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NATIONAL WOMEN'S HISTORY ALLIANCE



CELEBRATING WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY

Women's Right to Vote Was NOT Given - It Was Won AND AT A GREAT COST

What inspired America's first women to demand full citizenship? Was it the social equality they observed among the matrilineal Haudenosaunee (Iroquois)? Or was it the courage of colonial women who challenged patriarchal traditions? Or the unyielding pursuit of freedom by enslaved women?

Whatever their influences, they shared one unwavering conviction.

At Seneca Falls in 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton declared: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal..." That belief that women were entitled to the same rights and responsibilities of citizenship as men ignited one of the greatest civil rights movements in American history.

The suffrage movement spanned three generations and was sustained by thousands of determined women and supportive men. Suffrage leader, Carrie Chapman Catt wrote that **"millions gave the accumulated possibilities of their entire lifetimes"** to secure the vote. They began with no political power. Through courage, creativity, sacrifice, and perseverance, **they changed the Constitution** of the United States. As Catt reminded us after victory: **"That Vote has been costly. Prize it!"**

Suffragists waged **935 campaigns** national and state drives, referendums, petitions, legislative battles, ratification campaigns, parades, marches, door-to-door canvassing, and thousands of public meetings.

- **They sustained one of the nation's longest, non-violent civil rights campaigns**—what Catt called a "continuous, seemingly endless chain of activity" for 72 years.
- **They learned political leadership before they possessed political power.** Women became skilled organizers, speakers, lobbyists, fundraisers,

strategists, and journalists. They even established suffrage schools to train new activists. Every contribution mattered—from five-cent donations and bake sales to gifts worth millions of dollars.

- **They transformed public protest.** The magnificent 1913 Woman Suffrage March down Pennsylvania Avenue captured the nation's attention and mass involvement.
- **They became the first group to maintain a sustained picketting of the White House.** For seventeen months, the Silent Sentinels stood in all weather, demanding that President Wilson support a federal suffrage amendment.
- **They turned imprisonment into protest.** Suffragists declared themselves political prisoners, exposing the injustice of their arrests.
- **They became the first major organized political protesters in America to use hunger strikes and endure forced feeding.** Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, Rose Winslow, and their sister prisoners risked their lives to awaken the nation's conscience.
- **They mastered political messaging.** Long before television or social media, the slogan **VOTES FOR WOMEN** appeared everywhere: on buttons, banners, sashes, postcards, newspapers, sheet music, fans, parasols, china, automobiles, and countless other items. They built one of America's first great political brands.

Their movement was peaceful, but it was not without sacrifice. In 1916, suffrage leader **Inez Milholland** collapsed after months of exhausting campaign travel and died shortly afterward. Her reported final public plea still echoes today: **"How long must women wait for liberty?"**

On August 26, 1920, after **72 years** of relentless effort, **the 19th Amendment** guaranteed that the right to vote could not be denied on account of sex.

The vote was not given. It was won.

As we enter another election season, let us honor the women who refused to surrender, who marched, organized, sacrificed, endured prison, hunger strikes, and public ridicule so that every woman could cast a ballot. Knowing this story is urgent as we celebrate the 250th anniversary of our nation; the recognition of the importance of women achieving full equality has never been more important.

Honor their work. Sustain their Victory. Change the future. Vote!

EARLY AMERICAN WOMEN DEMANDED THEIR RIGHTS BY PLEADING THEIR OWN CASE.

Margaret Brent

"VOTE AND VOYCE": MARGARET BRENT DEMANDS A VOTE - 1648



She could manage property, settle estates, pay soldiers, and help save a colony. But she could not vote. In 1648 - two centuries before the Seneca Falls Woman's Convention - Margaret Brent challenged the political boundaries imposed on women. An unmarried woman and prominent Maryland landowner, Brent could own property, conduct business, lend money, and appear in court.

Governor Leonard Calvert trusted her enough to name her executor of his estate, instructing her to “Take all, & pay all.” When Maryland faced political and fiscal crisis, Brent used estate resources to pay soldiers and help stabilize the colony. The Maryland Assembly later praised her leadership, declaring that the colony’s safety had been better in her hands “then in any man’s else in the whole Province.”

Then, on January 21, 1648, Brent appeared before the Assembly and demanded a “vote and voyce” - one vote for herself and another as Lord Baltimore’s legal representative. **She was refused.**

Brent was not demanding the vote for all women. But she exposed a contradiction that would endure for centuries: If a woman could assume the responsibilities of citizenship, why should she be denied its political voice? Margaret Brent asked that question in 1648. American women would spend generations demanding the answer.

