

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON,  
"ADDRESS ON WOMAN'S RIGHTS" (September 1848)

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**Abstract:** This essay attends to the transformative power of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's first major public speech, in which she grounds her arguments in natural rights, adopts an embellished speaking style, and employs a narrative form in her conclusion to invite her audience to participate in her prophetic vision of massive transformation. The ideological tensions promoted in Stanton's Address on Woman's Rights speech persisted throughout the woman's rights movement into the twentieth century.

**Key Words:** natural rights, morality, sentimental style, prophetic persona

Elizabeth Cady Stanton is considered the "greatest speaker" of the early woman's rights movement.<sup>1</sup> She helped organize the first woman's rights convention, she drafted and presented the first woman's rights charter, and she founded multiple woman's rights organizations, remaining in the public eye as a leader of the movement for more than fifty years. Thus, her first formal public address, "Address on Woman's Rights," delivered in 1848, is a key text not only for understanding early woman's rights ideology, but also for understanding what drove one of our nation's most prominent social movement leaders.

This study takes a historical approach to illuminate the transformative power of Stanton's first major public speech, her "Address on Woman's Rights, 1848." To that end, I situate the address within the gendered context of 1848, detailing the social, political, and ideological forces at play in the historical moment. Additionally, I discuss how these forces, along with Stanton's privileged upbringing and entrance into reform activism, shaped her ideological approach toward woman's rights. Next, I treat Stanton's address as a site of discursive action where the interplay between text and context illuminates three key rhetorical strategies in Stanton's address. First, while Stanton's arguments were grounded in natural rights, she incorporated appeals to women's moral authority, developing a complicated and entangled ideology of gender differences. Second, Stanton's embellished speaking style facilitated her thorough and weighty refutation of arguments against woman's rights. Third, the narrative form of Stanton's conclusion invited her audience to participate in a vision of massive transformation, in which Stanton's prophetic call for sacrifice was both an enactment of women's equality and a forecast of her role in the early woman's rights movement. In conclusion, I consider the significance of Stanton's address for how it created a tension

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between natural rights and moral arguments that persisted throughout the history of the woman's rights movement.

### *Woman Leaders in a Culture of Resistance*

Stanton's 1848 "Address on Woman's Rights" should be understood as both a historical artifact of gender ideology and an example of Stanton's own personal tenacity. At age 32, Stanton's privileged upbringing and superior intellect helped her enter what was considered the public sphere—a space reserved for men—and share her revolutionary ideas on woman's rights. Other woman's rights successes, made particularly through advances in education and women's participation in the abolitionist movement, expanded the boundaries for women throughout the late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth centuries. These two forces—Stanton's untapped leadership and the momentum of other social movements—created the opportunity to deliver this address. The following traces key elements of this fortuitous intersection, showing how Stanton's upbringing and young adult life intersected with greater societal moves toward woman's rights.

#### Women's Education

In the post-Revolutionary War era, the demand for women's education became politicized. Prior to the war, white women were relegated to domestic life, but according to Linda K. Kerber, the Revolution "created a public ideology of individual responsibility and virtue" which compelled some to elevate the status of women as cultivators of civic virtue.<sup>2</sup> Of course women were still confined to the private sphere, but they were considered morally superior and natural teachers, thus redefining their domesticity into what was termed "republican motherhood."<sup>3</sup> As Kerber suggests, "theorists created a mother who had a political purpose and argued that her domestic behavior had a direct political function in the Republic."<sup>4</sup> As such, a woman's domestic life, particularly white women of means, were not only required to run a home and raise a family, but to cultivate good citizens for the betterment of the republic. At this time, a woman's domestic responsibilities had political ramifications, yet women were still constrained from directly entering the public sphere.<sup>5</sup>

The white republican mother was further enabled by increased access to education. As teachers of civic virtue, women needed an education to train their families to participate in society. According to Glenna Matthews, white women began receiving informal educations by the late eighteenth century. She explains: "Married women still could not control property in their own names, women still could not vote, but some at least were beginning to receive an education to equip them for intelligent participation in their society."<sup>6</sup> Despite these small gains, education was limited to wealthy, white women and focused on enriching their moral understanding, not their intellect. Thus, women's domesticity secured the nation's civic virtue, while pushing beyond the private sphere posed a threat to the young nation. Pursuing a formal education was certainly beyond the realm of the womanly sphere.<sup>7</sup>

Access to equal education, then, was the first movement toward woman's rights in America. One of the first advocates for women's education was an Englishwoman, Mary Wollstonecraft, who, in the *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, argued that women and men were naturally equals and that boundaries between the public and private spheres should be eliminated. She advocated for coeducation as a means of enriching women's moral and intellectual development. Ultimately, though, American women resisted embracing Wollstonecraft's radical ideas because of her eccentric personal character.<sup>8</sup>

Following in line with other voices advocating woman's rights (e.g., Mercy Warren, 1776, Judith Sargent Murray, 1782, and Hannah Mather Crocker, 1818), Emma Willard forged the opening of the first endowed educational institution for young women. After she was denied a formal education, Willard believed her self-taught mathematical and physiological training should be put to use. For two years she privately lobbied New York Governor DeWitt Clinton and many legislators. In 1821, she opened the Troy Female Seminary, which Stanton later attended.<sup>9</sup> Willard paved the way for many others to open seminaries or colleges exclusively for young women.<sup>10</sup>

