

Woman's March Towards the Nineteenth Amendment

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Dr. Kathleen Bashian guided the CMGs through the complex history of Woman's suffrage, and a physical tour of the exhibit at the National Portrait Gallery. As an English professor, she first defined our terms. Note that it is "Woman's" not "Women's" suffrage. The first--proper--term alludes to "man" as in "human", or "human rights". The word "suffragette" was rejected because "-ette" is a French diminutive, reflecting the sexism build into most Western languages. The word suffragist is not a diminutive, and is neuter. After all, men, such as Frederick Douglass, supported the movement. For shot, The women honored were "suffs". Their sashes, in Britain, were Green, White, and Violet. In America the first color was Gold. Either way, the sashes said "Give Women the Vote". Participants in the 1912 New York March were requested to "wear white to best effect". This was a big change. Even back then, Mothers of the Groom were told to 'show up, shut up, and wear beige.' as Dr. Bashian noted. Suffs, on the other hand, wore bright yellow roses, which matched the gold in their sashes. Those who opposed them were called simply 'antis', and wore the traditional red rose.

While this contrast implies a simple issue, Woman's right to vote was inextricably tied to other issues. Perhaps, then, it is appropriate that Washington's exhibits on the 19th Amendment are spread among different museums. The Portrait Gallery's exhibit, now closed., gives us personal looks and stories of the suffs. Photographs of this exhibit are included in this article. Below, there is an idealized look at women holding down the homefront during the Civil War. Please note the multitasking: one woman reads the New York Times while nursing, as the children parade.



The 1848 Seneca Falls convention is acknowledged as the movement's birth. In the Rotunda, the suffragists' monument includes Susan B. Anthony, who was not able to make the convention. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott are the two well-known suffs we see in the Rotunda. Three others were Mott's sister Martha Coffin Wright, along with Mary M'Clintock and Jane Hunt.

Woman's rights were always, if sometimes not officially, connected to abolition. Wright ran a station on the Underground Railroad. M'Clintock and Mott organized the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. Mott went as far as sewing her own clothes to be sure that she had no slave-produced cloth.

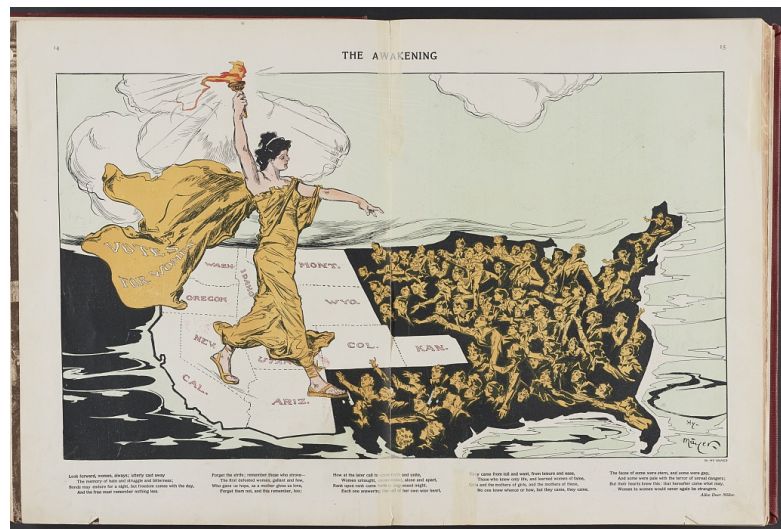
Susan B. Anthony supported the Movement's goals for the rest of her life. She is the only one of the major suffragists to follow the suggested course of single life, for example.

Frederick Douglass, who always supported woman suffrage, attended the Seneca Falls Convention.. There was never a question that the it would support actions such as overturning "coverture". This legal fiction assumed that husband and wife became one person, and a wife's rights were assumed by her husband. One of the first cracks in this tradition were married women's property acts passed by several states. Support for this and other goals, such as access to professions, equal pay therein, and participation in the public sphere was virtually unanimous. Douglass went further. He argued for the controversial Ninth Resolution, which called for woman's right to vote. This plank split off some organizational support. Some delegates wanted to work state-by-state; others wanted federal action, the 19th Amendment. Douglass' support remained steadfast even after and the Civil War and Civil Rights amendments, giving African American men the right to vote before white women, and other minorities, caused serious ruptures in the movement.

