

Suffrage History

Timeline of Voting Rights

Document Date: 2022-01-31



The historical timeline for women's suffrage typically begins in the 1840s with the first Women's Rights Convention. However, the movement might be said to have begun with Abigail Adams's March 31, 1776 letter to her husband, John Adams:

*"...I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husband."*¹

In a democracy, an advancement in suffrage for any group is an advancement for all; therefore, we have also included milestones not related specifically to women's suffrage.

This is not an exhaustive list. More research is ongoing.

The information shown in blue below is from the National Women's History Museum website.² Sources are included for other information that has been added.

1776

Abigail Adams writes to her husband, John Adams, a delegate to the Continental Congress and later U.S. President, protesting the lack of representation for women.¹

1789

States are granted the power to set voting requirements. Generally, states limited this right to property-owning or tax-paying White males (about 6% of the population).³

1790

The Naturalization Act of 1790 allows free White persons born outside of the United States to become citizens. However, due to the Constitution granting the states the power to set voting requirements, this Act (and its successor Act of 1795) did not automatically grant the right to vote.³

1840

Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton are barred from attending the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London. This prompts them to hold a Women's Convention in the US.

1848

Seneca Falls, New York is the location for the first Women's Rights Convention. Elizabeth Cady Stanton writes "The Declaration of Sentiments" creating the agenda of women's activism for decades to come.

1849

The first state constitution in California extends property rights to women.

1850

Worcester, Massachusetts, is the site of the first National Women's Rights Convention. Frederick Douglass, Paulina Wright Davis, Abby Kelley Foster, William Lloyd Garrison, Lucy Stone and Sojourner Truth are in attendance. A strong alliance is formed with the Abolitionist Movement.

1851

Worcester, Massachusetts is the site of the second National Women's Rights Convention. Participants included Horace Mann, New York Tribune columnist Elizabeth Oaks Smith, and Reverend Harry Ward Beecher, one of the nation's most popular preachers.

At a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, Sojourner Truth, a former slave, delivers her now memorable speech, "Ain't I a woman?"

1852

The issue of women's property rights is presented to the Vermont Senate by Clara Howard Nichols. This is a major issue for the Suffragists.

"Uncle Tom's Cabin" by Harriet Beecher Stowe, is published and quickly becomes a bestseller.

1853

Women delegates, Antoinette Brown and Susan B. Anthony, are not allowed to speak at The World's Temperance Convention held in New York City.

1861-1865

During the Civil War, efforts for the suffrage movement come to a halt. Women put their energies toward the war effort.

1866

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony form the American Equal Rights Association, an organization dedicated to the goal of suffrage for all regardless of gender or race.

1868

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Parker Pillsbury publish the first edition of *The Revolution*. This periodical carries the motto “Men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less!”

Caroline Seymour Severance establishes the New England Woman’s Club. The “Mother of Clubs” sparked the club movement which became popular by the late nineteenth century.

In Vineland, New Jersey, 172 women cast ballots in a separate box during the presidential election.

Senator S.C. Pomeroy of Kansas introduces the federal woman’s suffrage amendment in Congress.

Many early suffrage supporters, including Susan B. Anthony, remained single because in the mid-1800s, married women could not own property in their own rights and could not make legal contracts on their own behalf.

The Fourteenth Amendment is ratified. “Citizens” and “voters” are defined exclusively as male.

Citizenship is guaranteed to all male persons born or naturalized in the United States by the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, setting the stage for future expansions to voting rights.³

1869

The American Equal Rights Association is wrecked by disagreements over the Fourteenth Amendment and the question of whether to support the proposed Fifteenth Amendment which would enfranchise Black American males while avoiding the question of woman suffrage entirely.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony found the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), a more radical institution, to achieve the vote through a Constitutional amendment as well as push for other woman’s rights issues. NWSA was based in New York

Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, Julia Ward Howe and other more conservative activists form the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) to work for woman suffrage through amending individual state constitutions. AWSA was based in Boston.

Wyoming territory is organized with a woman suffrage provision.

1870

The Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution prevents states from denying the right to vote on grounds of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

Disfranchisement after Reconstruction era began soon after. Former Confederate states passed Jim Crow laws and amendments to effectively disfranchise Black and poor White voters through poll taxes, literacy tests, grandfather clauses and other restrictions, applied in a discriminatory manner. During this period, the Supreme Court generally upheld state efforts to discriminate against racial minorities; only later in the 20th century were these laws ruled unconstitutional. Black males in the Northern states could vote, but the majority of African Americans lived in the South.³

NWSA refused to work for its ratification and instead the members advocate for a Sixteenth Amendment that would dictate universal suffrage. Frederick Douglass broke with Stanton and Anthony over the position of NWSA.

