

Name: _____ Class: _____

Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions

By Elizabeth Cady Stanton
1848

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) was a social activist and suffragist who played an important role in the early women's rights movement. "The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" is a document written by Stanton and signed by 68 women and 32 men at the Seneca Falls Convention—the first women's rights convention. This number represents 100 people who signed the following document, out of a total of 300 people who were in attendance at the convention, showing how "The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" was controversial in its time. As you read, take notes on Stanton's tone and purpose in this text.

[1] 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 of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel¹ them to such a course.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal;² that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable³ rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. 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, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly, all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism,⁴ it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled.



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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 candid⁵ world.

1. **Impel (verb):** to force someone or something to do
2. This line alludes to a line from The Declaration of Independence—the original version of the line reads, "All men are created equal."
3. **Unalienable (adjective):** unable to be taken away from
4. **Despotism (noun):** the exercise of absolute power, especially in a cruel and oppressive way

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable⁶ right to the elective franchise.⁷

- [5] He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

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

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

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.

- [10] He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity,⁸ provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master—the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.⁹

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes of divorce; in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given; as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women—the law, in all cases, going upon the false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.

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 monopolized¹⁰ nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration.

He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction, which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.

- [15] He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education—all colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in Church as well as State, but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the Church.

5. **Candid** (*adjective*): truthful and straightforward; frank

6. **Inalienable** (*adjective*): impossible to take away

7. "Elective franchise" refers to a person's right to vote

8. **Impunity** (*noun*): freedom from consequences

9. **Chastisement** (*noun*): punishment

10. **Monopolize** (*verb*): to have exclusive commercial control of something

He has created a false public sentiment,¹¹ by giving to 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 usurped the prerogative¹² of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and her God.

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.

- [20] Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation,—in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and national Legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions, embracing every part of the country.

Firmly relying upon the final triumph of the Right and the True, we do this day affix our signatures to this declaration.

At the appointed hour the meeting convened. The minutes having been read, the resolutions of the day before were read and taken up separately. Some, from their self-evident truth, elicited but little remark; others, after some criticism, much debate, and some slight alterations, were finally passed by a large majority.

[At an evening session] Lucretia Mott offered and spoke to the following resolution:

- [25] Resolved, That the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women, for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit,¹³ and for the securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions and commerce.

The Resolution was adopted.

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11. **Sentiment** (*noun*): deep feeling
12. **Prerogative** (*noun*): individual privilege
13. Christian clergy

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes the author's tone in the text?
 - A. Desperate and pleading
 - B. Formal and firm
 - C. Angry and defensive
 - D. Bitter and mocking

2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government" (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners." (Paragraph 6)
 - C. "He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead." (Paragraph 8)
 - D. "...in view of the unjust laws above mentioned... we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States." (Paragraph 20)

3. What is the author's likely purpose for structuring the essay like the Declaration of Independence?
 - A. The author likely chose to structure the essay like the Declaration of Independence to emphasize the American value of equality, in which all men and women "are created equal."
 - B. The author likely chose to structure the essay like the Declaration of Independence to shame the Founding Fathers for not including women in it.
 - C. The author likely chose to structure the essay like the Declaration of Independence to support her refusal to submit to the corrupt American government.
 - D. The author likely chose to structure the essay like the Declaration of Independence to cite the document and support her argument that women have the right to vote.

4. PART A: As used in paragraph 3, what does the word "usurpations" most nearly mean?
 - A. Frustration
 - B. Removal of power
 - C. Hard work
 - D. Disagreement

5. PART B: Which of the following quotes from paragraph 3 best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "man toward woman"
 - B. "having in direct object"
 - C. "establishment of an absolute tyranny over her"
 - D. "submitted to a candid world"

6. Which of the following methods does Stanton use to strengthen her argument?
- A. Stanton uses repetition, repeating several phrases (such as "He has") to emphasize her argument concerning the repeated oppression of women.
 - B. Stanton satirizes U.S. legal documents (i.e. Declaration of Independence) so that they exclude men instead of women, giving perspective and strengthening her argument.
 - C. Stanton utilizes hyperbole, or exaggeration, to strengthen her argument by exaggerating the plight of women.
 - D. Stanton uses rhetorical questions to make her audience think about the oppressed status of women and to lead them to her conclusion.

7. According to Stanton, how have men retained power over women? Cite at least two examples in your answer.

8. Reread paragraph 18. What position, according to that passage, have men taken in women's lives?
- A. Stanton compares men to having taken the position of a woman's conscience, speaking and thinking for her without her knowledge.
 - B. Stanton compares men to having taken the position of "Jehovah," acting as a prophet between women and God in order to tell them what to do.
 - C. Stanton compares men to having taken the position of "Jehovah," or God, attempting to lord over women and conduct their fates.
 - D. Stanton compares men to having taken the position of a minister or priest, interfering with a woman's moral and religious values.

9. PART A: Which of the following best summarizes what Stanton wants her listeners to do?
- A. Stanton wants the audience to protest the federal government until women have the right to vote.
 - B. Stanton wants the audience to take something away from this speech and the Convention: a sense of injustice.
 - C. Stanton encourages the audience to go out and discuss what they heard that day at the Convention with everyone they meet, in the hopes they will change at least a few minds.
 - D. Stanton encourages the audience to spread word of their cause, petition state and federal governments, appeal to the church and press for support, and continue with more conventions.

10. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "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...." (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security." (Paragraph 2)
 - C. "We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and national Legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions, embracing every part of the country." (Paragraph 21)
 - D. "Resolved, That the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women, for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions and commerce." (Paragraph 25)

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Do you think that this document is still relevant today? Explain your answer.
2. In the beginning of her speech, Elizabeth Cady Stanton says, "Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes." Why would the writers of the Declaration of Independence be interested in making sure that laws are difficult to change? Should laws be difficult to change? Explain your answer.
3. How has the women's rights movement changed since Elizabeth Cady Stanton's time? Explain your answer.
4. In the context of this speech, how do we define the roles of men and women? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.