

RECOGNIZING

WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE ★

1848
—
1920

IN NEW YORK STATE

BEFORE
1848

Woman Suffrage



UNDER NEW YORK STATE LAW (as in all states long into the nineteenth century), women were considered dead in the law once they married. Having no legal existence, a married woman could not sue or be sued, have the right to a jury of her peers, serve on a jury, sign a contract or, of course, vote. She had no right to her property, nor even to her children. A husband could will away an unborn child. Marital rape was legal, and the law allowed a man to beat his wife, as long as he did not inflict permanent damage.

Women voted in the colonies and they continued to vote in New Jersey until 1807. Women's Rights emerged as an issue during the Revolution, when Abigail Adams warned John [Adams] not to accept the repressive Blackstone code of common law, or the ladies were "bound to foment a rebellion." Woman suffrage was brought up in Constitutional Conventions in New York before the 1848 Seneca Falls convention and the legislature passed a woman's property rights bill several months prior to it.

Imagine that women have the responsibility to choose all political representatives, removing from office anyone who did not address the wishes and needs of the people looking to the seventh generation ahead.



The Haudenosaunee

IMAGINE WOMEN LIVING IN A WORLD FREE FROM VIOLENCE COMMITTED AGAINST THEM, having the final say in matters of war and peace, and having the absolute right to their own bodies. Economically independent, imagine that women are also responsible for planning the spiritual ceremonies. Haudenosaunee (traditional Iroquois) women have had this authority—and more—since centuries before Europeans came to these shores.

When women in New York State began to organize for their rights in 1848, they took their cue from the nearby native communities, where women lived in the world that non-native women could only dream about.

Haudenosaunee women fired the revolutionary vision of early feminists by providing a model of freedom and agency. Euro-American women learned and were inspired by the Native American women's control of their bodies and property, religious voice, custody of their children, satisfying work, and absence of rape and domestic violence. Finally, they saw political equality in action, as clan mothers nominated the chiefs, held them in position, and removed them, if necessary. Everyone had a voice in decisions, women and men equally.

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