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CELEBRATING: WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY

In 1973, Congress designated August 26 as Women's Equality Day to commemorate the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which gives women the right to vote.

"I raise up my voice – not so that I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard ... We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back."

-- *Malala Yousafzai*

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, voting rights activist

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE 19TH AMENDMENT

Leading up to the passing of the 19th Amendment in 1920, women were not allowed to own or inherit property, and the few women who worked only made about half of the wages that men made. These inequalities led to the suffrage movement, during which women became activists for equal rights and representation in the patriarchal American society.

The 19th Amendment was first introduced in 1878, but it was not passed by Congress at that time. Rather, advocates and activists, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, and Julia Ward Howe, had to fight to make their voices heard using tactics such as passing state-level suffrage laws, picketing, vigils, hunger strikes, protests, and parades. Many of these activists were heckled, beaten, and even jailed. One famous activist, Susan B. Anothony, registered to vote in the 1872 election, which resulted in her arrest for "knowingly, wrongfully and unlawfully voting for a representative to the Congress of the United States."

By 1912, nine U.S. states had adopted suffrage legislation, and by 1916, almost all of the major suffrage organizations had united to complete their goal of a constitutional amendment. In 1917, New York adopted women suffrage legislation, and in the following year, President Wilson changed his position to support the movement. With all of its newfound support, the 19th Amendment was passed in 1919, and was ratified by agreement of three-fourths of the states in 1920.

"There is no limit to what we, as women, can accomplish." – Michelle Obama

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

On Women's Equality Day, we celebrate the activists' bravery and perserverance, without which women would not have the right to vote. However, despite women's success in voting, there are still many hurdles that we must face and overcome to gain full equality. One of the most notable inequalities is present in the American workforce. Although women make up almost half of the U.S. workforce, they still earn less than men and are underrepresented in management roles. In 2022, women earned an average of 82% of what men earned, meaning that for every dollar a man earns, a woman only earns 82 cents. Unfortunately this pay gap has been closing very slowly, as women earned 80% less than men in 2002 – this shows only a 2% increase in 20 years.

In addition to being paid less, women are also given executive positions less frequently than men are. In fact, in 2015, there were less female CEOs than there were male CEOs named "John." As of March 2023, women accounted for just 10% of CEOs at Fortune 500 companies, and only 8.2% of CEOs at S&P companies.

Other instances of inequality for women include the following:

- Female entrepeneurs receive less funding and investments than male entrepeuners
- Women are underrepreseted in politicis, the media, and STEM
- Working women continue to be burdened with more household and childcare duties than working men

WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENTS

However, depsite all of the above mentioned inequalities, there are many achievements that women can celebrate on Women's Equality Day.

First, women are being educated more and at higher levels of education, such as graduate or professional schools. For example, women make up a majority of law school students in the U.S., with 55% of law students being female.

Next, more women are entering the workforce. In 2022, the workforce participation rate for women was 56.8% for the United States as a whole. In Louisiana, it was 54%.

Finally, women lead policy areas relating to human rights, gender equality, and social protection.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

There are still many aspects of society, economics, and politics in which equality for women is a goal as opposed to an achievement. However, women have made great strides since the passing of the 19th Amendment back in 1920. If women in 2023 continue to fight for equal rights just as the voting activists did in the early 1900s, then there is a bright future ahead for the women of America.

WAYS TO SUPPORT THE WOMEN'S EQUALITY MOVEMENT

- Participate in a mentorship program for young women to discuss important topics such as career goals and education.
- Donate to a charity or organization designed to help women. Some charities in New Orleans that aim to improve the lives and circumstances of women include:

- Women & Children's Shelter – Sheltering organization that serves homeless families by providing resources such as meals and shelter, children's after-school programs, workforce development programs, and financial literacy.
- Dress for Success New Orleans – Nonprofit organization that is designed to empower women to achieve economic independence by providing support, professional attire, and employment/economic development tools.
- Nola4Women – Organization founded by women with the goal of "promot[ing] a future where every woman and girl has the opportunity ro reach her full potential."

- Sign the Women's Equality Day petition to help lobby for Women's Equality Day to be elevated to a federal holiday.