

7 Influential Women That Fought For Women's Rights

Winning the right to vote was only one small piece of the fight for women's rights. Even after the 19th Amendment passed, which guaranteed some women the right to vote, women still faced discrimination in many areas of life. In most states, women could not open a bank account without their father or husband's permission. They faced unequal pay in the workplace because women could legally be paid below the minimum wage. Women could not serve on juries and could not hold public office in much of the country. Clearly, there was a lot of work for women's rights advocates in addition to suffrage.

The broad spectrum of rights women enjoy today were never guaranteed, and it took years of fighting from countless activists to win them. Here is a look at seven influential women who changed the course of women's rights:

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883)

Sojourner Truth is well known as an abolitionist and women's rights advocate who traveled the country, speaking about her experiences as a woman and a formerly enslaved person. She worked with many prominent abolitionists and women's rights advocates throughout her life, including Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony.

Sojourner Truth was a speaker at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention, where she delivered one of the most famous women's rights speeches in American history, "Ain't I a Woman?". She held the controversial belief that women's suffrage should occur alongside suffrage for formerly enslaved men - not before or after. Ultimately, her hard work as an advocate earned her an invitation to meet President Lincoln at the White House in 1864, and she paved the way for many of the women that continued the fight for women's rights after her.

Ida B. Wells (1862-1931)

Ida B. Wells was born into slavery in Mississippi, and after the civil war, she later became a renowned investigative journalist, abolitionist, and suffragist in Chicago. She became an activist after experiencing discrimination in the courts when one of her cases was wrongly overturned. This experience left her frustrated, so she took to petitioning for the right for women and formerly enslaved people to vote.

Later in 1913, she was a part of the first suffrage parade in Washington D.C. Her leadership in this parade led her to become a leader in getting women the right to vote. After the 19th Amendment was passed, Wells ran massive voter registration drives in various locations to encourage women to participate in government.

Alice Paul (1885-1977)

Alice Paul was one of the first to fight for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would permanently give women the right to vote. She spent many formative years in England, where she learned about federal campaigning and refined her ideas of feminism and equality. From this advocacy, she lobbied and organized parades to support the 19th Amendment, granting women the right to vote.

She is most well known for leading a march in Washington the day before President Wilson was set to be inaugurated to draw attention to women's suffrage. Although influential, Paul was not perfect as she was often willing to put the interests of white women above the interests of all women. However, she did not rest after the 19th Amendment was successfully passed. Instead, she almost immediately wrote the Equal Rights Amendment, which to this day has yet to be ratified to the constitution.

Shirley Chisholm (1924-2005)

Shirley Chisholm was a trailblazer in politics. She was the first African American Woman Elected to Congress in 1968. Additionally, in 1972 she was both the first woman and the first African American to seek the nomination for president by one of the major political parties. Chisholm was a prominent figure in the feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s, and she joined her local chapters of the League of Women Voters, NAACP, and the Democratic Party club.

Most importantly, she brought the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment, written by Alice Paul years ago, to Congress and urged her colleagues to pass it into law. A cornerstone of her eventual presidential campaign was the equality of all people, notably between men and women. Although she did not win the nomination, she broke down barriers for all women who followed after her into government.

Ruth Bader Ginsberg (1933-2020)

Ruth Bader Ginsberg was an advocate for women's rights long before she sat on the Supreme Court. After law school, Bader Ginsberg worked on the ACLU Women's Rights Project for many

years before beginning her journey to the Supreme Court. Her lifelong advocacy led to wins for women to replace multiple outdated and sexist laws.

Before Bader Ginsberg, women could not open a bank account or take out a mortgage without a male co-signer, state-funded schools were allowed to bar women admission, women could be fired or refused work for being pregnant, and same-sex marriage was illegal. Bader Ginsberg had a hand in overturning every single one of those rules and more. She was a force, and even in death, she broke down barriers and became the first woman to ever lie in state at the Capitol.

Angela Davis (1944-Present)

Angela Davis is a well-known educator, political activist, and civil rights activist. She is most well known for her involvement in the civil rights movement, but she is also a staunch supporter of women's rights and intersectional feminism. Although she was incredibly active in the 1960s and 70s, Davis's political activism continues into the present day. In 2017, she was one of the honorary co-chairs of the Women's March on Washington, which occurred the day after former President Trump's inauguration.

In addition to helping organize the Women's March, Davis was a keynote speaker at the event, stating that "women's rights are human rights all over the world." Today Davis is still active and continues to inspire young people to fight for justice.

Kamala Harris (1964-present)

Finally on our list is the first woman ever elected to the office of the Vice President - Kamala Harris. Vice President Harris serves as a role model to all women and proves that women can thrive in high power political roles. Harris made history as the first woman, the first Black American, and the first Asian American to ever hold the office of the Vice President.

Her election signaled a change in how we view women politicians. Rather than judge Harris on her looks or personal life, the media focused primarily on Harris's ideas and qualifications. Harris's election shows how much women can achieve if only we support their careers and evaluate them the same way we assess male candidates.

Final Thoughts

Nearly 250 years ago, Abigail Adams wrote her husband John Adams, reminding him to "remember the ladies" while drafting the Declaration of Independence. However, it took another

150 years for the 19th Amendment to pass and another 100 years after that for Kamala Harris to prove that women can and should be trusted with the Vice Presidency.

Women have supported and improved the United States from its founding to the present day. We know that the fight is not over, even as we celebrate how far women have come. As we strive together to build a more perfect union, let's all remember to include women in the picture ... and perhaps in the next presidency as well.