

“Be a Good Boy”: Harry Burn’s Conflicts and  
Compromises with the Passing of the Nineteenth  
Amendment

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**Thesis Statement**

The passing of the Nineteenth Amendment was an incredible step in American history. But with the idea of women being able to vote, conflict arose. Women can now vote all because of one change of heart, one letter from Febb Ensminger Burn, and one split second compromise of Harry Burn's decision. These two amazing people do not get nearly the amount of recognition they deserve to this day, but many people do not even know of this history changing occurrence.

### **Before The Big Decision**

Women were not treated very well before the Nineteenth Amendment was passed. Women were labeled as second class citizens. They were also thought by men to be, "Weak, incapable of complex thought and ruled by their emotions."<sup>1</sup> While on the other hand men were thought to be the total opposite they were, "Strong, complex thinkers and in control of their emotions."<sup>2</sup> It was considered to be a woman's duty to take care of the home and the children and always support their husband's political views and ideas even if they disagreed.<sup>3</sup> If a couple where to get divorced the man always won the children even though it was supposed to be the woman's job to take care of the children. Suffragists picketed at the White House to try to gain attention because in this battle, attention meant greater chance of winning. Alice Paul was the leader of the National Woman's Party and she was sentenced to seven months in jail<sup>4</sup> after picketing with the Suffragists at the White House. At first they decided to stick her

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<sup>1</sup> Nardo, Don. *The Split History of the Women's Suffrage Movement, Suffragists' Perspective ;: The Split History of the Women's Suffrage Movement, Anti-Suffragists' Perspective*. Compass Point, 2014. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Nardo, Don. *The Split History of the Women's Suffrage Movement, Suffragists' Perspective ;: The Split History of the Women's Suffrage Movement, Anti-Suffragists' Perspective*. Compass Point, 2014. 24-25.

with the psychiatric inmates, hoping to embarrass her.<sup>5</sup> But Alice would not be embarrassed. They moved her in with the other female inmates. Some of which were Suffragists who were also locked up for protesting and picketing at the White House. Alice Paul soon decided to go on a hunger strike to show even though she may be in jail that she is still resisting and doing what she can to gain attention for the Women's Rights Movement. Since she would not eat, they forcibly shoved a tube down her throat that lead into her stomach and forced her to eat. This happened multiple times a day for weeks. The head official of the prison instructed forty to fifty guards to beat the inmates on November, 15, 1917. The guards beat them with clubs, choked them, kicked them and did many more abusive actions toward them. They even beat a woman who was in her seventies. They beat another woman until she suffered a heart attack and soon died. After the press released this information many Americans joined the fight on the Suffragist side. This unfortunate event is known as the Night Of Terror.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Beginning Of The Movement**

Harry T. Burn cast the deciding vote for the Nineteenth Amendment. He was originally against suffrage and did not want the Nineteenth Amendment to pass.<sup>7</sup> He was born into McMinn county, Tennessee which is known as a conservative county<sup>8</sup>. The women's suffrage movement was in progress for nearly a hundred years. The most recognized first action of the women's suffrage movement was The Seneca Falls

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 25-27

<sup>7</sup> Bomboy, Scott. "The Vote That Led to the 19th Amendment." *National Constitution Center – Constitutioncenter.org*, National Constituion Center, 18 Aug. 2017, [constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote](http://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote)

<sup>8</sup>Cohen, Jennie. "The Mother Who Saved Suffrage: Passing the 19th Amendment." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 16 Aug. 2010, [www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment](http://www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment).

Convention of 1848.<sup>9</sup> This convention was held in the little Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, New York. The Seneca Falls convention started at 10 a.m. on Thursday, July 19th, 1848 and Friday, July 20th, 1848.<sup>10</sup> On the first day men were not supposed to show up, but after a conversation between Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frederick Douglass and Lucretia Mott they let the men in. Two hundred and fifty women showed up and forty men showed up to the convention.<sup>11</sup> But before the first event to start the movement had to happen the people behind the event had to meet somehow right? Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott first met in 1840 while they were attending the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, England.<sup>12</sup> They decided to team up because they felt the same about the issue of women not being able to vote. In 1878 Susan B. Anthony introduced the suffrage amendment to the Senate.<sup>13</sup> This amendment soon became known as the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. The Susan B. Anthony Amendment was sent to the Senate to be passed but they refused to do so. The Suffragists continued to submit it to the Senate but they repeatedly refused. Until finally in 1919 President Woodrow Wilson started supporting the Susan B. Anthony Amendment being passed. On Sunday, June 4th, 1919 the Susan B. Anthony Amendment passed in the Senate by 56-25 votes.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Process Of Passing The Amendment**

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<sup>9</sup> Nardo, Don. *The Split History of the Women's Suffrage Movement, Suffragists' Perspective :: The Split History of the Women's Suffrage Movement, Anti-Suffragists' Perspective*. Compass Point, 2014. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Nardo, Don. *The Split History of the Women's Suffrage Movement, Suffragists' Perspective :: The Split History of the Women's Suffrage Movement, Anti-Suffragists' Perspective*. Compass Point, 2014. 27-28.

