

On The Nineteenth Amendment

After a long and bitter campaign, women won the right to vote with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. This activity highlights some of the arguments presented for and against women's suffrage.

PRO-WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

By 1910, four states, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho, had granted unrestricted suffrage for women. In a speech, Senator Robert L. Owen of Oklahoma supported women's suffrage.

Women compose one-half of the human race. . . . A full half of the work of the world is done by women. A careful study of the matter has demonstrated the vital fact that these working women receive a smaller wage for equal work than men do, and that the smaller wage and harder conditions imposed on the woman worker are due to the lack of the ballot. . . . Equal pay for equal work is the first great reason justifying this change of governmental policy.

There are other reasons which are persuasive: First, women, take it all in all, are the equals of men in intelligence, and no man has the hardihood to assert the contrary. . . .

Every evil prophecy against granting the suffrage has failed. The public men of Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, and Idaho give it a cordial support.

The testimony is universal:

First, it has not made women mannish; they . . . are better able to protect themselves and their children because of the ballot.

Second, they have not become office-seekers. . . . It [suffrage] has made women broader and greatly increased the understanding of the community at large of the problems of good government. . . .

It has not absolutely regenerated society, but it has improved it. It has raised the . . . moral standard of the suffrage, because there are more criminal men than criminal women. . . .

The great doctrine of the American Republic that "all governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed" justifies the plea on one-half of the people, the women, to exercise the

suffrage. The doctrine of the American Revolutionary War that taxation without representation is unendurable justifies women in exercising the suffrage.

Carrie Chapman Catt, who led the National American Woman Suffrage Association, energized the suffrage movement and directed its lobbying efforts, particularly after 1915. In a speech before Congress, Carrie Chapman Catt presented her arguments for suffrage.

Three distinct causes make it [woman suffrage] inevitable.

1. The history of our country. . . . Woman suffrage became an assured fact when the Declaration of Independence was written. It matters not at all whether Thomas Jefferson and his compatriots thought of women when they wrote the immortal document. They conceived and voiced a principle greater than any man. . . .
2. The suffrage for women already established in the United States makes woman suffrage for the nation inevitable. . . . [O]ur nation cannot long continue a condition under which government in half of its territory rests upon the consent of half the people and in the other half upon the consent of all the people. . . .
3. The leadership of the United States in world democracy compels the enfranchisement of its own women. The maxims of the Declaration . . . have become the slogans of every movement toward political liberty the world around. . . . Not a people, race or class striving for freedom is there, anywhere in the world, that has not made our axioms the chief weapon of the struggle.