UNIT 4 BIG IDEA

The Next Generation Remembers the Revolution

After the Revolutionary War ended in 1783, women began to rebuild their lives in a new nation founded on the promise that "all men are created equal." Many people, both men and women, questioned how independence would affect women's rights. Would their contributions during the Revolutionary War cause people to rethink the gender roles that defined women before the war? And for those that wanted women's gender roles to change, how would they use the ideals of the American Revolution and the memory of the New Jersey voters to advance their cause?

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the roles and experiences of women during the Revolutionary War, explore *Liberty: Don Troiani's Paintings of the Revolutionary War* Teacher Resource Guide Unit 4 - A Women's War.

https://www.amrevmuseum.org/unit-4-a-womens-war

REPUBLICAN MOTHERHOOD

As an effect of women's experiences during the war, Americans incorporated a woman's traditional tasks as wife and mother with a new duty to shape the future of the country. Republican Motherhood, as it came to be known, gave women a new and important role in American life: raising and educating informed and patriotic young Americans. As part of her children's instruction, a mother was encouraged to teach them the value of freedom, civic virtue, and the principles of government to prepare them to become engaged citizens. The hope was that this guidance would lead to a new generation that would ensure the future of the nation and the promises of the American Revolution.

PUSHING FOR RIGHTS AND EDUCATION

During the Revolutionary War, some women began to explore whether the ideas of equality and **natural rights** applied to them. In private letters and communications, and then later in publications, these women discussed their desire for equal rights and education opportunities as a way to advocate for a greater role in the new society. In 1776, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband John that she hoped he and other political leaders would "remember the ladies" as they established laws and guiding principles for the new nation. She saw similarities between the way Britain treated its colonies in North America and the ways laws and common practices favored men over women in American life.

Eventually, the discussion of women's rights expanded beyond private correspondence and started to appear publicly in print media. In 1790, Judith Sargent Murray, a wealthy and educated woman from Massachusetts, began writing under the pen name "Constantia" and published an essay called "On the Equality of the Sexes." It mocked the gender roles of women that existed at the time. She claimed that if women were considered inferior to men, it was only because they were not given the same opportunities. In a later essay, "Observations on Female Abilities" published in her book *The Gleaner* (1798), Murray argued that women had the ability to understand politics and participate in civic life. She asserted that women were just as easily able to demonstrate courage, patriotism, and loyalty as were men.

Arguably the most important author championing women's rights and education during the end of the 18th century was English writer and philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft. Her book, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), highlighted inequalities between men and women and appealed for education to open up new opportunities for women. Wollstonecraft used the idea of natural rights in asserting that women should have the same rights to life, liberty, and property as men.

As a result of these new ideas and publications, there came a large push for women's education. This created a demand for academies that catered to women. New schools and female academies, such as Susanna Rowson's Academy for Young Ladies in Boston and Sarah Pierce's Litchfield Female Academy in Connecticut, laid the groundwork for white women as well as some women of color to receive higher education. The students from these schools would go on to launch the middle-class reform movement of the 19th century and become the next generation of women activists.

MANY FACES OF FEMINISM

After the Revolutionary War, while white middle- and upper-class women were among the most vocal and visible advocates of the equality of the sexes, they were not alone. Some women of color, and some men, too, voiced their support for women's equal opportunities, especially in education.

Women of African descent were making their voices heard in the new nation. Jarena Lee was born to a free Black family in 1783 and grew up in Cape May, New Jersey. She became a preacher, despite being technically barred from the profession because she was a woman. Her sermons were so powerful that she convinced the Bishop Richard Allen of the African Methodist Episcopal Church to approve her request to become an official preacher within the church. Also in Philadelphia, a wealthy Black family called the Fortens used their influence to advance the cause of women's education and **suffrage**. Charlotte Vandine Forten, the wife of wealthy businessman James Forten, and three of their daughters — Margaretta, Harriet, and Sarah — were the co-founders of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. It was one of the first **abolitionist** societies in the nation to be led by women and was also an important example of **interracial** cooperation in the city.

LEARN MORE

Dig deeper into the story of free Black Philadelphian James Forten and his family with the *Black Founders: The Forten Family of Philadelphia* Virtual Tour. Explore how they became leaders in the abolition and women's suffrage movements, while navigating cross-racial relationships in Philadelphia in the decades that followed the Revolutionary War.

https://www.amrevmuseum.org/black-founders-virtual-tour

Many men were also involved in the push for women's rights during this time. One example is **Quaker** and renowned novelist Charles Brockden Brown. His 1798 publication *Alcuin* advocated for women's equal right to education and also criticized women's exclusion from politics. Another example is Elias Boudinot, a **Federalist** politician who led a campaign to encourage New Jersey women to participate in politics in 1793.

