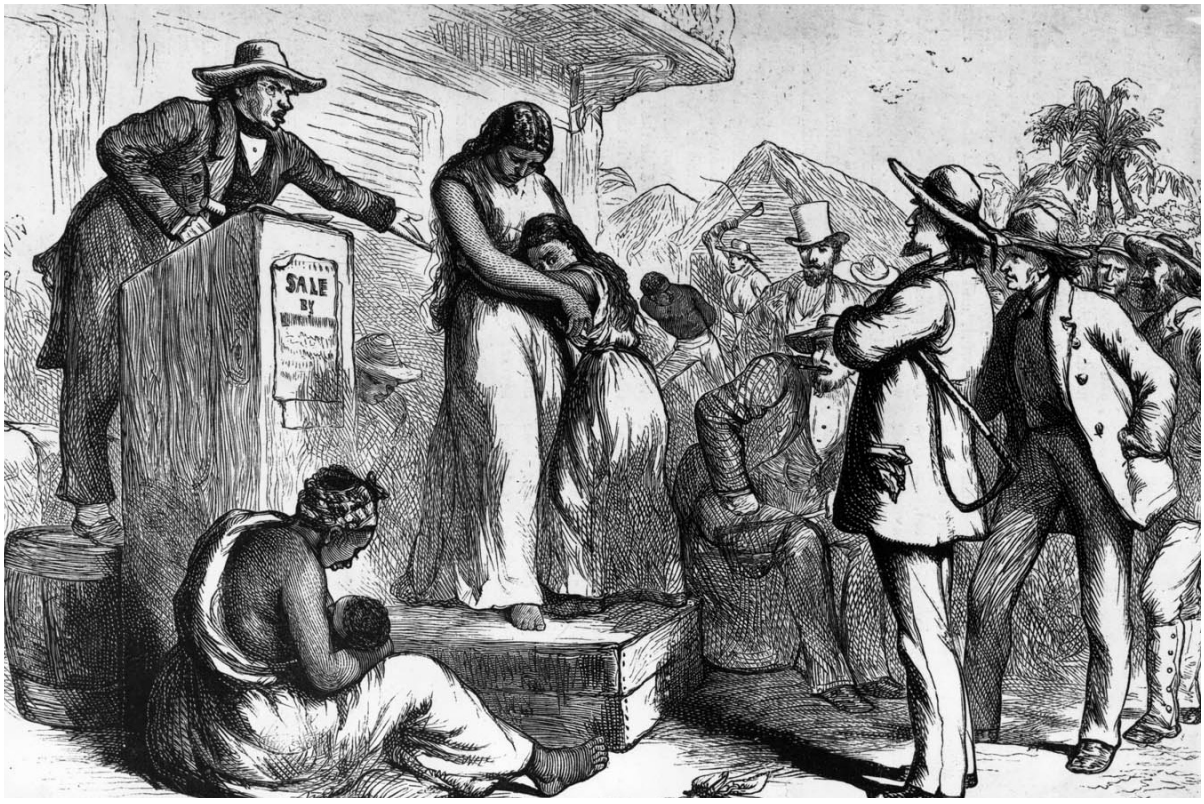
Seneca Falls, 1848
Women Organize for Equality

By Bill Bigelow

The first organized gathering of women to demand their rights *as women* took place during two days in July 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. The manifesto produced by the women in Seneca Falls offered a blueprint for feminist organizing for decades to come. The most "radical" demand—at least the only demand not passed unanimously by the assembly—was for universal suffrage. Not all attendees were women. In fact, it was the most prominent African American abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, who seconded Elizabeth Cady Stanton's motion for female suffrage. However, the large majority of those present were women, and many, perhaps most, were veterans of the abolition movement. Some of those in attendance were working-class, but most came from upper and middle class backgrounds. All the women who attended were white. Their *Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions* proclaimed that "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." But, as the feminist scholar Gerda Lerner points out, the



Getty Images

Although many of the women who initiated the gathering at Seneca Falls were abolitionists, the condition of women of color, including enslaved African Americans, was not an explicit concern at the convention.

authors of this denunciation "did not speak for the truly exploited and abused working woman. As a matter of fact, they were largely ignorant of her condition and, with the notable exception of Susan B. Anthony, indifferent to her fate." Nor did the document address the plight of women of color.

