“Do what you feel in your heart to be right—for you’ll be criticized anyway”
—Eleanor Roosevelt

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Women did not achieve political or cultural equality when the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920. Despite having the vote, women in 1920 still faced sexism in many parts of society, including politics, labor rights, family life and reproductive rights. By utilizing and empowering their voices, women successfully won the liberty to vote, a right that would continue to not only uplift them but drive them into future advocacy for many years to come. The 19th Amendment would reform our country for the better as it brought expectations of equality that women would fight for, leading them to lives fulfilled with opportunity and independence than ever before.

From a cultural perspective, the attitudes towards whether a woman was “capable” of working outside of the home brought doubt; as for so long, women had primarily a simple (yet important) life of raising a family and retaining a clean, organized household. So was it possible that a woman could sustain and lead a successful life outside of being a housewife? World War II was just the opportunity to prove that. Throughout the first decades of the 20th century, women made up less than 24 percent of the U.S. workforce. During the war however, there was an increase in women's involvement in the workforce because as men were away, they became more self-sufficient. It was an enormous step because men had ‘traditionally’ been the financial provider for their families, yet women were proving they could do just the same. By 1945, women made up 37 percent of the civilian workforce, earning an average of 59 cents on the dollar compared to men (Equal Pay Act of 1963). Women had traditionally earned less than men for doing
similar work, but male workers feared that this growing source of cheap labor would replace them or lower their wages. After the war, many women were pressured to go back into the role as housewives. Federal and civilian policies allowed employers to replace female workers with males and many companies would only hire men, even if they had hired women during the war. Women workers subsequently started unions and they kept working even when that meant less pay or no pay at all. By 1960, there were approximately 25 million women working outside the home (Equal Pay Act of 1963). Women were demonstrating that if they were allowed to vote, surely that should mean they should be able to work and receive an equal salary, too.

In addition to gaining more equality in the workplace, women have also made progress in other areas of society by taking part in the democratic process. For example, since 1920, women have gained financial independence, maternity leave, and more reproductive rights (Roe vs. Wade). Democracy would be a significant system that would not only enable women to take part in law making decisions, but would also allow them to elect people who would advocate for women’s issues. This resulted in many major legislative and legal victories, such as The Equal Pay Act and Title 9 (Grady). After the 19th Amendment was ratified, women yearned for more, and the 19th Amendment not only encouraged them to fight on but also redefined what a woman's place in society should look like.

Regarding race, although white women were often the designated “face” of the Suffrage Movement, black women have played a huge impactful role in the ongoing fight for equality. During the Suffrage Movement, black women faced racism as they were often excluded from conventions, protests, and even marches. It even got to the point where many women of color
were forced to organize separately through local clubs—eventually forming their own establishments, such as the National Association of Colored Women. However, the struggle to vote did not end with the ratification of the 19th Amendment. Some states took it upon themselves to require literacy tests and poll taxes to make it more challenging to vote. Unfortunately violence was often used as well to stop black women from coming to the ballot. It would become a routine for decades to come, where they would continuously have to face intersectional discrimination, either between their sex or race. Today, techniques such as gerrymandering and voter ID laws target people of color in order to disenfranchise them, which completely defies the exact purpose of the 19th Amendment. Even though today we still struggle with issues regarding race and sexism, the 19th Amendment is a reminder to persevere, “for you’ll be criticized anyway.” The 19th Amendment not only drove women to advocate for themselves, but continues to encourage women and men to fight for equality through all aspects of society.

When the 19th amendment passed, it was just the beginning. A beginning of which women would continue to speak out their values and introduce ideas to society that would forever change the United States. As a young woman myself, I greatly cherish my right to vote as it not only enables me and millions of other women in America to have a voice and influence within our country but also pushes us to strive for equality. Whether it be contending for job opportunities, fairer wages, education, or birth control, our voices will always align back to the millions of courageous women who stood among the frontlines during the suffrage movement—fighting for all of us.
Works Cited


