



# SHE SPEAKS

AUGUST 22, 2020

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF VOTING RIGHTS FOR U.S. WOMEN

by Faye Schrater

August 18, 2020 marks the centennial of the final vote for ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment: *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.*

Starting in 1878, a woman's suffrage amendment had been proposed every year in Congress, and failed. In the spring of 1919 the Women Suffrage Committee Chairman, James Mann of Illinois, introduced the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in the House.



“The time is ripe,” he said, “the people are ready and the beneficiaries of this amendment are eager, willing, and able to perform the duties of citizenship.” It passed by a vote of 304 to 89. After passage by the Senate the Amendment went out to the states. Adding the Amendment to the Constitution required ratification by three-fourth of the states.

Efforts to achieve social, political, and legal rights for women began before we were a

sovereign nation. Notably, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband, John, at the Continental Congress in March 1776 “. . . in the new code of laws . . . remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such



unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.”

John Adams replied, “We know better than to repeal our Masculine system.” He treated her request as a joke, in spite of the fact that if Abigail had not superbly managed the farm and their finances, Adams would not have had time for politics—and might well have been a pauper to boot.

That the authors of the Declaration of Independence could not imagine granting to women the rights they

demanded for themselves owes more to English common law carried to the colonies than to inherent misogyny. Abigail Adams was not asking for the right to vote, but rather was requesting relief from coverture, “a legal doctrine whereby, upon marriage, a woman's legal rights and obligations were subsumed by those of her husband”. Women had no claims on citizenship and its privileges. The legal doctrine of coverture, in concert with religious and social assumptions about gendered roles, hampered women at every step in their fight for rights and suffrage. Even violence against women was condoned under the principle of coverture.

Efforts to achieve women's rights gained little traction for the next 72 years. The notable exceptions are the various Married Women's Property Acts beginning in 1839. These laws granted to women the right to own property, enter into contracts and keep wages earned.





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In 1848 Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton convened a Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. The Declaration of Rights and Sentiment was patterned after the Declaration of Independence and listed legal and social "injuries and usurpations" by men toward women. The first "injury" listed is that of being denied suffrage; many Sentiments can be read as well-articulated objections to the legal doctrine of coverture; one points out that women were denied entrance to college. The Declaration's closing invoked the "disfranchisement of one-half of the people of this country" and insisted that women have ". . . immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States." Some 300 people attended the Convention; 68 women and 32 men signed the document. Another 72 years would pass before the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment became part of the Constitution.



The women's rights movement owes much to the anti-slavery movements of the 1830s. Lucretia Mott, Quaker,

minister, and abolitionist was one of six women delegates to the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840. However,



women's participation in public life challenged social norms. The organizers refused to seat Mott and her women colleagues in the open assembly, insisting rather that they remain quiet and segregated. The Women's Rights Convention was a direct consequence of that insult to Mott and other women delegates.

Frederick Douglass, a former slave, also attended the Seneca Falls convention, and signed the Declaration of Rights. Douglass remained steadfast in his support of women's suffrage, in spite of white leaders' abandonment of universal suffrage for fear it would detract from their cause. Two other former slaves were prominent in the early years of the quest for the vote, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman.

Truth, born into slavery in rural New York, escaped in 1826 three years before the state legislature declared slavery illegal. An abolitionist and women's rights advocate, she delivered her speech "Ain't I a Woman?" at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention in 1851. That speech encapsulated then—and now—the "intersection of race and womanhood." In 2014 Truth was included in the *Smithsonian* magazine's list of the "100 Most Significant Americans of All Time."



Like Truth, Tubman was born into slavery and escaped. Known as the "Moses" of her people, Tubman used the network of safe houses known as the Underground Railroad and helped other slaves to freedom. She helped John Brown plan the raid on Harper's Ferry. During the Civil War she served as a scout and spy for the Union. When the war ended, she retired to her property in rural New York where she cared for her parents and became active in the women's suffrage movement.



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Over time it became increasingly clear that not all abolitionists believed that women, much less black women, should have the vote. Even before the Civil War, Stanton and Anthony insisted that suffrage for women was as important as emancipation. They received little support and



refused to back the abolitionists, insisting on universal suffrage instead. They convened the Women's National Loyal League in 1863 and issued the resolution that "There can never be true peace in this republic until the civil and political rights of all citizens of African descent and all Women are practically established."

