

Women's Rights

If YOU were there...

You are a schoolteacher in New York State in 1848. Although you earn a small salary, you still live at home. Your father does not believe that unmarried women should live alone or look after their own money. One day in a shop, you see a poster about a public meeting to discuss women's rights. You know your father will be angry if you go to the meeting. But you are very curious.

Would you attend the meeting? Why?

BUILDING BACKGROUND Women were active in the movements to reform prisons and schools. They fought for temperance and worked for abolition. But with all their work for social change, women still lacked many rights and opportunities of their own. Throughout the 1800s, the women's rights movement gradually became stronger and more organized.

Women's Struggle for Equal Rights

Fighting for the rights of African Americans led many female abolitionists to fight for women's rights. In the mid-1800s, these women found that they had to defend their right to speak in public, particularly when a woman addressed both men and women. For example, members of the press, the clergy, and even some male abolitionists criticized the Grimké sisters. These critics thought that the sisters should not give public speeches. They did not want women to leave their traditional female roles. The Grimkés protested that women had a moral duty to lead the antislavery movement.

Early Writings for Women's Rights

In 1838 Sarah Grimké published a pamphlet arguing for equal rights for women. She titled it *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women*.

“I ask no favors for my sex ... All I ask our brethren [brothers] is that they will take their feet from off our necks, and permit us to stand upright on that ground which God designed us to occupy.”

—Sarah Grimké, quoted in *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina*, edited by Gerda Lerner

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. Influenced by the abolition movement, many women struggled to gain equal rights for themselves.
2. Calls for women's rights met opposition from men and women.
3. The Seneca Falls Convention launched the first organized women's rights movement in the United States.

The Big Idea

Reformers sought to improve women's rights in American society.

Key Terms and People

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, p. 464
Lucretia Mott, p. 464
Seneca Falls Convention, p. 464
Declaration of Sentiments, p. 464
Lucy Stone, p. 465
Susan B. Anthony, p. 465

TAKING NOTES

Create a graphic organizer like the one shown below. Use it to show some of the significant events in the struggle for women's rights.

Date	Events
1838	
1848	
1851	
1860	

Sarah Grimké also argued for equal educational opportunities. She pointed out laws that negatively affected women. In addition, she demanded equal pay for equal work.

Sarah Grimké never married. She explained that the laws of the day gave a husband complete control of his wife's property. Therefore, she feared that by marrying, she would become more like a slave than a wife. Her sister, Angelina, did marry, but she refused to promise to obey her husband during their marriage ceremony. She married Theodore Weld, an abolitionist. Weld agreed to give up his legal right to control her property after they married. For the Grimkés, the abolitionist principles and women's rights principles were identical.

In 1845 the famous transcendentalist Margaret Fuller published *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. This book used well-known sayings to explain the role of women in American society. Fuller used democratic and transcendentalist principles to stress the importance of individualism to all people, especially women. The book influenced many leaders of the women's rights movement.

Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth was another powerful supporter of both abolition and women's rights.

She had been born into slavery in about 1797. Her birth name was Isabella Baumfree. She took the name Sojourner Truth because she felt that her mission was to be a sojourner, or traveler, and spread the truth. Though she never learned to read or write, she impressed many well-educated people. One person who thought highly of her was the author Harriet Beecher Stowe. Stowe said that she had never spoken "with anyone who had more . . . personal presence than this woman." Truth stood six feet tall and was a confident speaker.

In 1851 Truth gave a speech that is often quoted to this day.

“That man over here says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over mud puddles, or gives me any best place . . . Look at me! I have ploughed and planted and . . . no man could head [outwork] me. And ain't I a woman?”

—Sojourner Truth, quoted in *A History of Women in America* by Carol Hymowitz and Michaele Weissman

Truth, the Grimké sisters, and other supporters of the women's movement were determined to be heard.

READING CHECK Drawing Inferences

Why would reformers link the issues of abolition and women's rights?