The role play included here is designed to simultaneously honor the accomplishment and explore the limitations of the Seneca Falls Declarations. The activity includes roles for the upper-class and middle-class white women who organized the convention, but also for women who were not in attendance: poor, working-class white mill workers; enslaved African American women; Cherokee women 10 years after the Trail of Tears; and Mexican women in territory newly conquered by the United States in its war against Mexico. This is not the entire rainbow coalition that would have been in attendance at an assembly fully representative of this country's women in 1848. But it's representative enough to give students a chance to imagine the additional demands that might have been raised that summer had it not been so limited in race and class.

A pedagogical note. Recently, I spoke with a teacher at a predominantly white school. She indicated that one of her white students was reluctant to take on the role of an enslaved African American woman because she did not want to "stereotype" her. She said that it would be presumptuous for her, a young woman in comfortable circumstances, to assume the persona of someone of another race whose life was so profoundly different. I appreciate this humility, this recognition that a role play like this is not "play," but asks us to imagine the conditions and aspirations of people one will never meet, who lived lives so different from one's own. But as heartfelt, respectful, and well-meaning as this response is, I think it misses the opportunity offered by this role play, and others, that ask students to assume the role of different individuals or social groups in history. First, this is not a role play in the sense of asking one to perform as another individual. It is, instead, an invitation to imagine the life circumstances of someone else and to consider the demands that someone in this position might have in order to live a fuller, freer life. In this and other role plays, we don't want students to put on accents, or to attempt to "act" the way they imagine others might have acted. The Seneca Falls role play asks students to stretch their imaginations, to wonder about what someone in these conditions would want from a document demanding rights for women — all women. Can we, in our varied identities in the present, authentically represent the aspirations, the demands, of enslaved women, of Cherokee women, of women in occupied New Mexico, of working class white women in the 19th century? Of course not. This role play, with careful facilitation from an instructor, simply invites students to try.

Suggested Procedure:

Note: Please read the Zinn Education Project's statement, "How to — and How Not to — Teach Role Plays," before launching this, or any role play, in your classroom.

1. The more students have read of Chapter 6 in Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, "The Intimately Oppressed," the better. However, it's best if they don't read the final paragraphs dealing with the Seneca Falls Declaration of Principles, as this may give away one of the "punch lines" of the lesson. Review with students "The Rights of Women: Laws and Practices" (p. 6). Some questions for discussion include:
   - How would the laws making divorce so difficult affect women? How might women be forced to respond? How might children be affected?
   - How would women of different social classes be affected differently by the laws concerning divorce?
   - How would men or lawmakers justify some of the laws?
   - Until 1848, women in the United States had not gathered in a large meeting or demonstration to protest their lack of rights. Why not?

- Do any of these laws help explain why women would have been so active in the Temperance movement, the drive to outlaw the consumption of alcohol? How could a man's addiction to alcohol be a threat to women's and children's physical and financial health?
- Why would women not be allowed to attend college?
- What are the underlying attitudes that many people in the United States must have had about women to pass and/or to tolerate laws like those listed here?
- What groups of women did these laws not apply to? What were the laws affecting enslaved African American women?

Students may recognize the document that the Seneca Falls Declaration is patterned after: the Declaration of Independence.

2. Number students off into five groups of relatively equal size. Explain that each of them will represent a woman in one of the five groups included on pp. 7-12: New England mill workers, enslaved African American women, Cherokee women living in Oklahoma, middle-class and upper-class white reformers, and Mexican women in the recently conquered territory of New Mexico.

   [Note: As in every role play, there are stereotype dangers. In this instance, for example, occasionally, males assigned the role of a female will adopt a high voice. In preparation, remind students that they are to speak in their normal voice and not attempt to "act" the way they imagine someone from a different gender might act.]

3. Review with students the questions on p. 14, "Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention." Emphasize that in writing their resolutions, students can use whatever information they have available, but the resolutions must be based on the perspective of the group that they represent. For example, enslaved African American women are going to be much more concerned with abolishing slavery than with abolishing the divorce laws that affect women—mostly white women—in the North.

