

Preamble

The year is 1997. We still hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and all women are created equal, and that the history of mankind continues to be 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.

It has been 149 years since our Foremothers met in Seneca Falls and adopted resolutions laying out their demands for freedom. In the years that followed, many more conventions were held and many more resolutions adopted. Those resolutions served as guideposts for feminists in their freedom struggle. As a result of years of agitation and organizing, women achieved many specific rights: the right to own property, including their own wages; the right to divorce and child custody; the right to higher education; the right to vote, to name just a few. But today women remain locked out of power on all levels of society, in individual relations with men as well as in national government and the economy.

Going back to the resolutions of Seneca Falls enables us to see what has been accomplished, and what has not. Evaluating our own experience in the last century and a half provides historical lessons they could not have anticipated.

We have learned that the vote, considered in 1848 to be the most radical of demands, cannot be an instrument of liberation as long as wealth and power determine which candidates we are allowed to vote for, and whose interests those candidates represent. We have learned that not only governments, but also economic systems, must protect our inalienable rights, and that when any economic system becomes destructive of those rights, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it and to overthrow it. Socialism does not guarantee women's liberation; capitalism does guarantee women's oppression.

We have learned, as the women at Seneca Falls understood, that women cannot be liberated individually; that an ongoing movement is needed, not only to advance our freedom but to protect gains that have already been won. Like them, we understand the importance of clearly stating our goals so that we can determine strategies for achieving them.

In that spirit, we offer these resolutions. Some can be accommodated within the present system, while others will require a total transformation of the system. Some are demands that we make of men, while others are demands that we make of women. Our basic demand of men is equality on all levels, and support for our freedom struggle. Our basic demand of women is honesty with themselves and others: that, in the words of the feminist pioneers, "they no longer publish their degradation by declaring themselves satisfied with their present position, nor their ignorance, by asserting that they have all the rights they want."

Resolutions of 1997

1. RESOLVED, that 24-hour child care and eldercare be made available as an extension of the public school system.
2. RESOLVED, that marriage and living together arrangements be total partnerships, with men taking on an equal share of housework and childcare without complaint nor bragging; that women maintain financial independence; that women keep their maiden names as a statement of their independence and of their solidarity with unmarried women, and that they most especially reject use of the honorific "Mrs."
3. RESOLVED, that women develop their muscles and learn self-defense, and that it be required as part of the school curriculum; that women be trained how to fight on par with men.
4. RESOLVED, that there be no special place in society accorded woman or man, even in the military. That we follow the instructive of Sojourner Truth: That if it is not a fit place for woman, it is not a fit place for man to be.

5. RESOLVED, that all tracking in schools be stopped; that teachers, childcare workers, parents and other adults treat boys and girls as human beings, not as sexes; that all activities, including sports, be integrated; that life preparation classes and other information and instruction, from mechanics to home economics, be required of both sexes; that feminist history be taught to all students.
6. RESOLVED, that all discriminatory appearance and dress codes in schools, at work, and in other public places be abolished; that women always have the right to wear pants and comfortable shoes; that women demand healthy, comfortable clothing.
7. RESOLVED, that women be accorded respect as human beings (lack of human respect and dignity is at the root of violence against women); that images exploiting women's sexuality be ended in advertising and the media; that the sexual act itself be treated with respect, rather than as something to snicker at or used as a weapon of domination.
8. RESOLVED, that childbirth is not a disease or a "medical condition;" that a woman has a right to choose whether a midwife, a medical doctor, or whoever else, she wishes may assist at the birth.
9. RESOLVED, that women on welfare not be made scapegoats for our failing economic system, and that working mothers not be made scapegoats for our failing social system. Single mothers need help instead of condemnation and promises. Like all families, they need childcare, good education, real jobs, healthcare, and child support.
10. RESOLVED, that the additional biological labor of childbirth necessary to the survival of the human race be recompensed in some way; that once birth has occurred the father has as much responsibility and duty to raise, care for and love the child as the mother; that our institutions be restructured to make this possible.
11. RESOLVED, that since childbirth unfairly falls only to females, both free abortion and free birth control be available on demand to all women; that abortions, birth control and sterilization not be pushed on any woman and carried out only with the fully informed consent of the woman involved.
12. RESOLVED, that men and women practice sexual honesty. Men and women who are at risk for STDs, including AIDS, disclose this to all partners before sexual involvement.
13. RESOLVED, that equal pay for equal work is not enough; that women demand total integration of the workforce; that women seek nontraditional jobs and that men welcome women into those jobs.
14. RESOLVED, that women and men make themselves aware of—and fight to end—the sexist insults and discriminations that women face in our daily lives.
15. RESOLVED, that women be treated with equality in the realm of all health care, from research to education to its delivery.
16. RESOLVED, that women work diligently for the liberation of all women, to acquire the power to attain an equal share in all the decision-making of society, and an equal share of the wealth.
17. RESOLVED, that women desiring liberation carefully study and learn from the struggles of women and of other oppressed groups, using original sources whenever possible.
18. RESOLVED, that, since no woman will be totally free until all women are free, all women privileged by race or class, fighting for their rights and liberation, learn about the bad effect of racism and class arrogance on past struggle, and do everything within their power not to repeat those mistakes.
19. RESOLVED, that men aid the movement for women's liberation when asked, and that they share the struggle for a just and cooperative economic system where no person's labor is exploited for the wealth or use of another.
20. RESOLVED, that not only is woman the equal of man, but man is the equal of women, or at least has the capacity to be; that any differences found in either sex as a whole, not arising directly out of the special division of labor in childbirth, result from differing positions of power, and are not biologically or genetically determined.

Preamble by Barbara Leon, 1994. Resolutions by Carol Hanisch, 1994, 1997.

Presented in the keynote speech by Carol Hanisch at the 149th Anniversary of the Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention of 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York on July 19, 1997

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