

## The Struggle for Women's Suffrage

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**Directions:** The following questions are based on the accompanying documents (A-D). Some of these documents have been edited for the purposes of these exercises. These questions are designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the sources of the document and the author's point of view.

**Questions:** Discuss the struggle of women's suffrage from the view point of the women in the following documents. How did these women view their role in society? What were their grievances? What did they believe needed to change in America?

**Historical Background: Document A** The Declaration of Sentiments was written and delivered at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. This document mirrors the Declaration of Independence. This document called for the equality of women under the law and the acknowledgement of women as right-bearing citizens in society.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/Senecafalls.html>

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 inalienable 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...

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. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world...

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men--both natives and foreigners.

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single, and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration [wage]. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in church, as well as state, but a subordinate position, claiming apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the church.

He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man.

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and to her God.

He has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life...

1. According to the previous document, what system of government has man established over women?
2. Identify five to seven rights that have been denied to women in the above passage.

**Historical Background: Document B** Lucretia Mott discussed the educational, economic, and political restrictions on women in Western Europe and America in her book Discourse on Woman. The following excerpt is from this book that was published in 1850.

<http://www.infoplease.com/t/hist/discourse-on-woman/index.html>

Philadelphia PA

December 17, 1849

There is nothing of greater importance to the well-being of society at large — of man as well as woman — than the true and proper position of woman. Much has been said, from time to time, upon this subject. It has been a theme for ridicule, for satire and sarcasm. We might look for this from the ignorant and vulgar; but from the intelligent and refined we have a right to expect that such weapons shall not be resorted to, — that gross

3. According to Mott, what has been the theme for ridicule, satire, and sarcasm?
4. What was Mott's desire or wish for women?

**Historical Background: Document C:** Sojourner Truth was a former slave and an advocate for women's rights. "Ain't I a woman?" is Sojourner Truth's, most recognized speech. She delivered it at a women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851.

[http://afroamhistory.about.com/library/blsojourner\\_truth\\_womanspeech.htm](http://afroamhistory.about.com/library/blsojourner_truth_womanspeech.htm)

**Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, 1851**

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

5. According to Sojourner Truth what are “negroes of the South and women of the North” talking about?
6. What are examples that Truth gives of herself that speak to her rights as a freed slave and as a woman?

**Historical Background: Document D:** Elizabeth Cady Stanton was considered to be the driving force behind the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, and for the next fifty years she played a leadership role in the women's rights movement. The following excerpt is from the Address delivered by Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton before the committee of the Judiciary of the United States Congress on January 18, 1892.

<http://womenshistory.about.com/library/misc/blsolitudeself.htm>

### **Solitude of Self**

The strongest reason for giving woman all the opportunities for higher education, for the full development of her faculties, forces of mind and body; for giving her the most enlarged freedom of thought and action; a complete emancipation from all forms of bondage, of custom, dependence, superstition; from all the crippling influences of fear, is the solitude and personal responsibility of her own individual life. The strongest reason why we ask for woman a voice in the government under which she lives; in the religion she is asked to believe; equality in social life, where she is the chief factor; a place in the trades and professions, where she may earn her bread, is because of her birthright to self-sovereignty; because, as an individual, she must rely on herself. No matter how much women prefer to lean, to be protected and supported, nor how much men desire to have them do so, they must make the voyage of life alone, and for safety in an emergency they must know something of the laws of navigation. To guide our own craft, we must be captain, pilot, engineer; with chart and compass to stand at the wheel; to match the wind and waves and know when to take in the sail, and to read the signs in the firmament over all. It matters not

7. rtunities
8. Why does Stanton believe that a woman should be an individual?

Using information from these documents and your prior knowledge, write an essay about this topic. Be sure to cite examples from the documents.

**Question: In the 1800's were women properly treated and given the rights they deserved compared to other groups in society?**