

## Women's Movement: The History and Timeline

### 1500s – 1600s

Our country was founded by a group from England called the Puritans. They were known to be so religiously conservative that they were asked to leave England for the new world. Think about the story you know of Thanksgiving. This was the foundation for our country and for the status and treatment of women in our country.

The Puritans believed:

- Social order lay in the authority of husband over wife, parents over children, and masters over servants.
- Women could not own property and lost their civil birth identity when they became married.
- A woman's salvation (place in heaven) was ensured by the godness exhibited in her children.
- The home was the only place women were allowed to exercise discipline. In public, they deferred to their husband or the patriarchy of the church and community.



The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth  
by Jennie A. Brownscombe

### 1701

The first sexually integrated jury hears cases in Albany, New York. This was a social change despite the fact that women were generally excluded from civic responsibilities and legal activities of the time.

### 1769

The American colonies based their laws on **English Common Law**, which is what they were familiar with. English Common Law stated:

*"By marriage, the husband and wife are one person under law. The very being and legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least incorporated into that of her husband under whose wing and protection she performs everything."*

### 1774

Colonial delegates – all men – gather to discuss the treatment they were receiving from their Mother Country (England). The Declaration of Independence was written by delegates such as George Washington and John Adams (the future first and second Presidents of the United States).

John Adams communicated the plans for a U.S. Constitution to his wife, **Abigail Adams**. She wrote to her husband on March 31, 1776:

*"Remember the Ladies, and be more generous to them than your ancestors. If care is not paid, we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice or Representation."*

**1789**

Without Abigail Adams and her letter to her husband, the U.S. Constitution might have included gender-specific words, such as "men." Instead, **the Constitution was ratified using the terms "persons," "people," and "electors."**

**1839**

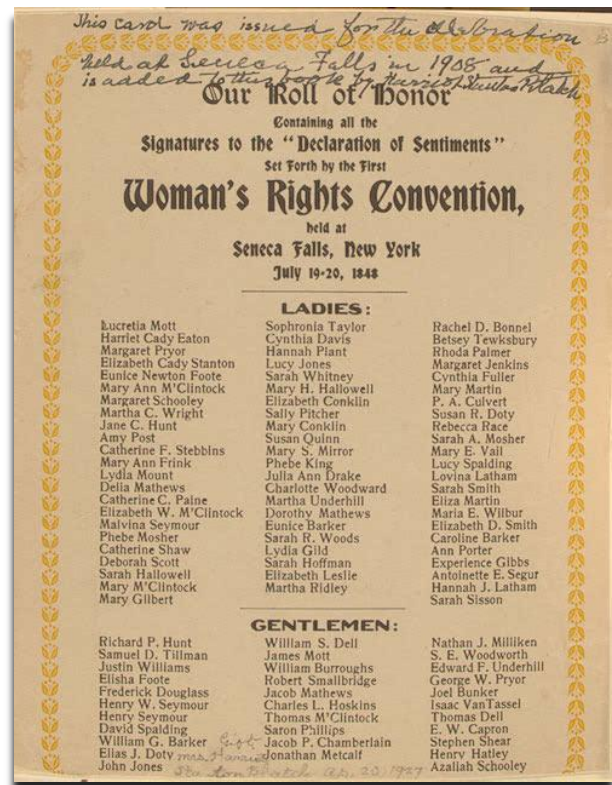
Mississippi is the first state to grant women the right to own property in their own names, with their husband's permission. Prior to this, women were not allowed to own property in their name. Property that was included in a marriage contract was automatically placed in the husband's name. Property where there was no male heir available was deeded to the nearest male relative to the deceased.

**1848**

Lucretia Mott, a Quaker minister and abolitionist, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a graduate of Emma Willard's school, meet in London, England, to attend the World Anti-Slavery Convention. Men would not let them attend the convention, which led them to return to the U.S. in a fury and they organized a public meeting.

The first Women's Rights Convention is held in Seneca Falls, New York, with 300 men and women in attendance. After two days of discussion and debate, 68 women and 32 men signed a **Declaration of Sentiments**, which outlines grievances and sets the agenda for the women's rights movement. A set of 12 resolutions was adopted, calling for equal treatment of women and men under the law and voting rights for women.

The Declaration of Sentiments made a radical, first-time-ever, public demand for female citizens' right to vote.



The Declaration of Sentiments

## 1850

May

- **Susan B. Anthony** and **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** form the **National Woman Suffrage Association**. The primary goal of the organization was to achieve voting rights for women by means of a Congressional **amendment to the Constitution**.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)

- worked to pass a New York law that allowed married women to control their own property and wages.

Susan B. Anthony

- was a famous suffragist.
- spent the majority of her life speaking, organizing, and writing to win suffrage (the right to vote) for women.
- Because of her work on the rights of women, Anthony was the first woman to be featured on U.S. currency – the silver dollar in 1979.



