Women’s Suffrage  
Discussion questions

In what ways do the activists for women’s suffrage try to locate their agenda within then tradition of American political thought as we have discussed it so far? Why might they do this?

Some of the authors, including Stanton and Mott, describe ways in which the oppression of women is harmful to men as well as women. What are they? Can you think of others?

What is the relationship between political rights and the law as described in these texts?

What is problematic for the Stanton, Rose, and Mott about femininity? Where does the concept come from, and what are its consequences? What does this suggest about the relationship between power, sexuality, and politics? In the Gage version of Sojourner Truth’s speech, what different point is made about femininity?

Judging by the words of the suffragists, what arguments were deployed against women’s right to vote? How do the suffragists refute them?

In the “Appeal for a 16th Amendment,” the authors call on the federal government to intervene on behalf of women against oppressive state laws. One what grounds do they make this appeal? What is the implicit relationship described between federal and state governments? What does it say about the authors’ understanding of American democracy that they call on the federal government in this way? What do you believe is the appropriate relationship between individual rights and majoritarian democracy?

The suffrage movement grew out of the abolition movement, and the relationship between abolition, racial relations, and women’s rights is complex in the extreme. What strikes you about that relationship in these texts? In terms of race, what strikes you about Gage’s version of the “Ain’t I a Woman” speech? What themes there emerge that are not present in the original version? What is different? Even if her recollection was authentically imperfect, what might these differences say about Gage?

Despite having been slaves, African American men were given the legal (though not de facto) right to vote more than fifty years before women were. What might this say about the way that Americans thought of each group?