

Woman Suffrage and The Great War

*What should woman suffrage advocates
do in response to the Great War?*



Brief History of Woman Suffrage

American arguments for women's rights and women's right to vote, or suffrage, date back to the Colonial Period.

Most notably, in 1638, Anne Hutchinson was banished from Massachusetts Bay Colony and excommunicated from the church for declaring that women had the right to read the Bible, form their own thoughts about God, and have a voice in church affairs.

Later during the Revolutionary War period as the Colonies declared their independence from the British Crown, women, such as Mercy Otis Warren, played a role in both the war and the democratic movement.

Famously, in 1777, Abigail Adams implored her husband John Adams, a delegate to the Continental Congress, to "remember the ladies" warning "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."

It's March 1917. Following the Zimmerman Telegram and the resumption of German submarine warfare, the U.S. is preparing to enter the war. The impending war coupled with technological and social changes have escalated anxiety about the future.

For the past few decades, reform movements interested in protecting and supporting families, women, children, workers, immigrants, minorities, and the poor gained traction and had some success. Now, with the U.S. entering the war, movements and individuals must consider whether to continue their work or suspend activities to support the war efforts. One such group is woman suffrage advocates.

Woman suffrage is gaining political momentum. In eleven states, women have full voting rights, and both political parties included state suffrage in their 1916 campaign platforms. But neither political party acted to move the cause forward. Woman suffrage raises controversial questions about the role of women in society. Opponents claim that suffrage will destroy women's moral character and physical health, result in weak sons, and advance reform and peace initiatives that will lead to the nation's demise.

In January 1917, the National Woman's Party began picketing the White House to force President Wilson to officially support the woman suffrage amendment. Deemed "unwomanly," the pickets attracted controversial press attention, verbal backlash, and physical attacks against protesters. With the outbreak of the war, the British suffrage movement that inspired many U.S. woman activists suspended militant and most peaceful protests to focus on supporting the war effort.

Those in the U.S. woman suffrage movement are divided in their responses to the impending war. Advocacy and activism for causes other than the war could jeopardize public support and endanger individuals. Even prior to the U.S. entry into the war, suffragists faced public anger, physical violence, and arrest. Emotions surrounding the war intensify personal safety concerns. Many of the choices are dangerous. What should woman suffrage advocates do during wartime?

The Movement for Woman Suffrage

The woman suffrage movement officially began in 1848 with the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York. The Declaration of Sentiments, which Elizabeth Cady Stanton modeled after the Declaration of Independence, provided the foundation for the convention. Of eleven resolutions, the one for woman suffrage was the only not passed unanimously, as many attendees were concerned that asking for suffrage would make whole convention "look ridiculous."

The 1913 Woman Suffrage Procession

After the Civil War, two organizations—the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA)—formed to advocate for woman suffrage and women’s rights more generally. The AWSA primarily focused on women’s essential morality and state suffrage; while the NWSA emphasized women’s natural rights as citizens and a federal suffrage amendment. Both organizations were responsible for significant gains in women’s legal, financial, safety, and maternal rights.

In 1878, successful NWSA lobbying resulted the introduction of a proposed federal woman suffrage amendment to the U.S. Congress. In 1890, the two organizations merged to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and concentrated on securing the right to vote in each state rather than a national amendment. They also appealed to the innate morality of women and partnered with temperance and other religious social reform organizations. After gaining suffrage in four western states in the late 1800s, the movement languished in the “doldrums” with few victories and little action. From 1910-1915, eight more states and territories granted full woman suffrage, but the movement faced considerable organizational challenges as well as intense opposition in Eastern and Southern states.

Meanwhile, the militant tactics of British suffragists served as a training ground and inspiration for a new generation of U.S. suffragists. The British Women’s Social and Political Union motto “Deeds not Words” became a rallying cry for American women, including Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, who were deeply influenced by their experiences with the British suffrage movement. They returned to the U.S. with tactics, strategies, and a commitment to immediate advancement of a federal amendment rather than what they saw as the frustratingly slow and ineffective state-by-state political processes of NAWSA.

