

Breaking Barriers For Women

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My mom and dad are debating about who they will vote for in the 2020 presidential election. While this might be a common household topic of conversation, it wasn't always like that. Did you know that women did not have the right to vote nationwide until 1920? That was only 100 years ago! I wanted to research this more thoroughly. While the 19th Amendment gave the right for women to vote nationwide, the process of getting the country to support this idea was lengthy and involved several people and groups. Susan B. Anthony worked with groups of people to break barriers for women to make it legal for women to vote.

Susan B. Anthony was a supporter of women's rights, and there were many others helping her. By describing her childhood and adult struggles, perhaps you can get a sense of what life was like for a woman in the mid-1800's. Susan B. Anthony was born on February 15, 1820 in Adams, Massachusetts. She and her family were Quakers, and they lived in a cozy large farm house. She had six siblings, four sisters and two brothers. The Anthony family didn't believe in vanity, they followed a very simple life, without decorations, musical instruments, toys or games. The parents feared this would distract them from thinking about God. Her parents worked in separate jobs. Susan's father owned a cotton mill. Her mother's job was to do the cooking, cleaning, take care of children, and to do the laundry for the family business.

The Anthonys had important beliefs. They mainly believed that all people were created equal. Her father, Daniel Anthony, believed that all people had the right to vote no matter the sex or gender. Her mother, Lucy Anthony believed that everyone deserves a chance to work, own a home, and earn a living. Together the Anthony family

believed in hard work and Susan and her siblings were expected to do many chores each day. One of Susan's many chores was to make 21 loaves of bread each day!

Education was also a very important belief in her family. When Susan was four, she and her sisters visited their grandfather for six weeks to learn how to read. Later she went to a Quaker boarding school to finish her education. After she finished, Susan traveled to New York in 1839 to become a teacher. It was rare for women to work outside of their home as they mostly worked as housewives at this time. While teaching, she only earned one fifth of the pay men got. As time went on, she made friends with African Americans and people of different races (at this time it was frowned upon to be friends with different races). Because Ms. Anthony complained about her pay and was good friends with the African Americans that worked there, she lost her job as a teacher. Later she got a better job teaching at a better school in New York, and she was a great teacher.

At this time, most women were getting married and raising families, but Susan didn't want to get married until she had equal rights. She was quoted as saying, "Independence is happiness". She even cut her hair short - something that was not considered proper at the time. She spent the rest of her life working towards equal rights for women, children, and races. She went so far as to "illegally" vote in the 1872 presidential election in Rochester New York. This broke barriers.

Susan B. Anthony delivered a speech after illegally voting, describing how the states use the pronouns he, his, and him differently within the Constitution. Because

female pronouns were not used in the Constitution, states were denying women the right to vote. The fact that women could not vote on government policies was not fair because women were being held to rules that they had no say in. She also argued that the 15th Amendment, stating that any man from any race or color could have the right to vote, should have included women, but it did not. One of Susan B. Anthony's famous quotes was, "Men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less". This quote shows that men had plenty of rights and didn't need anything more, but women, although they had some rights, needed more to be equal to men.

Many people and groups were working towards women's suffrage (the right to vote) during the 1800's to early 1900's. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was one of the many people that worked towards women's suffrage. She organized the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. Ms. Stanton and Ms. Anthony worked together on speeches on women's rights that they gave all around the country. Their work together helped end slavery, and they also helped to give African Americans the right to vote.

She and Susan shared many common interests and soon became good friends. Another ally of Ms. Anthony was Fredrick Douglas, a close friend to the Anthony family. She and Mr. Douglas worked together to help end slavery. Another ally she had was Carrie Chapman Catt who led the National American Woman Suffrage Association when Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were older and could not. Of course there were many people and groups opposed to women's suffrage.

One in particular was the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women was an active group during the 1880's. The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage was another group formed in 1911 and was popular in northeast cities. Their arguments against women's suffrage included:

- the majority of women did not want to vote
- it would promote competition of women vs. men instead of cooperation
- that women's votes would either double or cancel their husband's votes
- the extra expense for collecting and counting votes would not mean different voting results
- governments could be decided by women if there are more women than men voters
- the current voting system works and adjusting the system may not make it better
- that women do not have the ability to make informed voting decisions

Southern states seemed particularly opposed to women's suffrage on a cultural level. Major changes were happening that impacted the South at this time. The Civil War freed slaves and changed Southern lifestyles. Plantation owners could no longer rely on free work from slaves. With the 15th amendment, the slaves also had the right to vote. This changed everyone's social status. That was a lot of change happening in a decade, and women's rights efforts were just a little too much along with the Civil War.

Even though voting can have nationwide impacts, the states get to manage how voting happens. So state laws can individually decide who gets to vote and how. For example, states decided that children and criminals could not vote. It just happened that all the states' laws agreed during this time that women could not vote.

