THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

OBJECTIVES

• To analyze the origins of the movement for women's rights and how it emanated from women's involvement in abolition, temperance and other reform movements.

• To examine the goals of the 1848 Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and how they were or were not implemented.

• To consider alternatives to the Fifteenth Amendment, giving black men the vote, that might have included women.

• To contrast the continuing and changing attitudes and roles regarding women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

• To compare the legal and political rights and economic and social opportunities for women during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

CORRELATIONS WITH NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS

Era Four:
Standard 4C

The student understands changing gender roles and the ideas and activities of women reformers.

• Compare the North, South and West in terms of men's and women's occupations, legal rights and social status.

• Analyze the activities of women of different racial and social groups in the reform movements for education, abolition, temperance and women's suffrage.

• Analyze the goals of the 1848 Seneca Falls "Declaration of Sentiments" and evaluate its impact.

• Compare and contrast the antebellum women's movement for equality and twentieth century feminism.

Era Four:
Standard 3C

• Analyze how the Civil War and Reconstruction changed men's and women's roles and status in the North, South and West.
OVERVIEW

Women were a critical part of the development of the country in the colonial and Revolutionary periods. Yet, despite the ringing Revolutionary War rhetoric about "freedom" and "equality," women in the English colonies in North America were viewed as dependents, much like children. They had few legal rights and they were not able to vote or hold public office. If they were married, women were not even able to own property. The ideology that emerged, and to which most women subscribed, held that women were “naturally” dependent upon and subordinate to men in the political and economic realms while morally superior to males in their domestic roles as wives and mothers. In the nineteenth century, the struggle for women’s rights began as a consequence of women’s efforts for abolition, temperance, peace and social justice. Women began to focus on their immediate domestic needs, such as the right for married women to own property, to have custody of their children and to gain control of their own bodies. Only after obtaining some basic control over their domestic relations did women turn to their need for political rights. Even though male suffrage expanded dramatically during the early 1800s, the women’s rights movement did not emphasize the right to vote until after the Civil War, and it took another fifty years to achieve national female suffrage. In the meantime, women’s efforts resulted in the growth of a wide range of voluntary organizations. Women’s struggles for social reform, whether for themselves, their families, their children or for the broader society, have been a major factor in the expansion and protection of individuals and individual rights, as well as for the welfare of society.

What was the source of the conflict over proposals in the 1860s to imbue women with the same legal and political rights as men? Why were women unable to obtain the vote as part of the expanded definition of American citizenship that extended suffrage to former male slaves in post-Civil War Reconstruction? Why did it take until 1920 for women to become recognized as full citizens themselves? What were the obstacles? Why has the enfranchisement of women not had the anticipated impact on elections and public policy? What issues raised by the nineteenth century women’s movement remain significant today?

This case study includes two activities:

• A Mock Negotiation over priorities at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848

• A Mock Mediation over whether women’s rights advocates should support the Fifteenth Amendment in 1869.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

“I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors,” Abigail Adams wrote on March 31, 1777, to her husband John who was at the Continental Congress helping to determine national policies. Concerned that “all men would be tyrants if they could,” she urged that the new government curb the “unlimited power” of husbands over wives. She also threatened: “if particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.” In his brief reply, John Adams made fun of his wife’s concerns, dismissing her suggestion as a joke. Later, however, in writing to a male friend, he justified his dismissal of rights for women, as well as children, men without property, African Americans, and Indians, because he thought they lacked independent judgment as a result of their economic dependence on others (that is, white men). In the case of women, he added, “their delicacy renders them unfit for practice and experience in the great businesses of life.” The majority of Americans, including most women, held views similar to those of John Adams in the late eighteenth century.
The legal status of eighteenth-century women derived from a combination of English common law, equity practices and provincial statutes, which varied from colony to colony. Married women had no right to own real or personal property, to sign contracts or to sue. The colonies continued to follow Blackstone's *Commentaries* on English common law (1865): "The very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the course of marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection and cover she performs every thing." This English common law practice of "coverture" gave the husband legal rights to all of a married couple's property, including any property brought into the marriage or inherited by the wife and to wages the wife earned during the marriage. The husband was given custody of children in the rare cases of divorce or separation since he controlled the means of support. And he had the right to sexual satisfaction and, thus, to his wife's body. Husbands also had the right to "correct" their wives and children, and physical punishment was assumed to be a necessary feature of such correction. In the more "progressive" states, the "rule of thumb" was applied, restricting men from beating their wives (or their children) with any rod or stick larger around than their thumb. Legally, a woman was largely at the mercy of her husband. If she married a wastrel, an alcoholic, a gambler, or a man who was simply mean and abusive, she had little legal recourse. In a period when over 90 percent of women married, the status of wives was essentially the status of women. And wives had few domestic or property rights.

Although widows automatically gained a dower right, that is, a life estate in one-third of her husband's real and personal property, and could sign contracts, sue and be sued; she could not sell or bequeath the property without special permission of a court or legislature. Widows often found themselves dependent on charity. Men held at least 90 percent of colonial wealth.

Beginning with the First Great Awakening, a revitalization of religious piety that swept through the American colonies between the 1730s and the 1770s, women had started to form female voluntary associations within their churches, giving them a separate but influential role. The American Revolution upgraded the value of domestic contributions of women. Spinning and weaving American cloth were transformed into patriotic acts. The Revolution also sanctioned group activities by women: secular, single-sex, voluntary organizations to support the war effort. Women made critical contributions to the patriotic cause—raising funds; providing clothing, bandages, and food for the army; storing ammunition and other war material; caring for the sick and wounded; serving as spies and couriers; managing farms, businesses, and families in the absence of husbands and fathers; and defending themselves and their homes when necessary.

The mobilization of women in such public roles challenged the traditional belief of female dependence on men and exclusion from the public realm. The contradiction between the growing activism by women and the predominant ideology that excluded women from the public forum was resolved by the concept of "republican motherhood," which gave women a patriotic duty to educate their sons to be virtuous citizens, rather than for them to be direct, active participants in the body politic. The ideology of republican motherhood emphasized women's domestic duty and inspired women to participate in the moral improvement of their communities, thus drawing women's areas of activity somewhat closer to that of men. However, most women emphasized their more conservative domestic roles rather than claiming a direct connection with political life as articulated in Britain by Mary Wollstonecraft in *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792).

In the aftermath of the American Revolution, only New Jersey granted women the right to vote and then only to unmarried, property-owning (and therefore tax-paying) women—those who were not automatically represented by a husband and who had an independent economic stake in the government. Although these women formed a tiny percentage of New Jersey's electorate, ultimately they proved too independent for the all-male legislature. In 1806, a group of women voters formed a coalition with reform-minded men to turn out those in power. By a small margin, the coalition failed to achieve its ends, and in 1807, the New Jersey legislature retaliated by rescinding the vote for women and blacks. Since the Constitution did not specifically include women or blacks, a Constitutional amendment was not necessary to restrict the vote to "a free white male citizen."
Although the unmarried, propertied women of New Jersey were no doubt unhappy to lose their electoral privileges, this change in their political status placed them among the vast majority of Americans. Only a small minority of Americans—adult white men with property—could vote in the early 1800s. Therefore, only native-born, unmarried, white women who owned property could complain that they were unfairly denied the right to vote because of their gender. African-American, Native-American, and foreign-born women shared disfranchisement with most of the men of their groups, as did most poor white women, until the Jacksonian Era of the 1830s and 1840s, when property qualifications for voting were gradually eliminated.

