Women who made the difference

When people think about the women’s suffrage movement in the U.S., they often think of two women, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. The two women made a great team. Together they edited and published a woman’s newspaper, the Revolution, from 1868 to 1870. In 1869, Anthony and Stanton formed the National Woman Suffrage Association. However, as significant a role as these women played in fighting for women to have the right to vote, they were not alone; they were among many women, including women of color, whose stories are just surfacing and being shared. Even though Stanton and Anthony are described as abolitionists, supporters of the anti-racist movement, and traveled all over the country and abroad promoting woman’s rights, theirs is only half of the real story about how women won the right to vote.

The 19th Amendment: The Inclusive Narrative

In 1878 Senator Aaron A. Sargent, a friend of Susan B. Anthony, introduced into Congress a women's suffrage amendment. More than forty years later it would become the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution with no changes to its wording.

The passage of the 19th Amendment, which was ratified by the United States Congress on August 18 and then certified as law on August 26, 1920, technically granted women the right to vote. However, the 19th Amendment did not initially extend to women of African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, and Native American heritage because of widespread sexism, enduring inequality, and racism from within the ranks of the women's suffrage movement. White southern support of women's suffrage only existed so long as racist and supremacist racial lines were upheld. Black women were barred from accessing ballot boxes and denied voter registration through fraud and intimidation from voting officials in the South. It wasn't until the Voting Rights Act was passed nearly a half century later, on August 6, 1965, that black women were officially allowed to exercise their right to vote.

There was an African American Woman Suffrage Movement that focused on the challenges faced by Black women, even after the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Amendments.

Nine African American women gather for the Banner State Woman's National Baptist Convention in 1915 (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA)
During the 19th and 20th centuries, Black women played an active role in the struggle for universal suffrage. They participated in political meetings and organized political societies. African American women attended political conventions at their local churches where they planned strategies to gain the right to vote. In the late 1800s, more Black women worked for churches, newspapers, secondary schools, and colleges, which gave them a larger platform to promote their ideas.

But despite their hard work, many people didn’t listen to them. Black men and white women usually led civil rights organizations and set the agenda. They often excluded Black women from their organizations and activities. For example, the National American Woman Suffrage Association prevented Black women from attending their conventions. Black women often had to march separately from white women in suffrage parades. Though Black women are less well remembered, they played an important role in getting the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Amendments passed.

At 58 million, Latinos – the largest minority ethnic group in the US – are powerful. With 66,000 Latinos turning 18, the voting age, every single month, that force is vast enough to transform the political balance of our local, state, and federal governments. But that potential depends on one factor: Those who are legally able to vote utilizing their right by turning out to the polls on Election Day. Suffrage wasn’t an easy right to obtain or maintain for people of color, including Latinos, many of whom had to wait a decade after the historic Voting Rights Act of 1965 to cast their ballot. Even still, our enfranchisement is under perpetual threat by increased voting restrictions that impact Black and brown populations the hardest. A Brief History of Latino Voting Rights Since the 1960s

Who is Gloria Molina and why, for Latinos, did the impact of the 1965 Voting Rights Act come a decade later?

Gloria Molina has achieved several firsts in her lifetime - the first Latina elected to the California State Legislature, the first Latina elected to the Los Angeles City Council and the first Latina elected to the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors.

Her victories came in the 80s and 90s, a decade or more after the 1965 Voting Rights Act became law and following legal challenges based on the law, including one that went all the way to the Supreme Court.

“The Voting Rights Act is only as good as somebody who is willing to challenge the laws and make a case,” Molina.

For Latinos – often a footnote in the nation’s recall of voting rights discrimination – what is more significant is the 1975 extension of the Voting Rights Act, also signed on Aug. 6. It is important to celebrate the Voting Rights Act, but for the Latino community, the 1975 extension of the act is just as important.
The State of Native American Voting Rights

It's often overlooked that self-government in America was practiced by Native Americans long before the formation of the United States government. And yet, Native Americans faced centuries of struggle before acquiring full U.S. citizenship and legal protection of their voting rights.