The Nineteenth Amendment is stated as this in the U.S Constitution, “[T]he right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.”<sup>15</sup> But we did not have that amendment back before 1920 and many women were not treated fairly or equally and were certainly not allowed to vote. Thirty-six states needed to ratify the proposition but only thirty-five states ratified the proposal for the amendment. Connecticut, Vermont, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Florida could still possibly pass the amendment but Connecticut, Vermont, North Carolina and Florida decided they would not even consider resolution.<sup>16</sup> Tennessee was the Suffragists last hope and they decided to take on the challenge.<sup>17</sup> The amendment proposal soared through the Tennessee Senate but the House of Representatives was a different story. First the members of the House had to vote whether or not they wanted to continue on to vote to either pass or reject the proposal. The vote passed so Tennessee would take on the proposal for the Nineteenth Amendment. Now Anti-Suffragists and Suffragists alike camped out around the Tennessee State Capitol and inside of it’s lobby,<sup>18</sup> waiting intently for the day the vote would be passed and the fate of the Suffragists dreams. A few days later was the morning when they were supposed to vote on whether to pass or dismiss The Nineteenth Amendment. Harry Burn then received a letter from his mother Febb

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<sup>15</sup> "The Constitution of the United States," Amendment 19.

<sup>16</sup> Bomboy, Scott. "The Vote That Led to the 19th Amendment." *National Constitution Center – Constitutioncenter.org*, National Constitution Center, 18 Aug. 2017, [constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote](http://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote)

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, Jennie. "The Mother Who Saved Suffrage: Passing the 19th Amendment." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 16 Aug. 2010, [www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment](http://www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment).

<sup>18</sup> Cohen, Jennie. "The Mother Who Saved Suffrage: Passing the 19th Amendment." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 16 Aug. 2010, [www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment](http://www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment).

Ensminger Burn. In the letter Febb said, “Hurrah, and vote for suffrage! Don’t keep them in doubt. I notice some of the speeches against. They were bitter. I have been watching to see how you stood, but have not noticed anything yet.”<sup>19</sup> This is one thing Miss Febb wrote in the eight page letter. She had also wrote, “Be a good boy and help Mrs. Catt put the ‘rat’ in ratification.”<sup>20</sup> Which was an endorsement for the Suffragist leader Catt Chapman. It was obvious to Harry Burn what side his mother wanted him to vote for. But he didn’t know if the side his mother wanted him to vote for was right. But at the same time he didn’t know if the side he wanted to vote for was right. So with his red rose on his lapel signifying he was an Anti-Suffragist<sup>21</sup> he sat and thought for a while. During the roll call Turner Banks switched to the Anti-Suffragist side leaving the vote deadlocked.<sup>22</sup> During the roll call Harry Burn decided to state that he was still on the Anti-Suffragist side.<sup>23</sup> So they continued to table the amendment. They proceeded to go around the room and each member declared, “Aye” being to pass and, “Nay” being to reject the proposal of the amendment and not pass it. At last it came to Harry Burn and deep inside his heart he knew what was right. So with his red rose on his lapel and the letter from his mother hidden away inside his suit jacket, to end the nearly hundred year

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Bomboy, Scott. “The Vote That Led to the 19th Amendment.” *National Constitution Center* – *Constitutioncenter.org*, National Constitution Center, 18 Aug. 2017, [constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote](http://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote)

<sup>23</sup> Cohen, Jennie. “The Mother Who Saved Suffrage: Passing the 19th Amendment.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 16 Aug. 2010, [www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment](http://www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment).

battle for suffrage Harry Burn clearly said, “Aye”.<sup>24</sup> The Nineteenth Amendment was passed.

