8. Women's Rights

You will find this hard to believe, my Little Dear One, but it is only 37 years ago, in 1920, that women in this country were allowed to vote for the first time! And that was really only because of women's work in the war effort, the fact that women proved themselves as strong and courageous on the front lines as men. President Wilson and the rest of the American people had to accept the fact that if women fought for their country, they should have the right to be equal partners in the self-determination of that country. Women had worked more than 80 years to get that right! Even then, eleven countries passed voting rights for women laws before the United States did. This Story of Women's Suffrage was very new and interesting to me. One of the most important centers for women's rights in the United States was right in Wisconsin, only 45 miles from Bloomington, in the town of Richland Center, and the daughter of the center's founder came to Bloomington to speak one day. When I was growing up, there was no such thing as women's rights, and to tell you the truth, I just accepted things the way they were and didn't think they could change, because my church was basically telling me that God had ordained the order of the world and women's roles were service and support, not leadership.

Brewers and distillers, typically rooted in the German American community, opposed women's suffrage, fearing that women voters would favor the prohibition of alcoholic beverages. German Lutherans and German Catholics typically opposed prohibition and woman suffrage; they favored paternalistic families with the husband deciding the family position on public affairs. Their opposition to women's suffrage was subsequently used as an argument in favor of suffrage when German Americans became pariahs during World War I.

The entry of the U.S. into World War I in April 1917 had a significant impact on the suffrage movement. To replace men who had gone into the military, women moved into workplaces that did not traditionally hire women, such as steel mills and oil refineries. Even more importantly, women played a major role on the home fronts in the war as nurses, ambulance drivers, and especially as Hello Girls. When the war was over, many countries recognized the hypocrisy of denying women the right to vote. The war was a contentious issue among the women's groups. Some of the women's organizations, like the National Woman's Party, continued militant protests during the war and were criticized by other suffrage groups and the public, who viewed it as unpatriotic.

The demand for women's suffrage began to gather strength in the 1840s, emerging from the broader movement for women's rights. In 1848, the Seneca Falls Convention, the first women's rights convention, passed a resolution in favor of women's suffrage despite opposition from some of its organizers, who believed the idea was too extreme. By the time of the first National Women's Rights Convention in 1850, however, suffrage was becoming an increasingly important aspect of the movement's activities.

Women's suffrage became a major topic of discussion within the women's rights movement at that time. Many of its activists were aligned with the Garrisonian wing of the abolitionist movement, which believed that activists should avoid political activity and focus instead on convincing others of their views with "moral suasion. Many were Quakers whose traditions barred both men and

women from participation in secular political activity. A series of women's rights conventions did much to alter these attitudes.

The first women's rights convention was the Seneca Falls Convention, a regional event held on July 19 and 20, 1848, in Seneca Falls in the Finger Lakes region of New York. Five women called the convention, four of whom were Quaker social activists, including the well-known Lucretia Mott. The fifth was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who had discussed the need to organize for women's rights with Mott several years earlier. Stanton, who came from a family that was deeply involved in politics, became a major force in convincing the women's movement that political pressure was crucial to its goals, and that the right to vote was a key weapon. An estimated 300 women and men attended this two-day event, which was widely noted in the press. The only resolution that was not adopted unanimously by the convention was the one demanding women's right to vote, which was introduced by Stanton. When her husband, a well-known social reformer, learned that she intended to introduce this resolution, he refused to attend the convention and accused her of acting in a way that would turn the proceedings into a farce. Lucretia Mott, the main speaker, was also disturbed by the proposal. The resolution was adopted only after Frederick Douglass, an abolitionist leader and a former slave, gave it his strong support. The convention's Declaration of Sentiments, which was written primarily by Stanton, expressed an intent to build a women's rights movement, and it included a list of grievances, the first two of which protested the lack of women's suffrage. The grievances were aimed at the United States government and "demanded government reform and changes in male roles and behaviors that promoted inequality for women."

This convention was followed two weeks later by the Rochester Women's Rights Convention of 1848, which featured many of the same speakers and likewise voted to support women's suffrage. It was the first women's rights convention to be chaired by a woman, a step that was considered to be radical at the time. That meeting was followed by the Ohio Women's Convention at Salem in 1850, the first women's rights convention to be organized on a statewide basis, which also endorsed women's suffrage.

The first national suffrage organizations were established in 1869 when two competing organizations were formed, one led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the other by Lucy Stone. After years of rivalry, they merged in 1890 as the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) with Anthony as its leading force.

