

# The Right to Vote

## What opportunities does the right to vote provide?

Up until the Civil War, in most places, the right to vote in the United State was restricted to white males 21 years and older. Each state, not the federal government, established its own voter qualifications, but by far, adult white males accounted for almost all of the ballots cast. In the Dred Scott decision in 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that slaves were property of their owners, were not citizens and had no legal rights at all. A decade later, African Americans were not only free, but they were free citizens, and in Iowa, the path had been set to grant them the right to vote.

## Women's Suffrage

While African-American males were winning the right to vote, advocates for women's suffrage saw an opportunity to advance their cause. In 1848, a convention at Seneca Falls, New York, was the first to call for granting the right to vote to women, but the issue gathered little support before the Civil War. Because suffrage requirements were written into the Iowa constitution, any change required a proposal to be passed in two consecutive legislative sessions and then submitted to the voters for approval. While a women's suffrage bill could sometimes pass the House or the Senate in one session, it could never win approval by both chambers for two sessions.

Powerful opponents lined up against granting the vote to women. Most prominent were those who opposed prohibition, a strict limitation on the manufacture and sale of liquor. It was assumed that women voters would be hostile to liquor interests and would support greater restrictions. European immigrant groups, especially Germans and Irish, had no traditions that saw drinking as evil. Conservative churches, including Catholics, opposed women's suffrage as an attack on traditional family values. They pointed to Bible instructions that the man was to be the head of the house and that the wife was to submit to his authority. Women's suffrage made the two equal, and, some argued, could lead to friction within the family. In communities along the Mississippi and in northeast Iowa with strong Irish and German communities, there was strong opposition to votes for women. In western Iowa where Protestant churches like the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians dominated, there was strong support for both prohibition and women's suffrage.

Carrie Chapman Catt, an Iowa native, rose to the head of a national association promoting women's suffrage. Early victories in several western states led women's advocates that they could soon gain the right to vote across the nation, but it remained a tough battle. Around the turn of the century, women were allowed to vote on referenda like bond issues, but not in "elections" where there are candidates. This was known as the partial suffrage. In 1915, Iowa voters (still all male) narrowly defeated a women's suffrage amendment that would have struck the word "male" from the state's voting requirements. Nevertheless, when Congress submitted the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution to the states for ratification, the Iowa legislature approved it. In the 1920 elections, women across the United States went to the polls. Later in the decade, Iowa women won the right to serve on juries and be elected to public office.

## Supporting Question

How did women obtain the right to vote?

- [Women's Suffrage Parade Shown Passing by Church, October 29, 1908 \(Image\)](#)
- ["Votes for Women! The Woman's Reason" by the National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1912 \(Document\)](#)
- [Billboard Urging Iowans to Vote "Yes" for Women's Suffrage, 1916 \(Image\)](#)
- [Map Abstract of June 5, 1916, Vote for Woman Suffrage Constitutional Amendment in Iowa, 1916 \(Map\)](#)
- [Route of Envoys Sent by the Congressional Union for Woman's Suffrage to Organize in the West, between April and May 1916 \(Map\)](#)
- [Anti-Suffrage Ad from The Iowa Homestead, May 25, 1916 \(Document\)](#)
- [Letter from Anna Lawther of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association to County Chairs, November 13, 1918](#)
- [Activists Leaving National Woman's Party Headquarters to Take Petition to Senator Jones of New Mexico, 1918 \(Image\)](#)
- [Letter from President Woodrow Wilson to Carrie Chapman Catt, June 7, 1918 \(Document\)](#)
- [Response Letter from Iowa Secretary of State W.S. Allen to Anna Lawther, December 1918 \(Document\)](#)
- [19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, August 26, 1920 \(Document\)](#)
- [Sculpture of Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, between 1921 and 1923 \(Image\)](#)

## \*Printable Image and Document Guide

### Additional Resources

#### Women's Suffrage:

["Women's Suffrage in Iowa"](#): This online exhibit features women's suffrage resources from the Iowa Women's Archives and State Historical Society of Iowa.