Women voting in New Jersey in 1797, as depicted in Harper's Weekly (1880)

The Second Great Awakening, a religious revival that reached its peak in the 1820s, brought together religious beliefs and optimism for the possibilities of individual and communal improvement with the idea of female moral superiority. Emboldened by their sense of religious and civic mission, women built on their earlier organizing attempts and began to form secular, female voluntary organizations and associations for civic betterment. The Second Great Awakening marked the beginning of an alliance between women and ministers (almost all of whom were men): female moral superiority was endorsed by the clergy in exchange for women's support and activism. Women carved out a public space for themselves between the home and the formal institutions of government in voluntary organizations where they pursued reform efforts that were parallel to but separate from male efforts to effect social change through politics.

The doctrine of "women's sphere" was promoted by the changing work environment, the clergy and the popular ladies magazines that began to appear in the late 1820s. The "women's sphere" primarily reflected a change in the work force: the movement from an agrarian culture where the whole family worked on the farm to a wage labor economy where men went to work outside of the farm while middle class wives remained at home with domestic chores to do. The "separate sphere" doctrine increased women's authority at home and celebrated the new status of the middle class woman and a new consciousness of gender. Catharine Beecher contended in her Treatises on Domestic Economy in the 1840s that "the duties of the woman are as sacred and important as any ordained by men."
Women Advocating Change, 1830s and 1840s

Beginning in the 1830s, the public school system in the North began to expand and provide a decent, if all too brief, education to larger numbers of boys and girls. The need for low-paid teachers at the growing number of public schools as well as a public discussion about women's education stimulated the development of female seminaries and academies. Still, most women had little access to education that would prepare them for an occupation beyond housewife and mother. A small number of women earned their living as teachers, midwives, making textiles, shoes or hats, or taking in laundry or boarders. Beyond these, agricultural labor, domestic service, or prostitution offered poorly paid and sometimes dangerous ways for women to earn a living.

For black women, enslaved or free, the abolition of slavery was the major priority, as it was for the men of their race. The Northern states were slowly eliminating slavery: 1777 in Vermont; 1780 in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts; 1784 in Rhode Island, Connecticut and New Hampshire; 1787, by act of Congress, in the Northwest Territory (the future states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and part of Minnesota); 1799 in New York and 1804 in New Jersey. Concerned with protecting property rights, the state legislators adopted gradual emancipation of slaves. For example, in New York, children born to slave women after 1799 became free only after the males became 28 and the females became 24 years old. Slaves already in servitude remained slaves for life, although reclassified as "indentured servants." As late as 1830, there remained 3,568 black slaves in the Northern states. Similarly, American Indian women were more concerned about maintaining customary rights within their tribes and sustaining their communities on a shrinking land base than about gaining women's rights within the American political system. The women among the growing number of working-class European immigrants were focused, like their men, mainly on economic survival. Poor women with numerous children who were, for various reasons, the primary provider for their families hardly had a moment to think about the unfairness of their exclusion from voting and politics.

Given the constraints on women's lives, it is not surprising that when women—black, white, or Indian; native-born or foreign-born; poor, middling or rich; married or single; young, middle-aged, or old—thought about their rights, they focused on better education, higher wages, the right to their earnings and their property in marriage, the custody of their children and the control of their own bodies as both more critical...
and more attainable. Woman's suffrage was only one of the issues that concerned women activists, and for many it was secondary to abolition, temperance, and reforming laws on property rights, child custody and divorce. It was not that most women would have rejected suffrage; indeed, it offered them respect as a citizen as well as a way for them to obtain and enforce their legal and civil rights.

In the early to mid-nineteenth century, women, like men, tried to address the harsh results of the rapid social and economic changes occurring in the United States through industrialization, urbanization and western expansion and engaged in a wide variety of organizations and reform movements to ameliorate poverty, disease, prostitution, drunkenness and other social problems. Rooted in ideals of republican motherhood, religious devotion, economic necessity, ideological principle, or some combination of these, many women widened their domestic sphere to participate in missionary and charitable societies; reform organizations dedicated to temperance, the abolition of slavery and prostitution, the improvement of working conditions; or more radical movements demanding rights for African Americans, Indians, workers, and women.

Different organizations and movements attracted different groups of women. Wealthier wives and daughters joined missionary and charitable societies. Women from middle class and upwardly-mobile families, many inspired by evangelical religious beliefs, engaged in moral reform efforts to eradicate drunkenness, prostitution, and slavery. And some white women from progressive religious traditions—especially the Society of Friends or Quakers—joined free black women in movements to abolish slavery, advance equal rights for African Americans and Indians, institute land reform, and improve working conditions. It was from this last group of women activists that the nation's first women's rights advocates emerged. They included women from across the economic spectrum: daughters of wealth and privilege who were especially cognizant of the restrictions imposed on them by their sex as well as women from farming communities and the urban working classes.

Women began to exercise the few rights they did have—most notably their First Amendment right to associate and petition the government—to promote change. Many women, who never imagined demanding rights for themselves, signed petitions opposing the removal of the Cherokee Indians from their traditional tribal lands or the expansion of slavery into Texas and other new western territories. For many of these women, the fight against slavery offered a model for analyzing their own oppression and for mobilizing to change the status quo. It also provided a small coterie of women with the skills—speaking, petitioning, fundraising and organizing conventions—that would be crucial to the struggle for women's rights.

The antislavery crusade began in 1831 when William Lloyd Garrison first published The Liberator and formed the New England Anti-Slavery Society. Women joined immediately. Through the racially-integrated Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, a women’s petition campaign was launched, and in the spring of 1837, the first Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women was organized and held in New York City. At this national convention, Angelina Grimké offered the following resolution:

RESOLVED, That as certain rights and duties are common to all moral beings, the time has come for woman to move in that sphere which Providence has assigned her, and no longer remain satisfied in the circumscribed limits with which corrupt custom and a perverted application of Scripture have encircled her; therefore, it is the duty of woman, and the province of woman, to plead the cause of the oppressed in our land, and to do all that she can by her voice, and her pen, and her purse, and the influence of her example, to overthrow the horrible system of slavery.

The resolution was hotly contested. Some of the women thought that it was too radical and would hurt the cause to have it published with the convention proceedings. But with the support of Lucretia Mott, a Massachusetts Quaker and a founder of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, the resolution passed, though not unanimously. By 1838 the American Anti-Slavery Society had sent petitions with over 400,000 signatures to Congress. Almost 70 percent of those who signed the petitions were women.
Angelina and Sarah Grimké were daughters of a wealthy South Carolina slaveholder. They had come to abhor the institution of slavery, moved to Philadelphia, joined the Society of Friends and, in 1837, were hired by the recently formed American Anti-Slavery Society to lecture throughout New England on behalf of abolition. The Grimkés linked their religious devotion to their need to speak out against slavery. They also connected the oppression experienced by slaves to that experienced by women: “Women ought to feel a peculiar sympathy in the colored man’s wrong, for like him, she has been accused of mental inferiority, and denied the privileges of a liberal education.” And in the fight against slavery, they claimed, there was no reason for women to take a secondary place: “Men and women were CREATED EQUAL; they are both moral and accountable beings, and whatever is right for a man to do, is right for a woman to do.”

