

My Great-Grandmother was not a Person

My Great-Grandmother was not a person. Neither was yours. Up until about 67 years ago no females were. We were supposed to be pregnant and barefoot in the kitchen. At least that's the perception that the laws enforced. (For ex: The Election Act of the Dominion of Canada and The Common Law of England) As part of the British Commonwealth many of our laws were the same as England's and enforced by British parliament. One such law from the Common Law of England stated that "A woman is not a person in matters of rights and privileges, but she is a person in matters of pains and penalties." This gave women second class citizenship.

Women were not recognized as equals to men, even though the expectations of women were such that the work load was equal if not greater. As pioneer women we built homes, raised families, maintained the homestead, hunted food, fought natives, made clothes, cooked, cleaned, as well as the many manual labour jobs that men held. For example, women worked in coal mines, armories, and aided the war effort via the manufacturing industry, such as factories. If this is what is determined as equality then women were getting the short end of the stick and men were receiving all of the benefit. This perception still holds strong today, although not as strongly.

Men said that women were too fragile to vote. Yet no man has ever experienced labor pains. Furthermore no man has fought any battle that was as hard as the one the famous five women have fought. The Election Act of the Dominion of Canada states that "No woman, idiot, lunatic, or criminal shall vote." So women are equal to criminals? It's not a crime to be a woman. We should not be judged by our sex. On April 19, 1916 women in Alberta were granted the right to vote. A small battle was won. Five Canadian women have conquered countries and nations for their rights. When questioning the wording of "qualified persons to the senate" the Supreme Court of Canada rejected that the word "persons" included women. This battle was lost but the war was won when the Privy Council of England (the highest court in the land) ruled that the word "persons" included women. That was the 18th of October, 1929.

The famous five women are: Irene Perlby, Nellie McClung, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney, and Emily Murphy. These women have fought a battle of sexism that is of historic importance. Millions of women in Canada have these five women to thank for the past 67 years of equality'

Today the battle of the sexes still rages on where equality is still an issue in our daily lives.

"Despite all my rage / I'm still just a rat in a cage"

B. Corgan
Smashing Pumpkins

The views of society are that women are the inferior sex even though the law recognizes women as equals. Not until such time that women start becoming a predominant force in government, the workplace and can educate this equality to everybody; then will the battle of the sexes end. Today's woman can use her energies to fight the destructive forces of the marketing machine. Men can help too. Large corporations, fashions, Hollywood, Disney, Mattel and every sort of advertising that exploits women have a destructive message for society, that women are not perceived as equals. By educating out children and the following

generations that gender equality is an important value that society should respect.

The Famous Five fought the legal war that recognizes women as equals. It's time for us to fight society's gender war. We are here as humans, as people, as equals, as persons.

I'll leave you with this closing thought...

"No woman can become or remain degraded without all women suffering."
E. Murphy