

2. What evidence does Douglass present to disprove the idea of black inferiority?

76. Catharine Beecher on the "Duty of American Females" (1837)

Source: Catharine E. Beecher, Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, with Reference to the Duty of American Females (Philadelphia, 1837), pp. 5-6, 27, 41, 101-08, 128.

The abolitionist movement enabled women to carve out a place in the public sphere. Women attended antislavery meetings and circulated petitions to Congress. Most prominent during the 1830s were Angelina and Sarah Grimké, the daughters of a South Carolina slaveowner. The sisters had been converted to Quakerism and abolitionism while visiting Philadelphia. They began to deliver popular lectures that offered a scathing condemnation of slavery from the perspective of those who had witnessed its evils firsthand. In 1836, Angelina Grimké wrote *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*, urging them to take a stand against slavery.

The sight of women lecturing in public to mixed male-female audiences and taking part in public debate on political questions aroused considerable criticism. The prominent writer Catharine Beecher responded to Grimké's essay by reprimanding her for stepping outside "the domestic and social sphere," urging her to accept the fact that "heaven" had designated man "the superior" and woman "the subordinate."

MY DEAR FRIEND:

Your public address to Christian females at the South has reached me, and I have been urged to aid in circulating it at the North. I have also been informed, that you contemplate a tour, during the ensuing year, for the purpose of exerting your influence to form Abolition Societies among ladies of the non-slave-holding States.

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Beecher on the "Duty of Ladies" (1837)

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Address to American Females* (Philadelphia, 1837), pp. 5-6,

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the point to aid in circulating it at the North. I have
thought that you contemplate a tour, during the ensue-
of exerting your influence to form Aboli-
tion Societies of the non-slave-holding States.

Our acquaintance and friendship give me a claim to your private
ear; but there are reasons why it seems more desirable to address
you, who now stand before the public as an advocate of Abolition
measures, in a more public manner.

The object I have in view, is to present some reasons why it seems
unwise and inexpedient for ladies of the non-slave-holding States to
unite themselves in Abolition Societies; and thus, at the same time,
to exhibit the inexpediency of the course you propose to adopt. . . .

Now Abolitionists are before the community, and declare that all
slavery is sin, which ought to be immediately forsaken; and that it is
their object and intention to promote the *immediate emancipation* of all
the slaves in this nation. . . . [R]eproaches, rebukes, and sneers, were
employed to convince the whites that their prejudices were sinful. . . .

[T]he severing of the Union by the present mode of agitating the
question . . . may be one of the results, and, if so, what are the proba-
bilities for a Southern republic that has torn itself off for the purpose
of excluding foreign interference, and for the purpose of perpetuat-
ing slavery? . . .

Heaven has appointed to one sex the superior, and to the other the
subordinate station, and this without any reference to the character
or conduct of either. It is therefore as much for the dignity as it is for
the interest of females, in all respects to conform to the duties of this
relation. . . . But while woman holds a subordinate relation in society
to the other sex, it is not because it was designed that her duties or
her influence should be any the less important, or all-pervading. But
it was designed that the mode of gaining influence and of exercising
power should be altogether different and peculiar. . . .

Woman is to win every thing by peace and love; by making her-
self so much respected, esteemed and loved, that to yield to her
opinions and to gratify her wishes, will be the free-will offering of
the heart. But this is to be all accomplished in the domestic and
social circle. . . . But the moment woman begins to feel the prompt-
ings of ambition, or the thirst for power, her aegis of defence is gone.
All the sacred protection of religion, all the generous promptings of

chivalry, all the poetry of romantic gallantry, depend upon woman's retaining her place as dependent and defenceless, and making no claims, and maintaining no right but what are the gifts of honour, rectitude and love.

A woman may seek the aid of co-operation and combination among her own sex, to assist her in her appropriate offices of piety, charity, maternal and domestic duty; but whatever, in any measure, throws a woman into the attitude of a combatant either for herself or others—whatever binds her in a party conflict—whatever obliges her in any way to exert coercive influences, throws her out of her appropriate sphere. . . .

If it is asked, "May not woman appropriately come forward as a suppliant for a portion of her sex who are bound in cruel bondage?" It is replied, that, the rectitude and propriety of any such measure, depend entirely on its probable results. If petitions from females will operate to exasperate; if they will be deemed obtrusive, indecorous, and unwise, by those to whom they are addressed; . . . if they will be the opening wedge, that will eventually bring females as petitioners and partisans into every political measure that may tend to injure and oppress their sex . . . then it is neither appropriate nor wise, nor right, for a woman to petition for the relief of oppressed females. . . .