Hoping that the U.S. Supreme Court would rule that women had a constitutional right to vote, suffragists made several attempts to vote in the early 1870s and then filed lawsuits when they were turned away. Anthony actually succeeded in voting in 1872 but was arrested for that act and found guilty in a widely publicized trial that gave the movement fresh momentum. After the Supreme Court ruled against them in 1875, suffragists began the decades-long campaign for an amendment

to the U.S. Constitution that would enfranchise women. Much of the movement's energy, however, went toward working for suffrage on a state-by-state basis.

Laws that sharply restricted the independent activity of married women also created barriers to the campaign for women's suffrage. According to William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, an authoritative commentary on the English common law on which the American legal system is modeled, "by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage", referring to the legal doctrine of coverture that was introduced to England by the Normans in the Middle Ages. In 1862 the Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court denied a divorce to a woman whose husband had horsewhipped her, saying, "The law gives the husband power to use such a degree of force necessary to make the wife behave and know her place." Married women in many states could not legally sign contracts, which made it difficult for them to arrange for convention halls, printed materials and other things needed by the suffrage movement. Restrictions like these were overcome in part by the passage of married women's property laws in several states, supported in some cases by wealthy fathers who didn't want their daughters' inheritance to fall under the complete control of their husbands.

Many women worked on the issues of women's rights, and there were often fierce differences of opinion between the more progressive women and the more conservative ones. Several of the early "movers and shakers" stand out, however, for their tireless work for this cause. Lucretia Mott (née Coffin), lower left, January 3, 1793 – November 11, 1880) was a U.S. Quaker, abolitionist, women's rights activist, and social reformer. She had formed the idea of reforming the position of women in society when she was amongst the women excluded from the World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840. In 1848 she was invited by Jane Hunt to a meeting that led to the first meeting about women's rights. Mott helped write the Declaration of Sentiments during the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention.

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Elizabeth Cady Stanton, right, was the primary early voice in the women's rights movement to keep the focus on political reform and women's right to vote.

Susan B. Anthony, left, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton met in 1851 and soon became close friends and co-workers. Their decades-long collaboration was pivotal for the suffrage movement and contributed significantly to the broader struggle for women's rights, which Stanton called "the greatest revolution the world has ever known or ever will know." They had complementary skills: Anthony excelled at organizing while Stanton had an aptitude for intellectual matters and writing. Stanton, who was homebound with several children during this period, wrote speeches that Anthony delivered to meetings that she herself organized. Together they developed a sophisticated movement in New York State, but their work at this time dealt with women's issues in general, not specifically suffrage. Anthony, who eventually became the person most closely associated in the public mind with women's suffrage, later said "I wasn't ready to vote, didn't want to vote, but I did want equal pay for equal work." In the period just before the Civil War, Anthony gave priority to anti-slavery work over her work for the women's movement.

Another important early voice in the movement for women's rights was Margaret Fuller.

Sarah Margaret Fuller Ossoli (May 23, 1810 – July 19, 1850), commonly known as Margaret Fuller, was an American journalist, critic, and women's rights advocate associated with the American transcendentalism movement. She was the first full-time American female book reviewer in journalism. Her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is considered the first major feminist work in the United States.

Born Sarah Margaret Fuller in Cambridge, Massachusetts, she was given a substantial early education by her father, Timothy Fuller. She later had more formal schooling and became a teacher before, in 1839, she began overseeing what she called "conversations": discussions among women meant to compensate for their lack of access to higher education. She became the first editor of the transcendentalist journal *The Dial* in 1840, before joining the staff of the *New York Tribune* under Horace Greeley in 1844. By the time she was in her 30s, Fuller had earned a reputation as the best-read person in New England, male or female, and she became the first woman allowed to use the library at Harvard College. Her seminal work, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, was published in 1845. A year later, she was sent to Europe for the *Tribune* as its first female correspondent. She soon became involved with the revolutions in Italy and allied herself with Giuseppe Mazzini. She had a relationship with Giovanni Ossoli, with whom she had a child. All three members of the family died in a shipwreck off Fire Island, New York, as they were traveling to the United States in 1850. Fuller's body was never recovered.

Fuller was an advocate of women's rights and, in particular, women's education and the right to employment. She also encouraged many other reforms in society, including prison reform and the emancipation of slaves in the United States. Many other advocates for women's rights and feminism, including Susan B. Anthony, cite Fuller as a source of inspiration. Many of her contemporaries, however, were not supportive, including her former friend Harriet Martineau. She said that Fuller was a talker rather than an activist. Shortly after Fuller's death, her importance faded; the editors who prepared her letters to be published, believing her fame would be short-lived, censored or altered much of her work before publication.

