

The Iowa State Education Association sponsored an essay contest in recognition of the Centennial of the 19th Amendment. Essayists could draw on any aspect of the 19th Amendment from the initial organizing and struggle to pass it to the lasting effects in the United States and abroad. You can read the winning essays in each category reproduced here:

3rd – 5th grade: Celeste Brown, West Des Moines.

Americans often take for granted the right to vote. This is a right for all citizens, but that wasn't always the case. Up until 100 years ago, women around the country had to fight for their right to vote. This fight, and the people who fought it, were called suffragists

Many English practices carried over to the United States at the time of the American Revolution. One of them was who should have the right to vote. Only white men who owned land were allowed to vote until the passing of the fifteenth amendment which gave African American men the right to vote in elections, but still not women.

Women suffrage groups in the United States started around 1848. Many of the suffragists for the 19th amendment did not support the 15th amendment. In 1913, when Woodrow Wilson became president, there was a parade for women's suffrage. Some were thrown in jail. That made people angry so they joined the fight.

Fifty years after the 15th amendment was passed, the 19th amendment was passed. This gave ALL women the right to vote. In the election of 1920 over 8 million women voted.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was an activist. She helped create the The National Woman's Suffrage Association. She did not support the 15th amendment. She also created the Seneca Falls Convention. There were 240 people, both men and women, who went there to organize and plan. She played a big part in the passing of the 19th amendment.

Today women are taking jobs that used to be considered for men only. Former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, won the Democratic nomination for president in 2016. Many women started campaigns for president in 2019, like Senator Kamala Harris, Senator Amy Klobuchar and Senator Elizabeth Warren.

These women are outstanding role models even though none are still in the presidential race. Our state's governor, Kim Reynolds, and Senator Joni Ernst are both women in our state who are national leaders. The 19th Amendment let these women vote and take part in the government. Someday I hope to do the same as all these women.

6th- 8th Grade: Brady Barry, Marion

The passing of the 19th Amendment has influenced women throughout the last hundred years. If it wasn't for the many dedicated suffragists overcoming obstacles to pass this law, then we wouldn't be celebrating this milestone today.

The suffragists faced many obstacles. For example, they were often arrested for picketing or protesting. In 1872 Susan B. Anthony voted on Election Day. She was arrested and had to pay a fine, but her vote still counted. Some were beaten for speaking out and expressing their feelings. One suffragist, Alice Paul, was beaten and put in solitary confinement for picketing the White House. It was also a challenge to get public support, even from some women! It might sound strange today, but back then the public didn't believe that women needed equal rights.

Despite the challenges, the suffragists also gained many opportunities that other women didn't. Generally, women did not get to travel much. They would have to stay home and watch the kids. Suffragists like Arabella (Belle) Babb

Mansfield and Carrie Chapman Catt traveled around the country giving speeches about women's rights and protesting when necessary. Susan B. Anthony even started her own newspaper to raise awareness about women's rights.

The NWSA (National Woman Suffrage Association) was founded by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The NAWSA (National American Women's Suffrage Association) was also founded by Susan B. Anthony but in 1890 the two associations merged together. These associations were important to the movement because it was a place where women could go to talk about their issues that were important. The NAWSA and the NWSA was a platform that organized campaigns and petitions. Women started to see that there were more opportunities in life than just what society told them.

The 19th Amendment impacted society throughout history. My great-grandmother was born in 1915 without the right to vote. She was the first female postmaster in her small town, Kanawha, Iowa, and influenced my whole family to fight for their rights. For example, my mom is a teacher and she protested for collective bargaining. My aunt was in the military and enlisted in 1988. It was not as common then for women to join the armed forces and they weren't treated as well as male soldiers.

Thanks to the passing of the 19th amendment, women in my family in addition to all women in America, now have better rights. The impact of the suffrage movement has affected things today like women's education, awareness of their rights, political activism, and the types of jobs women can have. Women now can advocate for better pay, treatment during work, child care, medical leave, and many other freedoms.

As a male, researching this topic was difficult. At first, it was hard to go into detail because I'm a twelve-year-old boy that didn't experience the movement. I was born with rights and experienced strong women around me with rights. Now I understand why women wanted rights and what they had to do to get them. The treatment that women received makes me feel kind of guilty that my male ancestors did that. It makes me sad that some women were beaten for fighting for rights that should have already been granted. I want to make sure that history doesn't repeat itself and one day we will all be equal.

9th-12th Grade: MaryClaire McCarter, Dike

Whenever women's suffrage comes to mind, I immediately think of the 1964 Mary Poppins film in which Mrs. Banks storms into the house belting about the words to Sister Suffragette. As she dances around the room she reverently sings about the important work of the suffrage movement remarking, "Our daughters will adore us, and they'll sing in grateful chorus,

'Well done, Sister Suffragette!' I have to say, although the fictional Mrs. Banks was not an American, her sentiments certainly still apply. The transformation that took place allowed American women freedom of opportunity, a harsh contrast from the constraints of the past. The ratification of the 19th amendment and following legislation secured women as functioning members of society in and outside of the home.

