

# THE SOUL OF AMERICA

KNOW OUR PAST.  
SHAPE OUR FUTURE.

## LESSON TWO Women's Suffrage: Fighting for the American Ideal



# OVERVIEW

## Essential Questions

- What factors, and which voices, shape our understanding of women’s suffrage and the struggle for gender equality in America?
- What evidence does a historian draw upon in order to create a historical argument?
- How does this case study support Jon Meacham’s historical argument about the “soul of America?”

## Objectives

Students will:

- Critically view documentary film clips and interview segments.
- Analyze historical evidence and primary source materials to investigate the 1913 Women’s Suffrage March.
- Compare the viewpoints of multiple individuals and groups who campaigned for women’s suffrage.
- Explore how different factions within the movement used narrative to advance their common cause.
- Reflect on connections between the suffrage movement and a contemporary social movement.

In this lesson, students will examine women’s suffrage as a movement that employed sustained, impassioned, and strategic social activism for decades in order to secure women’s constitutional right to vote. Yet the movement’s leaders, while achieving expanded rights for white women, denied those same rights to women of color and other disenfranchised groups. Studying clips from **THE SOUL OF AMERICA**, interview segments collected during the making of the documentary, and other evidence and primary sources, students will learn from the perspectives of historians, and also understand the power of narrative in shaping history.

## Materials

- Equipment to screen the video segments
- Clip from **THE SOUL OF AMERICA**: (1:13:50 - 1:20:30)
- Copies of Handouts:
  - One: Women’s Suffrage Note Catcher
  - Two: Resources for The Roots of the Suffrage Movement—19th Century, Beginnings of Suffrage’s Narrative
  - Three: Tension Within the Movement

## Length

One 55-minute class period



# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It is important to situate the women's suffrage movement (1913 through the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920) within the context of other domestic and international events occurring during this period. Students can examine these influential factors by listening to additional interview segments compiled in the making of **THE SOUL OF AMERICA**, and by reading relevant source materials identified for this topic.

## → **Second Rise of the KKK:**

Interview Archive, Linda Gordon

- (1:07:55:03 - 1:12:10) The Second Klu Klux Klan, and what gave rise to the Second KKK
- (01:19:18:01 - 1:21:05) How the KKK perceived the Women's Suffrage Movement

## → **World War I:**

Interview Archive, Jon Meacham (Intvw 2) (01:36:54:10 - 1:40:48) The rebirth of the KKK in 1915

## → **Movement Towards Prohibition:**

Interview Archive, Lisa Tetrault

(1:35:29:16 - 1:36:56) Movements in the 19th century

Brown, L. Ames. "Suffrage and Prohibition." *The North American Review*, vol. 203, no. 722, 1916, pp. 93-100. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/25108710](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25108710). Accessed 26 June 2020.

## → **Text of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution**

## → **What does it take to ratify an amendment to the Constitution?**

<http://www.crusadeforthetvote.org/nacw>

Interview Archive, Lisa Tetrault

- (01:54:37:21 - 1:59:06) "Passage of the 19th Amendment," and "Tennessee as the last state to ratify the 19th Amendment"

## → **Learn about the movement for an Equal Rights Amendment to the constitution.**

Interview Archive, Lisa Tetrault

- (02:03:33:23 - 2:07:52) "The Equal Rights Amendment," and "The need for legislation against sex discrimination"

[EqualRightsAmendment.org](http://EqualRightsAmendment.org), a project of the nonprofit organization The Alice Paul Institute.

# ACTIVITY



## Opening

Read aloud this quote from historian Lisa Tetrault, associate professor of history at Carnegie Mellon University and author of *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898*. She is featured in **THE SOUL OF AMERICA**'s Interview Archive:

"WE TELL STORIES ABOUT THE PAST... TO MAKE SENSE OF WHO WE ARE IN THE PRESENT, AND WHAT OUR PRIORITIES SHOULD BE, AND WHAT OTHER PEOPLE'S PRIORITIES SHOULD BE, WHO MATTERS, WHO THEREFORE DESERVES TO HAVE POWER, WHO OUGHT TO BE GETTING MORE POWER, WHO'S BEEN OVERLOOKED, PEOPLE WHO ARE IN THE SILENCES. ALL OF THAT IS ABOUT THE PRESENT. IT'S NOT REALLY ABOUT THE PAST. WHAT FACTS FROM THE PAST WE CHOOSE TO HIGHLIGHT SAYS SOMETHING ABOUT WHO WE ARE." - LISA TETRAULT

