

## **A Select Timeline of Women's Rights in the U.S.**

**Check one of the provided boxes after each event on the timeline. Indicate whether you feel the event is an “advance” or a “setback” in the history of women’s rights.**

**1619** -- The beginning of enforced enslavement of Africans brought to the Virginia colony. Some historians debate this date/year, perhaps it began earlier. This connects to the rights of women because many of the ancestors of enslaved people will become abolitionists and suffragists 300 years later in the 20th century. Also, some Europeans and colonial women and men found slavery to be morally wrong. They began work to abolish this inhuman system. Some white women found their “voice” as they spoke out in churches, reading circles and other groups.

Advance      Setback

**1648** - Margaret Brent, acting as a lawyer for Lord Baltimore, demands but is denied a vote in Maryland’s colonial assembly.

Advance      Setback

**1756** - Lydia Taft, widow of Josiah Taft of Massachusetts, is allowed to vote as a proxy for her dead husband. She becomes the first woman to vote in what will become the U.S.

Advance      Setback

**1775/1776** -- Abigail Adams writes letters to her husband John, expressing her belief that women should have the right to vote: "If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice or Representation."

Advance      Setback

**1776** -- The New Jersey constitution allows all residents who own a specific amount of property to vote, without reference to gender or race. Unmarried or widowed women -- Black and white -- and Black men could thereby vote if they met the other requirements. (Married women could not vote because they could not legally own property. A woman's property reverted to her husband upon marriage.)

Advance      Setback

**1777** -- With the United States only one year old, all states pass laws that take away women's right to vote.

Advance      Setback

**1807** - NJ limits voting to "free white male citizens" only

Advance      Setback

**1820s** -- The Women's Suffrage Movement begins, focusing on getting women the right to vote.

Advance      Setback

**1838** -- Kentucky passes a statewide women's suffrage law that grants the vote to female heads of household in elections deciding on taxes and schools.    Advance      Setback

**1848** – The Seneca Falls Convention takes place. Abolitionists gather to address women's rights and challenge what historians call the "Cult of True Womanhood," which defines femininity by the virtues of piety, purity, submission and domesticity. At the convention, more than three hundred men and women sign the "Declaration of Sentiments," proposing that, "... all men and women are created equal. It's important to note that the suffragists who fought for the rights of women included African American, Asian American, Latinx and Native American women.

Advance      Setback

**1851** -- Sojourner Truth, an African American abolitionist and women's rights activist, delivers her most famous speech on racial inequalities, "Ain't I a Woman?", at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention.

Advance      Setback



Illustration of the Seneca Falls Convention

**1861-1865** -- Serving as nurses, cooks, launderers, etc., thousands of women participate in the Civil War. Between 400 and 1000 women disguised themselves as men and fought as soldiers. Many women put aside their political activism during the war in the interest of promoting the Union war effort.

Advance      Setback

**1870** – The 15th Amendment prohibits the federal government or any state from denying a citizen the right to vote based on “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” Susan B. Anthony and others associated with the Suffrage movement see this as an opportunity for the women’s movement. Anthony and Stanton argued that any constitutional amendment that did not grant women's suffrage was unacceptable. If anyone was deserving of the vote, it was "educated" white women. Stanton in particular argues that African Americans were ignorant of the laws and customs of the U.S. political system, and that it was "a serious question whether [they] had better stand aside and see 'Sambo' walk into the kingdom [of civil rights] first."

Advance      Setback

**1873** – Susan B. Anthony is arrested for attempting to vote in a Rochester, New York election. This leads to the criminal trial of the United States v. Susan B. Anthony in which Anthony argues that the recently adopted 15th Amendment provides women with the right to vote. Anthony is found guilty of violating state laws and is sentenced to pay a fine of \$100.

Although Anthony refuses to pay the fine, Judge Ward Hunt elects not to have her jailed in order to prevent the case from moving to the Supreme Court, which would potentially lead to increased awareness around the issue of women's rights.

