

Feminists

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manifested their great need of some education on that question." (History of Woman Suffrage)

Mott and Stanton returned to America and continued their abolitionist work as well as pressing for state legislative reforms on women's property and family rights. Although the women had discussed the idea of calling a public meeting on women's rights, the possibility did not materialize until eight years after the London Convention. On July 14, 1848, they placed a small notice in the Seneca (New York) County Courier announcing a "Woman's Rights Convention." Five days later, on July 19 and 20, some three hundred interested women and men, coming from as far as fifty miles, crowded into the small Wesleyan Chapel (now a gas station) and approved a Declaration of Sentiments (modeled on the Declaration of Independence) and twelve Resolutions. The delineation of issues in the Declaration bears a startling resemblance to contemporary feminist writings. Some excerpts are illustrative:

"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. . . .

"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 compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she has no voice. . . .

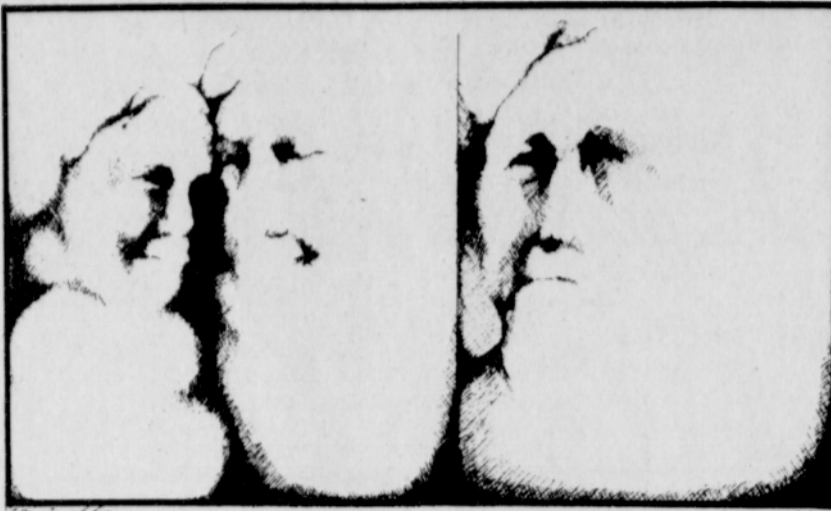
"He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead. . . .

"He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employment, 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 allows her in church, as well as State, but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with 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.



Laurie McLaughlin

"But if we can't distinguish tidily between oppressor and oppressed, how can we possibly wage battle — without destroying comrades as well as enemies?"

— Barbara Deming
from "Remembering Who We Are"

"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."

Included in the list of twelve resolutions was one which read: "Resolved, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise."

Although the Seneca Falls Convention is considered the official beginning of the woman's suffrage movement, it is important to reiterate that the goal of the early woman's rights movement was not limited to the demand for suffrage. In fact, the suffrage resolution was included only after lengthy debate, and was the only resolution not accepted unanimously. Those participants at the convention who actively opposed the inclusion of the suffrage resolution:

"...feared a demand for the right to vote would defeat others they 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. . . ." (History of Woman Suffrage)

Far more important to most of the women at the Convention was their desire to gain control of their property and earnings, guardianship of their children, rights to divorce, etc. Notwithstanding the disagreements at the convention, the Seneca Falls meeting was of great historical significance. As Eleanor Flexner

has noted in "Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States":

"(The women) themselves were fully aware of the nature of the step they were taking; today's debt to them has been inadequately acknowledged. . . . Beginning in 1848 it was possible for women who rebelled against the circumstances of their lives, to know that they were not alone — although often the news reached them only through a vitriolic sermon or an abusive newspaper editorial. But a movement had been launched which they could either join, or ignore, that would leave its imprint on the lives of their daughters and of women throughout the world."

From 1848 until the beginning of the Civil War, Woman's Rights Conventions were held nearly every year in different cities in the East and Midwest. The 1850 convention in Salem, Ohio:

"...had one peculiar characteristic. It was officered entirely by women; not a man was allowed to sit on the platform, to speak, or vote. Never did men so suffer. They implored just to say a word; but no; the President was inflexible — no man should be heard. If one meekly arose to make a suggestion he was at once ruled out of order. For the first time in the world's history, men learned how it felt to sit in silence when questions in which they were interested were under discussion." (History of Woman's Suffrage)

As the woman's movement gained in strength, attacks upon it became more vitriolic. In newspaper editorials and church sermons anti-feminists argued vociferously that the public arena was not the proper place for women. In response to such criticism, Stanton wrote in an article in the Rochester, New York National Reformer:

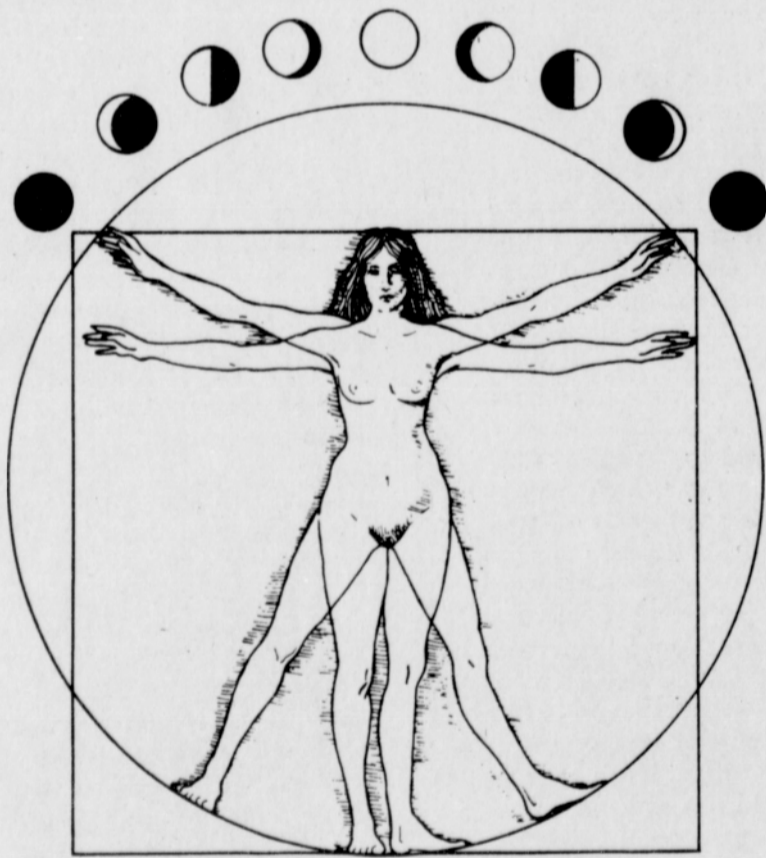
"If God has assigned a sphere to man and one to woman, we claim the right to judge ourselves of His design in reference to us, and we accord to man the same privilege. . . . We have all seen a man making a jackass of himself in the pulpit, at the bar, or in our legislative halls. . . . Now, it is to be wondered at that woman has some doubts about the present position assigned her being the true one, when her every-day experience shows her that man makes such fatal mistakes in regard to himself?"

It was abundantly clear to the women that they could not rely on the pulpit or the "establishment" press for either factual or sympathetic reportage; nor could they use the press as a means to disseminate their ideas. As a result they depended on the abolitionist papers of the day, and in addition founded a number of independent women's journals including The Lily, The Una, Woman's Advocate, Pittsburgh Visiter (sic), etc.

One of the many issues with which the women activists were concerned was dress reform. Some began to wear the "bloomer" costume (a misnomer since Amelia Bloomer, although an advocate of the loose-fitting dress, was neither its originator nor the first to wear it) in protest against the tight-fitting and singularly uncomfortable cinched-waisted stays and layers of petticoats. However, as Flexner has noted, "The attempt at dress reform, although badly needed, was not only unsuccessful but boomeranged and had to be abandoned." Women's rights advocates became known as "bloomers" and the movement for equal rights as well as the individual women were subjected to increasing ridicule. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, one of the earliest to wear the more comfortable outfit, was one of the first to suggest its rejection. In a letter to Susan B. Anthony she wrote:

"We put the dress on for greater freedom, but what is physical freedom compared with mental bondage? . . . It is not wise, Susan, to use up so much energy and feeling that way. You can put them to better use. I speak from experience."

When the Civil War began in 1861, woman's rights advocates were urged to abandon their cause and support the war effort. Although Anthony and Stanton continued arguing that any battle for freedom must include woman's freedom, the woman's movement activities essentially stopped for the duration of the war. After the war and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery (for which the women activists had campaigned vigorously), the abolitionists began to press for passage of a Fourteenth Amendment to secure the rights, privileges, and immunities of citizens (the new freedmen) under the law. In the second section of the proposed amendment, however, the word



- * WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE
- * PRENATAL CARE
- * HOME BIRTHS
- * PEDIATRICS
- * NUTRITION
- * HERBS
- * HERB COSMETICS
- * ALLERGIES
- * HEART DISEASE
- * CANCER
- * ARTHRITIS
- * MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS
- * CYSTIC FIBROSIS
- * HAIR ANALYSIS

* COMPLETE DIET ANALYSIS

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The final two lectures of a series by Doctor Ed Alstadt, N. D., are scheduled at the clinic, each beginning at 7 p.m. The subject of the first lecture, Monday, March 15, will be pre and postnatal care, with emphasis on diet and nutrition; the final lecture, Monday, March 22, will be about naturopathic philosophy — how the body heals itself when it is stimulated.

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