

The Equality Fighters

Freedom
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Equality

Michel-Guillaume-Jean De Crevecoeur, Letters from an American Farmer (1780s)

*** How does Michel-Guillaume-Jean De Crevecoeur see equality in America? ***

Crevecoeur was a Frenchman who had served in the French and Indian War in North America against the British colonists, but afterwards decided to remain in the New World and become an American citizen, even renaming himself John Hector St. John. For the next fifteen years, he farmed land in New York and wrote several Letters from an American Farmer, which were translated into several European languages and disseminated throughout the continent.

Notes

Annotations

For each fighter, annotate for their efforts to ensure that equality is practiced in America as well as for their effective use of ethos, logos, or pathos which helped persuade change.

He is arrived on a new continent; a modern society offers itself to his contemplation, different from what he had hitherto seen. It is not composed, as in Europe, of great lords who possess every thing, and of a herd of people who have nothing. Here are no **aristocratical** families, no courts, no kings, no bishops, no church dominion, no invisible power giving to a few a very visible one; no great manufacturers employing thousands, no great refinements of luxury. The rich and the poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe.

Except for some few towns, we are all farmers of the earth, from Nova Scotia to West Florida. We are a people of cultivators, scattered over an immense territory, communicating with each other by means of good roads and navigable rivers, united by the silken bands of mild government, all respecting the laws without dreading their power, because they are equitable. We are all animated with the spirit of **industry**, which is unrestrained, because each person works for himself.

If he travels through our rural districts, he views not the intimidating castle, and the **haughty** mansion, contrasted with the clay-built hut and miserable cabin, where cattle and men help to keep each other warm, and dwell in meanness, smoke, and indigence. A pleasing uniformity of decent competence appears throughout our habitations. The lowliest of our log-houses is a dry and comfortable habitation. Lawyer or merchant are the fairest titles our towns afford; that of a farmer is the only title of the rural inhabitants of our country.

There, on a Sunday, he sees a congregation of respectable farmers and their wives, all clad in neat homespun cloth, well mounted, or riding in their own humble wagons. There he sees a preacher as simple as his flock. We have no princes, for whom we **toil**, starve, and bleed: we are the most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free as he ought to be; nor is this pleasing equality so transitory as many others are.

Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and **posterity** will one day cause great change in the world. The Americans were once scattered all over Europe; here they are incorporated into one of the finest systems of population that has ever appeared. Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps the progress of his labor. Wives and children, who before **in vain** demanded of him a morsel of bread, now, fat and frolicsome, gladly help their father to clear those fields whence vigorous crops are to arise to feed and to clothe them all; without any part being claimed, either by a **despotic** prince or a mighty lord. The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. This is an American.

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Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Declaration of Sentiments (1848)

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*** How does Elizabeth Cady Stanton see equality in America? ***

Notes

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, along with Lucretia Mott, played a major role in drafting this declaration at the end of a convention held with the purpose of beginning a movement for women's equality, as their sex were considered were second-class citizens, holding a legal status similar to that of a minor. The Seneca Falls Conventions is considered the start of the Women's Rights Movement, though women had always objected to their lower status. This Declaration was modeled and heavily structured from the language of the Declaration of Independence some 75 years earlier. It was signed by 68 women and 32 men, 100 of the roughly 300 who had attended.

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....

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.
- 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 so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes of divorce; in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given.
- He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty **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 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 **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, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States.

Firmly relying upon the final triumph of the Right and the True, we do this day affix our signatures to this declaration.

Annotations

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Lucy Stone & Henry B. Blackwell, Marriage Contract (1855)

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*** How do Lucy Stone & Henry B. Blackwell see equality in America? ***

Notes

The first woman from Massachusetts to earn a college degree (at Oberlin College in Ohio), Lucy Stone spent most of her life as an influential abolitionist and feminist. When she married Henry B. Blackwell in 1855, she not only kept her maiden name, but they also used the marriage ceremony to issue a protest statement in which they both deplored the subjugation of women, which was later published in abolition newspapers and distributed to ministers in hopes that other may follow their led. Few did.

