

Women Who Fought for the Vote

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Susan B. Anthony, Frances Willard and other members of the International Council of Women. Rice/Library of Congress/Corbis/VCG via Getty Images

On Election Day in 1920, millions of American women voted for president for the very first time. Before then, no woman in the United States had the right to vote for president. Only men could vote.

For almost 100 years, women had been fighting to win the vote. They had made speeches and marched in parades. They had argued over and over again that women deserved the same rights as men. Some of the most famous leaders of this struggle are listed below.

Susan B. Anthony, 1820-1906

Susan B. Anthony is the most well-known women's rights fighter.

Anthony began as an anti-alcohol crusader. She believed that alcohol was particularly hurtful to women and children because it destroyed family life.

Anthony found that few government officials took her anti-alcohol fight seriously.

She felt they were ignoring her both because she was a woman and because she was talking about a problem that affected women. She decided women needed the right to vote. Only then could they be certain that the government would keep women's interests in mind.

Anthony later became the president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). "Suffrage" is the name for the right to vote in elections. Women who fought for suffrage were known as suffragists.

Anthony continued to fight for the vote until her death on March 13, 1906.

Alice Paul, 1885-1977

Alice Paul was the leader of the boldest group of suffragists. She was determined to do anything it took to win the vote.

After becoming a suffragist, Paul first joined NAWSA. In 1913, she helped plan an enormous suffrage parade. The parade took place on the same day that Woodrow Wilson became president. It interrupted Wilson's celebration and drew great attention to their cause.

Paul was too bold for some NAWSA members. In 1914, she left NAWSA and started her own group, the National Woman's Party (NWP). The NWP specialized in forceful protests. For example, they camped out in front of the White House for seven months.

Paul and others were arrested for their White House protest. The women were sent to jail, where they were treated very badly. Their brave stand won many people to their side. Once news of their mistreatment in jail reached the public, they were released.

In January 1918, President Wilson announced his support for a new law that would give women the right to vote. The law passed on August 26, 1920.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1815-1902

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was one of the leading women's rights activists of the 1800s. She began as an abolitionist fighting to end African-American slavery. In 1840, she traveled to the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, but she was turned away. Women were unwelcome at the Convention, she was told.

This injustice changed Stanton's course. It convinced her that women needed to win equal rights for themselves before they could seek equal rights for others. In the summer of 1848, she helped put together the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York.

Around 240 people gathered at the convention to discuss the rights of women. One hundred signed the Declaration of Sentiments, which was similar to the Declaration of Independence. It declared that women were equal to men.

The Seneca Falls Convention marked the official beginning of the long fight for women's suffrage.

Lucy Stone, 1818-1893

Lucy Stone was a pioneering abolitionist and women's rights activist. She is best known for refusing to change her last name when she married. Her husband was the abolitionist Henry Blackwell. Stone became a traveling speaker for the American Anti-Slavery Society.

In 1871, Stone and Blackwell began to publish the weekly feminist newspaper *The Woman's Journal*, which survived until 1931. Stone died in 1893.

Ida B. Wells, 1862-1931

Ida B. Wells is best known as a fighter for African-American civil rights. However, she also fought for many other causes, including woman's suffrage.

In March of 1913, Wells was preparing to join the suffrage parade held on the day Wilson became president. To her disappointment, she was asked not to come. Some of the white suffragists had refused to march alongside blacks.

Wells joined the march anyway. However, her experience showed that many white suffragists did not think equal rights were for everyone.

Wells continued to fight for civil rights for all until her death in 1931.