

**1920-2020: Votes for Women**  
**What's been accomplished? What's next?**  
**League of Women Voters-Discussion Group Guide-September 2019**

**DISCUSSION GROUP APPROACH**

At this first Discussion Group for the new program year, we will have 2 parts to the discussion.

**PART I. 1920-2020-The Passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment (40 minutes)**

On June 4, 1919, Congress approved the 19th Amendment. But another year passed before Tennessee became the 36<sup>th</sup> out of the existing 48 states to ratify the Amendment and clinch its passage. On August 26, 1920, the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was signed into law, ending 72 years of struggle. We will begin with an interactive activity to review the timeline for passage (about 20 minutes). Then we will discuss (about 20 minutes) the articles included in this Guide: (1) "The Crooked Path to Women's Suffrage," an account of the legislative journey to make the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment law; (2) "Challenging the Whitewashed History of Women's Suffrage," an article about the role of African-American women in the Suffrage Movement; and (3) excerpts from several articles that suggest lessons from the past that can inform the future.

**PART II. 2020-2120-Planning for the Next Centennial (50 minutes)**

We want to spend most of the time talking about the future. How do we honor the long struggle and the success of the suffragists? What can we as the League of Women Voters of Montgomery County do to plan for our future and to expand voting rights and women's rights for everyone during the next 100 years? The Discussion Questions (at the end of this Guide) invite participants to contribute to plans for the future of LWVMC. Each Discussion Group will record the group's responses, and they will be compiled and brought to January Program Planning meetings to help plan the League's future.

**READINGS FOR PART I**

**Part I, 1. *The crooked path to women's suffrage***, Susan Schulten. (2019, June 4). *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/04/opinion/the-crooked-path-to-womens-suffrage.html> (reprinted with permission from the author)

Exactly a century ago on Tuesday, the Senate passed the 19th Amendment, which forbade states from denying the right to vote on the basis of sex. While ratification would require another year, female suffrage had won its greatest and most permanent victory. That final vote was all the more remarkable given that the Senate had recently rejected the amendment not just once, but twice. The shift of just a few senators on the third vote in early June forever transformed American electoral politics.

Some of those senators who changed their vote realized that recent suffrage victories at the state level brought more women into their constituencies. Others responded to pressure from President Woodrow Wilson, a late convert to the cause. In January 1918, he endorsed the amendment as a demonstration of America's moral mission, but also something owed to women for shouldering the burdens of World War I at home. Just as African-American military service in the Civil War advanced black suffrage rights, women's work in the Great War advanced their political rights.

The amendment's passage capped a long struggle with striking geographical patterns, shown by a series of maps that marked the movement's progress. In the 1840s, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott convened several hundred women in Seneca Falls, N.Y., to demand the vote as a human right. In the aftermath of the Civil War, suffragists linked their struggle to that of the Southern freedmen. But while Frederick Douglass proved a crucial ally at Seneca Falls, other men argued that

woman's suffrage detracted from the far more urgent quest to enfranchise former slaves. As the white abolitionist Wendell Phillips stated: "One question at a time. This hour belongs to the Negro."

Such a strategy made sense, for blacks faced existential threats of discrimination and violence after emancipation. This dire situation led congressional Republicans to draft the 14th and 15th Amendments, which enshrined rights for black men by defining them as citizens. Yet by granting citizenship to all men, the amendments marginalized women. [White suffragists](#) such as Stanton responded with outrage that black men — whom they considered racially inferior — were enfranchised before them.

Despite this rejection of female suffrage at the federal level after the Civil War, the movement claimed smaller victories in the sparsely settled West. Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and Idaho extended voting rights to women in the late 19th century, less out of an enlightened sense of equality than for partisan purposes: leaders in the Utah Territory initially granted women the vote in 1870 in the hopes of combating anti-Mormon measures, while in Colorado a political alliance extended suffrage rights in 1896 to strengthen the short-lived Populist movement.

