



ELIZABETH C *Declaration and Res*

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON was naturally intelligent, and because her law-giving father had given her her gifts, she was provided the best education that any woman in America could expect. Born and bred in a New York family, she was one of six children, five girls and one boy, and all the hopes of the family rested on her. After graduating from college, Elizabeth strove to equal the achievements of her father. She studied Greek so that she could be read as the only young woman in the class, and she demonstrated her abilities—winning prizes—to those of the boys with whom she studied. Nonetheless, she did not win prizes. Her father, although he loved and cared for her, wished she had been born a boy. In her time, women had few rights and rather low expectations. Her father's was a case in point: it was a privilege for Elizabeth Cady to go to school with boys or even to attend college. She had no hopes of following in the footsteps of the men; the professions they aimed for were closed to women. When she was brought home to her when she finished college, the boys she studied with went on to Union College, but she was barred from attending the academy. She attended the much inferior Troy Female Seminary, one of the best of American education, Emma Willard's. Troy was as good a school as any woman could attend; yet it emphasized a great many things, as well as the principles of Calvinism.

From the *History of Woman Suffrage*.

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON

Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON (1815–1902) was exceptionally intelligent, and because her lawyer father was willing to indulge her gifts, she was provided the best education a woman in her time in America could expect. Born and raised in Johnstown, New York, she was one of six children, five girls and one boy, Eleazar, in whom all the hopes of the family rested. When Eleazar died after graduating from college, Elizabeth strove to replace him in the admiration of her father. She studied Greek so successfully that she was admitted as the only young woman in the local secondary school, where she demonstrated her abilities—which on the whole were superior to those of the boys with whom she studied.

Nonetheless, she did not win the esteem she hoped for. Her father, although he loved and cared for her, continually told her he wished she had been born a boy. In Johnstown, as elsewhere, women had few rights and rather low expectations. The question of education was a case in point: it was a profound exception for Elizabeth Cady to go to school with boys or even to study what they studied. She had no hopes of following in their paths because all the professions they aimed for were closed to women. This fact was painfully brought home to her when she finished secondary school. All the boys she studied with went on to Union College in Schenectady, but she was barred from attending the all-male institution. Instead, she attended the much inferior Troy Female Seminary, run by a pioneer of American education, Emma Willard (1787–1870).

Troy was as good a school as any woman in America could attend; yet it emphasized a great many traditional womanly pursuits as well as the principles of Calvinism, which Elizabeth Cady came to

From the *History of Woman Suffrage*.

believe were at the root of the problem women had in American society. In the 1830s, women did not have the vote; if they were married, they could not own property; and they could not sue for divorce no matter how ugly their marital situation. A husband expected a dowry from his wife, and he could spend it exactly as he wished: on gambling, carousing, or speculating. Not until 1848, the year of the Seneca Falls Convention, did New York pass laws to change this situation.

Elizabeth Cady married when she was twenty-four years old. Her husband, Henry Stanton, was a prominent abolitionist and journalist. He had little money, and the match was not entirely blessed by Elizabeth's father. In characteristic fashion she had the word *obey* struck from the marriage vows; thus, she had trouble finding a preacher who would adhere to her wishes. And, preferring never to be known as Mrs. Stanton, she was always addressed as Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Early on, the couple settled in Boston, where Elizabeth found considerable intellectual companionship and stimulation. Good servants made her household tasks minimal. But soon Henry Stanton's health demanded that they move to Seneca Falls, New York, where there were few servants of any caliber and where there were few people of intellectual independence to stimulate her. Her lot in life became much like that of any housewife, and she could not abide it.

After a discussion at tea with a number of like-minded women, she proposed a woman's convention to discuss their situation. On July 14, 1848 (a year celebrated for revolutions in every major capital of Europe), the following notice appeared in the *Seneca County Courier*, a semiweekly journal:

Seneca Falls Convention

WOMAN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION.—A Convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of woman, will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel, at Seneca Falls, N.Y., on Wednesday and Thursday, the 19th and 20th of July, current; commencing at 10 o'clock A.M. During the first day the meeting will be exclusively for women, who are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited to be present on the second day, when Lucretia Mott, of Philadelphia, and other ladies and gentlemen, will address the convention.

On the appointed day, less than a week after the notice, carriages and other vehicles tied up the streets around the Wesleyan Chapel with a large number of interested people. The first shock was that the chapel was locked, and the first order of business

was for a man to climb through the doors. The chapel was filled with women. Many men were present and the women decided that both men and women could stay.

The convention was a significant event that has been repeated frequently. In her declaration, Stanton figured as a pioneer in her declaration, figured as a champion of unheard-of reforms such as granting the vote to women. The moderates in the assembly of the convention wished to omit the question of the vote, but Stanton presented it as her first statement. She argued that without the right to vote on equal terms, women would never be able to change their situation. With the help of Douglass and others, the convention led to the Seneca Falls Declaration and the women's movement in America.

