

Political theories about suffrage

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In this oral history excerpt, Rosamonde Boyd and her interviewer share some of their theories as to why women achieved suffrage in 1920. In their conversation they discuss that some women were too disinterested or lethargic to press for suffrage. They also explore the effects of the Civil War, World War I, and World War II on women and issues of equality. Boyd asserts that President Woodrow Wilson gave women the right to vote for intellectual reasons rather than political reasons.

Audio

File:

Duration: 2:40

Transcript:

Rosamonde R. Boyd: Well, I know that the women up here were not really too eager to push in this direction although they favored the franchise of women and they would assume responsibility when it came. That is, the leadership. I think the rest of the women, were just lethargic and maybe disinterested.

Constance Myers: This is probably the case throughout the United States. You had a small handful of leaders that pushed hard for this.

Rosamonde R. Boyd: Yes, I think so. And I don't think the South was the area that really put it across at all, because women were rather conservative. This was where they were placed on a pedestal and kept there a longer period of time than elsewhere. Although, southern women during the Civil War had to assume heavy responsibilities and be mother and father both, to their families.

Constance Myers: Probably to some extent during World War I too, yes.

Rosamonde R. Boyd: I think, in the nation as a whole, that women assumed such an important role in World War I that the franchise was a reward for their community service and their national service. I don't think it could have been delayed much longer after women had played such a significant role in the War. Keeping the home fires burning and doing the necessary work for the troops that could be done at home and having to take over more male roles, more vocational and occupational positions that men previously had, proved their ability and equality.

Constance Myers: I wonder if you think that President Wilson viewed it in this light or if he was to some extent pressured by the women who appeared at the White House and picketed and sent him telegrams?

Rosamonde R. Boyd: I wouldn't think that President Wilson would be influenced by any public demonstrations.

Constance Myers: You wouldn't think so?

Rosamonde R. Boyd: No, I wouldn't. I think his determination for everything was the result of intellectually facing the

problems and the issues.

Constance Myers: Couldn't it have been a matter of political reality given the fact that some women did indeed have the vote? And some states were crucial in which women had received the vote on the state basis. And he was looking ahead to the 1920 election, not knowing that he would be so ill.

Rosamonde R. Boyd: I think that President Wilson, although a political scientist and a professor for many years, was not that much of a politician. No, I really don't.

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