Elizabeth Freeman

TRAILBLAZER FOR FREEDOM (1742 - 1829)

In 1781, an enslaved woman known as Mum Bett heard the words of the newly adopted Massachusetts Constitution: “**All men are born free and equal.**” She resolved to claim that promise for herself.

Enslaved and brutally treated in the Ashley household in Sheffield, Massachusetts, she sought the help of attorney Theodore Sedgwick. He filed a freedom suit on behalf of Bett and another enslaved man, Brom. In *Brom and Bett v. Ashley*, the court ruled in her favor -- **they were free**. The case became an important legal challenge to slavery in Massachusetts and helped pave the way for its abolition in the state.



Mum Bett chose a new name to mark her newly won status: **Elizabeth Freeman**.

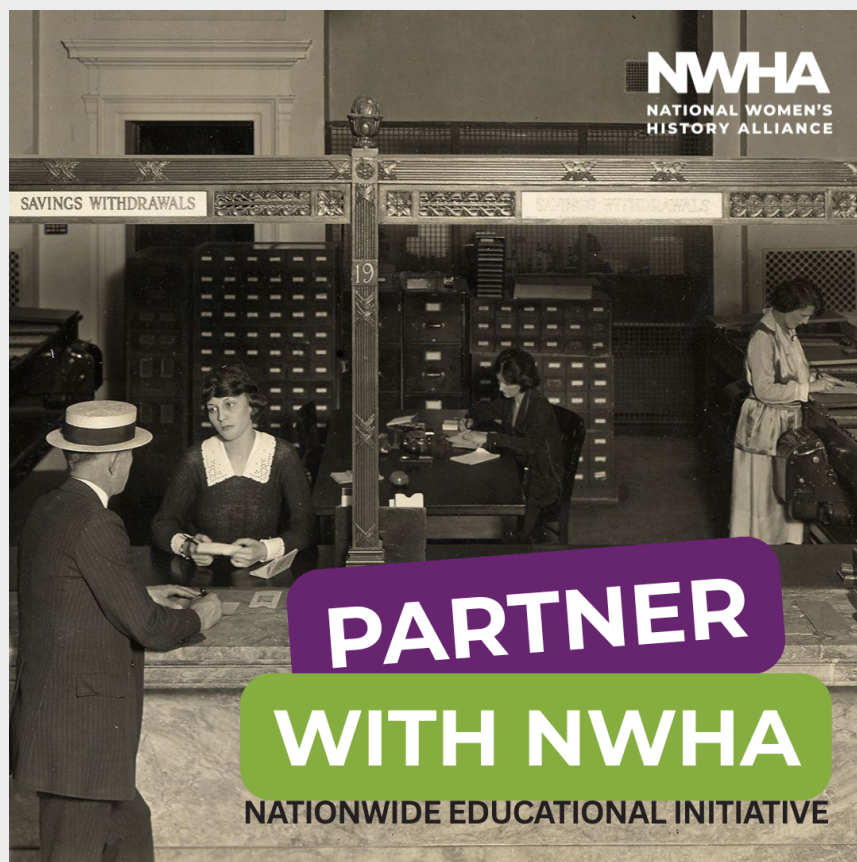
Her victory was more than an act of personal liberation. By demanding that Massachusetts live up to its own declaration that human beings were “born free and equal,” Freeman exposed the profound contradiction between America’s ideals and the reality of slavery.

Her own words convey what freedom meant to her:

“Any time, any time while I was a slave, if one minute’s freedom had been offered to me, and I had been told I must die at the end of that minute, I would have taken it.” (Elizabeth Freeman, recorded by Catherine Sedgwick)

Economic Security is Essential to Women's Equality

FINANCIAL LITERACY, LIBERATION, AND LEADERSHIP: WOMEN IN BUSINESS



To recognize historic and contemporary women in the workplace and beyond, and to promote financial literacy, the National Women's History Alliance is partnering with thirty universities, 500 bank branches, and 500 K-12 schools as part of our 2027 national educational campaign titled Financial Literacy, Liberation, and Leadership: Women in Business.

This collaboration will include a nationwide distribution of a print magazine featuring financial literacy lesson plans, interviews, and resources, and an online social media campaign elevating local business leaders as inspiration for the next generation.

