

Women's Equality Day



August 26, 2012

Women's Equality Day



Women's Equality Day commemorates the day when women in America were given full voting rights under the U.S. Constitution by the passage of the 19th Amendment.

Sixty-sixth Congress of the United States of America;

At the First Session,

*Begun and held at the City of Washington on Monday, the nineteenth day of May,
one thousand nine hundred and nineteen.*

JOINT RESOLUTION

Proposing an amendment to the Constitution extending the right of suffrage to women.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled (two-thirds of each House concurring therein), That the following article is proposed as an amendment to the Constitution, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States.

"ARTICLE _____.

"The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

"Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

F. H. Gillett

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Thos. A. Marshall

Vice President of the United States and

President of the Senate.

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This historic event was the culmination of a massive civil rights movement by women that had its formal beginnings in 1848.



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The women's suffrage amendment was introduced for the first time to the U.S. Congress on January 10, 1878.

Over the following year, the suffragists spent their time lobbying states in order to have the amendment ratified by the required two-thirds of the states.

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Tennessee, was the final state needed for Ratification. The state's decision came down to 23-year-old Representative Harry T. Burn to cast the deciding vote.

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Although Burn opposed the amendment, his mother convinced him to approve it. Mrs. Burn reportedly wrote to her son, *“Don't forget to be a good boy and help Mrs. Catt put the 'rat' in ratification.”*

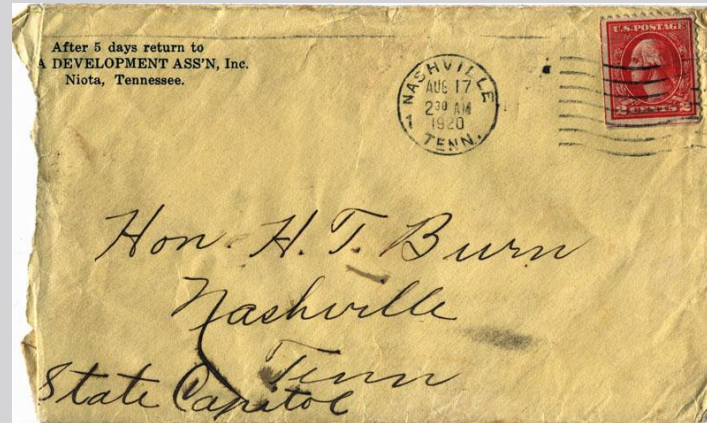


Photo courtesy of Library of Congress

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Burn heeded the advice of his mother and cast the deciding vote, breaking the tie of 48 to 48.



Photo courtesy of Library of Congress

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The U.S. Secretary of State, Bainbridge Colby, signed the amendment into law on August 26, 1920.



Photo courtesy of Library of Congress

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Fifty years later, on August 26th, 1970, Betty Friedan and the National Organization of Women (NOW) organized a nationwide Women's Strike for Equality, asking women to stop working for a day to draw attention to the prevalent problem of unequal pay for women's work.

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“The problem that has no name—which is simply the fact that American women are kept from growing to their full human capacities—is taking a far greater toll on the physical and mental health of our country than any known disease.”—Betty Friedan

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Friedan sought permission from the city of New York to close Fifth Avenue for the protest. The city refused.

Despite this setback, women and men gathered on the streets around 5 p.m., so that working women could attend.



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The women marching and participating in the day's actions were diverse and crossed the political spectrum, but their message was clear and evident through the various methods of protest implemented in the city. The strike movement demanded free 24-hour community-controlled child care centers and equal opportunity in jobs and education.

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Among the groups participating were the National Organization for Women, the Young Women's Christian Association, the National Coalition of American Nuns, Feminists in the Arts, and Women Strike for Peace.