4. Ask students to arrange their desks in five groups. They should follow the instructions described in "Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention." Circulate from group to group to make sure that students attempt to stay in role and write appropriate resolutions.

5. Explain to students that in preparation for the large convention you will first give people a chance to talk with members of other groups. Remind them that the information in their role descriptions are not included in other groups' role descriptions, so they will have to teach each other about their life conditions. Also tell them that their challenge will be to try to reach consensus on prioritizing their demands: "Naturally, you can come up with as many demands as you like, but it's likely that the newspapers and even your supporters will pay closest attention to your top three demands." It's this requirement to narrow their demands that creates the "dramatic tension" in the role play. This negotiating session between groups will be an opportunity for individuals from different groups to build alliances and get support for their resolutions in advance of the Seneca Falls convention. As in other role plays included at the Zinn Education Project website, ask students to choose half their group as traveling negotiators. For this role play, I prefer to have travelers rotate from group to group in roughly 8 to 10-minute intervals. For example, all the travelers from the enslaved African American women meet with the Cherokee women, and then

move on to the New Mexican women, and so on. You'll only need two rounds of travelers rotating from group to group before every combination of group will have met. Remind them that this is not a competition, but an effort to build unity among different groups of women in the United States.

As an alternative, you could re-divide the groups so that each new group would have at least one representative from the five social groups. Mill workers, enslaved women, Cherokees, white reformers, and New Mexican women would be present in each group to share experiences and compare resolutions.

6. Have students reconvene in their groups to settle on their top three resolutions. When I've done this role play, I've introduced myself as a longtime abolitionist and women's rights supporter and have run the meeting using a very loose version of Robert's Rules of Order. I ask students to propose a resolution that they think should be one of their top 10 and speak to why they believe that resolution is essential. We discuss only the resolution that is on the floor and after discussion, I call for an up or down vote. Students propose and discuss resolutions until we've agreed on three and then I ask for them to rank these in order of importance. This is not how the Seneca Falls Convention was structured—which I'll let them know later—but having to select just a few resolutions forces students to articulate which are the most urgent grievances that must be addressed.

7. Ask students to turn to "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions: Seneca Falls Convention, July 1848" (pp.15-17). Obviously, there are a number of ways to handle the comparison between the students' Declaration and the original Declaration. As with the entire lesson, the broad aim is twofold: to alert students to an American tradition of courageous feminism, and second, to encourage them to critique this early feminism in terms of its inclusiveness. Depending on the skill level of the class, you might read aloud the list of indictments that precede the formal resolutions. Ask students if they recognize the document that the Seneca Falls Declaration is patterned after (the Declaration of Independence). [Note that numbers have been added to the resolutions to facilitate discussion. The original resolutions were not numbered.]

   - Ask them to look for clues about the writers' class or race background, e.g.: "He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners."
   - In your own words, list the criticisms that the authors of the Declaration are making about U.S. society.
   - According to the document, who or what makes women fully equal to men?
   - What is the "enemy" according to the document? Are men the enemy?
   - Is there anything that confuses you about the document? What questions does it raise for you? What more would you need to know to decide whether you agreed with all the criticisms included in the Declaration?
   - From your group's standpoint, what is left out of this list of complaints about the status of women? What issues were people in your social group concerned with that the Declaration doesn't address? Why did the authors of the document not address these issues?
   - What actions do the women say they will take to win their demands? Are there actions that they might have included, but left out?

8. Ask students to pair up. Assign each pair one of the 12 resolutions and ask them to translate it into their own words. (Many of these are not written in a "high school friendly" fashion.) Someone from each pair should write their translation on the board. Review

these one by one, keeping the above questions in mind.

9. Ask students to write a critique of the Seneca Falls Declaration from their group's standpoint. Remind them that a critique does not mean that they are just to criticize. A critique can also be an appreciation. Obviously, exactly how appreciative they are of the Declaration will depend on which group students belong to. ■

Bill Bigelow (bbpdx@aol.com) is curriculum editor of Rethinking Schools magazine and co-director of the Zinn Education Project. He is the author and co-editor of numerous publications including *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years*, *A People's History for the Classroom*, and *A People's Curriculum for the Earth: Teaching Climate Change and the Environmental Crisis*.

