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## Women Votes- Today and Yesterday

By Stephanie Davis Smith, Tuesday, August 24, 2010

Kate Kelly is a historian on the women's suffrage movement. Her site, [AmericaComesAlive.com](http://AmericaComesAlive.com) is all about bringing the little stories in history to life. I asked her to tell me a remarkable story from the suffragist movement.

"One of my favorite stories is about the 'Golden Lane of Silence' formed by women in 1916 during the Democratic Party Convention on June 14, 1916. Apparently when the convention opened in St. Louis, 7,000 women from across the United States lined the streets along the route that the delegates would take on their way to the Coliseum," says Kate. "They said not a word as the delegates passed by. This was the 'golden lane of silence.'"



Magnify

Can you imagine 7,000 women all in white with yellow sashes and yellow parasols just standing there? I wonder if MLK Jr. learned the art of non-violent demonstration from these ladies. "Later, when word leaked out that suffrage had been added to the platform, one yellow parasol began to wave followed by another and another," says Kate. "A contemporary writer compared it to a 'sea of golden poppies...' waving in the wind."

What an incredible visual display that must have been. Kate says, "While women have made a great deal of progress over the last century, we still need the passage of an equal rights amendment to guarantee equality under the law. And remember that while women represent 51 percent of the population, consider these statistics gathered by the YWCA:

- Women have made progress in entering occupations predominantly held by men; however, as of March 2001, the majority of women in the workplace were still in traditional "female" occupations, i.e., 79 percent of administrative support workers were female.

- There is still disparity in pay: In 2003, the median income of full-time, year round U.S. workers was \$41,520 for men and \$31,663 for women. -During retirement, women's median annual Social Security benefits reach only 70% of men's benefits.

-Women make up only 1.2% of Fortune 500 CEOs and hold only about 15% of the seats in Congress." Kate attended Smith College where it was reinforced that "women can do anything they want if they set their minds to it."

She was hired to write a social history of American presidential election days called *Election Day: An American Holiday in American History*. She became interested in what was happening to women during the country's progress. She learned that the 1956 presidential election was the first election where the winning candidate, Dwight D. Eisenhower, was greatly aided by receiving a significant bloc of votes from women.

"The proportion of women voting for Ike was six percent higher than the proportion of votes the candidate gained from men." Kate sites that "in 1964 more women voted than men for the first time. Since that time, women voters regularly outnumber men.

Women's votes were a significant factor in Barack Obama's victory in 2008 as well, with a sizable gender gap evident in the election results. Women strongly preferred Obama to Senator John McCain (56 percent for Obama, 43 percent for McCain), unlike men, who split their votes about evenly for the two presidential candidates (49 percent for Obama, 48 percent for McCain)."

What would a world look like if women were never given the 19th amendment? "Young people today, who have seen women work in nontraditional jobs, lead major social movements, and hold high public office, cannot begin to envision a world where women were so degraded that they could not vote," says Kate.

"The anniversary reminds me of all that is left to be done, and I cannot help but hope that talking about suffrage and the anniversary will empower women to take on whatever causes most interest them. Our country was built by individuals who worked hard for what they believed in, and we must continue that legacy."

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