



August 19, 2020

Argus Special 2020 Edition

League of Women Voters of Lane County Newsletter

And the winners are...

Last fall, the League of Women Voters of Lane County and co-sponsor Wordcrafters of Eugene invited all Lane County high school students to write an essay on the topic of "Women and the Vote." The contest was one of several events presented by LWVLC to recognize the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution giving women the right to vote. This year is also the centennial of the founding of the League of Women Voters.

Wordcrafters is a nonprofit organization that provides writers and readers opportunities to strengthen their craft and share their knowledge with each other and with future generations.

Students had until March 13 to submit their entries. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, however, judging the entries and recognizing the winners was delayed – until now. The winners of the contest were announced at a virtual awards ceremony on August 19.

Hannah Ngo, a senior at Sheldon High School won first place for her essay, "Women of Color were Overlooked." In the essay, Ngo acknowledges the passage of the 19th Amendment was a monumental stride toward equality. She asserts, however, that "...Women of color were excluded in both the fight and the history of the suffrage movement." She calls for recognizing suffragists such as Ida B. Wells and Mary Church, both African Americans, alongside Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton who are historically noted for their roles in suffrage movement. Read the entire essay on the following page.

Grace Foltz, also a 12th-grade student at Sheldon High School won second place for her essay, "The Struggle for Suffrage: From Impossibility to Accepted Reality."

The third-place finisher is **Charlotte Schramm**, a student at Elmira High School. Her essay is, "The History of Women's Suffrage and Its Influence on Today's Politics."

Four students won an honorable mention for their essay. They are:

- **Jay Bramhall**, a 9th-grade student at Springfield High School, for "Vote = Power"
- **Whitney Conaghan**, a 12th-grade student at Sheldon High School, for "Strength and Struggle"
- **Sandra Detweiler**, an 11th-grade student at South Eugene High School, for "Women and the Vote: The Spirit of Equality"
- **Lucy Mitchem**, a 9th-grade student at Elmira High School, for "The Erasure of Women of Color From the Women's Rights Movement"

**Kathy Madison, Chair
Public Relations**



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WOMEN OF COLOR WERE OVERLOOKED ©

First Place Winner, Hannah Ngo, Sheldon High School, 12th Grade

The passing of the 19th Amendment was monumental in taking strides to true equality in America. However, women of color were excluded in both the fight and in the history of the women's suffrage movement. One of the arguments presented by the National American Woman Suffrage Association to convince politicians to give white women the right to vote was to "maintain white, native-born supremacy" as stated by Sally Roesch Wagner. In order to gain more support for giving white women the right to vote, they barred women of color from proposed policies and bills. Women of color, while they did still fight alongside white women, were disenfranchised when the call for equality was underway. Their voices were undercut by white women in order to advance their own agenda instead of fighting together for the same goal. When history was written, the importance of women of color in this movement was practically erased.

While names such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton are often thought of when talking about the women's suffrage movement, Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell also deserve to be recognized for their work. Wells was an African American woman who worked as a journalist and founder of the National Association of Colored Women's Club, which was created to deal with issues dealing with civil rights and women's suffrage. Terrell was one of the first African American women who earned a college degree in America, earning a bachelor's and master's degree from Oberlin College. She fought tirelessly to have black women included in the fight for the

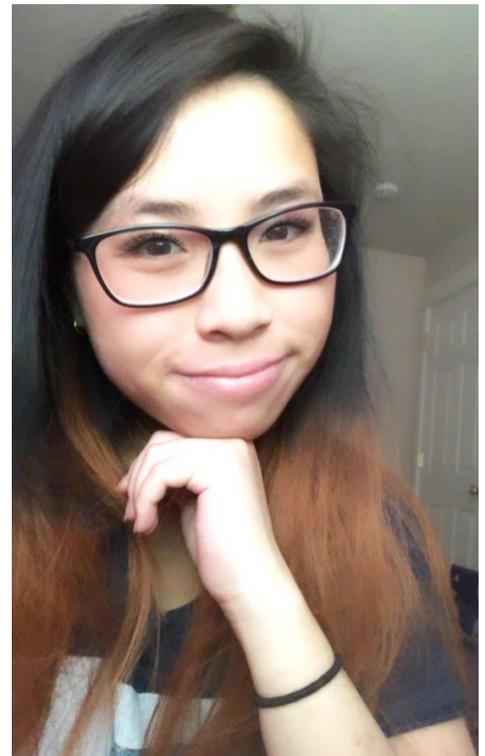
right to vote.