Differing perceptions of the success of the 1913 Suffrage Parade and Paul’s continued call for further militant tactics served as a catalyst for division. In 1914, Paul broke with NAWSA and formed the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, which in 1916 became the National Woman’s Party (NWP). Paul’s organization held the party in power (the Democrats) responsible for failure to advance woman suffrage. They actively campaigned against Democrats in the 1914 election and used the act of protest to influence public opinion. In contrast NAWSA relied on propriety, working within the system, and building relationships with elected officials.

During the 1916 presidential election, both NAWSA and NWP successfully worked to include woman suffrage in the parties’ platforms. Republican presidential candidate Charles Evan Hughes proclaimed support for a federal woman suffrage amendment; while President Wilson, a Democrat, professed his personal support and assured women that working through the states rather than at the federal level would ultimately be successful. He said, “The tide is rising to meet the moon. . . you can afford a little while to wait.”

On the eve of Woodrow Wilson’s 1913 inauguration, a NAWSA suffrage parade to publicly enact women’s citizenship was organized by Alice Paul and others. The parade drew more than five thousand marchers from all 48 states, over 20 floats, multiple bands, and over a half million spectators.

The marchers were a diverse group, with contingents of black women, college students, working women, trade union members, and men’s groups. Purportedly for their protection, black women’s groups were segregated at the end of the parade with the men’s groups. African American leader Ida B. Wells-Barnett protested and joined the Illinois delegation walking arm-in-arm with white women and Howard University students joined the parade with white students.

Hostile onlookers and coordinated inaction by police resulted in a near riot, injuring hundreds of marchers (well over 100 people were treated for mostly minor injuries) and requiring the Fifteenth Cavalry to restore order. The outcry resulted in a Congressional investigation, the replacement of the police superintendent, and a petition with over 200,000 signatures in favor of woman suffrage.

Arguments Against Woman Suffrage

In 1917, woman suffrage was an extremely controversial proposal. Arguments against woman suffrage largely reflected economic and social interests.

- Southern states opposed woman suffrage as it would give black women the vote. Both NAWSA and the NWP endorsed these fears by making arguments that white women voters would protect the electorate from influences of black and other minority voters. After the 19th Amendment, black women faced the same discrimination that prevented black men from voting in many states and localities.
- Liquor lobbies opposed woman suffrage. Some temperance associations supported woman suffrage, and local and state woman suffrage resulted in some alcohol bans.
- Some labor unions resisted because they believed voting would lead women into the workplace, where they would take jobs from men and decrease wages.
- Men and women, including radical labor activist Mary Harris “Mother” Jones and anarchist Emma Goldman, worried that politics would sully the moral character of women.
- Many feared that woman suffrage would lead to the breakdown of the family. They contended that voting would take time from domestic duties, and family life would be torn apart by political arguments.
- Others were concerned that women would oppose military action and weaken the nation.

Underlying arguments both for and against woman suffrage was the belief that enfranchising women would radically change politics, society, and family life, but the 19th Amendment resulted in little immediate political, social, or economic change for women or the country.

Although unhappy with Wilson’s lukewarm words, NAWSA supported him in hopes that he might be moved to action. Meanwhile, the NWP actively campaigned against Wilson and the Democratic Party. Targeting states in which women had the right to vote, the NWP’s Western Campaign used speakers, billboards, parades, and other tactics to focus attention on woman suffrage and urge voters to reject Democratic candidates. Ultimately, Wilson won all but two states in which women could vote, but Republicans gained a plurality in the House of Representatives.

In December 1916, during Wilson’s annual address to Congress, a group of NWP members unfurled a banner from the gallery asking, “Mr. President, what will you do for woman suffrage?” In January, a group of 300 suffrage advocates met with Wilson and asked him to support the federal amendment. He dismissed them, saying “things . . . are not accomplished by the individual voice, but by concentrated action, and that action must come only so fast as you can concert it.”

The following day, January 10, the NWP began to picket the White House, proclaiming “The President asked us to concert public opinion before we could expect anything of him. We are concerting it upon him.” The strategy was to keep suffrage in the press and to force Wilson’s hand.