Stanton was asked in 1867 if she would support black men getting the vote and her reply was: "I say no; I would not trust him with all my rights; degraded, oppressed himself, he would be more despotic with governing power than even our Saxon rulers are." There would be on-again, off-again alliances between African-American and predominantly white woman's rights groups up until the 1960s, and even a few today.

African American woman's' clubs, often protected under the umbrella of a church, were founded as early as 1763 in Philadelphia. Mary Church Terrell, a Washington, DC teacher, founded the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) 1896, with the motto "Lifting as we climb". A charter member of the NAACP, she also founded the National Association of University Women. Her home in LeDroit park is a historic landmark, although not open to the public. The Terrell Place office building near Chinatown has a plaque honoring her at the Seventh Street entrance, by F Street.

Terrell worked, and picketed, with the National Woman's Party. Founded in 1916 to obtain the vote for women nationwide, the party had a head start in the Western states. This map shows which western states had woman voters enfranchised to some degree. They beckon their sisters—ironically many in now-blue states-- to join them.



Of course, the right was not absolute. Women could not vote for every office in every state. So they often had separate ballot boxes.

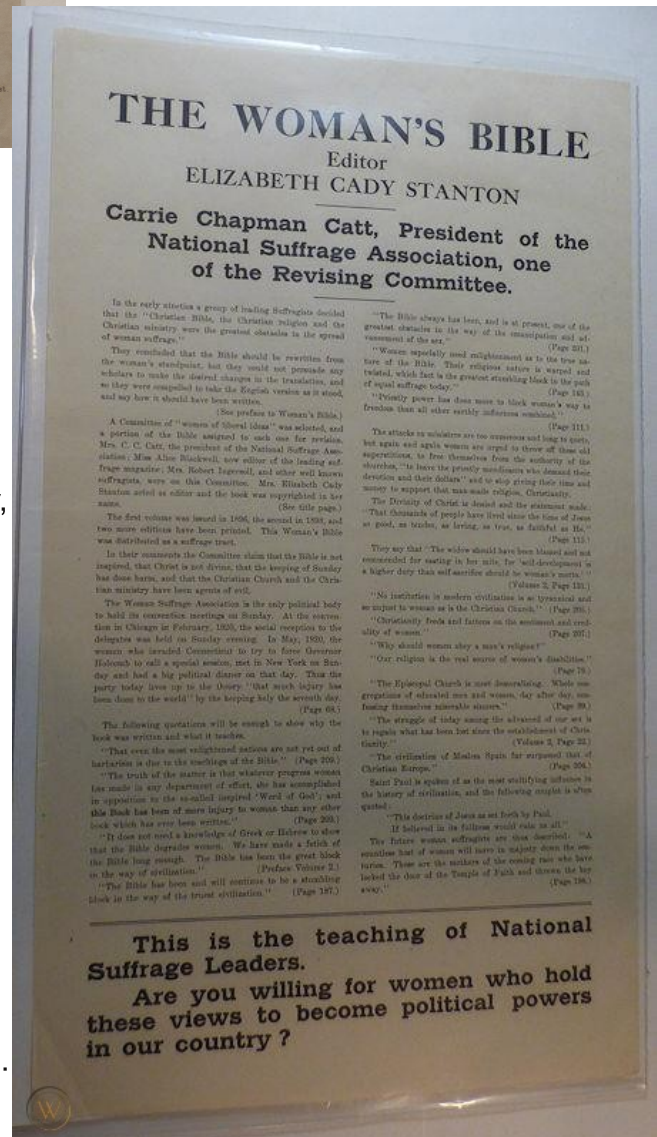


On the lighter side, the bicycle gave women local mobility, and led to acceptance of innovations in dress. Amelia Bloomer introduced the pants which would be named for her. Susan B. Anthony did wear bloomers for a while, but changed back. She noted that too much attention was paid to women's clothes. She wanted people to attend to her words, not her dress.

