



The Passage of the Nineteenth Amendment

Author(s): Steven Mintz

Source: *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 21, No. 3, Reinterpreting the 1920s (Jul., 2007), pp. 47-50

Published by: [Organization of American Historians](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25162130>

Accessed: 11/02/2014 19:04

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Organization of American Historians is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *OAH Magazine of History*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

The Passage of the Nineteenth Amendment

With an introduction by Steven Mintz

“The right of citizens of the United States shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex.”

Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Seventy-two years separated the original call for women's suffrage at the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, and ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, guaranteeing women the right to vote. Only two women who participated in the Seneca Falls convention were still alive when the Nineteenth Amendment went into effect.

The extension of the vote to women was achieved only after prolonged struggle, which included 480 campaigns to persuade state legislatures to adopt suffrage amendments to state constitutions; 56 statewide referenda among male voters; and 47 campaigns to convince state constitutional conventions to adopt women's suffrage provisions. Only one of the original 13 states allowed any women to vote. Between 1776 and 1807 New Jersey granted single and widowed women with property the right to vote. In 1838, Kentucky authorized women to vote in school elections, and many other states followed suit.

After the Civil War, women's rights supporters split over whether they should push to include women in the Fifteenth Amendment, which extended voting rights to African American men. In 1869, two competing organizations emerged, each with its own strategies and goals. The National Woman Suffrage Association, led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, favored a constitutional amendment giving women the right to vote along with divorce reform, property rights for women, and dress reform. The American Woman Suffrage Association, led by former abolitionist Lucy Stone, favored a state-by-state approach and a single-minded focus on suffrage.

The first breakthroughs for women's suffrage took place in the West. In 1869, Wyoming territory was the first government in the world to give women the vote on equal terms with men. It was followed by Utah, Colorado, and Idaho. In the West, support for suffrage was intermixed with a variety of seemingly unrelated issues. Some westerners favored women's suffrage as a way to attract settlers; others believed that it would attract women and help “civilize” the region. In Utah, suffrage

was related to efforts to maintain a Mormon voting majority within the state.

In 1890, the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association merged to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Instead of arguing for suffrage in terms of equal rights, the new organization's leaders contended that the vote for women was necessary to clean up politics and fight social evil. Some suffrage supporters made the ugly argument that giving the vote to women would guarantee that white, native-born voters would outnumber immigrant and nonwhite voters.

After 1900, the suffrage campaign developed a new, broader constituency, drawing support from many women who had received a college education or who held white-collar jobs. Beginning in 1910, seven additional western states adopted women's suffrage.

In 1915, Carrie Chapman Catt, a former schoolteacher, became head of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and developed a new political strategy to win the vote. Named the “Winning Plan,” it called for state laws that would give women the vote and for ratification of an amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Her strategy included the defeat of several key U.S. senators and the identification of supporters ready to lobby in every state legislative district in the country.

The two broadsides on the following pages present the arguments used to persuade men to vote in favor of women's suffrage. While some arguments were based on the notion that women deserve equal treatment under the law, others reflect the notion that motherhood made women particularly sensitive to corruption and gave them a special concern for education and children's welfare.

Meanwhile, a group of younger women, many of whom had received graduate education abroad and held professional jobs, adopted more confrontational tactics. Led by Alice Paul, a Philadelphia Quaker who formed the National Woman's Party, their strategies included picketing, marches, outdoor rallies, and hunger strikes in jail.

The combination of Catt's careful organizing and Paul's militant tactics helped make suffrage an inescapable issue. By 1916, a million American women already had the vote in national elections and were an influential force. Still, opposition remained intense. Some opponents

claimed that politics was too corrupt for women. Liquor manufacturers and saloon owners feared that women would vote to ban alcohol sales, while some business interests worried that women would vote against the use of child labor and for limitations on work hours.

In 1920, the United States became the twenty-seventh nation to give women the vote, after countries such as Denmark, Mexico, New Zealand, and Russia. World War I played a critical role in promoting women's suffrage, since it seemed to prove that the allies were fighting for democracy.

Women's suffrage had a big impact on politics during the 1920s. Women voters were more likely than men to attach priority to issues involving children, education, and health care. They also tended to be strong advocates of peace. Many of the issues that dominated American politics during the 1920s—education, the establishment of maternal and infant health care clinics, pacifism, and prohibition—reflected women's mounting political influence. □

Steven Mintz is John and Rebecca Moores Professor of History at the University of Houston. Additional material on the women's suffrage movement and other topics in American history by Steve Mintz can be found on the Digital History website at <<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu>>.

The Gilder Lehrman Collection, on deposit at the New-York Historical Society in New York City, holds more than 60,000 documents detailing the political and social history of the United States. For information on the collection and the educational programs and publications of the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, check online at <<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/>>, call 646-366-9666, or write to 19 W. 44th St., Ste. 500, New York, NY 10036.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE OAH
MAGAZINE OF HISTORY:
LINCOLN, SLAVERY, AND RACE



Image courtesy of Library of Congress, LC-USZC4-1526.

