Women In The Temperance Movement: Susan B. Anthony

With the turn of the twentieth century came new inventions and exciting new ways of self enjoyment. The hustle and bustle of this new lifestyle led to an overshadowing of a major event, that event being women's role in the Temperance Movement. The Temperance movement was the stance taken against the consumption of alcohol, that led to the banning of alcohol in the U.S, also known as the 18th Amendment. Women led the charge, as they formed prohibition organizations and unions to speak out on the case of alcohol. As women at the time had little to no rights, they were looked down upon in society, but they still fought to make a positive change. With ladies like, Susan B. Anthony, Frances Willard, Carrie Nation, and Agnes Slack speaking against the consumption of alcohol, they laid a foundation for future women leaders. Due to this movement, women's voices began to be heard and used to improve our nation. Women's role in the Temperance Movement was a stepping stone in women's rights and the American society we live in today.

A good place to start when discussing this movement would be background information on the organizations and unions and how they started. Some of the most common and important organizations consist of the Union Temperance Society, Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the American Temperance Union (Webb 62). All of these organizations have one major thing in common, they were all started and headed by women. As they fought for stricter laws concerning the consumption of alcohol, they hoped to make America a safer and better place. In terms of how much alcohol men at the time consumed, the average drinker in America from 1850-1920 consumed twice as much alcohol compared to drinkers today (Olsen 1). With the growing alcohol abuse that rose in the mid-19th century, these women felt they needed to make a change, as men would drink their nights away and take their anger out on their wives and children. The organizations headed campaigns to create laws in the name of God, that would help limit the abuse and dangerous effects of alcohol (Webb 62). They were partly successful in their early years, as they led 13 states to pass legislation that limited and alcohol abuse and enforced those laws (Webb 61). Their biggest victory came in 1917, as congress passed the 18th Amendment which effectively banned the sale and consumption of alcohol in the United States. Although that victory was short lived, as the 21st Amendment was passed in 1932, which repealed the 18th Amendment. Even though prohibition was eventually repealed, it showed America and men that women had the ability to make a major change, and that this movement opened the door for more opportunity.

Despite the importance of women's organizations and unions, some women made a stance individually and spoke publicly against alcohol abuse. One of these influential ladies was the well known Carrie Nation. Although Nation was known more for her wild and outrageous actions, she played a major role in showing the negative and downside of alcohol. In her first marriage, Nation's husband was a heavy drinker who suffered from alcohol abuse so bad that he couldn't even work! These awful effects of alcohol led to Nation becoming so angry that she went on a rampage. As she went from bar to bar in Wichita, Kansas using a hatchet to obliterate beer containers left and right (Waxman). The story sounds like something from a folk tale, and led to attention from the media and gave Nation a pedestal to speak from. At first the public viewed her as a crazy woman who went wild, but their views started to shift as Nation talked about the importance of limiting alcohol abuse and how it would make America a better place.

Nation later wrote stories for newspapers and opened a safe haven for battered women, in part so that the public wouldn't view her as "insane" (Waxman).

Another woman who played a major role in the Temperance Movement was Susan B. Anthony. She played a more direct role as she was one of the main advocates that established the 19th Amendment and women's right to vote. Anthony founded the Women's State Temperance Society and quickly realized the only way to ban alcohol would be to have women earn the right to vote (Waxman). Her original thoughts were actually wrong, as the 18th Amendment was made official seven months before the 19th Amendment, but Anthony took prohibition and women's suffrage hand-in-hand and ran with them. One of her most famous quotes comes from 1899 as Anthony states," The only hope for prohibition is putting the ballot into the hands of women" (Waxman). This quote was a key factor in the forming of the 19th Amendment and the overall ban of alcohol.

The eventual ban on the sale and consumption of alcohol that came with the 18th Amendment led to direct opportunity and a stepping stone for women of America today. The biggest case of opportunity came with the hiring Mabel Willebrandt, by the U.S government. Willebrandt served as an assistant U.S Attorney General. One of the most notable moments of her employment was the fact that she enforced the 18th Amendment. She served three presidential terms and used her voice to speak out on the importance of women in American Society and the growing role they serve (Waxman). During her time she served as an overseer in developments of prohibition, as the government felt that since prohibition was headed by women that it would be fitting for a woman to be in control of it.

As time moves forward and women's role in America expands, it is hard to deny the effect the Temperance Movement has had on women's rights. The women who fought for prohibition stood up with little to no backup and weren't afraid to let their opinions be heard. The direct effects of their role in the Temperance Movement have formed growth in women's rights and our America today. It has helped make clear the importance and necessity of women's equality.