Elizabeth Cady Stanton (left)  
and Susan B. Anthony

November

- **Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell** and others form the American Woman Suffrage Association. This group focuses exclusively on gaining voting rights for women through **amendments in individual state constitutions**.

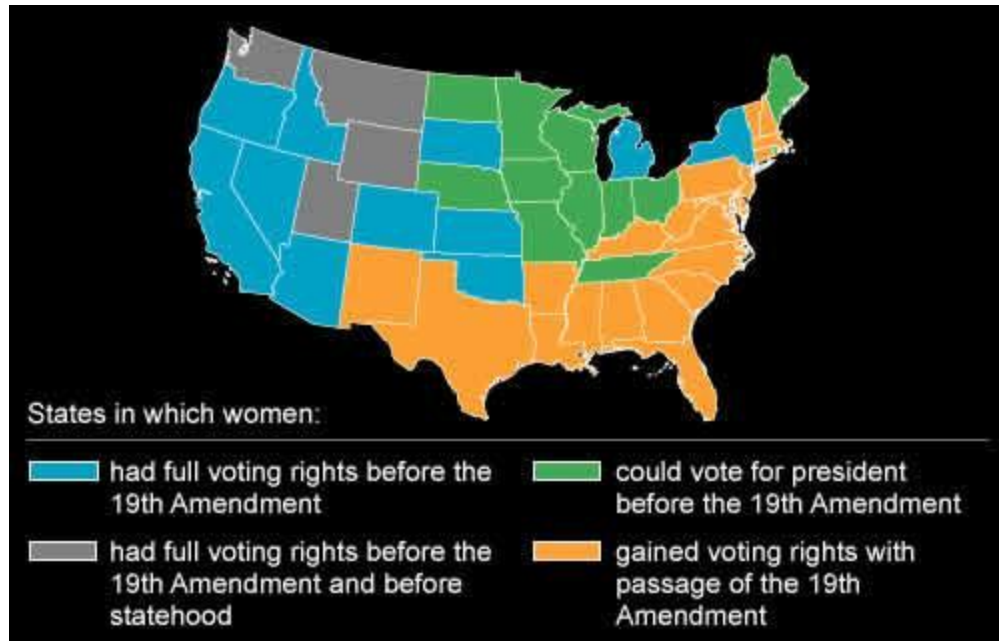
December 10

- The territory of **Wyoming** passes the first women's suffrage law. The following year, women begin serving on juries in the territory.

## 1893

**Colorado** is the first state to adopt an amendment granting women the right to vote.

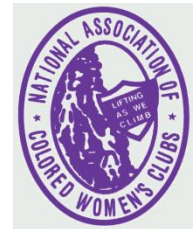
- Utah and Idaho follow suit in 1896
- Washington in 1910
- California in 1911
- Oregon, Kansas and Arizona in 1912
- Alaska and Illinois in 1913
- Montana and Nevada in 1914
- New York in 1917
- Michigan, South Dakota and Oklahoma in 1918



from [www.constitutioncenter.org](http://www.constitutioncenter.org)

### 1896

The **National Association of Colored Women** is formed, bringing together more than 100 black women's clubs. Leaders in the black women's club movement included Mary Church Terrell, Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, and Anna Julia Cooper.



### 1903

The **National Women's Trade Union League (WTUL)** is established to advocate for improved wages and working conditions for women.

### 1913

**Alice Paul** and **Lucy Burns** form the Congressional Union to work toward passage of a federal amendment to give women the vote. The group is later renamed the National Women's Party. Members picket the White House and practice other forms of civil disobedience.

Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, both college graduates, met in England during the height of the British Suffrage movement. They returned to the U.S. to take up their life cause of women's equality and suffrage. You can read more about their contributions at [www.alicepaul.org](http://www.alicepaul.org); also, be sure to watch the movie *Iron Jawed Angels* (HBO).

### 1916

**Margaret Sanger** opens the first U.S. birth-control clinic in Brooklyn, New York. Although the clinic is shut down 10 days later and Sanger is arrested, she eventually wins support through the courts and opens another clinic in New York City in 1923.



Margaret Sanger

## 1919

The federal woman suffrage amendment, originally written by **Susan B. Anthony** and introduced in **Congress** in 1878, is passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate. It is then sent to the states for ratification.

## 1920

August 26, 1920 – the 19<sup>th</sup> **Amendment to the Constitution**, granting women the right to vote, is signed into law by Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby.

## 1921

Margaret Sanger thought that no female would ever be free and independent without control over having babies. She founded the **American Birth Control League**, which evolved into the **Planned Parenthood Federation of America** in 1942.

## 1925

**American Indian suffrage** was granted by act of Congress. Native Americans were granted the right to vote in the United States.

## 1935

**Mary McLeod Bethune** organizes the **National Council of Negro Women**, a coalition of black women's groups that lobbies against job discrimination, racism, and sexism.



