



▲ Woman who worked in the temperance reform movement, 1851

Equality for Women

The sisters Sarah Grimké and Angelina Grimké Weld were ardent abolitionists. Through their work on the behalf of slaves, they became interested in fighting for the rights of another oppressed group: women.

“I am persuaded that the rights of woman, like the rights of slaves, need only be examined to be understood and asserted, even by some of those, who are now endeavouring to smother the irrepressible desire for mental and spiritual freedom which glows in the breast of many. . . .

Men and women were CREATED EQUAL; they are both moral and accountable beings, and whatever is *right* for man to do is *right* for woman.”

—Sarah Grimké, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman*, 1838

The Women's Movement

Objectives

- Identify the limits faced by American women in the early 1800s.
- Describe how women began playing an increasing role in political and economic life.
- Trace the development of the women's rights movement.

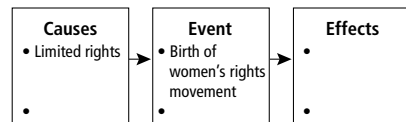
Terms and People

Sojourner Truth	women's rights
Lucretia Mott	movement
Elizabeth Cady Stanton	Susan B. Anthony
Seneca Falls Convention	suffrage
Declaration of Sentiments	

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Identify Causes and Effects

As you read, record the causes and effects of the birth of the women's rights movement.



Why It Matters Women took active roles in the temperance movement, the abolition movement, and other reform movements. Soon, some of these reformers began to work to gain equality for women as well. Their efforts would lay the groundwork for women's struggle for equal rights—especially the right to vote—over the next hundred years. **Section Focus Question:** What steps did American women take to advance their rights in the mid-1800s?

Women Work for Change

In the early 1800s, American women lacked many basic legal and economic rights. They usually could not own property, they could not hold office or vote, and they rarely took any role in public life. Formal educational opportunities beyond grade school were almost unheard-of. In the rare instances of divorce, husbands usually gained custody of children.

Women Lead Reform Efforts The drive to reform American society created by the Second Great Awakening provided new opportunities for women. Many joined reform groups sponsored by their churches. Women such as Dorothea Dix and Emma Willard played leading roles in the great reform movements of the day. Most community leaders of the temperance movement were women, partly because women and children were the primary victims of a husband or father's abuse of alcohol.

The abolition movement attracted some of the most thoughtful women of the day, including the Grimké sisters. Many abolitionist groups, like the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, were made up entirely of women. One of the most effective abolitionist lecturers was **Sojourner Truth**, a former slave from New York who entranced audiences with her powerful speech and arguments.

Women Enter the Workplace In the 1820s and 1830s, the Northeast was rapidly industrializing. This provided the first real economic opportunity for women outside the home in the nation's history. Thousands of young women who would have stayed in the family home instead went to work in the new mills and factories. This gave many a small degree of economic independence (although their wages were typically sent to their husbands or fathers) and a larger degree of social independence as they developed friendships with other factory workers. By 1830, a few women's labor unions had formed.

✓ **Checkpoint** What led to women becoming leaders of various reform movements?

Women Fight for Rights

Although many women became leading reformers and many others entered the workforce, there had still been virtually no progress in women's rights. Real progress began only when two historical trends coincided in the 1830s. First, many urban middle-class northern women began to hire poor women to do their housework. Freed from many of the burdens of housekeeping, these middle-class women had more time to think about the society in which they wanted to raise their children.

Vocabulary Builder

virtually—(VER choo uh lee) *adv.*
almost entirely; all but completely

● INFOGRAPHIC

History-Makers of the Early Women's Movement

Many women from different backgrounds and with different goals fought for women's rights in the mid-to late-1800s. Below are three early leaders.

◀ **Margaret Fuller** (1810–1850) took a key role in developing Transcendentalist thought. As an accomplished writer and thinker, she believed that women's powers of intellect were equal to those of men and that women should be able to pursue any career they chose. Her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* provided an intellectual basis for the budding women's rights movement.

*“We would have every
path open to woman
as freely as to man.”*

Margaret Fuller

Second, as more women became involved in the abolitionist movement, they began to see their own social restrictions as being comparable to slavery. They began to call for increased rights of their own.

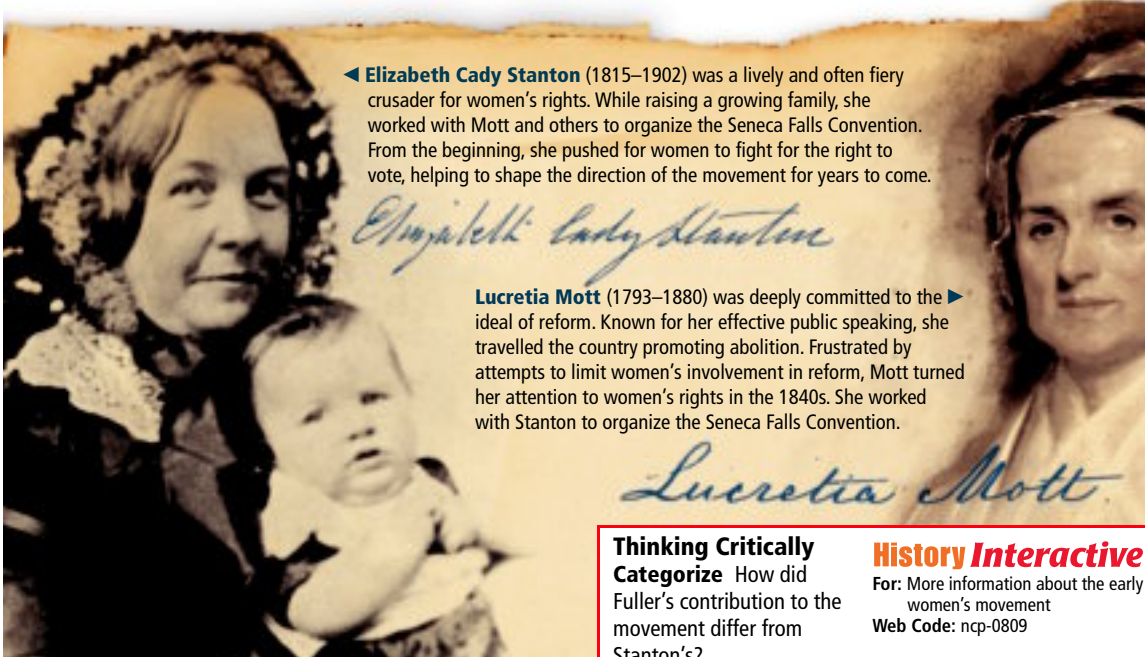
A Fight for Equality Begins Women's rights reformers began to publish their ideas in pamphlets and books. Among the first of these was Angelina Grimké. Grimké argued that God made men and women equal and that therefore men and women should be treated equally.