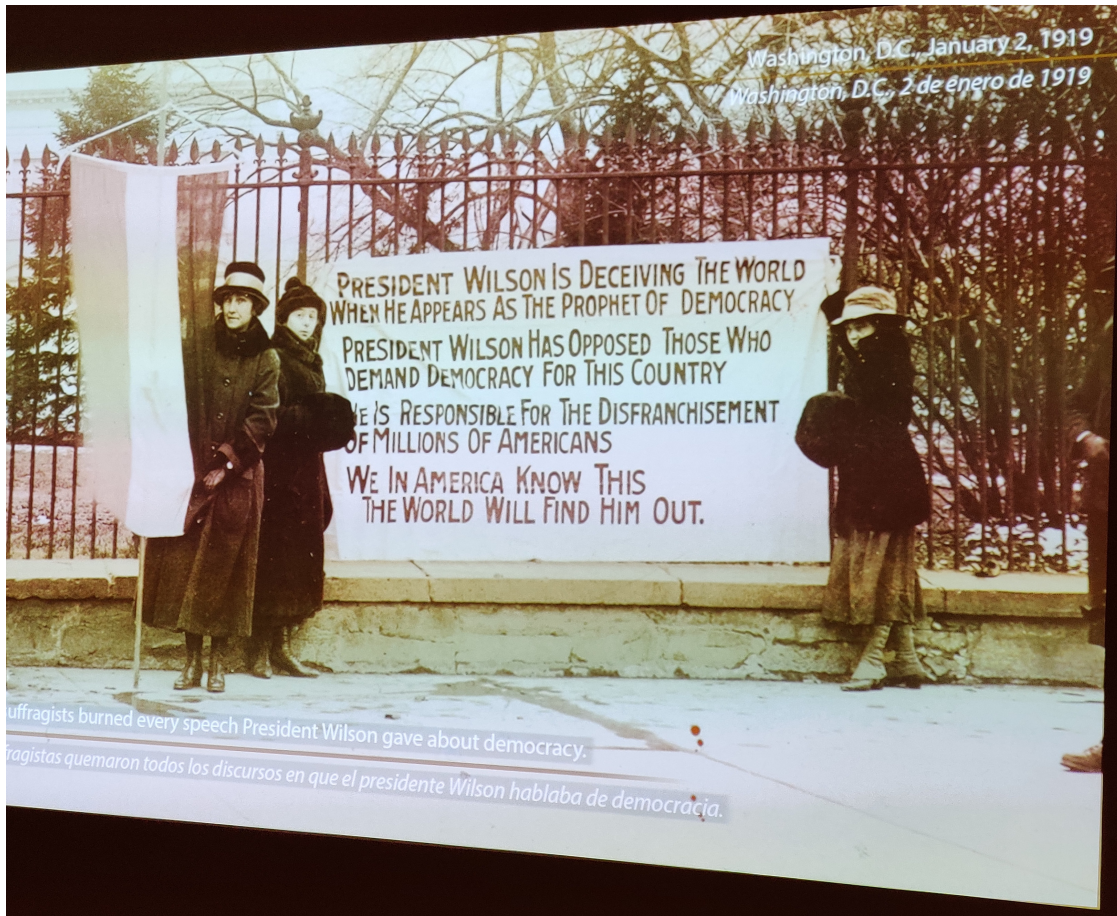
Suffragists such as Lucretia Mott worked at refuting interpretations of the Bible which put women in a subservient role: "It is not Christianity, but priestcraft that has subjected woman as we find her. The Church and State have been united, and it is well for us to see it so." The Church of England's revisions of the King James Bible inspired Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the National American Woman Suffrage Association to produce their own Bible.

The rage and opposition it inspired split the American movement, and limited Stanton's effectiveness thereafter.

Across the ocean, British suffragists, even without their own Bible, faced stronger opposition. They were often imprisoned, humiliated, and



force fed for crimes such as “unladylike behavior” . This resistance inspired their American counterparts. The unrest which World War I unleashed, inspiring the Russian Revolution for example, caught fire with the suffragists. They were the first group to demonstrate at the White House North Fence. “Wear White,” they were told. It was a slap in the face to the antis who maintained that only loose women walked the streets. As mentioned at the talk, the only time respectable women were in the paper is when they were born, married, and --finally-- eulogized.



Alice Paul, a founder of the National Woman’s party, was born to a Quaker family descended from William Penn. She followed its activist traditions through a stint as a social worker –which she decided was ineffective-- all the way to England. She was inspired by Christabel Pankhurst, and went to hear her mother Emmeline. Paul joined their radical Women’s Social and Political Union. She was thrice jailed before returning to the U.S.

The women organized a march up Pennsylvania Avenue, from the Capitol to the Treasury building and eventually the DAR auditorium. It was set for March 13, 1913 (3-3-13), the day before Wilson’s first inauguration. They never made it.