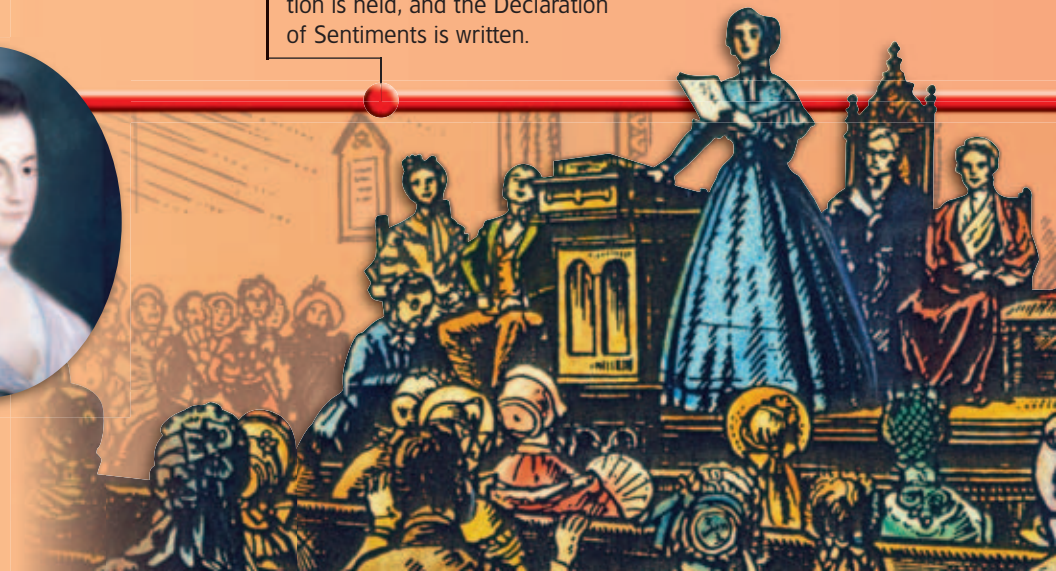
Time Line

Women's Rights

1776 Abigail Adams asks her husband, John Adams, to "remember the ladies" and their rights in the Declaration of Independence.



1848 The Seneca Falls Convention is held, and the Declaration of Sentiments is written.



Opposing the Call for Women's Rights

Publications about women's rights first appeared in the United States shortly after the American Revolution. However, women's concerns did not become a national issue with strong opposition for many more years.

The Movement Grows

The change took place when women took a more active and leading role in reform and abolition. Other social changes also led to the rise of the women's movement. Women took advantage of better educational opportunities in the early 1800s. Their efforts on behalf of reform groups helped them learn how to organize more effectively and to work together.

Another benefit of reform-group work was that some men began to fight for women's rights. Many activists, both men and women, found it unacceptable that women were not allowed to vote or sit on juries. They were also upset that married women in many states had little or no control over their own property.

Opposition to Women's Rights

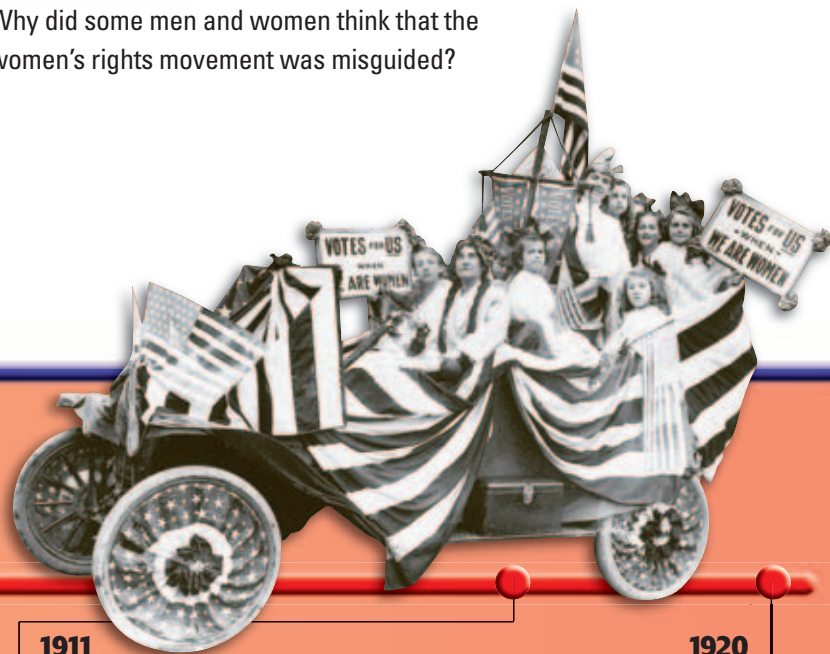
Like the abolitionist movement, the struggle for women's rights faced opposition. Many people did not agree with some of the goals of

