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## Suffrage Movement in the United States: Foundation and Objectives

As a citizen of the United States at the age of eighteen you are given the right to vote. Without thinking twice you can register and be a part of decisions that will affect the future of our country. Unfortunately that was not always the case. As a girl living in the United States I appreciate my right to vote because I know that just a hundred years ago I would not have a say in the future of my country. I would not have the right to vote. Women had to work hard to finally receive the right to vote in 1920. Many strategies were used by many women to receive the rights that they deserved. All of these women made an impact on the lives of so many women today. The suffrage movement was so much more than just receiving the right to vote, it gave women confidence to stand up for themselves and feel that they too should receive the same respect that men receive. The movement of women's suffrage is so important because without it women today may not be able to vote.

In 1848 the women's suffrage movement would begin with a resolution barely passed at a convention in Seneca Falls. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott would be the initial push of this movement. They would use practices previously used in the abolitionist movement. Susan B. Anthony would also play a big part in getting women the right to vote. She started by fighting the clause of the 14th amendment trying to make it broader so that it would include women. Even though that was unsuccessful that did not stop her. There were women like Alice Paul and Lucy Burns who took more of an aggressive approach to the movement. Even though each of these women individually had different ideas about how to achieve women's suffrage, under the National American Women Suffrage Association they would come together knowing that regardless of how they achieved their goal it must be achieved.

At a World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840 men voted to refuse women seating at this event. This forced the eight women who attended to sit behind a curtain where they could only see bits and pieces of this convention and hear what was going on from a far. Unfortunately the men did not know that their inconsiderate act started the push for a movement that later on would make it so women and men never had to be separated again. Behind those curtains Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton met for the first time. At that moment in time the two women had vowed to hold a Women's Rights Convention in the United States, and eight years later they did.

The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 took place in upstate New York. Due to the many religious revivals there women felt that this was a place that was open to new ideas and would be a good place to start. This would be the first time that women would publically talk about the injustices they feel that their gender had experienced. Lucretia Mott's husband would chair the meeting because it was unheard of for women to chair a meeting of both men and women (Parker). At the meeting Elizabeth Cady Stanton read her "Declaration of Rights and Sentiments." Each resolution in the document was debated and if needed revised. The most important one being "it is the duty of the women in this country to secure themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise." This took people by surprise because it was so extreme to ask for the right to vote right off the bat. Even though extreme this was the most important part of the document because ultimately the fight overall was to gain the right to vote for women. This resolution ended up being kept in the document although many people were

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uneasy about it. They also discussed other things like fair wage and greater respect for women in the work place. Women and men would work the same amount of hours and men could be paid up to eight dollars or more than a woman doing the same exact job. Women would also have a set schedule and expected to be paid for the hours that they were scheduled to work. If it was a slow day in the work place a boss would make someone go home early and not pay them for their scheduled shifts. More often than not they would make any woman go before any man. Working conditions were also awful. Work places were dirty and dangerous. A good example of this is the triangle shirtwaist factory fire in 1911. The bosses decided to lock the women in the factory until they were done making everything they had to make. When a fire started and there was no way for the women to get out they started to panic. One hundred and forty five women died some from the fire and some from jumping out the window knowing it was their only way out. This was a very tragic example of why it was so necessary for women to get better working conditions. Things like marriage and divorce laws were discussed. Surprisingly enough white women envied slave marriage because the government did not sanction it. If slaves were unhappy in a relationship then they could just walk out of decide for it to come to an end. The divorce laws that are decided on a state level had an unfair bias towards women and always favored men in any case of divorce. A women could loose all her belongings in the case of a divorce if the husband decided he wanted all of them. The Seneca Falls Convention was portrayed nicely when first being announced but after a few weeks many people wrote articles and papers bashing the convention and criticizing it. Even though a lot of people were portraying the convention in a negative light this one meeting of men and women got the ball rolling for women's rights. The Seneca Falls Convention got other people all over the country to start listening, and also expressing their own feelings about suffrage and women's rights negative and positive. This convention was the beginning of so much more for the women's suffrage movement.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was a very important figure not only in the fight for women's rights in the United States but also in Britain. She was considered a radical women's rights activist not in terms of her strategies but in the way that she did not beat around the bush and demanded women's suffrage right off the bat. She knew what she wanted to stand for and she would not let anyone take that away from her. While in Britain in 1840's she created life long friendships that would help the cause when she returned back to Britain in 1890's. One of these friends was John Bright who was a known women's advocate but saw it risky to be asking for women's suffrage. Although Bright did not advocate for women's suffrage his wife and her family, the Preistmans, did. While in Britain she changed the women's rights movement there from something more conservative to something more radicle. This eventually led to her getting involved in the Women's Franchise League which was a radicle group who's primary goal was not only suffrage but was also inclusion of married women in suffrage. Married women had less rights then a single women because technically they were already spoken for by their husbands. Mrs. Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy who was one of the leading women's activists of her time started the Women's Franchise League in England. All of this experience helped Elizabeth Cady Stanton prepare for what was to come while fighting for Women's rights in America. She was also the co founder of NWSA, National Women's Suffrage Association. Here she would make speeches and speak her mind the public to spread the word about women's suffrage and try to get people on board. One of her most famous speeches was made on the first anniversary of the American Equal Rights Association. In he speech she said "Never, until woman is an independent, self-sustaining force in society, can she take her true, exalted position as the mother, the educator of the race. Never, as a dependent on his wish, his will, his bounty to be sheltered, fed and clothed, will man recognize in woman an equal moral power in the universe