Such radical claims and public activism by women infuriated many Northerners, including ministers and politicians as well as more moderate women activists. The clergymen of Massachusetts were horrified not only by the Grimkés’ public proclamations on slavery, religion and women, but also by the huge “promiscuous” audiences. (In the early nineteenth century, the word “promiscuous” was used to indicate simply mixed groups of women and men.) In the midst of the Grimkés’ New England tour, pastors throughout the region read a letter to their congregations asserting that “The power of woman is her dependence, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection .... But when she assumes the place and tone of man as a public reformer .... she yields the power which God has given her for her protection, and her character becomes unnatural.” Many women embraced their ministers’ words and limited their public efforts to those approved by the church, steering clear of anything tainted by political considerations. The most prominent opponent of women’s public activism and equal rights was Catharine Beecher, the daughter of fiery abolitionist preacher Henry Ward Beecher and sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who would write *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852. A moderate reformer who wrote petitions on behalf of the Cherokee Indians, advocated education for girls and household management for women, Catharine Beecher believed that it was “unwomanly” for women to engage openly in public debate.

**The Emergence of Women’s Rights**

The debates at the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women and the growing demands by women within the American Anti-Slavery Society to gain an equal place in the movement with men brought the issue of women’s rights into the public arena. Antislavery preachers, like Samuel May of Syracuse, New York, would sermonize on women’s rights in this same period, always linking women’s moral duties to the fight against human bondage. Free black abolitionists, like Frederick Douglass, would advocate women’s right to speak, vote and
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hold office in antislavery organizations. In this sense, the women’s rights movement would, from its founding, tackle the intertwined issues of race and gender and do so in the heat of national struggles related to slavery, western expansion and industrialization. The disagreement over whether women should be included in leadership roles would split the ranks of the antislavery movement in two.

At the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London in 1840, the organizers refused to seat women delegates on the convention floor, much less let them speak. William Lloyd Garrison, a fiery orator and founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society, was so outraged by this discrimination against women that he moved to the balcony to sit with the women, abandoning his vote and his place on the floor. It was this public display of women’s second-class citizenship that inspired Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the new bride of antislavery advocate Henry Stanton, who met Lucretia Mott at the Anti-Slavery Convention, to consider the need for a convention to address women’s rights specifically, a convention that would occur eight years later when Mott and Stanton met again.

In the intervening years, antislavery women and men began boycotting slave-produced products such as sugar, rice, and cotton and arguing that only a refusal to participate in the system that supported slavery could end that system. Thus, in 1846, when the United States declared war with Mexico in a dispute over the border of slaveholding Texas, these same abolitionists spoke out against the war, and some refused to pay taxes to support what they called an unjust and immoral military effort. Joined now by other Northerners opposed to the war, a contingent of abolitionist men—many of them Quakers—and New England Transcendentalists such as Henry David Thoreau, refused to vote or to pay taxes.

While elite women most often formed benevolent associations and moral reform societies and middle-class women predominated in evangelical reform, women in the growing working classes, who were bearing the brunt of the changes in the working world from farms to factories, tried unsuccessfully to form labor organizations. Whereas the middle classes continued to idealize the mother-child relationship, poorer women often saw motherhood as a condition of extreme hardship. Sarah Trask, a factory worker in Massachusetts, kept a diary during the 1840s in which she recorded her concerns about work, wages, religion and marriage. Though she expected that she would be able to stay at home once she found a husband, she was nonetheless concerned about making a bad choice: “marriage to me seems a great responsibility,” she wrote, “and almost all of the care comes upon the wife.”

In the 1840s, women’s rights advocates and their supporters worked in a number of states to obtain legal and economic rights for women—rights to property, custody of their children, and to their own earnings and inheritances. Several state legislatures considered moderate reforms for women, such as property rights for married women. For example, in 1848, New York passed a Married Women’s Property Law, granting married women sole control over property that they brought into the marriage or received afterwards but not to property or wages they earned during the marriage. Since married women were not able to sue in court without their husband’s permission, they still had little chance of securing their new rights, since no husband would approve a suit against himself. This led to efforts to expand the limited rights granted in the 1848 law as well as inspiring petition campaigns on behalf of other legal rights for women. More radical women, such as Margaret Fuller, a writer and intellectual from Massachusetts, wrote books and articles advocating complete autonomy for women, including equal rights and the vote.
The Struggle for Women's Rights in the Nineteenth Century

In what would become an historic development, a group of women meeting in upstate New York, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, her sister Martha Wright, as well as Mary Ann McClintock and Jane Hunt, who were both Quakers from Waterloo, New York, concluded that action was required and resolved to call a women’s rights convention. The call for a Women’s Rights Convention to be held in Seneca Falls, New York, July 19-20, 1848, was written just two weeks earlier. It was published both in the Seneca Falls Courier and Frederick Douglass’ North Star in Rochester, New York, with only a few days notice to potential participants. Yet more than 200 women and about 40 men from the surrounding towns came to the meeting.

Activity One: Mock Negotiation Prioritizing Goals at the Seneca Falls Convention, 1848

On July 19, 1848, more than 200 people, virtually all abolitionists, met at the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, New York, to discuss women’s conditions and rights. Although the original plan had been for only women to meet on the first day, so many men as well as women arrived on the first day that the organizers decided to invite them all in. The attendees included several husbands and well-known male abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass. The women bowed to the gender convention of having a man, Lucretia Mott’s husband James, preside over the proceedings. James Mott proved to be an excellent facilitator for these boisterous debates. He was calm, judicious, widely respected and inscrutable as to his own stand on the issues.

At Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s suggestion, the women used the Declaration of Independence as the model for their Declaration of Sentiments: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal....” The Declaration of Sentiments presented a series of wrongs against American women and a series of resolutions intended to right those wrongs. (See Document 1: The Declaration of Sentiments.) Some of the most effective wording regarding women’s roles in religious and reform activities was taken directly from the resolutions passed by the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women in 1837. Other resolutions followed earlier antislavery petitions. Some were crafted on the spot, including the one demanding women’s suffrage. The convention debated eleven resolutions over two days, including women’s rights to equal treatment with men, occupations, education, spiritual equality, public speaking, the elective franchise and advocate change. Women’s public rights were asserted on the basis of women’s individual rights as citizens.

