

# A HISTORY OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN AMERICA

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Women Get the Vote

The 2020 presidential election in the United States was held in a landmark year. It had been one hundred years since women were granted suffrage, a Latin term that means “the right to vote.” This right was guaranteed with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution: “The right of 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.” While the Nineteenth Amendment is short and to the point, it took more than seventy years to pass. And it required the intensive efforts of thousands of women over three generations to ensure its passage.

Voting gives people control over their own destiny through the political process—and before 1920 American women did not have that power. In the nineteenth century married women were subjected to a doctrine called coverture, which put them in a legal category with children. The law considered women to be dependents of their husbands. A man was granted absolute ownership of a wife’s personal property, including real estate, savings, and earned wages. A married woman could not sign a contract, own a business, get a bank loan, or even obtain an education without her husband’s permission. And women were barred from most jobs, except seamstress, cook, teacher, or housekeeper, for which they were paid little more than pennies a day.



## Overcoming Disappointment

Lucy Stone viewed the restrictions on women as profoundly unfair. Born on a farm in Massachusetts in 1818, Stone was the eighth of nine children. She viewed gender discrimination from up close. Stone, who later wrote that she was smarter than her brothers, was denied an education by her father, who refused to pay for her schooling. In an 1848 speech at the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, Stone recalled her childhood: "From the first years to which my memory stretches, I have been a disappointed woman. When, with my brothers, I reached forth after the sources of knowledge, I was reproved with 'It isn't fit for you; it doesn't belong to women.'"<sup>4</sup>

In defiance of her father, Stone took a job teaching at age sixteen. By age twenty-five she had saved enough money to attend Oberlin College in Ohio. Oberlin was the first college in the United States to accept women and Black people. After she graduated in 1847, Stone gave her first public speech on women's suffrage. Her impassioned speeches drew large crowds—often as many as three thousand people. But Stone also attracted strong opposition from those who considered it shameful for a woman to speak before a mixed audience of men and women. Angry men disrupted her speeches, pelting her with prayer books and rotten vegetables.

*Lucy Stone spoke out in favor of women's suffrage in the 1840s and 1850s, a time when American women had few rights of any kind.*

**"From the first years to which my memory stretches, I have been a disappointed woman."<sup>4</sup>**

**—Lucy Stone, women's rights activist**



Stone persevered. In 1850 she helped organize the Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts. At the event, which drew more than one thousand people, Stone spoke out in favor of suffrage and against coverture. Stone's speech, later published in widely distributed pamphlets and newspapers, inspired many other women (including women's rights activist and social reformer Susan B. Anthony) to join the suffragist cause.

## Battling Against the Odds

Stone became a sought-after lecturer in the early 1850s. She traveled to St. Louis, Chicago, Cleveland, and dozens of other cities, where lecture halls were filled to capacity with people wanting to hear her speak. Stone was married in 1853 and had a daughter, Alice, who later described her mother's work: "Her adventures . . . would fill a volume. . . . She had no cooperation and no backing, and started out absolutely alone."<sup>5</sup>

**"To think I have had more than sixty years of hard struggle for a little liberty [the right to vote], and then to die without it seems so cruel."<sup>7</sup>**

—Susan B. Anthony, women's rights activist

Stone spent her whole life as a suffragist, someone who fights for women's suffrage. She died in 1893 without ever obtaining that right. But her dying words to Alice reflected her commitment to the cause: "I am glad I was born, and that at a time when the world needed the service I could give. . . . Make the world better."<sup>6</sup>

Around the time of Stone's death, only a few states allowed women to vote. One of them was Wyoming, which granted women the right to vote in 1890. Women gained statewide voting rights in Colorado in 1893 and in Idaho and Utah in 1896. Driven by these small victories, women's rights organizations tried to push more states into what was called the suffrage column. From 1896 to 1909 activists across the country submitted more than 160 legislative measures demanding suffrage. All these efforts failed. To the suffragists, this period became known as the doldrums.

When the eighty-six-year-old Anthony was lying on her deathbed in 1906, she told her daughters, “To think I have had more than sixty years of hard struggle for a little liberty, and then to die without it seems so cruel.”<sup>7</sup> However, American society was changing, and the roles of women along with it.

## Independent Women

In the early 1900s America was rapidly becoming an industrialized nation, and women made up about one-fifth of the workforce. They labored in clothing factories, in food production facilities, and as telephone operators. Some worked as professionals after attending women’s colleges like Vassar, Radcliffe, and Barnard that were founded in the late nineteenth century. In New York City, Harriot Stanton Blatch saw an opportunity to organize these independent women—many of them unmarried and in their twenties. As Blatch

## The Anti-Suffrage Movement

When women launched the first campaigns to gain voting rights in the nineteenth century, most of the anti-suffrage opposition came from men. But by the early twentieth century, women were playing a crucial role in the anti-suffrage movement. Female anti-suffragists formed associations and circulated petitions to deny women the right to vote. Many of these anti-suffragists came from wealthy families; their husbands were often politicians, lawyers, bankers, and powerful industrialists.

Anti-suffragists argued that women were destined to be wives and mothers. They believed families would be destroyed if women participated in the corrupt political system. Others said gender equality was in violation of God’s will. In 1911 the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, based in New York City, printed up postcards that demonized suffragists as old hags and man haters. Postcard cartoons portrayed husbands of suffragists as emasculated, apron-wearing men forced to do household chores. One popular postcard showed a woman trying to juggle a baby, a frying pan, a broom, and a piece of paper with the word “suffrage.” The cartoon read, “Can she do it?” Ironically, when the efforts of the anti-suffragists failed, a few ran for political office so that they could continue to promote their conservative beliefs.

