

"Major Problems in American Women's History"

4th edition

edited by:
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too become the darling of Providence! may God put his seal upon this also! may he bless and prosper you in this undertaking! bless you, and make you a blessing!

2. The Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women Meets in New York City, May 1837

Wednesday, May 10

The Convention was called to order at 3 o'clock, P.M.

A portion of the Scriptures was read, and prayer offered. . . .

Lydia M. Child offered the following resolution:

RESOLVED, That a thorough investigation of the anti-slavery cause, in all its various aspects and tendencies, has confirmed us in the belief that it is the cause of God, who created

mankind free, and of Christ, who died to redeem them from every yoke. Consequently it is the duty of every human being to labor to preserve, and to restore to all who are deprived of it, God's gift of freedom; thus showing love and gratitude to the Great Redeemer by treading in his steps.

Mary L. Cox, of Germantown, Pa., spoke in favor of the resolution, and on the necessity of treading in the Redeemer's steps. She expressed her thankfulness that all sectarian feeling had been swept away by the strong current of abolition philanthropy.

The resolution was adopted.

Lydia M. Child offered the following resolution:

RESOLVED, That while we rejoice in any mitigation of cruelty in the treatment of our brethren and sisters held as slaves, we will bear in mind that the great question is not one of treatment, but of *principle*; hence, that no compromise can be made on the score of kind usage, while man is held as the property of man.

S. M. Grimké spoke in favor of the resolution, and remarked that the essential sin of slavery consisted in reducing man to a brute.

The resolution was adopted.

On motion of A. E. Grimké the following resolutions were adopted:

RESOLVED, That we regard the combination of interest which exists between the North and the South, in their political, commercial, and domestic relations, as the true, but hidden cause of the unprincipled and violent efforts which have been made, (at the North, but made in vain,) to smother free discussion, impugn the motives, and traduce the characters of abolitionists.

RESOLVED, That we regard the legalized practice of surrendering fugitive slaves to their southern task-masters, as utterly at variance with the principles of liberty *professed* by us—"the freest nation in the world"—and a daring infringement of the divine commands, "Thou shalt *not* deliver unto his master, the servant that is escaped from his master unto thee."—"Hide the outcast, betray *not* him that wandereth. Let my outcast well with thee, be thou a covert to them from the face of the spoiler."

RESOLVED, That the right of petition is natural and inalienable, derived immediately from God, and guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, and that we regard every effort in Congress to abridge this sacred right, whether it be exercised by man or woman, the bond or the free, as a high-handed usurpation of power, and an attempt to strike a death-blow at the freedom of the people. And therefore that it is the duty of every woman in the United States, whether northerner or southerner, annually to petition Congress with the faith of an Esther, and the untiring perseverance of the importunate widow, for the immediate abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and the Territory of Florida, and the extermination of the inter-state slave-trade.

On motion of S. M. Grimké the following resolution was adopted:

RESOLVED, That we regard those northern men and women, who marry southern slaveholders, either at the South or the North, as identifying themselves with a system which desecrates the marriage relation among a large portion of the white inhabitants of the southern states, and utterly destroys it among the victims of their oppression.

The movers of the previous resolutions, sustained them by some remarks. . . .

S. M. Grimké offered the following resolution:

RESOLVED, That whereas God has commanded us to "prove all things and hold fast *that* which is good,"—therefore, to yield the right, or exercise of free discussion to the

demands of avarice, ambition, or worldly policy, would involve us in disobedience to the laws of Jehovah, and that as moral and responsible beings, the women of America are solemnly called upon by the spirit of the age and the signs of the times, fully to discuss the subject of slavery, that they may be prepared to meet the approaching exigency, and be qualified to act as women, and as Christians, on this all-important subject.

The resolution was supported by the mover, A. E. Grimké, and Lucretia Mott. A. E. Grimké offered the following resolution:

RESOLVED, That as certain rights and duties are common to all moral beings, the time has come for woman to move in that sphere which Providence has assigned her, and no longer remain satisfied in the circumscribed limits with which corrupt custom and a perverted application of Scripture have encircled her; therefore that it is the duty of woman, and the province of woman, to plead the cause of the oppressed in our land, and to do all that she can by her voice, and her pen, and her purse, and the influence of her example, to overthrow the horrible system of American slavery.

The resolution was sustained by the mover, and by Lucretia Mott. Amendments were offered by Mary Grew, and Mrs. A. L. Cox, which called forth an animated and interesting debate respecting the rights and duties of women. The resolution was finally adopted, without amendments, though *not unanimously*.

Adjourned to Thursday morning, 10 o'clock.

Thursday Afternoon, May 11

Convention was called to order at 3 o'clock, P. M.

Reading of the Scriptures by the President, and prayer by A. E. Grimké.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and approved. . . .

L. M. Child in consideration of the wishes of some members, who were opposed to the adoption of the resolution on the province of women, moved that the same be reconsidered. The motion was seconded by A. W. Weston, but after discussion was lost.