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While we acknowledge our mutual affection by publicly assuming the relationship of husband and wife, yet in justice to ourselves and a great principle, we deem it a duty to declare that this act on our part implies no **sanction** of, nor promise of voluntary obedience to such of the present laws of marriage, as refuse to recognize the wife as an independent, rational being, while they **confer** upon the husband an **injurious** and unnatural superiority, investing him with legal powers which no honorable man would exercise, and which no man should possess. We protest especially against the laws which give to the husband:

1. The custody of the wife's person.
2. The exclusive control and guardianship of their children.
3. The sole ownership of her personal, and use of her real estate, unless previously settled upon her, or placed in the hands of trustees, as in the case of minors, lunatics, and idiots.
4. The absolute right to the product of her **industry**.
5. Also against laws which give to the widower so much larger and more permanent interest in the property of his deceased wife, than they give to the widow in that of the deceased husband.
6. Finally, against the whole system by which "the legal existence of the wife is **suspended** during marriage," so that in most States, she neither has a legal part in the choice of her residence, nor can she make a will, nor sue or be sued in her own name, nor inherit property.

We believe that personal independence and equal human rights can never be **forfeited**, except for crime; that marriage should be an equal and permanent partnership, and so recognized by law; that until it is so recognized, married partners should provide against the radical injustice of present laws, by every means in their power.

We believe that where domestic difficulties arise, no appeal should be made to legal tribunals under existing laws, but that difficulties should be submitted to the equitable adjustment of **arbitrators** mutually chosen.

Thus **reverencing** law, we enter our protest against rules and customs which are unworthy of the name, since they violate justice, the essence of law.

[Signed]

Lucy Stone

Henry B. Blackwell

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Chief Joseph, Appeal to the Hayes Administration (1879)

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*** How does Chief Joseph see equality in America? ***

Notes

Chief Joseph was the name whites gave the leader of the Nez Perce, whose native name translates to Thunder Coming from the Mountain. The Nez Perce had given the Lewis and Clark expedition supplies on its way to the Pacific in 1805 and were promised the US government would always be their friend. However, in 1877 the Nez Perce were told to leave their home in eastern Oregon for a reservation in Idaho. They refused and Chief Joseph led his tribe on an thousand mile journey to Canada. Stopped just forty miles from the border, Chief Joseph was forced to surrender. Again promised a return to Oregon, his tribe was instead sent to Oklahoma, where many died from unhealthy conditions. Chief Joseph traveled to Washington D.C. to make his appeal for his people.

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At last I was granted permission to come to Washington and bring my friend Yellow Bull and our interpreter with me. I am glad I came. I have shaken hands with a good many friends, but there are some things I want to know which no one seems able to explain. I cannot understand why so many chiefs are allowed to talk so many different ways, and promise so many different things. I have seen the Great Father Chief [President Rutherford B. Hayes] and many other law chiefs (Congressmen) and they all say they are my friends, and that I shall have justice, but while all their mouths talk right I do not understand why nothing is done for my people.

I have heard talk and talk but nothing is done. Good words do not last long unless they amount to something. Words do not pay for my dead people. They do not pay for my country now overrun by white men. They do not protect my father's grave. Good words do not give me back my children. Good words will not give my people a home where they can live in peace and take care of themselves.

I am tired of talk that comes to nothing. It makes my heart sick when I remember all the good words and all the broken promises.

If the white man wants to live in peace with the Indian they can live in peace. There need be no trouble. Treat all men alike. Give them the same laws. Give them all an even chance to live and grow. All men were made by the same Great Spirit Chief. They are all brothers. The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it. If you tie a horse to a stake, do you expect he will grow fat? If you pen an Indian up on a small spot of earth and compel him to stay there, he will not be contented nor will he grow and prosper.

I have asked some of the Great White Chiefs where they get their authority to say to the Indian that he shall stay in one place, while he sees white men going where they please. They cannot tell me.

I know that my race must change. We cannot hold our own with the white men as we are. We only ask an even chance to live as other men live. We ask to be recognized as men. We ask that the same law shall work alike on all men. If an Indian breaks the law, punish him by the law. If a white man breaks the law, punish him also.

Let me be a free man, free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose, free to choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to talk, think and act for myself—and I will obey every law or submit to the penalty.

We shall be all alike—brothers of one father and mother, with one sky above us and one country around us and one government for all. Then the Great Spirit Chief who rules above will smile upon this land and send rain to wash out the bloody spots made by brothers' hands upon the face of the earth. For this time the Indian race is waiting and praying. I hope no more groans of wounded men and women will ever go to the ear of the Great Spirit Chief above, and that all people may be one people.

Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekht has spoken for his people.