

# Seneca falls convention



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The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 The Seneca Falls convention marked the first time in American history, where in an organized public setting, attention was brought onto the injustices women had endured for years. Women had been painstakingly succumbed to degradations for centuries and this convention, held in upstate New York, would bring them together to form a cause for their overall freedom from man's idea of who they should be. The Declaration of Rights and Sentiments, written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, would be the key to unlock those chains that had confined women for so long. The July 19th and 20th Seneca Falls convention would be the documented beginning of the struggle for women's rights. Although there were many abolitionists and supporters of the women's rights movement, Elizabeth Stanton and Lucretia Mott came to be remembered as the most significant. In 1840 they first met and created a bond at the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London. They both, along with five other women, were asked by William Lloyd Garrison to attend. However, when they arrived in England the British abolitionists denied them opportunity to speak or voice their opinions on the matter they had put so much effort and passion into. Instead the female delegates were forced to sit in the gallery in silence. As they sat their fuming with resentment and humiliation, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Stanton came to a harsh realization that their rights were equivalent to those of the slaves they had been petitioning for. Stanton and Mott vowed to one another that they'd hold a convention for the rights of women and the injustices they were given at the hands of men. Despite their passion and drive, they did not put this plan into action for 8 years. Between 1840 and 1848 Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Stanton kept themselves busy by raising families and continuing to participate at the temperance and anti-

slavery movements. Lucretia had been married to James Mott, a Quaker preacher and abolitionist. The Motts traveled often so that they could become more active in abolition. Elizabeth had been married to Henry Stanton, a lawyer and anti-slavery activist, and they had both picked up and moved from Boston to Seneca Falls due to financial issues. The town promised prosperity for them with its rich farm land, water power resources, and growing industry. The town was embedded with movements such as temperance, anti-slavery, and revivals, which meant that people from this area were more willing to listen to subjects such as women's rights. The suggestion for the women's rights convention resurfaced at a tea party located at Mary Ann M'Clintock's home in Waterloo, New York on July 16, 1848. Of those attending were Elizabeth Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Martha Wright, Jane Hunt, and Mary Ann M'Clintock. The meeting started out as a normal get together for the elite and ended up on a deep rooted discussion about the injustices women endured. Jane Hunt's husband advised them to take action rather than complain so the five well educated women put their brilliant minds together and brought Elizabeth Stanton and Lucretia Mott's dream into a reality. They decided to hold the convention in Seneca Falls within the next week while Lucretia Mott was still in town because her fame was a key component in drawing in a crowd. They got to work immediately because they only had a few days to organize an event that was sure to be eye opening and life changing for most and a possible slap in the face for others. Controversy was expected, but would not deter their efforts. First, they contacted the Wesleyan Chapel's minister and arranged for the convention to take place there. They also sent a notice to the Seneca County Courier stating the time and place the event would be held. The notice went

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through on July 11 and stated that the convention would be over the conditions and rights of women. Lucretia Mott was the only one mentioned because of her fame, and the others did not give their signatures. Instead, they addressed themselves as the " Women of Seneca Falls, New York" and that they'd be addressing the concerns of all. Due to the spontaneity of the events Elizabeth Stanton feared only a small group of people would show up or the convention would be disturbed by protestors. Lucretia Mott reassured her that despite the possibility of just a small crowd the event will be a start to many conventions to follow. Elizabeth Stanton composed a document of grievances that women have faced and resolutions to back them up. She did this by molding Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. Elizabeth Stanton and the four other women named the document the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments. It began by stating, " All men and women are created equal, " which became the overall message for the women's movement across the United States. Elizabeth Stanton replaced the 18 grievances, the colonists made against King George, with injustices women faced due to men. The grievances expressed that women were socially, emotionally, and politically injured by men. The document put all the responsibility of the injustices women faced solely on men. Once a woman was married she had no rights to her property or money, and if divorced from her husband she'd lose custody of her children. Women made lower wages than men, were prevented from being represented in elected bodies, and had no access to lucrative careers in medicine and law. Women were forced to have a subordinate role in the church, were expected to have higher morals than men, and were confined to a domestic sphere. The most important piece to this document was the resolutions, which laid out