Stanton's upbringing prepared her to excel as a student of Willard's. Although born into a wealthy family on November 12, 1815, Stanton was forced to overcome family hardship. Her mother Margaret, strong-willed and formidable, gave birth to eleven children, six of whom died before reaching adulthood. Stanton's father, Daniel, a prominent but reserved judge, was stricken with grief upon losing his second son Eleazar, when Stanton was only ten years old. Memories of Eleazar's funeral haunted Stanton, as she recalls her father saying to her, "Oh my daughter, I wish you were a boy."<sup>11</sup>

Throughout adolescence, Stanton excelled athletically and academically, voraciously reading in her father's law library, attending court sessions, and riding horses. Judge Cady even allowed his daughter to participate in dinner table debates with his law clerks. At fifteen years old, Stanton began to attend Troy Seminary where she embraced Willard's vision of women's education and considered Willard a role model. During her time at Troy Seminary, Stanton began to develop her confidence in a woman's ability to effect social change.<sup>12</sup>

### Abolition and a Woman's Right to Speak

The anti-slavery movement provided opportunities for women to participate in public action and for Stanton to develop her reformist sensibilities. Women who raised money and awareness for female education typically did so behind closed doors to avoid violating codes of proper, womanly behavior. But abolitionism challenged these codes by encouraging women to speak publicly. Boldly emerging into the public sphere was Frances Wright, a Scottish freethinker who, between 1828 and 1829, delivered anti-slavery speeches and advocated equal education for women. Her radical vision for gender and racial equality not only stirred the debate over human rights, but attracted "promiscuous audiences"—audiences comprised of both men and women.<sup>13</sup> Wright had such a profound effect on the role of women in social reform that woman's rights

advocates throughout the nineteenth century were often pejoratively labeled, "Fanny Wrightists."<sup>14</sup>

Many women abolitionists believed it was their moral duty to speak publicly against slavery. Maria W. Miller Stewart, an African American woman, made forthright calls toward Christian righteousness in favor of abolition and a woman's right to speak against slavery.<sup>15</sup> Sarah and Angelina Grimké also made arguments rooted in Christian beliefs. The sisters were compelled by their upbringing on a slave-owning plantation and their Quaker faith. Between 1835 and 1838, Sarah and Angelina waged a public abolitionist campaign, working for the American Anti-Slavery Society in Boston, writing editorials, and delivering lectures. Ultimately, the Grimkés advocated a woman's right to speak publicly in order to further the abolitionist cause.<sup>16</sup>

Between her late teenage years and early thirties, Stanton met many abolitionists, men and women, and began formulating radical views on slavery and equal rights for women. She remained inspired by Willard's views on social and political issues as she developed a close relationship with her cousin and abolitionist, Gerrit Smith. His life was dedicated to acts of benevolence, inspired by a humanitarian brand of Christianity. Ultimately, she met and fell in love with Henry Stanton, a "tall, handsome, dynamic" abolitionist. Stanton and Henry announced their engagement in October 1839 after knowing each other for less than a month.<sup>17</sup> Stanton's father disapproved of the hasty engagement and threatened to disinherit Stanton for marrying such a controversial public figure. After months of tumultuous debate, Stanton and Henry eloped on May 1, 1840, shortly before whisking away to London, England.<sup>18</sup>

London was the site of the first World Anti-Slavery Convention, which spurred the inception of the American woman's rights movement. Many notable abolitionists were in attendance, including Angelina Grimké Weld, Wendell Phillips, and William Lloyd Garrison. Most exciting to Stanton, though, was meeting Lucretia and James Mott. Lucretia Coffin Mott was an ordained Quaker minister, who at 47 years of age became an immediate mentor and confidante to Stanton. The two women bonded through adversity—on the first day of the convention, a vote was held as to whether the American women would be welcome to sit with the men. Out of protest, Garrison joined the women who had been relegated to the periphery of the convention floor. Stanton and Mott boycotted the rest of convention and decided that they needed to hold a convention of their own.<sup>19</sup>

During the eight years following the convention, Stanton was preoccupied with becoming a mother and "a domestic monarch."<sup>20</sup> Although Stanton entertained many prominent activists, she did not consider herself an activist, but rather a supporter of her husband's activities. In 1847, after Henry's political career and health flailed, the Stanton family moved to Seneca Falls, New York.<sup>21</sup>

## The Woman's Rights Movement

Despite this steady but slow trajectory toward acquiring woman's rights, American women in 1848 still lived with severe economic, legal, and social restrictions—all woven into a seemingly impenetrable web of laws and social customs. Marriage laws

in America were fashioned after English common law, which declared women *femme covert*—legally dead—upon marriage. A woman's legal rights were all but wholly absolved into her husband's identity. For example, "A working woman could be compelled to hand over every penny of her wages to a drunkard husband, even if she was left with nothing for her own subsistence or the maintenance of her children."<sup>22</sup> Additionally, a woman had no right to her family's possessions upon being widowed, and if she did seek divorce, she forfeited custody of her children.<sup>23</sup>

Religion also imposed social inequity upon women. While many women activists were Quakers and were therefore allowed to speak in church meetings, most American women were taught more conservative Christian values, such as piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness.<sup>24</sup> These four virtues constituted true womanhood, which established strict rules for white middle- and upper-class women in particular. They were to remain sexually pure, but they were to lose their virginity upon marriage; they were to forgive the immoral fiber of their husbands, but were not to disobey them; and they were to find joy in their domestic lives while ensuring their husband's happiness before their own. Sexual impurity and domestic imperfection were not tolerated. Even the schools established for women in the first half of the nineteenth century focused on a moral education, emphasizing skills only so far as they enhanced a woman's domestic capabilities.

