



Ohio Women Vote: 100 Years of Change

Activity #2

Primary Source - Speech

Disappointment Is the Lot of Women

1855

By Lucy Stone

About Lucy Stone

(1818-1893)

Lucy Stone was born and raised in Massachusetts where she adopted her father's abolitionist beliefs, but became frustrated by his refusal to send her to college while her brothers were encouraged to seek higher education. She was able to pay her way through her college courses, graduating from Oberlin College in Ohio in 1847. She was asked to write a commencement speech that would be read by a man, but refused. After graduating, Stone became a speaker, writing and delivering speeches about abolition and women's rights. She also organized and attended women's rights conventions. In 1855, Stone married Henry Blackwell, with an agreement that their vows would be egalitarian. Stone kept her last name throughout the marriage, despite challenges. Massachusetts allowed women to vote in certain local elections, but Stone was never able to register as she would not use her husband's surname. Stone became involved in a schism amongst suffragists in 1869. These wounds would eventually be healed by the next generation, including Stone's daughter Alice Stone Blackwell.

Stone delivered the following impromptu speech, "Disappointment Is the Lot of Women," at the National Women's Rights Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio on October 17, 1855 in response to a heckler interrupted the proceedings to call the female speakers "a few disappointed women."

The last speaker alluded to this movement as being that of a few disappointed women. From the first years to which my memory stretches, I have been a disappointed woman. When, with my brothers, I reached forth after the sources of knowledge, I was reproved with "It isn't fit for you; it doesn't belong to women." Then there was but one college in the world where women were admitted, and that was in Brazil. I would have found my way there, but by the time I was prepared to go, one was opened in the United States where women and negroes could enjoy opportunities with white men. I was disappointed when I came to seek a profession worthy an immortal being—every employment was closed to me, except those of the teacher, the seamstress, and the housekeeper. In education, in marriage, in religion, in everything, disappointment is the lot of woman. It shall be the business of my life to deepen this disappointment in every woman's heart until she bows down to it no longer. I wish that women, instead of being walking show-cases, instead of begging of their fathers and brothers the latest and gayest new bonnet, would ask of them their rights.



Ohio Women Vote: 100 Years of Change

Activity #2

The question of Woman's Rights is a practical one. The notion has prevailed that it was only an ephemeral idea: that it was but women claiming the right to smoke cigars in the streets, and to frequent barrooms. Others have supposed it a question of comparative intellect; others still, of sphere. Too much has already been said and written about woman's sphere. Trace all the doctrines to their source and they will be found to have no basis except in the usages and prejudices of the age. This is seen in the fact that what is tolerated in woman in one country is not tolerated in another. In this country women may hold prayer-meetings, etc., but in Mohammedan countries it is written upon their mosques, "Women and dogs, and other impure animals, are not permitted to enter." Wendell Phillips says, "The best and greatest thing one is capable of doing, that is his sphere." I have confidence in the Father to believe that when He gives us the capacity to do anything He does not make a blunder. Leave women, then, to find their sphere. And do not tell us before we are born even, that our province is to cook dinners, darn stockings, and sew on buttons. We are told woman has all the rights she wants; and even women, I am ashamed to say, tell us so. They mistake the politeness of men Ohio Women Vote: 100 Years of Change 2 Activity #2 Primary Source for rights-seats while men stand in this hall to-night, and their adulations; but these are mere courtesies. We want rights. The flour-merchant, the house-builder, and the postman charge us no less on account of our sex; but when we endeavor to earn money to pay all these, then, indeed, we find the difference. Man, if he have energy, may hew out for himself a path where no mortal has ever trod, held back by nothing but what is in himself; the world is all before him, where to choose; and we are glad for you, brothers, men, that it is so. But the same society that drives forth the young man, keeps woman at home-a dependent-working little cats on worsted, and little dogs on punctured paper; but if she goes heartily and bravely to give herself to some worthy purpose, she is out of her sphere and she loses caste. Women working in tailor-shops are paid one-third as much as men. Someone in Philadelphia has stated that women make fine shirts for twelve and a half cents apiece; that no woman can make more than nine a week, and the sum thus earned, after deducting rent, fuel, etc., leaves her just three and a half cents a day for bread. Is it a wonder that women are driven to prostitution? Female teachers in New York are paid fifty dollars a year, and for every such situation there are five hundred applicants. I know not what you believe of God, but I believe He gave yearnings and longings to be filled, and that He did not mean all our time should be devoted to feeding and clothing the body. The present condition of woman causes a horrible perversion of the marriage relation. It is asked of a lady, "Has she married well?" "Oh, yes, her husband is rich." Woman must marry for a home, and you men are the sufferers by this; for a woman who loathes you may marry you because you have the means to get money which she cannot have. But when woman can enter the lists with you and make money for herself, she will marry you only for deep and earnest affection.

I am detaining you too long, many of you standing, that I ought to apologize, but women have been wronged so long that I may wrong you a little. [Applause]. A woman undertook in Lowell to sell shoes to ladies. Men laughed at her, but in six years she has run them out, and has a monopoly of the trade. Sarah Tyndale, whose husband was an importer of china, and died bankrupt, continued his business, paid off his debts, and has made a fortune and built the largest china warehouse in the world. [Mrs. Mott here corrected Lucy. Mrs. Tyndale has not the largest china warehouse, but the largest assortment of china in the world]. Mrs. Tyndale, herself, drew the plan of her warehouse, and it is the best plan ever drawn. A laborer to whom the architect showed it, said: "Don't she know e'en as much as some men?" I have seen woman at manual labor turning out chair-legs in a cabinet-shop with a dress short enough not to drag in the shavings. I wish other women would imitate her in this. It made her hands harder and broader, it is



Ohio Women Vote: 100 Years of Change

Activity #2

true, but I think a hand with a dollar and a quarter a day in it, better than one with crossed ninepence. The men in the shop didn't use tobacco, nor swear-they can't do those things where there are women, and we owe it to our brothers to go wherever they work to keep them decent. The widening of women's sphere is to improve her lot. Let us do it, and if the world scoff, let it scoff-if it sneer, let it sneer-but we will go emulating the example of the sisters Grimke and Abby Kelly. When they first lectured against slavery they were not listened to as respectfully as you listen to us. So the first female physician meets many difficulties, but to the next the path will be made easy.

Stone, Lucy. "Disappointment Is the Lot of Women." 17 Oct. 1855.



This program is made possible, in part, by Ohio Humanities, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this activity do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Ohio Women Vote: 100 Years of Change

Activity #2

A large, empty shield-shaped graphic is centered on the page. The shield has a rectangular top and a pointed bottom, with a vertical line down the center and a horizontal line across the middle. It is positioned in the center of the grid formed by the table above.



Ohio Women Vote: 100 Years of Change

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Meet the document.

What is it?

- Photograph
- Written document
- Artifact or object
- Poster
- Map
- Cartoon
- Video
- Sound recording
- Artwork

What do you see? Describe it as if you were explaining it to someone who can't see it.

Observe its parts.

Who created it?

Who read, received or viewed it?

When is it from?

Where is it from?



Ohio Women Vote: 100 Years of Change

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Try to make sense of it.

What is the main idea?

Why was it created?

What evidence from the item helps you answer these questions?

What was happening at the time in history this document was created?

Use it as historical evidence.

What did you find out from this item that you might not learn anywhere else?

What other documents and historical evidence are you going to use to help you understand this event or topic?