Declaration of Sentiments – Women’s Rights

1. What is the first sentence stating?

2. How does the first sentence in the second paragraph differ from the similar famous sentence in the Declaration of Independence?

3. What type of system does women still live in? (3rd para.)

4. In the Declaration of Independence, who does “He” refer to?

In the Declaration of Sentiments, who does “He” refer to?

5. How many abuses do the women say they had to suffer from?

6. What are some objections that women have?

7. When divorces occurred in the early 1800s, who gained custody of the children?
1. Declaration of Sentiments

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one part of the family of man to assume a position different from that which they have held up to now, but one to which the laws of nature and of God entitle them, respect for the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that lead 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 unalienable 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. Caution, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and passing causes: and accordingly all experience shows that mankind are more given to suffer while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by doing away with the forms which they are used to. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, following unchangeably the same object, shows a plan to bring them under absolute control and tyranny, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new safeguards for their future security. Such has

been the patient suffering of women under this government, and such is now the necessity which forces them to demand the equal position 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 as its direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be given to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her unalienable right to vote.

He has forced her to submit to laws which she had no voice in forming.

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners.

Having withheld from her this first right of a citizen, the vote, thereby leaving her without representation in the legislatures, 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 to property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes without punishment, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the marriage ceremony, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master—the law giving him power to take away her liberty, and to punish her.

He has so written 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 wholly ignore 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 taking away all her 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 kept for himself nearly all the profitable jobs, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a small payment. He closes to 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 opportunity of obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed to her.

He allows her in church only a subordinate position, claiming the authority of God 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 setting forth 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 taken over the right of God 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 tried 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 hopeless life.

Now, in view of not allowing one half the people of this country to vote, of their social and religious degradation—in view of the unjust laws above mentioned and because women do feel themselves harmed, oppressed, and wrongfully 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.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate mistaken ideas, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall make every effort within our power to secure our object. We
work to enlist the help of the churches and the press in our behalf. We hope this convention will be followed by a series of conventions in every part of the country.

2. Resolutions

WHEREAS, The great order of nature is admitted to be that “man shall pursue his own true and substantial happiness,” Blackstone [a famous British scholar of the law] remarks, that this law of Nature being equal with mankind, and dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding everywhere, 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, obtain all their force, and all their validity, and all their authority, from this original; therefore,

Resolved, That all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a position in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of men, are contrary to the great order 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 recognized as such.

Resolved, That the women of this country ought to be instructed in regard to the laws under which they live, that they may no longer announce their degradation by declaring them-