**STUDENTS INVESTIGATING PRIMARY SOURCES**

**Suffering Through Suffrage: Arguing Women’s Right to Vote**

Why do the authors oppose woman suffrage?

*A Short Activity for High School U.S. History Courses*

**Benchmark Correlations**

SS.912.A.5.10 – Analyze support for and resistance to civil rights for women, African Americans, Native Americans, and other minorities

**Benchmark Clarification:** Students will recognize and/or examine varying points of view related to the desire to expand and restrict civil rights for women and political, social, economic, religious, and ethnic minorities.

LAFS.1112.RH.2.6 – Evaluate authors’ differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors’ claims, reasoning, and evidence.

**Activity Document**

- Memorial of Alice Wadsworth of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage

**Full Document Citation**

*Memorial of Alice Wadsworth of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage*, 12/11/1917; Petitions and Memorials, 1813-1968; Records of the House of Representatives, Record Group 233; Center for Legislative Archives. National Archives Identifier: 595295.

[https://catalog.archives.gov/id/595295]


**Activity Vocabulary**

- **amendment** – a change to a constitution
- **cajolery** – persuasion by flattery
- **feminism** – the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities
- **futile** – pointless
- **impotent** – lacking power or ability
- **pickets** – a person engaged in a demonstration or strike
- **ratification** – the process of formally approving something
- **repudiate** – to reject or cast off
- **Socialist** – a person who believes in a form of government where major industries are owned and controlled by the government rather than by individual people and companies
- **suffrage** – the right to vote

**Teacher Note:** This activity serves as a connection between SS.912.A.3.2: Examine the social, political, and economic causes, course, and consequences of the Second Industrial Revolution that began in the late 19th century; Benchmark Clarification: Students will explain the impact of social change and reform movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and SS.912.A.5.10; Benchmark Clarification 1.
1. Project and distribute a copy of “Memorial of Alice Wadsworth of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage Letter.” Remind students of the definition of suffrage (the right to vote) and that suffrage is a civil rights issue.

2. Direct students to visually scan both pages of the document and identify three items that stand out to them in the document. (Examples could include: underlined words, column of names, letter, use of one’s husband’s name, date, location, signature, printed on letterhead.)

3. Have a few students share out.

4. Explain to students the following points about the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage: the name of the organization states their view on woman suffrage, all of the names on the letter are women’s names, it was a national organization, and the letter has underlined text to emphasize points. Explain to students that the top paragraph of the letter is background information on the platform of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage.

5. Introduce the guiding question: Why do the authors oppose woman suffrage?

6. Explain to students that they will listen and follow along while the first page of the letter is read aloud. They will underline or mark the text to show evidence they hear that argues against woman suffrage. **Teacher Note:** Choose a read aloud strategy that works for your students; for additional assistance visit the ReadWriteThink Strategy Guide for ideas. Use the Activity Vocabulary table to address any unfamiliar terms.

7. Have a few students share out some of the evidence they marked to identify the argument. Some examples could include:
   - destroys the right of the people to vote on the question of woman suffrage;
   - allows woman suffrage to be forced on unwilling States by the Legislatures of other States;
   - This proposal is a violation of the present Constitution of the United States

8. Direct students to respond to the guiding question in writing, using the evidence they have already identified from the text: Why do the authors oppose woman suffrage? Remind students to state their position on the guiding question then provide evidence from the letter to support their response.

**Enrichment Suggestion** – Complete the same process for a pro woman suffrage source, then compare and contrast the views in both the pro and anti woman suffrage sources. Evaluate each author’s point of view based on his or her claims, reasoning and evidence. An example pro-suffrage document is listed below:

- Petition from Carrie Chapman Catt of the National American Woman Suffrage Association asking that a Committee on Woman Suffrage be appointed in the House of Representatives as in the Senate, 4/10/1917; Petitions and Memorials, 1813-1968; Records of the House of Representatives, Record Group 233; Center for Legislative Archives. National Archives Identifier: 306662 [https://catalog.archives.gov/id/306662]
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OPPOSED TO WOMAN SUFFRAGE

President, Mrs. JAS. W. WADSWORTH, Jr.,
Washington, D. C.

Secretary, Mrs. ROBERT LANSING,
Washington, D. C.

Treasurer, Mission ANN SQUIRE,
Washington, D. C.

PLATFORM—THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OPPOSED TO WOMAN SUFFRAGE—Stands for HOME and NATIONAL DEFENSE against Woman Suffrage, Feminism and Socialism. For MAN-POWER in Government, believing that Democracy must be STRONG to be SAFE. For the PRESERVATION of the established foundations of the American Republic as a Model for the World. For ENFORCEMENT of the CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT of each State to settle the question of Woman Suffrage by itself. For EFFICIENCY and Progress, without Waste and Duplication in Government. For the CONSERVATION of the best Womanhood of all conditions and stations of life. For the UNION of Women of all classes and creeds along NON-PARTISAN lines, so that the interests of Womanhood, Childhood and Civilization may be advanced FREE from the strife and division of political parties and parleys. For the retention of the best IDEALS of the past, adapted to the advantages and opportunities given to women under modern conditions, so that the FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES of Morality, of Patriotism and of World Progress may be more firmly established in the present and future generations.

December 11, 1917.

Hon. CASA. E. FULLER, M. C.
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

Your attention is invited to the following facts:

1. The proposed Federal suffrage amendment positively destroys the right of the people to vote on the question of woman suffrage, as provided for in their State Constitutions, and allows woman suffrage to be forced on unwilling States by the Legislatures of other States.

2. This proposal is a violation of the present Constitution of the United States, which provides that

"The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

3. The people, through their State Constitutions, ratified by popular vote, have reserved the right to adopt or withhold woman suffrage by popular vote.

4. This proposal asks you to rob the people of this right; to repudiate your party platform which recognizes the right of each State to settle this question for itself by popular vote.

Every principle of patriotism, every ideal of self-government, and your oath to defend the Constitution, urges you to vote against the attempt to obtain woman suffrage in spite of the expressed will of the people.

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Milwaukee, Wis.
Moreover, this amendment, in time of war, would immediately open up a new nation-wide suffrage campaign in forty-eight States to secure its ratification.

It would give suffragists and socialists the opportunity to annoy and pester every Legislator in the United States until a majority of the men in thirty-six Legislatures surrendered their judgment and principles to political threats and cajolery.

It would mean that no Legislature in the United States could meet without being surrounded by suffrage pickets.

It would be an official endorsement of nagging as a national policy.

It would give every radical woman the right to believe that she could get any law she wanted by "pester-ing" her City Council, her Legislature, her Congressman or her President - no matter how the people voted, nor what national crisis existed. And if feminism can be put through by pestering, regardless of the will of the people, so can pacifism, socialism and other isms.

Woman suffrage has been voted upon nineteen times in the last five years. Sixteen times it was defeated by popular vote.

Three times, (in Montana, Nevada and New York) it carried as the direct result of the increased socialist vote. This fact has been demonstrated mathematically.

Will you not defend the Constitution, your party platform and the rights of the people, rather than surrender to the futile threats and impotent dictation of the Woman Suffrage Machine and the Socialists, who are seeking this amendment precisely because they are not strong enough to carry woman suffrage in the majority of the States by popular vote?

Respectfully yours,

[Signature]

President.