

History 211 History of US Elections
Discussion Transcript for October 15, 2020
Women's Suffrage

**Main Readings: Baker, chapters 8-11 (Fowley and Jones, Bolt, DuBois, and Ford)
+ course post by Poeton**

The key debate for most historians of suffrage is how to weigh whether Carrie Chapman Catt's endgame strategy, known as the "Winning Plan," deserves most of the credit for the successful mobilization toward the Nineteenth Amendment (1920), or if Alice Paul's more confrontational street tactics (such as the "Silent Sentinels") was actually more impactful in transforming public opinion and pressuring cautious political leaders in Washington.

Here is a selection of student comments.

CATT'S WINNING PLAN

STUDENT COMMENT: "Carrie Chapman Catt drew two important lessons from early efforts in the women's suffrage movement: first, that women must take a more federal approach, and second, that the movement must not be affiliated with unpopular positions. The suffrage movement had struggled for 50 years to win the vote at the state level. While that resulted in some success, especially in the West, the efforts took an enormous amount of time and resources and inevitably led to many discouraging losses. In 1912, Theodore Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party pledged to "work for the women's suffrage constitutional amendment at all stages" in its platform, the first party to do so (Poeton). Though Roosevelt lost, the election propelled the women's cause and led some to realize the potential in a top down strategy. It was not until Catt's second stint as president of NAWSA when she realized that a strategy change was in order. From 1915 to 1920, Catt instituted her "Winning Plan", which combined efforts at the state level with a massive federal campaign including lobbying of the President and Congress. Quickly, Catt's emphasis became even more on the federal level, as she said, "We care not a gingersnap about anything but that federal amendment" (Baker, 136). In fact, only New York passed women's suffrage in the years between 1915 and 1920 (Ibid, 172. When the House and Senate passed the amendment put forth by Anthony and Stanton which had been dormant for half a century, Catt "correctly predict[ed] that [states] would follow the example of the federal government" (Ibid, 140). After 50 years of struggle, Catt's "Winning Plan" had finally achieved success. One of the reasons for the success was Catt's ability to associate women's suffrage with a unifying movement rather than divisive ones. Though the women's suffrage movement had two periods of success in the 1870s and 1890s, it was hampered by its association first with Mormonism, and second with populists and socialists. As Catt's outlook shifted nationally, she capitalized on World War I. Despite previously being a pacifist, she threw NAWSA's support behind the war effort for political reasons (Ibid, 139). Whereas radicals like the National Woman's Party found themselves persecuted by the government during WWI for their lack of patriotism, Catt propelled the movement into a more positive light by aiding the war effort and making the war about democracy (Ibid, 175)."

STUDENT COMMENT: "Catt's immediate means of organization revolved around engaging suffrage supporters from the broader public. As outlined by Fowler and Jones, Catt would do this by creating "suffrage schools," as well as "unit[e] every kind of women's group from local associations to important existing national women's groups..." (137-138). With the intent of suffragists becoming clearer to the broader public, there were, of course, other aspects of Catt's involvement that helped to define characteristics of success. A primary example of this may be drawn from Catt's ability to appropriately distribute much-needed funding throughout and on behalf of the NAWSA after receiving a one-million-dollar donation from Mrs. Frank Leslie. Historians may also consider the NAWSA's utilization of the media and press, especially as it related to clarifying to the public how suffragists felt about "the entry of the United States into World War I," to have been an essential characteristic of success during the suffrage movement (139)."

ALICE PAUL AND SUFFRAGE MILITANTS

STUDENT COMMENT: "The movement's affiliation with the progressive party and history of victories in states, along with new leaders such as Alice Paul and Carrie Catt primed it for recognition on a national level. There was no certainty that an amendment would pass or even be considered, which led to the deployment of Paul's silent sentinels and a more militant strategy, especially in Washington. However, the use of non-violent tactics while those in power at some points used violent crackdowns on the protesters allowed for public sympathy for the cause and pressure on the Democrats and Wilson. Linda Ford writes that, "when NWP women were beaten, arrested and jailed, they found a great deal of sympathy from the American Left, which was experiencing similar treatment for harboring antigovernment views during the world war" (Ford). This along with the continued pressure on Wilson throughout the war made the suffrage amendment possible. By portraying the women as patriots who simply would not give up fighting for their cause peacefully, the opposition was unable to do much to win public support. The American brand of militarism allowed for suffrage to succeed through pure determination."