The DC police recommended that they not follow Pennsylvania Avenue, but eventually relented and granted permission. But not protection. The bars lining the avenue were full of men anticipating the next day’s inauguration with serious drinking. They were not happy about the Temperance women’s expected displays.

The parade began with Inez Mulholland, an NYC labor lawyer – and noted beauty – in white on a

white horse. She represented the "Ideals and Virtues of American Womanhood" which the antis felt were threatened. The march included delegations from around the world, various trades and professions, and (first female) presidential candidate Belva Lockwood. She had needed to write to President Grant to get the diploma she had earned., and then became the first woman certified to argue before the U.S. Supreme Court.

The movement, and the NAWSA (National American Woman Suffrage Association) specifically, adopted a "states rights" position to appease the southern women who did not want to work for African-American women. Some African-American college groups, including Mary Terrell's Howard University women, were relegated to the back of the parade. Ida B. Wells, who had already tangled with Frances Willard of the Temperance Union, during their parallel tours in Britain, was told that the Illinois delegation would be restricted to whites, and she could join a colored group at the parade's rear. She was a woman journalist who had exposed lynchings and helped to found the NAACP. Instead of arguing, or accepting a subservient position, she simply waited until the parade passed by, and then joined the Land of Lincoln delegation.

As the day and the bystanders' alcohol content waxed, their tolerance for uppity women waned. There were insults exchanged, and then physical harassment of the demonstrators as the police stood by. The Boy Scouts, in town to help with the next-day's inauguration, got between the women and the men harassing them. There is even an official Boy Scout merit badge for protecting the suffragists' right to demonstrate.

The planned tableau by the Treasury Building never took place. The women – including Columbia --waited, barefoot in diaphanous costumes on a chilly March day, for their comrades to make it through the crowds. Columbia waited to greet her daughters for hours, since the parade was blocked. So much for the strategy of calling the allegorical virtues to her side.



Visual images were a suffragist innovation. True, there had been one protest outside the White House beforehand, but it was brief. The "Sentinels" would be a continuing presence, and newspaper photos would feature their messages. Ans World War I began, the slogans became more forceful, calling Wilson on the hypocrisy of fighting for 'liberty'-- but not for women.

Cokie Roberts' daughter Rebecca Boggs Roberts offers details in her book *Suffragists in Washington*.

The American suffragists were not quite as violent as their British counterparts, but were still seen as dangerous. Posters proclaiming “Kaiser Wilson” and extolling the new Soviet Constitution’s declaration of woman’s rights fueled the antis’ blowback. The liquor lobby funded publicity against the suffs, often allied with the ‘drys’. Protesters were hauled to the District’s workhouse and prison in Lorton VA, subject to force feedings similar to those inflicted on their British counterparts.