In pairs, have students interview one another to answer the following questions:

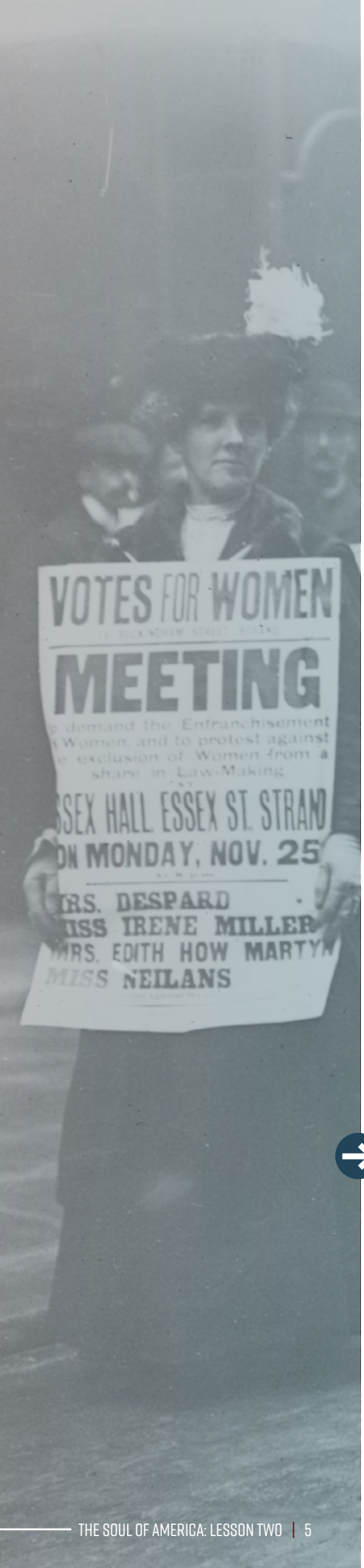
- What does this quote mean to you?
- What do you know about how women gained the right to vote?
- Why does the right to vote matter?
- What questions might you ask to deepen your understanding of the story, including as Lisa Tetrault says, "who matters... and who's been overlooked."



## Analyzing the Historical Perspective of *The Soul of America*

Watch a clip from **THE SOUL OF AMERICA** about women's suffrage

**Teacher Note:** Distribute **Handout One: Women's Suffrage Note Catcher** to help students watch the film clip actively and with critical eyes. Review the Note Catcher questions with students before showing the clips to give students a sense of what to watch for.



This clip introduces students to Alice Paul as a leader in the suffrage movement, the successful strategies the movement undertook to effect change, the exclusion of women of color from the movement, and ultimately, the ratification of the 19th Amendment.

### Watch film clip

1:13:50 - 1:20:30 (6:35 mins)

*Begins: "Alice Paul started a direct campaign..."*

*Ends: "That's a caution to us today because we're no different."*

After watching the clip, offer students a few minutes to finish the questions on their note catchers.

#### Note Catcher Questions:

- As you are watching, write down the names of activists, events, and organizations that you hear about or see in the clip.
- Who is against the right to vote for women, and why?
- What do you learn about Alice Paul as a leader of the movement?
- If you could ask her a question about any of her decisions, what would it be?
- What does the decision to exclude women of color from suffrage tell us about race in America at the turn of the 20th century?

