

# This Day in History... August 26, 1920

## The 19th Amendment

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*Stamp commemorates the 100th anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention.*

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On the other hand, supporters argued that women were possibly more qualified than men to vote based on a somewhat higher moral character. Some thought that women, as white people born in this country, had more rights to vote than newly emancipated slaves or recently naturalized immigrants. Both groups had the right to vote by the late 1800s.



*Stamp from the Celebrate the Century Series*



*Issued for the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the amendment.*

In the early 1800s, there were small movements and organizations that sought women's suffrage, but they were scattered and didn't work together. That all changed in 1848 when Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton arranged the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. The two had first met at the World's Anti-Slavery Convention, where they were both denied entrance because they were women. The purpose for the Women's Rights Convention was to forever change the role of women. They wanted to be, not just sheltered and silent wives and mothers, but productive and contributing members of society. Many famous Americans, including Frederick Douglass, attended the two-day event, held July 19-20, 1848.

Some opponents of the suffrage movement felt that women did not possess the common sense to vote. Other people used the argument that men were somehow saving women from the "contaminating and

The movement grew in strength over time, especially after the passage of the 15th Amendment to the US Constitution. This had given Black men the right to vote in 1870. A women's suffrage amendment was first introduced in Congress in 1878, but it failed to pass. An amendment was then reintroduced in Congress every session for the next 40 years.

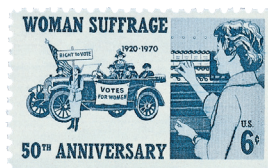
By the beginning of the 20th century, the right to vote had been won in only four states, but the suffrage movement continued to gain national momentum. Demanding the right to vote, women across the country held rallies, gave speeches, marched in parades, and lobbied Congress. When the grand dames of society joined the cause, suffrage even became fashionable. In the coming years, more newly created western states granted women's suffrage.

Carrie Chapman Catt succeeded Susan B. Anthony as president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1900. She stepped down in 1904 to take care of her husband, who passed away in 1905. In 1915, she was reelected president. She increased the size and influence of the organization, while renewing its focus on a federal amendment. When the US joined World War I, she placed the group on the forefront of the war effort, earning the support of President Woodrow Wilson.

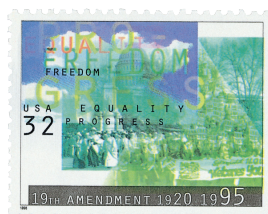
President Wilson spoke openly of his support for the 19th Amendment, granting women the right to vote. However, in two separate attempts in October 1918 and February 1919, it still failed, but only by two and then one vote.

Then in May 1919, a new congressional term began. The bill was brought to the House as one of its first actions, which passed it by 42 votes. That June, the Senate passed it as well, after lengthy discussion. Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan were the first states to ratify the amendment in the coming days. Over the next year, several more states ratified it, but 36 states were needed to ratify the amendment. Finally, after holding a special session on August 18, 1920, Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the 19th Amendment. The 19th Amendment was certified and adopted six days later on August 26, officially giving women the right to vote. Since the 1970s, this date has been celebrated as Women's Equality Day.

The amendment says: "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." More than just a victory for women, it was, as the *Kansas City Star* proclaimed, "a victory for democracy and the principle of equality upon which the nation was founded."



*Stamp pictures suffragists on the left and a woman voting on the right.*



*Stamp pictures a combination of two historic images – the 1913 procession of women at Wilson's inauguration and a 1976 march for the Equal Rights Amendment in Illinois.*



*One of the US postage stamps printed on Internal Revenue paper.*

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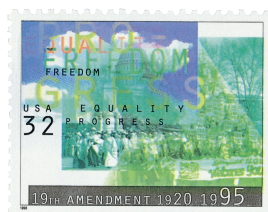
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