

The Women's Visionary Congress Gathers at Wilbur Hot Springs

By Annie Harrison, on behalf of
The Women's Entheogen Fund

WOMEN have a long history of gathering together to discuss and motivate social and political reform. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 was the first women's rights convention held in the United States. Its delegates signed a Declaration of Rights and Sentiments asserting the then-radical notion that men and women are created equal and that women should have the right to vote.



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This summer, another gathering of women will take place in northern California to consider pressing questions of public policy and social justice. The Women's Visionary Congress will convene at Wilbur Hot Springs on the weekend of July 27-29 to discuss the historical and contemporary use of entheogens. This Congress will offer a rare opportunity for women doing critical work in the entheogenic, medical cannabis, and harm reduction communities to meet and exchange ideas. The event will feature presentations by 25 mostly women healers, activists, researchers, and artists. At its conclusion, the V Congress will issue its own Declaration of Rights and Sentiments.

More details about the V Congress can be found at visionarycongress.org.

Like the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, the V Congress is open to both men and women. Co-sponsored by the Sibyl Society and MAPS, the V Congress is a benefit for the Women's Entheogen Fund (WEF), which was created in 2002 to support the work of women who spend a significant portion of their professional lives researching psychoactive plants and chemicals. The WEF was founded by a woman philanthropist, and MAPS is the WEF's nonprofit sponsor.

The V Congress is intended to continue the pivotal role of women in the prohibition debate. When women

organized to secure their political rights in the late 19th century, their top concern was the question of prohibition. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was organized in 1874 by women seeking to address the violence and family problems caused by alcohol.

The WCTU successfully lobbied for passage of alcohol prohibition in 1919. Ten years later, it became clear to many women that prohibition was causing widespread crime, corruption, health problems, and other harms that affected their families. The Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform (WONPR) was founded in 1929 and had an estimated membership of 1.5 million by 1931. The WONPR organized a pivotal bloc of women voters and activists who campaigned successfully to overturn prohibition.

Seventy-four years later, women are now concerned about the violence, corruption, racially biased enforcement, and broken homes caused by the War on Drugs. Many women see that the consequences of drug prohibition mirror and even exceed the harms caused by alcohol prohibition. The Women's Visionary Congress will encourage discussion of these issues and continue the long tradition of women exercising their rights to shape effective social policies. •