The women who spoke up for full equality were a small minority, however. Even among abolitionist women there was disagreement about how much public leadership women should take. When an international abolitionist convention met in London in 1840, the group fractured over whether women should be allowed to speak publicly and join in the men's business meetings.

Among the American women who traveled to the conference were **Lucretia Mott** and **Elizabeth Cady Stanton**. Mott, a Quaker, had helped found the American Anti-Slavery Society and the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. Stanton was married to a leading abolitionist, Harry Stanton. Both the Stantons were keenly interested in women's rights: When they wed, the couple agreed that she should remove the word "obey" from her marriage vows.

When they arrived in London, Mott and Stanton were told that women were not permitted to speak at the antislavery conference. Outraged, the two women were inspired to take a dramatic step to advance women's rights.

Women Meet in Seneca Falls In 1848, Mott and Stanton helped organize the nation's first Women's Rights Convention, held in Seneca Falls, New York. Often called the **Seneca Falls Convention**, the meeting attracted hundreds of men and women. One of the most illustrious attendees was Frederick Douglass.



◀ **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** (1815–1902) was a lively and often fiery crusader for women's rights. While raising a growing family, she worked with Mott and others to organize the Seneca Falls Convention. From the beginning, she pushed for women to fight for the right to vote, helping to shape the direction of the movement for years to come.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Lucretia Mott (1793–1880) was deeply committed to the ideal of reform. Known for her effective public speaking, she travelled the country promoting abolition. Frustrated by attempts to limit women's involvement in reform, Mott turned her attention to women's rights in the 1840s. She worked with Stanton to organize the Seneca Falls Convention.

Lucretia Mott

Thinking Critically
Categorize How did Fuller's contribution to the movement differ from Stanton's?

History Interactive*

For: More information about the early women's movement

Web Code: ncp-0809

The delegates to the convention adopted a **Declaration of Sentiments**, modeled after the language of the Declaration of Independence:

Primary Source


“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal. . . . The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.”

—Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Declaration of Sentiments

The Declaration called for greater educational opportunities for women, as well as for the right of women to control their own wages and property.

The Seneca Falls Convention resulted in no immediate, concrete improvements in women’s rights. It did, however, mark the beginning of the **women’s rights movement**, the campaign for equal rights for women, in the United States. It also inspired a generation of leaders who carried on the struggle. Among them was **Susan B. Anthony**, whose involvement in the temperance and abolition movements inspired her to work for greater rights for women as well. For more than 50 years, Anthony and Stanton would stand side by side at the forefront of the women’s rights movement in America. Anthony focused most of her efforts on procuring a single, critical right for women: **suffrage**, or the right to vote. But the long, hard quest for women’s suffrage would not be won in Anthony’s lifetime.

Women Make Some Gains In 1848, the same year as the Seneca Falls Convention, the state of New York passed a law, the Married Women’s Property Act, guaranteeing many property rights for women. Elizabeth Cady Stanton had worked hard for its passage. New York’s efforts to advance property rights for women would become a model for similar laws in other states in the years to come. By the mid-1800s, American women had laid the foundation for a future in which equality seemed a real possibility.

 **Checkpoint** What role did Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton play in the women’s rights movement?

Vocabulary Builder

procure—(proh KYOOR) *v.* to gain or obtain through some effort

SECTION

4 Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nda-0205

Comprehension

- 1. Terms and People** Write a sentence explaining how each of the following was connected with women’s rights.
 - Sojourner Truth
 - Lucretia Mott
 - Elizabeth Cady Stanton
 - Seneca Falls Convention
 - Declaration of Sentiments
 - women’s rights movement
 - Susan B. Anthony
 - suffrage

2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:

Identify Causes and Effects Use your chart to answer the Section Focus Question: What steps did American women take to advance their rights in the mid-1800s?

Writing About History

- 3. Quick Write: Make a Point-by-Point Outline** One way to organize a compare-and-contrast essay is point by point: first describing one of the items to be compared and then describing the other. Make an outline for a point-by-point essay comparing and contrasting the rights of men and women in the early 1800s.

Critical Thinking

- 4. Draw Inferences** Why do you think women’s rights were so limited in the early years of the country?
- 5. Synthesize Information** Why would abolitionists become outspoken advocates for women’s rights?
- 6. Determine Relevance** How significant do you think the Seneca Falls Convention was? Explain your answer.