Sources

Ellen Carol DuBois, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton," in Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Harvey J. Kaye, eds., *The American Radical* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Judith Nies, *Seven Women: Portraits from the American Radical Tradition* (New York: Penguin, 1977); Carol Hymowitz and Michaele Weissman, *A History of Women in America* (New York: Bantam, 1978); Ronald Wright, *Stolen Continents: The "New World" Through Indian Eyes Since 1492* (New York: Viking, 1991); Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1984); Benita Eisler, ed., *The Lowell Offering: Writings by New England Mill Women (1840-1845)* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1980); Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon, and Susan Reverby, eds., *American Working Women: A Documentary History—1600 to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1976); Larry Cuban and Philip Roden, *Promise of America: Struggling for the Dream* (vol. 2) (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1975); Albert Prago, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A History of Mexican Americans* (New York: Four Winds Press, 1973); Deena J. González, "The Widowed Women of Santa Fé: Assessments of the Lives of an Unmarried Population, 1850-1880," in Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz, eds., *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," in Jean E. Friedman and William G. Shade, eds., *Our American Sisters: Women in American Life and Thought* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1973); Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, (New York: Vintage, 1973); Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America: The Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972); Theda Perdue, "Cherokee Women and the Trail of Tears," in DuBois and Ruiz, eds., *Unequal Sisters*; Elizabeth Martínez, ed., *500 Años del Pueblo Chicano/500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures* (Albuquerque: Southwest Organizing Project, 1991).

Handout

The Rights of Women:
Laws and Practices

The following are some of the laws and conditions affecting many women in the United States in 1848:

- It is extremely difficult for a woman to divorce her husband in most states. In New York, adultery is the only grounds for divorce. Other states allow divorce for bigamy, desertion, or extreme cruelty. Most courts grant custody of the children to men. Alimony is sometimes awarded to women, but they are not allowed to sue in court to make him pay up.
- It is considered improper for women to speak in public.
- Until 1839, women were not allowed to own property in any state in the United States.
- An example from the personal experience of Elizabeth Cady: "Flora Campbell was a neighbor who owned a farm, which supplied the Cady family with fresh eggs, butter, milk, vegetables, and chickens. One day Flora Campbell came to the office [of Elizabeth's father, Judge Cady] beside herself with fear and anxiety. Her husband had mortgaged *her* farm to pay *his* gambling debts. The bank was going to foreclose. Elizabeth Cady's unbelieving ears heard her father say that Flora Campbell's husband had acted on accepted legal principle. Women had no right to hold legal title to property, and all of a wife's possessions belonged to her husband."[1]
- In almost every state, the father can legally make a will appointing a guardian for his children in the event of his death. Should the husband die, a mother could have her children taken away from her.
- In most states, it is legal for a man to beat his wife. New York courts ruled that, in order to keep his wife from nagging, a man could beat her with a horsewhip every few weeks.
- Until 1837, no college in the United States accepted women as regular students.
- Women may not vote in any state in the union.
- Based on British common law, a woman cannot sign a contract even if her husband lets her.
- Some women teach school, but they are paid only 30-50 percent of what men are paid for the same job.

1 Described in Judith Nies, *Seven Women: Portraits from the American Radical Tradition* (New York: Penguin, 1977), p. 68.

Handout

New England Mill Workers

You are young white women who were born on farms throughout New England and have come to Lowell, Massachusetts, to work in the textile mills. Most of you are single, but some of you left bad marriages. Married women often must change their names, because according to the law, whatever money a woman makes belongs to her husband. By the way, many people stereotype factory jobs as *male* jobs. But in 1848, almost a quarter of the people working in factories in the United States are women.

People say that at one time, conditions were pleasant in the mills, but no more. The verse of one of the songs that the girls sing goes like this:

Amidst the clashing noise and din
Of the ever beating loom
Stood a fair young girl with throbbing brow
Working her way to the tomb.

Is this an exaggeration? Hardly. Summer hours of work in the mills are from 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. Young women work an average of 75 hours a week with only four holidays a year. You get about 35 minutes for meals, but this includes travel time between the mill and your boarding house in the neighborhood. For this, you're paid anywhere from $20-25 a *month*.

