

The Woman's Hour Readers' Guide

Questions for Discussion

1. The two branches of the American suffrage movement – the National American Woman Suffrage Association (led by Carrie Catt) and the National Woman's Party (led by Alice Paul) – took different approaches towards their mutual goal of winning the vote. Do you think one group was more effective than the other? Why?
2. If you were a suffragist in 1920, do you think you'd align yourself with the NAWSA or the Woman's Party? (both women and men were supporters). Why? What attracted women, on the other hand, to the "Antis"? Do you think their fears were unfounded?
3. The suffragists campaigned before there were cell phones; no internet, no social media, not even radio. Can you imagine trying to promote today's causes with these limitations?
4. *The Woman's Hour* describes an important step in our country's evolution as a democracy. What other steps does our democracy still need to take?
5. Although we treasure our self-image as a nation built upon the bedrock of participatory democracy, our history proves we're conflicted about who has the right to participate. Voter suppression is a hot topic today. Do you think we consciously make it harder for some citizens to vote? Is voter suppression a threat to our democracy, or just the usual game political parties play?
6. Hundreds of suffragists were assaulted, attacked, and jailed for demanding the right to vote. Have you ever participated in a protest against government policies? Did you suffer any consequences for your actions? Would you be willing to go to prison to protest injustice or to promote a cause you think important?
7. Those opposed to woman suffrage often used religious arguments to warn that expanding women's rights, including the vote, violated Biblical teachings and went against "God's Plan" (women belong in the home, not in the public sphere). Do you think religious rationales should be used in forming public policy today?
8. Were the suffragists correct in keeping their eyes on the prize – pursuing the vote for the majority of American women – even if that meant making moral compromises and abandoning some of their own ideals? Can the suffragists' use of racist rationales to win the support of Southern legislators be justified? What are your thoughts on the suffragists' use of racist rationales to win the support of Southern legislators?
9. Some corporations clearly felt threatened by the prospect of women voters, and worked to influence public opinion and legislative action. The suffragists often complained that corporate interests were secretly financing anti-suffrage campaigns around the country. Do you see any similarities in what the suffragists faced then and the modern phenomenon of "dark money" entering political campaigns today?
10. The suffragists touted the benefits of allowing women to vote by maintaining that women would clean up corruption in politics and insist upon better laws protecting families and children. Carrie Catt believed women voters would bring about an end to war. Do you think women voters have improved our political system? In what ways?
11. If the issue of women's political equality – specifically the right to vote – was being decided today, and, as in 1920, only men were given the power to decide, do you think the amendment would pass?
12. Voter participation in the United States is well below other democratic nations. Many Americans, like the suffragists and subsequent civil rights workers, fought long and hard to win the right to vote. Many have died defending our freedoms. Some democracies impose a fine for not voting. Do think voting should be a mandatory responsibility of every eligible U.S. citizen?