



Struggle for Women's Rights

As
You
Read

Explore These Questions

- What rights did women lack in the early 1800s?
- What were the goals of the Seneca Falls Convention?
- How did opportunities for women improve in the mid-1800s?

Define

- women's rights movement

Identify

- Sojourner Truth
- Lucretia Mott
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton
- Seneca Falls Convention
- Susan B. Anthony
- Emma Willard
- Mary Lyon
- Elizabeth Blackwell

SETTING the Scene

As you have read, Sarah and Angelina Grimké became powerful speakers against slavery. However, the boldness of their activities shocked many people. Some New England ministers even scolded the sisters in a newspaper. "When [a woman] assumes the place and tone of a man as a public reformer," they wrote, "her character becomes unnatural."

Unmoved by such criticism, Angelina Grimké asked, "What then can woman do for the slave, when she herself is under the feet of man and shamed into silence?" More determined than ever, the Grimkés continued their crusade. Now, however, they had a second topic to lecture about—women's rights.

Seeking Equal Rights

Women had few political or legal rights in the mid-1800s. They could not vote or hold office. When a woman married, her husband became owner of all her property. If a woman worked outside the home, her wages belonged to her husband. A husband also had the right to hit his wife as long as he did not seriously injure her.

Many women, like the Grimkés, had joined the abolitionist movement. As these women worked to end slavery, they became aware that they lacked full social and political rights themselves. Both black and white abolitionists joined the struggle for women's rights.

Truth speaks out

One of the most effective women's rights leaders was born into slavery in New York. Her original name was Isabella Baumfree. After gaining her freedom, she came to believe that God wanted her to crusade against slavery. Vowing to sojourn, or travel, across the land speaking the truth, Baumfree took the name **Sojourner Truth**.

Truth was a spellbinding speaker. Her exact words were rarely written down. However, her powerful message spread by word of mouth. According to one witness, Truth ridiculed the idea that women were inferior to men by nature:

“ I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that? ”



Connections With Science

In the mid-1800s, women wore tightly laced corsets to make the waist as tiny as possible. Doctors warned that these "tightlacers" caused fainting, squeezed the internal organs, and could even crush the rib cage. Instead, reformers supported a looser, trouserlike garment known as bloomers.

Mott and Stanton

Other abolitionists also turned to the cause of women's rights. The two most influential were Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Lucretia Mott was a Quaker and the mother of five children. A quiet speaker, she won the respect of many listeners with her persuasive logic. Mott also used her organizing skills to set up petition drives across the North.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was the daughter of a New York judge. As a child, she was an excellent student as well as an athlete. However, her father gave his gifted daughter little encouragement. Stanton later remarked that her "father would have felt a proper pride had I been a man." In addition, clerks in her father's law office used to tease her by reading laws that denied basic rights to women. Such experiences made her a lifelong foe of inequality.

In 1840, Stanton and Mott joined a group of Americans at a World Antislavery Convention in London. However, convention officials refused to let women take an active part in the proceedings. Female delegates were even forced to sit behind a curtain, hidden from view. After returning home, Mott and Stanton took up the cause of women's rights with new energy.

A Historic Meeting

While they were still in London, Mott and Stanton decided to hold a convention to draw attention to the problems women faced. "The men... had [shown] a great need for some education on that question," Stanton later recalled.

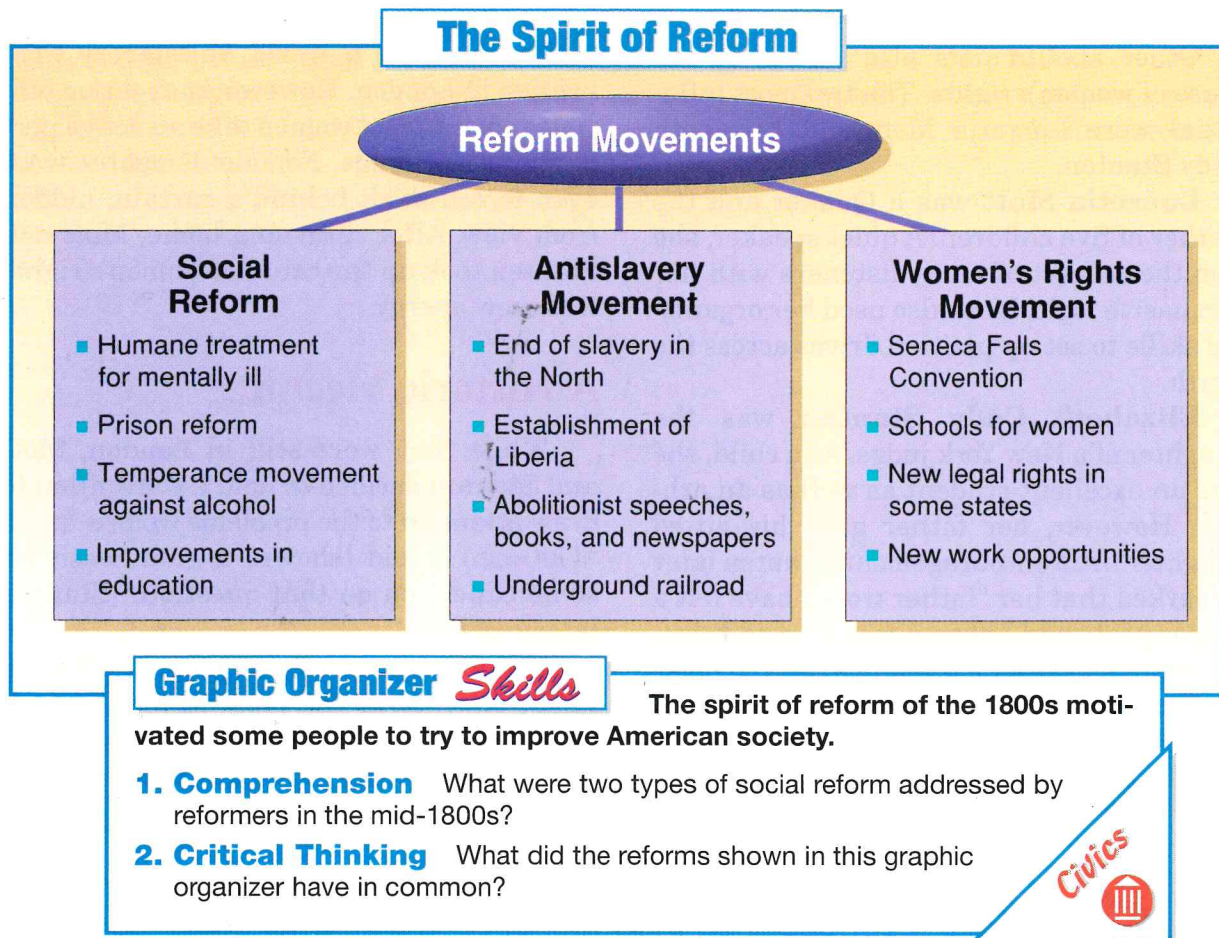
Eight years later, in 1848, in Seneca Falls, New York, the meeting finally took place. About 200 women and 40 men attended the **Seneca Falls Convention**.