GUEST EDITOR
DARREL E. BIGHAM

CONTRIBUTORS
Historiography: Lincoln, Slavery, and Race
BRIAN DIRCK

Lincoln, Race and Slavery: A Biographical Overview
ALLEN GUELZO

Emancipation and Colonization
RICHARD J.M. BLACKETT

Lincoln and African Americans
THOMAS MACKAY

Lincoln and Race before 1858: The Key Documents
WILLIAM BARTELT

Images of Lincoln and Race, 1860-1865
MATTHEW MCMICHAEL

Lincoln and Frederick Douglass
TOM MACKAY

Emancipation: The Key Documents
JAMES PERCOCO

VOTES FOR WOMEN!
THE WOMAN'S REASON.

BECAUSE

- BECAUSE** women must obey the laws just as men do,
They should vote **equally with men.**
- BECAUSE** women pay taxes just as men do, thus supporting the government,
They should vote **equally with men.**
- BECAUSE** women suffer from bad government just as men do,
They should vote **equally with men.**
- BECAUSE** mothers want to make their children's surroundings better,
They should vote **equally with men.**
- BECAUSE** over 8,000,000 women in the United States are wage workers and their health and that of our future citizens are often endangered by **evil** working conditions that can only be remedied by legislation,
They should vote **equally with men.**
- BECAUSE** women of leisure who attempt to serve the public welfare should be able to support their advice by their votes,
They should vote **equally with men.**
- BECAUSE** busy housemothers and professional women cannot give such public service, and can only serve the state by the same means used by the busy man—namely, by casting a ballot,
They should vote **equally with men.**
- BECAUSE** women need to be trained to a higher sense of social and civic responsibility, and such sense develops by use,
They should vote **equally with men.**
- BECAUSE** women are consumers, and consumers need fuller representation in politics,
They should vote **equally with men.**
- BECAUSE** women are citizens of a government **of the people, by the people and for the people, and women are people.**
They should vote **equally with men.**

EQUAL SUFFRAGE FOR MEN AND WOMEN.

WOMEN Need It.
MEN Need It.
The **STATE** Needs It.

WHY?

BECAUSE

Women Ought To GIVE Their Help.
Men Ought To HAVE Their Help.
The State Ought To USE Their Help.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE PARTY

OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Headquarters: 30. East 34th Street, Southwest cor. Madison Avenue



Women's suffrage broadside (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLCo8963).

PLAIN FACTS FOR THE WORKING MAN

You know that your vote helps you to get better working conditions. Why? **Because it helps elect to office the men who can get you what you want.**

If you were to die to-morrow and your wife or daughters had to work, **they would need the vote for the same reasons.**

You love your family, but you are away all day at work and your wife looks after the children and the home.

Think what happens when the food supply has not been properly inspected, when there is cheating in weights and measures and in the quality of goods. **Your earnings are wasted.**

Think what happens when there are not enough schools or playgrounds. **Your children go without education and play in the crowded streets.**

Think what happens when housing laws are bad, and streets are filthy and milk isn't pure. **Your babies sicken and die.**

Think what happens when dance halls and theatres are not decent, and when unlawful sale of "dope" is carried on. **Your boys and girls are in danger of going wrong.**

Remember you haven't time to look after all these things, and your wife's complaints to the City departments that control them, **do no good because she hasn't the vote.**

And don't forget there are more working people in this State than any other kind. When you let the women vote, you will double your power for getting what you need.

THINK IT OVER

and

Vote for the Woman Suffrage Amendment

NEW JERSEY WOMAN SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION

Headquarters: 309 Park Avenue, Plainfield



N. W. S. Publishing Co., Inc.

Women's suffrage broadside (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLCo8962)

A Teacher's Guide to the Gilder Lehrman Collection Documents

1. In Steven Mintz's introduction he notes that suffragists offered two different arguments in favor of a woman's right to vote:
 - a. Women deserve equal rights, including the ballot.
 - b. Women will elevate politics and promote reform.

Examine both documents included in the reading and list two reasons supporting a woman's right to vote that reflect each of the two arguments noted above.

2. Are there any specific reasons listed in the two documents that would have won your support for suffrage? Explain
3. Of the two arguments (*Women deserve equal rights* and *Suffrage will promote reform*), which would you have most supported? Why?
4. How can we account for the fact that some women did not support a woman's right to vote?
5. Why is the right to vote considered one of the cornerstones of democracy? What arguments did proponents of women's suffrage advance?
6. If a 19th-century suffragist visited us today, would that visitor be pleased with the changes that have taken place in women's rights? Explain.