Many government officials felt that Native Americans should be assimilated into America's mainstream culture before they became enfranchised.

The Snyder Act of 1924 admitted Native Americans born in the U.S. to full U.S. citizenship. Though the Fifteenth Amendment, passed in 1870, granted all U.S. citizens the right to vote regardless of race, it wasn't until the Snyder Act that Native Americans could enjoy the rights granted by this amendment.

Even with the passing of this citizenship bill, Native Americans were still prevented from participating in elections because the Constitution left it up to the states to decide who has the right to vote. After the passage of the 1924 citizenship bill, it still took over forty years for all fifty states to allow Native Americans to vote.

In 1948, New Mexico and Arizona moved to remove barriers to voting for Native Americans. Other states eventually followed suit over the next two decades.

Even with the lawful right to vote in every state, Native Americans suffered from the same mechanisms and strategies, such as poll taxes, literacy tests, fraud and intimidation, that kept African Americans from exercising that right. In 1965, with passage of the Voting Rights Act and subsequent legislation in 1970, 1975, and 1982, many other voting protections were reaffirmed and strengthened. https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/state-native-american-voting-rights

The Struggle for Natives Continues: The Native American Voting Rights Act of 2019

Native Americans have unequal opportunities to register to vote because of the absence of in-person registration opportunities on reservations. Election officials do not accept tribal identification cards under strict voter ID laws, or they reject registration applications from Native Americans lacking a physical address. Those who are able to register are confronted by great distances to off-reservation voting locations, often in places like sheriff's offices where they do not feel welcome.

The few polling places located on reservations may be closed for pretextual reasons. In places where mail-in voting occurs, Native voters may not have the financial means to pay the poll tax in the form of postage to return their ballot or may be unable to access ballot drop-off sites located several hours away off-reservation. Limited-English proficient Native voters frequently are denied access to voting information that voters receive in English, especially before Election Day.

The Native American Voting Rights Act of 2019 would remove many of these barriers. It will expand in-person registration opportunities by designating federally funded facilities on reservations as voter registration sites under the National Voting Registration Act. It mandates at least one polling place on tribal lands for each voting precinct. In-person registration and voting locations on tribal lands
could not be consolidated, moved, or eliminated if doing so is motivated by a discriminatory purpose or would have the effect of limiting voting opportunities for affected voters. Native voters would no longer have to pay to vote by mail and could pick up and drop off their ballots at their local tribal government buildings. Election officials would have to accept identification cards issued by tribal governments or other federal or tribal agencies. Native Americans living in areas where voting information is required in an American Indian or Alaska Native language would be able to receive written translations if requested by their tribal government.

1943: Chinese immigrants were given the right to citizenship and the right to vote by the Magnuson Act. The Magnuson Act, also known as the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act of 1943, was an immigration legislation proposed by U.S. Representative (later Senator) Warren G. Magnuson of Washington and signed into law on December 17, 1943 in the United States. [1] It allowed Chinese immigration for the first time since the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and permitted some Chinese immigrants already residing in the country to become naturalized citizens. However, the Magnuson Act provided for the continuation of the ban against the ownership of property and businesses by ethnic Chinese. In many states, Chinese Americans (including US citizens) were denied property-ownership rights either by law or de facto until the Magnuson Act itself was fully repealed in 1965.

What is gerrymandering?

It is a way that governing parties try to cement themselves in power by tilting the political map steeply in their favor. The goal is to draw boundaries of legislative districts so that as many seats as possible are likely to be won by the party’s candidates. Drafters accomplish it mainly through two practices commonly called packing and cracking.

A packed district is drawn to include as many of the opposing party’s voters as possible. That helps the governing party win surrounding districts where the opposition’s strength has been diluted to create the packed district.