Passage of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment (1868) granted citizenship and voting rights only to *male* African-Americans. Abolitionist-suffragist women had been sure that their right to vote would follow shortly after; when it did not, the suffrage movement splintered. Women of both races formed their own organizations. For some time they worked in concert and some groups were integrated.

After Reconstruction ended, the South re-asserted white supremacy and instituted Jim Crow laws that created voting barriers against black men, e.g. a literacy requirement. Not surprisingly, the South was overwhelmingly against granting the vote to black women. By the 1890s, the old alliance between black and white women had shattered.

Black women still fought for suffrage, but did so in the midst of rampant racism. In this context arose black suffragists and civil rights activists such as Mary McCloud Bethune, an educator who founded a school for black girls in Florida, and Ida B. Wells, an investigative reporter from Tennessee who wrote about the wave of lynching of black men in the South. In 1896 Bethune and Wells were among the founding members of the National Association of Colored Women.



Alice Paul, one of the more radical activists, organized the Women's Suffrage Parade in Washington

D.C. on March 3, 1913 to protest newly-elected President Wilson's non-support of suffrage. Convinced that white women would not march with black women, Paul insisted that black women's organizations could march only at the back of the line. Prominent members such as Wells and Bethune plus Mary Church Terrell and Nellie Quander waited until the parade was well along, then slipped into the middle.



White suffragist leaders determined to win the vote no matter what. After the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment passed the House and Senate in 1919 and went to the states for ratification, they sided with white supremacists in denying suffrage to black women. The resulting wound from this moral compromise has yet to heal.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment *technically* granted voting rights to all women citizens. But due to states' constitutional right to set their own election laws, southern states kept the legal and socio-economic barriers that hampered voting by black citizens. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 ended the



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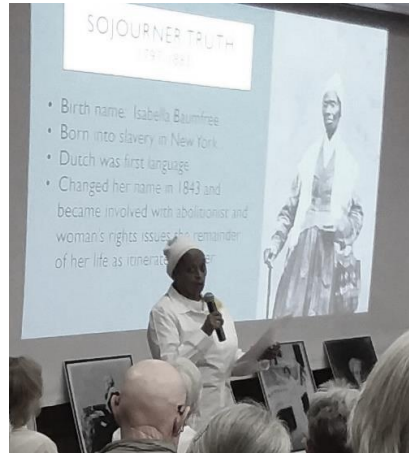
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most egregious aspects of these barriers.

And yet, equality for women, regardless of color, is yet to be achieved. For example, women suffer a gender wage gap, earning on average 82 cents for every dollar earned by men. Women still suffer sexual and racial harassment in the workplace and in academia. Alice Paul thought that women's rights did not end with the vote but had merely begun. In December 1923 she introduced into Congress an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) stating that equal rights shall not be denied on account of sex. Nearly 100 years later, the fate of the ERA is undecided and women are not yet guaranteed equal rights under the law.



Nonetheless, passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment after the long, relentless struggle starting at Seneca Falls is a remarkable achievement of human and civil rights. Carrie Chapman Catt, a major leader of the suffrage movement, encapsulated history and the importance of the Amendment.



“The vote is the emblem of your equality, women of America, the guarantee of your liberty. That vote has cost millions of dollars and the lives of thousands of women. Women have suffered agony of soul which you can never comprehend, that you and your daughters might inherit political freedom. That vote has been costly. *Prize it!* The vote is a power, a weapon of offense and defense, a prayer. Use it intelligently, conscientiously, prayerfully. Progress is calling to you to make no pause. *Act!*” Yes, let’s celebrate and remember that 100 years ago White women worked for, fought for, got arrested for, and marched for the right to vote, and received that right in 1920. But please remember, for women of color it took many, many more years to obtain what White women earned in 1920. And currently, we have undocumented women, such as DACA, and incarcerated

women in our country who are denied the right to vote. We have come a long way, now let’s keep working!