The *Woman's Journal* is founded and edited by Mary Livermore, Lucy Stone, and Henry Blackwell.

1871

Victoria Woodhull addresses the House Judiciary Committee, arguing women's rights to vote under the fourteenth amendment.

The Anti-Suffrage Party is founded.

1872

Susan B. Anthony casts her ballot for Ulysses S. Grant in the presidential election and is arrested and brought to trial in Rochester, New York. Fifteen other women are arrested for illegally voting. Sojourner Truth appears at a polling booth in Battle Creek, Michigan, demanding a ballot to vote; she is turned away.

Abigail Scott Duniway convinces Oregon lawmakers to pass laws granting a married woman's rights such as starting and operating her own business, controlling the money she earns, and the right to protect her property if her husband leaves.

1874

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) is founded by Annie Wittenmyer. With Frances Willard at its head (1876), the WCTU became an important proponent in the fight for woman suffrage. As a result, one of the strongest opponents to women's enfranchisement was the liquor lobby, which feared women might use their vote to prohibit the sale of liquor.

1876

Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joselyn Gage disrupt the official Centennial program at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, presenting a “Declaration of Rights for Women” to the Vice President.

1878

A Woman Suffrage Amendment is proposed in the U.S. Congress. When the 19th Amendment passes forty-one years later, it is worded exactly the same as this 1878 Amendment.

1887

The first vote on woman suffrage is taken in the Senate and is defeated.

Citizenship is granted to Native Americans who are willing to disassociate themselves from their tribe by the Dawes Act, making them technically eligible to vote.³

1888

The National Council of Women in the United States is established to promote the advancement of women in society.

1890

NWSA and AWSA merge and the National American Woman Suffrage Association is formed. Stanton is the first president. The Movement focuses efforts on securing suffrage at the state level.

Wyoming is admitted to the Union with a state constitution granting woman suffrage.

The American Federation of Labor declares support for woman suffrage.

The South Dakota campaign for woman suffrage loses.

1890-1925

The Progressive Era begins. Women from all classes and backgrounds enter public life. Women's roles expand and result in an increasing politicization of women. Consequently the issue of woman suffrage becomes part of mainstream politics.

1892

Olympia Brown founds the Federal Suffrage Association to campaign for woman's suffrage.

1893

Colorado adopts woman suffrage.

1894

600,000 signatures are presented to the New York State Constitutional Convention in a failed effort to bring a woman suffrage amendment to the voters.

1895

Elizabeth Cady Stanton publishes *The Woman's Bible*. After its publication, NAWSA moves to distance itself from Stanton because many conservative suffragists considered her to be too radical and, thus, potentially damaging to the suffrage campaign.

1896

Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Frances E.W. Harper among others found the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs.

Utah joins the Union with full suffrage for women.

Idaho adopts woman suffrage.

1903

Mary Dreier, Rheta Childe Dorr, Leonora O'Reilly, and others form the Women's Trade Union League of New York, an organization of middle- and working-class women dedicated to unionization for working women and to woman suffrage.

1910

Washington State adopts woman suffrage.

The Women's Political Union organizes the first suffrage parade in New York City.

1911

The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS) is organized. Led by Mrs. Arthur Dodge, its members included wealthy, influential women, some Catholic clergymen, distillers and brewers, urban political machines, Southern congressmen, and corporate capitalists.

The elaborate California suffrage campaign succeeds by a small margin.

1912

Woman Suffrage is supported for the first time at the national level by a major political party -- Theodore Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party.

Twenty thousand suffrage supporters join a New York City suffrage parade.

Oregon, Kansas, and Arizona adopt woman suffrage.

1913

In 1913, suffragists organized a parade down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC. The parade was the first major suffrage spectacle organized by the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

The two women then organized the Congressional Union, later known as the National Women's Party (1916). They borrowed strategies from the radical Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in England.

1914

Nevada and Montana adopt woman suffrage.

The National Federation of Women's Clubs, which had over two million women members throughout the U.S., formally endorses the suffrage campaign.

1915

Mabel Vernon and Sara Bard Field are involved in a transcontinental tour which gathers over a half-million signatures on petitions to Congress.

Forty thousand march in a NYC suffrage parade. Many women are dressed in white and carry placards with the names of the states they represent.

Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Massachusetts continue to reject woman suffrage.

1916

Jeannette Rankin of Montana is the first woman elected to the House of Representatives. Woodrow Wilson states that the Democratic Party platform will support suffrage.

1917

New York women gain suffrage.

Arkansas women are allowed to vote in primary elections.

National Woman's Party picketers appear in front of the White House holding two banners, "Mr. President, What Will You Do For Woman Suffrage?" and "How Long Must Women Wait for Liberty?"