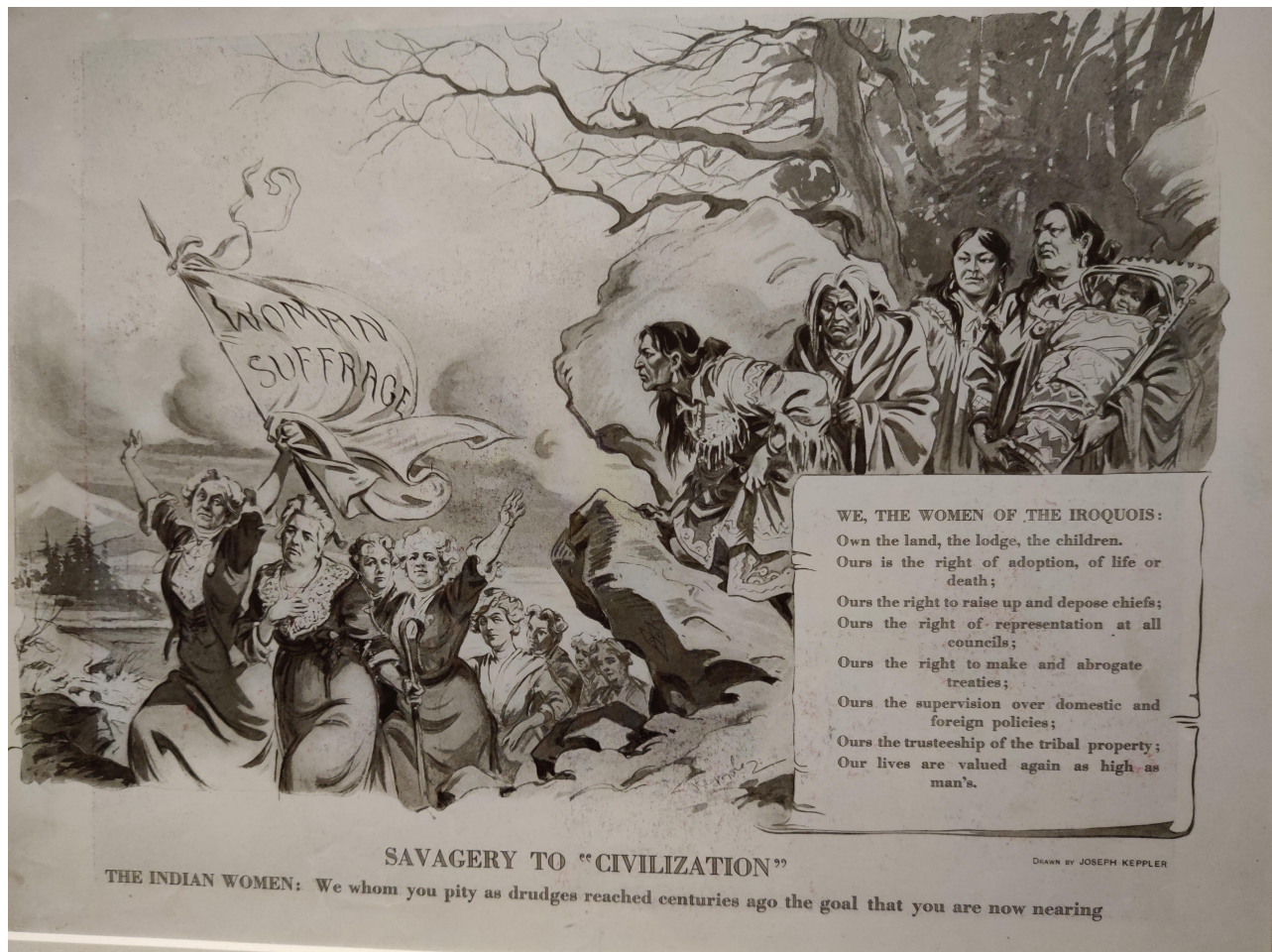
On November 13, 1917, counter protesters attacked the suffragists, stealing their signs and beating them. The police stood by, and then arrested the women. They were taken to the Lorton, VA workhouse, where they adapted the tactics Paul had learned in England. They demanded to be treated as political prisoners, went on hunger strikes, and were force fed through nasal tubes., Paul who had been service a seven-month sentence for protesting since the month before, had started a hunger strike and was being force fed through a nasal tube thrice a day.

Prison Superintendent, W.H. Whittaker would not tolerate more protesting prisoners, so the next night he ordered the guards to punish the prisoners. Dora Lewis was thrown into a cell, with her head aimed at an iron bed. Cellmate Alice Cosun suffered a heart attack at the brutality. Another protester spent the night naked with her hands chained above her head. Afterwards, those who ate were fed soup infested with worms; others were force fed.

As in the 60s, the cruelty against those protesting for their rights garnered public support. The tone got more civil, and even occasionally humorous. An Anti banner in American History Democracy exhibit: “Objection: Women are too pure for the dirty pool of politics.”

Answer by Suffs: “If the pool is dirty then time has come to clean it. Women have had long experience cleaning up after men.”

Even the Iroquois women, whose nation respected their rights, added their voice:



Wilson begrudgingly supported the 19th Amendment, which was headed for defeat in the last state needed to ratify it: Tennessee. Liquor lobbyists, fearful of the Temperance ladies, worked hard, with hard liquor. The Amendment was expected to narrowly lose.

But freshman Tennessee legislator Harry Burn received telegram from his mother advising him to cast the deciding vote for Suffrage. "Be a good boy and help Mrs. Catt put the rat in ratification" One can see the official result at the Archives' exhibit. (The controversial photo of the 2017 Women's March may not be available.)

The amendment is celebrated throughout the city. The Archives, Library of Congress, American History Museum, and Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument all have exhibits honoring the suffragists. Even the former Army Medical Museum, now the National Institute of Health and Medicine, features Dr. Mary Edward Walker, the only woman to have received the Medal of Honor for her service during the Civil War. Her story, like the movements, take many twists and turns worth exploring in more depth.

Thanks for reading.
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