

Why did a campaign  
for women's suffrage  
develop in the years  
after 1870 essay  
sam...



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In the second half of the 19th Century the rights of women began to develop towards greater equality with men. In the years after 1870 many factors began to contribute to a change. Women began to rebel against the unfair situation they were in and slowly began to see a result.

At the start of the Victorian age the position of women was even more clearly divided from the position of men than between the rich and poor. The strong division between men and women of the upper and middle classes kept women at home and men at work. Women would show the status of her household by remaining idle at all times. Ladies from respectable backgrounds were not expected to have careers or to work.

Even the household chores or looking after of the children would be carried out by a servant. Having a female member of your family work would bring shame upon the husband. It would be assumed that the husband or father could not afford to support them on his own wages. Therefore, women were encouraged to remain idle and to leave household chores to domestic servants. This was true from the nobility of the country to the houses of the middle classes. Women were not even encouraged to take exercise except riding and dancing.

The working class women however, had live a lot harder. Often the men's wages alone could not support the family. Wives or children would usually also need to work in order to earn enough money for the family. They could not afford to employ domestic servants, like the higher classes and this would mean that it was particularly burdensome for working class women. As

well as raising their children, they would carry out the household chores like cooking and cleaning.

Whilst working women were employed in factories, laundries or in trades like dressmaking and domestic service other, more significant and responsible careers were denied women of the middle and upper classes. Life for wealthy women however, was very different to that of the working class women, although they still had things in common. Neither had any legal status. A married woman's earnings automatically belonged to her husband. Her property and all goods all belonged to her husband. He owned the house and any land, even though many poor people hardly owned anything of their own. Dole money for the poor was paid to the man of the family, which did not necessarily mean that it reached his wife and children.

Women could not go to university and take a degree like many men could. She could not get a divorce on the grounds of adultery alone, as her husband could. Even a woman's children belonged to her husband. If a couple separated, the husband could take the children and refuse to let the mother even see them. Women could do nothing about this.

A woman could not vote. On the other hand in the first half of the century few men were even allowed the vote. In 1832 the Great Reform Act gave the vote to property owners of  $\geq 10$  a year. By 1867, all male householders were able to vote and in 1860 1/10th of men could vote. The reform act of 1884 allowed virtually all adult males the vote. Women still had not rights. This led to become a factor in the growing campaign for female suffrage after this time. Women, especially of the upper class, were annoyed at how

they had fewer rights than the working class men, and how they had no distinction of rights from working class women.

These changes arose once women began to have an education. Demands for the emancipation (setting free) of women from male control were rare before the development of girls' education in the second half of the 19th Century. The rise of public schools such as Cheltenham Ladies' College and university colleges for 'young ladies' and the start of state elementary schools led the way for changes in female status. In 1850 Frances Buss founded the North London Collegiate School. In 1873, women were finally given the right to go to University.

Women from wealthy families became increasingly unhappy with idleness. Having no money of their own, they saw themselves as even less independent than factory women. They didn't approve of the idea of this and saw Florence Nightingale as an example of what they could accomplish. Florence Nightingale was a member of an upper class, respectable family, who went against all the expectations of an upper class woman to become a nurse. They demanded that the professions like nursing should be opened to women so that they could play a useful part in society. A start was made when the London School of Medicine for Women opened in 1874. Twenty-five years later, there were over 300 lady doctors.

It made women happy that they had finally been given the right to education and job opportunities but it still annoyed them that with all of this they were still denied the vote. Source A, a Suffragette poster produced in 1912, showed their argument. A woman could be a mayor, nurse, mother doctor or

teacher, earning the utmost respect and carrying out crucial jobs and yet still not have the vote. On the other hand a man may be a convict, lunatic, or drunkard and still be entitled to vote. This seemed very unfair.

The introduction of the telephone and typewriter brought into being a whole new range of female occupations lower down the scale, from the 1880s onwards. Women and girls who wanted something better than factory work or domestic services now became telephone operators or typists. The idea of employing women in offices had previously been unheard of, yet by 1901, 7% of all business and commercial clerks were women. The rapid expansion of elementary schools after 1870 provided yet another career for women in teaching. Meanwhile thousands more became shop assistants.

Women still did not have the vote, but in other areas, such as their legal rights, improvements were made especially after 1850. One of their greatest grievances concerned ownership of property. In 1870 Parliament at last took action, allowing married women to keep their own earnings. Not until 1882 were wives granted the right to own property and give it to whom they wished. These Married Women's Property Acts gave wives new legal status that finally separated them from masculine control.

In 1888, Women were finally granted the right to vote for County and County Borough Councils. In 1907 they were even allowed to become councillors themselves. They continued to play no part in central government however. By this stage, English Feminists had accomplished many goals. Women could serve on town councils and school boards, could be factory inspectors, could even vote in select regional elections if they had enough property, and could

even become mayors like Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, but they still could not vote for Parliament. It was at this time that the first organisations for women's suffrage began, most notably the Female Political Association, founded by a Quaker named Anne Knight. Their patient efforts to gain the vote was still denied them the vote.

Before 1870, much had been accomplished due to the campaigns of women. One of the very first was Mary Smith, an unmarried property owner. In 1832 she quietly petitioned Parliament to include female property owners in the vote. Caroline Norton was another important figure who brought about the Infants Custody Bill by which children under 7 could stay with the mother, after separation and divorce of the parents.

Barbara Bodichon wrote pamphlets and collected signatures supporting a Married Woman's Property Bill that eventually came into power in 1856. Her situation was very rare as her father had brought her up exactly the same as his sons, but she was campaigning for equal rights for all women. The support of the MP John Stuart Mill was supported by those working for women's suffrage. They supported his election campaign in 1865, leading him to become an important ally in Parliament.

The first organisation designed to actively campaign for female suffrage was set up by Anne Knight and was called the Female Political Association. In 1903, the important Women's Social and Political Union and the suffragette movement was founded by Emmeline Pankhurst and her two daughters.

We can see how before the time of 1870, the struggle for woman's equality had only a small impact. It was now that women were becoming educated, <https://assignbuster.com/why-did-a-campaign-for-womens-suffrage-develop-in-the-years-after-1870-essay-sample/>

which I think is an important factor, allowing women to stand up for their own rights. They no longer were happy with living idle lives and started questioning why there was such a divide between them and the male population.

It is clear that once the suffragist and suffragettes movement was founded that changes began to take place. I think that this joining of forces allowed women to come together and fight for their rights with more power. Individuals such as Caroline Norton and Barbara Bodichon also led the way for more changes, as their individual roles played a large part in the realisation of the issue. It was after 1870 that the build up of all these factors resulted in a concerted and organised campaign to achieve female suffrage.