Stanton's

Because the Seneca Falls Declaration is often compared to Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, it is not surprising that the idea of Stanton's rhetorical gifts. She exercised a powerful wit (for which she is well known) by reminding her audience that the Declaration of Independence was uttered, not to the general audience—women. Thus, the Declaration was addressed to a select body, and it is especially effective in this respect.

The same periodic sentences, used in the Declaration, are used here and largely to the same effect. She uses a series of one-paragraph utterances and examples of them. Stanton played a marvelous role in the tyrannical foreign King George—the tyrant man. Because of the power of her arguments, she gathers strength and ironically undermines the tyrant.

The most interesting aspect of the Seneca Falls Declaration has to do with the order in which she lists the wrongs that she asks to be remedied. She begins with the vote, just as Jefferson began with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The entire argument, and both are the key to the Declaration, demands an entirely new government. Stanton's demand for equal participation in government is a demand for a government they have already won.

PREREADING QUESTIONS:
WHAT TO READ FOR

The following prereading questions may help you anticipate key issues in the discussion of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions. Keeping them in mind during your first reading of the selection should help focus your attention.

- What power has man had over women, according to Stanton?
- What is Stanton's attitude toward just and unjust laws?

Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions

**Adopted by the Seneca Falls Convention,
July 19–20, 1848**

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 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; 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 were accustomed. 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. of the women under this government which constrains them to demean themselves are entitled.

The history of mankind is a series of oppressions on the part of man toward woman, and the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. She should be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise an elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to a yoke which she had no voice.

He has withheld from her rights equally with ignorant and degraded men—both sexes.

Having deprived her of this elective franchise, thereby leaving her without voice in legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eyes of the law, he has taken from her all right of property she earns.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, who must commit many crimes with impunity, provided she is the wife of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, he has exacted obedience to her husband, he has subjected her to his master—the law giving him power to administer chastisement.

He has so framed the laws of property, that she has never proper causes, and in case of separation, the children shall be given, as to her, to the father, and the women—the law, in all cases, giving the supremacy of man, and giving all power to him.

After depriving her of all rights of property, he has still claimed for her, and the owner of property, he has exacted obedience to the law which recognizes her only as a chattel, profitable to it.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable arts, and from those she is permitted to follow, he has excluded her, on the pretext of their degradation. He closes against her all the avenues of science, theology, medicine, or law, she is not to be admitted.

He has denied her the facilities of making a profession, at colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in Church, as well as in State, no authority, claiming Apostolic authority for

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.

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 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.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, 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.

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes, and 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 a 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 monopolized 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.

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, at 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.

He has created a false public sentiment 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. 16

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and to her God. 17

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. 18

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 the United States. 19

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. 20

[The following resolutions were discussed by Lucretia Mott, Thomas and Mary Ann McClintock, Amy Post, Catharine A. F. Stebbins, and others, and were adopted:] 21

WHEREAS, The great precept of nature is conceded to be, that "man shall pursue his own true and substantial happiness." Blackstone¹ in his Commentaries remarks, that this law of Nature being coeval² with mankind, and dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries and at all times; no human laws are of any validity if contrary to this, and such of them as are valid, derive all their force, and all their validity, and all their authority, mediately and immediately, from this original; therefore, 22

Resolved, That such laws as conflict, in any way, with the true and substantial happiness of woman, are contrary to the great 23

¹**Sir William Blackstone (1723–1780)** The most influential of English legal scholars. His *Commentaries of the Laws of England* (4 vols., 1765–1769) form the basis of the study of law in England.

²**being coeval** Existing simultaneously.

precept of nature and of no validity to any other."

Resolved, That all laws which such a station in society as her condition in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the precept of nature, and therefore of no validity.

Resolved, That woman is man's equal, created by the Creator, and the highest good of the human race should be recognized as such.

Resolved, That the women of this country should not in regard to the laws under which they live, publish their degradation by declaring their consent to their present position, nor their ignorance of the rights they want.

Resolved, That inasmuch as man's natural intellectual superiority, does accord to him, it is pre-eminently his duty to encourage and improve it, and has an opportunity, in all religious assemblies, to use the same amount of energy.

Resolved, That the same amount of energy in the conduct of behavior that is required of man, and the same should be required of woman, and the same should be meted with equal severity on both man and woman.

Resolved, That the objection of inferiority, which is so often brought against woman, and which, in her presence, comes with a very ill-grace from her appearance on the stage of the circus.

Resolved, That woman has too many un- prescribed limits which corrupt the interpretation of the Scriptures have marked out, and she should move in the enlarged sphere assigned her.

Resolved, That it is the duty of woman to secure to themselves their sacred rights.

Resolved, That the equality of human rights, and the fact of the identity of the race in capacity, are to be maintained.

