



WEB WATCH

Declaration of Sentiments

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# THE ROAD TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

**1848** Elizabeth Cady Stanton helps organize the first women's rights convention, in Seneca Falls, New York.

In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton pushed the radical idea that women could gain equality only through the right to vote



## Characters

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON, *activist for women's rights*

MARY ANN MCCLINTOCK, *activist*

JANE HUNT, *activist*

MARTHA COFFIN WRIGHT, *activist*

LUCRETIA MOTT, *abolitionist (and Martha's sister)*

HENRY STANTON, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton's husband*

CHARLOTTE WOODWARD, *young glove maker*

FREDERICK DOUGLASS, *abolitionist, author, and orator*

EDITOR 1, *of the Oneida Whig newspaper in Oneida, New York*

EDITOR 2, *of the Daily Reveille newspaper in St. Louis, Missouri*

NARRATORS A-E

## PROLOGUE

**Narrator A:** The United States declared independence from Britain in 1776. But American women did not enjoy the same rights as men.

**Narrator B:** In the 1800s, women were still held back by laws that kept them subservient to men. Few colleges admitted women. Many professions, like medicine

and law, excluded them. Gaining rights was nearly impossible because in most places women couldn't vote.

**Narrator C:** In 1848, a reformer named Elizabeth Cady Stanton moved with her family to Seneca Falls, a village in upstate New York. A number of groups in the area were active in the antislavery and temperance [antidrinking] movements. But Stanton's focus was the limited opportunities available to women.

## Words to Know

- **abolitionist** (n): a person seeking to ban slavery
- **franchise** (n): an officially granted privilege or right
- **suffrage** (n): the right to vote

## SCENE 1

**Narrator D:** In July 1848, Lucretia Mott's missionary work brings her to Seneca Falls. Years earlier, Mott, a well-known Quaker **abolitionist**, and Stanton had become friends.

**1920** Suffragists hold a protest outside the Republican National Convention in Chicago.



**Narrator E:** The two share an interest in social reform and women's rights. When Jane Hunt hosts a tea for Mott and a group of local women, Stanton is invited.

**Elizabeth Cady Stanton:** My father once told me that he wished I'd been born a boy. He wouldn't let me go to college because he thought women should only be wives and mothers. But I learned plenty reading his law books.

**Mary Ann McClintock:** If only the world would let us put our learning to good use!

**Jane Hunt:** Thanks to Elizabeth and other brave women, New York State passed the Married Women's Property Act this year. At last, we have some control over our own property.

**Martha Coffin Wright:** But any money we earn still has to go to our husbands. Some progress!

**Stanton:** We can't wait for society to grant us rights. We have to demand them.

**Lucretia Mott:** I agree, Lizzie. It's time we organized the women's rights convention we once talked about.

**Stanton:** We should do it now, while you're still in Seneca Falls. You're a powerful speaker—I know you could rally people to our cause.

**Hunt:** I'm for it! We'll send out an announcement inviting all women—and sympathetic men—to join us.

**Wright:** But do you think anyone will come? No one has ever held an event like this.

**Stanton:** We won't know the answer until we try.

**Narrator A:** The women place an ad in the local newspaper, announcing that the convention will be held in 10 days at a Methodist church in Seneca Falls.

## SCENE 2

**Narrator B:** A few days before the convention, the women meet at McClintock's house to discuss what they'll say.

**Mott:** We need a bold statement that will get people stirred up.

**Stanton:** We should model it on the Declaration of Independence. What better inspiration is there than Thomas Jefferson?

**Narrator C:** McClintock pulls a *continued on p. 18* →

## Women's Rights in the U.S.



**1920** The 19th Amendment guarantees women the right to vote.

**1941-45** Eight million women take jobs vacated by men fighting in World War II—the first time women enter the workforce on a large scale. Many lose their jobs when the war ends.



book from the shelf and hands it to Mott, who opens it to the Declaration.

**Narrator D:** The women gather around a small table, where Stanton sits with pen and paper.

**Mott** (*reading aloud*): “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

**Stanton:** That’s great, but let’s have ours read “all men *and women* are created equal.”

**Narrator E:** The women set out their grievances in a document they call the Declaration of Sentiments. Just as the Declaration of Independence details charges against Britain’s King George, this document lists examples of unfair treatment of women.

**Narrator A:** The women conclude by demanding an end to unjust laws and a right to the “privileges” that men enjoy.

**Narrator B:** Later, Stanton adds another right. At home

that night, she reads it to her husband, Henry.

**Stanton** (*reading aloud*): “It is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.”

**Henry Stanton:** Lizzie, you’ve gone too far! You’ll turn the convention into a joke.

**Stanton:** Before women can make any progress, we must be able to vote! How can we bring about change if we have no say in choosing our leaders?

**Narrator C:** Henry Stanton decides to leave town rather than attend the convention. Mott also opposes pushing for the right to vote.