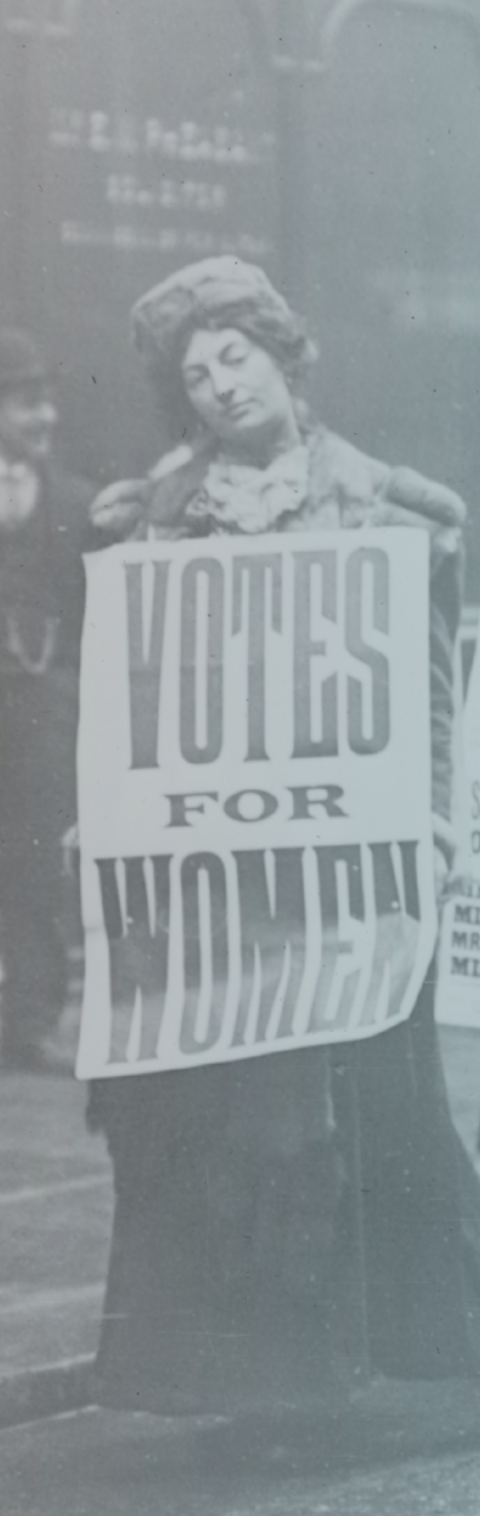


### Analyzing Historical Evidence

In order to analyze the historical evidence presented in the film, students will investigate excerpts from [The Interview Archive](#) and primary resources to investigate one of the suggested topics below.

They will prepare to present back to the class on the following questions:

- How is the topic relevant to the history presented in the film clip?



- What did you learn in your investigations that deepens or changes your understanding about the Suffrage March of 1913, or the women’s suffrage movement overall?
- Whose perspectives were illuminated in your investigation, and how did they differ from one another? Which perspectives are in need of more investigation?

As they conduct their research, encourage students to record data such as an author’s citations, and the names of other people, places, or events mentioned, and use those to further their research. To facilitate this, transcripts of the suggested excerpts from [The Interview Archive](#) are included in **Handouts Two** and **Three**.

The suggested evidence for each topic is meant as an introduction, and students are encouraged to use what they learn to seek out further evidence and information.

As students are reviewing the primary resources ask them to assess the historical evidence using the following questions as guidance:

- Where and when is the evidence from?
- Who wrote or produced it?
- Why was it produced?
- Do we know anything about the context in which it was produced?