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of mind.” This quote is very powerful in saying that men assign women all these roles, as the mother figure, the baker, the teacher, but really women can never fully take on those roles unless they are first recognized as being strong and independent. This was one of the greater things that suffrage brought out in women. It wasn’t just about the vote, it was about how people view women in general and the role that they play in society.

One of Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s close friends was Susan B. Anthony. Anthony was raised a Quaker by her father so she was very adamant about non-violence. She worked on women’s rights in England for a while helping out Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Back in the United States she was offered a job as a teacher but she would only receive two dollars and fifty cents per hour opposed to the ten dollars any male teacher would be receiving and this did not sit right with her. After realizing that she wanted to fight for women’s rights she started the Women’s State Temperance Society of New York in 1841. She made many speeches all over the United States but sometimes had an issue with the traveling because she had seven children (Anthony). Her husband and children were very supportive of the cause but when Anthony traveled her family couldn’t always go with her. As upsetting as that is you can tell how devoted she was to her cause, it must have been so hard leaving her husband and children behind for weeks at a time. Anthony took part in civil disobedience and participated in voting which was against the law at the time. Anthony and a few other women who were fighting for the same cause demanded that they be able to register to vote. After fighting for hours they were finally allowed to register and four days later she went to vote. She placed her vote for which presidential candidate she would like to become president in 1872. This was illegal and in turn Anthony and sixteen other women were arrested. She received a hundred dollar fine and never ended up paying it. She used this experience as a basis for a campaign in which she would again she give many speeches all over the United States. When Susan B. Anthony died unfortunately only four states had given women the right to vote, but she made a huge impact on the fight for women’s rights as a whole.

Alice Paul was another big player in the Women’s Suffrage movement. Alice Paul is a very religious Quaker and because of that had always been taught non-violence. This was brought into her strategies when it came to women’s suffrage. She would always go to women’s suffrage meetings as a young girl, with her mother, but they were nothing big. The meetings she attended consisted of a few women in the living room of a home (Adams). Even though they weren’t much they really were inspiring to Paul and since then she had always loved the fight for women’s suffrage. She always knew that she didn’t want to get married which gave her the freedom to go wherever the wind took her. She fought for women’s suffrage in England a little bit before she brought her talents to the United States. She began by making small speeches in England. At one point she was actually booed at by many men, and at that point she realized that public speaking was not her forte. She realized that talking about suffrage was just not enough; she was a lot better at taking action. To get a better grasp on learning more about women’s suffrage she joined a group called Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) (Adams). The Women’s Social and Political Union wanted to gain the right to vote for women on the same basis as men. There she would attend weekly meetings and not only learn more about women’s suffrage, but how to do a better job about spreading the word and helping people to understand what they were fighting for. After returning from England she decided to head to Washington D.C. all by herself at the age of 27. There she would be working for NAWSA and she was given a starting budget of ten dollars, no more, no less, to do whatever she needed in terms of lobbying and campaigning for women’s rights. Her radicle strategies began in 1909 when she stood on the roof of a building where a big meeting was being held

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and tried to speak to everyone waiting outside the building for the meeting to start. The cops forced her to come down but many women began to cheer for her as she did (Graham). She's most famous for her protest outside the White House, which was considered very rude, and unlady like. She held signs that said things like "Kaiser Wilson, have you forgotten your sympathy with the poor Germans because they were not self governed? 20,000,000 women are not self-governed. Take the beam out of your own eye." This sign is portraying Woodrow Wilson as if he is some sort of Hitler, which is awful enough, but then it was held right outside the white house for everyone to see. She also went on a hunger strike while she was in jail, which was the last straw that ultimately led to Woodrow Wilson setting a date for congress to vote on whether or not women should have the right to vote. There was a movie created in 2004 called Iron Jawed Angels, which takes place in 1912 and shows the progression through the women's suffrage movement. The movie portrays Alice Paul as one of the biggest players and main characters in the suffrage movement. They show a very vivid portrayal of Alice Paul being force fed through tubes that are shoved down her throat. When you see this it makes you feel bad and it's very obvious that this is something that would cause a huge controversy (Roberson). The movie really makes people understand what an important role that Alice Paul played in the women's suffrage movement.