Over the next few years, thousands of women from across the country joined the “silent sentinels,” standing in front of the White House carrying NWP purple, white, and gold banners. Emblazoned with bold slogans—“Mr. President, What Will You Do For Woman Suffrage?” and “How Long Must Women Wait For Liberty?”—the banners directly challenged the President. In order to keep the pickets in the newspapers, the banners were kept current and controversial. The NWP also staged theme days: Maryland State Day, College Day, Bastille Day, and even Working Women Day, the only picket held on a Sunday to encourage participation by working women. Many decried the protests as insulting to the President, unwomanly, and un-American. Massachusetts Representative Joseph Walsh referred to the protests as “the nagging of iron-jawed angels . . . bewildered, deluded creatures with short skirts and short hair.” NAWSA leadership, including Carrie Chapman Catt, condemned the pickets.

In February 1917, Catt and NAWSA pledged support for war preparations. In March, the NWP met to decide how to proceed once the U.S. officially entered the war. They did not need to

Diversity in the Suffrage Movement



The movement for woman suffrage and women's rights was largely a white middle class movement. While the early woman suffrage movement was aligned with abolition, after the Civil War, prominent suffragists, including Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, opposed the 15th Amendment, which gave black males the right to vote. Later NAWSA and the NWP advanced arguments for educated, middle class suffrage and limited the involvement of Black women to appease concerns of influential men and women. In her autobiography, Mary Church Terrell mentions participation in the White House pickets with her daughter Phyllis, but neither NAWSA nor the NWP actively encouraged the efforts of black women suffragists.

Despite the discrimination they faced from the movement, black women were active, organizing through black women's clubs and the National Association of Colored Women. In 1913, Ida B. Wells-Barnett founded the Alpha Suffrage Club, the largest black suffrage club in Illinois, and, in 1915, the club led a campaign that elected that first black city official in Chicago.

Despite their work for suffrage and these local victories, the 19th Amendment was just one step in a long battle for African American suffrage. Forty-five years later, the Civil Rights Movement's hard-fought victory in the Voting Rights Act of 1965 provided federal legal protections for blacks and others. Despite legal protections, questions about to whom and under what circumstances suffrage is extended to certain groups remains a controversial issue today.

wait long to act. By early April, when the U.S. declared entry into the war, ruptures in the suffrage movement reached a watershed.

This issue guide explores three options woman suffrage advocates faced in Spring 1917. With the imminent entry into the war, those in support of woman suffrage are considering what to do—continue to actively protest, focus work on the war effort, or protect those most vulnerable? Each option has strengths, weaknesses, and risks and none of the options is perfect for the movement or individual advocates. Which actions can you support? Which tradeoffs are you unwilling to accept? What do you recommend?

Option One: Continue to Actively Advocate for the Vote

Now is the time to push forward the federal woman suffrage amendment. If not now, when? During the Civil War, the woman suffrage movement suspended activity, believing that supporting Union war work would position the movement for later success. That strategy failed and set back the movement. President Wilson's first term clearly demonstrated that he and Congress will not act. He says that action on woman suffrage is up to us, so let us act. We must keep public and political pressure on President Wilson and Congress through pickets, spectacle, and campaigning against the party in power. Support for the war and working on other concerns are distractions to the cause. Once women

The Great War?

When the Great War began in 1914, the U.S. was neutral and the government and private envoys tried to negotiate peace. After German U-Boats attacked and sank the British ocean liner Lusitania killing 120 U.S. Citizens in May 1915, Germany agreed to discontinue unrestricted submarine warfare and the U.S. remained neutral.

In January 1917, Germany again began unrestricted submarine warfare, and the British intercepted the Zimmerman Telegram, in which Germany asked Mexico to join with them to regain lands taken by the U.S. (Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico). In April 1917, after several more U.S. ships were lost, President Wilson asked Congress to declare war.

The U.S. mobilized over 4 million U.S. soldiers (2.8 million drafted), with 2 million serving in Europe (including 350,000 black soldiers). In the 31 months in which the U.S. was involved in the war, over 110,000 American soldiers died in Europe (more than half from illness), over 200,000 sustained injuries, and others suffered "shell shock," what we now know as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

have the vote, they will be able to secure women's legal, economic, and social equality.