[Interview with Carrie Chapman Catt](#): This short video features prominent suffragist leader, Carrie Chapman Catt, who was born and raised in Iowa.

[Carrie Chapman Catt's Address to the U.S. Congress](#): This website for the Carrie Chapman Catt Museum in Charles City, Iowa, includes text of a speech Catt gave to the U.S. Congress in 1917 on the inevitability of women's suffrage.

["The Fight for Women's Suffrage" from IPTV](#): This online webpage from Iowa Public Television's "Iowa Pathways" collection summarizes the history of women's suffrage in Iowa.

[Trial of Susan B. Anthony](#): This online resource from UMKC School of Law summarizes the trial of women's suffragist leader Susan B. Anthony after she illegally voted in Rochester, New York in 1872.

## Women's Suffrage Parade Shown Passing by Church, October 29, 1908



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, Moxley, 29 October 1908

### Description

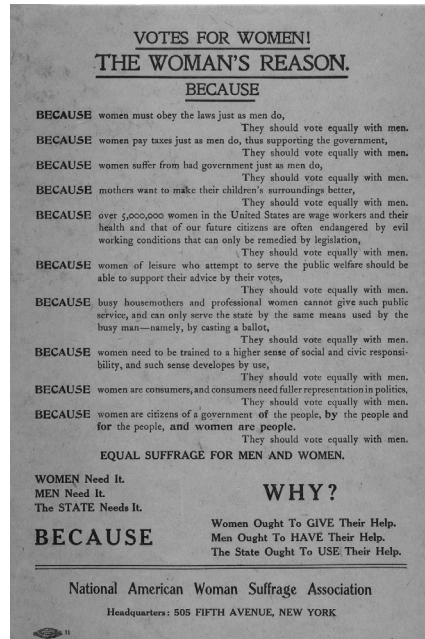
In this photograph, taken in Boone, Iowa on October 29, 1908, a suffrage parade made up of people carrying banners and flags passes by a large church. One banner held by a parade marcher reads: "Taxation Without Representation Is Tyranny. As True Now As In 1776."

### [Transcript of Women's Suffrage Parade Banner](#)

### Text-Dependent Questions

- Look closely at this photo of a women's suffrage parade that took place in Boone, Iowa. What do you notice about the parade participants?
- One woman is holding a sign that says "Taxation without representation is tyranny - as true now as in 1776." Refer to the [Votes for Women! The Woman's Reason document](#) which also mentions taxation. What does "Taxation without representation is tyranny" mean?
- Women paid taxes just like men, but in what ways were they without representation?

## “Votes for Women! The Woman’s Reason” by the National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1912



Courtesy of Library of Congress, “Votes For Women! The Woman’s Reason...,” National American Woman Suffrage Association, New York, 1912

### Description

The broadside, published by the National American Woman Suffrage Association, includes 10 reasons why women should vote equally with men are listed. The poster was created in 1912, and even made reference to a line made famous by Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural address by stating, “Because women are citizens of a government of the people, by the people and for the people. And women are people.”

### [Transcript of “Votes for Women! The Woman’s Reason” Broadside](#)

### Text-Dependent Questions

- How many of the reasons presented in this publication have to do with taxes or improving public welfare? Why would those issues be strong arguments for supporting women’s suffrage?
- The last part of President Abraham Lincoln’s 1863 Gettysburg Address is: “... that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Why would the National American Woman Suffrage Association use that famous text? In what ways is the struggle for women’s suffrage similar to and different from African-American suffrage and American-Indian suffrage?

