

Louisiana

1879—After a dying woman willed St. Anna's Asylum \$1,000, a court invalidated her will because female witnesses could not witness legal papers in the state. An infuriated Caroline Merrick, who served on the asylum's board, alongside other women's rights activists, presented a petition of 400 signatures to the Louisiana Constitutional Convention. The Convention granted women partial suffrage rights in school elections.

1892—Merrick founded Louisiana's first suffrage organization, known as the Portia Club.

1894—Sylvanie Williams founded the Phillis Wheatley Club in New Orleans, which was affiliated with the National Association for Colored Women. The groups advocated for Black women's voting rights and hosted luminaries like Susan B. Anthony to speak to their members after Black women were barred from the 1903 National Association of Woman Suffrage convention in New Orleans.

1895—The Louisiana Woman Suffrage Association (LWSA) elected Merrick as its president.

1898—Merrick and Kate Gordon, who had founded the Equal Rights for All Club (ERA Club) in New Orleans, advocated to the Louisiana Constitutional Convention Suffrage Committee for an amendment granting women full suffrage. Both the LWSA and the ERA Club explicitly excluded Black women, and their members voiced support for white supremacy.*

1914—After years of campaigning, suffragists convinced the legislature to consider a suffrage bill. The House passed the bill, but it failed in the Senate.

The LWSA pressured the legislature to reconsider suffrage, this time via a public referendum. New Orleans Mayor Martin Behrman spoke out against the referendum, and on November 5, 1918, the referendum failed.

1920—The legislature declined to ratify the 19th Amendment and defeated a separate suffrage amendment to the state constitution a month later.

June 11, 1970—Louisiana ratified the 19th Amendment.**

* Gordon staunchly opposed the federal amendment, believing it violated states' rights, and teamed up with anti-suffragists to oppose its passage.

**Jim Crow laws were enforced in Louisiana until passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and Black women were not able to vote post-1920.

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