Modern History Sourcebook:

The Declaration of Sentiments,

Seneca Falls Conference, 1848

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*Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, two American activists in the movement to abolish slavery called together the first conference to address Women's rights and issues in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. Part of the reason for doing so had been that Mott had been refused permission to speak at the world anti-slavery convention in London, even though she had been an official delegate. Applying the analysis of human freedom developed in the Abolitionist movement, Stanton and others began the public career of modern feminist analysis*

*The Declaration of the Seneca Falls Convention, using the model of the US Declaration of Independence, forthrightly demanded that the rights of women as right-bearing individuals be acknowledged and respected by society. It was signed by sixty-eight women and thirty-two men.*

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***The Declaration of Sentiments***

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 hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer. While evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are 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.

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 laws, 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 of 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 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 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, A History of Woman Suffrage , vol. 1 (Rochester, N.Y.: Fowler and Wells, 1889), pages 70-71.**

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*Dorothea Lynde Dix, Memorial Soliciting a State Hospital for* ***the Protection and Cure of the Insane****, Submitted to the General Assembly of North Carolina, November, 1848, pp. 8–9, 14–15, 16–17, 26–28, 39–41.*

**[Insane persons kept in jails or poorhouses**]

I admit that public peace and security are seriously endangered by the non-restraint of the maniacal insane. I consider it in the highest degree improper that they should be allowed to range the towns and country without care or guidance; but this does not justify the public in any State or community, under any circumstances or conditions, in committing the insane to prisons; in a majority of cases the rich may be, or are sent to Hospitals; the poor under the pressure of this [calamity](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary#calamity), have the same just claim upon the public treasury, as the rich have upon the private purse of their family as they have the need, so have they the right to share the benefits of Hospital treatment. Urgent cases at all times, demand, unusual and ready expenditures in every community.

If County Jails must be resorted to for security against the dangerous propensities of madmen, let such use of prison-rooms and dungeons be but temporary. It is not long since I noticed in a Newspaper, published near the borders or this State, the following paragraph: “It is our fate,” writes the Editor, “to be located opposite the County Jail, in which are now confined four miserable creatures bereft of the God-like attribute of reason: two of them females; and our feelings are daily excited by sounds of woe, that would harrow up the hardest soul. It is horrible that for the sake of a few thousand dollars the wailings of the wretched should be suffered to issue from the gloomy walls of our jails without pity and without relief. Were our law-makers doomed to listen for a single hour each day to the clanking of chains, and the piercing shrieks of these forlorn [wretches](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary#wretch), relief would surely follow, and the character of our State would be rescued from the foul blot that now dishonors it.” In nearly every jail in North Carolina, have the insane at different times, and in periods varying in duration, been grievous sufferers. In Halifax County, several years since, a maniac was confined in the jail; shut in the dungeon, and chained there. The jail was set on fire by other prisoners: the keeper, as he told me, heard frantic shrieks and cries of the madman, and “might have saved him as well as not, but his noise was a common thing he was used to it, and thought nothing out of the way was the case.” The alarm of fire was finally spread; the jailer hastened to the prison: it was now too late; every effort, (and no [exertions](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary#exertion) were spared,) to save the agonized creature, was unavailing. He perished in agony, and amidst tortures no pen can describe.…

In illustration of the blessing and benefit of Hospital care in cases long and most cruelly neglected, I adduce the following examples recorded by Dr. Hill, and corresponding with many cases under my own immediate observation since 1840. “Two patients,” writes the Dr. “were brought to me in 1836, who had been confined in a poor-house between eighteen and twenty years. During this period they had not known liberty. They had been chained day and night to their bedsteads, and kept in a state so filthy that it was sickening to go near them. — They were usually restrained by the strait-waistcoat, and with collars round their necks, the collars being fastened with chains or straps to the upper part of the bedstead, to prevent, it was said their tearing their clothes. The feet were fastened with iron leg-locks and chains. One poor creature was so wholly disabled by this confinement, that it was necessary for the attendants to bear her in their arms from place to place after she was brought to the Hospital; she shortly acquired good habits, and was long usefully employed in the sewing-room. The other was more difficult of management but soon gained cleanly habits, and now occupies herself in knitting and sewing, and that, after having been treated for years like the lowest brute. Another case was brought in chains, highly excited; five persons attended her; in six days all restraints were removed; and she walked with her nurse, in the patients’ gallery. In June, she was [discharged](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary#discharge) from the wards quite cured, and engaged as assistant in the kitchen.…

Iredell jail, is isolated and had just passed into the charge of a newly appointed officer, it would hardly be just to remark severely upon very dirty and neglected condition. The County poor-house, a few miles from Statesville, is situated in a singularly secluded spot, remote from supervision and often observation, and is a model of neatness, comfort, and good order: having a most efficient master and mistress, especially the latter, upon whose cares in these institutions by far the most is dependent. All in all, this was in much the best condition of any poor-house I have seen in North Carolina, neat, plain, and decent, it would do credit to any State; but it is no fit place for the insane. Since I was there, in September, a highly respected citizen writes me that a young woman has been sent to the poor-house so violently insane, that it is quite unfit she should remain there. Also a man has in that County, very recently become so violently mad as to be quite unmanageable, and having no Hospital in the State, they have confined him, with, chains and manacles, hand and feet, and do as best they can. A subscription paper has been circulated for the purpose of raising funds to send him to Columbia, S. C. Other painful cases exist in this, as in the counties which I have visited, and from which I have heard; most of which I do not feel at liberty, through their domestic and social position, to designate; but they plead in heart-reaching language for the early establishment of a State Hospital.…