Most women could not challenge these forces; they could not earn their own money, keep their own children, let alone forge their own identities. The ideological mindset of the republican motherhood had not faded, as many felt a woman's most important political act should be to instill the values of civic virtue within her family. But some women believed they should try to expand woman's political participation. In fact, by April 1848, with the help of Stanton, the New York state legislature adopted the Married Woman's Property Law, the first law in the United States to give any land-owning rights to women.<sup>25</sup> Still, many women believed this was just a beginning. Stanton, Mott, Martha Coffin Wright, Jane Hunt, and Mary Ann McClintock were among these women.

These five women managed to meet on July 13, 1848, in Waterloo, New York, near Seneca Falls, where the Stantons had moved the year before. Since their first meeting in 1840 at the London World Anti-Slavery Convention, Stanton and Mott struggled to revisit their idea of a woman's rights convention. Upon this reunion, Stanton passionately unleashed her dissatisfaction with her domestic life and rearing children without the help of her husband, who was always out of town. The five women drafted an announcement of a two-day "Woman's Rights Convention" that appeared in the *Seneca County Courier* the next day.<sup>26</sup>

On July 19, 1848, over one hundred men and women filled a small Wesleyan Chapel "to discuss the social, civil, and religious rights of woman" as the announcement promised.<sup>27</sup> While the first day of the convention was reserved for women only, over forty men were admitted. As such, the five conference leaders felt uncomfortable chairing the event and asked James Mott to do the honors after deciding that "this was an occasion when men might make themselves pre-eminently useful."<sup>28</sup> Mary Ann McClintock addressed the promiscuous audience on the purpose of the convention,

which was followed by a lively debate over the resolutions drafted in the foundational "Declaration of Sentiments."<sup>29</sup> The second day, even more men attended, including abolitionist Frederick Douglass. For the first order of business, Stanton presented the "Declaration of Sentiments," which to her surprise, was embraced and not ridiculed.<sup>30</sup> After debate and discussion, all resolutions of the Sentiments passed unanimously with one exception—the resolution for enfranchisement. Sixty-eight women signed the document as well as 32 men. Stanton spoke many times throughout the convention; she delivered a "well-written speech" the first day, she presented the Sentiments twice, she passionately defended the suffrage resolution, and at the conclusion of the second day, she rose to speak "buoyed up by the success of the meeting."<sup>31</sup>

According to recent archival research by the Stanton and Susan B. Anthony Papers project at Rutgers University, Stanton may not have actually delivered the "Address on Woman's Rights" at the Seneca Falls Convention, although according to the *History of Woman Suffrage*, her speech defending the suffrage resolution of the Sentiments contains parallel language to her "Address."<sup>32</sup> The fully-developed address was most likely delivered in September at Waterloo and on October 6 to the Congregational Friends at Farmington, a few months following the convention.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, the speech reflected Stanton's developing feminist consciousness and provides the first instantiation of the early woman's rights ideology. Additionally, the address reflects greater societal moves toward women's participation in the public sphere and the rhetorical resources available for women to do so. A rhetorical interrogation of Stanton's address gives us a look at these social forces and Stanton's masterful rhetorical leadership.

### *Stanton's Rhetorical Leadership*

Stanton's address was the first to give shape and character to early woman's rights ideology. Although Stanton was crippled by stage fright months earlier at the Seneca Falls Convention, she delivered the first speech whose content could be considered "feminist in modern terms" because "its tone was defiant, and its claims were strongly asserted."<sup>34</sup> Stanton's address allowed her to constitute herself as a leader, asserting her voice through three rhetorical strategies: first, Stanton strengthened her natural rights arguments by elaborating on the ideology embedded in the Declaration of Sentiments and by invoking arguments of moral authority; second, she fully developed her natural rights arguments through the sentimental style; and third, she adopted a Christ-like persona in a narrative of redemption and transformed herself and her audience into woman's rights leaders.

### Natural Rights, the "Declaration of Sentiments," and Moral Superiority

Stanton's address incorporated predominant beliefs regarding natural rights, which date back to eighteenth-century political thought and directly inform the Declaration of Independence. Stanton's strategy, as Ellen Carol DuBois notes, "involved the extension of natural rights egalitarianism from men to women—especially the

principles of individualism, the universal capacity for reason, and political democracy."<sup>35</sup> During the nation's founding, few were yet ready to extend these natural rights principles to women. Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century gender ideology still compelled women to secure their homes and families for the good of the republic.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the first woman's rights activists both drew upon and challenged prevailing views by "reaching deeper into the structures of women's subordination, claiming more territory as women's province, [and] going farther in envisioning a totally different sexual order."<sup>37</sup> By demanding access to spaces beyond the home, Stanton borrowed from the founders' most basic natural rights principles, and used those principles to challenge the social and political order of the new nation.