Cracking does the opposite: It splits up clusters of opposition voters among several districts, so that they will be outnumbered in each district.
THEN...

NOW...

What the 21st Century Fight Against Voter Suppression looks like

Stacey Abrams is a *New York Times* bestselling author, serial entrepreneur, nonprofit CEO and political leader. After serving for eleven years in the Georgia House of Representatives, seven as Minority Leader, in 2018, Abrams became the Democratic nominee for Governor of Georgia, when she won more votes than any other Democrat in the state’s history. Abrams was the first black woman to become the gubernatorial nominee for a major party in the United States. After witnessing the gross mismanagement of the 2018 election by the Secretary of State’s office, Abrams launched *Fair Fight* to ensure every Georgian has a voice in our election system. Over the course of her career, Abrams has founded multiple organizations devoted to voting rights, training and hiring young people of color, and tackling social issues at both the state and national levels including *Fair Count* — to ensure that the 2020 Census is fair, accurate, and counts everyone.
Historic Women in Modern History

Congresswoman **Deb Haaland** was elected as one of the first Native American women to serve in Congress. She is serving in leadership roles as the 116th Congress Freshman Class Representative to the House Democratic Steering and Policy Committee, House Democratic Region VI Whip (Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona) and Deputy Whip for the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Rep. Haaland is a former tribal administrator and has administered a local service provider for adults with developmental disabilities.

She is a 35th generation New Mexican who is an enrolled member of the Pueblo of Laguna and has Jemez Pueblo heritage. After running for New Mexico Lieutenant Governor in 2014, Haaland became the first Native American woman to be elected to lead a State Party. She used her experience reaching out to communities who are often forgotten during the electoral process during the two Obama presidential campaigns. During her time as State Party Chair, she traveled to Standing Rock to stand side-by-side with the community to protect tribal sovereignty and advocate vital natural resources.

This is the story of an American hero. One who stands tall amongst the likes of Robert Kennedy, Harriet Tubman and Martin Luther King, Jr. Someone who humbly defied the odds and overcame insurmountable obstacles to fight injustice and gave a voice to the voiceless. And yet few people know her name. This is the story of an American legend, **Wilma Mankiller**, who overcame rampant sexism and personal challenges to emerge as the Cherokee Nation’s first woman Principal Chief in 1985. **MANKILLER** examines the legacy of the formidable Wilma Mankiller and reunites the documentary team of Gale Anne Hurd and Valerie Red-Horse Mohl for their third and most powerful film. [https://www.pbs.org/show/mankiller/](https://www.pbs.org/show/mankiller/)

Lawyer and political activist **Florynce "Flo" Kennedy**'s wide-ranging career fought sexist and racist policies in and out of the workplace.

Kennedy attended Columbia Law School after an initial rejection because she was a woman. After Kennedy threatened a discrimination suit, the school
admitted her and she became one of its first black female graduates in 1951.

After opening her own office, one of Kennedy's first cases was on behalf of jazz legend Billie Holiday, who was seeking money her record company owed her. Kennedy quickly grew tired of law, writing the practice had "taught me more than I was really ready for about government and business delinquency and the hostility and helplessness of the courts."

Rev. Addie Wyatt looks at a framed photo of her friend, slain civil rights leader the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. at her Chicago home. As an activist for civil and women's rights, Rev. Addie Wyatt led the charge for equal pay as the head of the Coalition of Labor Union Women, then the only national organization for union women.

Wyatt successfully championed a number of "equal pay for equal work" policies for union contracts in the years before the Equal Pay Act of 1963 as head of the United Packinghouse Workers of America.

"She was part of that generation of great warrior-queens that said, 'Where help is needed, that's where I'm going to be,'" Carol Adams, president and CEO of the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago, said of Wyatt after her death in 2012.

In 1966, Lorena Weeks was working as a night telephone operator at the Southern Bell Telephone & Telegraph Company and juggling raising three young children. When the company posted an opening for a higher paying job, Weeks was eager to apply.