 **[Treatment of the insane]**

Moral treatment of the insane with a view to [induce](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary#induce) habits of self-control, is of the first importance. Uniform firmness and kindness towards the patient are of absolute obligation. The most exact observance of truth should be preserved in all intercourse with the insane. They rarely violate a promise, and are singularly sensitive to truthfulness and [fidelity](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary#fidelity) in others. They rarely forgive an injury and as seldom betray insensibility to kindness and[indulgence](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary#indulgence). Once deceived by a nurse or attendant they never a second time bestow their confidence upon the same individual.

Moderate employment, moderate exercise, as much freedom as is consistent with the safety of the patient, and as little apparent anxious watchfulness with cheerful society should be sought. The condition of the patients must determine the number of nurses in a ward. The general opinion is holden that all patients do better without special nurses, wholly devoted to their care.

“The proper mental and physical employment of the insane,” says Dr. Kirkbride, “is of so much importance that the full treatment of this subject would be to give at once a treatise on the insane and on insanity. Whatever it maybe, it must embrace utility, and it is well to combine both physical and mental occupation. Active exercise in the open air, moderate labor in the gardens, pleasure grounds, or upon the farm, afford good results. Short excursions, resort to the work shops, carpentering, joining turning, the use of a good library&c.,&c., are aids in advancing the cure of the patient.”[Sedentary](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary#sedentary) employments are not in general favorable to health. The operations of agriculture seem liable to the least objection. There is a limit to be observed in the use of labor as a moral means; for there are always some patients to whom it is decidedly injurious. This effect is [manifested](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary%22%20%5Cl%20%22manifest)oftenest in recent cases.

Dr. Ray says that it is an error to suppose that the insane can labor as productively and as uniformly as the sane man. The working hours of a patient should seldom exceed six or seven [per diem](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary#per-diem), and not seldom work is altogether intermitted.

The manner in which labor exerts a beneficial influence upon the insane mind differs no doubt in different forms of the disease. In highly excited patients the [surplus](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary#surplus) nervous energy will be consumed, if no other way is provided, in mischief and noise; but let it be expended in useful labor, and although the work may not always be perfectly well done yet the patient thinks it is, and experiences the gratification of having done what he believes is a good thing, and consequently, so far as it goes it is beneficial.

This sentiment of satisfaction in being useful, the guardian of the insane cannot too carefully watch over and foster, since it conducts to self-control and self-respect. Incurables who are able and willing to work, are much more contented and enjoy better health when employed. Even some of the most demented and idiots are found capable or doing something. A young man became a raving maniac, and in three months was conveyed to the hospital, but was already declining into idiocy; soon complete imbecility supervened. He was classed with the idiots in the institution; and considered as past hope of benefit or cure. One day he was observed to amuse himself with some rude coloring and odd figures upon the walls of his room. He was supplied with colours, brushes, and canvass, and soon commenced a portrait: he was now roused, and eager to accomplish his new and attractive work. He was encouraged to renew and repeat his attempts, and finally his mind was restored to its early and rational condition. Thus, careful attention to the daily state of the patient, suggested a method or treatment which resulted in a decided cure. The diseased organs were suffered to rest and their recuperative energies recovered action.

The physician of the hospital at Staunton, in a report of his institution, says, that during the past year, the men patients were chiefly employed in cultivating the farm, working the garden, improving the grounds constructing fences, cutting wood. and attending to stock. The women were engaged in sewing, knitting, spinning, and assisting in various departments of house-work, and other occupations and recreations suited to their sex.

“A patient, insane for more than ton [sic] years, and beyond hope of recovery, considered dangerous to the public safety, and therefore [detained](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary%22%20%5Cl%20%22detain)at a hospital, converses incoherently and raves wildly, yet finds constant and profitable employment upon the farm; has charge of a stock of cattle and hogs and is scrupulously faithful in the discharge of his duties. Instead of confinement in a county jail, from whence he was removed to the Hospital, in a most filthy, and abject condition. at a cost of little less than three hundred dollars [per annum](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary#per-annum) he is here a genteel, orderly, and industrious individual, cheerful, happy, and useful: his labor more than pays all his expenses and supplies him with [sufficient](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newnation/glossary#sufficient) indulgencies.”

**Modern History Sourcebook:  *Lowell Mill Girls* by Harriet Robinson**

*In her autobiography, Harriet Hanson Robinson, the wife of a newspaper editor, provided an account of her earlier life as female factory worker (from the age of ten in 1834 to 1848) in the textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts. Her account explains some of the family dynamics involved, and lets us see the women as active participants in their own lives - for instance in their strike of 1836.*

In what follows, I shall confine myself to a description of factory life in Lowell, Massachusetts, from 1832 to 1848, since, with that phase of Early Factory Labor in New England, I am the most familiar-because I was a part of it.