By the turn of the century the movement had reached a crossroads. The two foremost organizations — the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association — merged as the National American Woman Suffrage Association, but its aging leadership counted few successes outside the West. And just as the issue of women's suffrage stagnated at the turn of the century, black citizenship rights were being systematically dismantled: The former slave states disfranchised African-American men through terror but also through ostensibly legal measures such as poll taxes and literacy tests. A new strategy to expand woman's suffrage emerged in 1900 when the new organization elected Carrie Chapman Catt as its president. Catt avoided the rhetoric of gender equality, and instead tapped the more prosaic sentiment that women should be permitted to vote as mothers and as "municipal housekeepers." This strategy helped at first — over the next few years women won the right in several states to vote on local and state ordinances regulating taxation, schooling and the sale of alcohol. Yet the close association of women with temperance may have been counterproductive, generating even more opposition to "the woman vote." And though several states considered the issue between 1893 and 1910, not a single one extended full voting rights to women.

Given this resistance, the National American Woman Suffrage Association began to lobby state legislatures while also canvassing towns, wards and precincts. It abandoned its longstanding call for an education requirement for voting in order to broaden its reach beyond the middle class. Similarly, it forged alliances with trade unions, prompting Samuel Gompers, the conservative president of the American Federation of Labor, to support female suffrage.

But while expanding its networks, the association also argued that white women, armed with the franchise, would serve as a bulwark against black and immigrant votes. At the same time, though, Southern white opponents of women's suffrage also made racial appeals by arguing that the movement would empower Southern black women, an absolutely unacceptable prospect at the height of Jim Crow.

Perhaps the most notable convert to woman's suffrage was Theodore Roosevelt. In 1911, he wrote sympathetically to a leading opponent of suffrage that women "do not really need the suffrage although I do not think they would do any harm with it. Their needs are along entirely different lines, and their duties are along entirely different lines." A year later, when Roosevelt sought to recapture the presidency on the new Progressive Party ticket, he reassured the social activist Jane Addams that he backed women's suffrage "without qualification or equivocation."

Equally important was the adoption of savvy techniques to advertise suffrage through billboards, newspapers, pamphlets, mass meetings and parades. By the early 1910s, America was awash in suffrage propaganda that kept the issue in the news. After a successful campaign in California in 1911, suffrage organizations flooded the public with maps in an effort to export the undeniable momentum in the West to rest of the country.

When The New York Times published one such suffrage map in 1913, a Massachusetts reader responded that “woman suffrage has been adopted only by the crude, raw, half-formed commonwealths of the sagebrush and the windy plains, whence have come in endless procession foolish and fanatical politics and policies for a generation or two.”