A federal amendment is the only way to guarantee suffrage for all women. While we have had some success in Western states, our defeats outnumber our victories. We face nearly insurmountable barriers in the East and the South. Business interests, large populations of immigrants, and social mores impede progress in the East. Victory in the South is impossible. States' rights and concerns about black and minority voting have kept woman suffrage from even being considered by legislative bodies. Putting money into failed state campaigns wastes resources and demoralizes adherents. A federal amendment focuses the battle on the President and Congress and allows us to efficiently and effectively use our resources to move forward the cause for all women.

The 1916 election proved that the National Woman's Party strategy of holding the party in power responsible worked. Rather than determining who might or might not support suffrage, campaigning against all Democratic candidates allowed us to deliver a clear message to voters and to the Democratic Party. Republicans now hold a plurality in the House of Representatives. We can use this victory to continue to pressure individual legislators and the Democratic Party to support woman suffrage. Extending our strategy into state and local elections pressures both parties to support woman suffrage.

We must intensify our protests. Democracy starts at home. In the last election, President Wilson's last-minute acceptance of state woman suffrage came in response to the inclusion of woman suffrage in the Republican Party platform. This proves that he will act if pressed. In entering the war, President Wilson declared that the world "be made safe for democracy," but, yet, he refuses to advance suffrage for women. By escalating the pickets outside the White House, we can keep woman suffrage in the press and remind the public about the irony of fighting for democracy abroad while denying civil liberties to women.

As we learned from the violence at the 1913 Woman Suffrage Procession and from the British woman suffrage movement, picketing, especially during a time of war, is potentially dangerous. Harassment, physical attacks, and arrest are possibilities, but public outrage will work in our favor. We must immediately publicize any mistreatment from spectators or police. If we are arrested for exercising our Constitutional rights, we will refuse to pay fines. If we are jailed, we will declare ourselves political prisoners, engage in hunger strikes, and use our unlawful incarceration to gain sympatric support for our cause.

Option One: Continue to actively advocate for suffrage

We must continue to actively advocate for the federal woman suffrage amendment. Through pickets, spectacle, and campaigning against the party in power, we keep public and political pressure on President Wilson and Congress. Support for the war and working on other concerns are distractions. Once women have the vote, they will be able to secure women's legal, economic, and social equality.

But continuing suffrage work risks perceptions of impropriety and unpatriotic activity that undermine our efforts. The protests will enrage the President and Congress, the people and institutions we need to gain federal suffrage. Engaging in protest is dangerous and could harm the cause.

Examples of what might be done	Some consequences and tradeoffs to consider
Congress should pass a federal amendment to guarantee woman suffrage.	Focus on the federal amendment undermines state suffrage, which is supported by both political parties.
Advocates should escalate White House protests to keep pressure on the President and the Congress.	Protesting the president during wartime alienates the president, legislators, and public opinion
Enfranchised women should vote against candidates of the political party in power.	Campaigning against the party in power could alienate elected officials and voters and damage suffrage work at all levels.
Suffrage advocates should publicize incidences of violence and, if arrested, initiate hunger strikes to highlight status as political prisoners.	These tactics could damage the suffrage cause as well as result in injury and death for the women involved.
Black women, immigrant groups, and labor organizations should be actively involved in the movement.	Partnering with these groups may damage perceived "respectability," alienate influential supporters, and increase racial and class divisions within the movement.

Civil Liberties and the War

Although engaged in a war to make the "world safe for democracy," U.S. democracy and civil liberties deteriorated during the war. President Wilson promised in his declaration of war that disloyalty would be met with "a firm hand of stern repression." The Espionage Act and the Sedition Act gave the government broad powers to suppress speech, press, and other rights. Many peace activists were jailed or deported. While voluntary censorship of the press was encouraged, foreign language papers were required to submit translated copy to censors. Speech or writing which "abused" the government or incited others to resist the government could be met with a 20-year prison sentence. Citizens were encouraged to spy on their neighbors and report any suspicious activity. Watch groups formed, including a national youth organization known as The Boy Spies of America. Thousands of pacifists, socialists, labor activities, immigrants, and others were imprisoned or deported for questioning or seeming to question government policies. Individuals and community groups attacked and injured thousands of citizens and immigrants perceived to be against the war.

