



Law Day is May 1. The 2020 Law Day theme—*Your Vote, Your Voice, Our Democracy: The 19th Amendment at 100*—commemorates the centennial of the transformative constitutional amendment that guaranteed the right of citizens to vote would not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex. American women fought for, and won, the vote through their voice and action.

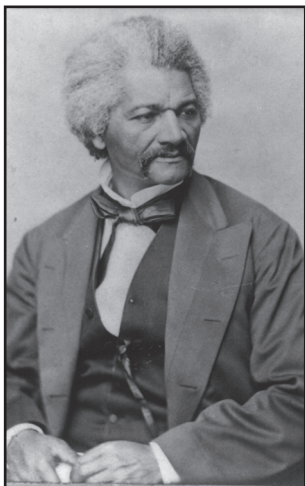
Every day for the next two weeks we will highlight historic quotes from key individuals related to the right to vote and power of voting.

As you think about these quotes also reflect on the importance of a citizen's right to vote and the challenges we still face in ensuring that all Americans have the opportunity to participate in our democracy. The right to vote is the very foundation of government by the people and arguably the basis for all other rights.

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“... there can be no reason in the world for denying to woman the exercise of the elective franchise, or a hand in making and administering the laws of the land.”

**Frederick Douglass,**  
African American social reformer, abolitionist,  
orator, writer, and statesman, quote from an  
editorial in *The North Star*, July 1848

From colonial times women’s legal rights were extremely limited. Most states based their laws on those of English common law which stipulated that a woman did not have a separate legal existence. Women were legally tied to their fathers or husbands. A woman could not file a law suit or sign a contract on her own. In most cases, a woman could not own property in her own name or control her own earnings. In fact, when a husband died, his widow could not be the guardian to their under-age children.

By the time the Woman’s Rights Convention met in Seneca Falls in July 1848, few of these legal practices had changed. During that two day meeting, nearly 300 attendees - women and men - discussed and passed 11 resolutions addressing women’s rights, among them, the right to vote.

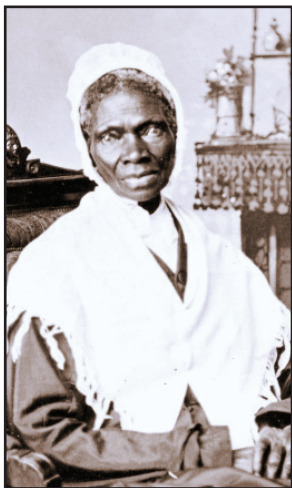
Frederick Douglass wrote editorials and spoke up about women’s suffrage.

Look through the news for modern examples of people speaking up for the rights, justice and dignity of others. Are any in the form of a news editorial or political cartoon?

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“We are now trying for liberty that requires no blood—that women shall have their rights—not rights from you. Give them what belongs to them; they ask it kindly too.”



**Sojourner Truth,**  
African American suffragist and abolitionist,  
quote from a national convention of the American  
Equal Rights Association, May 1867

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The American Equal Rights Association existed from 1866 to 1869 and worked to “secure Equal Rights to all American citizens, especially the right of suffrage, irrespective of race, color, or sex.”

In her speech to this group in New York City in 1867, Sojourner Truth acknowledges the success of the anti-slavery cause but regrets that freedom was won through a bloody civil war.

Look for news, in print or online, about a person or group of modern people fighting for a cause they strongly believe in. Prepare a summary report about this situation and be sure to include the who, what, when, where, why and how.

Has this struggle resulted in violence?

As a group (in person or virtually), discuss ways this modern group might work to achieve their goals in a peaceful way.

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“It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union. And we formed it, not



to give the blessings of liberty, but to secure them; not to the half of ourselves and the half of our posterity, but to the whole people - women as well as men.”

**Susan B. Anthony,**  
anti-slavery social reformer, women’s rights  
activist and co-author of “History of Women’s  
Suffrage,” quote from a speech given in 1872

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The 15th Amendment was ratified in 1870. Susan B. Anthony noticed that, even with this amendment, the U.S. Constitution didn’t specifically exclude women from voting. As a leader of the National Women’s Suffrage Association she decided to test her rights. With fifteen other Rochester women, she registered and voted in the 1872 presidential election. She was arrested and fined \$100. This quote is from a speech given following her arrest. Anthony never paid the fine.

Can you find modern examples of people willing to risk arrest and imprisonment to either bring awareness of an injustice or to fight for their rights or the rights of others? Compare and contrast this group with the suffragists in the late 1800s.

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“The right of women to personal representation through the ballot seems to me unassailable wherever the right of man is conceded and exercised. I can conceive of no

possible abstract justification for the exclusion of the one and the inclusion of the other.”