In this country, petitions to congress, in reference to the official duties of legislators, seem, IN ALL CASES, to fall entirely without the sphere of female duty. Men are the proper persons to make appeals to the rulers whom they appoint, and if their female friends, by arguments and persuasions, can induce them to petition, all the good that can be done by such measures will be secured. But if females cannot influence their nearest friends, to urge forward a public measure in this way, they surely are out of their place, in attempting to do it themselves. . . .

It is allowed by all reflecting minds, that the safety and happiness of this nation depends upon having the *children* educated, and not only intellectually, but morally and religiously. There are now nearly two millions of children and adults in this country who cannot read,

y of romantic gallantry, depend upon women as dependent and defenceless, and making nothing no right but what are the gifts of honor.

With the aid of co-operation and combination, assist her in her appropriate offices of piety, domestic duty; but whatever, in any measure, the attitude of a combatant either for herself finds her in a party conflict—whatever obliges her to coercive influences, throws her out of her

“Not woman appropriately come forward as a representative of her sex who are bound in cruel bondage?” The rectitude and propriety of any such measure, probable results. If petitions from females will be refused, if they will be deemed obtrusive, indecorous, to whom they are addressed; . . . if they will be refused, it will eventually bring females as petitioners for every political measure that may tend to injure them. . . . then it is neither appropriate nor wise, nor a petition for the relief of oppressed females. . . .

“Petitions to congress, in reference to the official record, IN ALL CASES, to fall entirely without the result. Men are the proper persons to make appeals, to be appointed, and if their female friends, by argument, can induce them to petition, all the good that measures will be secured. But if females cannot induce their friends, to urge forward a public measure, they are out of their place, in attempting to do it

“Reflecting minds, that the safety and happiness of the nation depend upon having the *children* educated, and not upon having the *children* morally and religiously. There are now nearly ten million children and adults in this country who cannot read,

and who have no schools of any kind. To give only a small supply of teachers to these destitute children, who are generally where the population is sparse, will demand *thirty thousand teachers* at the moment and an addition of *two thousand every year*. Where is this army of teachers to be found? Is it at all probable that the other sex will afford even a moderate portion of this supply? . . . Men will be educators in the college, in the high school, in some of the most honorable and lucrative common schools, but the *children*, the *little children* of this nation must, to a wide extent, be taught by females, or remain untaught. . . . And as the value of education rises in the public mind . . . women will more and more be furnished with those intellectual advantages which they need to fit them for such duties.

The result will be, that America will be distinguished above all other nations, for well-educated females and for the influence they will exert on the general interests of society. But if females, as they approach the other sex, in intellectual elevation, begin to claim, or to exercise in any manner, the peculiar prerogatives of that sex, education will prove a doubtful and dangerous blessing. But this will never be the result. For the more intelligent a woman becomes, the more she can appreciate the wisdom of that ordinance that appointed her subordinate station.

But it may be asked, is there nothing to be done to bring this national sin of slavery to an end? Must the internal slave-trade, a trade now ranked as piracy among all civilized nations, still prosper in our bounds? Must the very seat of our government stand as one of the chief slave-markets of the land; and must not Christian females open their lips, nor lift a finger, to bring such a shame and sin to an end? To this it may be replied, that Christian females may, and can say and do much to bring these evils to an end; and the present is a time and an occasion when it seems most desirable that they should know, and appreciate, and *exercise* the power which they do possess for so desirable an end. . . .

In the present aspect of affairs among us, when everything seems to be tending to disunion and distraction, it surely has become the

duty of every female instantly to relinquish the attitude of a partisan, in every matter of clashing interests, and to assume the office of a mediator, and an advocate of peace. And to do this, it is not necessary that a woman should in any manner relinquish her opinion as to the evils or the benefits, the right or the wrong, of any principle of practice. But, while quietly holding her own opinions, and calmly avowing them, when conscience and integrity make the duty imperative, every female can employ her influence, not for the purpose of exciting or regulating public sentiment, but rather for the purpose of promoting a spirit of candour, forbearance, charity, and peace.

Questions

1. How does Beecher think women should exert power within American society?
2. Why does she believe that the abolitionist movement is dangerous?

77. Angelina Grimké on Women's Rights (1837)

Source: The Liberator, August 2, 1837.