Your students will be playing the roles of various participants who were actually at the Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Convention in 1848. Their task in this mock negotiation is to prioritize the resolutions in order to better understand their content and context. Although the actual participants were primarily in agreement about the nature of the rights that women should have, they did not make any effort to identify what they thought were the most important demands for rights. The exercise to prioritize the resolutions is purely hypothetical. One of the purposes is for your students to appreciate the context of the times, including the recognition that female suffrage was not the primary goal on the minds of most women or men who attended the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. Another purpose is to appreciate that there were diverse views on what was most important, even among this group of feminists who mostly agreed, and to see if they could agree on a common list of priorities. This discussion will also help to set the stage for the second activity in this chapter: a mock mediation regarding the Fifteenth Amendment in 1869.
PARTICIPANTS

Lucretia Mott was born in 1793 into a Quaker family in the seafaring community of Nantucket, Massachusetts, where women managed the businesses and the families while most of the men were away at sea. She was educated at a school run by the Society of Friends, where she met and married James Mott in 1811. The two Motts taught at the school for a year. Lucretia received half the wages that her husband earned for the same job, as was the custom at the time. They then moved to Philadelphia where James became a successful merchant and Lucretia bore and raised six children, as well as speaking at meetings throughout the Northeast as a Quaker "minister." In 1833, she helped to found the interracial Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. She worked consistently for both the abolition of slavery in the South and the establishment of racial equality in the North. She was an active member of the Free Produce Society, which led boycotts against slave-produced goods, and she protested both slavery and the Mexican War. Mott also engaged in missions to the Seneca Indians in upstate New York and to fugitive African-American slaves in Canada, visited prisons regularly to work with prisoners to advance their education and assure their rights, and protested the use of capital punishment. Mott believed in equality in the family and in education and recognition of women's equal moral and religious capacity. She placed the abolition of slavery, rather than voting rights for women, as the primary concern of women's rights advocates in the mid-nineteenth century.

Amy Kirby Post was born in 1802 to a farming family in Long Island and attended Quaker schools. After her older sister Hannah, who had married Isaac Post and bore two children, died in 1828, Amy married Isaac and moved to Rochester, New York. Isaac worked as a butcher and then opened a pharmacy, while Amy raised her two stepchildren and bore four children of her own. Despite her domestic responsibilities and financial constraints, Amy became active in local and regional Quaker meetings, serving as a leader in the separate "women's" meetings which supervised women members, approved marriage bans and wrote testimonies on behalf of Indian rights, antislavery, temperance and other causes. During the 1840s, Post helped to found the interracial and mixed-sex Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, presided over numerous fundraising fairs, and worked with Isaac as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, helping slaves escape to Canada. From 1848 on, Post combined her antislavery activities with advocacy for women's rights. At the Rochester Woman's Rights Convention, held two weeks after Seneca Falls, Post insisted that a woman preside over the meeting. She helped form a Working Women's Protective Union among seamstresses. Amy Post was most concerned about how the limited access of black and white women to education and employment forced them into submission to men, immoral activities and impoverishment.

Frederick Douglass was born into slavery in Maryland in 1818. He worked as a field hand and dockworker for 20 years before escaping from his master while working in Baltimore. Using the papers of a free black sailor, he made his way to Boston and soon found employment as an antislavery lecturer for William Lloyd Garrison's
American Anti-Slavery Society. He toured throughout Europe and the northern United States before announcing plans in 1847 to start his own antislavery paper. Garrison and his followers in Boston disapproved, so Douglass moved west to Rochester, New York. There, as publisher of the North Star, he cemented his reputation as one of the leading spokespersons for abolition and racial equality for free blacks. A supporter of women's rights within antislavery circles as well as in the wider society, Douglass was, nonetheless, skeptical of wives holding equal rights within marriage. At about the time of the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention, Douglass turned away from Garrison's claims that the U.S. government was a pro-slavery institution and joined, instead, with a group of "political abolitionists," who argued that men must use their voting power to end slavery. His support for women's suffrage in Seneca Falls was linked to this agenda and to his demand for voting rights for Northern free blacks.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was born in 1815 in Johnstown, New York. Raised in wealth and ease, she received a substantial education for a girl of her day, including three years at a female seminary. She learned much about the law, including its inequities, by reading her father's law books and listening to him debate with the numerous law students who studied at his side. In 1840, she married Henry Stanton, a law student studying with her father who introduced her to the antislavery movement and to Boston social circles. Henry Stanton never fully approved of his wife's ventures into public life and was conspicuously absent from Seneca Falls during the women's rights convention of 1848. He believed abolition could only be achieved through political compromise and, as a congressman and lawyer, he feared being ridiculed for his wife's radical stands. He spent long periods in Washington, D.C., leaving Elizabeth to juggle childcare and activism. A Presbyterian, Cady Stanton had no experience with the Quakers' relatively egalitarian views on women, nor had she been deeply involved in antislavery politics before 1848. Although she believed that slaves should be freed, Stanton was also convinced that educated white women had a stronger claim to rights than the newly emancipated slaves or impoverished and illiterate Irish Catholic immigrants. She viewed suffrage as the most important weapon that women could wield to assure their rights.

**TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS**

**Preparation**

The class should read the background materials, the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions and the short biographies of the historical figures at the Convention, which include the participants' positions and interests.

**Directions**

1. Divide into groups of six or seven.
2. Assign each person a role:
   a. Elizabeth Cady Stanton
   b. Amy Kirby Post
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c. Frederick Douglass
d. Lucretia Mott
e. An Observer/Recorder/Reporter—Thomas or Mary Ann McClintock
f. An Observer/Recorder/Reporter—Catharine Beecher who will be preparing an article about
the Convention (She was not actually there, but we want to hear what she would say.)
g. Add James Mott as a mediator, if necessary.

The Roles

1. The four negotiators should try to come to an agreement as to which rights listed in the Declaration of
Sentiments were the most important and should be given priority, using conflict resolution skills but also
recognizing the constraints of their historical character.

2. The observer/recorder/reporters do not participate in the negotiation process. The role of the observer/
recorder/reporter is to objectively observe, record and report on the negotiation process and results,
using the negotiations evaluation form. Miss Beecher will listen to the deliberations and write an article
explaining her views regarding the proceedings at the Women's Convention.

3. The role of the mediator is to help the negotiators to identify the issues and to come to a resolution.

Debriefing

1. Discuss the process and results from the mock negotiations or mediations.
2. Hand out and discuss “The Facts Continued: From Seneca Falls through the Civil War”
3. Compare the results of the mock negotiation with what actually occurred.

THE FACTS CONTINUED: FROM SENECA FALLS THROUGH THE CIVIL WAR

On the second day of the Women’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, in mid-July
1848, the participants debated eleven resolutions. All but the ninth resolution passed unanimously.
The ninth stated: “Resolved, That it is the duty of women of this country to secure themselves their
sacred right to the elective franchise.” In the end, the resolution did receive the support of a majority,
albeit a narrow majority, of those in attendance but only as a result of the concerted efforts of Elizabeth Cady
Stanton and Frederick Douglass. (See Document 2: Report of the Women’s Rights Convention.)

In the decade following the Seneca Falls Convention, other women’s rights meetings were held throughout
the Northeast and Midwest. In 1850, Lucy Stone, a recent graduate of Oberlin College in Ohio (the first male
institution of higher education to accept women and blacks) and lecturer for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery
Society, organized the first national women’s rights convention and was instrumental in organizing several other
women’s rights conventions. By 1860, the women of New York finally secured the right to sue in court, and other
Northern states began to consider women’s legal rights. By 1865, twenty-nine states had enacted some form of
married women’s property reform. However, the battle for legal rights for women continued well into the twentieth
century.