From the time of America's founding, women were expected to stay home and serve the household. Colonial period laws, such as the laws of coverture, only encouraged this mindset as they allowed women's legal status to be overtaken by their husbands. Not many girls attended school and university was out of the question. Women were allowed no alternatives to the customary lifestyle and it wasn't just enforced by men. Many women believed that men were the superior gender. For example, even years after the ratification of the 19th amendment, first lady Eleanor Roosevelt admitted that, "I took it for granted that

men were superior creatures and knew more about politics than women did." Despite the almost inconceivable notion of women's enfranchisement, the movement marched as American women battled for their nation and gained justice for themselves.

The first rumblings of the 19th amendment began in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. Leaders such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organized a women's conference where attendees wrote the Declaration of Sentiments, a reworked Declaration of Independence focusing on women's equality. Although this was a good start, the real change began when women started to actively participate in social movements of the time. In particular, their role as abolitionists and nurses during the Civil War and later the female led temperance movement. The crusade advanced in leaps and bounds with the founding of the National Woman's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) whose strategies were to win suffrage state by state as well as pass a constitutional amendment. By the time WWI rolled around, eight states had granted women the right to vote, and the United States was on the fast track to equality.

Women's participation in the Great War, overseas and on the home front, radically changed previous roles. As men were called away by the military for active duty, women filled their jobs. Females became proficient at agricultural and manufacturing positions as the war raged on. Ladies propped up the economy, one newspaper even writing, "There has been a sudden influx of women into such unusual occupations as bank clerks, ticket sellers, elevator operator, chauffeur, street car conductor, railroad track walker, section hand, locomotive wiper and oiler, locomotive dispatcher, block operator, drawbridge attendant, and employment in machine shops, steel mills, powder and ammunition factories, airplane works, boot blacking and farming."

Women also heavily contributed to war manufacturing, by making weapons and clothing for the troops. Many also became directly involved with the military, entering service as nurses, Navy women, Marines and even a few as Coast Guards. American ladies also volunteered in the Red Cross, YMCA and Salvation Army to help support the war effort. Women even became US Army contract employees, civilian volunteers, and 230 bilingual females were telephone operators dubbed the "Hello Girls."

While some women embraced the changes with open arms, others decided to serve their country from the home by caring for children, boosting morale, planting Victory Gardens to conserve food, and pledging to, "carry out the directions and advice of the Food Administrator in the conduct of my household; in so far as my circumstances permit."

The homemaker's role was no less important than the working women as both contributed to the advancement of women's rights by showing that women can and would positively contribute to society. Finally, after years and years of rallies, marches and vigorous campaigning, the 19th Amendment was signed into law by the US Secretary of State on August 26, 1920. Although the Amendment technically granted women the right to vote and was a victory in the eyes of the common suffrage movement, it really only helped a fraction of American females.

Often women of color were still prevented from going to the polls by other forms of discrimination such as poll taxes and literacy tests. Other loopholes in the law were also exploited in order to prevent minorities from voting.

For example, Native Americans didn't gain the right to vote until the Snyder Act of 1924 granted American born natives citizenship and even then many states continued to practice disenfranchisement. It wasn't until 1935 when Puerto Rican women were granted suffrage and in 1943 the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed, acknowledging Chinese men and women as citizens although their rights were still limited.

The United States was slowly but steadily restoring the wreckage caused by racist laws such as Jim Crow, but the issues came to a head mid-1960s. The 24th amendment was passed in 1964, a law that prevented states from denying the right to vote through unscrupulous practices, specifically poll taxes. This was a major step in the right direction, but the Voting Rights Act of 1965 fully prohibited the practice of racial discrimination at the polls. Of course, further regulations and laws continued to support and maintain this important liberty, but for the most part the suffrage movement had succeeded.

More than 50 years after the passage of the Voting Rights Act, women are no longer victims. American females now have the freedom to make their own decisions. Men and women are now recognized as equals and women's empowerment has never been higher. Society's view of women has radically shifted, allowing an attitude of growth and progress to pervade even some of the most traditional minds. Ladies are in control of their career, as employers now choose qualifications over gender. Of course that's not to say that women who choose to stay home are any less. The great thing about the 19th Amendment is that it gives women opportunity. Women can be stay-at-home moms, or CEO's, programmers, teachers or whatever they want to be; a flagrant contradiction from the oppression of previous decades, all thanks to the original feminist movement and their determination to achieve justice for all.

The crusade for women's vote was a long and arduous journey. It took patience, determination and a whole lot of radicalism to reach the top, but it was worth it. Women had to fight for their freedom and are a lot stronger because of it.

We are now important political leaders, long-haul truck drivers, moms and so much more. "Our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain," by reflecting upon our shared history and never forgetting the struggle. We'll have some bumps in the road, and not every nation is there yet, but looking back at what we can achieve together is a good start. "Well done, sister suffragette."