**Elizabeth Cady Stanton**, suffragist, social reformer and co-author of “History of Women’s Suffrage,” quote from her statement before the U.S. Senate Committee on Woman Suffrage on April 2, 1888

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In the 1875 case of *Minor v Happersett*, the U.S. Supreme Court declared that despite the privileges and immunities clause, a state can prohibit a woman from voting. It’s no coincidence that Elizabeth Cady Stanton, continuing to fight for women’s suffrage, chose to parrot these words in her 1888 address to the U.S. Senate stating, “... the national Constitution should be so interpreted or amended as to secure to the women of the nation all the rights, privileges, and immunities of citizens.”

Look for modern examples of individuals addressing members of Congress to bring awareness about their cause to our legislators. What topics are they concerned about? Select one. Research that topic and track how long people have been working to fight for changes in the law.

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“That women should enjoy this right (suffrage) and perform this duty is essential to the success of democracy.”

**Louis D. Brandeis**,  
Supreme Court Justice,  
from a speech given  
at the Tremont Temple  
(1915)

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What formally started in 1848, specifically the fight for women’s suffrage, slowly gained momentum throughout the country. By 1915, 11 states and territories had given their female citizens the right to vote.

Before his nomination and confirmation to the United States Supreme Court, Louis Brandeis was convinced that the role of women in our society had changed and argued that, “Can anyone find ... finer work of organization or more public spirited devotion than that exhibited by the women in the present campaign?”

Louis Brandeis, along with many other men and women of his time, initially thought women did not know enough about government or the ways of the world to vote. He was convinced otherwise.

Look through the news for a story of someone who, faced with new evidence, changes his or her mind about a given topic.

Was it an individual or group’s words or actions (or both) that brought about the change in thought?

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“We women of America tell you that America is not a democracy. Twenty million women are denied the right to vote.”

**Alice Paul**,  
feminist, suffragist  
and political  
strategist, quote from  
a banner paraded  
outside of the White  
House in 1917



While women in the suffrage movement were united in their desire to secure women the right to vote, they disagreed with how to accomplish that. Alice Paul was more aggressive in her approach. She and others broke away from the National American Woman Suffrage Association and formed a new group that came to be known as the National Woman's Party (NWP). It was the NWP that organized the first picketing of the White House in January 1917. The women continued to protest throughout the year, even as the United States entered World War I. Many thought their actions were unpatriotic.

Alice Paul and her fellow suffragists exercised their First Amendment rights by peacefully assembling and speaking freely about obtaining the right to vote for women.

Can you find modern examples of people protesting government leaders on the local, state or national level? What issue(s) are they concerned about? Do any involve voting?

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“How can people in other countries who are trying to grasp our plan of democracy avoid stumbling over our logic when we deny the first steps in democracy to our women?”

**Jeannette Rankin**, the first woman elected to Congress, from her address to the House of Representatives on January 10, 1918 urging passage of the 19th Amendment

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On April 2, 1917, Jeannette Rankin’s first day in the House of Representatives, she took part in a Joint Session of Congress to hear President Woodrow Wilson ask to “make the world safe for democracy” by declaring war on Germany. Following debates on the war resolution, Rankin voted no in keeping with her personal anti-war beliefs. Fellow suffragists felt this hurt their own cause.

Less than a year later, after helping to organize the 1918 House vote for a suffrage amendment, Rankin was among those to address her colleagues before they narrowly passed the measure by the necessary two-thirds majority, 274-136. Despite acceptance in the House, the bill failed to pass in the Senate.

Jeannette Rankin believed in women’s suffrage and opposed war as a way to solve a global conflict.

Look through the news, in print or online, for articles about women serving their communities in political positions at the local, state and national level. What causes do these women support or oppose?

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“The vote is the emblem of your equality, women of America, the guarantee of your liberty. That vote of yours has cost millions of dollars and the lives of thousands of women. Money



to carry on this work has been given usually as a sacrifice, and thousands of women have gone without things they wanted and could have had in order that they might help get the vote for you. Women have suffered agony of soul which you can never comprehend, that you and your daughters might inherit political freedom. That vote has been costly. Prize it!”

**Carrie Chapman Catt**, suffragist and founder of the League of Women Voters, quote from a speech given in August 1920, celebrating the ratification of the 19th Amendment

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Carrie Chapman Catt was the power behind the National American Woman Suffrage Association’s (NAWSA) “Winning Plan” which coordinated state suffrage campaigns while urging for a constitutional amendment.

She was so confident of the eventual acceptance of the women’s right to vote that Catt helped form the League of Women Voters six months prior to the 19th Amendment’s ratification. It was a nonpartisan organization, designed to help women carry out their new responsibilities as voters.

Look for news and information about the League of Women Voters at the local, state or national level. In what ways does this group currently support all American voters?

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“The full and free exercise of our sacred right and duty to vote is more important in the long run than the personal hopes or ambitions of any candidate for any office in the land.”

**President Franklin Delano Roosevelt**, from a radio address broadcast from the White House on October 5, 1944

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Serving as President of the United States in the midst of World War II, Roosevelt decided the country would best be served with consistency in the executive branch. Unlike in his third term election when the Democrats pressed him into service at the convention, F.D.R. openly campaigned for a fourth term in office with Harry Truman as his running mate.