the women's rights movement. Some women believed that they did not need new rights. They said that women were not unequal to men, only different. Some critics believed that women should not try to work in public for social changes. Women were welcome to work for social change, but only from within their homes. "Let her not look away from her own little family circle for the means of producing moral and social reforms," wrote T. S. Arthur. His advice appeared in a popular women's magazine called *The Lady at Home*.

Some people also thought that women lacked the physical or mental strength to survive without men's protection. They believed that a woman should go from the protection of her father's home to that of her husband's. They also thought that women could not cope with the outside world; therefore, a husband should control his wife's property. Despite opposition, women continued to pursue their goal of greater rights.

READING CHECK Drawing Conclusions

Why did some men and women think that the women's rights movement was misguided?



1872 Susan B. Anthony is arrested while trying to vote in New York.

1890 Wyoming's new state constitution includes women's suffrage.

"There never will be complete equality until women themselves help to make laws and elect lawmakers."

Susan B. Anthony

1911 The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage is formed.

1920 On August 26, the Nineteenth Amendment is declared ratified by Congress, giving women the right to vote.

ANALYSIS SKILL

READING TIME LINES

Women in Wyoming could vote how many years before women in the rest of the country could?

Primary Source

HISTORIC DOCUMENT

Declaration of Sentiments

At the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, 100 people signed the Declaration of Sentiments, a document declaring the rights of women. The wording of the document purposely echoed the Declaration of Independence.

The authors use the same words that are in the Declaration of Independence, but include women.

Here the women demand that they become a part of government.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable¹ rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance² to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

1. **inalienable** not able to be taken away 2. **allegiance** loyalty

ANALYSIS SKILL

ANALYZING PRIMARY SOURCES

Why would women want to use the Declaration of Independence as a source for their own declaration?

Seneca Falls Convention

In 1840 **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** attended the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London, England, while on her honeymoon. She discovered that, unlike her husband, she was not allowed to participate. All women in attendance had to sit behind a curtain in a separate gallery of the convention hall. William Lloyd Garrison, who had helped found the American Anti-Slavery Society, sat with them in protest.

The treatment of women abolitionists at the convention angered Stanton and her new friend, **Lucretia Mott**. Apparently, even many abolitionists did not think that women were equal to men. Stanton and Mott wanted to change this, so they planned to “form a society to advance the rights of women.” Eight years passed before Stanton and Mott finally announced the **Seneca Falls Convention**, the first public meeting about women's rights held in the United States. It opened on July 19, 1848, in Seneca Falls, New York.

Declaration of Sentiments

The convention organizers wrote a **Declaration of Sentiments**. This document detailed beliefs about social injustice toward women. They used the Declaration of Independence as the basis for the language for their Declaration of Sentiments. The authors included 18 charges against men—the same number that had been charged against King George III. The Declaration of Sentiments was signed by some 100 people.

