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Seneca Falls Law Day Essay

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A History of Women's Rights

The fight for equal rights has always been an important part of America's rich history. Women gained their entitlements as American citizens by revolting against the normalities of their time to stand up for themselves and their rights. The story of how it began lies in the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, the birthplace of American feminism. As the very first women's rights convention in the U.S., it served as a starting point for the women's suffrage movement. The meeting brought attention to the topic of women's suffrage and led to the large change brought by the 19th amendment regarding women's voting rights.

A Wesleyan church in the small town of Seneca Falls, New York sets the scene for one of the most important events in the history of women's rights. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton led the meeting with high hopes for a revolution. Their passion for the topic began when they met in London while attending the World Antislavery Convention with their husbands. Because of their gender, the two women were not permitted to sit or talk during the entire convention. Enraged and thirsty for a change, they decided to spread the word about the Seneca Falls Convention. Women's grievances and stories of injustice were discussed during the first day of the meeting, which was women only. The second day called for the men to listen while the women recounted the discussion topics of the day before.

As a result of the meeting a document called the Declaration of Sentiments was produced. Although many men disagreed, 100 signatures consisting of 68 women and 32 men were collected. The document described the unequal, separate roles women were forced into and called for them to fight for their constitutional rights as American citizens. Rights to property and education were included as well as the right to vote. The beginning of the document echoed the Preamble in a way

that indicated men and women were equals and should be treated as such. It was ratified on June 20, 1848 with only one minor disagreement. Many men believed the right to vote was exclusive and that women were not entitled to it. Even though the topic was often discussed, it wasn't until after the Civil War that the convention was perceived as the formal rise of the women's rights movement. Starting in 1873 women began to host anniversaries for the Seneca Falls Convention. Each anniversary led to the story becoming more embellished. Although many of the tales weren't completely true, highlights of the historical event helped spread the word about the campaign for women's rights.

Even though the foundations for change were laid at Seneca Falls, it took over 70 years for any constitutional modifications to be made. In 1920 the nation ratified the 19th Amendment which allowed women to vote. This crucial milestone represented the efforts women had been pushing towards since the convention in 1848. Along with the amendment came hope for future generations and for women worldwide. Other groups fighting for equal rights viewed the women's success as an example of what they wished to accomplish. Many books were published regarding the topic including works by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, which are still read today.

A lasting impact of the Seneca Falls Convention can be seen in many ways in the modern world. The success of the women's suffrage movement eventually led to gains in other areas of women's equality, including education and employment. Women like Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Hillary Clinton, Sally Ride, Oprah Winfrey, and many others owe a measure of their success to the pioneering efforts of those who came before them. It is hard to overestimate the impact that this historic gathering had on future generations. It gave women a chance to speak up, make things right, and start a revolution of equality that echoes to this day.

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