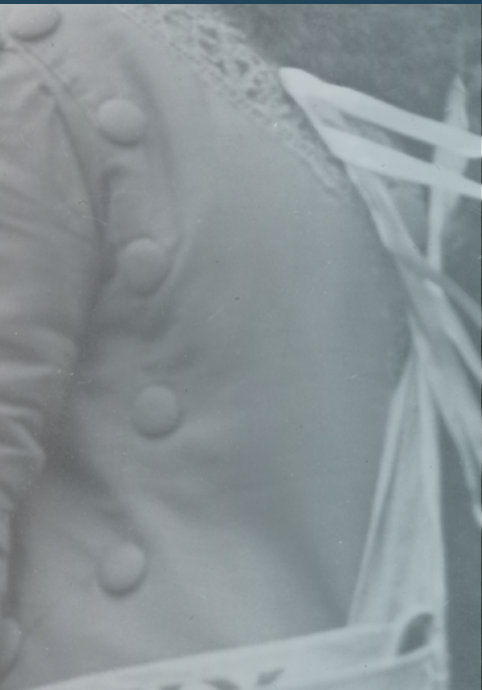
**JON MEACHAM EXPLAINS:**

“THE AMERICAN STORY IS A STORY OF MORE GENEROUSLY APPLYING THE JEFFERSONIAN IDEA THAT EVERYBODY GETS A CHANCE. THOMAS JEFFERSON WROTE, ‘WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT, THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL, AND ARE ENDOWED BY THEIR CREATOR WITH CERTAIN INALIENABLE RIGHTS, AMONG THEM LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.’ JEFFERSON DIDN’T MEAN EVERYBODY WHEN HE SAT DOWN TO WRITE THAT IN JUNE OF 1776. HE DIDN’T MEAN WOMEN. HE DIDN’T MEAN PEOPLE OF COLOR. HE MEANT WHITE MEN. BUT THE STORY OF THE COUNTRY IS ONE IN WHICH WE HAVE MORE GENEROUSLY UNDERSTOOD WHAT THAT SENTENCE MEANT. WHERE WE WERE OPENING OUR ARMS AND NOT CLENCHING OUR FISTS.”



- Discuss the dueling forces of struggle and aspiration or hope within the idea of the soul of America.
- Choose a spokesperson to summarize your idea of the soul of America and the role of struggle and hope for the class.

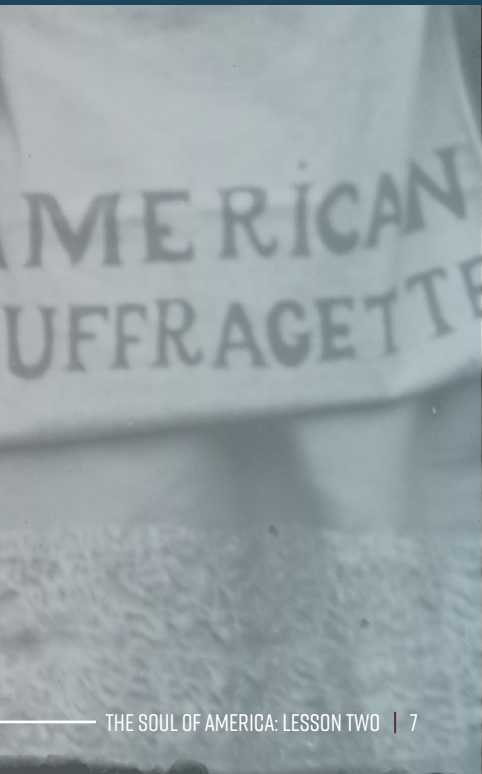
## Topic One: The Roots of the Suffrage Movement - 19th Century, Beginnings of Suffrage's Narrative



### Suggested Resources:

- Interview Archive Material:  
Lisa Tetrault (01:17:24:21 - 01:22:29) Split in Suffrage Movement over 15th Amendment, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's Suffrage Narrative
- Or
- "Inventing Women's History 1880-1886," Chapter 4., Tetrault, L. *The Myth of Seneca Falls*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 2014, pp 112-144.
- National Women's History Museum: [Crusade for the Vote Primary Resources](#) Set

## Topic Two: Tension within the Movement



### Suggested Resources:

- Interview Archive Material:  
Lisa Tetrault (1:06 - 1:09:53) Fractures within social movements, 1:38:22:19-1:44:38 "Carrie Chapman Catt"- "Complexity of the struggle"
- Ida B. Wells' Recollections ([Chicago Tribune](https://suffrage2020illinois.org/2020/02/02/for-the-future-benefit-of-my-whole-race-ida-b-wells-and-the-alpha-suffrage-club/))  
<https://suffrage2020illinois.org/2020/02/02/for-the-future-benefit-of-my-whole-race-ida-b-wells-and-the-alpha-suffrage-club/>
- Alice Paul's Oral History: <http://content.cdlib.org/view?docId=kt6f59n89c;NAAN=13030&doc.view=frames&chunk.id=d0e151&toc.depth=1&toc.id=d0e151&brand=calisphere> (p. 131 under the heading: 1914 - The Formative Year)



## Exit Ticket: Echoes and Connections to Today

Discuss as a class or assign as a short reflective writing assignment:

How does the story of the women's suffrage movement in the early 1900s support Jon Meacham's historical argument about the "soul of America"? Identify a social movement that is active today? What is its goal? What are its tactics and strategies? What does it reveal about our worst instincts and our better angels?