### Citation Information

“Votes For Women! The Woman’s Reason...,” National American Woman Suffrage Association, New York, 1912.  
[Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

## Billboard Urging Iowans to Vote “Yes” for Women’s Suffrage, 1916



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 1916

### Description

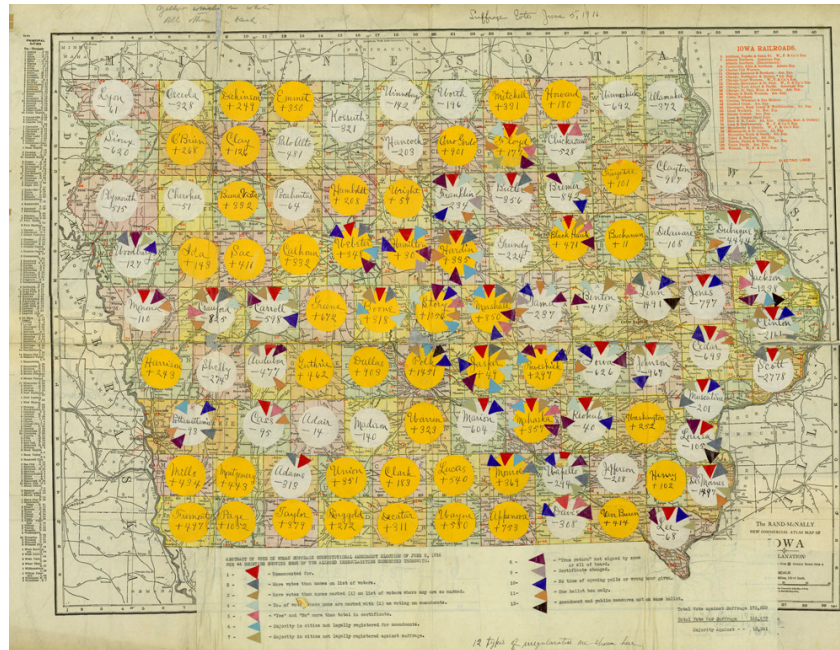
This photograph is of a billboard urging Iowans to vote for women’s suffrage in an upcoming primary election on June 5, 1916. The large text reads, “Iowa Next. Vote yes June 5th 1916,” and is next to a map of the 48 contiguous states. The states where “full suffrage” and “partial suffrage” have been achieved are indicated. Iowa is shown as a state with “partial suffrage.”

### Text-Dependent Questions

- What did the creators of this billboard want people to do?
- Compare this billboard with the [map abstract of June 5, 1916](#). What was the outcome of the election?



## Map Abstract of June 5, 1916, Vote for Woman Suffrage Constitutional Amendment in Iowa, 1916



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 1916

### Description

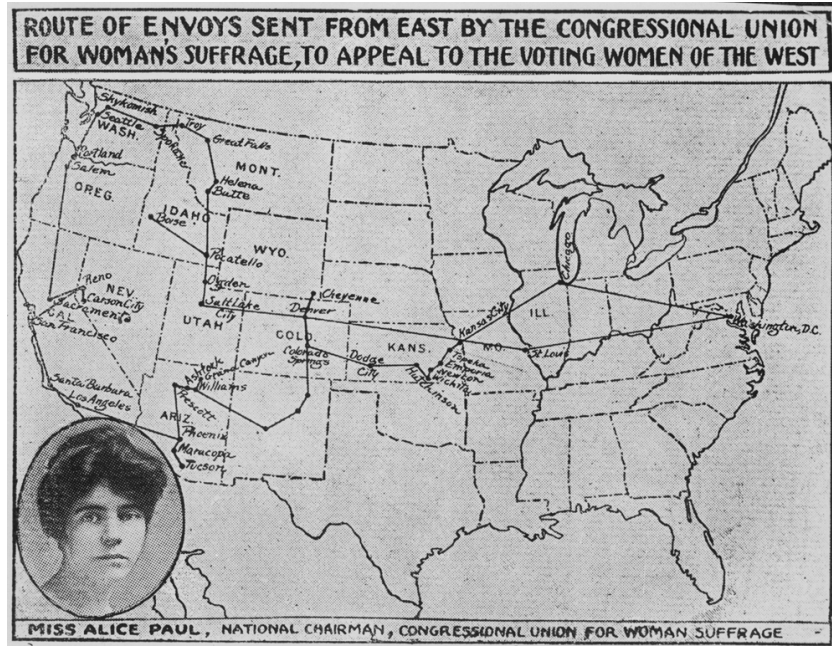
This 1916 map from Carrie Chapman Catt’s scrapbook was created after the failed June 5, 1916, vote attempt to add a woman suffrage amendment to the Iowa constitution. Suffragists plotted out the margin of victory or loss by county. Their work also included the 12 different alleged irregularities that may have occurred in some counties that led to a statewide majority opposed to the amendment.

