International Women's Day? Once upon a time, nowhere in the world could women claim to have all the same rights and opportunities as men. Women's oppression and inequality was goading women to become more vocal and active in campaigning for change around the world as well as across the United States. On July 19, 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organized the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, NY, to discuss social, civil, and religious conditions as well as the rights of women. It was the first time women's right to vote was presented in a public political forum.

On March 8, 1857, women garment workers in New York City staged a protest against inhumane working conditions and low wages. In the 1880's a proletarian women's movement concerned with the wages and working conditions of female factory workers, domestic workers, and women in the trades was formed in Germany. Gradually, more of its energy was put into campaigning for women's right to vote.

Women in the UK were seeking suffrage, too. In 1903, Emmeline Pankhurst founded the Women's Social and Political Union of radical suffragists. Often they were brutally beaten by the police, arrested, and jailed at Halloway prison.

The idea of the International Proletarian Women's Day was conceived in Germany in 1907 when Clara Zetkin suggested that women's demonstrations be held "annually" on a fixed day all over the world as an expression of international women's solidarity. In 1908, Luise Zietz began to officially organize such a day.

Also, in 1908, on March 8, 15,000 protesters marched through NYC demanding women's rights under the slogan "Bread and Roses." Bread for economic security and roses for a better quality of life. The following year (1909) the Socialist Party of America designated the last Sunday in February as National Women's Day in the United States.

In 1910, when socialist organizations around the world convened in Copenhagen, Zietz formally proposed an International Day to mark the strike of garment workers in the United States. Zetkin seconded. Over 100 women from 17 countries voiced unanimous agreement. As proposed, International Women's Day was to include the right to vote struggle, but no fixed date of celebration was selected.

International Women's Day was celebrated for the first time in Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland on the 19th of March 1911. On that day, more than one million women and men attended International Women's Day rallies campaigning for women's rights to work, to vote, to hold public office, and to end gender discrimination. Forty-one mass meetings were held in Berlin alone and hundreds more in the rest of Germany. Many were filled to overflowing and men were asked to leave that more women could be admitted. At every meeting after the speeches, resolutions demanding the vote for women were passed unanimously.

Less than a week later on the 25th of March, the tragic Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in New York City took the lives of more than 140 working women, most of them poor Italian and Jewish immigrants. These working women were locked in sweatshop factory rooms, locked in by the male factory owners, and could not escape. Many jumped out of windows to their death. Many burned to death in the locked factory. This disastrous event drew significant attention to working conditions and labor legislation in the United States that became a focus of subsequent International Women's Day events.

In 1917, in a five-month period, 168 suffragists were imprisoned in the United States. Alice Paul and fifteen others were arrested in front of the White House and, literally, thrown into jail. They were handcuffed, beaten, forced to perform hard labor, and placed in solitary confinement. When Britain entered WWI, suffragists in the UK suspended their activities in support of the war effort. England's suffragists were released from prison and took on men's jobs.

Russian women held a strike for "bread and peace" in response to the death of over 2 million Russian soldiers in the war. After four days Czar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate and the provisional government put into place granted women their right to vote. After the war, Britain passed a law in 1918 to allow women over thirty to cast ballots. In the United States, the women's suffrage bill was still in Congress.

In 1921, March 8 was established as the official date of International Women's Day to be celebrated around the globe, but in the USA it lay dormant until the new wave of feminism in the 1960's when it gradually started to be celebrated. Men and women celebrating this day are often asked why in the world would women of the world want to claim an International Women's Day.

The long answer is, because, nowhere in the world can women claim to have all the same rights and opportunities as men. The short answer is, **NO**WHERE. And, once upon a time is **NOW**HERE. Happy International Women's Day, everywhere, every year, everyone.

Sources: HBO "Iron Jawed Angels"
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