



Women's suffragists parade in New York City in 1917, carrying placards with the signatures of more than one million women. Image courtesy of The New York Times photo archive.

WHAT WAS THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT?

The women's suffrage movement was a period of time when women throughout the United States fought for their right to vote. Lasting for decades, it took nearly 100 years for women to gain the right to vote in the United States.

Social reform groups began to pop up all over the United States in the 1820s and 1830s. This included anti-slavery organizations, temperance leagues, religious movements and others. Women were often at the center of these organizations, pushing back against the notion that a woman's place was in the home.

In 1848, a group of abolitionists (mostly women, but some men were included) gathered in Seneca Falls, New York to discuss women's rights. This movement was led by early suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. From 1848 on, women's suffrage activists took up a campaign to grant women the right to vote in the United States.

“Such a truth is woman’s right to equal liberty with man. She was born with it. It was hers before she comprehended it. It is inscribed upon all the powers and faculties of her soul, and no custom, law or usage can ever destroy it.”

– Frederick Douglass speaking to the International Council of Women in Washington, D.C. in April, 1888

WHAT IS A SUFFRAGIST?

Suffragists are individuals who want to extend voting rights. Historically, the term suffragist has primarily been associated with the effort to extend voting rights to women in the United States.

Some notable suffragists include Jane Addams, Mary Church Terrell, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone and Ida B. Wells.

DID YOU KNOW?

Not all suffragists were women. Men like Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison and Robert Purvis were also suffragists.

COULD A SUFFRAGIST ALSO BE AN ABOLITIONIST?

Yes. Many suffragists were also abolitionists since the women’s rights movement had many parallels to the anti-slavery movement. However, suffragists split from one another after the Civil War over the passage of the 14th and 15th Amendments that granted African American men the right to vote. The 15th Amendment excluded women—many suffragists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were frustrated by this. They reacted by founding the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1869. This organization sought universal suffrage and did not support the passage of the 15th Amendment.

However, some suffragists did support the passage of the 14th and 15th Amendments. These pro-15th Amendment supporters formed the American Woman Suffrage Association which focused on fighting for the vote for women on a state-by-state basis. This organization was founded by abolitionist suffragist Lucy Stone and others.

In 1890, the two organizations merged to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association. It was this unified organization who would finish the fight for women’s suffrage.

“We should do more and talk less.”

– Mary Ann Shadd Cary in a 1848 letter to Frederick Douglass in response to his question in *The North Star* newspaper on how people can help African Americans in the United States.

MARY ANN SHADD CARY

Born in Wilmington, Delaware in 1823 to free African American parents, Mary Ann Shadd Cary would become one of the most prominent abolitionists and women’s rights advocates of the 19th century.

In her activist career, she became the first woman to speak at a national African American convention, the first African American woman to edit and publish a newspaper in North America, the first woman to enter Howard University’s law program and the first African American woman to obtain a law degree (she was among the first women in the United States to do so). She fought alongside fellow suffragists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. In 1874, She was one of 600 citizens who signed a petition that suffragists later presented to the House Judiciary Committee—the petition urged lawmakers to grant women the legal right to vote. She was a member of the National Women Suffrage Association and in the late 1880s founded the Colored Women’s Progressive Franchise Association.





Five female officers of the Women's League in Newport, RI. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress

AFRICAN AMERICAN SUFFRAGISTS

Due to the rift caused by the passage of the 15th Amendment, African American suffragists were often left out of the larger movement for women's suffrage or overlooked when we remember the history today. However, this does not mean African American Suffragists did not exist. In many ways, Black Suffragists had much more at stake than their white counterparts—fighting not only sexism in the United States, but racism as well.

In the years leading up to the Civil War, many formerly enslaved and free Black women became active in the women's suffrage movement including Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman and Mary Ann Shadd Cary. In the years after the Civil War—when many suffragists were arguing about supporting the 15th Amendment—Black Suffragists continued to fight for women's rights. Some joined organizations created by white suffragists while others worked to form their own organizations. These included the Colored Woman's Franchise Association (1880), the National Association of Colored Women (1896) and Alpha Suffrage Club (1913)—the first Black Suffrage club in Illinois founded by Ida B. Wells-Barnett. These organizations were led by African American Suffragists like Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Charlotte ("Lottie") Rollin and Mary B. Talbert.

WHEN DID WOMEN FINALLY GAIN THE RIGHT TO VOTE?

The 19th Amendment to the Constitution finally granted women the right to vote. It was ratified by Congress on August 18, 1920. On November 2, 1920, more than 8 million women voted in elections for the first time in United States history.



"Votes for Women" pennant. Demonstrators carried pennants like this one throughout the United States while seeking the right to vote in the early 1900s. Image courtesy of The Children's Museum of Indianapolis, IMCPL Digital Collections.

“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 the account of sex.”

— Excerpt from the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution

VOCABULARY

Suffrage: the right to vote

Suffragist: someone who wants to extend the right to vote; frequently used to refer to women

Abolitionist: a person who speaks out against slavery

14th Amendment: granted citizenship to formerly enslaved African Americans

15th Amendment: granted African American men the right to vote

19th Amendment: granted women the right to vote

Equality: the state of being equal, especially in status, rights and opportunities

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1) What did the 19th Amendment accomplish?

