



Background Reading for Women's Suffrage: Idealism and Reality

Women in the United States gained the right to vote in 1920 with the ratification of the Constitution's 19th Amendment. Prior to this, women from all backgrounds organized to advocate for women's suffrage rights. Starting in 1848 at a meeting of civic-minded women called the Seneca Falls Convention, women like Susan B. Anthony pushed for incremental approaches to gaining women's suffrage, in which women gained their rights step-by-step, as more and more people could be convinced that it was a just idea. More militant suffragists, like Alice Paul, thought this was too moderate and instead advocated for sweeping national changes brought about by whatever means were necessary. Some women, like Ida B. Wells, faced more than one level of discrimination, because she was a woman who wanted voting rights, but was also African American, living in a time when slavery was still legal. Even within suffragist organizations, she faced discrimination, because she saw the enfranchisement of women as linked to the end of racism and wanted to push both for abolition and women's suffrage together.

This podcast discusses the history of women's suffrage in Kentucky and the role, past and present, of the League for Women Voters in ensuring full suffrage.

This lesson uses the podcast discussion as a jumping off point to focus on the diversity of the women's suffrage movement and the tension between idealism and reality in assessing the success of the 19th Amendment. In a movement with a common goal, how did activists navigate the diversity of approaches and emphases to gain universal women's suffrage?