Stanton's address extended the natural rights arguments made in the Declaration of Sentiments, which strategically co-opted the natural rights ideology embedded in the Declaration of Independence. The Sentiments included a systematic listing of grievances and resolutions modeled after America's revolutionary founding document. Understanding how the Sentiments functioned in comparison to the Declaration of Independence shows that the purpose of Stanton's speech was to both elaborate and enact the Sentiments' promises. In doing so, Stanton did not make simple natural rights arguments, but rather she rhetorically transformed revolutionary thought into public moral action for the betterment of women's lives.

The Declaration of Sentiments was intentionally modeled after the Declaration of Independence. Three days before the Seneca Falls Convention, Stanton met with Mary Ann McClintock and her oldest daughters to revise Stanton's draft of an opening speech.<sup>38</sup> During this meeting, it was agreed upon that the draft would be "a second Declaration of Independence."<sup>39</sup> According to the *History of Woman Suffrage*, after "a faithful perusal of various masculine productions, . . . one of the circle took up the Declaration of 1776, and read it aloud with much spirit and emphasis."<sup>40</sup> The Sentiments was so directly modeled after the Declaration of Independence that it too began, "When in the course of human events."<sup>41</sup> The most obvious revision lay in the opening of the second paragraph, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men *and women* are created equal."<sup>42</sup> The Sentiments was structured "in the tradition of declarations as a genre" by listing a host of grievances and then resolutions.<sup>43</sup> Thus, as both an extension and a revision of the Declaration of Independence, the Sentiments offered what Stanton believed to be a true statement of natural rights—that women were also human, and that they too were born with the innate right and responsibility to revolt when abused by the government.

Stanton's address embraced and elaborated upon this natural rights argument to make the case for woman's rights. The address captured the revolutionary spirit of the natural rights ideology: "But we did assemble to protest against a form of government existing without the consent of the governed, to declare our right to be free as man is free—to be represented in the government which we are taxed to support" (16).<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Stanton complicated her notion of equal rights as she addressed the right to vote. Aware that many in her audience opposed woman suffrage, including the Motts, she distinguished between natural rights and natural abilities:<sup>45</sup> "All men in this

country have the same rights however they may differ in mind, body, or estate" (17). She added pointedly,

But to have the rights of drunkards, idiots, horse-racing, rum selling rowdies, ignorant foreigners, and silly boys fully recognised, whilst we ourselves are thrust out from all the rights that belong to citizens—it is too grossly insulting to the dignity of woman to be longer quietly submitted to. (17)

As such, Stanton argued that, despite unequal ability, men and women should have equal access to the vote. Ultimately, she declared, "The right is ours, have it, we must—use it we will" (17). By differentiating between rights and abilities, she highlighted the inconsistencies in the arguments against woman suffrage, and although she claimed that rights and abilities were not equal, she demonstrated her own remarkable capability to reason wisely.

Stanton also strengthened her natural rights arguments by making biblically-based appeals. Using the Bible as an authority was particularly strategic considering most arguments against woman's rights were rooted in Christian doctrine. The third resolution of the Sentiments invoked the Christian ethos: "Resolved, That woman is man's equal—was intended to be so by Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she be so."<sup>46</sup> Religious beliefs deeply encoded in American culture held that women were subordinate to men. True womanhood compelled women to consider piety and submissiveness in tandem. However, Stanton's address renegotiated biblical authority to reconfigure gender roles. She said,

There is a class of men who believe in their natural inborn, inbred superiority both in body and in mind and their full complete Heaven descended right to lord it over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, the beast of the field and last, tho' not least, the immortal being called woman. I would recommend this class to the attentive perusal of their Bibles. (7)

Through sarcasm, Stanton made obvious the ungodly nature of men's assumed righteousness and set up her strategic refutation. She refers to Genesis 1:27, which says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."<sup>47</sup> By not reading this Bible passage and only referring to it, Stanton bolstered her biblical authority and ethos. Furthermore, Stanton based her natural rights argument in the same book used to justify women's subordination, turning a tool of oppression into a tool of empowerment.

Stanton complicated her natural rights arguments by invoking predominant notions of women. For example, Stanton appealed to republican motherhood:<sup>48</sup> "The earth has never yet seen a truly great and virtuous nation, for woman has never yet stood the equal with man. As with nations so with families. It is the wise mother that has the wise son" (33). Here, Stanton glorified woman's most essentialized role—motherhood. However, she also considered a woman's moral authority as the *raison d'être* for equal access to public structures and power. She argued, "So long as your



women are mere slaves, you may throw your colleges to the wind" (33). As such, Stanton suggested equal access to colleges would allow a woman's morality to purify public spaces. Stanton further complicated her moral argument by re-situating it within a scheme of universal humanity. She said, "God in his wisdom has so linked the whole human family, that any violence done at one end of the chain is felt throughout its length" (33). Thus, while Stanton certainly relied on woman's moral authority, she renegotiated its rhetorical thrust into an argument for equal rights.

The righteous character of the morally-superior woman continued to offer Stanton the means to argue for equal rights. Consider Stanton's discussion of child abuse: "It is a mother's sacred duty to shield her children from violence from whatever source it may come, it is her duty to resist oppression wherever she may find it at home or abroad, by every moral power within her reach" (27). Here, it is both a woman's "sacred duty" to protect her home and liberate the oppressed. The vision of woman protecting home and hearth was acceptable to Stanton's 1848 audience, and it worked in tandem with her larger argument that women were agents of liberation. Just as women fight to protect their children, they must fight the oppression of one another. Ultimately, Stanton's appeals to dominant gender ideology helped temper the revolutionary idea that men and women were naturally and religiously equal.

