

## 73. Anne Knight (1848)

Alas, my brother, is it then true that thy eloquent voice has been heard in the heart of the National Assembly expressing a sentiment so contrary to real republicanism? Can it be that thou hast really protested not only against women's rights to form clubs but also against their right to attend clubs formed by men? Is all this true?

*Alas, was this well done, Charmion?* (Shakespeare)

Is it possible that thou, a minister of religion, hast spoken a language so contrary to the commandments of thy "Divine Master," for thus I have heard thee call him. This divine Master has said: "Do unto others as thou wouldst have others do unto thee." Well then! Would thee like it if thee were forbidden to hold meetings and to uphold thy opinions there?

Oh! reflect on thy words. What terrible events have taken place since the letter I wrote to thee [in April] soliciting thee to place thy mind and thy voice in the service of women's emancipation. Dost thou remember what M. Legouvé\* said in one of his lessons on the first revolution? "It failed," he said, "because it was unjust toward women." Then think on this: Could the horrible massacres that took place a few days ago<sup>†</sup> have taken place if the citizens, less preoccupied with their own egotistical interests, had proclaimed liberty *for all men and all women*? Wouldst thou be living under a state of siege? Ah! no. Thou knowest well that if a woman had been seated in the councils at man's side, these horrible events would never have occurred. With the clairvoyance and the sentiment of justice that moves women, they would have opposed such measures, which they foresaw from the beginning would lead to such dreadful consequences. As long as this great injustice toward women remains, misery and insurrection will persist.

Hasten then, I beg thee, in the name of thy beloved fatherland, and also in the name of my country, poor England!

*Bound in with shame, with shame, with inky blots and ragged parchment bonds.* (Shakespeare)

Demand that the disinherited women of the nation be reintegrated into the rights enjoyed by the women of the Gauls, rights that were not denied to my Anglo-Saxon ancestors in 1515, if history is to be believed. Cast away this awful yoke of prejudice; mount the steps of this tribune, I beg thee, dressed in the armor of the just, like a Christian warrior! Protest in the name of the rights of *humanity*, without distinction of garb.

The righteous have the lion's courage; the cause is just, and it has for its shield the words of our Savior: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." Matt. 7:12.

Yes: "Do unto others as thou wouldst have others do unto thee."

\* The dramatist Ernest Legouvé, who in the spring had lectured on the "moral history of women" at the Collège de France.—EDS.

<sup>†</sup>The infamous June days of 1848 when the government closed the national workshops.—EDS.

Oh! for the love of suffering humanity, *retrace thy steps*. Demand that woman be reintegrated into the rights that have so long been denied her, and let me inform thee that thou wilt not be the only one to labor in our good work. A good American pastor told me in Paris that if two-thirds of the members of Congress were replaced by women, it would be a great blessing for America. An English minister has written that if one-half of our [parliamentary] fox-hunters and steeplechase amateurs were replaced by women, the country would soon attain the height of prosperity. What we lack is a little more of that cautious sensibility and, especially, that sympathy for all, which are the preeminent qualities of woman.

Ally thyself with these two noble brothers and form a glorious trio. Sound the retreat, so that all devoted men can hear thee and, following the example of the noble archbishop of Paris, mount the barricades, proclaim the law of peace, prepare the happiness of thy nation and, thereby, of the earth. Then thou wilt have raised the true tricolor flag destined to circle the world with its slogan: Liberty, equality, fraternity—justice, compassion, and truth.

*Fiat justitia!*

Thy sister,  
Anna Knight

### Revolutionary Visions in America

#### SOURCES

74. "Declaration of Sentiments" and "Resolutions" adopted by the Seneca Falls Convention of July 1848; reprinted from *History of Woman Suffrage*, ed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, I (New York, 1881), 70-73.

75. Newspaper reports on the Seneca Falls Convention (1848); reprinted from the *History of Woman Suffrage*, I, 802-5.

76. Elizabeth Cady Stanton's reply, from the *National Reformer* (Rochester, N.Y.), 14 September 1848; reprinted from the *History of Woman Suffrage*, I, 806.

News of the European revolutions traveled quickly to America and may have served indirectly to precipitate an extraordinary event during the hot summer months of 1848: the calling in mid-July of a convention on women's rights in the small, upstate New York community of Seneca Falls by a little band of women, mostly Quakers, who had been at the forefront of the abolitionist movement. These women had been concerned with the problem of women's rights ever since their exclusion from the London antislavery convention eight years earlier. Two of them, Quaker activist Lucretia Mott (1793-1880) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), drew up the "Declaration of Sentiments," paraphrasing the American Declaration of Independence, much in the same way that Olympe de Gouges (Doc. 26) had paraphrased the Declaration of the Rights of Man some sixty years earlier. This declaration and its list of resolutions, drafted by Stanton, marked the beginning of the organized movement for women's rights in the United States. It

offers a vivid statement of the injustices that politically aware women perceived in a society generally recognized as the most democratic in the western world.

The Seneca Falls Convention of July 19 attracted considerable attention in the press, as the commentaries in the second selection reveal. Editorial writers ranged from whole-hearted support for the women's cause, through tongue-in-cheek satire, to dire predictions of a world soon to be topsy-turvy. Putting the American events into world context, however, remained the task of James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald*.

A reply to the press soon came from Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The gifted Stanton had been sensitized to the inferiority of woman's situation through her exposure to her father's law practice, through experiences in her own family as a daughter, wife, and mother of an ever-growing number of children, as well as by her antislavery activities. She wrote this rejoinder concerning women's sphere only a few weeks after the Seneca Falls Convention.

#### 74. "Declaration of Sentiments" (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. 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.

#### 74. "Declaration of Sentiments" (1848)

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, 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

WHEREAS, The great precept of nature is conceded to be, that "man shall pursue his own true and substantial happiness." Blackstone in his Commentaries remarks, that this law of Nature being coeval 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;

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

*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 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.

*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.

*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.

*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.

*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.

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

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

*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 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 Mott offered and spoke to the following resolution:

*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.

## 75. Newspaper Reports on the Seneca Falls Convention (1848)

[From the *Mechanic's Advocate*, Albany, New York]

### *Women Out of Their Latitude.*

We are sorry to see that the women in several parts of this State are holding what they call "Woman's Rights Conventions," and setting forth a formidable list of those Rights in a parody upon the Declaration of American Independence.

The papers of the day contain extended notices of these Conventions. Some of them fall in with their objects and praise the meetings highly; but the majority either deprecate or ridicule both.

The women who attend these meetings, no doubt at the expense of their more appropriate duties, act as committees, write resolutions and addresses, hold much correspondence, make speeches, etc., etc. They af-