



# Women and Reform

## MAIN IDEA

Women reformers expanded their efforts from movements such as abolition and temperance to include women's rights.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The efforts of 19th-century women reformers inspired both woman suffragists in the early-1900s and present-day feminist movements.

## Terms & Names

- Elizabeth Cady Stanton
- Lucretia Mott
- cult of domesticity
- Sarah Grimké
- Angelina Grimké
- temperance movement
- Seneca Falls Convention
- Sojourner Truth

## One American's Story

**Elizabeth Cady Stanton** timed her marriage in 1840 so that she could accompany her husband to London for the World's Anti-Slavery Convention, where her husband was a delegate. At the antislavery convention, Stanton and the other women delegates received an unpleasant surprise.

### A PERSONAL VOICE ELIZABETH CADY STANTON

“Though women were members of the National Anti-Slavery society, accustomed to speak and vote in all its conventions, and to take an equally active part with men in the whole antislavery struggle, and were there as delegates from associations of men and women, as well as those distinctively of their own sex, yet all alike were rejected because they were women.”

—quoted in *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*

At the convention, Stanton found a friend in the Quaker abolitionist **Lucretia Mott**. Stanton and Mott vowed “to hold a convention as soon as we returned home, and form a society to advocate the rights of women.” They kept their pledge and headed the first women's rights convention, assembled at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848.



▲ Elizabeth Cady Stanton

## Women's Roles in the Mid-1800s

In the early 19th century, women faced limited options. Prevailing customs demanded that women restrict their activities after marriage to the home and family. Housework and child care were considered the only proper activities for married women. Later that tradition became known as the **cult of domesticity**.

By 1850, roughly one in five white women had worked for wages a few years before they were married. About one in ten single white women worked outside


**MAIN IDEA**
**Identifying Problems**

**A** What were the main problems faced by women in the mid-1800s?

the home, earning about half the pay men received to do the same job. Women could neither vote nor sit on juries in the early 1800s, even if they were taxpayers. Typically, when a woman married, her property and any money she earned became her husband's. In many instances, married women lacked guardianship rights over their children. **A**

## Women Mobilize for Reform

Despite such limits, women actively participated in all the important reform movements of the 19th century. Many middle-class white women were inspired by the optimistic message of the Second Great Awakening. Women were often shut out of meetings by disapproving men, and responded by expanding their efforts to seek equal rights for themselves.

**WOMEN ABOLITIONISTS** Sarah and Angelina Grimké, daughters of a South Carolina slaveholder, spoke eloquently for abolition. In 1836 Angelina Grimké published *An Appeal to Christian Women of the South*, in which she called upon women to “overthrow this horrible system of oppression and cruelty.” Women abolitionists also raised money, distributed literature, and collected signatures for petitions to Congress.

Some men supported women's efforts. William Lloyd Garrison, for example, joined the determined women who had been denied participation in the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840. Garrison said, “After battling so many long years for the liberties of African slaves, I can take no part in a convention that strikes down the most sacred rights of all women.” Other men, however, denounced the female abolitionists. The Massachusetts clergy criticized the Grimké sisters for assuming “the place and tone of man as public reformer.”

Opposition only served to make women reformers more determined. The abolitionist cause became a powerful spur to other reform causes, as well as to the women's rights movement. **B**

**WORKING FOR TEMPERANCE** The **temperance movement**, the effort to prohibit the drinking of alcohol, was another offshoot of the influence of churches and the women's rights movement. Speaking at a temperance meeting in 1852, Mary C. Vaughan attested to the evils of alcohol.

### A PERSONAL VOICE MARY C. VAUGHAN

“There is no reform in which woman can act better or more appropriately than temperance. . . . Its effects fall so crushingly upon her . . . she has so often seen its slow, insidious, but not the less surely fatal advances, gaining upon its victim. . . . Oh! the misery, the utter, hopeless misery of the drunkard's wife!”

—quoted in *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*

In the early 19th century, alcohol flowed freely in America. Liquor helped wash down the salted meat and fish that composed the dominant diet and, until the development of anesthetics in the 1840s, doctors dosed their patients with whiskey or brandy before operating.