But it's not only the long hours and the short time for meals that are making you "work your way to the tomb." The conditions of the work itself are also terrible. The air in the factory is awful. It's polluted with flying lint and the fumes from the whale-oil lamps that hang on pegs from each loom. The owners demand that the overseers regularly spray the air with water to keep the humidity high so that the cotton threads won't break. The windows are all nailed shut. The long hours in the bad air means that you and your friends often get sick. It's common for workers to get tuberculosis—"the white death," as you call it. The owners don't have any clinics for the workers, and there are no hospitals for the poor. Young women with breathing problems just go home to die. Add to this the terrible speed of the work. All workers must tend more than one loom, and male overseers, who are paid a premium based on how much cloth is produced, harass slower workers.

Living conditions are also very crowded. It's common for young women to live six to a room with three beds. There are very limited bathing facilities.

In response to these conditions, you've joined with other young women in the "10-hour movement" to reduce hours from the current 12 or 13 a day down to 10. Some people say that women are to do as they're told, but women in the mills have gone on strike a number of times to protest the long hours and bad conditions of work and housing. Thousands of women have signed petitions demanding shorter hours. During strikes, owners have fired strikers and hired "scabs," people who take the place of strikers. Some of the newer people hired by the mill owners are Irish immigrants—still, all women—who the owners say will work for less and not complain.

The owners are especially eager to learn the identities of the women who are the organizers of the 10-hour movement. When they find out who the leaders are they fire them and put their names on a "blacklist," so that no mill owner will hire them. So all meetings must be held in secret.

Handout

Enslaved African American Women

You are enslaved African American women living in the South. No one can imagine the horrible conditions of your lives, but here are some brief details. The most basic fact of slavery is that you have no control over any aspect of your life. As a woman, this lack of control is especially harsh and intimate. It is not uncommon for you to be sold away from members of your family, even your children. This may happen, for example, when a white owner dies and his property is sold to pay his debts, or simply because his heirs decide they would rather have money than enslaved human beings. A so-called master can do about anything to you that he wants. Sexual abuse is common. There are laws that make it look like enslaved people have protection against torture, but no enslaved person can testify in court, so these laws are meaningless. If an owner wants to beat you, he beats you. If he wants to whip you, he whips you. If he wants to rape you, he rapes you. Your body is owned by another person. You have no legal rights whatsoever.

Most enslaved people do not live on huge plantations, but on smaller estates with just a few other enslaved people. This means that contact with an owner is almost constant. Some owners made enslaved people sleep on the floor by the bed to attend to their needs. Not only do enslaved women do the housework, but they often do most of the field work. Enslaved African American men often do blacksmithing, carpentry, or other skilled work, which means that women are sent to the fields to pick cotton. Whether you work in the field or in the house of the white owner, you perform double duty. You still must cook for your family and take care of your own children. Life is no better for enslaved women who work in the owner's house than it is if they work in the fields. Owners often send off the children of Black women because they don't want the women spending any time with their children.

Enslaved women are whipped or tortured as punishment. One woman who tried to escape to freedom had one of her front teeth pulled out of her mouth so that she would be easily recognizable if she tried it again.

Forty years ago, in 1808, sexual abuse of Black women became even worse. The African slave trade was outlawed. This meant that the only way of increasing the number of enslaved laborers was through new births. Many enslaved women were forced to bear children. One Texas woman was sold four times as a "breeder," but did not get to keep any of her children. If a white man rapes an enslaved woman, the woman's child also is enslaved. So white owners actually profit from the sexual abuse of enslaved women.

As enslaved African American women, you have no right to vote, no right to own property, no right to an education, no right to travel, no right to marry, no right to keep or spend time with your children. Enslaved African American women have no rights—period.

Handout

Cherokee Women

Life for Cherokee women has changed dramatically in the last 100 years—for the worse. Today, in 1848, you live in the land called Oklahoma, where the United States army moved you by force. But there was a time when you had more power, respect, and happiness.

In Cherokee societies, women historically had great influence. It was the man who went to live in the house of the woman's family. Marriage gave him no right to control her or her property. As John Ross, Principal Chief of the Cherokee, explained to a white U.S. general in the 1830s: "By the laws of the Cherokee Nation, the property of husband and wife remain separate and apart and neither of these can sell or dispose of the property of the other." If they "divorced," the women kept the children and her property. The men were the main hunters, but women were the main farmers, and the women's families controlled the fields. However, the Cherokee did not believe in private property, like in the white society. Anyone could use unoccupied territories, but cultivated fields were controlled by large families. No individual or family could *own* land. Women signed the early land agreements between Cherokees and whites.