## HANDOUT ONE:

# Women's Suffrage Note Catcher

As you are watching, write down the names of activists, events, and organizations you hear about or see.

What strategies and tactics do you notice the suffrage movement using in their organizing campaign, such as marches, picketing, etc.?

Who is against the right to vote for women, and why?

What do you learn about Alice Paul as a leader of the movement?

If you could ask her a question about any of her decisions, what would it be?

What does the decision to exclude women of color from suffrage tell us about race in America at the turn of the 20th century?

## HANDOUT TWO:

# Resources for The Roots of the Suffrage Movement - 19th Century, Beginnings of Suffrage's Narrative

Transcript for Interview Archive Material, Lisa Tetrault

### Split in Suffrage Movement Over 15th Amendment

As different people who think we can make our vision of justice a reality start fighting with one another over those different visions of justice, you start to get all kinds of ugly cleavages in the United States and ugly splits and ugly fights. And one of them that is unbelievably painful is one that happens in the feminist-abolitionist coalition, those people who had been organized in women's rights and anti-slavery, prior to the American civil war. They found a new organization after the American Civil War and they decide what we're going to press for is voting rights for freed people, all freed people, Black men and Black women and white women, and so they start pressing for those demands. They're like, this is what we think is the most important demand for remaking a nation. When Congress proposes the 15th amendment, and only gives voting to Black men or only extends voting to Black men, there's a huge fight within the feminist abolitionist coalition because it's half of what they're demanding. So do they approach it as a glass half full or is this too short of their ultimate goal and therefore ought to be rejected as too much of a compromise with principle? And so an enormous fight breaks open between some very famous figures. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglass, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper—a variety of titans within the feminist abolitionist movement—Lucretia Mott. And Stanton and Anthony really are the ones who opened the fight by saying we refuse to support the 15th amendment because this is enfranchising Black men before white women.

And a lot of people want to defend that as a principled stand. You know, what we demand is all things for all people, not just half of our demands. But really it's not that. What it is—is Stanton and Anthony standing up and saying, and revealing their own sense of a pretty entrenched racial hierarchy, in saying we don't want ignorant "Black Sambos," which is language they use. Ignorant Black men, "Sambos," voting before the educated white womanhood of the nation, which of course they're seeing in a kind of elevated fashion. So, it's not this kind of egalitarianism that you might hope for. And Stanton and Anthony get into a huge fight with Frederick Douglass, and Frederick Douglass says back, We need this, we have to have this, our brains are being dashed out on the pavement. There's massive violence in the Civil War South, you know, in the post-war South, vigilante violence, Klan violence, all kinds of... I mean freed people are being slaughtered, and he says, you know,

know, we're being hung from lampposts, we have to have this, it's an imperative in this moment. And Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton say no. And they bolt from that alliance and they form a new organization, and they leave their abolitionist colleagues in the dust. And they leave a bunch of their women's suffrage colleagues in the dust, too. So this splits not just the abolitionist and the women's suffragists, it splits the suffragists. A whole lot of women suffragists say no, Lucy Stone and others, we will remain with the 15th Amendment. We will support it and we will continue to fight for its gradual expansion.

### Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's Suffrage Narrative

That narrative we were talking about, the suffrage merriment, Stanton and Anthony end up writing it. They're the ones who really give the movement its history. And so they give their version of the story, and really they're at the center of the story. And when we remember the suffrage movement, we largely remember them. And that's how they intended it. But there were all these other suffragists including those that stayed aligned with the 15th Amendment, and Lucy Stone is chief among those. And she's largely forgotten today, but she was as influential and as important as Stanton and Anthony. She started her career as early as they did. She cut her teeth in abolition in the 1840s. She went to Oberlin. She was one of the first women to get an equal college degree. She would live all the way through to the end of the 19th century and be fighting her own fight, parallel to Stanton and Anthony's. They fought two different fights and they would hate each other really for the rest of their lives.

