

The activities of the
women's suffrage
movements influence
the decision to
grant ...



It was written in a book that "women are three fifths of a man", this quote comes from the bible, the book a whole religion is based upon. But are women equal to men? In the mid 18th century equality of men and women was unheard of, the position of women was extremely different of that today. Women of the time were second-class citizens. However the struggle for women's rights has an extensive history. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote the first published work on the topic in 1792.

In her book entitled, 'Vindication of the rights of women', she noticeably challenged a society dominated by men, she argued that if a woman were capable of 'the gift of reason', they ought to be treated in the same way as men. Such extreme thoughts did little to progress the status of women at the time. However this book set the way for 'The Feminist Movements' who crusaded for an expansion in their rights in society and the law.

19th century feminists had many aims: they desired to be able to train for employment to allow them to receive work beyond the home, they sought after equal educational prospects with men, they wanted identical rights in the law, and finally they wanted the right to vote. Receiving the vote would mean that women could vote for a party which was going to improve the situation that women found themselves in. The campaign for the vote by women is called 'The Women's Suffrage Movement', the term suffrage means to vote.

During this time there were two main groups; they were the Suffragists and the Suffragettes. The suffragists were formed in the 19th century, its roots were in the social reform movements founded by Lydia Becker. "The early

suffragists were a well-connected group of women who used their influence to try and persuade powerful men to take up their cause”.

In 1887, they developed into a countrywide movement, when Millicent Fawcett took leadership; several suffrage organizations formed themselves into the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies, N. U. W. S. S. The methods engaged by the NUWSS were analogous to those of used by the independent suffrage groups for the prior thirty years, ie, nonviolent influence and always within the law. Suffragists composed leaflets, held conferences, and sent out educated speakers, all with the intent of shifting public opinion. A delegation of suffragist and suffragettes and politicians met the new Liberal Prime Minister named Campbell Bannerman, in 1906. He stated that, even though he was individually in support of women receiving the vote, his Cabinet colleagues were separated.

The suffragists were frustrated in his feelings as a lot of them were supporters of the Liberal Party. They reply was to launch a campaign of leaflets, petitions and meetings besieging Liberal politicians to attempting to convince them to alter their point of view on the matter of women's suffrage. Afterward in the same year, the NUWSS assumed a new and more hostile attitude by threatening to create independent candidates to compete against Liberal politicians who were in opposition to giving women the vote

The idea of women's suffrage had become increasingly popular among women, as in 1909 its membership was 13, 000 and had a proficient association on a national scale. The suffragist did influence the award of the vote for women as they used non-militant methods, which did not create any

moral outrage. Having said that they did not receive as much publicity as the Suffragists and the press ridiculed them. Also not every woman believed giving the vote to women.

Queen Victoria wrote that, The Queen is most anxious to enlist everyone who can speak or write, to join in checking this mad wicked folly for ' Women's Rights' with all its attendant horrors on which her poor feeble sex is bent, forgetting every sense of womanly feeling and propriety. It is subject which makes the Queen so furious that she cannot contain herself" The other main group who campaigned for women's suffrage were the Suffragettes, who in 1903 were created out of the suffragist movement.

Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst, who was previously been a member of the Manchester suffragists group and who had been concerned in the struggle to search for encouragement from working-class women in Cheshire, decided to leave the NUWSS and establish a individual society. She had become irritated with the middle-class, upright, gradualist strategy of the NUWSS. The new suffragette association was called the Women's Social and Political Union, WSPU. And its motto was " Deeds, not words", which ominously implies their activities. The Suffragettes campaigned more vigorously than the suffragists.

Rallies and demonstrations were organised, a newspaper was published, ending with women being arrested when they tried to protest at the House of Commons. They through verbal abuse at the Chancellor of the Exchequer, HH Asquith. But in 1907 the WSPU separated into two groups as a result to a clash between Mrs. Pankhurst, her daughter, and other executive members.

Those who left created the Women's Freedom League, whilst the Mrs. Pankhurst, her daughter and their faction established an even stronger grasp on the Suffragettes, forewarning even more militant procedure in the future.

They believed their more 'peaceful methods were getting them no-where' As time went on, demonstrations grew stronger and better. In London, Mrs. Pankhurst and her daughter were arrested for trying to "rush the House of Commons". And by 1909 the tactics they employed had become even more militant. Politicians against women's suffrage were regularly broken up, Winston Churchill was attacked by a woman with a dog whip, and the windows of Prime Minister HH Asquith were smashed. Many political meetings were often disrupted, properties set on fire, acid was poured in letterboxes, golf courses and flower beds wrecked.

Despite these militant ways the WSPU had factions all across the country by 1909. Their newspaper 'Votes for women' sold around 20,000 copies per week. However, the suffragettes weren't quite so popular with national paper. In 1908, the leader writer in the Daily Express advised that, "The time for dealing gently with idle mischievous women who call themselves militant suffragists has gone by", he ordered that, "these women who unite to disorder and riot, shall be punished with the utmost severity". The view reflected that of the public. However their opinions about the suffragettes changed and they did begin to sympathies.

The illegal actions of the suffragettes led to them being incarcerated. Some went on hunger strike and were forcibly fed. This force feeding attracted such bad publicity that the Liberal Government passed the "Cat and Mouse

Act' which permitted provisional release and arbitrary rearrest. Nevertheless, the militant ways of the suffragettes took the next step. In 1913 during the Derby horse race, Emily Wilding Davidson darted onto the course as she tried to grab the bridle of the king's horse, Anmer. The frightened animal fell, injuring her fatally.