**Remember:**

**Women of Color and the Vote**  
**Kate Smith & Kathy Fine-Dare**

Disfranchisement (also called disenfranchisement) is the revocation of suffrage (the right to vote) of a person or group of people, or through practices, prevention of a person exercising the right to vote. Disfranchisement is also termed to the revocation of power or control of a particular individual, community or being to the natural amenity they are abound in; that is to deprive of a franchise, of a legal right, of some privilege or inherent immunity. Disfranchisement may be accomplished explicitly by law or implicitly through requirements applied in a discriminatory fashion, intimidation, or by placing unreasonable requirements on voters for registration or voting.





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**REMEMBER:**

At first, the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 was a success for African-American women. Black women could freely register to vote in the North, and African-American women's voter registration in Florida was higher than that of white women. Black women were politically organized, and black activist Annie Simms Banks was chosen to serve as a delegate to Kentucky's Republican Party convention in March 1920. White southerners soon took notice of these gains, however, and responded by targeting African-American women (and men) with violence and unconstitutional exclusionary tactics.

In the South, African-Americans faced the most severe obstacles to voting, including bodily harm and fabricated criminal charges that would land them in jail and keep them from the polls. Other disenfranchising methods included making citizens wait for up to twelve hours to register to vote, pay head taxes,

and undergo new types of literacy tests, one of which required African-American women to read and interpret the Constitution before being deemed eligible to vote.



These practices continued until the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which outlawed discriminatory voting practices. To this day, obstacles to voting persist, leading a new generation of politicians, such as Georgia's Stacey Abrams, to take up the fight against voter suppression.



We must recognize that African American women at the time were working on fighting for citizenship, voting rights, and barriers to employment due to their skin color. The intersection of these three key pieces of an African American woman's life were real and

daunting at times. But each piece comprises the lived lives of Black women during that time and continues in this time.

**KeyDates:BlackSuffragists**

\* **May 29, 1851:** Abolitionist and former slave Sojourner Truth speaks to a Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, giving a speech later known as "Ain't I a Woman."

\* **May 10, 1866:** Abolitionist and poet Frances Ellen Watkins Harper speaks at the 11th National Women's Rights Convention in New York City.

\* **May 1866:** The American Equal Rights Association is formed when the National Women's Rights Convention and American Anti-Slavery Society merge. The group dissolves about four years later amid continuing disagreements about prioritizing race or gender in the fight for voting rights.

\* **July 1896:** National Association of Colored Women is founded. The group endorses women's suffrage in 1912.

\* **Aug. 18, 1920:** Tennessee becomes the 36th state to ratify the Constitution's 19th Amendment, which guarantees a woman's right to vote.

\* **Aug. 6, 1965:** President Lyndon Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act, which outlawed the discriminatory voting practices that many Southern states adopted after the Civil War to restrict black men and women from voting.



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**REMEMBER:**

**Native American Suffrage**

Despite granting Native Americans citizenship in 1924, they were only able to gain full enfranchisement by fighting for it state by state. The last state to fully guarantee voting rights for Native people was Utah, in 1962. Despite these victories, Native people were still prevented from voting with poll taxes, literacy tests and intimidation—the same tactics used against Black voters.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965, mentioned earlier, helped strengthen the voting rights that Native people had won in every state. However, the act is no longer fully intact. In 2013, the Supreme Court's decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* dismantled one of its key provisions, which required that states with a history of racial bias in voting get permission before passing new voting laws. Just before the 2018 midterm elections, North Dakota's Supreme Court ruled in favor of a new voting requirement that may prevent hundreds of Native residents from voting.

**REMEMBER:**

**Voting and Incarceration**

The incarceration of women in the United States refers to the imprisonment of women in both prisons and jails. There are approximately 219,000 incarcerated women in the US according to a November 2018

report by the Prison Policy Initiative, and the rate of incarceration of women in the US is at a historic and global high, with 133 women in correctional facilities per every 100,000 female citizens. The United States is home to just 4% of the world's female population, yet the US is responsible for 33% of the entire world's incarcerated female population. The steep rise in the population of incarcerated women in the US is linked to the complex history of the US "War on Drugs" and its prison-industrial complex. These linked phenomena have led to mass incarceration among many demographics, including women, but had particularly dramatic impacts on women of color.



