

The Seneca Falls Convention [1848]

The American women's rights movement became a nationwide crusade at its first national convention held at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. A Declaration of Sentiments was one of the results of that convention. It was patterned after the Declaration of Independence.

READING FOCUS

1. What rights did women *not* have in 1848?
2. What was the legal status of married women?
3. What position did men take on the education and employment of women?
4. What effects did women's social status have on their attitudes toward themselves?

[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 impel them to such a course.

[2] 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

inalienable: rights that are incapable of being given up, taken away, or transferred to someone else

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**, 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.

[3] 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.

[4] He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective **franchise**.

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

transient: passing away with time

usurpations: seizures of power or authority by force without legal right

despotism: rule by an autocrat

franchise: vote

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

- [7] 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.
- [8] He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.
- [9] 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**, 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**.
- [11] He has so framed the laws of divorce . . . 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.
- [12] 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.
- [13] He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to

impunity: exemption from punishment or penalty
chastisement: beating
supposition: the basis for a belief, idea, or action which cannot be proven true

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.

- [14] He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her.
- [15] 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.
- [16] 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.
- [17] 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.
- [18] 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 **object** life.
- [19] 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

remuneration: payment
prerogative: an exclusive right or privilege
object: miserable or wretched
degradation: reduction in rank, status, or position

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.

[20]

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. . . .