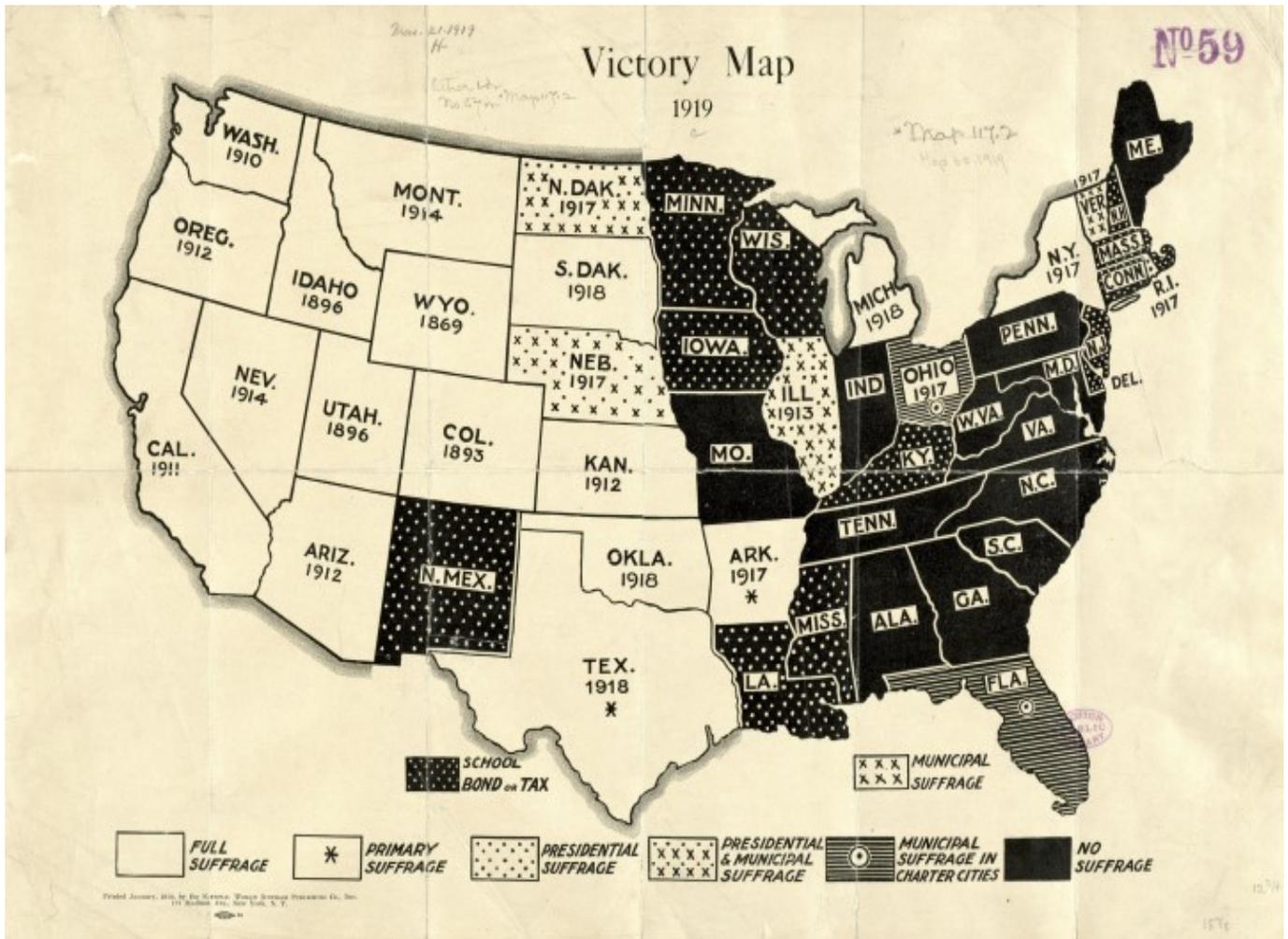
Given the intransigence in the South and East, the 1915 effort to grant women the right to vote in the nation’s largest state, New York, drew tremendous attention. The National American Woman Suffrage Association had even moved its headquarters from Ohio to New York to symbolize its commitment to the “Empire State Campaign.” To fuel support, the artist Henry Mayer portrayed suffrage on an eastward march, upending assumptions about the westward progress of civilization.

Pro-suffrage groups were not the only ones using maps to promote their cause. The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage reminded readers that the true test of support for woman’s suffrage was population, not geographical area. Measured by population, the occasional Western victories were vastly outweighed by the states that had defeated suffrage, especially New York. By labeling this a movement of “double suffrage,” the organization implied that women’s votes were redundant, pointlessly enlarging the electorate by replicating the male vote. To anti-suffragists, women did not need the vote because they were politically represented through their husbands, sons and fathers.

The initial failure of suffrage in New York highlighted the limits of the state level campaigns and revived the quest for a federal amendment. Leading this drive was Alice Paul, who parted with the National American Woman Suffrage Association to adopt a more forceful approach. In the 1916 election, she urged voting women in the West to hold the Democratic Party accountable for the lack of progress on a suffrage amendment. By defeating Wilson and congressional Democrats, she argued, women would flex their political muscle, demonstrating but also amplifying their power.

