

## **The Effects of Women in Political Movements**

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### **Abstract**

A closer look will reveal that women have fought fiercely for the right to vote, equal pay, and the right to birth control among others. In today's gendered society, there is a tendency to overlook the role that women have played in the advancement of politics, economics, and social progress. Historically, women have played crucial roles in political movements in pursuit of a broad range of goals, including early marriages, abortion, sexual violence, environmental rights, racial justice, and climate. Women of all colors have been instrumental in the formation and direction of various political movements in the history of the nation, including during times when such movements would be punished severely by the government. From the research, it emerges that women have founded and participated in political movements in the push for wage parity, a battle that is still ongoing. Besides, the research has demonstrated that women have played a crucial role in the fight for the right to vote as well as the right for access to contraceptives. As it emerges, women have historically been involved in fundamental changes in politics, society, and economy.

*Keywords:* women, political movements, rights.

## **The Effects of Women in Political Movements**

In today's gendered society, there is a tendency to overlook the role that women have played in the advancement of politics, economics, and social progress. As a result, it is critical to emphasize that women have played an immense role in pursuing some of the most important things that Americans today enjoy. A closer look will reveal that women have fought fiercely for the right to vote, equal pay, and the right to birth control, among others. Historically, women have played crucial roles in political movements in pursuit of a broad range of goals, including early marriages, abortion, sexual violence, environmental rights, racial justice, and climate. The literature indicates that women of all colors have extensively used their resources to pursue major political goals. In his study, Cranley (2019) examines 12 women who dedicated their money, energy, and time to pursue equal pay (Para. 12-15). As he reveals, the push for equal pay is still ongoing. In her book, DeLauro (2010, pg. 10) explores the successes achieved so far and also the challenges that remain in pursuing equal pay for women. As she notes, a lot of success, especially in terms of legislation, has been achieved. However, she notes that it may take a while for the actual parity to be realized in the boardrooms. Walton (2016, pg. 15) focuses on the life of Alice Paul, particularly her militant style of pursuing change. Both Randolph (2018, pg. 12) and Kennedy (2017, pg. 29) focus on the enormous challenge of fighting for women equality and racism that colored women faced in the US. For Wallner (2012, pg 15-34), her focus lies with Susan Anthony. As she outlines, Anthony was a fervent fighter of women's rights, including the fight to vote. Anthony dedicated much of her adult life to fighting for women's right to vote in local, state and national elections.

## **Method**

The research makes use of secondary data from published sources. The study is specifically designed to cover the economic, political, and social front in which women have participated. The study examines the contribution of at least seven women who effected social, economic, and political change through political movements. To best examine the contribution of each woman, the discussion is divided into three sections.

## **Results**

### **Equal Pay**

For nearly half a century, the fight for equal pay for women has ranged. Congress passed the Equal Pay Act over 50 years ago, but a significant gender-based wage gap persists (Dorman, 2013, p. 21). However, despite radical demonstrations and landmark legislation, women still earn about 80.7 cents for every dollar than a man working full-time earns, thereby significantly shrinking women's annual earnings (Dorman, 2013, p. 33). It is no wonder that various women in the history of the country's social justice, entertainment, and politics have tried to influence the political process for better wages for women.

One of the women who contributed to the fight against equal pay is an activist and lawyer Florynce Kennedy. Kennedy became one of Columbia Law School's first black female graduates in 1951 after initial rejection in admission for simply being a woman (Randolph, 2018, p. 44). One of Kennedy's major contributions was her efforts against want ads in the New York Times.

These advertisements were based on gender segregation as women would be paid much less than men for a similar number of working hours.

The Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity acknowledged her movement in 1968 by concluding that separate want ads for women and men were a violation of Title seven of the Civil Rights Act (Randolph, 2018, p. 23). As Kennedy (2017) elaborates, her efforts were a strong initial development in regards to women empowerment, especially for women trying to enter the workplace (p. 18).

Esther Peterson and Rosa DeLauro have played crucial roles in different historical periods towards equal pay. Peterson was the head of the Women's Bureau during President John Kennedy's administration. She pushed and guided President Kennedy towards securing formal progress for the women of the US through such initiatives such as the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (Dorman, 2013, p. 57). Her years of data collection and organization of interest groups culminated in the passing of the Equal Pay Act of 1963, setting the stage ready for a host of other anti-discrimination laws.