### [Transcript of Map Abstract of Vote for Woman Suffrage Constitutional Amendment](#)

### Text-Dependent Questions

- Who is the likely intended audience, and for what purpose was this map created?
- According to this map, by how many votes was women’s suffrage defeated in Iowa?
- Find the county that you live in. How did your county vote in this election? If this vote were taking place in your county today, how would you vote? Explain why.
- In your opinion, which of the colored flags are the most significant? Explain why.

## Route of Envoys Sent by the Congressional Union for Woman's Suffrage to Organize in the West, between April and May 1916



Courtesy of Library of Congress, "[Map of] Route of Envoys Sent from East by the Congressional Union for Woman's Suffrage, to Appeal the Voting Women of the West [with inset portrait of Alice Paul]," between April and May 1916

### Description

This map of the United States shows the tour of Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage as they travel to the West to recruit and organize fellow women suffragists. An image of suffragist Alice Paul is in the lower left-hand corner. The map is captioned "Call to Women Voters to Assemble in Chicago June 5, 6, 7 to Launch A National Woman's Party."

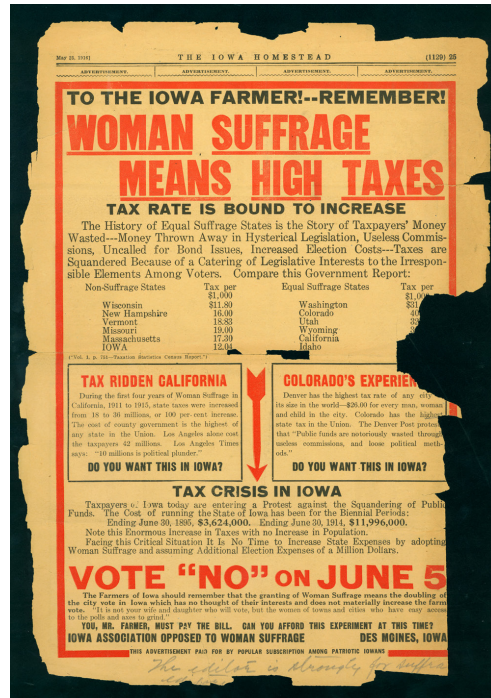
### Text-Dependent Questions

- How many states did this envoy travel through? How many cities did the envoy stop in?
- In 1916 only 11 states had granted women full voting rights, including: Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Idaho, Washington, California, Arizona, Kansas, Oregon, Nevada and Montana. Infer why the Congressional Union for Woman's Suffrage might have chosen this route.

### Citation Information

"[Map of] Route of Envoys Sent from East by the Congressional Union for Woman's Suffrage, to Appeal the Voting Women of the West [with inset portrait of Alice Paul]," between April and May 1916. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

## Anti-Suffrage Ad from *The Iowa Homestead*, May 25, 1916



Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, 25 May 1916

### Description

This advertisement, printed in *The Iowa Homestead* on May 25, 1916, was funded by the Iowa Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage. The organization argues that women’s suffrage would directly lead to both higher taxes and the drowning out of the rural vote because of a doubled city vote. The ad was published just over a week before the June 5, 1916, vote held in Iowa to add a women’s suffrage amendment to the Iowa constitution, which ultimately failed.

