

The women's suffrage movement began in 1848 when a group of women met in Seneca Falls New York. These women issued what became known as the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, and 11 pt. document outlining the demand for equal rights.

All of the articles of the Declaration passed except for the right to vote. It was widely believed at that time, that women were both physically and mentally inferior to men, and therefore should not have the right to vote. The Seneca Falls convention was organized by a group of women who had been active in the antislavery movement. When they were rejected as delegates to an abolitionist convention because of their sex, they vowed to turn their attention to women's rights. This convention attracted lots of attention from the press, mostly negative. One of the organizers, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, welcomed even the negative attention. She said "It might start women thinking; and men to; when men and women think about a new question the first step is taken.

Because of their involvement in the abolitionist movement, women had learned to organize, to hold public meetings, and conduct petition campaigns. As abolitionists, women first won the right to speak in public, and they began to evolve a philosophy of their own place in society. When the 15th amendment, which gave black men the power to vote, was passed women became furious. Julia Ward Howe said "For the first time, we saw... every Negro man govern every white woman. This seemed to me intolerable tyranny."

After the fifteenth amendment was passed, the women's suffrage movement turned its attention towards gaining the right to vote state by state. Susan B. Anthony, a leader in the movement, met a wealthy businessman named George Francis Train while campaigning in Kansas. He offered her the money to launch a suffrage newspaper. In return he would be allowed to write a column about economics. Thus the Revolution was born. Its motto was "Men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less."

Lucy Stone and a group of conservative suffragists broke away from Anthony's National Woman's suffrage Association and founded the American Woman Suffrage Association. The NWSA attracted younger and more radical women who worked for a constitutional amendment to get the vote. The AWSA directed its efforts toward getting states to give women the right to vote. Anthony believed that this would take a long time and tried to the the courts to declare that voting is the right of all citizens. She based this belief on the fact that the 14th amendment made women citizens. In 1872 she went to the polls and cast her ballot for president. Two weeks later she was arrested for voting illegally. Virginia Minor, a friend of Anthony's and president of the Missouri

Woman

Suffrage Association, tried to vote in 1872. The election registers refused to let her cast her ballot, so she brought a suit against them. She claimed that they had interfered with her right as a citizen to vote. The Supreme court ruled that the Constitution "does not confer the right of suffrage upon anyone, and that the constitutions and laws of several states which commit that important trust to men alone are not necessarily void." meaning that the Constitution does not give the right to vote to everyone and that the constitutions and laws of the states that only allow men to vote are not necessarily invalid.

In 1878 Senator Aaron Sargent of California finally introduced the proposed the Sixteenth amendment which many people called the Anthony Amendment. This amendment stated "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex." This amendment remained unchanged and unpassed for forty-two years even though both the House and Senate committees favored it. Some argued that the amendment would destroy homes and break up families. Others argued that the vote would degrade women. Senator George C. Vest explained why he felt this way, "It would take her down from that pedestal where she is today, influencing by her gentle and kindly caress the action of her husband towards the good and the pure."

Meanwhile none of the dire consequences predicted by the antisuffragists had occurred in the few states where women voted. In 1869 the Wyoming Territory adopted a constitution granting both men and women the right to vote. When they asked to join the union they were pressured to banish the women's right to vote. Wyoming stood firm and even adopted the motto "America will be a better place to live when women go to the polls." Until the early 1900's, only a few states, all of them western, had granted women the right to vote. By this time the two organizations had merged to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

On June 4, 1919 women were finally granted the right to vote. Congress ratified the 19th amendment to the Constitution which stated that no citizen could be denied the right to vote "on account of sex". This victory was not only for women, but for democracy and the principle of equality upon which our great nation was founded.