The more contact between the white Europeans and the Cherokees, the more power the women lost. The Europeans wanted to deal only with men, because men were the hunters and the warriors. And the Europeans wanted to make military alliances with the Cherokees, and to trade for deer skins. For these needs they had no use for the women. Meanwhile the white Protestant missionaries who came into your territory wanted Cherokee women to act like white women. They wanted them to convert to Christianity, wear dresses, and allow the men to head the households.

Whites also pushed for the Cherokee people to give up the traditional method of land ownership. But in white society, the husband legally owned a married woman's property, even property she held before marriage—this is still true in 1848. However, you worried less about your own personal land than the land of your people. Thirty years ago, in 1818, a group of Cherokee women urged the Cherokee men not to give up any lands to the white landowners and the U. S. government. As they said, "The land was given to us by the Great Spirit above as our common right, to raise our children upon, and to make support for our rising generations. We, therefore, humbly petition our beloved children, the head men of warriors, to hold out to the last in support of our common rights, as the Cherokee nations have been the first settlers of this land; we, therefore claim the right of the soil."

However, slowly, whites in nearby Georgia claimed the land should belong to them and began to come onto Cherokee land and attacked your people. Georgia law prohibited Cherokees from testifying in court. Many Cherokees tried to appeal to the whites by adopting their ways. In fact, in 1826 the Cherokee government adopted a law that no woman could vote or hold office.

Finally, the United States government took all the Cherokees nation's land from them and forcibly moved them to Oklahoma. About 15,000 people were marched west; 4,000 died on

the trip that was later named the Trail of Tears. An eyewitness reported that "even aged females, apparently nearly ready to drop in the grave, were traveling with heavy burdens attached to the back." At least 69 Cherokee women gave birth along the Trail of Tears. One observer said that troops forced women in labor to continue marching until they collapsed and gave birth "in the midst of the company of soldiers." One soldier even stabbed a pregnant Cherokee woman with a bayonet.

After removal to Oklahoma your people had to totally rebuild. Now, in 1848, the divisions among the Cherokee have been healed and new schools are under construction, including a college for Cherokee young women. Your major worry is that white settlers and the U.S. government will once again steal your land and kill your people. In places like Kansas Territory, just north of Oklahoma, white settlers are beginning to move in and take Indian land. You don't want another Trail of Tears. You don't want your children and families attacked once again.

Handout

Middle- and Upper-Class White Reformers

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, the Grimké sisters, et al.

The first thing you discovered you had in common with each other is your opposition to slavery. Even though all of you are white, you believe that slavery is a terrible wrong. You are all "abolitionists"—people who want to abolish (end) slavery. So what does wanting to end slavery have to do with wanting rights for women? The more you spoke out against slavery and for the rights of Black people, the more you came to see similarities in your own situations; the more you saw your *own* lack of rights. In many ways, women are the possessions of their husbands. As with slavery, you want this inequality with men to end.

Almost all of you are from upper-class or at least middle-class backgrounds. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's father was a prominent lawyer, judge, and former congressman who served on the New York Supreme Court. Lucretia Mott's father was the master of a whaling ship and her mother ran a store. Sarah and Angelina Grimké's family was one of the wealthiest slaveowning families in South Carolina. Your privileged backgrounds help explain why you feel so limited. Even though some of you went to fine girls' schools, there is only one college in the United States that will accept women! No women in the country are lawyers or doctors. Women are rarely allowed to speak in public, never allowed to vote or be elected to political office. In 1838, when Angelina Grimké delivered anti-slavery petitions and spoke before the Massachusetts state legislature, it was the first time a woman had *ever* spoken before a legislative body in the United States.

The idea for the upcoming Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, was born eight years ago in London, England. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were attending the World Anti-Slavery Convention. Even though they were active abolitionists in the United States, and Mott was an elected delegate of the American Anti-Slavery Society, they were not allowed to participate. They were forced to watch, as spectators. When the male leaders of the anti-slavery movement refused to let you speak, you told each other that it made you, yourselves, feel like enslaved people.