Though Wilson was re-elected, the anticipation of female voting power did change behavior. In 1917 women won the vote in North Dakota and Nebraska, but also in Eastern states (Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana) and the Southern state of Arkansas. The solidly anti-suffrage East and South had been broken. Then, in the fall of 1917, New York again considered a referendum to grant women full voting rights. While the powerful Tammany Hall political machine had ensured the measure’s defeat in 1915, a wellspring of support among New York City Democrats secured its passage. That support grew partly from a grass-roots campaign across the five boroughs, as shown in this postcard sent to a male voter.

New York proved a turning point, for it marked the largest victory in the state-level campaigns. Within a few months, Wilson had come around to supporting the federal amendment. But his decision was also influenced by his relationship to the suffrage movement during the Great War. In 1917, Catt, the president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, abandoned her prior pacifism so that her group would not be considered unpatriotic in a war that brutally suppressed dissent.



Alice Paul rejected Catt’s wartime strategy. She not only opposed the war, but openly picketed “Kaiser Wilson” in one of the first White House protests and an early example of nonviolent resistance. Paul and her National Woman’s Party paid dearly for their actions, enduring attacks and jail sentences to publicize the hypocrisy of a nation fighting to extend democracy abroad while denying those same rights to women at home.

Scholars debate whether Catt’s accommodation or Paul’s resistance influenced President Wilson. In fact, it was the combination of the two that forced Wilson to recognize woman’s suffrage as a moral right that would also advance his reform agenda. Though previously noncommittal — even resistant — by January 1918 Wilson vigorously supported the amendment, which was then under debate in the House of Representatives.

The subsequent vote tells us much about the path of political change. The amendment had failed in the House in 1915, but now reached the necessary two-thirds majority. More specifically, 56 of the congressmen who changed their vote from no to yes represented states that had enfranchised women in 1917. Their seats — and their political futures — were now determined by a transformed electorate.

Yet congressmen in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio and across the South remained staunchly opposed to the amendment. Overall, congressional Democrats were evenly split while Republicans supported it by a wide majority. And while suffragists continued to make state-level

gains, during the war voting rights for women were actually vetoed or overturned in Ohio, Vermont and Indiana.

With victory in the House secured, attention turned to the Senate. In September, the president traveled to Capitol Hill with almost every member of his cabinet to demonstrate support for the amendment. The Senate was unmoved, and defeated the measure. That November, three more states joined the suffrage column, which brought the total number of electoral votes in states with equal voting rights to 237. Two anti-suffrage senators were defeated in that election, yet when the Senate reconvened in early 1919 the amendment was yet again rejected.

Opponents reiterated that a federal amendment violated state rights, and that enfranchising black women would threaten the white power structure of the South. This stalwart Southern and Eastern opposition might have buried the amendment entirely. But in those last few months, more states granted women limited voting rights, which in turn forced a realignment in the Senate. Though highly distracted by the peace negotiations in Paris, President Wilson managed to wrangle the last vote needed to reach a two-thirds majority on June 4, 1919.

If the woman's suffrage movement challenged certain power structures, it benefited from and reaffirmed others. It was not above exploiting class and racial divisions to advance its agenda. Once ratified, the 19th Amendment offered little hope to African-American women in the South, who remained marginalized and disfranchised. Yet the movement transformed American democracy by vastly enlarging the electorate and forcing a fundamental recognition of women as political actors.

**Part I, 2: Challenging the whitewashed history of women's suffrage.** The Editors. (2019, June 1). *Southern Poverty Law Center*. Retrieved from <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2019/06/01/weekend-read-challenging-whitewashed-history-womens-suffrage> (reprinted with permission)

Last week, members of the U.S. House of Representatives wore yellow roses to commemorate the passage of the 19th Amendment in the lower chamber on May 21, 1919.

June 4 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment by the two-thirds Congressional majority – an action that sent the amendment granting women the right to vote to the states for ratification.

But we must not forget that while the 19th Amendment was momentous, the reality was that it did not grant the franchise to all women in the United States. In practice, it ensured the franchise for primarily white, middle and upper class women; women of color largely did not enjoy the right to vote.