Horace Greeley, like Margaret's father, was instrumental in supporting her tireless educational work.

Greeley hired Margaret Fuller in 1844 as first literary editor of the *Tribune*, for which she wrote over 200 articles. She lived with the Greeley family for several years, and when she moved to Italy, he made her a foreign correspondent. He promoted the work of Henry David Thoreau, serving as literary agent and seeing to it that Thoreau's work was published. Ralph Waldo Emerson also benefited from Greeley's promotion. Historian Allan Nevins explained:
"The *Tribune* set a new standard in American journalism by its combination of energy in news gathering with good taste, high moral standards, and intellectual appeal. Police reports, scandals, dubious medical advertisements, and flippant personalities were barred from its pages; the editorials were vigorous but usually temperate; the political news was the most exact in the city; book reviews and book-extracts were numerous; and as an inveterate lecturer Greeley gave generous space to lectures. The paper appealed to substantial and thoughtful people."

Greeley sponsored a host of reforms, including pacifism and feminism and especially the ideal of the hard-working free laborer. Greeley demanded reforms to make all citizens free and equal. He envisioned virtuous citizens who would eradicate corruption. He talked endlessly about progress, improvement, and freedom, while calling for harmony between labor and capital. Greeley's editorials promoted social democratic reforms and were widely reprinted. They influenced the free-labor ideology of the Whigs and the radical wing of the Republican Party, especially in promoting the free-labor ideology. Before 1848 he sponsored an American version of Fourierist socialist reform but backed away after the failed revolutions of 1848 in Europe. To promote multiple reforms, Greeley hired a roster of writers who later became famous in their own right, including Margaret Fuller, Charles Anderson Dana, George William Curtis, William Henry Fry, Bayard Taylor, Julius Chambers and Henry Jarvis Raymond, who later co-founded *The New York Times*.

The state of Wisconsin played a pivotal role in the last stages of the campaign for women's right to vote.

Richland Center became an important location for the women's suffrage movement in Wisconsin after Laura Briggs James, Julia Bowen, and other residents founded the Richland Center Woman's Club in early 1882. Two years later, the Woman's Club hosted the first regular convention of the Wisconsin Suffrage Association. In 1886 Susan B. Anthony spoke for suffrage in Bailey's Opera House in Richland Center. The club quickly became the largest suffrage group in the state and was

influential in organizing the movement throughout Wisconsin. Later, Laura James' daughter Ada James became influential in the movement, helping to found the Political Equality League in 1909 and advocating for women's rights, pacifism, birth control, and prohibition. World War I, which the United States entered in April 1917, created the conditions that compelled President Woodrow Wilson to support women's suffrage. In 1919, Wisconsin became the first state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Wisconsin won this distinction because Ada's father, former State Senator David G. James, traveled to Washington, D.C. via train and hand delivered the documents to just nose out Illinois for this honor. Women voted nationwide for the first time in the presidential election of 1920.

Ada James is remembered as Richland Center's and Richland County's most prominent suffragette and for her work with disadvantaged children and women. She came to the suffrage movement naturally because her mother, Laura, in 1882 was one of the founders of the Richland Center Woman's Club that worked tirelessly for women's suffrage.

In 1892, Ada and several other high-school girls formed the Equality Club to assist in the campaign for women's suffrage. In 1911, she was a founding member of the statewide Political Equality League and served as its president for two years, including the crucial state referendum fight of 1912. Ada used unprecedented tactics - hiring a motorboat to distribute leaflets along the Wolf River and employing an airplane to drop brochures on county fair crowds in the campaign. However, women's suffrage went down in a resounding defeat, by 90,000 votes; a trouncing Ada blamed primarily on the lavish spending by the brewing interests that feared women voters would support temperance.

In 1912, after the ill-fated campaign, the Political Equality League and the Wisconsin Suffrage Association merged under the latter's name and Ada became a vice president, although the WSA continued its work for other causes as well.

With the suffrage battle finally won, Ada James devoted the remainder of her life to numerous other causes - temperance, pacifism, world peace, and assistance for underprivileged children. She became keenly interested in the latter cause when she began bringing poor children from Chicago to Richland County in the summers. These "sunshine children" caused her to realize that Richland County had its own underprivileged children. During 1920, Ada led a campaign that convinced the Richland County Board to create a Children's Board, the first such organization in the state. She poured her energy and money into this cause. Richland County's shelter for abused women and their children is named Ada James Place.

