

The Suffragist Legacy



In the Rotunda of the United States Capitol, surrounded by sculptures of leading men in American history, an unfinished statue was displayed in 1921. It honored three women with Massachusetts connections who were instrumental in securing the vote for women, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony. The statue was unfinished by design, perhaps signifying an unfinished agenda, perhaps leaving room someday for the first woman President.



The "Portrait Monument" by Adelaide Johnson

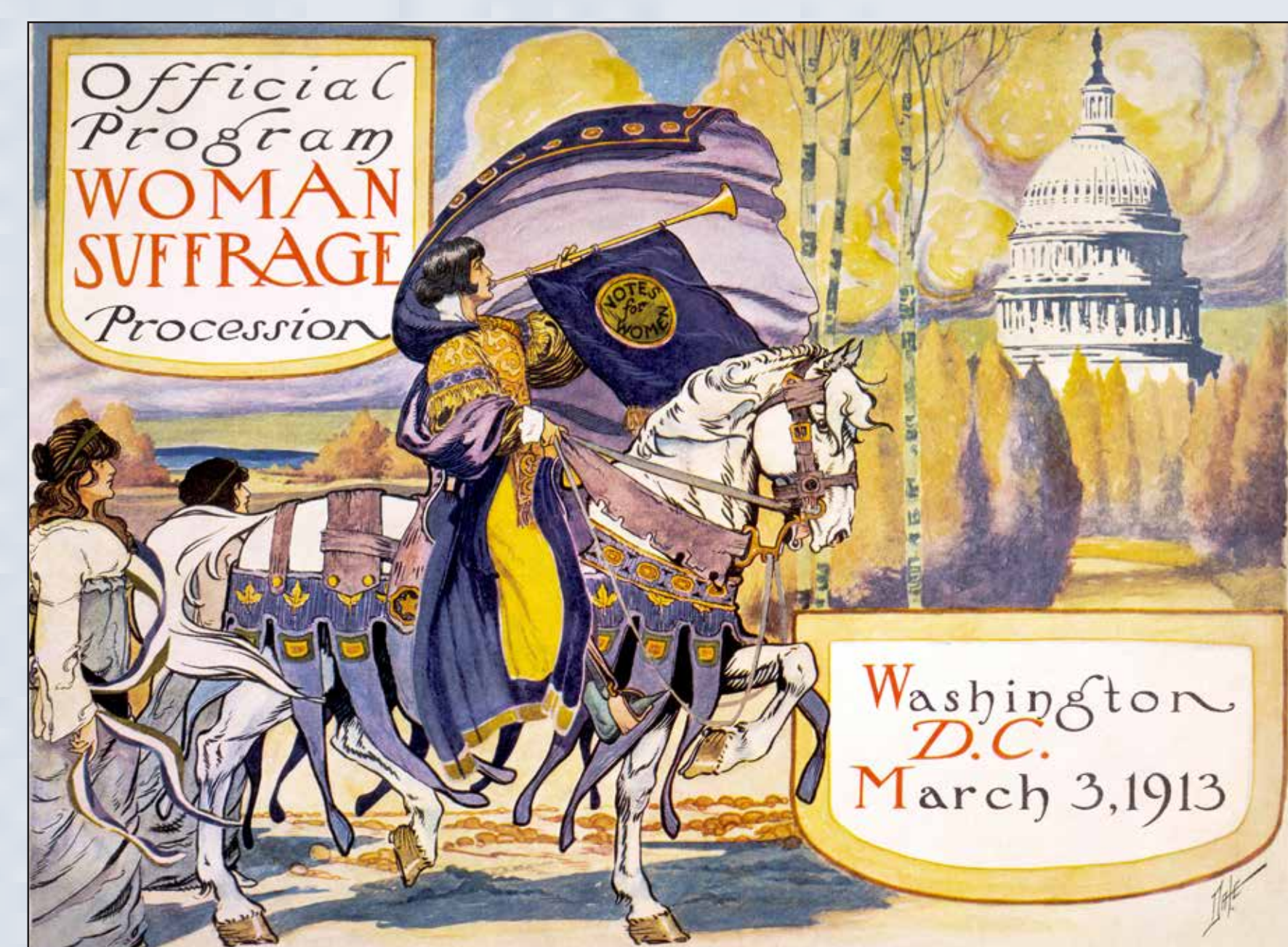
Two days later the statue was removed to the Capitol basement. Enfranchising more than half the population was seen as an insignificant milestone by many members of Congress.