### **First Reactions to Harry’s Decision**

Catt Chapman wrote in her 1923 book *Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement*, “He also invoked the fury of his red rose-carrying peers while presumably avoiding that of his mother—which may very well have been the more daunting of the two.”<sup>25</sup> Many of the Anti-Suffragists were furious about how he betrayed them. Just after Harry Burn cast his vote he fled to the attic of the Tennessee State Capitol and stayed there until the seething mobs of Anti-Suffragists downstairs dispersed. Some people even say that he crept onto a third floor ledge to escape a enraged mob of Anti-Suffragist lawmakers that were threatening to beat him up.<sup>26</sup> The amendment was passed soon after when Harry Burn cast his vote for the Nineteenth Amendment on August 18th, 1920. Lawmakers in Tennessee had even tried to delay the state's official approval, but on August 26th, 1920, the official documents arrived in Washington D.C. and they were quietly signed by the Secretary of State.<sup>27</sup> Later in an interview Harry Burns said, “I appreciated the fact that an opportunity such as seldom comes to a mortal man to free 17 million women from political slavery was mine.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Bomboy, Scott. “The Vote That Led to the 19th Amendment.” *National Constitution Center – Constitutioncenter.org*, National Constituion Center, 18 Aug. 2017, [constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote](http://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote)

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, Jennie. “The Mother Who Saved Suffrage: Passing the 19th Amendment.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 16 Aug. 2010, [www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment](http://www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Bomboy, Scott. “The Vote That Led to the 19th Amendment.” *National Constitution Center – Constitutioncenter.org*, National Constituion Center, 18 Aug. 2017, [constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote](http://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote)

<sup>28</sup> Bomboy, Scott. “The Vote That Led to the 19th Amendment.” *National Constitution Center – Constitutioncenter.org*, National Constituion Center, 18 Aug. 2017, [constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote](http://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote)

Even Harry Burn's mother Febb Ensminger Burn was receiving backlash and said that she was pressured in person by the governor of Louisiana's wife to recant the letter and say the letter was a fraud, she refused to do so.<sup>29</sup>

### **Conflicts Of Opinions, Decisions And Choices**

Harry did not know what to do. Should he do what he thought was right or should he do what his mother said? He was conflicted on what to do. He thought for awhile about what he should do. The next day was voting day. On his lapel he still had his red rose signifying that he was against ratification<sup>30</sup> but hidden away from the public eye was something that said otherwise. In his suit coat he had the eight page letter from Febb Ensminger Burn<sup>31</sup> (his mother). So as he sat down at his seat in the Tennessee State Capitol he knew which way he wanted to vote. Everybody waited for his, "Nay".<sup>32</sup> "Aye". The most impactful speech uttered on sexism in the U.S was one syllable. "Aye,"<sup>33</sup> rang in the public's ears, everybody paused for one second. They all thought, "Did he just say what I thought he said?" Thinking they heard wrong. He was no longer conflicted on what to do but he compromised his opinions, choices and decisions all for his mother's.

### **Harry Burn's Compromise**

Harry Burn made a compromise of his own feelings, thoughts and his decisions for his mother. "I know that a mother's advice is always safest for her boy to follow and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Cohen, Jennie. "The Mother Who Saved Suffrage: Passing the 19th Amendment." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 16 Aug. 2010, [www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment](http://www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



my mother wanted me to vote for ratification,"<sup>34</sup> Harry Burn explained in an interview after the vote. There was no written or verbal agreement on how to vote however the agreement was all in Harry Burn's head. He knew he should, "Be a good boy."<sup>35</sup> He let his mother's influence take control of his choices. He was not forced to vote for ratification but it was his own decision to compromise his choices with his mother's.

### **Historical Significance**

Women could now stand for their political beliefs and women were now valued and treated slightly better than they were before the Nineteenth Amendment was passed. Women would no longer have to just follow what their husband's political beliefs were and be victims of political slavery. They were free from political slavery for once and for all in America. As a result many elections were influenced by women's opinions, and the winner could have possibly been different if it were just men who were allowed to vote. Since the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment female empowerment movements have been spreading and spreading through the nearly hundred years. The passing of the Nineteenth Amendment in America has also impacted other countries women's right movements. Other countries saw what we as a nation have accomplished which inspired them to spark their women's rights movements across the world.

### ***Big Impact No Recognition***

To this day Febb Ensminger Burn does not get nearly any recognition for being the main influence on her son Harry Burn. Harry Burn was the final vote for The

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<sup>34</sup> Cohen, Jennie. "The Mother Who Saved Suffrage: Passing the 19th Amendment." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 16 Aug. 2010, [www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment](http://www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Nineteenth Amendment and The Nineteenth Amendment was only passed by one vote. It was so close to not passing that if not for the letter from his caring mother Febb Ensminger Burn, he would not have compromised his original decision. Women would not have been able to vote and the outcomes of elections would be very different. There are still issues in this world with sexism, but passing The Nineteenth Amendment is one small step for man one big leap for womankind. All because of one caring mother.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

#### **Primary Sources**

Burn, Febb Ensminger. Letter to Harry T. Burn. 17 Aug. 1920. MS. Niota, Tennessee.

