

**[Handout for Session 2]**

**Struggle for Justice:**

**The Women's Suffrage Movement**

March is National Women's History Month in the United States of America, a month reserved for the celebration of the achievements and contributions women have made to society. The achievements and contributions of women in this country cannot be celebrated fully without acknowledging the backdrop of the many barriers and injustices that many women have had to endure.

The suffrage movement (women's right to vote) in the United States gained prominence with the first women's rights convention in the world: the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. The convention was organized by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, active members of the abolitionist movement who met in England in 1840 at the World Anti-Slavery Convention.

A child of Quaker parents, Mott grew up to become a Quaker minister and leading social reformer. Besides leading and later chronicling

the history of the suffrage movement, Elizabeth Cady Stanton took on the role religion played in the struggle for equal rights for women. She had long argued that the Bible and organized religion played a role in denying women their full rights. With her daughter, Harriet Stanton Blatch, she published a critique, *The Woman's Bible*, which was published in two volumes. The first volume appeared in 1895 and the second in 1898. This brought considerable protest not only from expected religious quarters but from many in the woman suffrage movement.

Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton attended the famous World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840, the one that refused to allow women to be full participants. This led to them calling for the now renowned Seneca Falls Convention in New York in 1848 focused on attaining women's right to vote.

Sixty-five years after the landmark women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, N.Y., the first national demonstration for women's suffrage took place the day before Woodrow Wilson's presidential inauguration. On March 3, 1913,

8,000 women gathered to march down Pennsylvania Avenue in support of women's right to vote.

Attorney Inez Milholland Boissevain heralded the grand procession clad in armor astride a white horse, a beautiful and intelligent epitome of the new generation of suffragists. Banners of purple, gold and white fluttered in the breeze on the crisp Washington morning.

As the women and several male supporters set forth with 26 floats, a crowd of roughly half a million people watched with mixed emotions. The murmurs of the crowd grew loud and angry as malicious bystanders crumpled parade programs and flung them at the women. The police that Congress promised would protect the parade stood aside as men poured onto the street, shouting insults and condescending remarks, and began to physically attack the marchers.

Police ignored cries for help as the mob ripped banners from the hands of young girls. Many officers joined the fray; one was heard shouting, "If my wife were where you are, I'd break her head!" A policeman roughly pulled a

woman off her feet and tore her jacket because she slapped a man who spit on her.

Reporters from newspapers around the country snapped photographs of men dragging elderly women through the streets. By evening, all that remained of the parade were scattered papers and scraps of purple and gold cloth.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps these women, like Habakkuk also cried out, **"O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?" (Habakkuk 1:2).**

NOTE

1. Adapted from <https://www.biography.com/people/>.