Another woman who played such an important role in gaining women's suffrage in the United States was Carrie Chapman Catt. She was the only woman in her graduating class at the Iowa State University. There she was part of the Iowa Women's Suffrage Association. Just like Susan B. Anthony, Catt started out her career as a schoolteacher. In 1833 she became one of the first women to ever be appointed as the super intendant of school. Chapman Catt founded the League of Women's Voters in 1920, which was originally created to encourage women to vote and carry out their new responsibilities as voters (Amidon). Catt's organizational, speaking and writing skills established her reputation as a leading suffragist and after Susan B. Anthony Carrie Chapman Catt became the next president of NAWSA. Under NAWSA Carrie Chapman Catt came up with something called the winning plan. The winning plan was to solely focus on getting women's suffrage passed federally. After the amendment for women's suffrage was passed in 1920 Chapman Catt set out to help women achieve suffrage worldwide. Catt was a leader in the formation of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance (IWSA), and became president for sometime. Unfortunately she had to take a break from all her work with women's suffrage to take care of her husband who was sick (Amidon). When he died she quickly returned to helping women fight for suffrage. Unfortunately Carrie Chapman Catt died of heart failure on March 9th 1947, but her efforts toward the fight for women's suffrage in the United States and worldwide will always be remembered.

All of these women had different backgrounds and different strategies to achieve one similar goal, which was for women to gain the right to vote. With some strategies being radical and some more conservative it affected each person differently. Each different strategy had impacts of a lot of different people and without all these different techniques being used by these different women the goal of women's suffrage may have not been achieved at the end of the day. At this point in time from a legal stand point women were seen as unequal to men, they could not vote, and married women had no legal claim to anything they earned. A divorce was unheard of in that period of time, and if in the end a divorce was going to happen a woman would not split all of the belongings in the house down the middle with her husband like people do it today. In those times if a two people got a divorce the man got whatever he wanted and a woman could possibly be left with nothing at all. Not only was it legally that women were unequal but also socially women had no place in a man's world other than to cook, clean and

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take care of children. The gender stereotype at the time did not leave much for women to work with and it was completely unfair. Women were not paid as much as men, and were not respected as much as men were in the least bit. For all of the women who fought for women's suffrage this was not good enough and it got to the point where no one wanted to sit around and wait anymore for something to be done about it. That is why these women took it into their own hands to make sure they received the rights that they truly deserved.

All of these women's hard work began to be worth something. Between the years of 1910 and 1918 seventeen states extended the right to vote to women, which was a huge step in the right direction. After Alice Paul's hunger strike in 1918 Woodrow Wilson changed his stance on Women's Suffrage. He defended the switch by saying it was only to support Carrie Chapman Catt and her views on suffrage, which were much less aggressive than Alice Paul's. He also defended his change in perspective by relating women's suffrage to large role that women played in World War One. He said that he believed women were vital to the war effort and if he won't cooperate with them how could he expect them to cooperate with him. Finally on May 21st 1919 Susan B. Anthony's resolution for women to get the right to vote was presented in front of congress, and this time all of the suffragettes hard work really came into play. The house passed the resolution with a 304-89 vote, which was much more than needed to have it passed. Two weeks later on June 4th 1919 the senate passed the resolution as well. After much contemplation between the states it took quite some time to have the amendment ratified. Eventually on August 26th 1920 the official 19th amendment was put into place.

Before her death Susan B. Anthony said "when we shall have our amendment to the Constitution of the United States, everyone will think it was always so, just exactly as many young people believe that all the privileges, all the freedom, all the enjoyments which woman now possesses were always hers. They have no idea of how every single inch of ground that she stands upon today has been gained by the hard work of some little handful of women of the past" (Anthony, Nineteenth). On August 26th 1920 her dreams of having her amendment came true. She makes the point of saying that a vote today will be taken as an ordinary right and not a privilege that should be worked for. In today's world a vote is something that a person just expects to be given at the age of eighteen, but that's not necessarily right. It is important to know how women got their right to vote, and the women who worked so hard so more women can have the right to vote today.