Now, eight years later, the time has come for women to unseal our lips and speak about our needs, speak about our rights. Women's lives are just too hard. It wouldn't be right for us to speak up for the abolition of slavery, but at the same time to remain silent about the need for freedom for women. The prominent abolitionist and women's rights advocate Lucy Stone once spoke about her family. Stone, who unlike most of you came from a poor background, said that when her mother learned that she had given birth to a daughter instead of a son, she sighed, "Oh dear! I am sorry it's a girl. A woman's life is so hard."

We are the educated women. If we won't stand up for women's rights, who will?

Handout

Women in the Newly Conquered Territory of New Mexico

Two years ago, in 1846, the United States went to war with Mexico. That summer, Colonel Stephen W. Kearny of the United States army marched into Santa Fé to take control. Up until that moment, you had been Mexican women. Since that moment, you have been *conquered* Mexican women. There are about 25,000 to 30,000 of you in New Mexico. Your lives have been changed for the worse by the U.S. conquest. You worry that things will continue to go downhill.

The white male conquerors who came from the East treated you very badly. They had contempt for all Mexicans, especially women. One U.S. lieutenant wrote a letter to his parents about the conduct of U.S. troops during the war: "Every species of outrage was committed. Old women and girls were stripped of their clothing—and many suffered still greater outrages. Men were shot by dozens ... their property, churches, stores and dwelling houses ransacked ..." Even the commander of U.S. troops in Mexico, General Winfield Scott, admitted that his troops "committed atrocities to make Heaven weep and every American of Christian morals blush for his country. Murder, robbery, and rape of mothers and daughters in the presence of tied-up males of families have been common." One of the U.S. politicians in the North offered his opinions about New Mexico: "The mass of the people are Mexicans, a hybrid race of Spanish and Indian origin, ignorant, degraded, demoralized and priest-ridden." If this is what the so-called educated U.S. leaders have to say in public, think about how this encourages the soldiers to treat people in private.

But now the war is officially over. These are hard economic times for all Mexicans. For women it's even worse. Half the women of Santa Fé live in poverty. The only people with cash are the Anglo (white) soldiers, and the Anglo merchants and businessmen who have begun arriving. If you are lucky, you make some money washing, sewing, or being a domestic for Anglos. A woman domestic might make 50 cents a day, a seamstress as little as five cents a day. Mexican men who work as laborers make twice as much as Mexican female domestics, but Anglo men make three times as much as Mexican domestics—*30 times* as much as Mexican seamstresses. Is this fair? You have to work two jobs just to feed your families.

Also, the Anglo Easterners arrive with so many dollars that it drives up the prices. Food costs more these days. But that's not the worst of it. The Anglos are looking to make money, and you will be the victims. They are buying up land as they look to mine for copper and silver. And slowly they are beginning to take over Mexicans' land, including land owned by women. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the U.S. war with Mexico, guaranteed that all Mexicans in the conquered territories could keep their property, and would have all the rights of U.S. citizens if they wanted. But a treaty is just a piece of paper unless it is enforced.

Traditional Mexican communities like yours were not perfect, but everyone had rights to land and water. As a woman, you could own property in your maiden name, and sell or give it away without your husband's signature. You could

even farm your own land apart from your husband's land or land you owned together. You've heard that Anglo women in the East don't have these rights. If becoming a U.S. citizen means that your husband will control your property, no thank you.

Finally, you don't speak English; you speak Spanish. But English is the language used by the lawyers, judges and tax assessors. The U.S. authorities demanded that all Mexicans come in to register their land. But some of you didn't meet the deadline, and so the courts took your land away from you. They also taxed the land heavily. This was not a Mexican custom. People who couldn't afford to pay the cash, lost the land. And guess who was there at the auction to buy up the land? That's right: the Anglo men from the East. And after they bought the land, the Anglo tax assessors lowered the taxes.

With the conquest, you are hurt because you are women, you are hurt because you are poor, and you are hurt because you are Mexican.

Handout

Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention

Women from all over the country have been invited to a convention in Seneca Falls, New York, to discuss the plight of women and to propose a number of reforms that could make life better for women. All of you are delegates to this convention.