Resolved, therefore, That, being in the same capabilities, and the same conditions, their exercise, it is demonstrably the right of woman, with man, to promote every righter means; and especially in regard to the rights of religion, it is self-evidently her right to be heard in teaching them, both in private and public assemblies, speaking, by any instrumentalities proper to be held; and that

precept of nature and of no validity, for this is "superior in obligation to any other."

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. 24

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. 25

Resolved, That the women of this country ought to be enlightened in regard to the laws under which they live, that they may no longer publish their degradation by declaring themselves satisfied with their present position, nor their ignorance, by asserting that they have all the rights they want. 26

Resolved, That inasmuch as man, while claiming for himself intellectual superiority, does accord to woman moral superiority, it is pre-eminently his duty to encourage her to speak and teach, as she has an opportunity, in all religious assemblies. 27

Resolved, That the same amount of virtue, delicacy, and refinement of behavior that is required of woman in the social state, should also be required of man, and the same transgressions should be visited with equal severity on both man and woman. 28

Resolved, That the objection of indelicacy and impropriety, which is so often brought against woman when she addresses a public audience, comes with a very ill-grace from those who encourage, by their attendance, her appearance on the stage, in the concert, or in feats of the circus. 29

Resolved, That woman has too long rested satisfied in the circumscribed limits which corrupt customs and a perverted application of the Scriptures have marked out for her, and that it is time she should move in the enlarged sphere which her great Creator has assigned her. 30

Resolved, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise. 31

Resolved, That the equality of human rights results necessarily from the fact of the identity of the race in capabilities and responsibilities. 32

Resolved, therefore, That, being invested by the Creator with the same capabilities, and the same consciousness of responsibility for their exercise, it is demonstrably the right and duty of woman, equally with man, to promote every righteous cause by every righteous means; and especially in regard to the great subjects of morals and religion, it is self-evidently her right to participate with her brother in teaching them, both in private and in public, by writing and by speaking, by any instrumentalities proper to be used, and in any assemblies proper to be held; and this being a self-evident truth 33

growing out of the divinely implanted principles of human nature, any custom or authority adverse to it, whether modern or wearing the hoary sanction of antiquity, is to be regarded as a self-evident falsehood, and at war with mankind.

[At the last session Lucretia Mott³ offered and spoke to the following resolution:] 34

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. 35

³**Lucretia Mott (1793–1880)** One of the founders of the 1848 convention at which these resolutions were presented. She was one of the earliest and most important of the feminists who struggled to proclaim their rights. She was also a prominent abolitionist.

QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL READING

1. Stanton begins her declaration with a diatribe against the government. To what extent is the government responsible for the wrongs she enumerates?
2. Exactly what is Stanton taking issue with? What are the wrongs that have been done? Do they seem important to you?
3. How much of the effect of the selection depends on the parody of the Declaration of Independence?
4. Which of the individual declarations is most important? Which is least important?
5. Are any of the declarations serious enough to warrant starting a revolution?
6. Why do you think the suggestion that women deserve the vote was so hard to put across at the convention?

SUGGESTIONS FOR CRITICAL WRITING

1. Make a careful comparison between this declaration and Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. What are the similarities? What are the differences? Why would Stanton's declaration be particularly more distinguished because it is a parody of such a document? What weaknesses might be implied because of the close resemblance?

2. Write an essay that is essentially a response to the questions above. Choose a cause carefully and discuss what it does in the selection. Establish the relationship between the government and the cause you are interested in.
3. To what extent is it useful to look back at the centuries of wrongs done to women? How were women treated so badly? Did the Declaration have a significant effect on helping to change that? Is it appropriate or inappropriate to look back at her search for equality?
4. The Declaration of Independence is a document that raises the question of war anywhere implied in the question, what is? Is there anything else that is implied?
5. Read down the list of declarations and see how many merates. Have all of these issues been addressed? Is such a declaration as this still necessary? Has the movement accomplished all its goals?
6. Examine the issues treated in the Declaration of "morals" for men and women. How does that expression, and consider how they were in Stanton's day.
7. **CONNECTIONS** To what extent would Stanton (p. 301) would have agreed with the Declaration? How would he have found most useful? How would he have urged women to practice civil rights, or would he have accepted the Declaration and concerned himself only with the rights of men?
8. **CONNECTIONS** Stanton uses the phrase "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" to represent the way Stanton's Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions "Defense of Injustice" (**bedfordstm**) represents the positive virtues of justice revealed in the Declaration. What, for Stanton, are the positive virtues of justice revealed in the Declaration? How sympathetic is she to the Declaration?
9. **SEEING CONNECTIONS** Would Stanton's *Liberty Leading the People* painting represent Stanton's hopes for the liberation of women? In the painting would she have represented the way she have used in her own declaration? How would she have made a good advertisement for her cause? Imagine the place between her and Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* painting. What would they have