A national analysis finds that an estimated 676,730 women are currently ineligible to vote as a result of felony disenfranchisement laws. This represents 0.63% of the women's voting age population. While this study only analyzes national data based on other studies, it can be expected that

the rate of disenfranchisement in the most restrictive states will likely be considerably higher than this average. And given the disproportionate rate at which African American women are under supervision in the criminal justice system, their rate of disenfranchisement



is considerably higher. An estimated 245,925 African American women cannot vote, which is a rate of 1.92%, or one of every fifty black women. This rate of disenfranchisement is three times the national average for women. But since the national average also includes Black women, the Prison Policy website has reported that it can develop a more appropriate analysis by comparing disenfranchisement rates between black women and non-black women, resulting in a disparity ratio of 4.3 (1.92/.45). Because of inadequate data on corrections populations nationally, however, they are not able to provide estimates of disenfranchisement rates for



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Latinas or other racial/ethnic groups.

**REMEMBER:  
Asian-American Suffrage**



The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 finally lifted all restrictions on Asian immigrants becoming naturalized citizens, fully opening up Asian-Americans to become citizens and exercise their right to vote.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 expanded Asian-American voting rights even further by adding protections and accommodations for voters with limited English, such as access to translators and ballots in multiple languages.

**REMEMBER:  
Voting Rights Act**

“It is important to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act,” said Thomas Saenz, president and general counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF). “But for the Latino community, the 40th anniversary of the 1975 extension of the act is just as important.” Luis u, a professor in Notre Dame’s

Institute of Latino Studies, also noted: “This law in 1975 was an absolutely critical contributor to all the success and growth we’ve seen in Latino political empowerment.”



Signed by then President Gerald Ford, a Republican, the extension of the Voting Rights Act ended discrimination against so-called “language minorities,” the Mexican Americans of Texas and California, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Alaskans, Hawaiians and others who continued to be kept from voting for at least a decade after the Voting Rights Act became law. “It was a major battle ... that’s why it’s so important to us. ... MALDEF had to fight very hard to get it included” in the act, Saenz said.

That same year, the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP) was established by Willie Velasquez in San Antonio to register as many Latinos as possible. Because of the act, “you could now require

jurisdictions to provide translation materials to facilitate voter registration, said Luis Fraga.

**REMEMBER:**

Yes, let’s celebrate and remember that 100 years ago White women worked for, fought for, got arrested for, and marched for the right to vote, and received that right in 1920. But please remember, for women of color it took many, many more years to obtain what White women earned in 1920. And currently, we have undocumented women, such as DACA, and incarcerated women who are denied the right to vote. We have come a long way, now let’s keep working!

**OP ED – revised Aug., 2020  
by Trish Pegram**

Most of us now believe it is the right and duty of all citizens of the U.S. to register and vote. But this hasnot always been so.



As originally written, our Constitution gave the decision about who could vote to the states. For most of our early



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history, only white, male property owners were allowed to vote. At different times, and in different states, those requirements have changed. In some states freed slaves could vote; in New Jersey, before 1807, women who owned property could vote; by 1856, the requirement of an elector being a property owner had been eliminated.

As citizens of Colorado now, we have some of the most open, fair and inclusive voting practices in the country.



A nonpartisan process for redistricting will be implemented after the census in 2021 and is being touted as a model for the rest of the country. Our mail ballot elections are safe, secure and simple. We have higher registration numbers and voting numbers than almost any other state, and the security of our elections has been called the best in the

country.

We also have a less well known history of voting firsts. At the Colorado State Constitutional Convention of 1875-76, there was debate about giving women full suffrage. Although this was not approved, women were allowed to vote in school elections and the process for women to gain full suffrage was simplified for the future.

The first try for full suffrage was on the ballot in 1877 but didn't pass. For the next several years, the Colorado suffrage movement worked continued their work for another chance.

They were aided by leaders in the national movement who campaigned in Colorado, such as Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone. Anthony kept a daily diary of her experiences, which was not always complimentary of her reception or the transportation she encountered.



Other organizations took up the fight also, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Movement, the Grange, Farmers' Alliance, the Knights of Labor, and the Populist Party.