Even as women’s rights advocates worked to advance women’s legal rights, open the professions to
women, and eradicate exploitative working conditions, alcoholism and wife abuse, the cause that gained the
greatest attention from reform-minded women continued to be the abolition of slavery. As civil war loomed on the
horizon, even the most ardent women’s rights advocates, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the recently recruited Susan B. Anthony, set aside the battle for gender equality to focus on ending slavery.

The Civil War (1861-1865) required the efforts and sacrifices of women in the North and the South, as well as the men on the battlefields. Women’s rights advocates, led by Stanton and Anthony, formed the Women’s National Loyal League to raise funds for the war and support for the Union. Amy Post, Lucretia Mott and other Quaker pacifists, along with black abolitionists, argued that the war was only worth supporting if its purpose was to end slavery. Abolitionists like Stone and Stanton hoped that an end to slavery and greater rights for African Americans would also bring expanded legal and political rights for women. Beginning with President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and concluding with the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (ratified in 1865), which officially prohibited the practice of human bondage anywhere in the United States, the conflict became a war not just to preserve the Union but also to abolish slavery. However, it was not the abolition of slavery that posed grave problems for Americans in the war’s aftermath but rather the status of freed blacks in the re-united nation. And it was the debates over this status—specifically over black citizenship and suffrage—that led to a major realignment within the women’s rights movement in the late 1860s.

The Fifteenth Amendment, 1869

Woman’s rights advocates like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony hoped that the war would open the way for suffrage for women as well as black men. In 1866, with this agenda in mind, Stanton and Anthony joined former abolitionists, including Lucy Stone, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth and Frances Harper, in establishing the American Equal Rights Association. Yet, almost immediately, African-American women divided, many like Harper made clear their belief that there was greater urgency for black men to gain suffrage than for women—black or white—to gain equal rights. Indeed, when the Fourteenth Amendment (ratified 1868) guaranteeing citizenship to African Americans inserted the word “male” in the Constitution for the first time, most African Americans—women and men—as well as many of their white abolitionist allies voiced their support. Anthony, Stanton and the legendary African-American lecturer Sojourner Truth, however, urged women’s rights advocates to press for suffrage for women while the definition of U.S. citizenship was on the national political agenda. Although the threat of reduced representation in section two of the Fourteenth Amendment was never used to punish states which denied the vote “to any of the male inhabitants,” the women’s rights advocates saw this language as an affront to their claims to be equal citizens.

It was, however, the proposal for the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution that aroused the most serious debates among the women’s rights advocates. Passed by Congress in February 1869, this amendment specifically enfranchised black men but not women. As the amendment headed to the states for ratification, the American Equal Rights Association met to discuss whether or not to support it.

Stanton and Anthony opposed the amendment, arguing that only a constitutional amendment that granted suffrage to women as well as black men should be supported because the vote was the right of ALL citizens. In contrast, Douglass, Harper and other abolitionists supported the amendment, believing that as Douglass said, “it was the Negro’s hour,” and that granting the vote to black men would eventually open the door to votes for women. Lucy Stone feared that simultaneous consideration of women’s suffrage might jeopardize black male suffrage. Many women were torn by the issue—between principle and personal loyalty or between competing principles. Amy Post, for instance, had long supported racial and gender equality, and she believed deeply that universal rights were the only platform worthy of support. However, she chose to ally herself with the cause of black male suffrage. Sojourner Truth believed that newly freed African Americans required suffrage to ensure their rights, but she feared that granting black men (and not women) suffrage would give the men undue power over black women. Although Lucretia Mott believed that black men needed the protection of the suffrage more than women did, she was unwilling to speak out against her old friend and co-worker, Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Therefore, Mott refused to take any stand on the Fifteenth Amendment.
ACTIVITY TWO: MOCK MEDIATION WHETHER WOMEN’S RIGHTS ADVOCATES SHOULD SUPPORT THE FIFTEENTH AMENDMENT, 1869

In May 1869, the Equal Rights Association, a coalition of blacks and whites, women and men dedicated to gaining rights for blacks and women, met in New York City. The Equal Rights Association included men and women who had worked together for years in support of both women’s rights and abolition. Among the participants at the meeting in 1869 were Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, Frances Harper, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, Amy Post and Sojourner Truth. Chief among the issues for debate was whether or not to support the proposed Fifteenth Amendment, which read: "The 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 race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

The issue in this hypothetical mock mediation is, as it was at the Association’s meeting in New York, whether during the Reconstruction debates in 1869 the Equal Rights Association should support an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that specifically guaranteed the right of male African Americans to vote but not the right of females to vote. Participants in this exercise will engage in a mock mediation on the issue of whether or not to support ratification of this proposed Constitutional amendment. Lucretia Mott will be the mediator. Catharine Beecher will be the observer/recorder/reporter.

PARTICIPANTS

Refer to the prior activity for short biographies of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Amy Kirby Post, Frederick Douglass and Lucretia Mott.

Susan B. Anthony was born in 1820 in Adams, Massachusetts, to a Quaker father and a Baptist mother. She was brought up in a family with a long tradition of Quaker activism. She attended boarding school until the collapse of her father’s textile business forced her into earning her own living. After teaching for fifteen years, she became active in the temperance movement to limit the consumption of alcohol, but because she was a woman, she was not allowed to speak at temperance rallies. Anthony did not attend the women’s rights convention of 1848. She was frustrated by the inequalities between men and women and ready to embrace women’s rights when she met Elizabeth Cady Stanton in Seneca Falls in 1852. Anthony was hired as a lecturer by the American Anti-Slavery Society and merged her antislavery work with efforts on behalf of women’s rights to their own property and earnings and women’s labor organizations. Stanton, whose many children and other family responsibilities kept her at home, counted on the unmarried Anthony to deliver speeches and petitions that Stanton had written. The two formed a partnership that lasted fifty years. In 1869, Anthony joined Stanton in opposing the Fifteenth Amendment because it did not explicitly grant women the right to vote. Throughout the late 19th century, Anthony stayed focused on woman’s suffrage. Ignoring opposition and abuse, she traveled, lectured and canvassed across the nation for the vote. She remained active until her death in 1906.

Sojourner Truth was born into slavery as Isabella Baumfree in Ulster County, New York, around 1797 and worked for a Dutch farming family. In 1827, when New York law emancipated all slaves, she claimed her freedom and moved to New York City, taking along her infant son. In 1843, she became a convert to evangelical religion,
declared herself a preacher and took the name "Sojourner Truth." In 1846, she joined an antislavery, utopian community in Northampton, Massachusetts, where she was introduced to the abolitionist movement. She made her first speech on women's rights at a women's rights convention in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1850. Her most famous speech was at a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851. Although this speech would later be reduced to the mantra of "Aren't I a woman," this phrase was never part of her original speech. (See Document 3: Sojourner Truth's Speech at the Akron Women's Rights Convention, Ohio, June 1851.) Truth became one of the most sought after lecturers on abolition and women's rights. Throughout her career, Sojourner Truth's main concern was promoting the rights of black women. For this reason, the Fifteenth Amendment posed a serious dilemma for her. She believed that newly freed African Americans needed political rights but she was also deeply concerned that black women not be subordinated to black men. She remained ambivalent about supporting the Fifteenth Amendment. Truth died in 1883.

