

Women's History

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Suffrage Denied Not Won

This year celebrates the 85th anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment as a legal document not by which women “won” the vote, but as a constitutional amendment which prohibits denial of the right to vote because of gender: Prior to 1920, women voted in state elections in Idaho, Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming. In 1917, Janet Rankin was elected by the women and men of Montana to the U.S. House of Representatives, as the first female member of Congress.

The political effort which led to the 19th Amendment, actually began 72 years prior to its passage at the 1848 Woman's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, NY, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton stood up and read the motion: “Resolved that it is the duty of the women of this country to secure for themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.” Her words gave birth to the Women's Movement in America. Stanton's words “secure their sacred right” differ from the words “win the right.” Susan B. Anthony's rhetoric states, to “secure women's right” to the elective franchise, not to be given it.

First presented before Congress in 1878, Anthony's amendment was reintroduced in each succeeding Congress, for 42 years, until its passage exactly as she wrote it, and exactly as Alice Paul, along with 15 unrelenting women, hungered and hunger-struck for it. Nowhere in her amendment does it say women may now have the “right” to vote, or any such redundant statement about women. The Nineteenth Amendment reads:

The right of the 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.

What this Amendment does say, is that those people (who all seem to be male), who have been obstructing the justice set forth in the Constitution by prohibiting others (who all seem to be female) from voting, will no longer be able to continue to exercise or legally enforce gender discrimination which prohibits citizens from exercising their Constitutional right to vote.

Literally, the amendment is not about women, but about men who will no longer be legally supported or ignored by the law when obstructing voting rights. It is an amendment not about enacting the vote for women, but about enacting the law to prohibit the judicial vigilantism of men who pushed, punched, prohibited, jeered, even jailed, citizens seeking to exercise their right to vote. No men seem to have been arrested or jailed for obstructing this constitutional right of all citizens. Thus, this summer, and every summer, on Women's Equality Day-August 26th:

Celebrate the 19th Amendment for what it truly is,
A law which confirms that she too had the vote,
Which all along he proclaimed...was just his.
The law, as you see, does not say that she “won”,
A right she already possessed.
The law simply states, her right can't be denied,
Regardless of what “he” professed.

Note: June 10, 1919, the first state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment was...Illinois!