How could they? Native Americans were not even granted citizenship until 1924. And, discriminatory Jim Crow laws, coupled with a resurgent and violent Ku Klux Klan, had a firm grip in the Southern states. African-American women in the Deep South could no more exercise their right to vote in 1920 than African-American men after the passage of the 15th Amendment in 1870.

It should also be remembered that the women's suffrage movement often intentionally excluded and undercut the voices of black and brown people to advance its agenda.

Though famed female suffragists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were vocally opposed to slavery before the Civil War, their alliance with abolitionists like Frederick Douglass faltered in the post-war years. These alliances especially deteriorated after it became clear that

African-American men would get the vote before white women – a development that was viewed at the time as degrading to white women and led to increasingly racist rhetoric within the movement.

As the years wore on, the alienation of black and brown female suffragists only intensified. White women eventually realized that relying on racial exclusion would be the only way to get Southern states to ratify the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

And, not only did white suffragists exclude their black and brown compatriots from their movement, when its history was written, they rendered women of color, and their important and significant contributions to the fight for equality, invisible.

There are many historians who've worked to correct this whitewashed history, bringing forth the names of lesser known female suffragists of color such as Mary Church Terrell, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Sarah Parker Remond, Fannie Barrier Williams, and Mary Ann Shadd Cary.

Additionally, The National Portrait Gallery, in its exhibit celebrating the 19th Amendment's centennial, will give long-overdue attention to the lives and work of these women.

The work of these women of color is evident today in the historic representation by a diverse group of women in Congress. But it's clear there's much more work ahead. Native Americans still face significant difficulties accessing the polls, naturalized citizens face voter intimidation, and Southern states have enacted onerous restrictions to systematically dilute the African-American vote.

This lack of political voice among people of color impacts women.

We must recognize that women of color live in the world as women and as people of color simultaneously. Their experiences cannot and should not be separated to prioritize equality for one marginalized identity over another. The black and brown suffragists of history refused to do it – and so should we.

So, as we celebrate the centennial of the 19th Amendment's passage, let's challenge oversimplified and exclusionary historical narratives. Let's honor the women of color who fought tirelessly for the right to vote. And in doing so, may we recommit ourselves to a women's movement that stands up for the rights of *all women*.

### **Part I, 3. Lessons Worth Learning**

1. Dubois, Ellen C. (2019, March 8). What activists today can learn from the women's suffrage movement. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com> The following text is excerpted.

**Persistence is key.** Women won the right to vote as the result of a decades-long struggle. The demand for women's suffrage was first made in 1848, in a small town in Upstate New York, at a time when people all over Europe were pushing for democracy.... When Susan B. Anthony was arrested for illegally casting her vote in 1872, she protested her sentence and continued to fight for another 40-plus years....

**Coalition-building is difficult but essential.** In becoming a more inclusive movement, race was the biggest hurdle.... White women concentrated on winning over white Southerners, not welcoming black women into their movement.... As the nation industrialized, the fast-growing female labor force

saw that they needed votes to protect themselves. Coalition building matters because major political change...needs the broadest support possible.

**Backlash will be fierce, which is why the fight must continue:** Immediately after 1920, approximately one third of the 30 million women granted the vote leveraged that right.... When it came to running for office, women found that enfranchisement had a ceiling. Politically skilled suffrage leaders were labeled as dangerous radicals — socialists, and even worse, feminists. Backlash persists and reminds us that the fight for women’s political power does not end even with monumental achievements like a constitutional amendment.

2. James, Kay Coles. (2019, June 3). Celebrating 100 years of women’s suffrage. *The Heritage Foundation*. Excerpted paragraph. Retrieved from <https://www.heritage.org/civil-society/commentary/celebrating-100-years-womens-suffrage>

**Coalition Building:** “I know many conservative women who have a lot to say about discrimination that they’ve faced in the workforce and I think it would be strategic and smart of the women on the left to understand that when they cut out our voices from the issues that are important to us that what they’re doing is missing an entire element that could help get these issues over the finish line. We have influence and voices and we can promote these issues as well.”