Wyoming was the first state to allow women's suffrage, but not for all the reasons Susan B. Anthony was hoping for. Wyoming was a territory when they first offered the right for women to vote in 1869. They did this because of two reasons: They needed to attract more women into the territory; and, they also felt that with the small population, more people involved in politics would give them more voice in national politics. When Wyoming became a state in 1890, the state maintained the right for women to vote.

The constitution prohibited all states from denying a citizen the right to vote based on that citizen's "race, color, or previous condition of servitude" Even though this was certainly a step in the right direction, Susan B. Anthony was upset. She thought that the 15th Amendment should have included giving all women the right to vote too.

In 1919, Illinois Representative James Mann proposed a bill in the House to allow women's suffrage. By this time Susan B. Anthony had passed away. The proposed 19th Amendment almost didn't pass in 1919. While the House and Senate were able to get the bill passed with a two-thirds vote, at least two-thirds of the states needed to then ratify the Amendment before it would become official. The deciding ratification was with Tennessee Representative Harry T. Burn, a 23 year old from McMinn County. Burn was opposed to the Amendment, but his mother wrote him a letter saying, "Don't forget to be a good boy and help Mrs. Catt put the 'rat' in

ratification.” He voted for the amendment. The state of Mississippi did not ratify the 19th Amendment (sent to the states in 1919) until 1984.

The direct impact of the 19th Amendment was that women were finally allowed to vote nationwide, starting with the 1920 presidential election. The number of voters increased from 18.5 million votes in 1916 to 26.8 million votes in 1920. Many women must have gone to vote.

The process of passing the 19th Amendment has led to a century of conversation of women’s rights. In the 1800’s, women couldn’t even own their own property or children and the husband had rightful custody over them. Think of how far we’ve come as a country since then! Women can own property now. Women go to college, hold prestigious jobs, are senators, representatives, and governors, and run for president. They still manage to take care of their children - which they can now claim half custody.

The United States has made so much progress with civil rights. It is hard to believe that, from the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention until the 19th Amendment was two-thirds ratified by the states, took 72 years! My grandma isn’t even that old. I can’t imagine a world where women were treated so unfairly, and that the unfairness was considered “normal”. Even Mississippi refused to ratify the 19th Amendment until 1984 - this was 64 years later. This makes me wonder why the United States was so resistant to change? I wonder how many other times today we are resisting change for the betterment in today’s society.

Although it took 72 years, unless you count Mississippi which took 136 full years, it was worth the wait. No one person could ever say that they got women the right to vote. Not one person could complete such a difficult project. It took small steps from different people to reach the top floor, which we haven't even reached yet since women still don't get equal pay. If women don't vote, it disrespects all of the years and hard work that so many people put into making this our right. We are in a much better place than we were a hundred years ago, and I'm thankful for the time and the people that were involved in helping women's rights. In my future, I will be more than proud to vote as a woman.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Resources:

Anthony, Susan B. "Constitutional Speech: Speech After Being Convicted of Voting in the 1872 Presidential Election." Delivered 1872-1873 in 29 postal districts of Monroe County, NY. Accessed on 1 Feb 2020 at <http://gos.sbc.edu/a/anthony.html>. This speech points out how women are made to pay taxes and follow laws without any representation in creating these laws. It points out that the pronouns he, his, and him used in The Constitution were used to disqualify women from voting, even though the same pronouns are used in the taxation and criminal law enforcement for women. The Constitution protects civil rights to all its citizens, and "citizens" is a defined term. She points out that the only argument to decide if women have the right to vote or not is to answer the question "are women people?"

Anthony, Susan B. Letter to Elizabeth Cady Stanton. 5 Nov 1872. Accessed 1 Feb 2020 at <https://famous-trials.com/anthony/441-voteletters>. This letter discusses her experience of casting a vote in the 1872 presidential election.

Secondary Resources:

Herweck, Dona. *Susan B. Anthony*. Teacher Created Materials, 2004. This book gave a common idea of who Susan B. Anthony was - a Quaker, a teacher, from a big family in Massachusetts, and her family believed that all people were created equal.

Kendall, Martha E. *Susan B. Anthony: Fighter for Women's Voting Rights*. Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2015. This book describes Susan B. Anthony's history, campaign on women's rights, and her relationship with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and their work together.

Raatma, Lucia. *Susan B. Anthony*. Compass Point Books, 2001. This book describes how Susan B. Anthony was the first (and still the only) woman printed on a coin in the USA.

<https://www.biography.com/video/susan-b-anthony-a-powerful-friend-2080100510> This video biography helped me get a better understanding about Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton's relationship.

<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fifteenth-amendment>

The website gave me a good understanding of the 15th amendment

. <https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/19th-amendment-1>

This website gave me a better historical timeline of women's suffrage in the states and names of people and organizations that helped women's suffrage happen.

<http://www.crusadeforthevote.org/naows-opposition>

This website gives me information about the opposition to women's suffrage.