

Women's Rights

Overview:

The influence of the Great Awakening and other reform movements inspired women to become more involved in public life and to consider their own rights and place in society. In the 1800s, women increasingly demanded more rights and equality, including **access to education, suffrage (the right to vote) and equality under the law**--for example, being able to own property and file for divorce. Their biggest goal, however, was passing a **constitutional amendment giving women the right to vote**.

In 1848, women led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott met at the Seneca Falls Convention in New York to discuss issues facing women. There they issued the Declaration of Sentiments, arguing for women to have **property rights, equal access to education and work, and most controversially, suffrage (the right to vote)**.

Historical Context:

Women in the early 1800s were legally and socially inferior to men. Women could not vote and, if married, could not own property. They also could not file for divorce, sign a contract or sue in court except in special circumstances. Women were expected to maintain the home and raise children and stay out of the "men's spheres" of business and politics. They were also discriminated against in the areas of education and employment, not receiving the same opportunities as men. This encouraged the development of educational institutions for women. **The Second Great Awakening inspired many women to advocate for their own rights** and the rights of others, like slaves or the mentally ill. **The abolition movement also helped spur the women's rights movement, as women saw the power of become socially and politically active despite not having the right to vote.**

Historical Significance

Antebellum women's rights fought what they perceived as senseless gender discrimination, such as the barring of women from colleges, unequal pay and the inability to divorce or own property. The Seneca Falls Convention was the first of many such gatherings promoting women's rights. However, the women's rights movement grew slowly and experienced few victories. Few states reformed married women's property laws before the Civil War, and no state was prepared to offer women the right to vote during the antebellum period. At the onset of the Civil War, women's rights advocates temporarily threw the bulk of their support behind abolition, working for racial equality before gender equality. But the words of the Seneca Falls convention continued to inspire generations of activists.

Key Event:

Seneca Falls, 1848: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, two women's rights activists, called together the first conference to address Women's rights, called the **Seneca Falls Convention**, in 1848. They wrote a petition called the *Declaration of Sentiments*, using the Declaration of Independence as a model. **The Declaration of Sentiments demanded that the rights of women be acknowledged and respected by society.** Stanton's Declaration called for an end to the unequal treatment of women as well as the right to vote (suffrage). It was signed by 68 women and 32 men.

Key Leaders & Accomplishments:

Lucretia Mott: 1848, Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized a women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York, proclaiming a Declaration of Sentiments Months earlier, along with Stanton, they successfully worked for the passage of the New York Married Women's Property Act which recognized women's right to her separate property.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton: She along with Lucretia Mott planned a women's right convention at the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Seneca Falls which sparked the women's movement. She was also active in the fight for abolition and temperance, but was devoted to women's rights.

Catherine Beecher: Lyman Beecher's daughter and a militant opponent of female equality, she fought for a profession in which females could be appreciated. With this, she discovered the institution of education in which women could play an important part in. In this profession, women became the main source of teachers.

Opposing Point of View:

Some men and women opposed women's rights, arguing that women were abandoning their responsibilities and overstepping their proper places in society.



What It Would Be Like If Ladies Had Their Own Way! This anti-women's rights cartoon satirizes women's demands, sending the message that if women were given equal rights, men would be left to do all the work.