We invite you to be part of this campaign in whatever way works best for you.

JOIN A Coalition of Thirty Universities as Sponsors
BE ONE OF 500+ BANK PARTNERS To Uplift Local Business Icons Stories
REQUEST FREE EDUCATORS' MAGAZINE For Any Level of K-12 Schools
SUGGEST AN ICON To Be Included in Magazine or Social Media
FOR ANYONE ELSE SEEKING A Way to Get Involved

[LEARN MORE](#)

SAVE THE DATE

TUESDAY

AUGUST 25TH

WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY WEBINAR

NWHA

**NATIONAL WOMEN'S
HISTORY ALLIANCE**

Save the Date! Join us on **Tuesday, August 25**, for a special Women's Equality Day webinar as we commemorate the enduring fight for equality and celebrate the women who continue to shape our democracy.

Program details and registration coming soon.

Women's Equality Day: August 26th

THE ANNIVERSARY OF WOMEN WINNING THE RIGHT TO VOTE

Voting is the Foundation of Our Democracy.

Plan today to ensure that Women's Equality Day, August 26th, the 106th Anniversary of American Women Winning the Vote is included in America's 250th anniversary celebrations.

In this election year with the Voting Rights Act challenged in the courts, we are reminded that barriers to voting can still exist. Women's Equality Day, August 26th is an opportunity to celebrate the vote and in so doing remind others, especially our children about the importance of the vote. Women's Equality Day, August 26, 2026, honors the 106th anniversary of women in the United States winning the right to vote.

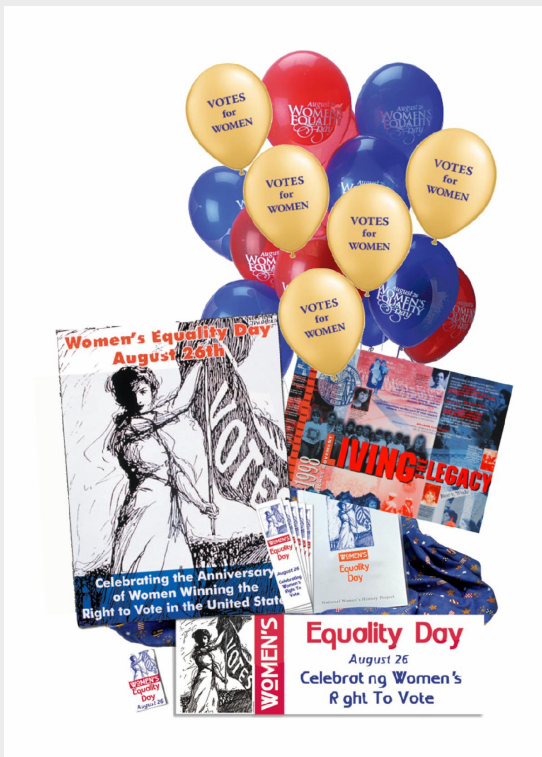
The **Voting Rights Act of 1965** extended the right to vote by challenging voter suppression and intimidation. Unfortunately, the Voting Rights Acts is being diminished in the courts.

When you vote, you are taking action to support this democracy and to recognize the unrelenting tenacity and spirit of women who worked, and who are continuing to work, to protect and secure the vote for women, and indeed, all American Citizens.

RESOURCES

Women's Equality Day Proclamation
Download Women's Equality Day Brochure

WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY KIT



[Purchase HERE](#)

Many of our commemorative items are currently available at 50% off in the 250th Anniversary Sale section of our **ONLINE STORE**.

To deepen your understanding of the movement that transformed American democracy, we also invite you to read **Winning the Vote: The Triumph of the Woman Suffrage Movement**. Widely praised as "the most comprehensive book of the suffrage movement," this beautifully illustrated volume honors the determination, courage, and persistence of the women who fought to secure the right to vote. It is also available at 50% off during our anniversary sale. Learn more and order through our online store.

Celebrate. Educate. Advocate. Join the National Women's History Alliance as we honor the women who shaped our nation and ensure their stories continue to inspire future generations.



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National Women's History Alliance is a non-partisan, non-profit registered 501(c)(3) whose mission is dedicated to advancing women's history in education, fostering empowerment, championing equality, and promoting inclusion.

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*Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok land

We acknowledge that the land in Santa Rosa, CA, is the traditional, ancestral territory of the Southern Pomo and Coast Miwok peoples, who have stewarded it for thousands of years.

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