- A. Gave African American men the right to vote
- B. Gave women the right to vote
- C. Gave African American men citizenship

2) What is the name of the organization that formed in 1890 when the two major women's suffrage organizations merged?

- A. National American Woman Suffrage Organization
- B. National Woman Suffrage Association
- C. American Woman Suffrage Association

3) Name 3 Suffragists you learned about today. Describe what they did:

1.

2.

3.

WORD SEARCH

A M Y Q V B M D O X C L Y
A M Q N V O O B C L A L Q
F H E Y O U T A J Y R E Z
F J L N G H E E Q G Y R S
T M D L D P T I L R B R U
A C A R L M R N W J S E F
M S A O J W E Z A N F T F
S T R U T H Q N G I B E R
Y T I L A U Q E T I E C A
C G Z A C N V U B N W B G
M H R K H I I N O Y K B E
L A E E G Q M T C G M N F
D B J Q P X S I D Y Q F Q

Suffrage
Douglass

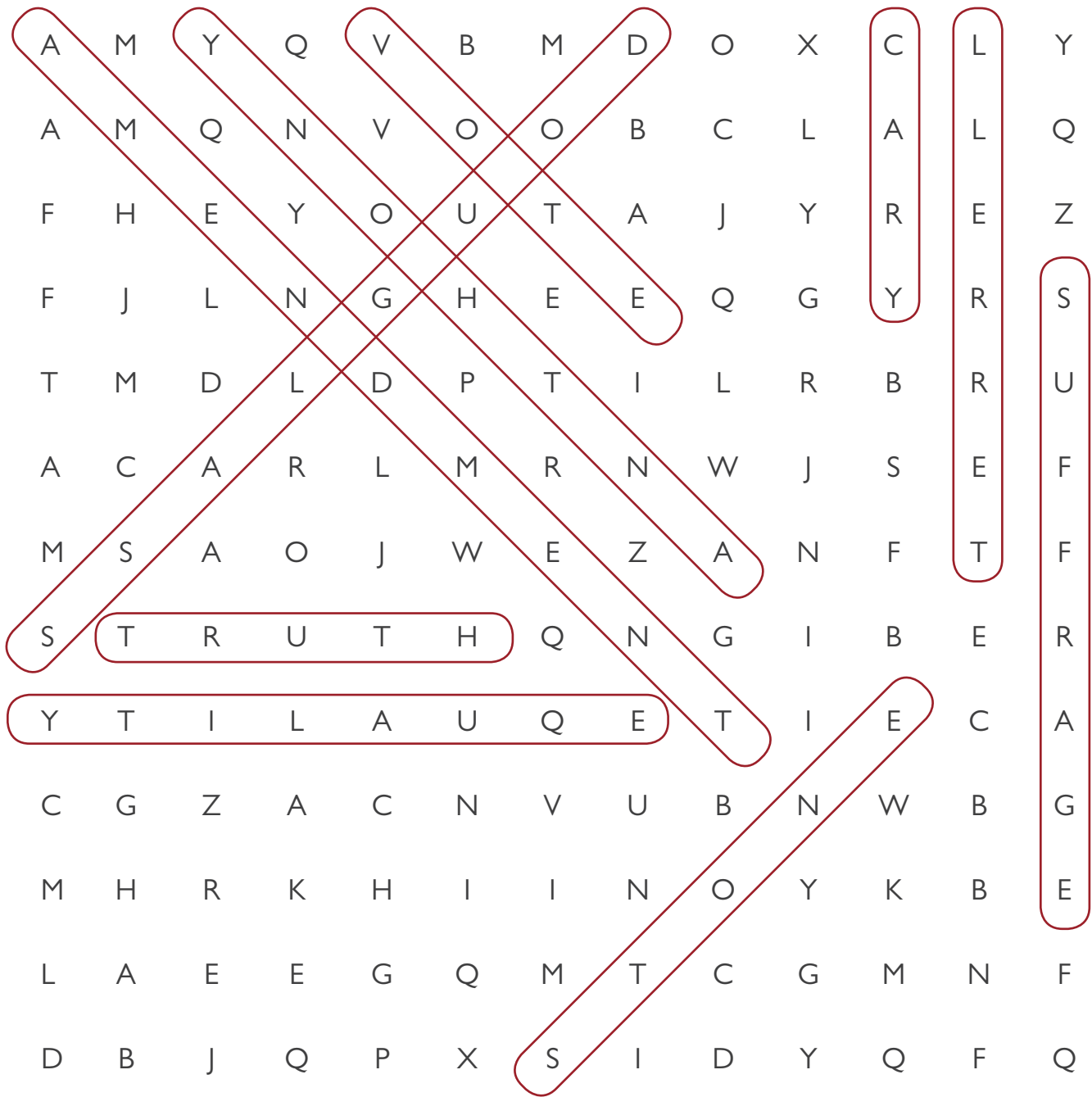
Anthony
Stone

Terrell
Amendment

Equality
Vote

Truth
Cary

ANSWER KEY



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