Woman Suffrage and The Great War

Both Alice Paul of the NWP and Carrie Chapman Catt of the NAWSA were pacifists, a potentially dangerous position during the war. Despite being a founder and active member of U.S. and international peace organizations, Catt supported the President and pledged the help of women in the war effort; meanwhile, for Paul, the war provided an opportunity to underscore arguments about democracy and escalate opposition to President Wilson.

Suffrage advocates responded in different ways. Some turned their attention to supporting the war effort; while, others continued to work for federal and state suffrage. NAWSA used war work to establish women as patriotic citizens. NASWA also targeted suffrage work in strategic states. Catt used the militant nature of the NWP to befriend President Wilson, assuring him that his actions against the picketers were justified and that women were willing to wait for suffrage.

Meanwhile, the NWP escalated the pickets. Picket banners directly ridiculed Wilson's statements about democracy and referred to him as "Kaiser Wilson." The picketers also burned his speeches. The NWP did not discourage its members from engaging in war work but clearly articulated its focus on continued picketing. NAWSA leaders and others asked national and local newspapers to not cover the pickets.

As we look to increase support for our cause, strategically partnering with black women, labor, and immigrant organizations can expand our base and provide access to working women, who are more likely to support our militant tactics. In navigating these relationships, we must be careful. Associations with black women, labor organizations, and immigrants may concern some of our wealthy and influential supporters; however, we are better positioned to work with these organizations than NAWSA, as they cannot afford to upset their more moderate and "proper" members or their relationships with Democratic elected officials.

Option Two: Support the War Effort to Generate Good Will

Now is the time to focus our efforts on supporting the president and the war, laying the foundation for post-war suffrage success. Supporting the war effort will demonstrate that women are patriotic citizens. At the same time, we should strengthen and unify the organization and plan a coordinated target of a few strategic states to position the movement for a quick post-war victory. Focus on the federal amendment must wait until after the war, and protesting will damage our respectability and do irreparable harm to the movement. Both protest and working for other causes appear unpatriotic. No matter our personal views on war, we must unite to support the President and the country.

Women's work is needed to ensure food supply, support the soldiers, provide funds for the war, and replace men in factory jobs. We can demonstrate our patriotic citizenship by selling Liberty Bonds, supporting the Red Cross, and planting gardens. Every woman has a role from rolling bandages and knitting socks for the men fighting overseas to actively raising money for the war effort. With men fighting overseas, women entering the workforce provide equipment necessary for U.S. victory, preserve our economy, and demonstrate women's' commitment to the country. All women, whatever their skills, must find a way to support the war. Even those opposed to war must follow the lead of Carrie Chapman Catt and put aside concerns to show Congress, the President, and all enfranchised men that we are invaluable contributors to the Nation and thus deserve the vote. Look at what just happened in England. The House of Commons is poised to approve woman suffrage because women have proven to be essential in the war effort. Our work at this critical time will set us up for success after the war.

In our support for the war, it is critical that we support the president. Despite Wilson's lukewarm acceptance of woman suffrage, we need to rally behind him now. This is particularly important when the National Woman's Party makes us all look ridiculous by protesting at the White House. We must publicly denounce those who would protest president. We must draw a distinction between us and the radical misguided women of the NWP, who hurt our cause every day. Instead, we can befriend the president and get him on our side.



To support President Wilson's Americanization efforts to make our country safer at home, we must work to educate and Americanize immigrants in our communities. Much of this work can be done in the schools, but we can also organize meetings and go into homes to give cooking lessons and provide cultural education. Through teaching immigrants language, work habits, cooking, and American culture, we can help them assimilate and

protect the country from internal threats. Women's work together on the war effort is an opportunity to solidify and grow a coordinated national suffrage organization. As we mobilize state and local suffrage chapters to support the war, we build those organizations, secure their commitment, and gain additional members. Rallying behind a singular message of woman as patriot citizens who deserve the vote will position us for the future. With state and local entities working toward the same goals and financially supporting the national organization, we will raise necessary funds for postwar efforts. Following Carrie Chapman Catt's Winning Plan, we all must stay together and then after the war launch the final push for suffrage. Splinter groups distract from the main message, scatter resources, and ultimately will lead to failure.