Jeannette Rankin of Montana, the first woman elected to Congress, is formally seated in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Alice Paul, leader of the National Woman's Party, was put in solitary confinement in the mental ward of the prison as a way to "break" her will and to undermine her credibility with the public.

In June, arrests of the National Woman's party picketers begin on charges of obstructing sidewalk traffic. Subsequent picketers are sentenced to up to six months in jail. In November, the government unconditionally releases the picketers in response to public outcry and an inability to stop National Woman's Party picketers' hunger strike.

1918

Representative Rankin opens debate on a suffrage amendment in the House. The amendment passes. The amendment fails to win the required two thirds majority in the Senate.

Michigan, South Dakota, and Oklahoma adopt woman suffrage.

President Woodrow Wilson states his support for a federal woman suffrage amendment.

President Wilson addresses the Senate about adopting woman suffrage at the end of World War I.

1919

The Senate finally passes the Nineteenth Amendment and the ratification process begins.

1920

Three quarters of the state legislatures ratify the Nineteenth Amendment. **American women win full voting rights.**

In practice, the same restrictions that hindered the ability of non-white men to vote now also applied to non-white women.³

1924

All Native Americans are granted citizenship and the right to vote through the Indian Citizenship Act, regardless of tribal affiliation. By this point, approximately two thirds of Native Americans were already citizens.³

1943

Chinese immigrants given the right to citizenship and the right to vote by the Magnuson Act.³

1961

Residents of Washington, D.C. are granted the right to vote in U.S. Presidential Elections by the Twenty-third Amendment to the United States Constitution.³

1962-1964

A historic turning point arrived after the U.S. Supreme Court under Chief Justice Earl Warren made a series of landmark decisions which helped establish the nationwide "one man, one vote" electoral system in the United States.³

In March 1962, the Warren Court ruled in *Baker v. Carr* (1962) that redistricting qualifies as a justiciable question, thus enabling federal courts to hear redistricting cases.³

In February 1964, the Warren Court ruled in *Wesberry v. Sanders* (1964) that districts in the United States House of Representatives must be approximately equal in population.³

In June 1964, the Warren Court ruled in *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964) that both houses of the electoral districts of state legislative chambers must be roughly equal in population.³

1964

Poll Tax payment prohibited from being used as a condition for voting in federal elections by the Twenty-fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution.³

1965

Protection of voter registration and voting for racial minorities, later applied to language minorities, is established by the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This has also been applied to correcting discriminatory election systems and districting.³

1966

Tax payment and wealth requirements for voting in state elections are prohibited by the Supreme Court in *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections*.³

1971

Adults aged 18 through 21 are granted the right to vote by the Twenty-sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution. This was enacted in response to Vietnam War protests, which argued that soldiers who were old enough to fight for their country should be granted the right to vote.³

1972

Requirement that a person reside in a jurisdiction for an extended period is prohibited by the Supreme Court in *Dunn v. Blumstein*, 405 U.S. 330 (1972).³

1984

Mississippi becomes the last state in the union to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment.³

1986

United States Military and Uniformed Services, Merchant Marine, other citizens overseas, living on bases in the United States, abroad, or aboard ship are granted the right to vote by the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act.³

1996-2008

Twenty-eight US states changed their laws on felon voting rights, mostly to restore rights or to simplify the process of restoration.³

2006

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was extended for the fourth time by George W. Bush, being the second extension of 25 years.³

2008

State laws on felony disenfranchisement have since continued to shift, both curtailing and restoring voter rights, sometimes over short periods of time within the same US state.³

2013

Supreme Court ruled in a 5–4 decision that Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act is unconstitutional. Section 4(b) states that if states or local governments wants to change their voting laws, they must appeal to the Attorney General.³

2020

North Dakota reaches an agreement with the Spirit Lake Nation and the Standing Rock Sioux to recognize tribal address as valid for voting purposes.³

2021

The Supreme Court's ruling on *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* has broad removals on the remaining sections of the Voting Rights Act.³

Numerous states begin to enact restrictive voting laws.

House passes John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

Please also see references included in the sources listed below.

¹ Abigail Adams to John Adams, 31 March 1776, Founders Online, National Archives, accessed November 25, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/04-01-02-0241>. [Original source: The Adams Papers, Adams Family Correspondence, vol. 1, December 1761–May 1776, ed. Lyman H. Butterfield. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963, pp. 369–371.]

² Woman Suffrage Timeline (1840-1920), National Women's History Museum, accessed November 25, 2019, <http://www.crusadeforthetvote.org/woman-suffrage-timeline-18401920>.

³ Timeline of Voting Rights in the United States, Wikipedia, accessed January 31, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_voting_rights_in_the_United_States.