concrete ideas on how to better women's lives. One resolution stated that men should be required to express delicacy and refined behavior as women are told to do, women should have the same responsibilities required of men, and women should be given the right to vote. Elizabeth Stanton pushed the voting resolution even against Lucretia Mott's advice. Out of all five women, Stanton was the only one who wasn't a Quaker. Quakers believe that women should stay out of politics. However, Elizabeth Stanton stuck by her decision because she knew this was the only way to obtain total equality. The other women eventually agreed upon it and the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments, along with the Resolutions, were completed with the convention just days away. The event was sure to bring radical ideas to the table and attention from both admirers and detractors. Three Hundred men and women awaited outside Wesleyan Chapel's doors on Wednesday July 19th. It had been planned that only women attend the first session, but the organizers allowed the men to stay as long as they listened and didn't speak. Quakers made up the largest denomination of the audience, but many Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Methodists were dispersed throughout the crowd. The convention was supposed to begin at 10 am, but the organizers forgot to request a key beforehand. After a volunteer climbed through the church window and opened the doors from the inside, the convention finally began at 11 am. After Lucretia's husband presided the convention Elizabeth Stanton approached the crowd and stated that women worldwide had faced injustices perpetrated by men and she advised women to take a stand and fight for equality. She went on to explain that these injustices had been around for far too long and that women have become numb to them. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Stanton encouraged those

women to take a stand, pursue their rights, and join the cause. Elizabeth Stanton then introduced the Declarations of Rights and Sentiments followed by the 11 resolutions. Lucretia Mott then urged men to join the cause as well and to stand beside women in their pursuit to freedom. The first session went well and adjourned at 2: 30pm. Some weren't impressed with the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments as they stated that it elevated white women above immigrants and black men, and most of the grievances only pertained to the upper and middle class. However, many people were ecstatic with the results and word spread quickly that Seneca Falls was holding a revolutionary event on July 20th. The second session's attendance was larger and more men showed up than the first day. Elizabeth Stanton read the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments and after a discussion the document was adopted unanimously. Next up were the resolutions and all 11 of them came up for an individual vote. The ninth resolution, which was the right to vote, was the only one that faced opposition. Most of the audience agreed that women should not have a role in politics, but the husband represents the wife's vote, and the whole voting process would destroy women's morals. It seemed to be a lost cause until Frederick Douglas, a former slave now abolitionist, declared that he could not ask for the same rights if women were denied of them and he convinced many members of the audience that female suffrage was crucial in the course of their movement so that they could protect their rights. Thanks to Frederick Douglas all of the resolutions were passed. The Declaration of Rights and Sentiments brought on one last debate as the convention came to an end; whether or not both women and men should sign the document. They came to a compromise as 68 women signed one sheet of paper and 32 men signed

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a separate sheet, and those who gave their signature varied greatly in status from upper to working class. There was a lot of negative feedback such as sarcasm, mockery, and belittlement coming into Seneca Falls from all over the country. Due to shame and embarrassment a few of the signers withdrew their names from the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments. Out of the 100 people that signed the document, only one person, Charlotte Woodard Pierce, lived to see women vote in 1920, 72 years after the Seneca Falls convention. The 1848 Seneca Falls convention marked the start of a series of events to follow in the women's rights movement. Women all over the country found courage to join the cause and stand up for their rights. Those brave and dedicated women who orchestrated the convention shaped America as we know it, and without their efforts we could still be waiting for equality and justice to come around. Works Cited McMillen, Sally Gregory, "Seneca Falls and the origins of the women's rights movements" (Oxford University Press, 2008)88, 90, 93 " Seneca Falls Convention July 19-20, 1848, " <http://www.npg.si.edu/col/seneca/senfalls1.htm> " Seneca Falls Convention, " West's Encyclopedia of American Law (2005), Encyclopedia.com (November 21, 2011). National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/wori/historyculture/seneca-falls-in-1848.htm> (Accessed November 11, 2006) Colleen Adams, " Women's Suffrage: A Primary source History of the Women's Rights Movement in America" (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 2003)15, 17 Ann D. Gordon, (2010) " The Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's Paper Project" (New Brunswick, N. J., 1997)

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