Option Two: Support the war effort to generate good will.

We must focus our efforts on supporting the president and the war to demonstrate that women are patriotic citizens worthy of suffrage. We can position the movement for a quick post-war victory through strengthening and unifying the organization and targeting a few strategic states. Protesting damages the movement, and working for causes appears unpatriotic. No matter our personal views on war, we must unite to support the President and the country.

But putting suffrage on the back burner again undermines current momentum and holds no guarantee of success.

Examples of what might be done	Some consequences and tradeoffs to consider
Women should demonstrate patriotism by selling Liberty Bonds, supporting the Red Cross, preserving food, and entering the labor force.	Work in support of the war diverts energy from the cause of suffrage.
Everyone should support the president and his war-time decisions and oppose those who criticize him.	Support the President may not necessarily lead to progress on suffrage after the war.
The suffrage movement should establish one national suffrage organization that unites all state and local organizations with one cohesive message and strategy.	Using different strategies and targeting multiple fronts can be more effective in generating widespread support.
Suffrage organizations should continue suffrage work in a few strategic states and localities, even if just to achieve school and local suffrage.	State-by-state suffrage is time-consuming and ultimately ineffective. Compromising for limited suffrage weakens arguments for federal suffrage.
Local suffrage organizations should provide support the President Wilson's 's anti-sedition "Americanization" efforts by providing education for immigrants.	Immigrants pose no threat to the country or our communities. They work long hours and do not need or have time for programs to learn how to be "American."

Option Three: Secure the Safety of Women, Children, and Families

During war, all of our efforts must be directed at protecting society and individuals from the potential dangers of war. Women's civic duty is to protect women, children, families, and the nation. Without being able to vote, women have raised money, volunteered, and successfully advocated for a number of social reforms. Reports from Europe document the horrific abuse, hunger, and illness faced by women, children, and families. Safety must be our main concern. Support for the war effort and suffrage are useless distractions. We must be united in protecting individuals and society from the potential dangers that war may bring at home.

War in Europe has brought a great humanitarian crisis—hunger, illness, and physical violence, with women, children, and families the most vulnerable. Even if we had the vote, it would do nothing to protect women and children. We must completely suspend a woman suffrage activity and focus all of our efforts at the dangers facing society and individuals. We certainly should not befriend the president who has brought this terrible scourge upon us. The Woman's Peace Party was right to condemn Carrie Chapman Catt and NAWSA for supporting the war to gain favor with the president. Above all else, we must stand united in our work to protect women, children, and families.

Women should oppose war and its inhumanity. As she cast her vote against the U.S. entering the war, U.S. Representative Jeannette Rankin, the first woman elected to Congress bravely said, "I want to stand by my country — but I cannot vote for war." Some say she hurt the cause of suffrage, but we must stand with her, Jane Addams, and Crystal Eastman in opposing the war. We should join the Woman's Peace Party and the American Union Against Militarism to oppose the war, prevent the government from drafting men into military service, and provide legal and financial support for conscientious objectors.

The war also provides an opportunity for us to pass a federal prohibition amendment. Alcohol is a deviant force in society. It pulls apart families and harms women and children. News from

Women Respond to the War

With the draft of young men, three million women went to work to support the war effort and their families. Child labor was common at the time, and additional children entered the workforce to support their families.

Over 25,000 women served in Europe, as nurses or providing support for the soldiers (washing and cooking). Through the Red Cross, YMCA, Salvation Army, and other groups, women worked in hospitals and canteens in the U.S. and Europe, even serving on the front lines. In France, NAWSA set up two hospitals staffed with female physicians and nurses.

Women's clubs, including local suffrage organizations, produced and preserved food, knitted socks, and provided medical supplies (mostly bandages) for the war effort. Other organizations advocated for labor laws, prohibition, social service work, and "Americanizing" immigrants. President Wilson called for such "Americanization" efforts to protect the country from the potential "threat" from immigrants. At the time, one-third of U.S. population was foreign born or had at least one foreign-born parent. A Wisconsin women's organization proclaimed, "You cannot do a more valuable patriotic service than to help make good American citizens of those who are among us and not of us."

