Historians say that the fight for women’s rights in the United States began in July 1848 with the Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. The convention’s Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, written primarily by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, is a landmark document in U.S. history. Signed by 68 women and 32 men, it set forth a series of demands for equal treatment for women. Read this brief adaptation of the Declaration, then answer the questions that follow.

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.

Such has been the patient sufferance of women under this government, and such is now the necessity which [compels] them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled.

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries 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 [the vote], thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation.

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

He has taken from her all right in property, even to wages she earns.

In the covenant [solemn agreement] of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master.

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.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow she receives but a scanty [payment].

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 life.

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement* of one-half the people of this country; 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.

*the state of being deprived of a right

Questions

1. On what historic document did Stanton base the Declaration? Why do you think she did so?
2. How would you describe the tone of the Declaration? Why do you think it was written this way?
3. Give three examples of the “tyranny” of men toward women, according to the Declaration.
4. How might the general public have reacted to this document in 1848 and why?
5. With what parts of the Declaration do you agree or disagree and why? Do you think modern society has met its demands? Explain.