration of Sentiments, made the intentions of the movement clear at the Seneca Falls Convention, held in 1848. Among other things, women in the early 1800's to 1920's wanted emancipation from social constructs within marriage and the workforce. Black suffragettes, in particular, had to overcome the added obstacle of racism; while the movement protested for women's rights, white women would often reject the idea of suffrage for women of color. The women's suffrage movement, widely known as the movement that gave women the right to vote, also protested for marital rights and equality between black and white Americans and had lasting effects on generations to come.

In the nineteenth century, the publicity of the women's suffrage movement skyrocketed after the Seneca Falls Convention, where Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted the Declaration of Sentiments. The document outlined many of the suffragettes' grievances, including accusing men of "depriving [women] of all rights as a married woman...denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education - all colleges being closed against her" (Stanton 1848). These bold claims caught the attention of both supporters and enemies of the movement, sparking debate and protest across the country. Among these requests was the demand for women to gain the ability to vote, and this became the focal point of the movement. During the American Civil War, the women's suffrage movement lost publicity but was revived during World War I; women were put

into jobs that were traditionally done by men, allowing ex-housewives to prove themselves deserving of rights. This, along with countless peaceful protests, conventions, and marches, paved the way for the 19th Amendment to be ratified in 1920.

The fight for suffrage was a long and strenuous one. The methods they used ranged from peaceful practices to violent acts of protest. In an article titled "Women's Suffrage: Methods of Protest," Amy Jane Cohen writes, "Later, the Sentinels participated in the 'Watchfire' protests during which Woodrow Wilson's speeches were burned and his body was hanged in effigy" (Cohen n.d.). The Silent Sentinels, the first group to picket in front of the White House, hoped to galvanize lawmakers into creating a suffrage bill through their aggressive acts. As a result, many women were arrested while protesting. Later on, the public was outraged at the treatment of these women and called for justice, further giving the women's suffrage movement publicity. Though unusual, the methods women used proved effective in recruiting support for the women's suffrage movement.

Voting rights weren't the only thing that suffragettes were concerned with; black suffragettes in particular had to battle racism in order to have their voices heard along with those of the white women, often being left out of retellings of history. A prominent black woman who spoke out about this issue was former slave Sojourner Truth. In 1851, she delivered her "Ain't I A Woman?" speech, criticizing the treatment of black women compared to white women. In her speech, she states, "That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman?" (Truth 1851) Though this speech talks about black women, the message is clear that Truth wanted fair treatment for

black people as a whole. White people claimed women were delicate and helpless creatures who needed assistance, but she never received any assistance or special treatment because she was black. Truth was one of many who challenged the movement, met by disagreement but nevertheless persisting their journey to give black people the same rights as white people.

After years of hard work and dedication, people of all backgrounds and genders can exercise their right to vote. Though the women's suffrage movement seems like an ancient thing of the past, the harsh truth is that the 19th amendment was passed less than 100 years ago. Though the United States has changed drastically in such a short amount of time, it still has a long way to go in terms of equality. Today, many civilians and people in power still believe that historically oppressed peoples, like women, do not deserve the same opportunities as men; the archaic stereotypes about women and their "duties" as housewives still stand in the minds of many. On top of this, racism and xenophobia are prominent in today's society, with tensions regarding immigration and foreign countries running higher every day. Those who are educated about the women's suffrage movement are better equipped to make choices about their own lives and empowered to fight for their rights, reviving the passion that the suffragettes had to have a better future.

Reference List

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