Meanwhile, in response to horrific stories of kidnapping and rape of women and children in Europe, some women formed gun clubs and militia to protect their families. The U.S. press lauded an all-female Russian battalion as an example of patriotic motherhood in defense of their homeland. A female gun club member noted in an editorial in *The New York Times*, "if American women are ever called upon to defend their homes, their children, and themselves, they will not be helpless as were the Belgian women." U.S. gun manufacturers and gun organizations promoted female gun training and ownership to protect themselves and families. Women connected these protective efforts to patriotic citizenship. One woman wrote, "Whether we vote or not—we are going to shoot."

Europe tells of drastic food shortages. Banning alcohol would save grain to feed the country and fuel the war effort. After years of advocating for state laws and a federal amendment, now is the time to lobby the President and Congress to support prohibition.

The war will move more and more women and children into the labor force. We know that factory conditions are unsafe, and, now with women and children in jobs formerly held by men, those conditions will be especially unsafe for them. With more women and children working to support families, we must force businesses to provide safe working conditions and reasonable working hours. We must lobby Congress to enact laws to protect women and children laborers.

From Europe we have heard horrible reports about abuses of women and children. Recently, U-Boats have been found off of our shores. In Russia, women were forced to form a militia to protect their families. With our men fighting overseas, women and children are especially vulnerable. American women must be able to protect themselves, their families, and potentially defend the country. Gun manufactures have responded by providing training and special women-friendly firearms. We should all learn to shoot and be prepared to defend ourselves and the country.

Option Three: Secure the safety of women, children, and families

We must protect society and individuals from the potential dangers of war. In Europe, women, children, and families face horrific abuse, hunger, and illness. Safety must be our main concern. Support for the war effort and suffrage are useless distractions. We must be united in protecting individuals and society from the dangers of war.

But working on these issues may not actually protect anyone, especially not in the long term. Working in support of the war effort could lead to a quicker return of men and less loss of life. Women with the vote could advance real legal changes to protect women and children.

Examples of what might be done	Some consequences and tradeoffs to consider
Suffrage organizations must suspend all suffrage activities.	This will set the movement back, just as it did during the Civil War.
Suffrage advocates should redirect their efforts to work for peace and oppose the war.	These activities will be seen as un-American and may result in physical violence and arrest.
Women should lobby for a Constitutional amendment to ban alcohol in order to conserve food and protect families from the immorality of alcohol.	The difficulty of enforcing a national alcohol ban will take resources from public safety and make society more dangerous.
The U.S. Government must enact labor laws to protect women and children in the workforce.	Such laws punish business by decreasing production. Women and children should work to support the country.
Women should learn to use firearms to protect their homes, their families, and the country from potential threats.	Learning to use firearms, even to protect ourselves and our families, undermines our arguments for nonviolence and peace.

A Hard-won Victory

In June 1917, in response to the continued public embarrassment of the President, NWP picketers were arrested for obstructing traffic. Arrests escalated throughout the summer, and those arrested refused to pay fines. As a result, picketers were sentenced to jail time from three days to seven months. The women were imprisoned in appalling conditions at the District Jail or Occoquan Workhouse in Lorton, Virginia. Between 1917 and 1919, approximately 2000 women from 30 states participated in demonstrations, 500 were arrested, and 168 imprisoned.

Prisoners demanded they be treated as political prisoners and refused to do assigned tasks. In response to worsening conditions, they began a hunger strike. The prison superintendent ordered forced feedings in which the women were placed in restraints while doctors shoved tubes down their throats or up their noses and poured in liquefied food. On what is known as the “Night of Terror,” thirty-three suffrage prisoners were brutally beaten by prison guards. News of their abuse horrified the country. A judge ruled that they had been unlawfully arrested and imprisoned, and the women were released. The pickets sporadically continued throughout 1918 and 1919, going beyond the White House to the U.S. Capitol and House and Senate office buildings.

In January 1918, Wilson publicly called for a federal woman suffrage amendment. The House passed the amendment the next day, but, over the next year, it failed twice in the Senate. The NWP continued to campaign against Democrats and picket. In September 1918, less than two months before the end of the war, President Wilson went before Congress to urge passage of the amendment, saying “We have made partners of the women in this war. . . Shall we admit them only to a partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toil and not to a partnership of privilege and right?”