Lucy Stone was born in Massachusetts in 1818. Even as a girl she chafed at the restrictions placed on members of the female sex. She graduated from Oberlin College in 1847 and became a lecturer for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, which granted her permission to devote part of each week to speaking on her own for women's rights. She helped to organize the first national women's rights convention in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1850 and was also instrumental in organizing other women's rights conventions. In 1855, she married Henry Blackwell, an Ohio abolitionist and crusader for women's suffrage. By mutual agreement with her husband, she retained her maiden name. Stone and Blackwell chose to support the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments even though they represented a setback for women's rights. After passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, Stone joined more conservative reformers to create the American Woman Suffrage Association and launched the weekly Woman's Journal in 1870. The schism in the women's movement was not healed until 1890 with the formation of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Stone died in 1893.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was born in 1825 in Baltimore, Maryland to free black parents, and orphaned when she was three years old. She attended Watkins Academy but could only find a job as a domestic servant. In 1852, she moved to Philadelphia where she gained fame as a poet. Starting in 1854, she began lecturing about abolition. She married, moved to Ohio, had four children and was widowed during the Civil War. Harper spoke on behalf of women's suffrage at a Women's Rights Convention following the war in May 1866 in New York City, where the American Equal Rights Association was founded. She continued to advocate for women's rights but believed that the most important issue at the moment was rights for blacks, and thus she supported the Fifteenth Amendment. (See Document 4: Frances Ellen Watkins Harper Speech, May 1866.) Harper continued to lecture in the South on black morality and on temperance and against white racial violence. She died in 1911.
Observer/Recorder/Reporter: Catharine Beecher was the daughter of fiery abolitionist preacher Henry Ward Beecher and sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Catharine Beecher was a moderate reformer who wrote petitions on behalf of the Cherokee Indians, and advocated higher education and household management for women. She opened a female seminary in Hartford, Connecticut and the Western Female Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio, and was instrumental in founding women's colleges in Iowa, Illinois, and Wisconsin. Beecher believed that women should devote themselves to the moral development and education of their children and that it was "unwomanly" for women to engage openly in public debate. Although active in expanding higher education for women, Beecher opposed women's public activism, including providing women with the right to vote.

**TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS**

**Preparation**

The participants, mediators and observer/recorder/reporters should read the background materials, the short biographies of the participants and any specific speeches, newspaper articles, or other written materials which provide background and understanding of their particular positions and/or interests.

**Directions**

1. Divide into groups of eight (for negotiation without a mediator) or nine (for mediation).
2. Assign each person a role:
   a. Susan B. Anthony
   b. Frederick Douglass
   c. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper
   d. Amy Kirby Post
   e. Lucy Stone
   f. Elizabeth Cady Stanton
   g. Sojourner Truth
   h. Lucretia Mott—mediator
   i. Catharine Beecher—observer/recorder/reporter

**The Roles**

1. The participants should try to find a consensus that is consistent with the constraints of their historical characters.
2. The mediator should help the participants to come to a resolution that meets their underlying interests. The mediator should not try to impose his or her views on the participants.
3. The observer/recorder/reporters do not participate in the negotiation or mediation. They should
objectively observe, record and report on the mediation process and results. In this case, the observer/recorder/reporters might also write an article reporting on the proceedings from the perspective of Catharine Beecher.

Debriefing


2. Compare the results of the mock mediation with what actually occurred.

**The Facts Continued: 1869 to 1920**

Unable to find a compromise position on the issue of suffrage for women as well as black men (See Document 5: Proceedings of the Equal Rights Association, New York City, May 1869), the American Equal Rights Association split into two groups. Stanton and Anthony, who had demanded votes for both, formed the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA); Douglass and Harper, who accepted black male suffrage as a priority, joined Stone to form the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). Over the next several decades, the AWSA recruited male as well as female members and focused exclusively on suffrage. Stanton and Anthony’s NWSA allowed only women to be officials and promoted a broader agenda, including divorce reform and equal pay for women as well as suffrage. Stanton and Anthony’s NWSA included working-class women, and it pushed for a national constitutional amendment for women’s suffrage. Stone’s AWSA was in many ways a more conservative organization, and its acceptance of men and its focus exclusively on the vote for women gained the support of the largest number of white abolitionists as well as most of the African-American activists of the age. Sojourner Truth, however, refused to break ties with her former supporters and friends, Stanton and Anthony. Amy Post maintained membership in both the NWSA and the AWSA, but she clearly stood on the side of black rights as the foremost priority in the postwar world. Mott sought to the end of her days to reconcile the two sides but to no avail.

Some see the women’s debate over the Fifteenth Amendment as an early sign of white women’s concern primarily for their own advancement. Stanton had made these critiques easier by her outrage at men she called “ignorant negroes and foreigners” gaining admittance to the polls before educated white women like herself. Yet the issues raised by this debate were more complex than they might seem at first glance. Sojourner Truth, for instance, agreed with Anthony that the Fifteenth Amendment would put black men “in the position of tyrants” over black women. And women did not divide along strictly racial lines, in spite of Harper’s prediction. Rather, white women were themselves at odds over whether to support or oppose black male suffrage. At least as many white women sided with Stone’s AWSA as with Stanton and Anthony’s NWSA.

Following ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, few men—black or white—continued to support the fight for women’s suffrage. In fact, as Reconstruction waned, many men—primarily black men but also some poor white men—were effectively disenfranchised through exclusionary mechanisms such as poll taxes, grandfather clauses and literacy tests. As Stanton and Anthony had feared, once they had gained rights for themselves, few men bothered to battle on behalf of women’s rights, for blacks or whites. Black women began to form their own suffrage organizations, feeling largely abandoned by black men and alienated from white women. The division into rival groups in 1869 proved an asset as well as a liability. It enabled the suffrage movement to involve a wider range of women nationwide and forced Stanton to tone down her interperate rhetoric.

After 1869-1870, the battle for women’s suffrage moved from the national level to the states and territories. Even in these smaller arenas, progress was very slow and often subject to the vagaries of partisan, ethnic and religious-group politics. In 1869, the territory of Wyoming was the first (after New Jersey’s brief experiment) to grant women suffrage. The men in sparsely settled, frontier Wyoming were hoping to attract more women and families as permanent residents, rather than just transient men. In addition, Wyoming Democrats believed they
could improve the position of their party by expanding the electorate to include women. When Wyoming became a state in 1890, its women not only had the right to vote but could also serve on juries and hold elective office. Colorado entered the Union in 1876, and in its first state constitution, women were granted the right to vote in local school elections. However, a referendum on full female suffrage was defeated in 1877. With an increasing number of men with more "liberal" views, the example of Wyoming and the rise of the People's Party (Populists), the Colorado legislature in 1893 authorized a referendum on women's suffrage which passed with the help of an intensive campaign by its proponents. Susan Anthony attributed these gains, in part, to less prejudice against suffrage in Western communities.

