



#1 FACTUAL ENTERTAINMENT BRAND

Based on the 2021 Harris poll EquiRank® Equity Score



Bettmann Archive/Getty Images

From a plea to a founding father, to the suffragists to Title IX, to the first female political figures, women have blazed a steady trail towards equality in the United States.

Women's history is full of trailblazers in the fight for equality in the United States. From [Abigail Adams imploring](#) her husband to "remember the ladies" when envisioning a government for the American colonies, to suffragists like [Susan B. Anthony](#) and [Elizabeth Cady Stanton](#) fighting for women's right to vote, to the rise of [feminism](#) and [Hillary Clinton](#) becoming the first female nominee for president by a major political party, American women have long fought for equal footing throughout the nation's history.

And while some glass ceilings have been shattered (see: Title IX), others remain. But progress continues to be made. As Clinton said while accepting her nomination, "When there are no ceilings, the sky's the limit."

Below is a timeline of notable events in U.S. women's history.

Abigail Adams, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth

March 31, 1776: In a letter to her husband, [Founding Father John Adams](#), future first lady [Abigail Adams makes a plea](#) to him and the [Continental Congress](#) to “remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.”

July 19-20, 1848: In the first women’s rights convention organized by women, the [Seneca Falls Convention](#) is held in New York, with 300 attendees, including organizers [Elizabeth Cady Stanton](#) and [Lucretia Mott](#). Sixty-eight women and 32 men (including [Frederick Douglass](#)) sign the Declaration of Sentiments, which sparked decades of activism, eventually leading to the passage of the [19th Amendment](#) granting women the right to vote.

READ MORE: [Why the 19th Amendment Did Not Guarantee All Women the Right to Vote](#)

January 23, 1849: [Elizabeth Blackwell](#) becomes the first woman to graduate from medical school and become a doctor in the United States. Born in Bristol, England, she graduated from Geneva College in New York with the highest grades in her entire class.

May 29, 1851: A former slave turned abolitionist and women’s rights activist, [Sojourner Truth](#) delivers her famous “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech at the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. “And ain’t I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne 13 children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman?”

Dec. 10, 1869: The legislature of the territory of Wyoming [passes](#) America’s first woman suffrage law, granting women the right to vote and hold office. In 1890, [Wyoming](#) is the 44th state admitted to the Union and becomes the first state to allow women the right to vote.

READ MORE: [Early Women’s Rights Activists Wanted Much More than Suffrage](#)

Suffrage Movement, 19th Amendment

May 15, 1869: Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton found the National Woman Suffrage Association, which coordinated the national suffrage movement. In 1890, the group teamed with the American Woman Suffrage Association to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

October 16, 1916: Margaret Sanger opens the first birth control clinic in the United States. Located in Brownsville, Brooklyn, her clinic was deemed illegal under the “Comstock Laws” forbidding birth control, and the clinic was raided on October 26, 1916. When she had to close two additional times due to legal threats, she closed the clinic and eventually founded the American Birth Control League in 1921—the precursor to today’s Planned Parenthood.

April 2, 1917: [Jeannette Rankin](#) of Montana, a longtime activist with the National Woman Suffrage Association, is [sworn in](#) as the first woman elected to Congress as a member of the [House of Representatives](#).

Aug. 18, 1920: Ratification of the 19th Amendment to the [U.S. Constitution](#) is completed, declaring “the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.” It is nicknamed “The Susan B. Anthony Amendment” in honor of her work on behalf of women’s suffrage.

May 20-21, 1932: [Amelia Earhart](#) becomes the first woman, and second pilot ever ([Charles Lindbergh](#) was first) to fly solo nonstop across the Atlantic.

Rosa Parks, Civil Rights, Equal Pay

Dec. 1, 1955: Black seamstress [Rosa Parks](#) refuses to give up her seat to a white man on a bus in Montgomery, Ala. The move helps launch the [civil rights movement](#).

May 9, 1960: The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves the first commercially produced birth control pill in the world, allowing women to control when and if they have children. Margaret Sanger initially commissioned "[the pill](#)" with funding from heiress Katherine McCormick.

June 10, 1963: [President John F. Kennedy](#) signs into law the [Equal Pay Act](#), prohibiting sex-based wage discrimination between men and women performing the same job in the same workplace.

July 2, 1964: President [Lyndon B. Johnson](#) signs the [Civil Rights Act](#) into law; [Title VII](#) bans employment discrimination based on race, religion, national origin or sex.

June 30, 1966: [Betty Friedan](#), author of 1963's *The Feminine Mystique*, helps found the National Organization for Women (NOW), using, as the organization [now states](#), "grassroots activism to promote feminist ideals, lead societal change, eliminate discrimination, and achieve and protect the equal rights of all women and girls in all aspects of social, political, and economic life."

READ MORE: [Six Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement](#)

Title IX, Battle of the Sexes

June 23, 1972: Title IX of the Education Amendments [is signed](#) into law by [President Richard Nixon](#). It states "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

Jan. 22, 1973: In its landmark 7-2 [Roe v. Wade](#) decision, the [U.S. Supreme Court](#) declares that the Constitution protects a woman's legal right to an abortion.

