

Pen in hand, I take one of my first steps in my transition from childhood to adulthood: filling out a voter registration application. I will soon be able to voice my opinion in elections, perform my civic duty, and give back to the nation that is my second mother. A little over a century ago, however, my attempt to vote would've been met with active resistance and hostility.

Suffrage was not always a liberty women could enjoy. Before 1920, those who attempted to exercise their right to vote were harassed, arrested, or even taken to court. This perpetual silencing disavowed half of society, forcing women to be subject to the political whims of men. Eventually, women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony decided that enough was enough. No longer should women have to endure this injustice without representation. No longer should women be callously dismissed as inferior, second-class citizens. Inspired by figures such as Olympe de Gouges and Mary Wollstonecraft, they spearheaded the American women's suffrage movement beginning with the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. During the 1900s, this leadership passed on to two organizations: the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and the National Woman's Party (NWP). Through their combined efforts, the 19th Amendment was finally ratified on August 18, 1920, guaranteeing that suffrage "...shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

This historic triumph was a step in the direction for gender equality for both women in the United States (U.S.) and women around the world. In the domestic sphere, the success of the suffrage movement inspired women to campaign for greater job opportunities, fairer wages, and reproductive rights. In the foreign sphere, other nations followed suit and adopted universal

suffrage. A more egalitarian culture opened new doors for women in all domains of society. For example, female politicians began to arrive on the scene, setting new precedents for political representation. As a nation of the people, by the people, and for the people, the U.S. better exemplified the principle of democracy by listening to everyone's voices. Women did not have to hold office to be heard. Politicians still had to cater to a new, influential voting population to garner support for their agendas. Today, female voters constitute 53% of the electorate.

Before the ratification of the 19th amendment, the song of the people was made of the low, bass tones of men. Following its implementation into law, the high, soprano tones of women were added to the melody. Together, these harmonies created a symphony of voices, a symphony of equality, a symphony of America.