Rise of Women's Rights

In the late 18th century, women like Olympe de Gouges pushed for a greater voice in society and politics. At the same time more women were starting to work outside of the home in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution and gained increased economic independence. However, women still did not have increased political power. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, women in many European countries and the United States organized and agitated for greater political, legal, and economic rights. Lead by early suffragettes such as Emilene Pankhurst in England and Susan B. Anthony, in the United States, the debate that developed around the many issues raised by organizers for women's rights became known as the "woman question." In particular, people had strong opinions about whether women should have suffrage (the right to vote).

Directions: Using the documents below, answer the following questions and create a list of the social attitudes that kept women from gaining the right to vote.and the arguments given in support of women's suffrage?

Document 1

The family is a school of despotism. in which the virtues of despotism, but also its vices, are largely nourished. Even with true affection, authority on the one side and subordination on the other prevent perfect confidence. Thorough knowledge of one another hardly ever exists, except between persons who, besides being intimates, are equals. The moral regeneration of mankind will only really commence when the family is placed under the rule of equal justice and when human beings learn to cultivate their strongest sympathy with those who are equal in rights.

John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women,,* 1869

1. From Mill's point of view, who held all of the power within a family?

2. According to the author, when will society "mankind" become truly moral (good)?

Document 2

When the people acquired the right to vote in 1848, thinking individuals understood that the exclusion of half of humanity was a gratuitous insult for women, equal to men as French persons, equal before taxes both direct and indirect as well as before the penal code, and that it was ironic to call universal a suffrage that rejected women as minors lacking in judgment.

Julie Daubiê, French political activist, 1870

3. In 19th French society, in what ways were women treated as equals to men?

4. What was the reason why women were denied suffrage?

Document 3

The woman question affirms more profoundly the roots of democracy, discredits the rule of force, advances women in the economic sphere, and weakens the power of traditional prejudices.

Anna Mozzoni, leading Italian feminist, *The Question of the Emancipation of Women in Italy,* 1871

5. What ideas would be strengthened by women's suffrage and what ideas would be weakened?

Document 4

We cannot separate domestic politics from social conditions of life. If we are told that we have nothing to do with politics, we can but answer that politics have a great deal to do with us. With respect to the home as woman's natural sphere, it is by no means a domain she rules, for as wife and mother she has hardly any legal rights. This distinction seems to result in man's keeping the supremacy in every sphere to himself.

Arabella Shore of the London National Society for Women's Suffrage, 1877

6. One long standing idea was that a natural place for women was to take care of the home and family. For Arabella Shore, what was the problem with that idea?

Document 5

When, after a political struggle in parliament, you retreat into your domestic sanctuary, you find peace; the day when women participate in public business, you will find war.

Francesco Crispi, liberal Italian politician and future prime minister, speaking in the Italian Senate, 1883

7. According to Crispi, what would happen if women started to participate in topics outside of the home and family?

Document 6

Women will be more valuable citizens, will contribute more precious elements to the national life without the vote than with it. The quickness to feel, the willingness to lay aside prudential considerations in a right cause, which are amongst the peculiar excellencies of women, are in their right place when they are used to influence the more highly trained and developed judgment of men. But if this quickness of feeling could be immediately and directly translated into public action, the risks of politics would be enormously increased.

Mrs. Humphrey Ward, popular novelist, on behalf of a group of prominent English women, "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage," 1889

8. According to Mrs. Ward, what was the best role for women as citizens?

Document 7

We hope that the representatives will support the people, give them land and freedom, and open the doors of the prisons to liberate the fighters for the people's freedom and the people's happiness. We hope that the representatives obtain civil and political rights for themselves and for us Russian women, who are unfairly treated and without rights even within our families. Remember that a slave cannot be the mother of a free citizen.

Petition from the peasant women of Nogatkino to their deputy in the Russian Duma, 1906

9 . What were some of the demands of the peasant women?

Document 8

> Women want to rule and we don't want to let them. The German Empire was created with blood and iron. That was man's work. If women helped, it was not women of the sort involved in the new women's movement, but women of the Spartan and old Germanic kind, who stood behind their men in battle and fired them on to kill as many enemies as possible [fervent applause].
>
> Count Reventlow, addressing the German League for the Prevention of the Emancipation of Women, 1912

10. What was the excuse the Germans gave for not giving women the right to vote?

Based on the documents, what social attitudes kept women from gaining the right to vote ?

Social Attitudes List

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