

Background



Photo Courtesy of the League of Women Voters.

“There is a word sweeter than mother, home, or heaven. That word is ‘Liberty!’ - Matilda Electa Joslyn Gage*

LIBERTY (n) **1.** the state or condition of people who are able to act and speak freely. **2.** the power to do or choose what you want to. **3.** a political right.

Women in the United States, especially married women, were constrained in many ways by federal or state laws, social customs, and economic status. Despite this, many women worked for women’s rights and believed having the right to vote would help accelerate change.

Below are the motivating factors that led to the women’s suffrage movement:

Limitations on Women’s Roles in Society

- No economic rights.
- No right to an education.
- Lack of ability to earn income and the right to keep it.
- Not having any legal claim to their children.
- No right to own property in their own name.

Demographics and Geographic

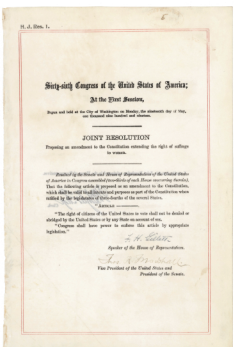
- National vs. State vs. Local
- North vs. South and East vs. West

Ethnic Groups

- Many who were active in the early suffrage movement were also abolitionists.
- In some areas discrimination against various ethnic groups, including Chinese and Hispanic women, became causes of the suffragists.

Some of the justifications these groups used to oppose the movement were:

- Religion dictating the role of women.
- Domestic sphere (home and raising children) ruled by women vs Public sphere (business, trade government) ruled by men.
- The belief that most women did not want to vote.
- Women did not have time to vote and stay updated on politics because they took care of the home and children.
- Women lacked the expertise or mental capacity to have an opinion about political issues.
- Textile mill owners worried about the impact women’s votes would have on child labor laws.
- The liquor industry worried that women would support Prohibition.



The **Suffrage Movement** resulted in the **ratification** of the **19th Amendment** to the **United States Constitution** on August 18th, 1920.



While this **amendment** made it clear **women could vote**, states **used** their **power** to **create obstacles** to **prevent African American women** and other minorities **from voting** until the **Voting Rights Act** of 1965.