STUDENT COMMENT: "The standout character from this batch of new suffragists was Alice Paul who emerged leading the National Woman's Party. This group was more radical in its approach to gaining the right to vote on a national level. They most famously were the organization that picketed at the White house during the WWI, openly protesting a wartime president. Their actions asserted that "their struggle for women's rights took precedence over war patriotism", and many NWP members were imprisoned and otherwise suppressed by the government (Ford, 175). Their radical actions and imprisonment ultimately gave the cause of woman suffrage a huge audience and garnered a lot of support of their cause."

ELECTION OF 1912

STUDENT COMMENT: "Also significant was the crucial four-way election in 1912, when Teddy Roosevelt's Progressive party officially made woman suffrage a tenet of

the party platform. As a result, "Women had taken a larger part in the political campaign...than ever before", suffragist Ida Husted Harper claimed (Poeton). The amount of politically active women during this time could as be seen as the membership of NAWSA grew dramatically during this same time period, with the dues-paying members growing explosively from 17,000 in 1904 to 200,000 in 1916 (Fowler & Jones, 134). After decades of hurdles to clear, this formative period provided the wide support needed to get momentum for the woman suffrage amendment.

FROM LOBBYING TO MILITANCY: THE BIG OVERVIEW

STUDENT COMMENT: "The Women's Suffrage movement provided historical lessons about the influence of lobbying, media, and the power of being militant. Throughout Jean H. Baker's *Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited*, each essay conveyed how American History disregarded the movement. The almost century long battle and campaign for female justice became a continuous trial and error battle due to the changing of female image overtime and the campaign's stigmas. For example, in Rebecca Edwards's Essay: "Pioneers at the Polls", she discussed the backlash towards the suffrage movement. She writes, "The suffrage movement had suffered from the stigma of Mormon polygamy; in the years between 1897 and 1910, the stigma of radicalism was even worse, and suffragists later referred to this period as "the doldrums." (98) As other movements began in new territories, suffrage used polygamy, radicalism, populism, and socialism to push the state governments to vote women in. The influence of political partisanship benefited their power to vote. If women supported these new movements, it would help increase the population to help pass more bills in their favor. Women needed to attach themselves to male-run groups and causes to gain enfranchisement because men held power in state and federal government positions. Outside of these politically-focused groups, suffragists strived to remain bipartisan because they believed in women's importance of representing a unified voice. To achieve the goal of voting, activists should stay bipartisan. Carrie Chapman Catt was a suffragist activist, President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and founder of the League of Women Voters. Catt conducted the "Winning Plan" to help secure women's votes at both state and federal levels. After decades of society's ignorance towards their fight, Catt and suffragists knew that the 19th Amendment ratification plan would not be easy. Within her "Winning Plan," she used nonpartisan lobbying strategies to approve a federal amendment to the constitution. The program pushed suffragists to obtain politicians and the public's attention through aggression, marches, civil disobedience, speeches, petitions, and publicity stunts. After discovering the British suffrage campaign methods, American women gained inspiration for switching to a more militant focused movement. British suffragettes, known as the Women's Social and Political Union, focused on proactive actions and causing crimes to capture the attention of politicians, government, and the public. In Christine Bolt, "America and the Pankhursts," she described Emmeline Pankhurst and the British movement's positive mark on the Americans and its push for unified passion for gender equality. Bolt begins her essay with a quote from Pankhurst herself, "All over American the Suffragists declare that they have gained hope and inspiration

from our great British movement. In the early days of our long struggle it was we who drew inspiration from them. Our movements act and react on each other." (143)

Pankhurst explored how the Americans and the British learned to embody hope and defy gender norms. Since peaceful protesting was not working, women switched to violence by destroying property to project anger. They wanted to be seen and heard and express their frustration with the government's dismissal of their moment.

Later in 1913 and 1919, the British campaigns transformed the suffrage movement because of Alice Paul. In "Alice Paul and the Politics of Nonviolent Protest," written by Linda Ford, she described Alice Paul's utilization of protesting outside the white house, parading, and propaganda through films and newspapers. Women turned to aggression and unladylike methods which eventually led them to being assaulted and/or arrested. The police placed Paul in a psych ward for her efforts to get the President's acceptance. Though the government disliked their approach, their parades and jollification drew a lot of attention and observers and gave a new look onto the activist's fight. Paul's strategy gave women's suffrage issue of national attention. The complicated journey to establishing the 19th Amendment allowed women to develop their role in society and rebel against preexisting social norms."