But Southern Bell denied her the position because she was a woman and hired a man with less seniority. So, Weeks teamed up with NOW to sue the company. The case was the first victory under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

Not only did Weeks make history by setting a precedent that helped ensure women weren't denied jobs on the basis of their sex, she got the job and $31,000 in back pay.

100 Years: One Woman’s Fight for Justice

Elouise Pepion Cobell, also known as Yellow Bird Woman, was a tribal elder and activist, banker, rancher, and lead plaintiff in the groundbreaking class-action suit Cobell v. Salazar. This challenged the United States' mismanagement of trust funds belonging to more than 500,000 individual Native Americans.

100 Years: One Woman’s Fight for Justice chronicles the courageous efforts of Cobell, a petite Native American warrior who discovered
billions of dollars missing from the century old government managed Indian Trust Fund belonging to 300,000 Native Americans. In 1996, Cobell filed the largest class action lawsuit ever filed against the U.S. Government. For 15 long years and through three Presidential administrations, Cobell relentlessly fought for justice for her people. This is the story of how she prevailed and made history.


DeLauro has introduced the bill, which pushes for increased pay transparency in the workplace, in session after session since 1997 and has said she will continue to do so until the gender pay gap disappears.

"I cannot tell you how difficult it has been to break through on something so simple — that men and women in the same job deserve the same pay," DeLauro said after Democratic lawmakers re-introduced the bill in January 2019.


Lilly Ledbetter became cemented in history when her name was used for the Fair Pay Act, which President Barack Obama signed into law in 2009.

Her struggle for workplace equality was built on decades of wage discrimination and sexual harassment in her workplace.

After realizing her boss's decision to pay her less than her male counterparts would affect her savings for the rest of her life, Ledbetter took a lawsuit to the Supreme Court, but lost in a 5-4 decision in 2007.

Two years after the ruling, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act creates more opportunities for employees to file complaints about wage disparities that are based on gender or race.

Ledbetter has remained at the forefront of women's equality causes, saying of her passion in 2009: "I told my pastor when I die, I want him to be able to say at my funeral that I made a difference."
In 2000, after six years with the company, Betty Dukes realized that neither she nor the 72% of female Walmart employees were eligible for the same promotions as their male counterparts.

In a suit that included more than 1 million plaintiffs, Dukes pointed to the disparity between the vast majority of female store workers and employees in management, only one-third of which were female.

The Supreme Court decided in 2011 that 1 million plaintiffs were too many to prove they were all discriminated against in the same way.

Despite the setback, Dukes kept up the cause through a smaller lawsuit for female Walmart employees in California. She also worked with lawmakers like DeLauro on the Equal Employment Opportunity Restoration Act, which was proposed in 2012 to grant employees more freedom to pursue class action lawsuits against employers.

"The one thing I do know is the work that she did is fluid. It has not stopped," a friend of Dukes' told the Los Angeles Times after her death in 2017. "She was one of many voices fighting for the same cause."

Tarana Burke, an activist from Harlem, launched the #MeToo movement in 2006 to aid underprivileged women of color affected by sexual abuse. Burke said that the movement is not about "naming and shaming," but about changing culture in ways that end sexual violence, support survivors, and eliminate toxic office spaces through open dialogue.

Now referred to as a “silence breaker”, Tarana was inspired after bonding with a young girl during a youth camp hosted by Just Be Inc., a nonprofit she founded that’s “focused on the health, well-being, and wholeness of young women of color.”

Burke has said, "It's not about a viral campaign for me. It’s about a movement." "On one side, it's a bold declarative statement that 'I'm not ashamed' and 'I'm not alone.' On the other side, it's a statement from survivor to survivor that says 'I see you, I hear you, I understand you and I'm here for you or I get it.'" She is currently Senior Director at Girls for Gender Equity in Brooklyn, New York.