

Focus on Freedom

SENECA FALLS DECLARATION

In the mid-nineteenth century in the United States, the main political issue was the freedom of enslaved African Americans. At the same time, however, many American women felt that they had no more rights than the slaves did. On July 19, 1848, women assembled at the Seneca Falls Convention, in New York, to begin the fight for equal rights. Below are excerpts from their declaration and resolutions.

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations [seizures] 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 vote].

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

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. . . .

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 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 [loss of the right to vote] of one half of the people in 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. . . .

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 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.

Examining the Document

Reviewing Facts

1. State the underlying goal the women are seeking.
2. Explain how the women view laws with which they do not agree.

Critical Thinking Skills

3. Making Inferences Why do the women classify themselves, when married, as “civilly dead”?