Sept. 20, 1973: In "[The Battle of the Sexes](#)," tennis great [Billie Jean King](#) beats Bobby Riggs in straight sets during an exhibition match aired on primetime TV and drawing 90 million viewers. "I thought it would set us back 50 years if I didn't win that match," King says after the match. "It would ruin the women's [tennis] tour and affect all women's self-esteem."

Sandra Day O'Connor, Sally Ride

July 7, 1981: [Sandra Day O'Connor](#) is [sworn in](#) by [President Ronald Reagan](#) as the first woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court. She retires in 2006, after serving for 24 years.

June 18 1983: Flying on the Space Shuttle Challenger, [Sally Ride](#) becomes the first American woman in space.

July 12, 1984: Democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale [names](#) U.S. Rep. [Geraldine Ferraro](#) (N.Y.) as his running mate, making her the first woman vice president nominee by a major party.

March 12, 1993: Nominated by President [Bill Clinton](#), Janet Reno is sworn in as the first female attorney general of the United States.

Jan. 23, 1997: Also nominated by Clinton, [Madeleine Albright](#) is [sworn in](#) as the nation's first female secretary of state.

Sept. 13, 1994: Clinton signs the [Violence Against Women Act](#) as part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, providing funding for programs that help victims of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, stalking and other gender-related violence.

Nancy Pelosi, Hillary Clinton

Jan. 4, 2007: U.S. [Rep. Nancy Pelosi](#) (D-Calif.) [becomes](#) the first female speaker of the House. In 2019, she reclaims the title, becoming the first lawmaker to hold the office two times in more than 50 years.

Jan. 24, 2013: The U.S. military [removes a ban](#) against women serving [in combat positions](#).

July 26, 2016: [Hillary Clinton](#) becomes the first woman to receive a presidential nomination from a major political party. During her speech at the Democratic National Convention, she says, "Standing here as my mother's daughter, and my daughter's mother, I'm so happy this day has come."

January 20, 2021: [Kamala Harris](#) is sworn in as the first woman and first woman of color vice president of the United States. "While I may be the first woman in this office, I will not be the last," Harris said after getting elected in November.

The daughter of Jamaican and Indian immigrants, Harris served as California's first Black female attorney general and won election to the U.S. Senate in 2016. She made her own unsuccessful presidential bid before being selected by former vice president [Joe Biden](#) as his running mate.

READ MORE: [7 Women Leaders That Were Elected to Highest Office](#)



[GALLERY](#)

7 IMAGES

Sources

Timeline of Legal History of Women in the United States, [National Women's History Alliance](#)

Seneca Falls Convention, [Library of Congress](#)

Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I A Woman?" [Sojourner Truth Memorial](#)

Woman Suffrage, [National Geographic Society](#)

Suffragists Unite: National American Woman Suffrage Association, [National Women's History Museum](#)

A record number of women will be serving in the new Congress. [PEWResearch.org](#).

A List of Firsts for Women In This Year's Midterm Elections. [NPR.org](#).

Citation Information

Article Title

Women's History Milestones: A Timeline

Author

[History.com Editors](#)

Website Name

HISTORY

URL

<https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/womens-history-us-timeline>

Access Date

July 16, 2021

Publisher

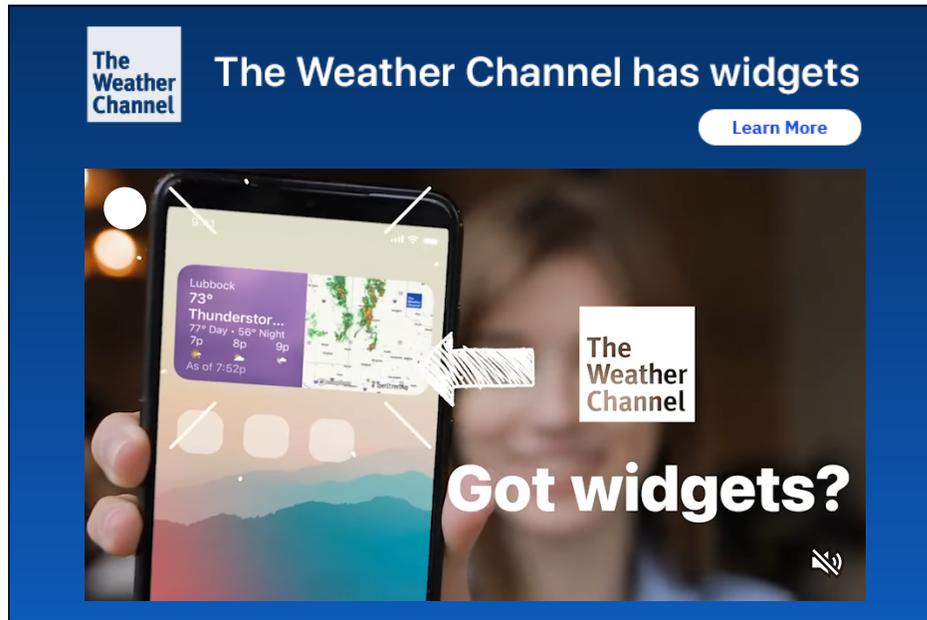
A&E Television Networks

Last Updated

March 22, 2021

Original Published Date

February 26, 2019



FACT CHECK: We strive for accuracy and fairness. But if you see something that doesn't look right, [click here](#) to contact us!

VIDEOS

RELATED CONTENT