This is the young woman I came to know about in Bloomington. She had dropped her brochures over the fairgrounds there on July 5, 1909, when presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan (an orator and statesman who ran as a presidential candidate three times) spoke there. 3000 people

came to hear him speak, in a town of 700 people! Ada dropped brochures again at the 1910 and 1911 fairs, and that's when I picked one up. Then she was invited to speak at a Bloomington Salmagundi Club meeting to talk about the Political Equity League. That's where I heard her speak. She focused her speech on the need to empower women politically to make social change. Her words rang very true in my mind, and I knew that my thinking would never be the same again about women's role in society. Many years later this process of becoming aware would be called "consciousness-raising."

In 1916 Alice Paul formed the National Woman's Party (NWP), a militant group focused on the passage of a national suffrage amendment. Over 200 NWP supporters, the Silent Sentinels, were arrested in 1917 while picketing the White House, some of whom went on hunger strike and endured forced feeding after being sent to prison. Under the leadership of Carrie Chapman Catt, the two-million-member NAWSA also made a national suffrage amendment its top priority.

Way back in 1878 Senator Aaron A. Sargent, a friend of Susan B. Anthony, had introduced into Congress a women's suffrage amendment. More than forty years later this would become the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution with no changes to its wording. Its text is identical to that of the Fifteenth Amendment except that it prohibits the denial of suffrage because of sex rather than "race, color, or previous condition of servitude". This was the amendment women were fighting for. In 1917, women suffragists paraded in New York City, carrying placards with the signatures of more than a million women in support of the amendment.

On June 4, 1919, it was brought before the Senate, and after a long discussion it was passed, with 56 ayes and 25 nays (Republicans 36-8 for, Democrats 20-17 for). Within a few days, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Michigan ratified the amendment, their legislatures being then in session. Other states followed suit at a regular pace, until the amendment had been ratified by 35 of the necessary 36 state legislatures. After Washington, on March 22, 1920, ratification languished for months. Finally, on August 18, 1920, Tennessee narrowly ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, making it the law throughout the United States. Thus the 1920 election became the first United States presidential election in which women were permitted to vote in every state. Nearly twenty years later Maryland ratified the amendment in 1941. After another ten years, in 1952, Virginia ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, followed by Alabama in 1953. After another 16 years Florida and South Carolina passed the necessary votes to ratify it in 1969, followed two years later by Georgia, Louisiana and North Carolina. Mississippi did not ratify the Nineteenth Amendment until 1984, sixty-four years after the law was enacted nationally.

And this is the story, my Little Dear One, of how women finally got the right to vote in this country after 80 years of trying. After a hard-fought series of votes in the U.S. Congress and in state legislatures, the Nineteenth Amendment became part of the U.S. Constitution on August 26, 1920. It states, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." This was, without doubt, not only a great accomplishment for women's rights, but the pivotal cornerstone on which to build the self-determination of one half of the population of this country, if understood and used for progress. Unfortunately, its potential to upset long-standing cultural norms and roles insured not only the long, hard journey to achieve it, but a long series of battles ever since in which women have had to fight continuously to try to actually get the status promised by that cornerstone. Those who have enjoyed privileged status for hundreds or thousands of years are in no hurry to relinquish that status, nor is it easy for them to understand that their refusal to relinquish that status condemns the world to the continuing violence of society today. Those recalcitrant ones deride Feminism as

the scourge causing a sick society, when in reality it is the denial of the true practice of Feminism that is the cause of the sick society. Feminism might better be labeled Civil Rights for All.

Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal: to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes. This includes seeking to establish educational and professional opportunities for women that are equal to those for men. Feminist movements have campaigned and continue to campaign for women's rights, including the right to vote, to hold public office, to work, to earn fair wages or equal pay, to own property, to receive education, to enter contracts, to have equal rights within marriage, and to have maternity leave. Feminists have also worked to ensure access to legal abortions and social integration, and to protect women and girls from rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. Changes in dress and acceptable physical activity have often been part of feminist movements.

And The Message to Take Away from All of This Is a Series of Questions:

If You Go Up Do I Have to Go Down?

Does My Good Fortune Require Your Bad Fortune?

Does The Advancement of One Person or Group Always Require the Decline of Another Person Or Group?

Do Human Interactions Have to Be a Zero-Sum Game?