In May 1919, Wilson called a Special Session of Congress for woman suffrage, and, by early June, the amendment passed both the House and the Senate. The NWP and NASWA worked vigorously for ratification in the states. In August 1920, Tennessee became the 36th and final state needed to ratify what became the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Between 1941-1984, nine Southern states eventually joined in ratifying the Amendment (women in these states had the right to vote; these ratifications were symbolic). The 1920 Presidential and Congressional elections were the first in which women could legally vote, but those legal protections did not extend to all women. The federal legal guarantee of voting rights for black and other women of color was not officially secured until Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Voting Rights Act and suffrage for minorities, immigrants, and others remain contested legal and political issues.

In February 1920, six months before passage of the 19th Amendment, Carrie Chapman Catt founded the League of Women Voters to educate newly enfranchised women about their role in the political process and power to shape public policy. Following passage of the 19th Amendment, the NWP proposed and worked for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to Constitutionally guarantee women’s civil liberties.

Suffrage Timeline

1848	The Declaration of Sentiments and first U.S. women's rights convention.
1869	National Woman Suffrage Association and American Woman Suffrage Association
1878	The federal woman suffrage amendment is first introduced to Congress.
1890	The suffrage associations merge to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association
1913	Suffrage parade on eve of President Wilson's inauguration results in violence and a Congressional investigation.
1914	Alice Paul leaves NAWSA and forms the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage
1916	Alice Paul forms the National Woman's Party
January 1917	The NWP initiates pickets at the White House
April 1917	The U.S. enters the Great War
June 1917	Arrests of NWP pickets begin
November 1917	In the "Night of Terror" at the Occoquan Workhouse, 33 incarcerated suffrage advocates are beaten. By the end of November, public outcry results in their release from prison.
January 1918	President Wilson publicly calls for a federal woman suffrage amendment.
May 1919	President Wilson calls a Special Session of Congress for woman suffrage.
June 1919	The woman suffrage amendment is passed by the Senate and sent to the states for ratification.
August 26, 1920	The woman suffrage amendment ratified by Tennessee, the 36th and final state needed for passage of 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Notable Woman Suffrage Leaders

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902). Founder of the National Woman Suffrage Association (1869). First president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (1890).

Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906). Founder of the National Woman Suffrage Association (1869). Prosecuted for casting a vote in the 1872 presidential election. President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (1892-1900).

Lucy Stone (1818-1893). Founder of the American Woman Suffrage Association (1869).

Anna Howard Shaw (1847-1919). President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (1904-1915)

Carrie Chapman Catt (1859-1947). President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (1900-1904, 1915-1920). Founder of the League of Women Voters (1920).

Alice Paul (1885-1977). Co-founder of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (1913) and National Woman's Party (1916). Co-author of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Lucy Burns (1879-1966). Co-founder of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (1913) and the National Woman's Party (1916).

Crystal Eastman (1881-1928). Founding member of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (1913). Co-founder and executive director of the American Union Against Militarism (1915-1917). Co-Founder National Civil Liberties Bureau (1917, later to become the American Civil Liberties Union).

Alva Belmont (1853-1933). Benefactor and president of the National Woman's Party (1920-1933).

Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954). Founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. President National Association of Colored Women (1896-1900). Joined the NWP pickets at the White House.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862-1931). Founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Founding member of the National Association of Colored Women.

Harriot Stanton Blatch (1856-1940). Daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Founder Women's Political Union (1907), a suffrage group for working women. The WPU merged with the NWP in 1916.



KAISER WILSON

*HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN
YOUR SYMPATHY WITH
THE POOR GERMANS
BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT
SELF-GOVERNED?*

*20,000,000
AMERICAN WOMEN ARE NOT
SELF-GOVERNED.*

*TAKE THE BEAM
OUT OF YOUR OWN EYE.*

This issue guide, published by The National Woman's Party, is based on research done in collaboration with the Charles F. Kettering Foundation. Historic Decisions issue guides foster the development of deliberative democratic skills through examining the difficult choices Americans faced in the past. All photos are part of the National Woman's Party collection. Visit <https://www.nationalwomansparty.org/> for more information.

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