### The Sentimental Style of Stanton's Argumentative Voice

Stanton's speech is lengthy, due to the embellished, sentimental speaking style of the time. Characteristic of this "sentimental" style are long illustrations, humorous anecdotes, and a point-counterpoint argumentative structure.<sup>49</sup> Stanton's use of the sentimental style provided elaborate arguments and narratives, which were used to instruct her audience how to think and feel. The style accommodated Stanton's goal to illustrate "the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth of [woman's] own degradation" (3). Stanton used the sentimental style to catalogue the historical mistreatment of women, the forces that continued to oppress women, and the contradictory arguments against woman's rights. Ultimately, through the sentimental style, Stanton asserted her voice as an intelligent, articulate leader.

Most significantly, Stanton's use of the sentimental style allowed her to thoroughly refute arguments about man's intellectual, moral, and physical superiority. Stanton pointedly critiqued such claims by illustrating their social constructedness. In regards to intellectual superiority, she maintained that it could not be measured "until [women] have had a fair trial" (8). Stanton advocated for women's higher education by describing the "yearning" of a young girl's "spirit" for knowledge (8). She also debunked the notion that women were controlled by emotions by recasting the story of Creation. Noting that Adam sinned because of his love for Eve, she concluded that man, not woman, was "the creature of the affections" (9).

In her elaborate style, Stanton also refuted claims of male moral and physical superiority. She spared no effort in ranting on the hypocrisy of church leaders, doctors, and politicians. Again Stanton pointed to the social constructedness of male superiority: "In my opinion he is infinitely woman's inferior in every moral virtue, not by nature, but

made so by a false education" (11). Stanton maintained her equal rights argument by showing morality was not natural, but the product of culturalization. Moreover, Stanton argued that woman's physical strength had not been given equal opportunity to develop. She supported this claim with long anecdotes about how the size of a person did not equal the strength of their mind (e.g., John Quincy Adams) and how women of other cultures carried loads that rivaled the physical strength of American men (14).

Stanton structured much of her speech in this point-counterpoint fashion, in which she rhetorically transformed arguments against woman's rights into arguments *for* equal rights. For example, she made grand statements calling for the moral uplift of men and women, even as she maintained her natural rights perspective. With dramatic expression in the sentimental style, she said, "Oh! for the generous promptings of the days of chivalry—oh! for the poetry of romantic gallantry" (24). By romanticizing "chivalry" and "gallantry," Stanton glorified predominant masculine behaviors, which included the protection of women. Simultaneously, Stanton recast masculinity as a means for securing woman's rights. She said, "Then may we hope that these pious young men who profess to believe in the golden rule, will clothe and educate themselves and encourage poor weak woman to do the same for herself" (24). Chivalry and gallantry were thus invoked toward the larger goal of empowering women as capable, independent beings.

Stanton's embellished style also helped her demonstrate women's leadership qualities. First, she offered an elaborate history of women leaders. Throughout her address, Stanton called attention to women rulers, including Queens Catharine I, Elizabeth I, Isabella I, and Maria Theresa; women intellectuals, such as Harriet Martineau, Anne De Staël, and Hannah Moore; and noted scientists, such as Caroline Herschel and Mary Somerville (7; 29-31). The extensive length and detail of this history certainly refuted the notion that woman could not excel in all realms of human endeavor. Moreover, by speaking as a leader of the woman's rights movement, Stanton associated herself with the authority and impressive character of these historical leaders. Stanton's style also allowed her to enact intellectual, moral, and physical equality. Delivering an address of this length must have demanded great physical endurance, to say nothing of a remarkable memory and a complex understanding of history, philosophy, and politics. Thus, in addition to a thorough rebuttal of the arguments against woman's rights, Stanton's style provided her the means to enact the strong leadership she admired in other women.

### Stanton Transforms and Is Transformed

Another historical figure Stanton conjured up in her address was Joan of Arc. While Stanton wielded power by association with Joan of Arc's leadership, she also used the story of Joan of Arc to initiate a transformative process that guided the conclusion of the address. This transformation began as Stanton invited her audience to recall Joan of Arc's historical narrative:

What man or woman of you has a feeling of disapproval or disgust in reading the history of Joan of Arc. The sympathies of every heart are at once enlisted in the success of that extraordinary girl. Her historian tells us that when all human power seemed unavailing, the French no longer despised the supernatural aid of the damsel of Dom Remy. (32)

Stanton summoned Joan of Arc's "extraordinary" and "supernatural" power before her audience as an indisputable example of female heroism. She invited her audience to identify with the once-resistant French who were ultimately saved by Joan of Arc's mystical strength and were transformed into believers in the strength and leadership of women.