3. Cochrane, Kira. (2013, May 29). Nine inspiring lessons the suffragettes can teach feminists today. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/29/nine-lessons-suffragettes-feminists> Excerpts from the article include:

- **Find your voice, and use it.** The dearth of women in public life today is often attributed to a lack of confidence, and the suffragettes sometimes struggled with this too.
- **Sweetness is overrated.** Women were bound by feminine ideals at the start of the last century – expected to be submissive, nurturing, self-effacing – and we still are today.
- **Take strength from the haters.** Anyone who writes about feminism online knows there can be a nasty response. The only useful response was to take strength from the insults.
- **Accept that those haters will include other women.** In a male-dominated society, women are often brought up to identify with men, to see men's views and rights as paramount, and so it's not surprising that many women oppose their own liberation.
- **Fortune favours the brave.** After a meeting of 30,000 suffragettes in 1906, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence said she had "never met anyone so fearless as were these young girls." Such bravery was necessary, as the women often faced serious violence.
- **Publicity is power.** The suffragettes were a creative whirlwind, constantly devising new ways to catch the attention of politicians and the public. There's often tension today between those who deliver feminism with humour and those who prefer unfiltered anger – the suffragettes showed that both are necessary.
- **Strength through solidarity.** There were often major splits in the suffrage movement but there was also enough solidarity to keep the mission afloat.
- **Never give up.** Histories often focus on the last years or so of the struggle, but women fought for the vote for more than a century....
- **Accept victory – nothing else.** There are often arguments today about who should represent feminism, but the suffrage fight suggests we need the whole spectrum: the rabble-rousers, theorists, dogged campaigners, sympathetic politicians, those whose wit draws women to the cause, those whose anger keeps them motivated, and those who quietly, conscientiously chip away at issues that make others give up in despair. We need those who refuse to see any conceivable option but victory.

## **Addendum**

The National Capital Area League of Women Voters' website includes a bibliography of "Celebrations, Events and Resources for Centennial of Women's Vote. LWV and non-League."

Go to [www.lwvnca.org](http://www.lwvnca.org) and click on **CENTENNIAL of Women's Right to Vote** to find an excellent compilation of local Centennial exhibits and events at places like the Portrait Gallery, Archives, the Library of Congress, etc.

## **PART II. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: PLANNING FOR THE NEXT CENTENNIAL**

The goal of this part is to capture your thoughts—not on the past 100 years—but on the next 100 years, and what we, as a local League, should be doing. This could include specific issues we should pay attention to or might raise points about the ways we go about doing our work. Think about your responses before the Discussion Group so we can have a creative and energetic conversation together. Should we do more things with other groups in the community? Should we do more advocacy at the County level? Should we be more active during primaries? What does "suffrage" mean today? You choose the priorities. This isn't a test and your answers will not be collected. The DG recorder will summarize the comments offered during the discussion and they will provide input into LWVMC's program planning for the future. There does not have to be consensus.

*Starting with the discussion we just had on "lessons learned,"*

1. I think one of the most important lessons from the past is:
2. Applying that lesson to today means the League should prioritize:

*The background material for today showed that suffrage in 1920 didn't represent the same success for black women.*

3. To improve attention to election issues for black women and other minorities, the League could:
4. The League could also take other steps to help diminish the racial divisions that happened in 1920, such as:

*Even though suffrage gave women the right to vote, it took until 1984 for more than 50% of women to vote in the general election.*

5. In order to improve voting participation among women, the League should:
6. In order to improve voting participation by minorities and other low participating groups (e.g., young people), the League should consider doing:

*Registering voters is critically important, but isn't the end of the story.*

7. In 2020 and beyond, the concept of "suffrage" should also include attention to:

*One of the key lessons voiced by the authors of certain articles was the importance of coalition building to achieve big goals.*

8. The advantage of working with other groups is:
9. But I would be concerned about working with a group that:
10. A specific group we could work with is: