

RECOGNIZING
WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE
 IN NEW YORK STATE

Give women the right to vote, the argument went, because white women outnumber all African-Americans and immigrants and woman suffrage is a way to maintain white, native-born supremacy.



Race and Diversity

COOPERATION BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE WOMEN IN THE EARLY YEARS

GIVEN THE INSTITUTIONALIZED NATURE OF SLAVERY, THE STRUGGLE WITHIN THE MOVEMENT AGAINST RACISM IN THE EARLY DAYS BROUGHT ABOLITIONISTS AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVITIES TOGETHER. Eventually, however, the issue of race would cause divisiveness in the movement. Race was as much of an issue for suffragists as it was for most people during the period of suffrage movement.

After the Civil War, the abolition and women's rights movements continued to work together, now in a combined organization. The American Equal Rights Association, established in 1865 to promote universal suffrage, hired African American women speakers such as Louisa "Mollie" Jacobs to speak to audiences around New York State and beyond to convince them of the need to: black men and all women to have the right to vote. After outlawing slavery with the 13TH AMENDMENT, the United States Congress identified citizens as only men in the 14TH AMENDMENT and enfranchised African American men with the 15TH AMENDMENT, excluding women – white and black.

Divided over whether to support these advances for African American men at the expense of all women, the American Equal Rights Association split into two groups in 1869: the National Woman Suffrage Association, headquartered in New York by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, and the American Woman Suffrage Association, headquartered in Boston by Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell. This split marks a difference in ideology, but African Americans ended up in both organizations, for example, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, the Purvis family and Charlotte E. Ray joined with the National Woman Suffrage Association while Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin aligned with the American Woman Suffrage Association.



Portrait of a woman, thought to be Julia Weston Jones.
 To Hon. W. E. Burghardt DuBois
 W. E. B. DuBois, 1905

DISFRANCHISEMENT

BY
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6. Dangerous Arguments.

While many of those seeking enfranchisement recognize the broad demand of justice for all human beings which underlies their argument, they are often tempted by the exigencies of the situation to ignore the application of those underlying principles to any but themselves, or even to deny and attack the justice of equally just demands for the ballot. The advocates of woman suffrage have continually been in great danger of asking the ballot not because they are citizens, but because they occupy a certain social position, are of a certain grade of intelligence, or are "white." Continually it has been said in America: "If Paupers and Negroes vote why not college-bred women of wealth and position?" The assumption is false and a woman has superior right to have her interests represented in the nation and the Negroes and Paupers have few rights which society leaders are bound to respect. So, too, many colored people in arguing their own enfranchisement, are willing to be counted against the enfranchisement of women or foreigners or the unfortunate. Such argument or neglect is both false and dangerous, and while its phrasing may be effective at times it represents a climbing of one class on the misery of another.

Overt Racism after 1890

WITH THE MERGER OF THE NATIONAL (NWSA) AND AMERICAN (AWSA) WOMAN SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATIONS IN 1889 INTO THE NATIONAL AMERICAN WOMAN SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION (NAWSA), THE MOVEMENT CHANGED DIRECTION.

The NWSA heralded a broad array of women's issues, from "equal pay for equal work" (a common phrase by the 1850s) to a woman's right to be, in Elizabeth Cady Stanton's words, "the absolute sovereign of herself." While more conservative, the AWSA nonetheless concerned itself with issues like the conditions of working women. The merger changed everything. The vote increasingly became the single issue of the movement, and with it, an often covert, sometimes overt racist pandering to gain the support of Southern states, and a blatant xenophobia appealing to anti-immigrant sentiment. State suffrage organizations were allowed to segregate and work for the vote for white women only. Give women the right to vote, the argument went, because white women outnumber all African-Americans and immigrants and woman suffrage is a way to maintain white, native-born supremacy. While suffragists might be publicly friendly to black women, the movement at the same time utilized racism and xenophobia as a strategy. W. E. B. Du Bois, a prominent civil right activist and supporter of women's rights, argued strongly that such tactics were self-defeating. He believed that civil rights could not be truly gained by any group by denying the rights of others.

WOMEN WON THE RIGHT TO VOTE IN 1917

In New York State

and in all states in 1920 with the passage of the 19th AMENDMENT. It is important to note that while legally entitled to vote, black women were effectively denied voting rights in numerous Southern states until 1965.

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