It is important to remember that not all women at the end of the 18th century pushed for new rights. The majority of women were focused on restoring their lives, families, and communities after the Revolutionary War. Most women did not pursue changing their roles in society and did not openly question the gender roles that continued from the colonial period. **Coverture** laws remained, and married women had no legal identity or right to own property.

THE NEXT GENERATION REMEMBERS THE REVOLUTION

In 1848, historian and author Elizabeth Ellet published the first history of women in the American Revolution. Her book *The Women of the American Revolution* featured heroic figures like the legendary Molly Pitcher, a nickname given to several courageous women who took over in battle when their husbands were injured. As a result of Ellet's book, many people around the country learned about the important contributions women made during the Revolution, causing them to consider what rights women should have.

In the mid-1800s, **suffragists** began to look back to the years before the Revolutionary War to justify their cause. The rallying cry "no taxation without representation" was used as a way to assert that all people who paid taxes should be able to vote for their representatives in government. Elizabeth Cady Stanton spoke at the third National Women's Rights Convention in 1852 and asked, "Should not all women, living in States where woman has a right to hold property, refuse to pay taxes, so long as she is unrepresented in the government of that State?"

Some women took further action. In 1858, suffragist Lucy Stone became one of the first women to refuse to pay her property taxes, claiming she was not represented in government. In a public letter of protest to her tax collector, Stone wrote "Enclosed I return my tax bill, without paying it. My reason for doing so is that women suffer taxation and yet have no representation, which is not only unjust to one-half of the adult population but is contrary to our theory of government." As a result of this protest letter, much of her household goods were seized, but she did not give up. Stone went on to lead multiple suffrage organizations in New Jersey and later formed the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) with Julia Ward Howe.

Suffragists also used the principle that "all men are created equal" to argue that women were equal to men and, therefore, deserved the right to vote. The Declaration of Sentiments was delivered in 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention in New York. This event was the first women's rights convention in the United States. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the main author of the Declaration of Sentiments, modeled it after the Declaration of Independence. Using both the **Enlightenment** ideals and language of the Declaration of Independence, Stanton claimed women were entitled to the same god-given natural rights as men. "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal."

In the same spirit as the Declaration of Independence, the Declaration of Sentiments included a list of grievances, not against a tyrannical king, but against men who denied women their rights. First of these grievances was the denial of the right to vote, which left women without a formal political voice. Other grievances included the passage of divorce laws that favored men, unequal access to education, and the exclusion of women from various fields of employment. In light of these "abuses," the Declaration called on women to "throw off such government." By designing the Declaration of Sentiments in the same format and using some of the same language as the Declaration of Independence, the women at Seneca Falls connected their movement for equal rights to the American Revolution.

THE NEXT GENERATION REMEMBERS THE NEW JERSEY VOTERS

During the women's suffrage movement, the example of earlier voters in New Jersey became an inspiration. New Jersey suffragists in particular were inspired by the women who voted in their state during the period between 1776 and 1807. These suffragists believed that by exercising their right to vote, New Jersey women had set an example that women were capable of voting and deserved the right to elect their representatives.

Some women attempted to vote even while it was still illegal in New Jersey. After a failed attempt in 1868, Portia Gage organized a suffrage demonstration in Vineland, New Jersey. She and 172 other women brought **ballot** boxes built from blueberry crates to cast their vote at the polling station. The demonstration grew, inspiring women around the country

to organize similar protests. In 1880, Elizabeth Cady Stanton attempted to vote in her hometown of Tenafly, New Jersey. When told there was no precedent for women voting, Stanton cited "Women are voting on school questions in eight States of the Union to-day, and on the sacred soil of New Jersey, where we now stand, women voted thirty-one years, from 1776 to 1807." Despite this, the inspectors still refused her ballot.

The argument for women's suffrage occurred not only at local polling places but at the state level as well. In 1867, Lucy Stone addressed the New Jersey State **legislature** pointing to the women voters from 1776 - 1807 as justification for passing a women's suffrage **amendment**. Almost fifty years later, the first woman lawyer in New Jersey, Mary Philbrook, argued for women's suffrage in the New Jersey Supreme Court. She argued that the 1776 Constitution gave the vote to "all inhabitants," including women, and since women were not permitted to vote on the 1844 Constitution it was invalid. This would also invalidate limiting the vote to male citizens in the state. The Supreme Court rejected Philbrook's case, upholding the 1844 Constitution.

The account of the early women voters was also used in the movement against women's suffrage. Anti-suffrage organizations, like the New Jersey Association Opposed to Women's Suffrage, invoked the allegations of voter fraud in the early 1800s as evidence of why women should not be allowed to vote. Although the legitimacy of the allegations is unclear, posters claiming "Women voters were convicted of committing these frauds...Does this go to prove that women's votes will purify politics?" helped defeat a 1915 law that would have given women the right to vote.

However, despite the work of anti-suffrage activists, New Jersey was the 29th state to approve the 19th Amendment in 1920. The amendment promises that "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." After almost 115 years, women in New Jersey regained the right to vote.