About 240 people attended the Seneca Falls Convention, including men such as abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Many other reformers who also worked in the temperance and abolitionist movements were present. Several women who participated in the convention worked in nearby factories. One of them, 19-year-old Charlotte Woodward, signed the Declaration of Sentiments. She worked long hours in a factory, making gloves. Her wages were very low, and she could not even keep her earnings. She had to turn her wages over to her father.

Women's Rights Leaders

After the convention, the struggle continued. Women's rights activists battled many difficulties and much opposition. Still, they kept working to obtain greater equality for women. Among the many women working for women's rights, three became important leaders: Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Each brought different strengths to the fight for women's rights.

Lucy Stone was a well-known spokesperson for the Anti-Slavery Society. In the early years of the women's rights movement, Stone became known as a gifted speaker. Elizabeth Cady Stanton called her "the first who really stirred the nation's heart on the subject of women's wrongs."

Susan B. Anthony brought strong organizational skills to the women's rights movement. She did much to turn the fight for

women's rights into a political movement.

Anthony argued that women and men should receive equal pay for equal work. She also believed that women should be allowed to enter traditionally male professions, such as religion and law. Anthony was especially concerned with laws that affected women's control of money and property.

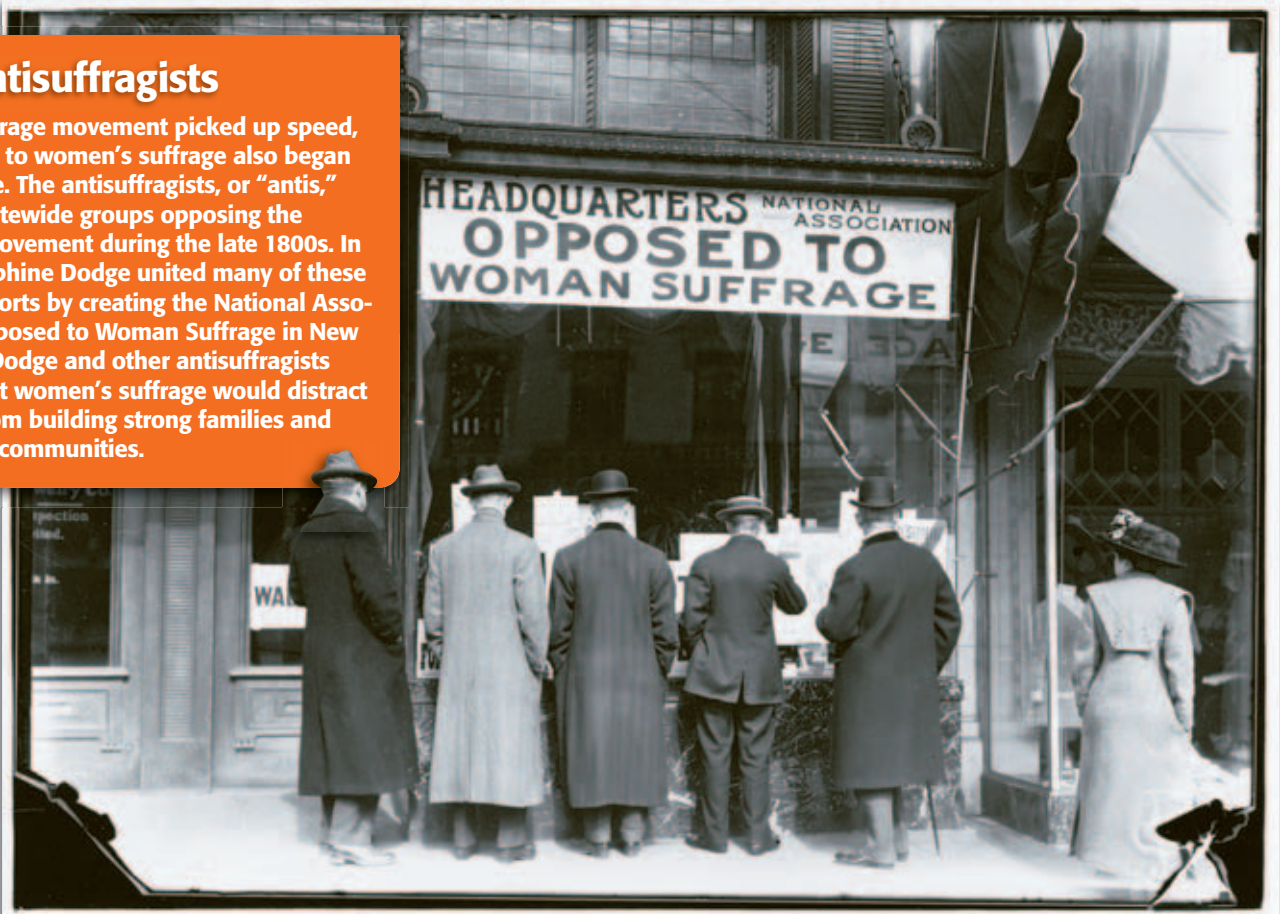
Anthony led a campaign to change laws regarding the property rights of women. She wrote in her diary that no woman could ever be free without "a purse of her own." After forming a network to cover the entire state of New York, she collected more than 6,000 signatures to petition for a new property-rights law. In 1860, due largely to the efforts of Anthony, New York finally gave married women ownership of their wages and property. Other states in the Northeast and Midwest soon created similar laws.