On motion of Mrs. A. L. Cox, seconded by Rebecca B. Spring,

RESOLVED, that there is no class of women to whom the anti-slavery cause makes so direct and powerful an appeal as to *mothers*; and that they are solemnly urged by all the blessings of their own and their children's freedom, and by all the contrasted bitterness of the slave-mother's condition, to lift up their hearts to God on behalf of the captive, as often as they pour them out over their own children in a joy with which "no stranger may intermeddle"; and that they are equally bound to guard with jealous care the minds of their children from the ruining influences of the spirit of pro-slavery and prejudice, let those influences come in what name, or through what connexions they may. . . .

On motion of A. E. Grimké

RESOLVED, That as most of the merchants and editors of our large cities have done every thing they could to close the door of access at the South against abolition doctrines by vilifying the characters and misrepresenting the motives of abolitionists, who have stood forth as the advocates of the oppressed American, whether bond or free; so we as their wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters, are resolved to do all that we can to open that door, by vindicating their characters from the aspersions which have been cast upon them, and to stand side by side with them in the great struggle between right and wrong, freedom and despotism, justice and oppression, Christian equality and American prejudice.

On motion of Martha Storrs,

RESOLVED, That as the northern churches are united to the sectarian slaveholding churches by the bonds of church government, or Christian fellowship, they are solemnly called upon to rebuke their brethren and not suffer sin upon them: And that it is the duty of women to send up memorials to the different ecclesiastical bodies to which they belong, praying them to declare slavery a sin, which ought to be immediately repented of lest the curse of Almighty God fall upon their churches for refusing, as Meroz did, to come up, "to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

A. W. Weston offered the following resolution, viz.:

RESOLVED, That we feel bound solemnly to protest against the principles of the American Colonization Society, as anti-Republican and anti-Christian, that we believe them to have had a most sorrowful influence in removing the chains of the slave by recognizing him as the property of his master, and in strengthening the unreasonable and unholy prejudice against our oppressed brethren and sisters, by declaring them "almost too debased to be reached by the heavenly light," that to the slave, the Society offers exile or bondage; to the free man, persecution or banishment, and that we view it as an expatriation Society.

This resolution elicited much expression of opinion, and some touching appeals from the colored members of the Convention. The resolution was adopted.

On motion of A. E. Grimké,

RESOLVED, That this Convention do firmly believe that the existence of an unnatural prejudice against our colored population, is one of the chief pillars of American slavery—therefore, that the more we mingle with our oppressed brethren and sisters, the more deeply are we convinced of the sinfulness of that anti-Christian prejudice which is crushing them to the earth in our nominally Free States—sealing up the fountains of knowledge from their panting spirits, and driving them into infidelity, and that we deem it a solemn duty for every woman to pray to be delivered from such an unholy feeling, and to act out the principles of Christian equality by associating with them as though the color of the skin was of no more consequence than that of the hair, or the eyes.

On motion of Lucretia Mott,

RESOLVED, That the support of the iniquitous system of slavery at the South is dependent on the co-operation of the North, by commerce and manufactures, as well as by the consumption of its products—therefore that, despising the gain of oppression we recommend to our friends, by a candid and prayerful examination of the subject, to ascertain if it be not a duty to cleanse our hands from this unrighteous participation, by no longer indulging in the luxuries which come through this polluted channel; and in the supply of the necessary articles of food and clothing, & c., that we "provide things honest in the sight of all men," by giving the preference to goods which come through required labor.

On motion of A. E. Grimké, . . .

RESOLVED, That it is the duty of abolitionists to do all they can to establish and sustain day, evening, and Sabbath schools irrespective of color; and likewise to visit the schools in which colored pupils are taught, to encourage them in the acquisition of knowledge, and strengthen the teachers in their labor of love.

RESOLVED, That we view with heartfelt commendation the noble stand which Oberlin Collegiate Institute has taken with regard to prejudice; and that it is with peculiar satisfaction we have learned that our oppressed sisters may find at least one seminary in our republican despotism where they may enjoy the benefits of a liberal education. . . .

3. The American Female Moral Reform Society Warns Mothers About the "Solitary Vice," 1839

BELOVED SISTERS,

Will you permit an associated band, most of whom share responsibilities similar to your own, and know with yourselves the deep yearnings of maternal love, to call your attention, for a few moments, to a forbidding, but most important subject. Be assured that nothing but the fixed conviction that it is a subject affecting the temporal and eternal well-being of the young immortals committed to your care, would induce us to commend it to your consideration through the Press. We refer to a species of licentiousness from which neither age nor sex is exempt; a vice that has done its work of ruin, physical, mental, and moral, when no eye but that of Omniscience could behold it, a vice that has been practised in ten thousand instances, without a correct knowledge of its consequences, or its guilt, until it has paved the way for the most revolting excesses in crime. . . .

Recently it has pleased, our Heavenly Father to bring before our minds a flood of light, by which we have been solemnly convinced, that in nine cases out of ten, "solitary vice" [masturbation] is the first cause of social licentiousness, and the foundation and hidden source of the present corrupt state of society. . . .