Many Americans, however, recognized drunkenness as a serious problem. Lyman Beecher, a prominent Connecticut minister, had begun lecturing against all use of liquor in 1825. A year later, the American Temperance Society was founded. By 1833, some 6,000 local temperance societies dotted the country.

## KEY PLAYER



**LUCRETIA MOTT**  
1793–1880

History has it that Lucretia Mott was so talkative as a child that her mother called her Long Tongue. As an adult, she used her considerable public-speaking skills to campaign against slavery.

Mott became interested in women's rights when she learned that her salary as a teacher would be roughly half of what a man might receive. She was a prominent figure at the Seneca Falls Convention, at which she delivered the opening and closing addresses. Mott and her husband later acted on their abolitionist principles by taking in runaway slaves escaping on the Underground Railroad.

**MAIN IDEA**
**Summarizing**

**B** In what ways were women excluded from the abolitionist movement?



▲ This engraving is from a temperance society tract of around 1840. It depicts a family driven to despair by alcohol.

*Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman* (1838), a woman who knew “chemistry enough to keep the pot boiling, and geography enough to know the location of the different rooms in her house,” was considered learned enough.

### A PERSONAL VOICE SARAH GRIMKÉ

“During the early part of my life, my lot was cast among the butterflies of the fashionable world, I am constrained to say . . . that their education is miserably deficient. . . . Our brethren may reject my doctrine . . . but I believe they would be ‘partakers of the benefit’ . . . and would find that woman, as their equal, was unspeakably more valuable than woman as their inferior, both as a moral and an intellectual being.”

—*Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman*



▲ Sarah Grimké (above) and her sister Angelina spoke out against slavery and gender inequality.

In 1821 Emma Willard opened one of the nation’s first academically rigorous schools for girls in Troy, New York. The Troy Female Seminary became the model for a new type of women’s school. Despite much mockery that “they will be educating cows next,” Willard’s school prospered.

In 1837 Mary Lyon overcame heated resistance to found another important institution of higher learning for women, Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (later Mount Holyoke College) in South Hadley, Massachusetts. In the same year Ohio’s Oberlin College admitted four women to its degree program, thus becoming the nation’s first fully coeducational college.

African-American women faced greater obstacles to getting an education. In 1831 white Quaker Prudence Crandall opened a school for girls in Canterbury, Connecticut. Two years later she admitted an African-American girl, but the townspeople protested so vigorously against desegregated education that Crandall decided to admit only African-American students. This aroused even more opposition, and in 1834 Crandall was forced to close the school and leave town. Only after the Civil War would the severely limited educational opportunities for African-American women finally, though slowly, begin to expand. **C**

**WOMEN AND HEALTH REFORM** In the mid-19th century, educated women also began to work for health reforms. Elizabeth Blackwell, who in 1849 became the first woman to graduate from medical college, later opened the New York Infirmary for Women and Children. In the 1850s, Lyman Beecher’s daughter, Catharine, undertook a national survey of women’s health. To her dismay, Beecher found three sick women for every healthy one. It was no wonder: women

They held rallies, produced pamphlets, and brought about a decline in the consumption of alcohol that would continue into the 1860s.

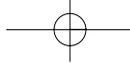
### EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

Until the 1820s, American girls had few educational avenues open to them beyond elementary school. As Sarah Grimké, who ran a school for women with her sister Angelina, complained in *Letters on the*

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Summarizing

**C** What gains did women make in education in the 1820s and 1830s? Did these gains extend to African-American women?



rarely bathed or exercised, and the fashion of the day included corsets so restrictive that breathing sometimes was difficult.

Amelia Bloomer, publisher of a temperance newspaper, rebelled. Bloomer often wore a costume of loose-fitting pants tied at the ankles and covered by a short skirt. Readers besieged her with requests for the sewing pattern. Most women who sewed the “bloomers,” however, considered it a daring venture, as many men were outraged by women wearing pants.

## Women’s Rights Movement Emerges

The various reform movements of the mid-19th century fed the growth of the women’s movement by providing women with increased opportunities to act outside the home.