Part of the reason we don't remember Lucy Stone is she never understood what Stanton and Anthony understood, the power of historical narrative. She refused to participate in their history project. Stanton and Anthony start writing history. About halfway through the suffrage . . . they realize they need some reinforcements. And the reinforcements they pick is history writing as a way to start controlling the narrative and making an argument. And Lucy Stone refuses to participate and she says, "We don't have time to write history. We have a movement to fight." What Stanton and Anthony understood, but I don't think could have openly articulated, I think they understood it tacitly was history writing was movement fighting. Lucy Stone never understands that and she therefore doesn't leave a readymade narrative to future generations to understand this story, and she's left out of it.

# HANDOUT THREE:

## Tension Within the Movement

Interview Archive Transcript, Lisa Tetrault

### Fractures within social movements

01:06:21:06

One of the ways in which social narratives or movement narratives operate within the movement also is to try to make them look more cohesive and more united than they often actually are. Because a cohesive, united movement makes a stronger argument for change and for demand than a fractured divisive in-fighting narrative. So social movements themselves end up creating narratives about themselves where they're united and unified, but in fact, usually almost always social movements are fractured and divided and argumentative and ugly at times. But that doesn't make a very strong case for their demands. So it works better, in many cases, to make social movements appear as if they're unified and coherent.

We often romanticize social movements as perfect in some ways, as idyllic, as utopian, [but] they are just as fractured because they're political movements, as all kinds of politics. There are messy struggles. They don't unfold neatly and they don't accomplish their goals neatly.

Yeah, the suffrage movement is such a complicated movement and I find it fascinating for just that reason, because it is revered by a large segment of the population and it is maligned by an equally large segment of the population. So how do we make sense of those dual approaches to this particular movement? And part of it is by paying attention to the complexity of movements that we often miss when we cover movements. And much in the same way that white men often told the history of a nation as a kind of story of triumphal progress that brought everybody along, and social activists would argue, no, we didn't get brought along in that social progress, you know, you've left us out. The same things happened within the women's suffrage movement. The white women narrate it as, this is a story of progress. We began our fight in 1848, we won our goal in 1920, and with that is a story of a kind of progress, both of white women and of American democracy as a whole. There are lots of other people who know that is not a story of progress. That is a story of us being left out. And much like white men who ruled this nation for a long time, a lot of white women in the movement leave out and forget and silence and ignore a lot of the other women who were left out of that narrative of progress.

And the racism within the movement, much like the racism within the United States, was endemic and was ubiquitous. It was everywhere within the movement. And so, people who got left out of that story and who got left out of that tide, millions and millions and millions of women, look back on that and the people with whom they're aligned, and other social movements look back on that suffrage movement and see a movement that was very narrowly focused on the rights of a few, and willing to play a politics of white supremacy and throw women of color under the bus and throw men of color under the bus. And so they malign the movement. So what we get is this, if we tell the story from white suffragists' points of view, it seems like a very triumphal happy narrative. If we tell it from the point of view of the people who got left out, it looks like a movement that was highly exclusionary and, in many cases, reinforcing a politics of white supremacy rather than challenging it.

### Carrie Chapman Catt

01:38:22:19

Carrie Chapman Catt represents this kind of older guard of a woman [who] came of age during the Victorian era rather than the 19-teens and the 1920s. Who's still heavily dressed in Victorian garb and who takes a more deferential approach to politics. And we're going to curry the favor and the likability of these politicians rather than coming up and throwing a sign up in their face yelling at them.

### Winning suffrage at the state level

When Stanton and Anthony go off and break from the feminist abolitionists coalition, they start a very new demand: suffrage by federal amendment. And that is a brand new idea after the war because nobody thought the federal constitution could be used to enforce voting rights—that was a state prerogative. A bunch of suffragists argue that's unconstitutional, that still belongs to the states and Lucy Stone and a bunch of other people fight for voting [at the state level.] In other words, go state by state and get “male” taken out of the constitution. That is a dual strategy that moves forward all the way to the 20th century. Working at the state level and working at the federal level, you've got two branches of the movement. The state movement starts to win. A lot of victories. States out West and states in other places start enfranchising women and allowing them access to the ballot. But the federal amendment has been stalled and has failed repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly. So when

Carrie Chapman Catt gets appointed Anthony's successor in the movement, she realizes that a direct fight for the federal amendment is not winnable because it's just repeatedly lost. So what she decides, and she comes up with a plan that says, "Let's win suffrage in a couple of key states where women have huge voting power if they were enfranchised. And then we'll put pressure on the Democratic Party with female voters to pass a federal amendment."

