

Voices of Women's Reform



Textbooks often emphasize the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 and the Declaration of Sentiments calling for women's suffrage as the core of the 19th-century women's reform movement. Many women, however, had other ideas for promoting social change.

Read each quote below and write next to it the number corresponding to its author. The choices are:

1. Catharine Beecher, a supporter of education for women and of valuing women's domestic and child-rearing roles;
2. Lucretia Mott, a Quaker minister and abolitionist who helped organize the Seneca Falls Convention;
3. Frances Watkins Harper, an abolitionist, teacher, and author, who criticized oppression based on race, gender, and class; and
4. Frances Wright, a lecturer and writer known for her attacks on organized religion, slavery, and the oppression of women.

_____ ". . . we deny that the present position of woman, is her true sphere of usefulness: nor will she attain to this sphere, until the disabilities and disadvantages, religious, civil, a social, which impede her progress, are removed out of her way. . . . Far be it from me to encourage woman to vote. . . . Her right to the elective franchise however, is the same, and should be yielded to her, whether she exercise that right or not." (1849)

_____ "A woman may seek the aid of co-operation and combination among her own sex, to assist her in her appropriate offices of piety, charity, maternal and domestic duty; but whatever, in any measure, throws a woman into the attitude of a combatant, either for herself or others—whatever binds her in a party conflict—whatever obliges her in any way to exert coercive influences, throws her out of her appropriate sphere." (1837)

_____ "I do not believe that giving the woman the ballot is immediately going to cure all the ills of life. . . . While there exists this brutal element in society which tramples upon the feeble and treads down the weak, I tell you that if there is any class of people who need to be lifted out of their airy nothings and selfishness, it is the white women of America." (1866)

_____ "In the citadel of human error, as exhibited in this country, it is easy to distinguish two main strong holds. . . . First, the neglected state of the female mind, and the consequent dependence of the female condition. . . . Time it is, I say, to turn our churches into halls of science, our schools of faith into schools of knowledge, our privileged colleges into state institutions for all the youth of the land." (1829)