6. "Declaration of Sentiments" and Resolutions

Elizabeth Cady Stanton first met Lucretia Mott at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840. Shocked and dismayed that convention officials refused to recognize women delegates and required them to sit, voiceless, in a section cordoned off from the main floor, they resolved to hold a meeting to discuss women's rights when they returned home. Eight years later, when Mott was visiting the Seneca Falls, New York, area, Stanton and her neighbors Mary Ann McClintock and Martha Wright placed a notice in the local newspaper calling for a Woman's Rights Convention to be held on July 19 and 20, 1848. Over two thousand women and forty men from the region known for reform activism attended (see text pp. 360–361).

The centerpiece of the meeting was the "Declaration of Sentiments" written and read by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Stanton modeled the document on the Declaration of Independence to reinforce republican ideas of liberty and to underscore the omission of women from the original document. The resolutions contained in and appended to the "Declaration of Sentiments," especially the call for woman suffrage, were radical ideas that met with strong resistance. Stanton and her supporters' call for a direct civic role for women questioned the entire construction of separate spheres based on gender.

The following resolutions were discussed by Lucretia Mott, Thomas and Mary Ann McClintock, Amy Post, Catharine A. E. 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." [English jurist James 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 others. 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 law 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 precepts 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 recognised 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 assenting that they have all the rights they want.

Resolved, That so much 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 indecency and impropriety, which is so often brought against woman when she addresses a public audience, comes with a very ill-grace from those who re-earsege, 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 custom 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 subject 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 as 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.

The only resolution that was not unanimously adopted was the ninth, urging the women of the country to secure to themselves the elective franchise. Those who took part in the debate feared a demand for the right to vote would defeat others then deemed more rational, and make the whole movement ridiculous.

But Mrs. Stanton and Frederick Douglass seeing that the power to choose rulers and make laws, was the right by which all others could be secured, persistently advocated the resolution, and at last carried it by a small majority.

Questions
1. What reforms did the "Declaration" call for?
2. What were the effects on people at the time of modeling the "Declaration of Sentiments" on the Declaration of Independence?
3. Why was the resolution for woman suffrage controversial?