

Voting Rights for All

A quote from Thomas Jefferson's Inaugural Address, "Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political..." reinforces the issue that only men had the right to vote until the early part of the 20th Century. "Equal and exact justice" was meant for men and did not include women. It seems our forefathers and founders of the Constitution may have overlooked this passage from the Bible, in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Knowing that our Constitution was, indeed, inspired by the words in the Bible it seems men remained hypocritical pertaining to certain equalities. This brings to mind the Suffragette movement which began in 1857 in the State of Vermont. The movement produced courageous, dedicated women who were determined to get an amendment added to the Vermont Constitution. These women weathered a long and difficult struggle to obtain their goal.

The Bible, interpreted properly, teaches us the fundamental equality of men and women, as reflected in the Galatians 3:28 verses, based on the teachings of scripture. Essentially, in Genesis, woman was not created from man's feet so that man would be over her, or was she created from man's head so that she would be over him, but from his rib that they would be equal. As a result, the woman's movement had these words to help support their cause.

One of these women, Clarisse Nichols, a member of the Suffragettes, was a writer and a newspaper woman in Vermont. As was depicted in her portrayal in the movie, *Freedom and Unity*, it was not until she began to give public lectures that she



found a perfect format to match her calling. In her speeches, she pointed out that women are citizens and should have the right to vote in local elections. Her position was that a new amendment be written to the Vermont Constitution that would guarantee women the right to vote. Clarisse was determined to get the message across that having the right to vote would not remain permanent. Only an amendment to the Vermont Constitution would ensure this right for women. According to the movie, *Freedom and Unity* filmed in 2008, Clarisse's strife included being heckled by members of the Vermont Senate. During one of Clarisse's closing speeches, she was interrupted by one of the Senate members. He had the audacity to ridicule her by saying, "Eve was not the last woman to be led astray." He referred to her speech as a charade and was "puffed up pride and free love." This type of chauvinist behavior and cynical statements were common among the men in the Senate and shows how difficult it would be for women to get what they wanted. During the Civil War, which lasted from 1861-1864, the number of men killed exceeded the number of women that were living at that time. As a result, women steadily increased in numbers by a large margin. In 1870, the statewide Constitutional Convention was held to vote on giving women the right to vote. The final vote was 255 to 1.

In 1907, after 50 years of small victories, Vermont became the first state in New England where women, finally, won the right to vote in local elections. Eventually, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gave all women the right to vote. Even though the right to vote was given to women, we all need to remain vigilant in our efforts to preserve that privilege. In the fall of 2012, before President Obama's re-election there were attempted restrictions of voting rights. For instance, in the state of Florida, the voting hours were shortened due to political intervention. The reason for this was the Governor of Florida who was a republican cut in half the number of hours at the polls. The opposing party was targeted in these Democratic polling areas. A lesson should be learned as a result of this kind of action. This incident is a reminder that we all need to pay attention to this type of scheming and deceptive practices by a political party. Women and men alike need to pay close attention to their local voting area centers. A way to make certain that this type of activity does not take place would be for both women and men to write to their Congressmen. Another source would be to enact a new bill, and make it illegal to tamper with voting rights. Also, petitions can be started and circulated throughout the country via the Internet. Technology is a way of getting the word out to all citizens, by means of blogs, Twitter, and YouTube videos. Preserving the right to vote for all is critical. Overseeing the process therefore is essential to avoid corruption by either political party.

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