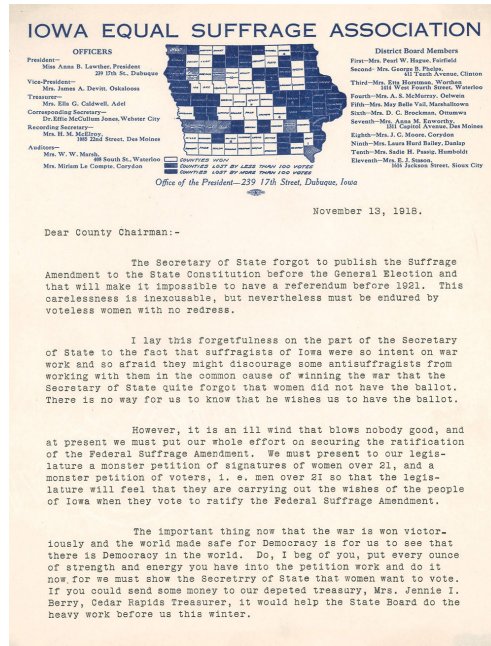
### [Transcript of Anti-Suffrage Ad from \*The Iowa Homestead\*](#)

### Text-Dependent Questions

- Does this advertisement support women’s suffrage? What evidence from the source supports your answer?
- Who is the intended audience of this advertisement?
- What is the message the Iowa Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage communicating in this advertisement?
- Compare this document to the [Votes for Women! The Woman’s Reason](#). Both documents address taxation but how is the message different?



# Letter from Anna Lawther of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association to County Chairman, November 13, 1918



Courtesy of University of Iowa Libraries and Archives, Lawther, Anna, "Speeches and letters by Anna Lawther, 1910s," 13 November 1918

## Description

In a letter to a county chairman, Anna Lawther states that the secretary of state forgot to publish the suffrage amendment in newspapers prior to the June 5 election which led to the amendment's defeat. She urges the chairman to write their state and federal representatives and secure written pledges that they will support women's suffrage amendments when they are presented.

## Transcript of Anna Lawther's Letter to County Chairman

## Text-Dependent Questions

- Who does Anna Lawther say is to blame for the defeat of Iowa women's suffrage in 1916? She wrote that "This carelessness is inexcusable, but nevertheless must be endured ..." Why must this action be endured by women rather than acted upon?
- What hope does Lawther offer that women's suffrage is still possible? Why would the federal amendment be the quickest path for women's voting rights in Iowa?
- Infer as to why a person might not have wanted to help Lawther.

## Citation Information

Lawther, Anna, "Speeches and letters by Anna Lawther, 1910s," 13 November 1918. [Courtesy of University of Iowa Libraries and Archives](#)

## Activists Leaving National Woman's Party Headquarters to Take Petition to Senator Jones of New Mexico, 1918



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Harris & Ewing, "Deputation Leaving Headquarters to Take Petition to Senator Jones of New Mexico [Annie Fraher, Bertha Moller, Berthe Arnold, Anita Pollitzer]," September 1918

### Description

This photograph shows Annie Fraher, Bertha Moller, Berthe Arnold and Anita Pollitzer standing outside the National Woman's Party headquarters with a large-rolled suffrage petition. After a multi-state journey, the petition was delivered to Senator Andrieus Jones of New Mexico, who was chairman of the Suffrage Committee in September 1918. An earlier movement resulted in an 18,000 foot-long petition with half a million signatures in support of women's suffrage. That petition was delivered on several huge spools to President Woodrow Wilson in December 1915, but he remained committed that suffrage was a state issue, not a federal one.

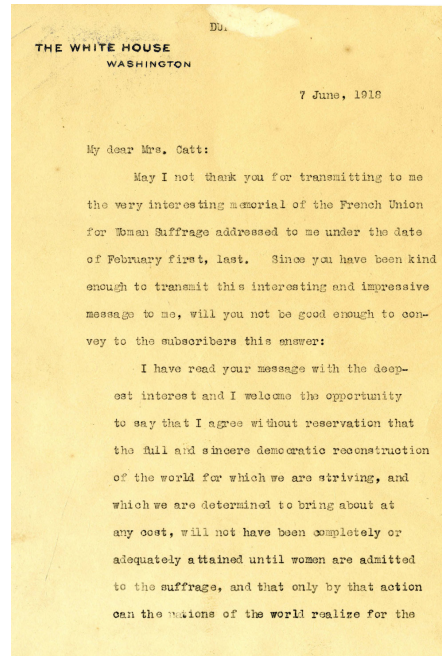
### Text-Dependent Questions

- How does a petition, one form of "grassroots activism," show lawmakers what the general public thinks?
- Using what you've learned about suffrage movements, analyze the effectiveness of this strategy to ensure rights. What motivates lawmakers to "listen" to petitions?