Quoted in Samantha Schmidt, “Thousands of Women Fought Against the Right to Vote. Their Reasons Still Resonate Today,” *Washington Post*, August 9, 2020. [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).



***Suffrage parades like this one in the nation's capital in 1914 were considered scandalous, but such events created headlines and helped broaden support for women's voting rights.***

explained in a 1907 speech, "The suffrage will be won by women who are economically independent. The woman who supports herself has a claim upon the state, which legislators are coming to recognize."<sup>8</sup>

Blatch, a Vassar graduate, was in a unique position to lead the suffrage movement; her mother was the renowned suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The movement Stanton led in the mid-to late 1800s was foundering. But Blatch saw a way forward. In 1907 she formed the Equality League of Self-Supporting Women. The league was open to all working women and soon grew to over twenty thousand members, including factory workers and some of the first female doctors, lawyers, and engineers.

Blatch's Equality League organized suffrage parades that featured a variety of speakers calling on government leaders to give women the vote. This type of activism was considered scandalous, and the women were often heckled by crowds of rowdy men who pelted them with stones and garbage. But these dustups brought headlines and helped broaden support for the movement. In Brooklyn male allies of the movement formed the Men's League for Women's Suffrage, while Black women aligned



# SOURCE NOTES

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1. Quoted in Rachel Hartigan, “She Co-Founded Black Lives Matter. Here’s Why She’s So Hopeful for the Future,” *National Geographic*, July 8, 2020. [www.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.nationalgeographic.com).
2. Quoted in Louis Sahagun, “East L.A., 1968: ‘Walkout!’ The Day High School Students Helped Ignite the Chicano Power Movement,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 2018. [www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com).
3. Michael Eric Dyson, “King and His BLM Activists,” *PageSuite*, January 18, 2021. <https://edition.pagesuite.com>.

## Chapter One: Women Get the Vote

4. Lucy Stone, “Disappointment Is the Lot of Women,” *National Susan B. Anthony Museum & House*, 2020. <https://susanbanthonyhouse.org>.
5. Alice Stone Blackwell, *Lucy Stone: Pioneer of Woman’s Rights*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1930, p. 90.
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7. Quoted in *New York Times*, “Miss Susan B. Anthony Died This Morning,” March 13, 1906. <https://archive.nytimes.com>.
8. Quoted in Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991, p. 165.
9. Quoted in Robert S. Gallagher, “Alice Paul: I Was Arrested, of Course. . . .,” *American Heritage*, 2018. [www.americanheritage.com](http://www.americanheritage.com).
10. Quoted in Alex Cohen and Wilfred U. Codrington III, “The Equal Rights Amendment Explained,” *Brennan Center for Justice*, January 23, 2020. [www.brennancenter.org](http://www.brennancenter.org).
11. Quoted in Gallagher, “Alice Paul.”

## Chapter Two: The Fight for Civil Rights

12. Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987, p. 23.

# ORGANIZATIONS AND WEBSITES

## **Black Lives Matter (BLM)**

<https://blacklivesmatter.com>

The BLM website features news about the movement and information about civil rights history, the latest protests, and other actions. Users can download learning materials about race relations and related issues.

## **Climate Reality Project**

[www.climaterealityproject.org](http://www.climaterealityproject.org)

This organization was founded by Al Gore to find solutions to the climate crises that can be realistically implemented in communities throughout the world. The website offers information about climate change and provides links to young people interested in joining the Climate Reality Leadership Corps.

## **May 4 Visitors Center**

[www.kent.edu/may4visitorscenter](http://www.kent.edu/may4visitorscenter)

The May 4 Visitors Center is dedicated to the students killed at the Kent State antiwar protests on that date in 1970. Online exhibits include oral histories of the event, biographies of the fallen students, and an augmented reality experience that combines historical imagery, audio, and visual materials.

## **National Museum of African American History & Culture**

<https://nmaahc.si.edu>

The only national museum devoted to African American life and history features a wealth of online resources for students and teachers, including the Talking About Race web series that addresses structural racism, Whiteness, antiracism, and other prominent topics brought to the fore during the BLM protests of 2020.

# FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

## Books

Marke Bieschke, *Into the Streets: A Young Person's Visual History of Protest in the United States*. San Francisco: Zest, 2020.

Todd Hasak-Lowy, *We Are Power: How Nonviolent Activism Changes the World*. New York: Abrams, 2020.

Stuart A. Kallen, *Black Lives Matter*. San Diego: ReferencePoint, 2021.

Stuart A. Kallen, *The Environmental Movement*. San Diego: ReferencePoint, 2019.

Julie Knutson, *Global Citizenship: Engage in the Politics of a Changing World*. White River Junction, VT: Nomad, 2020.

Uma Krishnaswami, *Threads of Peace: How Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Changed the World*. New York: Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy, 2021.

Rachel Walsh and Bill O'Neill, *The Great Book of Badass Women: 15 Fearless and Inspirational Women That Changed History*. LAK, 2020. Kindle.

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Mark Jannot and Henry Robertson, "What If Women's Suffrage Never Happened?," *Marie Claire*, October 5, 2020. [www.marieclaire.com](http://www.marieclaire.com).

Daniel S. Levy, "'There Was All This Chaos': Vietnam-Era Antiwar Activists Reflect," *Time*, January 30, 2015. <https://time.com>.

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