

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women and Politics

Women's Suffrage and Lessons for Women in Higher Education

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The Way Up Conference

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The Women's Suffrage Movement

- Seneca Falls, NY, 1848
- *Declaration of Rights and Sentiments*
- Abolition movement ties
- Split over the 15th Amendment



The Mainstream Group

- NAWSA reunified the movement, 1890
- Carrie Chapman Catt, President, 1900-1904 and 1915-1920
- “Winning Plan”



The Militant Wing

- Alice Paul
- Founder, National Women's Party, in 1917.
- White House pickets and arrests



The Suffrage Debate

- Allies: (Many) Abolitionists, Temperance movement, women's labor union movement, progressives and reformers (men and women).
- Well organized opposition: liquor industry, Catholic Church, industrial leaders; traditionalists, including men and women; (most) Southerners
- Final state: Tennessee, August 20, 1920
- Barely passed.

What the Suffragists Expected

- League of Women Voters founded, Feb. 14, 1920 by Carrie Chapman Catt
- Women wanted the vote and would turn out in high percentages
- Women would block vote for reforms and social change

What Happened

- Women did not vote differently from men
- Women did not turn out at high rates
- Some women were prohibited from voting even with the 19th Amendment
 - Mississippi refused to reopen voter registration for the Fall election
 - African American women in the South were not enfranchised due to Jim Crow laws
 - Other women of color were disenfranchised for other reasons

Fast Forward 100 Years

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION TODAY

Voting

- Women are a numerical majority of voters (1964)
 - 72.5 million men vs 82.2 million women (2020)
- More women are registered to vote than men
 - 79.3 million men vs 89 million women (2020)
- Women vote at higher rates (1980)
 - 65% for men vs 68.4% for women (2020)

Other Gendered Differences

- Women are more likely to favor Democratic Party, democratic candidates and to participate in political protests, social movements
- Women have reached parity in % that donate money (but not in magnitude of donations)

As Candidates:

- When women run, women win.
- No disadvantage in fundraising

What Can We Learn from Suffragists?

LESSONS FOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The Political Stuff

- **Vision:** Imagine what you want to see for your institution
- **Persistence:** Suffrage took more than seven decades
- **Find Allies:** People in positions of power, influence, and/or authority. Numbers have power
- **Keep Your Message Simple:** And stick to it. Repeat, repeat, repeat
- **Don't Ignore Arguments of Opponents:** To ignore an argument is to concede the point
- **Know and Use the Rules:** Law, policies, norms, practices, professional association statements, etc.

The People Stuff:

- **Educated Women are Formidable:** All the leading suffragists were well educated, which contributed to their leadership skills.
 - **Power in Numbers:** Engaging working class/trade union women
- **Build Your Skill Set(s):** Within or outside institution
- **See Yourself There:** Imagine yourself in a leadership position

Thank you!

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

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THANK YOU!