1. In your group, read the role describing some of the conditions that you face. Based on what you know, the history described in chapter six of *A People's History of the United States*, the material in the reading on the laws affecting women and the information in your role, brainstorm a list of all the conditions and laws that you want changed. Not all of these changes need to apply *only* to women. You may want to change conditions that also apply to men who, in certain cases, face similar conditions. Remember to stay in your role.
2. In preparation for the convention, as a group, make a list of your most important demands. Try to come up with at least five. Begin each demand with "Resolved that ..." For example: "Resolved that it should be against the law for a husband to beat his wife."
   Possible categories include:
   - slavery
   - divorce and children
   - working conditions
   - personal property and land ownership
   - wages
   - voting/political participation
   - ability to speak out and participate in organizations
   - sexual abuse
   - language
   - cultural rights
3. Put all your demands in order of importance to your group: Resolution #1, most important; Resolution #2, second most important; etc.

Handout

Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions

Seneca Falls Convention, July 1848

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind require that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.

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. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government. ...

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 never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

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 ...

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.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master—the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes, and in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given ... the law, in all cases, going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.

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. 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. ...

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 ... 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.

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation—in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and National legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions embracing every part of the country.

Resolutions

Whereas, The great precept of nature is conceded to be, that "man shall pursue his own true and substantial happiness."... therefore,

1. **Resolved**, That such laws as conflict ... with the true and substantial happiness of woman, are contrary to the great precept of nature and of no validity ...
2. **Resolved**, That all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no ... authority.
3. **Resolved**, That woman is man's equal—was intended to be so by the Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such.
4. **Resolved**, That the women of this country ought to be enlightened in regard to the laws under which they live, that they may no longer publish their degradation by declaring themselves satisfied with their present position, nor their ignorance, by asserting that they have all the rights they want.
5. **Resolved**, That inasmuch as man, while claiming for himself intellectual superiority, does accord to woman moral superiority, it is pre-eminently his duty to encourage her to speak and teach ... in all religious assemblies.
6. **Resolved**, That the same amount of virtue, delicacy and refinement of behavior that is required of woman ... should also be required of man, and the same transgressions should be visited with equal severity on both man and woman.

7. **Resolved**, That the objection of indelicacy and impropriety, which is so often brought against woman when she addresses a public audience, comes with a very ill-grace from those who encourage, by their attendance, her appearance on the stage, in the concert, or in feats of the circus.
8. **Resolved**, That woman has too long rested satisfied in the circumscribed limits which corrupt customs and a perverted application of the Scriptures have marked out for her, and that it is time she should move in the enlarged sphere which her Creator has assigned her.
9. **Resolved**, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.*
10. **Resolved**, That the equality of human rights results necessarily from the fact of the identity of the race in capabilities and responsibilities.
11. **Resolved**, therefore, That, being invested by the Creator with the same capabilities, and the same consciousness of responsibility for their exercise, it is ... the right and duty of woman, equally with man, to promote every righteous cause by every righteous means; and especially in regard to the great subjects of morals and religion, it is self-evidently her right to participate with her brother in teaching them, both in private and in public, by writing and by speaking ...; and this being a self-evident truth ..., any custom or authority adverse to it ... is to be regarded as a self-evident falsehood, and at war with mankind.

Note: Elizabeth Cady Stanton had drafted all the above resolutions. At the last session Lucretia Mott offered the following:

12. **Resolved**, That the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women, for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions, and commerce.

* From Philip Foner, ed., *We, The Other People: Alternative Declarations of Independence by Labor Groups, Farmers, Woman's Rights Advocates, Socialists, and Blacks 1829-1975* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1976): "Many of the delegates, even Lucretia Mott, felt that the demand for the right to vote was too advanced for the times and would only heap ridicule on the entire movement. But as Elizabeth Cady Stanton told an audience of Suffragists years later, 'I knew Frederick [Douglass], from personal experience, was just the man for the work.' Hurrying to Douglass' side, Mrs. Stanton read the resolution and asked him to speak on the question. Douglass promptly arose and addressed the delegates. He argued convincingly that political equality was essential for the complete liberation of women. The resolution was adopted by a small majority." All other resolutions were adopted unanimously.