***The Declaration of Sentiments*** by the National Woman Suffrage Association

***Authors****: Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton*

***Location****: Seneca Falls, Canada. Prominent black leaders like Frederick Douglass were present at the Conference, so the group was forced to find rooms in Canada since America would not allow whites and free blacks to share a hotel.*

***Date****: 1848, during the height of the expansion of slavery controversy, Popular Sovereignty, the Fugitive Slave Laws, the Abolitionist Movement, and just after the Mexican American War. One year before the California Gold Rush; 13 years before the first shots fired in the Civil War; 60 years before women actually achieved the right to vote.*

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 has 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.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to law 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 as 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 the 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.

From <http://www.usconstitution.net/sentiments.html>, 30 October 2012.

***The Declaration of Sentiments*** Reading Response

Answer the following questions related to *The Declaration of Sentiments*. Respond in complete sentences. You must answer each question FULLY in order to receive credit!

1. This document follows the exact format of the *Declaration of Independence*. Paraphrase and summarize the information from the Declaration of Sentiments that belongs in each of the four sections:
   1. Introduction
   2. Preamble (make sure you include the specific rights they claim)
   3. List of Grievances (directly paraphrase at least eight, summarize the overall trend of the rest)
   4. Conclusion
2. Why did the women at Seneca Falls Conference use the original Declaration of Independence as a model for their own declaration of rights?
3. What irony (about the Declaration of Independence and the “natural rights of man”) are the women looking to highlight? Were they successful in pointing out this fundamental irony?
4. Looking at the first three paragraphs, point out and explain at least three differences/changes that Mott and Stanton made from the original Declaration of Independence. Why did the women make these changes?
5. Who is the “He” referred to in the Declaration of Sentiments? What parallel does that create when you compare the “He” of the Declaration of sentiments to the “He” in the original document?
6. In your opinion, how far has the women’s rights movement come since this document was issued?
7. From the standpoint of building a strong, logical argument, how could the women of the Seneca Fall Convention have made their declaration even stronger? Pick at least two parts of the documents that you think could be improved upon and make your changes.
8. From the following list, choose one of the groups that might benefit from issuing a declaration of right’s in today’s society. After making your choice, answer questions a and *b*.

Women, Men, African-Americans, Homosexuals, Hispanic Americans, Asian-Americans, Native Americans, White Americans, American Youth, Elderly Americans, Muslim Americans, Immigrants, Wealthy Americans, Impoverished Americans, Handicapped (Mentally or Physically) Americans, Veterans, Gun-Owners

* 1. Explain your choice/answer
  2. What rights should the group you chose be entitled to that they are be entitled to that they are not being given?

1. If you were the President,
   1. would this document draw your attention? Why or why not?
   2. Would it change your opinion? Why or why not?