### Citation Information

Harris & Ewing, "Deputation Leaving Headquarters to Take Petition to Senator Jones of New Mexico [Annie Fraher, Bertha Moller, Berthe Arnold, Anita Pollitzer]," September 1918. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

## Letter from President Woodrow Wilson to Carrie Chapman Catt, June 7, 1918



Courtesy of Iowa State University Library Special Collections and University Archives, Woodrow, Wilson, "Letter from President Wilson to Catt, June 7, 1918," 7 June 1918

### Description

President Woodrow Wilson said in this letter to Carrie Chapman Catt that he believes democracy will not have reached its fullest until women are given the right to vote. He also said he fully supported women's suffrage and acknowledged the significant contributions that women have made during times of crisis throughout history.

### [Transcript of President Woodrow Wilson's Letter to Carrie Chapman Catt](#)

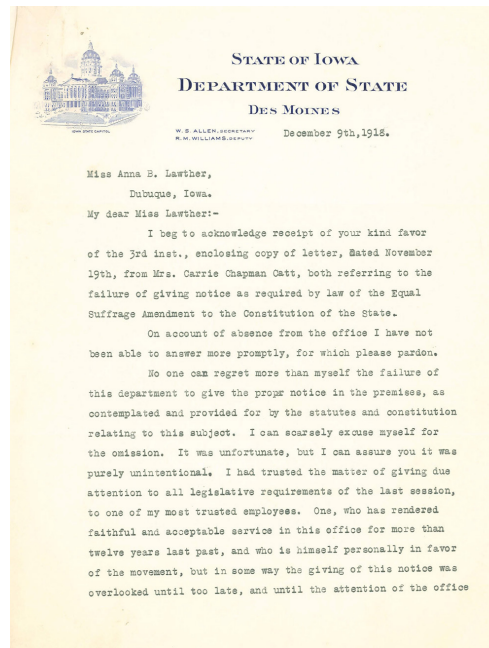
### Text-Dependent Questions

- What evidence from this letter, shows that President Woodrow Wilson supports women's suffrage?
- What might be the significance of having presidential support for an initiative? Explain why.

### Citation Information

Woodrow, Wilson, "Letter from President Wilson to Catt, June 7, 1918," 7 June 1918. [Courtesy of Iowa State University Library Special Collections and University Archives](#)

## Response Letter from Iowa Secretary of State W.S. Allen to Anna Lawther, December 1918



Courtesy of University of Iowa Libraries and Archives, Allen, W.S., "Speeches and letters by Anna Lawther, 1910s," 9 December 1918

### Description

Iowa Secretary of State W. S. Allen wrote this response letter to Anna Lawther and Carrie Chapman Catt to apologize for not publishing the proposed suffrage amendment in local newspapers ahead of the June 5, 1916, vote. He insisted that it was an unfortunate mistake and not an intentional act, going on to say that he supported women having the right to vote. He said he felt assured that the legislature would put a vote before the people again soon and that it would be successful.

### [Transcript of Response Letter from W.S. Allen to Anna Lawther](#)

### Text-Dependent Questions

- What does W.S. Allen say was the reason for the failure to publish the amendment vote in Iowa newspapers prior to the June 1916 vote? Who does he believe is at fault for that oversight?
- Before this letter was written, Iowa Carrie Chapman Catt called W.S. Allen's character into question. Why would W.S. Allen write about his support of women's suffrage?
- Based on this letter from Allen, as well as "[Letter from Anna Lawther of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association to County Chairman](#)," how important is publishing a proposed amendment in local newspapers ahead of the vote on them?