Toward the conclusion of Stanton's address, she constructed a parallel narrative that allowed the transformation of herself into a Christ-like figure and her audience into believers and activists. Within this narrative, Stanton called upon her audience to lead a crusade and convert others into believers in woman's rights. Scholars have noted that adopting a prophetic persona is a particularly effective way for speakers to constitute community identity. Phyllis M. Japp, for example, argues that Angelina Grimké spoke as Old Testament Isaiah, "as one chosen of God to present God's messages."<sup>50</sup> With such authority, Grimké could command women to seize their rights, and in doing so, Grimké moved "women from subjugation into equality and even dominance."<sup>51</sup> Stephen H. Browne notes that Grimké's prophetic persona functioned as a witness of things unseen, and thus constituted her audience as witnesses of their own spiritual transformation.<sup>52</sup> Stanton similarly built a shared identity for her audience through her prophetic persona. But instead of offering a narrative of her personal transformation, she began with the story of Joan of Arc.

Through the Joan of Arc narrative, Stanton directed her audience's attention from the admiration of an extraordinary woman to a realization of their own strength and potential. Stanton continued,

[Joan of Arc] had full faith in herself and inspired all those who saw her with the same. Let us cultivate like faith, like enthusiasm and we too shall impress all who see and hear us with the same confidence which we ourselves feel in our final success. (32)

Stanton infused Joan of Arc's spirit into her audience, empowering them to visualize themselves as leaders—as saviors converting skeptics. Furthermore, this narrative shift invited Stanton's audience to see Stanton herself as a savior helping them to realize their own faith in the cause. As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell puts it, "In a superb moment of enactment, Stanton says to the women she addressed, do as I have done."<sup>53</sup>

Stanton's Christ-like persona further emerged as she created a biblical context for her narrative. She said, "There are deep and tender chords of sympathy and love in the breasts of the down fallen the crushed that woman can touch more skillfully than man" (33). Stanton invoked the New Testament scene, where Christ's indiscriminating love and self-sacrifice cleansed the world of its sins. According to James Darsey, Christ's

martyrdom is key in shaping the prophetic persona.<sup>54</sup> When arguing against war, for example, Stanton asked her audience to become like Christ and persist in the face of opposition. She argued that "frail man" should act as Christ—"loving his enemies, blessing those who curse him and always returning good for evil" (18). Furthermore, Stanton's call for Christ-like behavior functioned as a performance of this very call.

Stanton's conclusion invited her audience to be transformed into equals and leaders of equal rights. She cast her audience as martyrs united for the cause of women's rights:

We do not expect that our path to be strewn with the flowers of popular favour—that our banner which we have flung to the wind will be fanned by the breath of popular applause, no we know that over the nettles of prejudice and bigotry will be our way, that upon our banner will beat the dark storm cloud of opposition from those who have entrenched themselves behind the stormy bulwarks of might, of force who have fortified their position by every means holy and unholy, but we steadfastly abide the result. Unmoved we will bear it aloft. (34)

Stanton calls for her audience to endure "nettles of prejudice and bigotry" just as Christ wore a thorny crown upon crucifixion. Further, Stanton depersonalizes woman's rights opponents by constructing prejudice as the evil—instead of men. In doing so, not only did she invite men to participate in this movement for equality, but she united her audience in opposition to social customs. As such, Stanton's vision allowed the audience to place themselves in this narrative of adversity and triumph. She offered this resolution:

Undauntedly we will unfurl it to the gale—we know the storm cannot rend from it a shred, that the electric flash will but more clearly show to us the glorious words inscribed upon it, "Equality of Rights." (34)

Stanton motivated her audience to embrace the woman's rights movement as the necessary plight toward equal rights. As Stanton predicted a long future of slow social change, she worked to transform herself from a woman speaker into a prophet and her audience from witnesses into disciples of woman's rights.

#### *An Established Leader and an Ideological Fraction*

Stanton's 1848 "Address on Woman's Rights," bolstered the prominence of the Declaration of Sentiments, elaborated and enacted the early movement's ideology, and transformed a small, but integral population of believers into political actors. Further, the speech previewed the ideological conflict that would threaten the advances of the movement. Even further, the speech debuted Stanton herself as "the best known and most persistent advocate of woman's rights in the nineteenth century, with a career that began at age twenty-five and did not abate until age eighty-seven."<sup>55</sup>

Recent archival research suggests that Stanton delivered versions of this speech many times following the Seneca Falls convention. She also parceled out its arguments in a number of published articles.<sup>56</sup> Most certainly, the address established "Stanton's leadership prowess" as a key asset to the early formation of the movement.<sup>57</sup> Stanton's fifty years of public speaking began with this address, which provided her the opportunity to transform herself from an ordinary woman with a moral conscience into a public figure engaged in political action.

Stanton's leadership eventually expanded beyond the issue of woman's rights to embrace a host of other issues. She went on to serve as founder and president of the New York Temperance Society (1851-1853). She was also the founder and president of the American Equal Rights Association (1866-1869), founder of the National Woman's Loyal League (1863), president of the National Woman Suffrage Association (1869), and president of the merged woman's rights organization, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (1890). She gave numerous speeches at woman's rights conventions and on lyceum circuit. Her career in journalism included editing the *Revolution* (1868-87), and she wrote two volumes of the *Woman's Bible* (1895, 1898) and edited the first three volumes of the *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881-1887).<sup>58</sup> Needless to say, Stanton's address not only launched an epic social movement, but also her own career as a tireless activist—an activist who would not stop traveling, writing, and speaking until her death in 1902.