Both of these women had to fight harder than many other women's rights activist on the basis that they had two things going against them: their race and their sex. They had to live as women and people of color simultaneously. They should not have had to separate themselves into either a person of color or a woman to fight for that marginalized identity. Women of color were called women of color because they didn't want to separate their experiences. Their experiences were valuable in showing the injustices placed upon them, but racism colored the ears of the privileged.

The impact of white supremacy in America's history is abundantly evident just by looking through history textbooks. This nation was built on stolen land and was cultivated by stolen labor. Even in the fight for women's right to vote, women of color were still left out of the fight in order to appeal to southern voters. They had to deal with both racism and sexism. While the 19th Amendment was meant to guarantee all women the right to vote, women of color still found themselves unable to exercise that right. Jim Crow laws in the South prevented men and women of color from voting in the late 19th century. Literacy tests and poll taxes were created for the sole reason of making it much more difficult for minorities to exercise their legal right to vote. It wasn't until 1965 when the passage of the Voting Rights Act allowed black women in the South to vote. It took another ten years after that, when the voting rights amendments was passed in 1975 by the federal government,

which prohibited discrimination against "language minority" citizens. That meant Latinx, Native, and Asian American women were finally granted the right to vote as well.

The disenfranchisement of women of color in the fight for equality isn't as widely known as it should be. Leaders such as Wells and Terrell should have as much recognition as Anthony and Stanton, but their status as African American women downplayed their contributions to the movement. While the American school system fails in properly educating people on the contributions of people of color in American history, things like Women's History Month and Black History Month raise awareness for people like Wells and Terrell. The roles of people of color in history will not be forgotten.



THE STRUGGLE FOR SUFFRAGE: FROM IMPOSSIBILITY TO ACCEPTED REALITY ©

Second Place Winner, Grace Foltz, Sheldon High School, 12th Grade

Today, many women vote with ease. The action itself is not difficult, but it is very meaningful. With every button press, ripped chad, and inked-in box by a woman, the desires of those fundamental woman's suffrage activists are being fulfilled, their effort acknowledged. The right to vote for women in the U.S. is important and its history makes it all the more significant. The woman's suffrage movement was built upon the notion of simple democratic actions being available to all in the face of a system that denied them this.

The movement began in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York at a convention, which gave way to the Declaration of Sentiments. This Declaration, modeled after the Declaration of Independence, voiced the demands of the women and men present: "that all men and women are created equal" and that it is a government's duty, and truly their purpose, to ensure that the inalienable rights of all its citizens are secured ("The Gilder"). This commonplace event, a congregation of like-minded individuals, would lead to a prolonged movement for women's suffrage.

However, many of those at the convention were abolitionists first. As the 15th Amendment, one that would make it illegal to deny the right to vote "on account of race, color, or previous servitude" ("Constitute"), came to the forefront of activist's concern, priorities were uncovered and debated. The crucial question began to be asked: should woman's suffrage be a priority when black men were so close to the vote? For many, the answer was "no." For Susan B. Anthony, on the other hand, the notion of the "Negroes' Hour" was ridiculous. When a schism developed in the women's suffrage movement because of this issue, she sided with the proponents for delayed universal suffrage over immediate suf-

frage for only black males. The separation wouldn't last. In 1890 the two separate factions joined to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) ("Women"). This simple act of fighting and reconciliation led to a stronger organization.

NAWSA would find itself divided after some years again, but the different factions would each make strides towards success. This time, Alice Paul would be the one to make the divide. Her organization, the National Women's Party (NWP), took more radical actions than she believed current NAWSA president Carrie Chapman Catt would ("National"). Paul's and the NWP's prime directive was swaying President Woodrow Wilson in favor of a women's suffrage amendment by picketing outside the White House ("Women"). They were arrested for their efforts. In the Occoquan Workhouse in Virginia, the picketers, led by Alice Paul, went on hunger strike and were force fed, but news of this made the public sympathetic ("Alice"). Paul and the other women were soon released, and not long afterwards, President Wilson voiced his support for a woman's suffrage amendment ("Alice").

The constitutional amendment now had to be ratified by the states. Success was uncertain, but in the end, the three-fourths majority was fulfilled by a young Tennessee General Assembly member, Harry Burn ("Women"). Really, it was his mother who appealed to him through a note and gave him a yellow heart beneath his red rose ("Women"). And so, in August of 1920 the 19th Amendment was passed, giving citizens of the United States the right to vote regardless of sex ("Constitute"). With a simple note, the tide was turned.