Utah applied for statehood with a constitution permitting women to vote, which was approved in 1895. The following year, a suffrage amendment in Idaho passed by a sweeping margin. In Idaho and Colorado, women were able to hold public offices as well as vote. In spite of an 1867 law in the territory of Washington that declared that "all white American citizens twenty-one years of age" were entitled to vote, the fact that several women had cast their ballot in 1869 without prosecution, and that the Washington legislature reaffirmed its support for women suffrage in 1883 and 1888, a federal court declared that the legislature had no right under the organic act of the territory to accord women the right to vote. Thus, by the close of the nineteenth century, women held voting rights in only four Western states—Wyoming, Colorado, Utah and Idaho.

The slow progress of the women's suffrage movement resulted from opposition at several levels. The Victorian ideology of the "cult of true womanhood," which confined women to the domestic sphere while men engaged in the worldly affairs of business and politics, retained a powerful hold, reinforced in the press and pulpit. In the North, many ethnic groups, particularly from agricultural regions of Europe, maintained a traditional view of the place of women. In the conservative post-Reconstruction South, many white Southerners, working to keep blacks from the polls, feared any attempts to extend the franchise. Some historians have suggested that the definition of separate spheres accompanied and made possible the replacement of patriarchal family relationships by companionate ones. The terms "separate spheres" expressed both a limiting ideology imposed on women and a set of boundaries expected to be observed by women, as well as a culture created by women.

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Temperance Movement, cartoon from Harper's Magazine, 1859
Just as woman's reform efforts in the antebellum period were dedicated to abolition, so in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries far more women were engaged in battles for temperance or outright prohibition of alcohol or in campaigns to assist the poor and needy, for good government, and for international peace than in the fight for their own enfranchisement. During the late nineteenth century the most significant women's group in support of women's suffrage was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Established in 1874, this reform group was committed to aiding women through numerous means including restricting domestic violence, abandonment and economic deprivation as a result of drunken husbands. In addition to temperance, women's efforts at social reform and improvement pushed and shaped the Populist and Progressive movements. Such efforts at reform also placed entrenched interests, such as the liquor industry and urban political machines, against woman suffrage, because they believed enfranchised women, emphasizing temperance, morality and good government, would vote against them.

Women, too, remained divided over their role in society and whether they should have the right to participate directly in political life, with many accepting the nineteenth century Victorian view of women as subordinate to men and not direct participants in political life. Some women, including prominent women such as Mrs. Grover Cleveland, First Lady in the mid-1890s, remained vigorously opposed to women's right to vote. These anti-suffragists argued that women's views were represented by the men of their social group, since it was presumed that their interests were the same.

During the late nineteenth century, opportunities for women in higher education expanded greatly. Separate women's colleges, including Vassar, Smith, Wellesley, as well as colleges for women affiliated with male universities, such as Barnard at Columbia University and Radcliffe at Harvard University, opened in the Northeast. A number of Western and Midwestern states created co-educational state colleges and universities. By 1880, 40,000 women (nearly a third of all college students) were enrolled in higher education. However, they faced a stark choice on graduation—marriage or a career. Many careers, such as teaching, were open only to unmarried or, at least, childless women. Nearly half of all college-educated women in the late nineteenth century never married; and those who married did so later and had fewer, if any, children.

In 1873, Susan Anthony attempted to cast a ballot in New York and was tried, convicted and fined for this offense. The following year, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed in *Minor v. Happersett*, 88 US 162 (1874), that it was constitutional for a state to deny women the right to vote. Virginia Minor, an official in a local suffragist organization, had tried to vote in Missouri in 1872. She filed a suit with her lawyer husband (since as a married woman she could not bring her own suit) against the registrar who had excluded her from the polls. The Minors argued that suffrage was a privilege of citizenship and that the Fourteenth Amendment prohibited the states from interfering with this privilege. However, the U.S. Supreme Court, affirming the lower court's decision, held that suffrage was not a privilege of citizenship. This forced the suffragists back to Congress for a constitutional amendment.

Recognizing that a divided movement was hurting their success, the two women's suffrage organizations finally overcame their antagonism and merged into the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1890 with Stanton as the first president and Anthony as her successor. However, the organization remained internally divided over strategy. The resulting compromise was to work at both the state and national levels. Between 1870 and 1910, some 480 local suffrage campaigns produced 17 referenda, but only two of those resulted in a victory for woman suffrage. At the same time, suffragists added new arguments to their Enlightenment tradition of individual rights. No longer focused primarily on women's just claim to equal rights as citizens, they now argued that the state needed women precisely because of their difference from men. They claimed that the state needed women to vote because female morality would help improve society and clean up corruption, protect children, and enhance women's ability to carry out their traditional roles as wives and mothers. These arguments, developed as Victorian ideas about the separate roles for men and women, were beginning to crumble between 1900 and 1915 with the growth of working women, labor unions, women's clubs, settlement houses and progressive ideas.
After 1910, the suffragists broadened and intensified their methods. They moved from polite letter-writing campaigns to large-scale parades and other public demonstrations and intense political efforts at the national level. Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s daughter, Harriet Stanton Blatch, whose marriage to an Englishman made her familiar with the more militant approach taken by British suffragists, and Alice Paul, a New Jersey Quaker who had studied in London, brought these militant tactics to the suffrage movement in the United States. At one point, Blatch and other suffragists chained themselves to the White House fence, demanding that President Woodrow Wilson support women’s suffrage. After defeats in state referenda in four key eastern states—Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania—a new generation of younger women assumed control of the women’s rights movement after 1915. These leaders, including Carrie Chapman Catt as well as Paul and Blatch, were committed to national action.

By 1916, suffrage for women had become a national political issue. Suffragists besieged both Republican and Democratic National Conventions that year. Initially ambivalent about the issue, Democratic President Woodrow Wilson announced his support for suffrage at a NAWSA convention in 1916 but reiterated that it should be accomplished on a state by state basis. Republican presidential candidate Charles Evans Hughes supported a national suffrage amendment, but the Republican convention favored state action. The attempt to gain voting rights for women became merged with the issue of U.S. entry into World War I. (See "U.S. Entry into World War I," Volume Two, Chapter Six.) Many prominent women reformers and peace advocates, such as Jane Addams, as well as women’s organizations like the Women’s Peace Party (predecessor of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom), pressed for international mediation rather than U.S. entry into the war. Women peace advocates, like the progressive reformers—male and female, including Alice Paul—had supported Wilson’s re-election. After his re-election, militant suffragists from the National Woman’s Party picketed Wilson at the White House in early 1917, with banners asking “How Long Must Women Wait for Liberty?” Several were arrested and sent to prison where they continued their protests with hunger strikes, generating both support and antipathy. Once the U.S. declared war in April 1917, some women continued to oppose war mobilization, but the majority of women worked long hours supporting the war effort at home. Many women expected that their efforts would be rewarded with expanded political rights. Indeed, President Wilson lent his support to women’s suffrage as he called upon American women to support his crusade to make the world “safe for democracy.”
The Struggle for Women's Rights in the Nineteenth Century

With the nation at war, the government calling for all Americans to do their duty, and the power of the brewers and liquor interests as well as the urban machines temporarily curtailed, the political movement for enfranchising women gained momentum. During 1917, women gained the right to vote in Arkansas, Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota (presidential election only), Ohio (repealed later that year), New York and Rhode Island. In 1918, Oklahoma, South Dakota and Texas (primaries only) followed suit. By that time, women had been granted the right to vote in a growing number of countries: New Zealand (1893); Australia (1902—white women only); Finland (1906); Norway (1907—economic requirements until 1913); Denmark (1915); Iceland (1915—women age 40 or above); Russia (1917), Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, and Hungary (limited); Luxembourg, Poland and the United Kingdom (married women, women householders and women university graduates age 30 and over); Rhodesia (Zimbabwe); and Sweden (1918).