In response to Catharine Beecher's criticism, Angelina Grimké wrote a series of twelve letters forthrightly defending the right of women to take part in political debate. The final one addressed the question of women's rights directly. "I know nothing," she wrote, "of men's rights and women's rights." "My doctrine," she declared, "is that whatever is morally right for man to do, it is morally right for woman to do." The Grimké sisters soon retired from the fray, after Angelina married the abolitionist Theodore Weld. But their writings helped to spark the movement for women's rights that arose in the 1840s.

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SINCE I ENGAGED in the investigation of the rights of the slave, I have necessarily been led to a better understanding of my own; for I have found the Anti-Slavery cause to be the high school of morals in our land—the school in which human rights are more fully investi- gated, and better understood and taught, than in any other benevo- lent enterprise. Here one great fundamental principle is disinterred, which, as soon as it is uplifted to public view, leads the mind into a thousand different ramifications, into which the rays of this central light are streaming with brightness and glory. Here we are led to examine why human beings have any rights. It is because they are moral beings; the rights of all men, from the king to the slave, are built upon their moral nature: and as all men have this moral nature, so all men have essentially the same rights. These rights may be plundered from the slave, but they cannot be alienated: his right and title to himself is as perfect now, as is that of Lyman Beecher: they are written in his moral being, and must remain unimpaired as long as that being continues.

Now it naturally occurred to me, that if rights were founded in moral being, then the circumstance of sex could not give to man higher rights and responsibilities, than to woman. To suppose that it did, would be to deny the self-evident truth, "that the physical con- stitution is the mere instrument of the moral nature." To suppose that it did, would be to break up utterly the relations of the two natures, and to reverse their functions, exalting the animal nature into a monarch, and humbling the moral into a slave; "making the former a proprietor, and the latter its property." When I look at human beings as moral beings, all distinction in sex sinks to insignificance and nothingness; for I believe it regulates rights and responsibilities no more than the color of the skin or the eyes. My doctrine then is, that whatever it is morally right for man to do, it is morally right for woman to do. Our duties are governed, not by difference of sex, but by the diversity of our relative connections in life, and the variety of gifts and talents committed to our care, and the different eras in which we live.

This regulation of duty by the mere circumstance of sex, rather than by the fundamental principle of moral being, has led to all that multifarious train of evils flowing out of the anti-christian doctrine of masculine and feminine virtues. By this doctrine, man has been converted into the warrior, and clothed in sternness, and those other kindred qualities, which, in the eyes of many, belong to his character as a man; whilst woman has been taught to lean upon an arm of flesh, to sit as a soul arrayed "in gold and pearls, and costly array," to be admired for her personal charms, and caressed and humored like a spoiled child, or converted into a mere drudge to suit the convenience of her lord and master. This principle has spread desolation over the whole moral world, and brought into all the diversified relations of life, "confusion and every evil work." It has given to man a charter for the exercise of tyranny and selfishness, pride and arrogance, lust and brutal violence. It has robbed woman of essential rights, the right to think and speak and act on all great moral questions, just as men think and speak and act; the right to share their responsibilities, dangers, and toils; the right to fulfill the great end of her being, as a help meet for man, as a moral, intellectual and immortal creature, and of glorifying God in her body and her spirit which are His. Hitherto, instead of being a help meet to man, in the highest, noblest sense of the term, as a companion, a co-worker, an equal; she has been a mere appendage of his being, and instrument of his convenience and pleasure, the pretty toy, with which he wiled away his leisure moments, or the pet animal whom he humored into playfulness and submission. Woman, instead of being regarded as the equal of man, has uniformly been looked down upon as his inferior, a mere gift to fill up the measure of his happiness. In the poetry of "romantic gallantry," it is true, she has been called the "last best gift of God to man;" but I believe I speak forth the words of truth and soberness when I affirm, that woman never was given to man. She was created, like him, in the image of God, and crowned with glory and honor; created only a little lower than the angels,—not, as is too generally presumed, a little lower