\_\_\_\_\_ This was the letter from Febb Ensminger Burn to her son Harry Burn. I used quotes from this source to represent what were his mother thoughts about the amendment, the movement and how she thought her son should vote. It helped me understand the topic by hearing what exactly what Febb thought of the whole situation and it helped set the whole event for me and showed why this event was so important.

Burn, Harry T. "Harry T. Burn." *National Women's History Museum*, WomensHistory.org, Knoxville County Public Library, 1919, [www.crusadeforthethevote.org/primary-documents-1/](http://www.crusadeforthethevote.org/primary-documents-1/).

This picture of Harry Burn told where this whole story happened, where he was originally born and summarized the event as a whole. I used this information to lock in where exactly in Tennessee he was from to explain how his past opinions were.

"Marchers Who Disagreed with the Anti-Suffragists Carried a Banner in a 1914 Parade." *Burgan, Michael. The 19th Amendment.* , Compass Point Books, 2006, pp. 19–19.

This was a photo of Suffragists marching in the street with a banner in a parade. I used this photo to better understand what a suffragist parade looked like and what type of efforts Suffragists did to help people be aware of this issue.

"Suffragists Protested at the White House in 1917." *Burgan, Michael. The 19th Amendment* Compass Point Books, 2006, pp. 31–31.

This was a photo of Suffragists protesting at the White House in 1917. I used this photo to better understand what efforts the Suffragists were doing to voice their opinions and make the public more aware of this issue.

"The Constitution of the United States," Amendment 19.

This is the Nineteenth Amendment. I referred to this in my *The Process Of Passing The Nineteenth Amendment* paragraph. This helped me understand what the amendment was that was getting passed, what the amendment would mean when it actually was passed and how it affected everyone.

"Wyoming Women Could Vote in 1869." *Burgan, Michael. The 19th Amendment.* , Compass Point Books, Wyoming, 2006, pp. 20–20.

This was a photo of women voting in Wyoming. This photo helped me understand what voting looked like back then and how some states allowed women to vote even before the country wide Nineteenth Amendment was passed.

## **Secondary Sources**

Bomboy, Scott. "The Vote That Led to the 19th Amendment." *National Constitution Center – Constitutioncenter.org*, National Constituion Center, 18 Aug. 2017, [constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote](http://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-man-and-his-mom-who-gave-women-the-vote)

This was a website that a large portion of my research came from. I used quotes from this website, I also used numbers from the votings and from the amount of states that could possibly vote and last of all I used this website to understand why Harry Burn made his decision

Cohen, Jennie. "The Mother Who Saved Suffrage: Passing the 19th Amendment." *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 16 Aug. 2010, [www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment](http://www.history.com/news/the-mother-who-saved-suffrage-passing-the-19th-amendment).

This was a website that was very useful for me. I used quotes from this source, I also used information about state and voting numbers, I used a description of what Harry Burn looked like on that day and what the two different sides looked like on that day, where he was born, I also used information about Harry Burn's explanation after he made his decision.

History.com Staff. "The Fight for Women's Suffrage." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2009. Web. 16 Nov. 2017. <http://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/the-fight-for-womens-suffrage>

This was a website. I used dates for the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment and I used background information about the Women's Suffrage Movement.

"Home." *Our Documents - Home*, [www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash](http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash).

This website I used for only one little thing I could not find anywhere. I used the dates of when the Nineteenth Amendment was passed by Congress and when it was ratified from this website.

Nardo, Don. *The Split History of the Women's Suffrage Movement, Suffragists' Perspective :: The Split History of the Women's Suffrage Movement, Anti-Suffragists' Perspective*. Compass Point, 2014.

This book was very useful to me because it showed both the Suffragist perspective and the Anti-Suffragist perspective. I used information of how women were treated before the Nineteenth Amendment was passed, what the early days of the Women's Suffrage Movement was like and information about the Seneca Falls Convention.

."Women's Suffrage:Tennessee and the Passage of the 19th Amendment." *Women's Suffrage: Tennessee and the Passage of the 19th Amendment*. Tennessee Department of State, 2016. Web. 11 Dec. 2017. [http://cdm15138.contentdm.oclc.org/ui/custom/default/collection/coll\\_p15138coll27/resources/custompages/landing/index.php](http://cdm15138.contentdm.oclc.org/ui/custom/default/collection/coll_p15138coll27/resources/custompages/landing/index.php)

This was a website that I used some information from. I used information about which states could possibly vote for the Nineteenth Amendment, I also used a description of what Harry Burn looked like on that day.

