

Re-envisioning Seneca Falls and Lucretia Mott

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Objective: To give a brief history of the virtues and moral energy of reformer Lucretia Mott (1793-1880) working for abolition, woman's rights, and peace. The *Portrait Monument* serves as a signpost for the overlapping alliances and themes of these social movements.



Portrait Monument to Lucretia Mott,
Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony
by sculptor Adelaide Johnson (1921)

QUOTE #1. From 1849 sermon by Lucretia Mott to white, male medical students in Philadelphia

I called you not here for any theological discussion.

I confess to you, my friends, that I am a worshipper after the way called heresy—a believer after the manner which many deem infidel. . . . I believe man is created innately good; that his instincts are for good. . . . [I know] that He has implanted there [in man's hearts], a sense of justice and mercy, of charity and all goodness. This is the beauty and divinity of true religion, that it is universal. . . .

Cultivate this ennobling view; be obedient to the truth. . . I speak unto those who have ears to hear, who have hearts to feel. May their understandings not be closed! May they be willing to receive that which

conflicts with their education, their prejudices and preconceived opinions. . . and if we have faith, we shall do the things done in former times and greater—that which has been spoken in the ear in closets, shall be heard upon the house-top.

QUOTE #2. Lucretia Mott in "call for the first Woman's Rights Convention in Pennsylvania June 2, 1852

The elevation of woman is the elevation of the human race. Her interests can not be promoted or injured without advantage or injury to the whole race. The call for such a Convention is therefore addressed to those who desire the physical, intellectual, and moral improvement of mankind.

QUOTE #3. Lucretia Mott served as president in 1866-69 of the American Equal Rights Association (AERA), which was organized to "secure Equal Rights to all American citizens, especially the right of suffrage, irrespective of race, color, or sex."

QUOTE #4. From *Woman Suffrage Statue* book about the Portrait Monument (sculpted by Adelaide Johnson, installed in US Capitol in 1921)

[Carrie Chapman] Catt insisted that the third pioneer should have been Lucy Stone because "while Lucretia Mott reflected the spirit of suffrage, she did not fight in the ranks." The New York Tribune reporter thought such criticism after the completion of the monument would be unfortunate in any case "and it is still more so because the chronology does not support Mrs. Catt." Not only was Mott deserving of the honor, but as Alice Paul pointed out, "Neither Mrs. Catt nor I had anything to do with the selection of the three pioneers. They were the choice of Miss Anthony herself."

QUOTE #5. From May 10, 1866 speech by Lucretia Mott at the Eleventh National Woman's Rights Convention, Church of the Puritans, NY

Young women of America, I want you to make yourselves acquainted with the history of the Woman's Rights movement, from the days of Mary Wollstonecraft . . . I want you to note the progress of this cause, and know now that Woman's redemption is at hand, yea, even at the doors.

QUOTE #6. From Susan B. Anthony's copy of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft (published 1792), at Library of Congress
Presented to the Library of Congress by a great admirer of this earliest word for woman's Right to Equality of rights ever penned by a woman. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "A wholesome discontent is the first step toward progress." And here in 1892 [1792] we have the first step---so thinks Susan B. Anthony, Rochester, NY Jan. 1. 1904.

QUOTE #7. From *The Myth of Seneca Falls* book

- *We tell these canonical stories of American history for the lessons they possess (about the possibilities and limits of the movements they forge), not for accuracy, which has little correlation to a story's power. . . . Myth in this context does not mean . . . a falsity. Rather, myth means a venerated and celebrated story used to give meaning to the world. . . . it acts as a filter that people use to impose a certain type of meaning onto a complex and contested landscape.*
- *Every event in history is a beginning, a middle, and an end; it just depends on where you pick up the thread and what story you choose to tell.*
- *Memory is made, not found, and what we remember matters.*

QUOTE #8. From James Baldwin

American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.

Timeline of Lucretia Mott (1793-1880)

Early Reform

- 1821 Became Quaker preacher
- 1830 Quit cotton trade, advocated the radical idea that slavery was sinful and must be abolished
- 1833 Helped found Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (interracial)
- 1838 Anti-Slavery Convention mobbed – incensed by interaction of black and white women
- 1838 New England Non-Resistance Society formed by Garrison (versus American Peace Society, 1828)
- 1840 Attended London World Anti-Slavery Convention – women not allowed to speak or sit in hall
- 1848 Helped organize Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention
- 1849 Delivered *Discourse on Woman* in response to lecture of Richard Henry Dana
- 1849 Gave Sermon to Medical Students in Philadelphia
- 1850 Helped escaping slaves after Fugitive Slave Law enacted

Civil War Buildup and Aftermath

- 1859 John Brown and twenty-one men invade Harpers Ferry; Mary Brown stayed with Motts at Roadside
- 1860 Expressed views as "disturber of peace" and of John Brown as "moral hero"
- 1861-64 Opposed Civil War; Worked with other Quakers to found coeducational Swarthmore College
- 1866-69 Served as president of American Equal Rights Association (AERA)
- 1866-69 Worked to have women included in the 14th and 15th Amendments
- 1867 Helped to organize the Free Religious Association, to free religion from its dogmatic traditions
- 1869 Joined National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) with Stanton and Anthony
- 1870-1880 President of the Pennsylvania Peace Society

After Death --- Memory and Myth

- 1880s Writing of *History of Suffrage* volumes started
- 1893 Portrait Busts of Mott, Stanton, and Anthony exhibited at Chicago World Fair
- 1920-21 Portrait Monument created by Adelaide Johnson and unveiled in US Capitol on Feb. 15, 1921
- 1923 Equal Rights Amendment proposed (also known as the Lucretia Mott Amendment)