

12-8 Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions (1848)

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) and Lucretia Mott (1793–1880) met in London at the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840 (see text pp. 363–364). Stanton attended with her husband, the abolitionist Henry B. Stanton. Mott, a Quaker minister, attended as a delegate for the American Anti-Slavery Society. The convention's decision to deny recognition to women consigned Stanton and Mott to the gallery as observers, and they resolved to link the struggle against slavery with a struggle for women's rights. In 1848 they convened the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York, and Stanton drafted its famous "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions," using the Declaration of Independence as a model.

Source: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881–1922; reprint, New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1969), 1:70–73.

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. . . . Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government. . . .

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise. . . .

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners. . . .

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns. . . .

After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single, and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it. . . .

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her. . . .

He has created a false public sentiment by giving the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man. . . .

He has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life. . . .

Resolved, That all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no force or authority.

Resolved, That woman is man's equal—was intended to be so by the Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such. . . .

Resolved, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.

Questions

1. Read the Declaration of Independence (see text p. D-1) and consider the structural as well as ideological reasons why Stanton used it as a model.
2. In light of the tone and substance of Stanton's protest, why did so many male abolitionists fail to see these "self-evident" truths?
3. How are Stanton's arguments related to the interests and experiences of middle-class women?