

What is Women's Equality Day?

Did you know that Women's Equality Day is Saturday, August 26? It honors the anniversary of women winning the right to vote. It's important to focus on the word "winning" because many women fought, sacrificed, and suffered for this cause. In fact, it took 72 years for women in the United States to win the right to vote. When the 19th Amendment passed in 1920, it was the culmination of a massive, peaceful civil rights movement by women that had its formal beginnings in 1848 at the world's first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York. What would those suffragettes think today if they knew that after all their hard work, only 65 percent of women voted in the last election? Maybe the best way to celebrate Women's Equality Day 2006 will be to decide now to learn as much as you can about the candidates from local to national campaigns and then exercise your right to vote in every election from now on.

The U.S. Congress designated August 26 as "Women's Equality Day" in 1971 at the urging of Rep. Bella Abzug (D-NY) to commemorate the 1920 passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, granting women the right to vote. The purpose of Women's Equality Day goes far beyond honoring that milestone. It calls attention to women's ongoing efforts toward full equality. The passage of the 19th Amendment was followed by the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 that finally made it possible for African American women in the South to vote. Women's Equality Day celebrations across America include a wide range of events from marches, luncheons, and rallies to educational programs.

Why not organize your own Women's Equality Day celebration? Get together and talk about how you can make a difference for current issues and concerns. If you're 18, or will be by November 7th, register to vote. Even if you're under 18, you can still celebrate Women's Equality Day and make a difference! Educate yourself about candidates, learn about issues that are important to you, talk to parents, other family members and friends about why it's so important to vote. Volunteer for an organization that concentrates on issues that are important to you. We can all take time to learn more about the amazing sacrifices and drama that led to winning the right to vote. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucretia Mott were a few of the courageous women who worked hard for women to have the right to vote. These suffragists wanted all kinds of rights for women and believed that voting was the most important because it would lead to other rights. It wasn't easy. At that time, many people thought women weren't as smart as men, and that their husbands should speak for them. They worried that families would fall apart if women got involved in the political process. The suffragists took extreme actions including getting arrested and going on hunger strikes to call attention to their cause. The movie *IRON JAWED ANGELS* tells the story of the determined leadership of young women securing the vote as their basic right as citizens. Read *THE HUNGRY HEART* for insights into the movement for the Equal Rights Amendment

Women's Equality Day is the ideal time to take a close look at women in leadership roles at local, state and national levels. What do you think about progress towards more equality for women? What changes would you like to see? Voting is one way you can make a difference. Happy Women's Equality Day!