So Carrie Chapman Catt is busy with the ground game and she's going to try to win over key states. New York, for example, gives women the right to vote in 1917, California, really powerful states. While Alice Paul says, "To heck with that ground game, I'm going to go straight to the president and I'm going to go straight to Congress." And she's busy doing that. And it's really the two strategies that come together. Had it not been for these other states falling and granting women's voting rights, I don't think Alice Paul would have had any success with the federal amendment. But it was never that Carrie Chapman Catt gave up on the federal amendment, she just didn't think going directly for it was doable.

They absolutely are studying history. They're studying other radical movements. They are veterans in political organizing. . . . They come of age in a movement that is fully formed and fully active. . . . They cut their teeth in movement struggles. They're trained by activists before them.

## Generational tension in the suffrage movement

**01:41:17:08**

Oh, so there's this all kinds of generational tension. Carrie Chapman Catt thinks Alice Paul is going to cost them the vote. She thinks that her direct militant strategy is going to alienate people so much that the vote is going to be lost. She doesn't like these new women. She also doesn't like her own leadership being challenged. Alice Paul challenges Carrie Chapman Catt, goes off and forms a new organization. Carrie Chapman Catt is quite convinced, in the kind of self-assured way that many of these suffrage leaders had, that she knows the right way and everyone should fall in line behind her. And if you don't, you are messing up the works. Whereas Alice Paul looks at Carrie Chapman Catt and just thinks "Y'all are a bunch of fuddy duddy old ladies." There's a lot of ageism in this, and you see this over and over again in women's movements. The younger generation thinking the older generation is nothing but a bunch of conservative drag. They're old biddies. They got nothing that we need. You know. We understand the way of the future. And it showcases, in many ways, youthful optimism. And that kind of youthful sense that I know the way to fix the world.

## Women's suffrage in states

**01:42:24:13**

So, when Wilson takes office in 1913, women are already voting in nine states. So, women's suffrage is not something new and untried. It's being practiced, and being experimented with, and being accepted in a whole wide range of places already. There are other states where women have partial suffrage rights. And partial suffrage rights was whereby you didn't get voting on equal terms with men, you got the right to vote only in certain types of elections. So like Illinois for example, gives women presidential suffrage, you can vote for president, but you can't vote for anything else. So by 1920, there are only eight states where women are not voting in some fashion and many where they're voting on the same terms as men. So tons of women are voting before 1920 and tons of women aren't voting after 1920.

## Setting the stage for a federal women's suffrage amendment

**01:43:10:23**

The fact that so many women are voting, that states pull the word "male" from their voting clauses before 1920, I think convinces Americans that civilization is not going to fall if women vote. And I think that sets the stage for making the federal amendment possible. The other thing that makes the federal amendment possible is World War I. Many, many social movements have very successfully leveraged America's claim to democracy abroad while denying it at home. And what Alice Paul does very, very effectively is say, "You're fighting this war, World War I, to make the world safe for democracy, but you're denying it at home." And that becomes a political embarrassment for the United States. And I think that makes the federal amendment possible as well.

## Complexity of the struggle

**01:43:58:03**

I think when we tie these things up in these nice linear narratives that end in happy ending points, we miss all of the complexity that it takes to try to fight for something. We miss all the complexity, all the myriad individual local battles that you have to fight to get someplace and the unbelievable amounts of strategizing it takes. The fact that you might be strategizing in the wrong direction. It's not always clear what the proper path forward is. And that itself can be a real limitation for social movements. What's the best way forward? It can be very hard to know. And of course in the suffrage movement, they had different ideas about what was the best move forward.