**Mary McLeod Bethune**  
courtesy Library of Congress

## 1936

The federal law prohibiting the dissemination of contraceptive information through the mail is modified and birth control information is no longer classified as obscene. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, birth control advocates are engaged in numerous legal suits.

## 1955

The **Daughters of Bilitis** (DOB), the first lesbian organization in the United States, is founded. Although DOB originated as a social group, it later developed into a political organization to win basic acceptance for lesbians in the United States.

## 1960

The **Food and Drug Administration** approves birth control pills.

## 1961

President **John Kennedy** establishes the President's commission on the Status of Women and appoints **Eleanor Roosevelt** as chairwoman. The report issued by the Commission in 1963 documents substantial discrimination

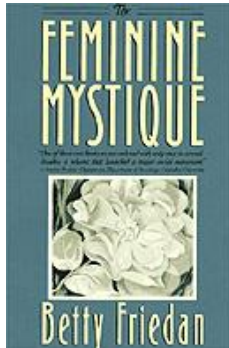


**Two women in the National Federation Council on Birth Control office, Washington, D.C.**

courtesy Library of Congress

against women in the workplace and make specific recommendations for improvement, including fair hiring practices, paid maternity leave, and affordable child care.

### 1963



- **Betty Friedan** publishes her highly influential book *The Feminine Mystique*, which describes the dissatisfaction felt by middle-class American housewives with the narrow role imposed on them by society. The book becomes a best-seller and galvanizes the modern women's rights movement.
- June 10, 1963 – Congress passes the **Equal Pay Act**, making it illegal for employers to pay a woman less than what a man would receive for the same job.

### 1964

Title VII of the **Civil Rights Act** bars discrimination in employment on the basis of race and sex. At the same time, it establishes the **Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)** to investigate complaints and impose penalties.

### 1965

In *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the **Supreme Court** strikes down the one remaining state law prohibiting the use of contraceptives by married couples.

### 1966

The National Organization for Women (NOW) is founded by a group of feminists, including **Betty Friedan**. The largest women's rights group in the U.S., NOW seeks to end sexual discrimination, especially in the workplace, by means of legislative lobbying, litigation, and public demonstrations.

### 1967

Executive Order 11375 expands President Lyndon Johnson's affirmative action policy of 1965 to cover discrimination based on gender. As a result, federal agencies and contractors must take active measures to ensure that women, as well as minorities, enjoy the same educational and employment opportunities as white males.

### 1968

The EEOC rules that sex-segregated help wanted ads in newspapers are illegal. This ruling is upheld in 1973 by the Supreme Court, opening the way for women to apply for higher-paying jobs hitherto open only to men. Check out the EEOC website at [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov).



**Betty Friedan, president of NOW, talks with reporters**  
courtesy Library of Congress

## 1969

California becomes the first state to adopt a “no fault” divorce law, which allows couples to divorce by mutual consent. By 1985, every state has adopted a similar law. Laws are also passed regarding the equal division of common property.

## 1971



Ms. Magazine is first published as a sample insert in New York magazine; 300,000 copies are sold out in 8 days. The first regular issue is published in July 1972. The magazine becomes the major forum for feminist voices and editor Gloria Steinem is launched as an icon of the modern feminist movement.

**Gloria Steinem**  
courtesy Library of Congress

## 1972

- March 22 – The **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)** is passed by Congress and sent to the states for ratification.

Originally drafted by Alice Paul in 1923, the amendment reads:

“Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”



**Supporters of ERA picket  
Washington, D.C.**  
courtesy Library of Congress

The amendment died in 1982 when it failed to achieve ratification by a minimum of 38 states. Women DO NOT have equal rights in the United States because the ERA was NEVER passed in the United States.

Also on March 22 – In *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, the Supreme Court rules that the right to privacy includes an unmarried person's right to use contraceptives.

- June 23 – Title IX of the Education Amendments bans sex discrimination in schools. It states:

*“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”*

As a result of Title IX, the enrollment of women in athletics programs and professional schools increases dramatically.

**1973**

As a result of **Roe v. Wade**, the Supreme Court establishes a woman's right to safe and legal abortion, overriding the anti-abortion laws of many states.

**1976**

The first **marital rape law** is enacted in **Nebraska**, making it illegal for a husband to rape his wife.

**1978**

The **Pregnancy Discrimination Act** bans employment discrimination against pregnant women. Under the Act, a woman cannot be fired or denied a job or a promotion because she is or may become pregnant, nor can she be forced to take a pregnancy leave if she is willing and able to work.

**1986**

In *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson*, the Supreme Court finds that sexual harassment is a form of illegal job discrimination.

**1994**

The **Violence Against Women Act** tightens federal penalties for sex offenders, funds services for victims of rape and domestic violence, and provides for special training of police officers.

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