f duty by the mere circumstance of sex, rather than the principle of moral being, has led to all that is evil flowing out of the anti-Christian doctrine of feminine virtues. By this doctrine, man has become the warrior, and clothed in sternness, and those duties, which, in the eyes of many, belong to his sex, whilst woman has been taught to lean upon another as a soul arrayed "in gold and pearls, and costly apparel for her personal charms, and caressed and cherished child, or converted into a mere drudge to do the will of her lord and master. This principle has spread over the whole moral world, and brought into all the evils of life, "confusion and every evil work." It has opened the way for the exercise of tyranny and selfishness, of lust and brutal violence. It has robbed woman of the right to think and speak and act on all great things as men think and speak and act; the right to the rights of citizenship, dangers, and toils; the right to fulfill the duties of life, as a help meet for man, as a moral, intellectual, and of glorifying God in her body and soul. Hitherto, instead of being a help meet to man in the noblest sense of the term, as a companion, a co-worker, she has been a mere appendage of his being, and a convenience and pleasure, the pretty toy, with which he spends his leisure moments, or the pet animal whom he cherishes with affection and submission. Woman, instead of being the equal of man, has uniformly been looked upon as inferior, a mere gift to fill up the measure of his life. The poetry of "romantic gallantry," it is true, she has received as the best gift of God to man;" but I believe I speak the truth and soberness when I affirm, that woman is not man. She was created, like him, in the image of God, with glory and honor; created only a little lower than man, as is too generally presumed, a little lower

than man; on her brow, as well as on his, was placed the "diadem of beauty," and in her hand the scepter of universal dominion. . . .

Measure her rights and duties by the sure, unerring standard of moral being, not by the false rights and measures of a mere circumstance of her human existence, and then will it become a self-evident truth, that whatever it is morally right for a man to do, it is morally right for a woman to do. I recognize no rights but human rights—I know nothing of men's rights and women's rights; for in Christ Jesus, there is neither male or female; and it is my solemn conviction, that, until this important principle of equality is recognized and carried out into practice, that vain will be the efforts of the church to do anything effectual for the permanent reformation of the world. Woman was the first transgressor, and the first victim of power. In all the heathen nations, she has been the slave of man, and no Christian nation has ever acknowledged her rights. Nay more, no Christian Society has ever done so either, on the broad and solid basis of humanity. I know that in some few denominations, she is permitted to preach the gospel; but this is not done from a conviction of her equality as a human being, but of her equality in spiritual gifts—for we find that woman, even in these Societies, is not allowed to make the Discipline by which she is to be governed. Now, I believe it is her right to be consulted in all the laws and regulations by which she is to be governed, whether in Church or State, and that the present arrangement of Society, on those points, are a violation of human rights, an usurpation of power over her, which is working mischief, great mischief, in the world. If Ecclesiastical and Civil governments are ordained of God, then I contend that woman has just as much right to sit in solemn counsel in Conventions, Conferences, Associations, and General Assemblies, as man—just as much right to sit upon the throne of England, or in the Presidential chair of the United States, as man. . . .

. . .

I believe the discussion of Human Rights at the North has already been of immense advantage to this country. It is producing the

happiest influence upon the minds and hearts of those who are engaged in it; . . . Indeed, the very agitation of the question, which it involved, has been highly important. Never was the heart of man so expanded; never were its generous sympathies so generally and so perseveringly excited. These sympathies, thus called into existence, have been useful preservatives of national virtue. I therefore do wish very much to promote the Anti-Slavery excitement at the North, because I believe it will prove a useful preservative of national virtue. . . .

The discussion of the wrongs of slavery has opened the way for the discussion of other rights, and the ultimate result will most certainly be "the breaking of every yoke," the letting the oppressed of every grade and description go free—an emancipation far more glorious than any the world has ever yet seen, an introduction into that liberty wherewith Christ hath made his people free. . . .

Questions

1. Why does Angelina Grimké call the abolitionist movement the nation's foremost "school [of] human rights"?
2. What role does she think the difference between the sexes should play in determining a person's rights and obligations?

78. Declaration of Sentiments of the Seneca Falls Convention (1848)

Source: Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al., eds., A History of Woman Suffrage (Rochester, N.Y., 1881-1922), Vol. 1, pp. 70-74.

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the antislavery crusade, was the principal author of the Declaration of Sentiments adopted at Seneca Falls, the town in upstate New York where she lived. Modeled on the Declaration of Independence, the document added "women" to Jefferson's axiom, "all men are created equal." And in place of Jefferson's list of injustices committed by George III, Stanton condemned the "injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman." The first to be listed was denying her the right to vote. As Stanton told the convention, only the vote would make woman "free as man is free," since in a democratic society, freedom was impossible without the ballot. The vote, however, was hardly the only issue raised at the convention. Equal rights became the rallying cry of the early movement for women's rights, and equal rights meant claiming access to all the prevailing definitions of American freedom.

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 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.

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.

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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.

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.

Questions

1. What are the key demands, other than the right to vote, put forward by the Seneca Falls Convention?
2. How does the Declaration seem to define freedom for women?