

A woman with long, wavy hair is shown from the chest up, looking upwards and to the left. She is holding a large American flag, which is draped over her shoulders and extends across the top of the frame. The flag's red and white stripes are prominent. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

A VOICE OF OUR OWN

LEADING AMERICAN
WOMEN CELEBRATE
THE RIGHT TO VOTE



Edited by Nancy M. Neuman

*Foreword by Becky Cain, President
League of Women Voters
of the United States*

A VOICE OF OUR OWN

LEADING AMERICAN
WOMEN CELEBRATE
THE RIGHT TO VOTE

Edited by Nancy M. Neuman

*Foreword by Becky Cain, President
League of Women Voters of the United States*



JOSSEY-BASS PUBLISHERS
SAN FRANCISCO

Copyright © 1996 by Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 350 Sansome Street,
San Francisco, California 94104.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior
written permission of the publisher.

Substantial discounts on bulk quantities of Jossey-Bass books are available to corpo-
rations, professional associations, and other organizations. For details and discount
information, contact the special sales department at Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers
(415) 433-1740; Fax (800) 605-2665.

For sales outside the United States, please contact your local
Simon & Schuster International Office.

Manufactured in the United States of America.

The chapter titled "Our Collective Challenges" by Donna Shalala is excerpted from a speech
to the National Women's Political Caucus Convention in 1995 and from testimony before the
U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related
Agencies and is not subject to copyright.

Interior design by Paula Schlosser.

Photography credits are on page 265.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A voice of our own: leading American women celebrate the right to
vote / Nancy M. Neuman, editor; foreword by Becky Cain.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-7879-0231-4 (acid-free paper)

1. Women—Suffrage—United States. 2. Women in politics—United
States. I. Neuman, Nancy M., date

JK1896.V65 1996

324.6'23'0973—dc20

96-1349

FIRST EDITION

HB Printing

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*The Nineteenth Amendment
to the Constitution of the
United States of America*

“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.

“Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”

Ratified August 26, 1920

A VOICE OF OUR OWN



FOREWORD



FOR MANY AMERICANS, PARTICIPATION in American democracy has not always been easy—or even possible. For women, more than half the American population, the right to vote was won only after a seventy-two-year struggle.

The essays in *A Voice of Our Own* highlight how far women have come in the struggle for full participation and equality and, at the same time, how much remains to be done. Each of the women contributing to this book offers the reader her unique and often touching perspective on her vision of equality.

The League of Women Voters hopes that women, and men, from all walks of life throughout the United States and worldwide will not only find value in the diverse perspectives offered here but also gain a greater appreciation for the battles that have been fought for many years, in many arenas, with many weapons, to move women toward

the goal of full participation and equality. By reflecting on the lessons of the past and celebrating our successes, we women can gather our individual and collective strengths to build on those hard-fought gains, to finish the battle.

The league thanks Nancy Neuman, League of Women Voters national president from 1986 to 1990 and professor of women in politics, for so ably leading this effort for the league and editing this collection of significant and personal essays.

It has taken many voices with one vision to achieve an ever increasing role for women in American democracy. *A Voice of Our Own* continues that successful tradition, celebrating who we are and where we are and revealing where we must go.

March 1996

Becky Cain

President

*League of Women Voters
of the United States*

PREFACE



AT THE CLOSE OF A CENTURY marked by two significant waves of the movement to gain equality for women in America, this collection of essays is a very personal portrait of that struggle. *A Voice of Our Own: Leading American Women Celebrate the Right to Vote* honors the women who came before us and challenges the ones to come. It eloquently expresses the combined experience and vision of women whose leadership inspires and enlightens American society, its culture, and its institutions.

The League of Women Voters commissioned this book in 1995 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of universal woman suffrage in the United States. Itself a product of the woman suffrage movement, the League of Women Voters invited women leaders with diverse life experiences to write for this enterprise. Each was asked, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary, to reflect upon the impact of women's increased

political participation and equality on American democracy and to engage the next generation of women.

A Voice of Our Own is the result. It is an inspiring conversation about women's lives and women's commitment to improving and nurturing American democracy. It symbolizes the success of the women's movement in the twentieth century and poses questions for the future. *A Voice of Our Own* is the spirited voice of female activism: of young women awakening to public roles, of older women whose battles for equality from the 1930s onward made possible the stories of the women who followed them. The contributors to this book differ in age, background, interests, and political persuasions, but they share at least two important values: that each person has a responsibility to make a difference and that active citizen participation is critical in ensuring that American democracy lives up to its promise of liberty and justice for all.

A Voice of Our Own is important reading, especially for women and students of women in American politics and history. It illustrates women's accomplishments in making democracy work, opening up careers and institutions, and becoming politically involved. Even more remarkable is the intensely honest and personal nature of this collection. These stories provide a glimpse of real women living real lives. They have inspired and touched all of us who worked on the book.