### Citation Information

Allen, W.S., "Speeches and letters by Anna Lawther, 1910s," 9 December 1918. [Courtesy of University of Iowa Libraries and Archives](#)



## 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, August 26, 1920

AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION, 1920.

BAINBRIDGE COLBY, August 26, 1920.

SECRETARY OF STATE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME,  
GREETING.

KNOW YE, That the Congress of the United States at the first session, sixty-sixth Congress began at Washington on the nineteenth day of May in the year one thousand nine hundred and nineteen, passed a Resolution as follows: to wit—

JOINT RESOLUTION

Proposing an amendment to the Constitution extending the right of suffrage to women.

Enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled three-fourths of each House concurring therein. That the following article is proposed as an amendment to the Constitution, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States.

"ARTICLE —

"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.

"Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

And, further, that it appears from official documents on file in the Department of State that the Amendment to the Constitution of the United States proposed as above said has been ratified by the Legislatures of the States of Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

And, further, that the States whose Legislatures have so ratified the said proposed Amendment, constitute three-fourths of the whole number of States in the United States.

NOW, therefore, be it known that I, Bainbridge Colby, Secretary of State of the United States, by virtue and in pursuance of Section 205 of the Revised Statutes of the United States, do hereby certify that the Amendment above said has become valid to all intents and purposes as a part of the Constitution of the United States.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the Department of State to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this 26th day of August, in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and [SEAL.] twenty.

BAINBRIDGE COLBY,  
1920

Courtesy of Library of Congress, "19th Amendment to the Constitution," U.S. Congress, 26 August 1920

### Description

The United States Congress approved a women's suffrage amendment to the U.S. Constitution and three-fourths of the states ratified it. On August 26, 1920, Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby officially certified the 19th Amendment with his signature and the seal of the United States.

### Transcript of the 19th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution

### Text-Dependent Questions

- Look closely at the states that ratified the amendment (in 1920 there were only 48 states that made up the U.S.). What states didn't ratify the amendment? Discuss possible reasons why those 12 states didn't help to ratify the amendment.
- Compare this document to [President Woodrow Wilson's letter to Carrie Chapman Catt](#). How was President Wilson's sentiment expressed in the amendment?
- Governor William Harding ratified the amendment on July 2, 1919, making Iowa the 10th state to do so. Refer to different view points in the [Votes for Women! The Woman's Reason](#) and the [anti-suffrage ad from The Iowa Homestead](#). How might these and other opinions have influenced Governor Harding's decision to ratify the amendment for Iowa?

### Citation Information

"19th Amendment to the Constitution," U.S. Congress, 26 August 1920. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)

## Sculpture of Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, between 1921 and 1923



Courtesy of Library of Congress, Harris & Ewing, "[Sculpture: Portrait Monument to Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony]," between 1921 and 1923

### Description

On February 15, 1921, representatives of over 70 women's organizations gathered at the United States Capitol rotunda for the unveiling ceremony of this monument featuring prominent leaders of the women's suffrage movement. Left to right, the figures represent: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott. Stanton was the author of the women's bill of rights, which she read at the Seneca Falls, New York, convention in 1848, and is widely considered the first woman to demand the vote for women. Anthony joined Stanton in 1851 and proposed what would become the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which would be passed many years after she died. Mott was an organizer of the Seneca Falls convention in 1848, which launched the women's rights movement. The monument itself is carved out of Italian marble and weighs 8.5 tons.

### Text-Dependent Questions

- This monument pays honor to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott, who were instrumental in the women's suffrage movement. This monument is located in the U.S. Capitol rotunda. What does the location of this monument tell about its significance?
- What role do monuments like this one play in American society?

### Citation Information

Harris & Ewing, "[Sculpture: Portrait Monument to Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony]," between 1921 and 1923. [Courtesy of Library of Congress](#)