The 19th Amendment was not the end, though, because in America, black women alongside black men

were being stonewalled from their right to vote. The Civil Rights movement in 1964 turned heavily towards voter registration and rights campaigns like that of Freedom Summer in Mississippi (Rogers). The negative responses, sometimes violent, to such campaigns and marches pushed President Johnson to streamline the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Act outlawed practices meant to discriminate at voter registration and the polls and urged federal enforcement and observation where necessary. This made it possible for the thousands of black female voters to follow, unhindered, in the footsteps of their white counterparts in 1920.

In the present when someone mails in a ballot or shows up to a voting center, it feels like nothing special. We take for granted something that, for some, was more than one hundred years in the making. We shall forever be indebted to the women and men who committed themselves to this struggle and fought on in ways that we can all emulate. We congregate. We argue. We reconcile. We protest. We write. We listen. We vote.



THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON TODAY'S POLITICS ©

Third Place Winner, Charlotte Schramm, Elmira High School, 10th Grade

The history of women's suffrage and the subsequent fight for equality are important parts of our past, not only for the United States, but for countries all over the world. As a German exchange student, I am happy for the opportunity to write about this significant topic in American history.

On August 18, 1920, the Congress of the United States ratified the 19th Amendment, which granted American women the right to vote. But how did the suffragettes achieve their goal? What is the history of those women? How does it impact politics in America and other countries today? This essay in honor of the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment will answer those and many more questions.

The engagement of women for their right to vote goes far back into the past, but the women's suffrage movement first began to gather strength in the 1840s. The women's rights convention held in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 is seen as the event that launched the suffrage movement. For several years, many supporters of women's suffrage worked all over the country to gain publicity for their case. Finally, in 1869, two national suffrage organizations were established: the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) under the leadership of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Stanton, and the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) with Lucy Stone as president. The AWSA had more moderate goals and worked only to earn women the right to vote. Meanwhile, the NWSA focused on other women's issues, too, such as equal pay and divorce rights, and fought with extremist means. It took years of negotiations between the NWSA and the AWSA until the founding convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) on February 18, 1890, united the two organizations. Susan B. Anthony emerged as their leading figure.

Soon, opponents of suffrage began to organize in official institutions. The Anti-Suffrage Party was founded in 1871. According to the group, women should concentrate on their roles as wives and mothers. Another institution formed was the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS) in 1911. Not only men but also many women participated in this association. The women argued that they and others would not want to vote.

For a long time, it looked like the suffragettes had more enemies than allies. However, when they were supported by Theodore Roosevelt's national Bull Moose Party one year after the NAOWS was formed, the tide slowly started to turn. More and more people began to speak in support of women's right to vote.

At that time, the suffragettes focused increasingly on lobbying for a constitutional amendment that granted the right to vote for women. For that purpose, the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, later the National Woman's Party (NWP), was established in 1913. The first big objective was achieved when Woodrow Wilson declared in 1916 that the Democratic Party would support suffrage. In that same year, the first woman was elected to the House of Representatives. In 1917, when the United States entered World War I, the suffrage movement got another boost in supporters. The NAWSA promoted America's participation in the war, so many citizens saw it as patriotic.

Without a doubt, the suffrage movement was finally successful. Originally written by Susan B. Anthony, the Woman Suffrage Amendment was passed by Congress in 1919 and ratified in 1920.

So, how did it influence American politics? It is unquestionable that women have used their opportunity to participate. From early on, women

have voted in elections at least in the same percentage as men, and often more. For instance, the voter turnout of the midterm elections in 2018 showed that women had a higher participation by 3.2%. The differences in prior years were even as high as 12%.

Nonetheless, the gender gap is clearly recognizable. Women in political professions are a minority even today. As of 2018, only 23.5% of the members in Congress were female. These results are below the global average, and the United States ranked merely 75th in the corresponding World Classification. Many other nations placed higher. Rwanda, Cuba, and Bolivia are leaders as the only countries with female majorities in government. Other Western democracies, such as Britain, Sweden, and Germany, outpace the United States, too.

Despite all of those numbers, the United States is one of the strongest supporters for gender equality today. All women in America can be proud of their growing participation in politics and of their history as fighters for women's rights.