Biography

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Sojourner Truth

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (left) was born into a well-to-do, middle-class family and raised her own children in comfort. Sojourner Truth (right) was born into slavery and saw at least one of her children sold. Despite their vastly different backgrounds, the two women became allies in the fight for women's rights. ★ Both Truth and Stanton were abolitionists. How was abolition linked to the movement for women's rights?





“Women are created equal”

At the meeting, leaders of the women’s rights movement presented a Declaration of Sentiments. Modeled on the Declaration of Independence, it proclaimed, “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal.”

The women and men at Seneca Falls voted for resolutions that demanded equality for women at work, at school, and in church. Only one resolution met any opposition at the convention. It demanded that women be allowed to vote. Even the bold women at Seneca Falls hesitated to take this step. In the end, the resolution narrowly passed.

A long struggle

The Seneca Falls Convention marked the start of an organized campaign for equal rights, or **women’s rights movement**. Other leaders took up the struggle. **Susan B. Anthony** built a close-working partnership with Elizabeth Cady Stanton. While Stanton

usually had to stay at home with her seven children, Anthony was free to travel across the country. Anthony was a tireless speaker. Even when audiences heckled her and threw eggs, she always finished her speech.

In the years after 1848, women worked for change in many areas. They won additional legal rights in some states. For example, New York passed laws allowing married women to keep their own property and wages. Still, many men and women opposed the women’s rights movement. The struggle for equal rights would last many years.

New Opportunities

In the early 1800s, women from poor families had little hope of learning even to read. Middle-class girls who went to school learned dancing and drawing rather than science or mathematics. After all, people argued, women were expected to care for their families. Why did they need an education?

The women at Seneca Falls believed that education was a key to equality. Elizabeth Cady Stanton said:

“The girl must be allowed to romp and play, climb, skate, and swim. Her clothes must be more like those of the boy—strong, loose-fitting garments, thick boots. . . Like the boy, she must be taught to look forward to a life of self-dependence and to prepare herself early for some trade profession.”



The American Medical Women's Association gives this annual medal in honor of Elizabeth Blackwell.

Holyoke was the first women's college in the United States.

New careers

At about this time, a few men's colleges began to admit women. As their education improved, women found jobs teaching, especially in grade schools.

A few women entered fields such as medicine. **Elizabeth Blackwell** attended medical school at Geneva College in New York. To the surprise of school officials, she graduated first in her class. Women had provided medical care since colonial times, but Blackwell

was the first woman in the United States to earn a medical degree. She later set up the nation's first medical school for women.

Women made their mark in other fields as well. Maria Mitchell became a noted astronomer. In the 1850s, Antoinette Blackwell was the first American woman to be ordained as a minister. She also campaigned for abolitionism, temperance, and women's right to vote.

Schools for women

Reformers worked to improve education for women. **Emma Willard** opened a high school for girls in Troy, New York. Here, young women studied “men's” subjects, such as mathematics and physics.

Mary Lyon opened Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in Massachusetts in 1837. She did not call the school a college because many people thought it was wrong for women to attend college. In fact, Mount

★ Section 3 Review ★

Recall

1. **Identify** (a) Sojourner Truth, (b) Lucretia Mott, (c) Elizabeth Cady Stanton, (d) Seneca Falls Convention, (e) Susan B. Anthony, (f) Emma Willard, (g) Mary Lyon, (h) Elizabeth Blackwell.
2. **Define** women's rights movement.

Comprehension

3. Describe three ways that laws discriminated against women in the early 1800s.
4. What resolutions did the delegates at Seneca Falls make?

5. (a) What type of education did most women receive in the mid-1800s? (b) How did reformers change women's education?

Critical Thinking and Writing

6. **Understanding Causes and Effects** How was the women's rights movement a long-term effect of the antislavery movement?
7. **Predicting Consequences** How do you think the growth of educational opportunities affected the future of the women's rights movement?



Activity Designing a T-shirt It is four weeks before the Seneca Falls Convention. You have been asked to create a T-shirt for all the attendees. Draw a clever and attractive design that expresses the feelings and demands of the women's rights movement.