In the same speech, President Roosevelt also addressed his concern for ‘the defects in voting laws’ by stating, “The right to vote must be open to our citizens irrespective of race, color or creed, without tax or artificial restriction of any kind. The sooner we get to that basis of political equality, the better it will be for the country as a whole.”

Look for modern examples of individuals running for office at the local, state and national level. Have these candidates expressed any views about the voting rights of the people?

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“Our American heritage is threatened as much by our own indifference as it is by the most unscrupulous office or by the most powerful



foreign threat. The future of this republic is in the hands of the American voter.”

**Dwight D. Eisenhower**, President, U.S. Army General, quote from an address he gave as President of Columbia University for the 18th Annual New York Herald Tribune Forum, October 24, 1949

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Almost from the passage of the 15th Amendment, various discriminatory practices were used to prevent African Americans, particularly those in the South, from exercising their right to vote. During his re-election campaign, Eisenhower proposed a civil rights bill designed to provide federal protection for African American voting rights.

Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1957 which established the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. The act had little impact on African American voting.

Eisenhower’s quote cautions us not to take our rights and privileges of voting for granted.

Look through the news, in print or online, for articles about the voting process, rights and privileges granted to people in other countries. Select one and compare and contrast it with the United States.

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“The most significant civil rights problem is voting. Each citizen’s right to vote is fundamental to all the other rights of citizenship and the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 make it the responsibility of the Department of Justice to protect that right.”



**Robert Kennedy, U.S. Attorney General (1963)**

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The Civil Rights Act of 1960 established federal inspection of local voter registration polls and introduced penalties for anyone who obstructed someone’s attempt to register to vote. Serving as the U.S. Attorney General during his brother, John F. Kennedy’s, presidency, Robert Kennedy was responsible for those inspections and enforcement of the law.

State and local governments have the responsibility for administering elections in the United States. The Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Justice Department enforces the federal voting rights laws that protect the constitutional rights of all citizens to access the ballot. This group, led by the U.S. Attorney General, is also responsible for investigating and prosecuting instances of voter fraud.

Look for news about how the U.S. Attorney General and the Justice Department are defending the constitutional rights of American citizens. Are any related to voting and elections?

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“I just thought that you couldn’t get people to register and vote until you teach them to read and write.”



**Septima Poinsette Clark**, educator and civil rights activist, from her 1986 book, “Ready from Within”

Photo credit: Avery Institute

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Septima Clark graduated from high school in 1916 and worked as a teacher while making her way through college. She ultimately earned her bachelor’s degree in 1942 and master’s degree in 1946. A longtime member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), she was fired from her teaching job in 1956 for refusing to end her affiliation with the civil rights group.

Clark then went to work for the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee and developed “citizen education” workshops to teach African Americans necessary skills to not only help them register, but to prepare them to pass the literacy tests used to keep African Americans from exercising their right to vote.

Septima Clark used her knowledge and skills as a teacher to assist others in voting.

Look for news and information about individuals or groups of people using their expertise to help others. Did you find any who are helping others to register or to better understand the voting process?

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“Voting is the most precious right of every citizen, and we have a moral obligation to ensure the integrity of our voting process.”

**Hillary Rodham Clinton**, first lady, Senator and U.S. Secretary of State, in reference to the Count Every Vote Act (2005)

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The purpose of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 was to help states improve the administration of elections including improved accessibility of polling places for disabled voters and the replacement of older punch card or lever voting machines to ensure more accurate results.

Concerns were raised as voting shifted to the use of modern technology. The fear was that a fair and accurate recount might be impossible. The Count Every Vote Act, first introduced in 2005, was drafted to insure every voting machine would leave a paper trail. It would also make Election Day a national holiday allowing all eligible voters ample time to vote. A similar bill was introduced in 2007 but neither version of the act was passed into law.

Hillary Clinton and others attempted to pass legislation they believed would improve voting access and accuracy. Look for news and information about current voter reform legislation. If there isn't any, research the most recent measures law makers have taken to ensure every vote counts.

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“The right to vote is the right upon which all of our rights are leveraged—and without which none can be protected.”

**Benjamin Todd Jealous,** civic leader and politician, president and CEO of the NAACP 2008-2013, from a keynote address given in July 2011

Photo credit: Gage Skidmore

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Barack Obama was the first African American elected as President in 2008. He served two terms in the White House. Many felt the injustices of disenfranchisement were now a part of our past.

But even before President Obama’s reelection, Benjamin Jealous and others started speaking out against voting measures, including voter ID regulations, designed to limit voter fraud. These new laws may have, in fact, imposed voting restrictions, especially among poor and minority populations.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence, “Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed.” Who could and should vote has been debated and fought over ever since. African Americans, women, Native Americans, non-English speakers, and citizens between the ages of 18 and 21 each in turn, fought for their right to vote.

Ensuring we protect and defend the voting rights of all citizens has proven to be an ongoing and unending challenge.

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