A second referendum on suffrage was held on Nov. 7, 1893. The majority of Colorado newspapers were supporters of the movement. A quote from the "Mancos Times" of Oct 6, 1893, sounds like it was written this month: "Drop all other things from now until Nov 7 to work for suffrage.... Every vote counts...and will...hasten the day of full liberty for women."

This time the people were ready for change. On Nov. 11, 1893, the "Silverton Standard" recorded the statewide win for women's suffrage "by a majority of several thousands." Colorado has the distinction of being the first state where an all-male electorate in a popular election supported women voting. And that wasn't Colorado's only "first." The





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next year, three women were elected to the Colorado General Assembly, another first in the U.S.

The national suffrage movement continued its fight in the following years. The movement splintered during this time, with a more conservative group working state by state for changes in voting laws. By 1917 15 states, most in the Western U.S., had given women full suffrage. Further movement was slow and when the First World War started the more conservative groups agreed to a moratorium on their work, as requested by President Woodrow Wilson.



A newer, younger, group of suffragists, led by Alice Paul, had, by then, started a much more aggressive movement that insisted there must be a Constitutional amendment that covered all women and all the country. They refused to halt their actions during the war, staging protests in front of the White House every day for the duration of the war. These women were often arrested, were held in horrible

conditions, with many going on hunger strikes and being force fed by prison guards.

At war's end, many political leaders felt there should be some recognition for the work of women during the war. This was a pressure point for forcing the Federal Government to act on a suffrage amendment. After working for literally lifetimes, in June, 1919, the suffragists saw the US Congress pass a woman's suffrage amendment to the U.S Constitution.

In this atmosphere, a new group, organized by suffrage leaders at a convention in Chicago, was started. This was the League of Women Voters, with the mission to educate new voters to help them carry out their responsibilities as citizens. February 14, 2020, was the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the League. There now are more than 700 local organizations, including the La Plata League, still educating voters and supporting policies of good governance in a nonpartisan manner.



The historical moment for women voting finally came in 1920. The amendment required ratification by 36 states, with the 36<sup>th</sup> state, Tennessee, approving ratification by a single vote. On August 26, 1920, the certification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was official. The exact words of the amendment are short: "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."

The work, however, was not finished.



The 19<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution gave black men and women the legal right to vote. But Jim Crow laws, poll taxes, and racism of all forms, would lead to systemic barriers to voting which still exist. Native populations were deemed not covered by the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Amendments due to them not being citizens. In 1924, that was changed by the



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**19<sup>th</sup> Amendment  
Committee News**  
by  
**Jean Olsen**

Snyder Act which admitted Native Americans to full US citizenship. But the states still had the right to decide who could vote, and they took years to officially declare Native Americans as voting citizens. New Mexico, in 1962, was the last state to enfranchise Native Americans. Finally, by law, almost all citizens are guaranteed the right to vote. Unfortunately, that right is still being manipulated by political actions, such as gerrymandering, removing polling places, and voter ID requirements.

It has been quite a spring and summer, hasn't it? Well, the summer isn't over yet, and neither are we!



loud speakers. Yard signs will be given to the first 100 attendees. Commemorative T-shirts will be available as will historical handouts and voter registration information.



Posters will be displayed around the community with all relevant information.

So look for the flags and balloons in Buckley Park on Saturday, August 22<sup>nd</sup> from 10-11:30 and come celebrate this historic event. Bring your family, friends and neighbors, and don't forget to wear your T-shirt and a mask.



Remember that rally at Buckley Park I promised you in the last Sage? Well, it is no longer a 'rally' as per AAUW and Colorado directives during this pandemic. It is now AN OPEN-AIR SALUTE TO SUFFRAGISTS!!!



Although the free, fair and open voting process we want is still lacking, that does not decrease the importance of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and the suffragists, men and women, who worked for 2 generations to make it possible. We must remember their work, thank them for their perseverance, and pledge to ensure it continues.

There will be ten educational 'stations' spread out around the park to visit at your leisure. Music along with snippets of talks will be broadcast over the

The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment Committee says:  
*Thank You*  
La Plata County