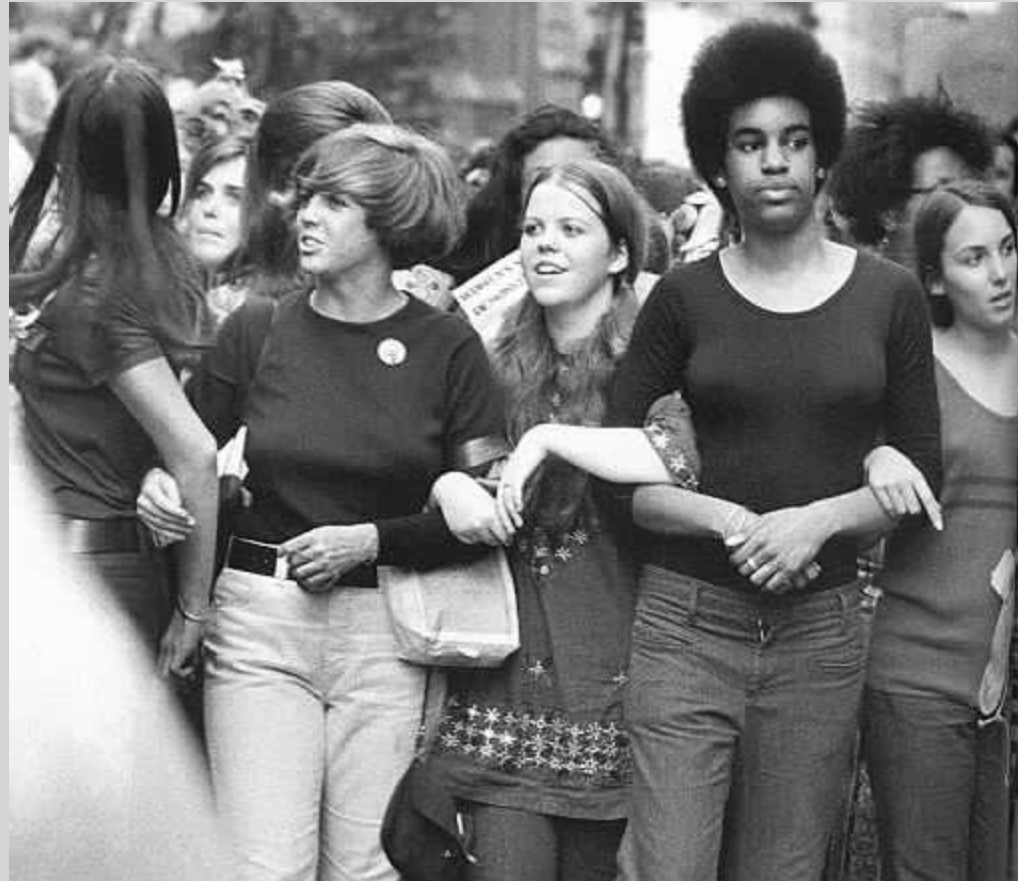


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This was the largest protest for gender equality in U.S. history. There were demonstrations and rallies in more than 90 major cities and small towns across the country, and over 100,000 women participated, including 50,000 who marched down Fifth Avenue in New York City.

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Thousands of politically and satirically charged signs dotted the crowd. “*Don't Iron While the Strike Is Hot,*” was the movement's famous slogan.

Other slogans included:

- *End Human Sacrifice—Don't Get Married*
- *I Am Not a Barbie Doll*
- *Storks Fly—Why Can't Mothers?*
- *We are the 51% minority*
- *Women Demand Equality*

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In New York's City Hall Park, women staged a demonstration at a daycare center. Another group of women visited targeted companies and presented satiric "awards" for under-employing women and for creating degrading images of women.



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Women also took over the Statue of Liberty. In preparation, several women climbed up to measure the wind velocity. Later, they returned with two 40-foot banners to hang from the crown. One read, “*March on August 26 for Equality.*” The other, “*Women of the World Unite.*”



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Similar events took place in other cities. Boston women marched in graduation gowns with a banner reading, “*Veritas* [Harvard University's motto] *is a feminine noun.*”

Pittsburgh women sponsored a day-long conference on women's rights. Women in several cities gathered signatures, staged rallies, and marches advocating Senate passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

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Detroit women who worked at the *Detroit Free Press* kicked men out of one of their restrooms, protesting unequal facilities for men and women staffers.

In New Orleans, women who worked for the newspaper ran pictures of the grooms, instead of the brides in engagement announcements.

Abroad, French women marched in Paris and Dutch women marched at the U.S. Embassy in Amsterdam.

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An organized group stopped the ticker tape at the American Stock Exchange and held signs with slogans like, “*We won't bear any more bull.*”

Another action taken during the day was a lawsuit filed against the New York City Board of Education to gain equality for women in educational administration. The case lasted about ten years and finally resulted in an increase in females promotion to principal.

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The following year in 1971, at the urging of Representative Bella Abzug, the U.S. Congress designated August 26 as “Women’s Equality Day” to honor women's continuing efforts toward equality.

Part of the bill reads that Women’s Equality Day is a symbol of women’s continued fight for equal rights and that the U.S. commends and supports them.