Skeptics who pronounce the women's movement dead or dying should read this book. The women in this book *are* the women's movement.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONTENTS

Long before winning the right to vote in 1920, American women were active in public life. Former first lady Rosalynn Carter, who generously contributed two essays to this book, first describes the efforts of colonial women to influence the drafting of the U.S. Constitution, and archivist Lucinda Robb discusses presuffrage activism of women at the grassroots. We are reminded that the woman suffrage movement grew

out of the antislavery movement in the 1830s and was officially launched in 1848 at the first women's rights convention, held in Seneca Falls, New York.

What did the seventy-two-year struggle for woman suffrage achieve? Antisuffragists and prosuffragists alike oversold the impact of women voting. Like the anti-ERA forces in the 1970s and 1980s, anti-suffragists raised the specter of women's equal political rights as a threat to the sanctity of the home; woman suffrage would destroy the American family. Prosuffrage forces insisted that women voting would transform American politics: suffrage would usher in major social reform and clean up corruption.

But millions of women did not vote, and by the mid 1920s, a backlash set in against the reform agenda of the woman suffrage organizations. Not until 1980, sixty years after suffrage was won, did women vote in equal proportions to men. Seventy-five years after suffrage, as journalist Judy Woodruff points out, a record number of women were serving as elected representatives in the United States Congress and state legislatures. Yet compared to men, the proportion of women elected to public office remains small.

The struggle our forebears made to obtain the right to vote is not forgotten. For politician Lindy Boggs, woman suffrage has been a central influence on her entire life. To singer and songwriter Mary Chapin Carpenter, the vote is the emblem of a woman's independence; it is her "pass to the dance." Feminist writer Rebecca Walker will always remember the tears of a ninety-three-year-old woman registering to vote for the first time because a young person cared enough to ask.

Reporter Gwen Ifill and lawyer Antonia Hernández caution us that winning the right to vote has never been sufficient; guaranteeing voting rights for every citizen, especially members of racial minorities, is a continuing struggle that each generation must fight all over again. And nonprofit executive Sara Meléndez questions whether the vote makes any difference at all to women ravaged by poverty.

Winning the right to vote in 1920 did not achieve equality for women. Alice Paul, head of the National Woman's Party, thought an

equal rights amendment guaranteeing women and men the same rights under the law should be added to the Constitution. In 1923, when Paul's ERA was first introduced in Congress, a coalition of postsuffrage women's organizations opposed it on the grounds the ERA would eradicate newly won reforms that finally succeeded in regulating hours and conditions of work for women.

This dispute about the ERA, which bore no resemblance to the claims made by anti-ERA social conservatives half a century later, continued for many years, until labor laws changed. Even so, historian and educator Elisabeth Griffith contends that the women's movement has been weakened by the enduring legacy of this division (which she attributes to an even older and bitter schism over tactics that occurred in 1916 between militant suffragist Alice Paul and moderate suffragist and founder of the League of Women Voters, Carrie Chapman Catt).

The debate continues whether women should demand the same treatment as men or different treatment in order to achieve full equality. A recent incarnation of this debate emerged after the deadline to ratify the ERA ran out in 1982. This version celebrates women's "difference" as special, perhaps superior, and a necessary ingredient in all aspects of public life. At the same time, the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, which provides identical benefits to women and men and was a priority issue for women's organizations, is a monument to equity, not difference.

In the years between ratification of the woman suffrage amendment in 1920 and the revival of the women's movement in the late 1960s, women and women's organizations did not go dormant. In spite of a backlash against the movement and in spite of the Great Depression and World War II, activist women continued to seek improvement in the status of women.

In the 1930s, Esther Peterson tells us, she learned firsthand about the working conditions women endured in sweatshops, and was motivated to become a labor organizer. Appointed by President Kennedy as assistant secretary of labor and head of the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, Peterson played a major part in enactment of the

Equal Pay Act of 1963, which women's organizations had sought since the end of World War II. Historian Anne Scott's vignette about her own woman suffragist mentors in the League of Women Voters illustrates how involved women were in issues affecting the nation during the war years and the postwar period.

Reporter Sarah McClendon has spent a lifetime working for women's equal treatment. A WAC in World War II, she maintains an active interest in issues affecting the status of women in the military. Businesswoman Barbara Blum begins her essay by recalling the ground-work "Rosie the Riveter" laid during World War II when women performed "men's" jobs, only to be replaced by returning veterans at war's end. Women's roles and opportunities have changed profoundly since then, as Rosalynn Carter explains in her very personal second essay.