Advance      Setback

**1890** - Wyoming becomes the first U.S. state to allow women citizens to vote.

Advance      Setback

**1920** – The 19th Amendment gives women the right to vote. That same year eight million women exercised their right. It should be noted, however, that these eight million women were white. Many women of color would not have access to the vote until 1965 with the Voting Rights Act. Native American, Asian American, Latinx and African American suffragists had to fight for their own voting rights long after the 19th Amendment was ratified.

Advance      Setback



Suffragists campaigning for the right to vote, 1920

**1932** – The National Recovery Act forbids more than one family member from holding a government job, resulting in many women losing their jobs.

Advance      Setback

**1950's** -- Black women baseball players are brought into the Negro Leagues as a way to increase audiences.

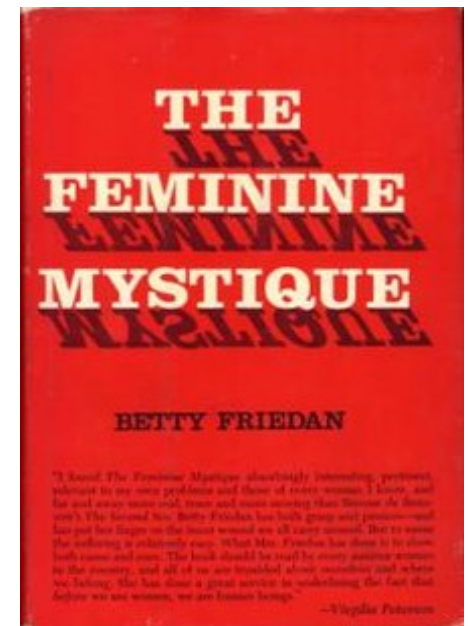
**1961** – Hoyt vs. Florida. U.S. Supreme Court upholds Florida rule that more men will necessarily be called for jury service because the “woman is still regarded as the center of home and family life.”

Advance      Setback

**1963** – Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* is published, raising awareness around issues of gender discrimination. Excerpt:

“The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night — she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question — ‘Is this all?’ . . . For over fifteen years there was no word of this yearning in the millions of words written about women, for women, in all the columns, books and articles by experts telling women their role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers.”

Advance      Setback



**1965** -- The Voting Rights Act is signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, a landmark piece of federal legislation that prohibits racial discrimination in voting. Congress later amends the Act five times to expand its protections. Designed to enforce the voting rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, (some 95 years after these amendments were ratified) the Act aims to secure the right to vote for racial minorities throughout the country, especially in the South.

Advance      Setback

**1972** – Title IX of the Educational Amendments, a follow-up to 1964’s Civil Rights Act, prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity. Title IX legislation brought about significant changes in school sports, increasing opportunities and support for female athletes. Girls Softball leagues grew exponentially in the wake of Title IX.

Advance      Setback

**2021** – Senator Kamala Harris is inaugurated as the first Black, Southeast Asian female Vice President of the United States.

Advance      Setback

## Questions:

1. The Declaration of Independence, written in 1776, includes the phrase “All men are created equal.” Why is this a problematic phrase?
2. Women did not have the right to vote in 1776. How did women fit into the nation’s founding principles of freedom and equality?
3. What was the “Women’s Suffrage Movement”?
4. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 was a gathering of people who fought for the social, civil and religious rights of women. Some attendees were both suffragists and abolitionists like Fredrick Douglass and Lucretia Mott. What did abolitionists and suffragists have in common? What similarities do you see between the two movements?
5. What was the “Cult of True Womanhood” How might the values it promotes ultimately limit the possibilities for women in the 19th Century?
6. How was the signing of the 15th Amendment a step towards women’s suffrage?
7. In 1920, white women gained the right to vote. How did that represent an advancement for women’s rights? How did it reflect other inequities in U.S. society?
8. How does the idea that women are the “center of home and family life” serve as an argument against more women serving on juries in Florida in 1961?



9. In your own words, how does Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*, describe the lives of suburban housewives in the middle of the 20th Century?
  
10. Title IX required equal funding in schools for men's and women's programs, increasing the presence of women's sports. How might this have affected young women looking to play team sports? How do you think this affected the rise of softball as a sport?