In 1919, a year after the war's end and a year before the next presidential election, Congress passed and President Wilson signed the Nineteenth Amendment granting women suffrage nationally. It took another year for the required three-quarters of the states to ratify the amendment, the most substantial opposition coming in the South. The final state to approve ratification was Tennessee. The constitutional amendment was passed in that state in 1920 by a one-vote margin—the vote of a young congressman whose mother was a long-time suffragist.

Legacies for Today

The Nineteenth Amendment granted 26 million women the right to vote, beginning with the presidential election of 1920. However, most black women, like most black men, were prevented from exercising their right to vote through discriminatory laws and practices, primarily in the Southern states, until the Civil Rights Movement and laws of the 1960s. During the 1920s, after the passage of women's suffrage, the National American Women's Suffrage Association evolved into The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization that influenced public policy through education and advocacy. Alice Paul's National Woman's Party shifted its goal to an Equal Rights Amendment, which the League of Women Voters opposed as a threat to the protective legislation that women had achieved.

By the mid-1920s, it was clear that supporters and opponents of women's suffrage had overestimated the impact that woman's suffrage would have on the political life of the country. Women have tended to vote in smaller proportions than men. They have not voted as a block. With few exceptions, women have followed the voting patterns of the educational, social or economic class or group to which they belong, much like the men. And although the number of women in elective office has grown steadily, progress has been slow. In 1916, Jeanette Rankin (MT) was the first woman elected to serve in Congress. In 1940, Margaret Chase Smith (ME) became the first woman elected to the Senate without having first been elected or appointed to fill a vacant Senate seat. According to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 16 percent of the 100 seats in the U.S. Senate and 16 percent of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives were held by women at the start of the 110th Congress (2007-2009). In 2007, women served as governors in nine of the fifty states;
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represented 23.5 percent of the 7,382 seats in state legislatures and served as mayors for 12 of the 100 largest American cities. This is an increase in comparison to 1979, when women held 3 percent of the seats in Congress, 11 percent of statewide legislative offices and 10 percent of state legislative offices. With Nancy Pelosi (CA) becoming the first female Speaker of the House in 2007, women are finally claiming leadership positions in Congress. The campaign of Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY) as the first female to pose a major challenge to the hegemony of men as a presidential candidate for one of the two major political parties demonstrates both the progress made by women and the lingering sexism. Full political equality for women still remains elusive at the start of the twenty-first century.

Women in the early twenty-first century continue to argue over the definition of women’s issues and the importance of and priorities for particular issues in advancing women’s rights and equality. Is an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution the best way to ensure gender justice or must attitudes and images of women be transformed before legal changes can make a significant difference? Since women have the right to vote, should the franchise be exercised to advance equality of the sexes or are there other issues that have a greater impact on how women vote in any given election? Should women choose candidates who are pro-choice or anti-choice on the issue of abortion, for instance, assuming that single-issue politics is most effective? Or do women need to think about broader platforms and visions that get lost by concentrating too closely on any one issue?

Why, for instance, is there a greater public outcry over sexual harassment cases than over cuts in social welfare when reduction in social welfare funding negatively affects a far greater number of women? How does women’s economic insecurity make them more vulnerable to sexual abuse, whatever its form? How can women forge alliances to advance social change when they have such diverse experiences and needs? Moreover, given the very different educational and occupational opportunities available to women of different racial, ethnic and class backgrounds, how can coalitions be built to address the needs of diverse women? When is it important to include men in those coalitions, and when is it necessary for women to organize on their own?

Far too many of the issues raised in the nineteenth century are still relevant to women’s lives today. Remnants of the ideology of “separate spheres” for men and women persist as symptoms of a gendered system of power relations that has long historical roots. The slow pace of improvement in the legal and political rights of women in the United States in the nineteenth century and the gender inequities that continue into the twenty-first century reflect how glacially social attitudes change. (For a continuation of the struggle for women’s rights, see “Women in the Workforce after World War II.”)

Questions for Discussion

1. How did the antislavery movement challenge established notions regarding women’s roles in society?
2. Why was suffrage for women considered a radical idea in 1848?
3. Which particular groups supported and which opposed women’s suffrage in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and why? How could the conflict over women’s enfranchisement have been resolved?
4. Why were women not given the right to vote along with black men in the Fifteenth Amendment in 1869? What do you think were the most compelling arguments for and against woman’s suffrage in 1869?
5. What might have been the impact on U.S. domestic and foreign policies had women been given the right to vote in 1869?
6. How do women decide when their own needs are more important than helping others in need?
7. How can people of different genders, races, classes and ethnic groups work together to develop an agenda that will benefit them all?
DOCUMENTS

Document 1: Declaration of Sentiments at the Women’s Rights Convention, Seneca Falls, NY, July 1848


Document 3: Sojourner Truth Speech at Akron Women’s Rights Convention, Ohio, June 1851, from Anti-Slavery Bugle, Salem, Ohio, June 21, 1851.


TEACHER OVERHEADS/STUDENT HANDOUTS

1. Timeline: The Struggle for Women’s Rights, 1780-1860

2. Directions for Mock Negotiations: Prioritize the resolutions at the Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, 1848

3. Resolutions from the Declaration of Sentiments at the Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, July 1848

4. Directions for Mock Mediation: Should Women’s Rights Organizations Support the Fifteenth Amendment in 1869?

5. Timeline: The Struggle for Women’s Rights Continues, 1848-today
Chapter Ten: The Struggle for Women's Rights in the Nineteenth Century

**Sources and Credits for Illustrations**

p. 4: Women Voting in New Jersey in 1797, *Rutgers University Libraries*

p. 5: Antebellum women in corseted hoop skirts, 1830s, *University of Waterloo*

p. 7: Angelina Grimké, *LC-USZ61-1609*

p. 7: Sarah Grimké, *LC-USZ61-1608*

p. 8: Cover of Lydia M. Child's *Authentic Anecdotes of American Slavery*, 1838, *LC Rare Book Division*

p. 10: Lucretia Mott, *LC-USZ62-42559*

p. 10: Amy Kirby Post, *Rochester Public Library*

p. 11: Frederick Douglass, *LC-USZ62-15887*

p. 11: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *LC-USZ62-28195*

p. 14: Susan B. Anthony, *University of Pennsylvania Libraries*

p. 15: Sojourner Truth, *LC-USZ62-119343*

p. 15: Lucy Stone, *LC-USZ62-29701*

p. 15: Frances Watkins Harper, *University of Alabama*

p. 16: Catharine Beecher, *The Library of Congress*

p. 18: Temperance Movement Cartoon from *Harper's Magazine*, 1859, *University of Wisconsin*

p. 20: Suffragists Demonstrating at the Capitol, 1913, *LC-USZ62-22262*

p. 21: Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, 1919, *National Archives 100 Most Important Documents*