**SENECA FALLS** In 1848 Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott decided to hold a women’s rights convention. They announced what would become known as the **Seneca Falls Convention** (for the New York town in which it was held). Stanton and Mott composed an agenda and a detailed statement of grievances. Stanton carefully modeled this “Declaration of Sentiments” on the Declaration of Independence. The second paragraph began with a revision of very familiar words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal.” Some of the resolutions that were also proposed at the convention spoke to the circumstances with which women reformers had struggled.



▲ Amelia Bloomer adopted the full trousers that became known as bloomers in 1851.

### A PERSONAL VOICE

**“Resolved, That all laws which prevent women from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no force or authority.**

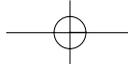
**Resolved, That woman is man’s equal—was intended to be so by the Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such.”**

—Resolutions adopted at Seneca Falls Convention, 1848

Nearly 300 women and men gathered at the Wesleyan Methodist Church for the convention. The participants approved all parts of the declaration unanimously—including several resolutions to encourage women to participate in all public issues on an equal basis with men—except one. The one exception, which still passed by a narrow majority, was the resolution calling for women “to secure to



◀ In 1888, delegates to the First International Council of Women met to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Seneca Falls. Stanton is seated third from the right.



**KEY PLAYER**



**SOJOURNER TRUTH  
1797–1883**

Sojourner Truth, born Isabella Van Wagener (or Baumfree), became legally free on July 4, 1827, when slavery was abolished in New York. A deeply spiritual woman, Truth became a traveling preacher dedicated to pacifism, abolitionism, and equality. She earned a reputation for tenacity, successfully suing for the return of her youngest son who had been illegally sold into slavery.

Truth was not taught to read or write but dictated her memoirs, published in 1850 as *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave*.

After the Emancipation Proclamation, Truth's final cause was to lobby (unsuccessfully) for land distribution for former slaves.

themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise,” the right to vote. The vote remained a controversial aim. Some thought suffrage was an extreme solution to a nonexistent problem. As Lucy Stone’s sister wrote in 1846, “I can’t vote, but what care I for that, I would not if I could.” **D**

**SOJOURNER TRUTH** Women reformers made significant contributions to improving social conditions in the mid-19th century. Yet conditions for slaves worsened. Isabella Baumfree, a slave for the first 30 years of her life, took the name **Sojourner Truth** when she decided to sojourn (travel) throughout the country preaching, and later, arguing for abolition. At a women’s rights convention in 1851, the tall, muscular black woman was hissed at in disapproval. Because Truth supported abolition, some participants feared her speaking would make their own cause less popular. But Truth won applause with her speech that urged men to grant women their rights.

**MAIN IDEA**

**Contrasting**  
**D** How did the Seneca Falls Convention differ from the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention held in 1840?

**A PERSONAL VOICE SOJOURNER TRUTH**

“Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman?”

—quoted in *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave*

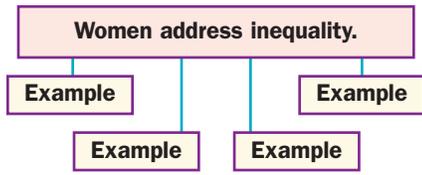
As Truth showed, hard work was a central fact of life for most women. In the mid-19th century, this continued to be the case as women entered the emerging industrial workplace. Once there, they continued the calls for women’s rights and other social reforms.

**SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT**

- 1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton
  - cult of domesticity
  - temperance movement
  - Sojourner Truth
  - Lucretia Mott
  - Sarah and Angelina Grimké
  - Seneca Falls Convention

**MAIN IDEA**

- 2. TAKING NOTES**  
In a diagram similar to the one shown, fill in historical events, ideas, or people that relate to the main idea.



**CRITICAL THINKING**

- 3. ANALYZING ISSUES**  
The Seneca Falls “Declaration of Sentiments” asserted that “Woman is man’s equal.” In what ways would that change the status women held at that time? Cite facts to support your answer. **Think About:**
- women’s social, economic, and legal status in the mid-1800s
  - married women’s domestic roles
  - single women’s career opportunities and wages

- 4. EVALUATING**  
In what ways did the reform movements affect the lives of women—both white and African American? Use details from the section to support your answer.
- 5. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS**  
Why do you think that many of the people who fought for abolition also fought for women’s rights?