

The 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... 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 [vote]...

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 [legally] 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 to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies [neglect of moral duties] 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...

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.

Discussion Questions:

1. According to the Declaration, what rights are women denied?
2. Which of these grievances have been redressed (corrected)? Do any still remain in 2013?
3. Why do you think Elizabeth Cady Stanton (the author) chose the particular wording she used?