



Women's Suffrage: Idealism and Reality

Uses Vote Worthy Part 1 Segment 2 [Listen here](#)

Background Reading

Women in the United States gained the right to vote in 1920 with the ratification of the Constitution's 19th Amendment. Prior to this, women from all backgrounds organized to advocate for women's suffrage rights. Starting in 1848 at a meeting of civic-minded women called the Seneca Falls Convention, women like Susan B. Anthony pushed for incremental approaches to gaining women's suffrage, in which women gained their rights step-by-step, as more and more people could be convinced that it was a just idea. More militant suffragists, like Alice Paul, thought this was too moderate and instead advocated for sweeping national changes brought about by whatever means were necessary. Some women, like Ida B. Wells, faced more than one level of discrimination, because she was a woman who wanted voting rights, but was also African American, living in a time when slavery was still legal. Even within suffragist organizations, she faced discrimination, because she saw the enfranchisement of women as linked to the end of racism and wanted to push both for abolition and women's suffrage together.

This podcast discusses the history of women's suffrage in Kentucky and the role, past and present, of the League for Women Voters in ensuring full suffrage.

This lesson uses the podcast discussion as a jumping off point to focus on the diversity of the women's suffrage movement and the tension between idealism and reality in assessing the success of the 19th Amendment. In a movement with a common goal, how did activists navigate the diversity of approaches and emphases to gain universal women's suffrage?

Discussion Questions

(Italicized questions are to be answered while listening to the podcast)

1. *What could “make a democracy perfect”?*
2. *What is the purpose of the League of Women Voters?*
3. *How was Kentucky impacted by the 19th Amendment?*
4. *How were black Kentucky women impacted by the 19th Amendment?*
5. What issues did suffragists care about? (Hint: it was not just voting!)
6. What issues, among those that suffragists cared about, did the 19th Amendment address?
7. Did one group of suffragists benefit from the 19th Amendment more than others?
8. Can we consider the 19th Amendment successful if it did not address all issues suffragists advocated?

Key Vocabulary

19th Amendment: ratified August 18, 1920, the amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting women the right to vote

Alpha Suffrage Club: the first black women’s suffrage club in Chicago, founded in 1913 by Ida. B. Wells; its goals included giving voice to African-American women (who were excluded from national suffrage organizations such as the National American Woman Suffrage Association) and promoting the election of African Americans to public office.

Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906): an American social reformer and women’s rights advocate who played a key role in the women’s suffrage movement

National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA): an organization founded in 1869 by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton that worked for women’s right to vote

National Woman’s Party: an American political organization formed in 1911 to work for women’s suffrage; its main leader was Alice Paul.

Alice Paul (1885-1977): an American suffragist and women’s rights advocate who was a primary strategist in the work to pass the 19th amendment

political platform: a candidate or political party’s statement of principles, goals and stands on issues

Ida. B. Wells (1862-1931): An African American journalist, educator and leader in the early civil rights and women’s suffrage movements; she was a co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909.

women’s suffrage: the right of women by law to vote

Suggested Activity

Listen to the podcast and have students read the *Smithsonian Magazine* article [“The Original Women’s March on Washington and the Suffragists Who Paved the Way.”](#) Then have students work in groups to [jigsaw](#) the article to compare and contrast the rights the 19th Amendment gave women with the rights suffragists advocated for.

Have students construct an argument backed with evidence addressing the question: Can we consider the 19th Amendment successful if it did not address all issues suffragists were advocating for? Arguments can be expressed via an essay, poster presentation, pictorial depiction, or other appropriate format.

Suggested Supplemental Sources

- 1913 Women’s March: Smithsonian Magazine article “The Original Women’s March on Washington and the Suffragists Who Paved the Way.”
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/original-womens-march-washington-and-suffragists-who-paved-way-180961869/>
- 19th Amendment: “Women’s Right to Vote” at the Interactive Constitution website.
<https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendment/amendment-xix>
- Jigsaw method: [TeachHUB.com](https://www.teachhub.com) article “The Jigsaw Method Teaching Strategy” at <https://www.teachhub.com/teaching-strategies/2016/10/the-jigsaw-method-teaching-strategy/>

Kentucky Academic Standards

Social Studies

HS.C.CV.3 Analyze the impact of the efforts of individuals and reform movements on the expansion of civil rights and liberties locally, nationally and internationally.

HS.UH.CE.5 Evaluate the ways in which groups facing discrimination worked to achieve expansion of rights and liberties from 1877-present.

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