Peterson's fight is today championed by Rosa DeLauro, a Democratic Representative from Connecticut. Since her election in 1990, DeLauro has fought for equal pay through different administrations. Her most important piece of legislation is the Paycheck Fairness Act that is posed to update the Fair Labor Standard Act and Equal Pay Act by introducing for increased pay transparency in the workplace (DeLauro, 2010, p. 67). She has been introducing the bill since 1997.

## **The Right to Vote**

Women were not allowed to vote in republican Rome and ancient Greece as well as in other democracies that emerged in Europe. As a result, women were not granted the right to vote in the US, and they had to fight for this right in what is referred to woman suffrage. For over 100 years, women and men had been fighting for the right to vote through marches, petitions, and speeches (Walton, 2016, p. 24).

Arguably, the most prominent women's rights activist in history is Susan Anthony, who was born to a Quaker family in 1820 in Massachusetts (Wallner, 2012, p. 15). Raised to be outspoken and independent, she was quick to champion for men and women to study, work, and live as equals. From early on, she believed that drinking was a social problem as it brought poverty and violence to many families. However, very few politicians took her anti-liquor crusade seriously simply because she was a woman.

Consequently, she started to campaign for property rights for married women as well as joined the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1856 ( Wallner, 2012, p. 56). She helped in the founding of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1890 and was its second president. Together with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Anthony continued to champion women's right to vote until her death in 1906 (Wallner, 2012, p. 96).

Another of the instrumental women was Alice Paul. However, unlike Anthony, Paul was the leader of the militant front of the woman suffrage movement. She was well educated and determined to win the right to vote by all means necessary. Alice Paul was born in New Jersey in

1885 (Walton, 2016, p. 64). She learned to use civil disobedience in London among other radical and militant tactics to draw attention to her cause.

To coincide with President Wilson's inauguration in March 1913, Paul organized for an enormous parade to distract the inauguration. She organized for more protests and marches in that year. In 1914, she founded the National Woman's Party (Walton, 2016, p. 34). She was arrested and imprisoned for organizing a seven-month picket of the White House. Alice was placed under solitary confinement and force-fed, something that swung public opinion in favor of the imprisoned, leading to her release thereafter. Her efforts led to a constitutional amendment in 1918 that gave female citizens the right to vote

Another of these important women in the history of the nation was Ida Wells. She was born in Mississippi in 1862. Wells fought for both women's political rights and racial equality. Writing for *The Free Speech*, Memphis black newspaper, she condemned and exposed the injustices and inequalities in the Jim Crow South (Cranley, 2019, p. 38). In 1913, Wells helped found Chicago's Alpha Suffrage Club. The club helped register thousands of the city's black women to vote.

## **Birth Control**

Women have fought strongly in the social front, particularly concerning issues that are unique to women and girls. For decades, women were made to bear the burden of sexual relations alone. As a result, women like Margaret Sanger fought for contraceptives so that mothers could control their births. Her fight led to the introduction of the birth control pill in 1960, and the women, for the first time, could deter pregnancy by their own choice (Cranley,



2019, paras. 2-4). With this control, women could postpone having children or space births. As a result, women could pursue education and careers.

In the fight against women's right to birth control, Sanger was put in jail on various occasions for lawlessness for her clinics in New York City as well as her publications (Fields, 2003, p. 46). However, she steadily challenged the norms and laws through the courts. For example, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the pill and later, abortion (Fields, 2003, p. 68). The ruling gave women more control over their bodies and births.

Catherine Dexter McCormick also played an essential role in the fight for birth control for women. Using her own money, she provided the dollars required for the research and development of the oral contraceptive (Fields, 2003, p. 17). She was an active member of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

Just like the right to vote, Catherine believed that a women's right to control their bodies was important too. It was during her fight for the right of the women to vote that she met with birth control activist Margaret Sanger. The two became close friends. During her trips abroad, she would smuggle diaphragms into the country for the birth control clinics that Sanger owned. After the death of her husband in 1947, she began to commit more resources to research into birth control (Fields, 2003, p. 21). It was partly due to her support that the contraceptive was introduced into the market in 1960.

## **Discussion**

The results indicate that women have played significant roles in the political, social, and economic fronts of American society. As demonstrated, from the past to the present, women have contributed immensely to the progress of the nation through political movements. The rewards of their hard work are visible in today's society. For example, women and girls have better control of when to give birth and when to pursue education.

However, the push for equal pay is still ongoing and is likely to continue for the next several decades. The implications of these findings are that more affirmative action should be implemented to accommodate more women in politics so that the public can enjoy more social, economic, and political progress. This study is limited in size, with only up to two women examined in each section or front of society (political, social, and economic). Future research should focus on more women and probably focus on a few political movements to enhance depth.

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