Of the great reform movements in American history, the struggle for women's suffrage was often overlooked. Even today it may be assumed that the idea of "votes for women" was not controversial by the twentieth century. In fact winning the vote required a prolonged struggle against determined resistance over several generations.

Like any great movement there were strong personalities and differences of opinion on tactics. Some favored state by state efforts, others pursued a federal amendment. Suffragist parades introduced an inspiring theatrical quality to the movement. Eventually frustration led to dramatic action—picketing the White House and protesting President Woodrow Wilson's visit to Massachusetts in 1919.

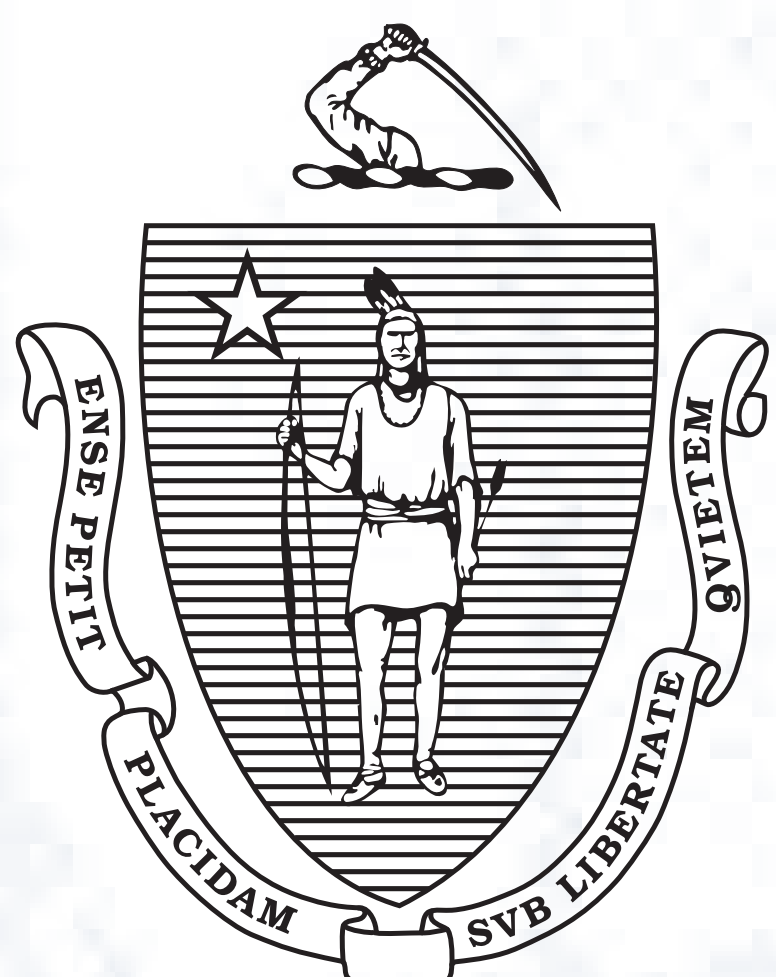
In Washington D.C. mobs attacked suffragists as police stepped aside. Some activists were imprisoned, injured in jail, and force fed. Finally, in 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified guaranteeing women the right to vote.

The statue of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony was returned to the Capitol Rotunda in 1996. The story of the struggle for women's suffrage is also taking its place among the great themes in American history.



The Suffrage Centennial Display Panel Project

Anticipating the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in 2020, the office of Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin in partnership with the Women's Suffrage Celebration Coalition of Massachusetts will present a "suffragist of the month," at the Commonwealth Museum in each of the 36 months leading to the anniversary.



William Francis Galvin
Secretary of the Commonwealth

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Women's Suffrage Celebration
Coalition of Massachusetts