Stanton's speech may have established her leadership of the woman's rights community, but its treatment of conflicting arguments for woman's rights—equality and moral superiority—would ultimately split the movement in the late 1860s. Stanton argued for equal rights while relying on notions of innate difference. The issue of the vote embodied this conflict between natural sameness and difference, breeding conflict even between Stanton and the Motts. By 1869, following the Civil War and the conflict over black male suffrage, this ideological tension led to a split in the suffrage movement. Two competing organizations emerged over a difference in strategy. First, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), founded by Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in May of 1869, was only open to white women and addressed a host of equal rights issues, including divorce, religious hypocrisy, and equal wages. The second organization, the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), founded in November 1869, only invited delegates of other woman suffrage organizations and focused mostly on securing suffrage for white women on the state level. The AWSA's weekly organ, the *Woman's Journal*, is noted for making less overt appeals to the women's equal rights than the NWSA, for fear of alienating their readership.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, the organizations united in 1890, yet little headway was made for woman's rights until after 1900.<sup>60</sup> Even so, up until 1920, when women were granted the right to vote by the Nineteenth Amendment, appeals to potential women voters were largely moral and religious, while the notion of equal rights was still considered radical.<sup>61</sup> Consider, for example, that the Women's Christian Temperance Union maintained a membership of over 250,000 women, while the National Woman's Party, with its emphasis on equal rights, peaked at only 48,000 members.<sup>62</sup>

The legacy of Stanton's arguments, though, can still be found in more recent debates over woman's rights. For example, Stanton's vision of women's liberation is visible in the woman's rights movement of the 1960s, which focused its energies on equal pay, equal treatment in the home, and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). On the contrary, appeals to woman's moral authority and notions of a woman's "proper place" undergirded the STOP ERA campaign, as Phyllis Shafly and her followers described women's equality as a threat to the family institution.<sup>63</sup> Arguments of woman's equal rights have been transformed in the current feminist milieu. The term "postfeminism," for example, describes a post-1980 generation of women who reject the "feminist" label despite benefiting from feminist efforts toward equal rights and equal treatment. The postfeminist generation is noted for taking equal rights for granted and celebrating sexuality as a source of power. Additionally, those who embrace "third-wave feminism" believe that a woman is empowered by her sexuality. Stanton's vision of equal rights, then, has been transformed into the equal right to choose one's political beliefs and individual identity.<sup>64</sup>

Nonetheless, Stanton managed to rhetorically negotiate the moral imperatives of a restrictive culture into arguments for equal rights. Her "Address on Woman's Rights, 1848" allowed her to call on her audience for leadership and, in doing so, to cast herself as a prophetic orator. Along with her co-authorship of the Declaration of Sentiments, the speech allowed her to espouse a natural rights ideology; her sentimental style allowed her to refute arguments against woman's rights and usher in overwhelming evidence of women's leadership; and her conclusion's narrative structure helped her to adopt a Christ-like persona and worked to transform her audience into savior-activists of the woman's rights movement. Stanton's "Address on Woman's Rights" rhetorically functioned as the command laid forth in James 1:22: "But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves."<sup>65</sup>

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#### Notes

1 Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, ed., "Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Speech at the Seneca Falls Convention, 1848," in *Man Cannot Speak for Her: Key Texts of the Early Feminists*, 2 vols. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1989), 2:41.

2 Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 231.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 229.

5 Republican motherhood was also an ideological force in the homes of middle- to upper-class black women, however, the early woman's rights movement privileged white women and excluded black women. For a full discussion of the way in which black women adopted predominant gender ideologies in the nineteenth century, see Shirley Wilson Logan, *"We Are Coming": The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 152-78.

6 Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 70.

7 Kerber, "Education and Intellect," *Woman of the Republic*, 189-231. Also see Ann Firor Scott, *Making the Invisible Woman Visible* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 39. In the chapter, "What, Then, Is the American?" Scott provides a history of women in education, and in fact, schools for women emerged as early as the mid-eighteenth century. By the 1830s, she says, women were attending seminaries in large numbers.

8 Wollstonecraft's association with the secular radicalism of the French Revolution was considered unfavorable as the ideology became outdated by 1800. Also, she had given birth to a child before marriage and was socially outcast. *Ibid.*, 2.

9 Eleanor Flexner and Ellen Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 24-25; and Martha Watson, *Lives of Their Own: Rhetorical Dimensions in Autobiographies of Women Activists* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 65.

10 Catharine Beecher, a vocal proponent of women's education, ran a seminary for girls in Hartford, Connecticut from 1823-1827. Another advance in women's education was the establishment of Oberlin College in 1833. The college's enrollment was open to all races and classes of women and fashioned its curriculum after Harvard's. Additionally, Mount Holyoke was founded in 1837 by Mary Lyon, who believed women's colleges "must prepare their students for more than homemaking or teaching." Lyon fulfilled her vision and raised an unprecedented \$27,000 through her own fundraising efforts. Flexner and Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle*, 29-32.

11 Elisabeth Griffith, *In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 6-17.

12 *Ibid.*

13 See Susan Zaeske, "The 'Promiscuous Audience' Controversy and the Emergence of the Early Woman's Rights Movement," in *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 81 (1995): 191-207.

14 Flexner and Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle*, 25-26.

15 *Ibid.*, 41.

16 See Stephen Howard Browne, *Angelina Grimké, Rhetoric, Identity, and the Radical Imagination* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1999).

