

THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

Biography

One important movement of the Progressive Era was the campaign for women's suffrage. In the 1890s, Carrie Chapman Catt began rising through the ranks of the suffrage movement and was elected president of the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1900. In this role, Catt campaigned across the United States, reaching out to women of many backgrounds and urging them to demand the right to vote. ♦ *As you read, think about the challenges that Catt faced as she worked to gain women's suffrage. Refer to the passage entitled "Catt Takes Charge of the Movement" in Section 2 of your textbook for more information on Catt's work with and leadership of NAWSA. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Carrie Chapman Catt

(1859–1947)

Carrie Chapman Catt said that one of the most influential moments of her life came when she was 13 years old. Catt asked her mother why she was not getting dressed to go cast her vote in an important election with Catt's father. Both parents laughed and explained that women were not allowed to vote. This inequality angered young Catt.

When Catt graduated from high school, she taught school until she had earned enough money to attend college. In 1880, she graduated from Iowa State Agricultural College, the only woman in her class, and went on to become a school principal and superintendent. In 1885, she married newspaper editor Leo Chapman and began writing columns on women's rights for his newspaper, *the Mason City Republican*. Following Chapman's death in 1886, Catt dedicated her time to organizing the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association.

Over the next decade, Catt remarried and continued to devote her time to the

cause of women's suffrage. Her dedication led other women to elect her to succeed Susan B. Anthony as president of NAWSA. Catt used her position to focus the efforts of women across the nation on fighting for suffrage at both the state and national levels. She traveled frequently, training other women to campaign, appealing to the public for support, and lobbying legislators.

In the early 1900s, several state governments began granting women suffrage, and Catt continued to push for a constitutional amendment. In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment, guaranteeing women the right to vote, was ratified. After this victory, Catt renamed NAWSA, which became known as the League of Women Voters, and

began to lobby on behalf of other progressive causes. Today, the League of Women Voters continues to encourage citizen participation in government and to work for reform.



Carrie Chapman Catt,
National Archives and
Records Administration

Questions to Think About

1. What early event influenced Catt's outlook on women's suffrage?
2. In what ways did Catt focus efforts to gain women's suffrage?
3. **Draw Inferences** How might Catt's experiences as an educator have helped her as a leader of the women's suffrage movement?