



# Toward a Universal Suffrage: African American Women in Iowa and the Vote for All

## Questions to Consider

In what ways were African American women discriminated against in the fight for suffrage?

- Many suffrage organizations excluded African American women from membership (though the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association was open to all, regardless of gender or race, from its 1870 founding).
- Suffrage organizations often promoted segregation rhetoric.
- Suffrage organizations often failed to address issues critical to African American women.

How did African American women in Iowa (and across the country) organize to fight for women's suffrage?

- Clubs
  - Iowa Federation of Colored Women's Club
  - Colored Women's Suffrage Club
  - Des Moines Mary Church Terrell Club
  - Iowa branch of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs
- Order of the Eastern Star and other African American sororities
- Des Moines League of Colored Women Voters

What other causes did African American suffragists advocate for?

- Health care
- Education (including housing for African American students at colleges and universities)
- Social services
- Civics

When did African American women in Iowa get the right to vote?

- April 1894 – All tax-paying Iowa women are granted partial suffrage, allowing them to vote on bond issues and tax increases for schools and municipalities.
- April 1919 – All Iowa women are granted the right to vote in presidential elections.
- August 26, 1920 – All Iowa women are fully enfranchised by the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

What federal legislation finally enfranchised all African American citizens in the United States?

- The Voting Rights Act of 1965, which prohibited literacy tests and other discriminatory practices that kept people of color from voting and political participation in many southern states.

What is the significance of the U.S. Supreme Court's 2013 *Shelby v. Holder* decision?

- It undermined the U.S. Justice Department's ability to review proposed changes to election laws in certain jurisdictions to ensure they do not have discriminatory effects, opening the door for states to pass laws that discriminate against racial and ethnic minorities and the poor, such as voter ID laws, aggressive purging of voter rolls and shortening/eliminating early voting periods.

Who were some of the African American leaders of the suffrage movement in Iowa? Name one leader and one thing you found most interesting about her.

## Additional Resources

Iowa Civil Rights Commission. (2015). *Civil rights: Celebrating 50 years of higher quality through equality*. <https://icrc.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2016/Civil%20Rights%20Toolkit%20updated.pdf>.

Iowa Department of Human Rights. *Iowa women's hall of fame*. <https://humanrights.iowa.gov/cas/icsw/events-recognition/iowa-womens-hall-fame>

Iowa Equal Suffrage Association documents and reports, 1910s. <http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/suffrage/id/3108/rec/13>

*Iowa State Bystander*. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025186/>

Noun, L. R. (1986). *Strong-minded women: The emergence of the woman suffrage movement in Iowa*. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State Press.

State Historical Society of Iowa. *The Annals of Iowa*. <https://ir.uiowa.edu/annals-of-iowa>

University of Iowa Libraries Iowa Women's Archives. *Women's suffrage in Iowa: A digital collection*. <https://www.lib.uiowa.edu/iwa/suffrage>

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