In 1832, Lowell was little more than a factory village. Five "corporations" were started, and the cotton mills belonging to them were building. Help was in great demand and stories were told all over the country of the new factory place, and the high wages that were offered to all classes of work­people; stories that reached the ears of mechanics' and farmers' sons and gave new life to lonely and dependent women in distant towns and farm­houses .... Troops of young girls came from different parts of New England, and from Canada, and men were employed to collect them at so much a head, and deliver them at the factories. . . .

At the time the Lowell cotton mills were started the caste of the factory girl was the lowest among the employments of women. In England and in France, particularly, great injustice had been done to her real character. She was represented as subjected to influences that must destroy her purity and self­ respect. In the eyes of her overseer she was but a brute, a slave, to be beaten, pinched and pushed about. It was to overcome this prejudice that such high wages had been offered to women that they might be induced to become mill­girls, in spite of the opprobrium that still clung to this degrading occupation....

The early mill­girls were of different ages. Some were not over ten years old; a few were in middle life, but the majority were between the ages of sixteen and twenty­ five. The very young girls were called "doffers." They "doffed," or took off, the full bobbins from the spinning­ frames, and replaced them with empty ones. These mites worked about fifteen minutes every hour and the rest of the time was their own. When the overseer was kind they were allowed to read, knit, or go outside the mill­yard to play. They were paid two dollars a week. The working hours of all the girls extended from five o'clock in the morning until seven in the evening, with one half­ hour each, for breakfast and dinner. Even the doffers were forced to be on duty nearly fourteen hours a day. This was the greatest hardship in the lives of these children. Several years later, a ten­ hour law was passed, but not until long after some of these little doffers were old enough to appear before the legislative committee on the subject, and plead, by their presence, for a reduction of the hours of labor.

Those of the mill­girls who had homes generally worked from eight to ten months in the year; the rest of the time was spent with parents or friends. A few taught school during the summer months. Their life in the factory was made pleasant to them. In those days there was no need of advocating the doctrine of the proper relation between employer and employed. *Help was too valuable to be ill­treated....* . . .

The most prevailing incentive to labor was to secure the means of education for some *male* member of the family. To make a *gentleman* of a brother or a son, to give him a college education, was the dominant thought in the minds of a great many of the better class of mill­girls. I have known more than one to give every cent of her wages, month after month, to her brother, that he might get the education necessary to enter some profession. I have known a mother to work years in this way for her boy. I have known women to educate young men by their earnings, who were not sons or relatives. There are many men now living who were helped to an education by the wages of the early mill­girls.

It is well to digress here a little, and speak of the influence the possession of money had on the characters of some of these women. We can hardly realize what a change the cotton factory made in the status of the working women. Hitherto woman had always been a money *saving* rather than a money earning, member of the community. Her labor could command but small return. If she worked out as servant, or "help," her wages were from 50 cents to $1 .00 a week; or, if she went from house to house by the day to spin and weave, or do tailoress work, she could get but 75 cents a week and her meals. As teacher, her services were not in demand, and the arts, the professions, and even the trades and industries, were nearly all closed to her.

As late as 1840 there were only seven vocations outside the home into which the women of New England had entered. At this time woman had no property rights. A widow could be left without her share of her husband's (or the family) property, an "encumbrance" to his estate. A father could make his will without reference to his daughter's share of the inheritance. He usually left her a home on the farm as long as she remained single. A woman was not sup posed to be capable of spending her own, or of using other people's money. In Massachusetts, before 1840, a woman could not, legally, be treasurer of her own sewing society, unless some man were responsible for her. The law took no cognizance of woman as a money­ spender. She was a ward, an appendage, a relict. Thus it happened that if a woman did not choose to marry, or, when left a widow, to re­marry, she had no choice but to enter one of the few employments open to her, or to become a burden on the charity of some relative. . . .

One of the first strikes that ever took place in this country was in Lowell in 1836. When it was announced that the wages were to be cut down, great indignation was felt, and it was decided to strike or "turn out" en masse. This was done. The mills were shut down, and the girls went from their several corporations in procession to the grove on Chapel Hill, and listened to incendiary speeches from some early labor reformers.

One of the girls stood on a pump and gave vent to the feelings of her companions in a neat speech, declaring that it was their duty to resist all attempts at cutting down the wages. This was the first time a woman had spoken in public in Lowell, and the event caused surprise and consternation among her audience

It is hardly necessary to say that, so far as practical results are concerned, this strike did no good. The corporation would not come to terms. The girls were soon tired of holding out, and they went back to their work at the reduced rate of wages. The ill­ success of this early attempt at resistance on the part of the wage element seems to have made a precedent for the issue of many succeeding strikes.

**Harriet H. Robinson, "Early Factory Labor in New England," in Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, *Fourteenth Annual Report* (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1883), pp. 380­82, 387­88, 391­92.**