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“The test for whether or not you can hold a job should not be the arrangement of your chromosomes.” — Bella Abzug



Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress

Women's Equality Day



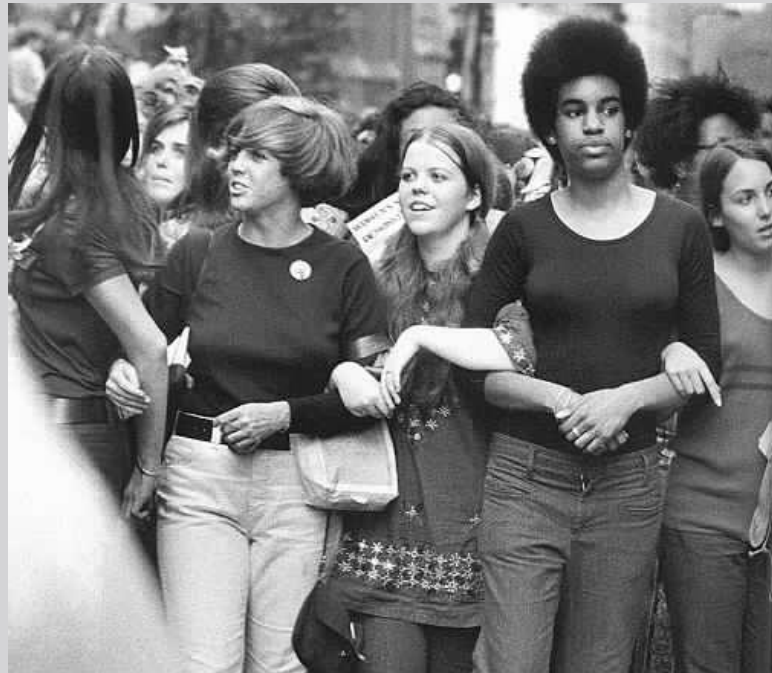
The Women's Strike for Equality is often remembered as the first major protest of the Women's Liberation movement and the largest protest for women's rights at that time.



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While the strike did not halt the activities of the nation, it drew national attention to the women's rights movement.



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Some people called the demonstrators anti-feminine or even Communist.

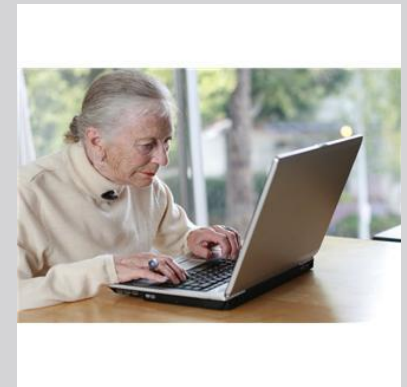
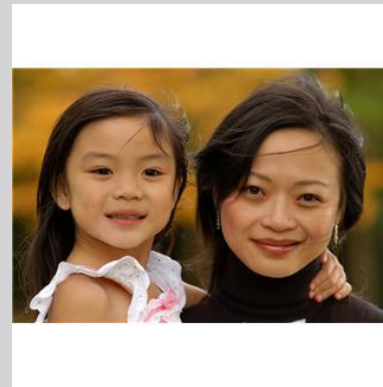
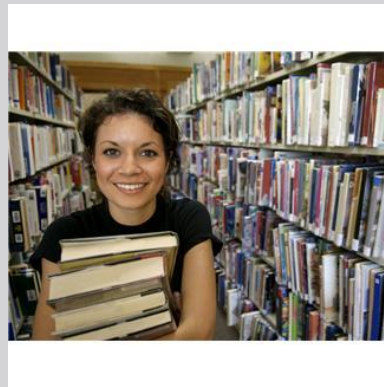
The Women's Strike for Equality made the front page of national newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Tribune*.

It was also covered by the three broadcast networks, ABC, CBS, and NBC, which was the pinnacle of extensive television news coverage in 1970.

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Women today continue to draw on the history of these brave and determined women.



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As we observe Women's Equality Day 2012 we not only commemorate the passage of the 19th Amendment, but also call attention to women's continuing efforts toward full equality.



Women's Equality Day



Women comprise less than 1/5 of our Congress and account for a small fraction of the chief executives at the helm of our biggest companies.

Women hold only 27 percent of jobs in science and engineering, which are critical to our economic growth in the 21st-century economy.

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Almost 50 years after the Equal Pay Act was passed, American women still earn 77 cents for every dollar men earn.

This gap increases among minority women and those living with disabilities. These disparities remind us that our work remains unfinished.

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“If we continue to fight for our hopes and aspirations, there will be no limit to the possibilities for our daughters and granddaughters.”

—President Barack Obama



Photo courtesy of The White House

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