**Mott:** You’ll make us look ridiculous, Lizzie! We must go slowly.

**Stanton:** Without the right to vote, we won’t be able to win any other rights! I’m going to keep it in. We’ll let the convention decide—by voting on it.

### SCENE 3

**Narrator D:** On July 19, 1848, the first day of the convention, about 300 people, including 40 men, gather at the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls. It’s sweltering inside the packed church.

**Hunt** (*to a young attendee*): Do you live in Seneca Falls?

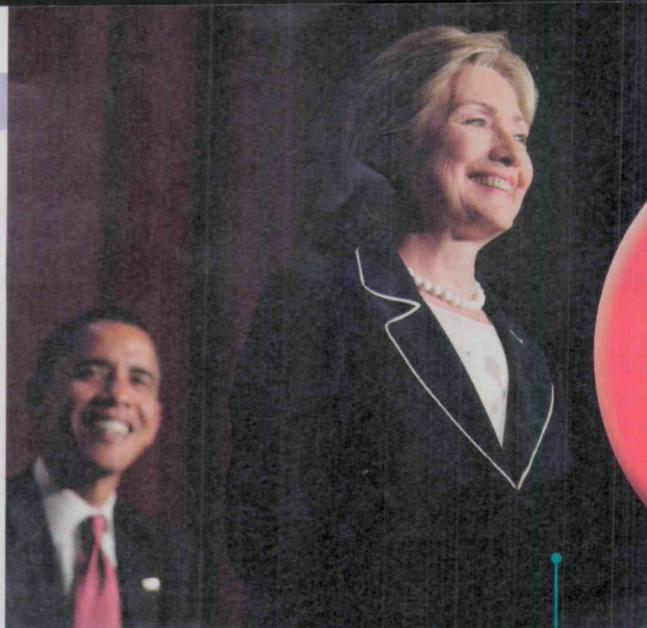
**Charlotte Woodward:** I live about 40 miles from here. It was a long, hard trip, but it was worth it. I want the same opportunities men have. Right now, I make gloves at home for a pittance, and I don’t get to keep any of the money. It all goes to my father.

**Hunt:** We’re glad to have you.

**Stanton** (*addressing the crowd*): Welcome to the Seneca Falls Convention. We are here, sisters, to take responsibility for our own lives. Here is our Declaration of Sentiments.

**Narrator E:** As she reads the document, the audience applauds.

**Stanton:** “In view of this



**A Woman's Place Is in the House . . .**  
**And in the Senate**

**1972** Congress passes the Equal Rights Amendment, which guarantees equal treatment for women under the law. But it fails to win ratification by the necessary 38 states within 10 years.

**1981** President Ronald Reagan appoints Sandra Day O'Connor of Arizona to be the first female Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court.

**1984** Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro of New York becomes the first female vice presidential candidate of a major party.

**2007** Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi of California becomes the first female Speaker of the House.

**2008** Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York loses the Democratic presidential nomination to Senator Barack Obama. In 2009, President Obama names Clinton his Secretary of State.

**2011** Buttons like this were popular in the 1970s. Today, 76 women (of 435) are in the House and 17 (of 100) are in the Senate.

disenfranchisement of one half the people of this country . . . we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States.”

**Narrator A:** The crowd approves all of the resolutions—except Stanton’s voting measure.

Frederick Douglass, an orator and former slave, then speaks in favor of women’s **suffrage**.

**Frederick Douglass:** America would be a much better place if women had a voice in politics. I for one couldn’t vote in good conscience knowing that my sisters were denied this basic right.

**Narrator B:** Douglass’s rousing speech moves the crowd. The convention unanimously approves Stanton’s resolution.

**Mott:** Now the time has come to sign our names to the Declaration. Who will join us?

**Woodward:** I will!

**Narrator C:** Of the 300 people

attending the conference, 100 sign—68 women and 32 men.

#### SCENE 4

**Narrator D:** In the days that follow, many ministers and public leaders condemn the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments.

**Editor 1** (*reading aloud*): “Was there ever such a dreadful revolt? I declare it was the most shocking and unnatural incident ever recorded!”

**Narrator E:** Others realize this is a turning point in U.S. history.

**Editor 2** (*reading aloud*): “The flag of independence has been hoisted for the second time on this side of the Atlantic.”

**Narrator A:** Despite the harsh words and the controversy, Elizabeth Cady Stanton is happy.

**Stanton:** *The New York Herald* made fun of us, but they printed the entire Declaration! Think of all the women who will read it and start imagining a better future.

**Mott:** We have a long and difficult journey ahead, Lizzie.

**Stanton:** But this is the first step.

#### EPILOGUE

**Narrator B:** Only one signer of the Seneca Falls Declaration, Charlotte Woodward, lived to see the 1920 ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, which guarantees women the right to vote. Since then, American women have continued their battle for equality (*see above*).

—Ruth Hamel

#### Think About It

1. Why do you suppose Elizabeth Cady Stanton thought that women could gain equality only through voting? Do you agree? Explain.
2. Does it surprise you that it took so long for women to get the right to vote? Explain.