THE IMPACT TODAY

In the United States, as of the year 2000, women earned about 75 percent as much as men did.

The Antisuffragists

As the suffrage movement picked up speed, opponents to women's suffrage also began to organize. The antisuffragists, or "antis," formed statewide groups opposing the suffrage movement during the late 1800s. In 1911, Josephine Dodge united many of these groups' efforts by creating the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage in New York City. Dodge and other antisuffragists argued that women's suffrage would distract women from building strong families and improving communities.



Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote many of the documents and speeches of the movement, which were often delivered by Anthony. Stanton was a founder and important leader of the National Woman Suffrage Association. This organization was considered one of the more radical groups because of its position that abolition was not a more important cause than women's rights.

Not every battle was won. Other major reforms, such as women's right to vote, were not achieved at this time. Still, more women than ever before became actively involved in women's rights issues. This increased activity was one of the movement's greatest accomplishments.

READING CHECK Identifying Points of View

What did Susan B. Anthony mean when she said that no woman could be free without "a purse of her own"?



Lucy Stone worked for equal rights for women and African Americans.

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW Women's rights became a major issue in the mid-1800s, as women began to demand a greater degree of equality. In the next chapter you will read about western expansion.

Section 5 Assessment

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Online Quiz

KEYWORD: SC7 HP14

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

1. **a. Identify** What role did Sojourner Truth play in both the abolition and women's rights movements?
b. Analyze How did the abolition movement influence women to demand equal rights?
2. **a. Identify** What limitations on women's rights did many activists find unacceptable?
b. Summarize Why did many Americans oppose equal rights for women?
c. Elaborate What arguments might you use to counter the arguments of men and women who opposed equal rights for women?
3. **a. Recall** Who were the three main leaders of the women's rights movement, and how did they each contribute to the movement?
b. Draw Conclusions Why might working-class women like Charlotte Woodward have supported the **Seneca Falls Convention** and the **Declaration of Sentiments**?
c. Evaluate Do you agree with **Susan B. Anthony** that women should receive equal pay for equal work? Explain your answer.

Critical Thinking

4. **Analyzing** Review your notes on events in the women's rights movement. Then copy the graphic organizer shown below and use it to show the goals of the movement, as well as the arguments against it.

Goals	Opponents' Arguments

FOCUS ON WRITING

5. **Describing Women's Suffrage** Add notes about the women's suffrage movement to your chart. Note important leaders and describe what they were fighting for. Ask yourself, "How did the women's suffrage movement change life in the United States?"