The dangers to which all classes of the rising generation are exposed, are great beyond expression, they are dangers, too, that may stain the soul with guilt, and yet elude the vigilance of the most watchful parent, unless obviated *from the cradle*, by proper training and correct instruction. . . .

"A pupil in a select school, a child but ten years of age, confessed to her teacher, that she had been guilty of the sin alluded to for years, although she had never been taught it, and knew not that any one living practised it but herself. Her mind was fast sinking, she was wholly unable to reckon even small sums. This child had been religiously educated, but she was reared where the table was made a snare. Rich and high seasoned food, and abundance of dainties were given her, bathing was neglected, and a precocious development of the passions, and their consequent indulgence, was, in this case, the result."

"A child, under 12 years of age, whose morals in every respect had been carefully guarded, and who had never, except in one instance, been exposed, to the influence of an evil associate; on being questioned by her mother, confessed with tears that the sin had been taught her by the suspected individual."

"A son of a highly respectable physician, under three years of age, with no teacher but depraved instinct, had become so addicted to this pernicious habit, that

the mother was obliged to provide a close night dress, and watch his waking hours with unceasing care." . . .

"A theological student, of superior mind and high attainments, deservedly beloved by numerous friends, and eminently fitted to be the centre of attraction in the highest circles of refinement, became a subject of this debasing vice. Presently his health failed, and abused reason deserted his throne. He was carried from the seminary to his friends, a maniac, and after lingering a few days, was ushered into the presence of his Judge."

A physician, who has long had an extensive practice in this city, confidently affirms that most of the young men in feeble health, who go south, to escape or recover from consumption, are the victims of this body and soul-destroying sin.

4. The Seneca Falls Convention Issues a "Declaration of Sentiments," 1848

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 were 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 constraints them to demand the equal situation 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.

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 had 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 received 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.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and National legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press

in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions embracing every part of the country.

5. Elizabeth McClintock and Elizabeth Cady Stanton Defend the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention, 1848

For the *National Reformer*.

Woman's Rights.

Messrs. Editors:—As you announce Mr. Sulley, (the author of the article headed "Woman's Rights Convention," published in your paper of last week) as a man who seeks to know the truth, and one who will do justice to any subject he examines, and as he declares himself to be a great lover of his race, and one who has thought deeply on the subject of human improvement, I humbly ask *him* what are these other means to which he refers, by which the present social, civil and religious condition of woman can be improved. It is evident, aside from his own assertion, that Mr. Sulley has thought much on this subject, for he says, "I am not one of those who think that no improvement can be made in the condition of woman, even in this favored land." He is interested, too, in our movement, and has been kind enough to tell us what means will not effect what we desire. He says those recommended and presented by the convention will not do. He thinks legislative action cannot alter the laws of nature. Does Mr. Sulley assume that our present degradation is in accordance with the laws of God? Mr. Sulley having been announced as a lover of truth, we rejoiced in the belief that at length we had found one opponent who would meet us in fair argument, one who though not agreeing with us fully in our measures, was yet sufficiently interested in this subject to give us some plan by which the elevation of woman might be effected. But alas! we have the same old story over again—ridicule, ridicule, ridicule. We have hints of great arguments that could be produced—profound philosophy, fully convincing and satisfactory to all thinking minds, but he gives us nothing tangible, not even the end of the tail of any of these truths, by which could we get a fair hold, we might draw out all the rest. Mr. Sulley thinks our convention was a mere pompous outward show; because, forsooth, we could not give on the spot, a panacea for all the ills of life—because we could not answer Mr. Sulley's silly questions in a manner to satisfy him, though the audience thought him fully answered. We did not assemble to discuss the details of social life—we did not propose to petition the legislature to make our husbands just, generous and courteous; no, we assembled to protest against an unjust form of government, existing without the consent of the governed; to declare our right to be free as man is free: to claim our right to the elective franchise, our right to be

Elizabeth McClintock and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Women's Rights," *Rochester National Reformer*, September 21, 1848. This document can also be found in Patricia Holland and Ann D. Gordon, eds., *The Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1991).

represented in a government which we are taxed to support; to have such laws as give to man the right to chastise and imprison his wife, to take the wages which she earns—the property which she inherits, and in case of separation the children of her love; laws which make her the more dependant on his bounty: it was to protect against such disgraceful laws, and to have them, if possible, forever erased from our statute books, as a shame and reproach to a republican, christian people in the enlightened nineteenth century. We did not meet to decide home questions—to say who should be the ruling spirit, the presiding genius of every household—who should be the umpire to settle the many differences in domestic life. . . .

Mr. S. expressed a wish to quote the Bible on this subject, but found it would have no authority with us. We affirm that we believe in the Bible. We consider that Book to be the great charter of human rights, and we are willing, yes, desirous to go into the Bible argument on this subject, for its spirit is wholly with the side of Freedom. . . .

E. W. MCCLINTOCK,
E. C. STANTON.

of the University of Delaware published a wide-ranging survey of the development of women's organizations of all sorts before 1840. How do the radical groups chronicled by Jeffrey and Isenberg fit into the patterns she describes?