A number of pioneers have written essays for this book. Bishop Mary McLeod, the first woman to head an Episcopal diocese in the United States, recounts the pain of discrimination, made all the more hurtful when delivered in the name of religion. Beverly Harvard worked her way up from patrol officer in Atlanta to become the first African American woman to head a police department in the United States. Diane Yu, the first woman, first minority, and youngest person to be appointed general counsel for the State Bar of California, describes growing up in America as the child of Chinese immigrants.

Native American leaders Ada Deer and Wilma Mankiller made history as the first women chiefs of their respective tribes. But Deer's account of Menominee "termination" and Mankiller's description of the suffering Cherokees endured on the Trail of Tears are clear evidence that broken promises are also part of the story of American democracy.

As a new century looms, Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala wonders whether America will renege on its promise to help the poor, the aged, the disadvantaged, and the young. Tennis champion Martina Navratilova yearned to become a U.S. citizen, only to discover that several states would not permit her to apply for citizenship because of her sexual orientation.

Former first lady Betty Ford turned two personal tragedies into op-

portunities for active work on behalf of women suffering from breast cancer and alcoholism. Physician Bernadine Healy, former head of the National Institutes of Health, issues warnings, particularly to young women, about the potential misuse of scientific advances, especially as they affect women's health and reproduction.

A Voice of Our Own is a call to action. Cartoonist Nicole Hollander offers a unique summons to women everywhere. Activist Maria Luisa Mercado, whose mother was an immigrant Mexican farmworker, considers the kind of future she wants for her daughter. College president Nancy Bekavac warns young women not to take equality for granted or underestimate the hard work that lies ahead. First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton hopes future generations will cease to demean women's rights as somehow separate and less important than all human rights. And Professor Condoleezza Rice cautions us not to forget how far we have come, even as we commit ourselves to perfecting American democratic principles.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For me as editor, this project has been a fascinating journey. Along the way, I could not predict exactly what this book would become—it reshaped itself as each contribution arrived. In the end, however, the combined collection was even better than I had dreamed.

The League of Women Voters is very grateful to the contributors for their thoughtful responses and for the time and energy they contributed to this effort. We especially appreciate their trust: each contributor fashioned her piece without knowing what anyone else would produce. Therefore, these chapters, prepared for this book by invitation, do not represent a consensus of any kind.

My personal deep appreciation goes to President Becky Cain and the national board of the League of Women Voters for believing in the project and inviting me to be the editor. I owe many thanks to Monica Sullivan, publications director, and her assistant Irene Carr in the league's national office for their support, advice, and patience.

And to all the women who struggled to win woman suffrage—those whose names we know and those whose names are known only to their daughters and granddaughters—we thank you!

Lewisburg, Pennsylvania
March 1996

Nancy M. Neuman

CONTENTS



FOREWORD xi

BECKY CAIN

PREFACE xiii

NANCY M. NEUMAN

A VOTE OF OUR OWN

My Vote, My Self 3

MARY CHAPIN CARPENTER

Impact 7

GWEN IFILL

Finding America 13

REBECCA WALKER

OUR STRUGGLE FOR FULL CITIZENSHIP

Women Who Shaped the Constitution 21

ROSALYNN CARTER

Lessons from the Woman Suffrage Movement 31

LUCINDA DESHA ROBB

The Politics of Sisterhood 43

ELISABETH GRIFFITH

The Women's Movement Across Generations 51

SARAH MCCLENDON

*American Democracy:
A Puerto Rican Perspective* 63

SARA E. MELÉNDEZ

No More Sounds of Silence 69

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA

*BREAKING THE BARRIERS
OF DISCRIMINATION**A Gift of the Spirit* 75

MARY ADELIA ROSAMOND MCLEOD

Turning the World Rightside Up 87

BEVERLY J. HARVARD

Or You Can Get to Work 93

ADA E. DEER

Gender, Race, and Democracy 103

DIANE C. YU

Cartoon 115

NICOLE HOLLANDER

*FAMILY, WORK, AND COMMUNITY**Women, Work, and Family* 119

JUDY WOODRUFF

Do What Is Right 129

ESTHER PETERSON

My Life with the League of Women Voters 135

ANNE FIROR SCOTT

Keepers of the Culture 141

CORINNE C. "LINDY" BOGGS

My Democracy 147

BARBARA DAVIS BLUM

Challenges and Change in One Woman's Life 157

ROSALYNN CARTER

OUR COLLECTIVE CHALLENGES

Equal Opportunity for Recovery 165

BETTY FORD

Harvard Medicine in the Women's Era 175

BERNADINE HEALY

Our Collective Challenges 187

DONNA SHALALA

Whose Nation Is This? 195

ANTONIA HERNÁNDEZ

FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

A Call to Action 205

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

Entering the Twenty-First Century—

On Our Own Terms 213

WILMA P. MANKILLER

Small Steps, Giant Leaps 225

CONDOLEEZZA RICE

My Daughter's Generation 233

MARIA LUISA MERCADO