17 Griffith, *In Her Own Right*, 26.

18 *Ibid.*, 18-35.

19 *Ibid.*, 35-39.

20 *Ibid.*, 44.

21 Ibid., 44-46.

22 Ibid., 58.

23 Ibid.

24 See Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1820," in *American Quarterly*, 18 (1966): 151-74. Welter argues that four key values, piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness, were paramount to a woman's worth in the mid-nineteenth century.

25 Flexner and Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle*, 60, 68; Judith Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman's Rights Convention* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 153.

26 Flexner and Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle*, 68-69.

27 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage (HWS)*, 6 Vols. (New York: Source Book Press, 1889), 1:67; Griffith, *In Her Own Right*, 55.

28 Stanton et al., *HWS*, 1:69.

29 Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls*, 195.

30 Ibid., 194-96.

31 According to the *HWS*, "Elizabeth and Mary McClintock, and Mrs. Stanton each read a well-written speech" on the first day. Stanton et al., 1:69. Additionally, Wellman says that Cady Stanton spoke at the close of the second day of the convention. See *The Road to Seneca Falls*, 203. Also, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell says, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton presented the Declaration of Sentiments...; she then made a speech, followed by general discussion." See *Man Cannot*, 1:52. Recent archival work conducted at Rutgers University suggests that pieces of Stanton's address were delivered at the Convention. However, the speech as a whole was most likely first delivered in September at Waterloo following the Convention and secondly, on October 6 to the Congregational Friends at Farmington.

32 Stanton et al., *HWS*, 1:70; In defense of the ninth resolution of the Sentiments, which asked for woman suffrage, Stanton said, "But to have drunkards, idiots, horse-racing, rumselling rowdies, ignorant foreigners and silly boys fully recognized, while we ourselves are thrust out from all the rights that belong to citizens, it is too grossly insulting to the dignity of woman to be longer quietly submitted to. The right is ours. Have it, we must. Use it, we will." This language also appears in the more fully developed "Address on Woman's Rights."

33 See editorial note under "Authentication" provided by the Stanton and Anthony Papers Project Online. Rutgers University. <<http://ecssba.rutgers.edu/docs/ecswoman1.html>>.

34 Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, ed., "Woman's Rights Conventions: Ideological Crucibles," in *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric*, 2 vols. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1989), 1:59.

35 Ellen Carol DuBois, "Introduction: The Invention of Women's Rights," in *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony: Correspondence, Writings, Speeches*, ed., Ellen Carol DuBois (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 2.



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36 This gender ideology has been termed, "Republican Motherhood." By raising their children as contributing citizens, women fulfilled a political duty. See Kerber, *Women of the Republic*.

37 Ibid., 2.

38 Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls*, 191-192.

39 Ibid.

40 Stanton et al., *HWS*, 1:68.

41 Campbell, *Man Cannot*, 2:34.

42 Ibid., emphasis added.

43 Stephen E. Lucas, "The Rhetorical Ancestry of the Declaration of Independence," in *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 1(2) (1998): 151.

44 Here and elsewhere passages in "Address on Woman's Rights, 1848" are cited with reference to paragraph numbers in the text of the speech that accompanies this essay.

45 Resolution 9 reads, "Resolved, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise." Cited from Campbell, *Man Cannot*, 2:38.

46 Ibid., 2:37-38.

47 *The Holy Bible, New International Version*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1986), Genesis 1:27, 2.

48 See Kerber, *Women of the Republic*.

49 For a full discussion of the sentimental style, see Edwin Black, "The Sentimental Style as Escapism, or the Devil with Dan'l Webster," in *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action*, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, eds. (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1978), 75-86.

50 Phyllis M. Japp, "Esther or Isaiah?: Abolitionist-Feminist Rhetoric of Angelina Grimké," in *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 71 (1985), 342.

51 Ibid., 343.

52 See Browne, "Violent Inventions: Witnessing Slavery in the Pennsylvania Hall Address," in *Angelina Grimké*, 139-65.

53 Ibid., 1:63.

54 See James Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

55 Susan Schultz Huxman, "Perfecting the Rhetorical Vision of Woman's Rights: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Anna Howard Shaw, and Carrie Chapman Catt" in *Women's Studies in Communication*, 23 (3) (2000): 310.

56 See editorial note provided by the Stanton and Anthony Papers Project Online. Rutgers University. <<http://ecssba.rutgers.edu/docs/ecswoman1.html>>.

57 Huxman, "Perfecting the Rhetorical Vision," 315.

58 Campbell, *Man Cannot*, 2:41.

59 Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 145-46.

60 For a full history of first-wave feminism, see Flexner and Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle*.

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61 Ibid.

62 Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 176.

63 For a full discussion of pro-ERA and STOP ERA arguments, see Sonja K. Foss, "The Equal Rights Controversy: Two Worlds in Conflict," in *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 65 (3) (1979), 275-89.

64 For a full discussion of postfeminist politics, see Mary D. Vavrus, *Postfeminist News: Political Women in Media Culture* (Albany: State University of New York), 2002. For a full discussion of third-wave feminism, see Natalie Fixmer and Julia T. Wood, "The Personal is *Still* Political: Embodied Politics in Third Wave Feminism," in *Women's Studies in Communication*, 28 (2005), 235-56.

65 *Holy Bible*, James 1:22, 1064.