

Susan B. Anthony, 1873 Speech, After Having Been Fined \$100 and Arrested for Voting in Election

Background: Born in Massachusetts, Susan B. Anthony (February 15, 1820 – March 13, 1906) was an American civil rights leader and a leader in the movement for women's right to vote (suffrage) in the United States. One of the many famous women in history, Susan B. Anthony delivered this speech in all 29 postal districts of Monroe County, New York: between 1872 and 1873 after she was fined \$100 and arrested for voting in the presidential elections of 1872. The section reproduced here is an excerpt (shorter, selected version) of the entire speech. For the complete text, click here:

<http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/anthony/anthonyaddress.html>

This speech was delivered in 1873, after Anthony was arrested, tried and fined \$100 for voting in the 1872 presidential election. Before reading the speech, view the following video about Susan B. Anthony's life and achievements.

[Click here for Susan B. Anthony Video.](#)

Friends and Fellow Citizens: I stand before you tonight under indictment for the alleged crime of having voted at the last presidential election, without having a lawful right to vote. It shall be my work this evening to prove to you that in thus voting, I not only committed no crime, but, instead, simply exercised my citizen's rights, guaranteed to me and all United States citizens by the National Constitution, beyond the power of any State to deny.

Our democratic-republican government is based on the idea of the natural right of every individual member thereof to a voice and a vote in making and executing the laws. We assert the province of government to be to secure the people in the enjoyment of their inalienable right. We throw to the winds the old dogma that government can give rights. No one denies that before governments were organized each individual possessed the right to protect his own life, liberty and property. When 100 to 1,000,000 people enter into a free government, they do not barter away their natural rights; they simply pledge themselves to protect each other in the enjoyment of them through prescribed judicial and legislative tribunals. They agree to abandon the methods of brute force in the adjustment of their differences and adopt those of civilization . . . The Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, the constitutions of the several States and the organic laws of the Territories, all alike propose to protect the people in the exercise of their God-given rights. Not one of them pretends to bestow rights.

The preamble of the Federal Constitution says:

"We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union. And we formed it, not to give the blessings of liberty, but to secure them; not to the half of ourselves and the half of our posterity, but to the whole people--women as well as men. And it is a downright mockery to talk to women of their enjoyment of the blessings of liberty while they are denied the use of the only means of securing them provided by this democratic-republican government--the ballot.

For any State to make sex a qualification that must ever result in the disfranchisement of one entire half of the people is to pass a bill of attainder, or an ex post facto law, and is therefore a violation of the supreme law of the land. By it the blessings of liberty are for ever withheld from women and their female posterity. To them this government has no just powers derived from the consent of the governed. To them this government is not a democracy. It is not a republic. It is an odious aristocracy; a hateful oligarchy of sex; the most hateful aristocracy ever established on the face of the globe; an oligarchy of wealth, where the rich govern the poor. An oligarchy of learning, where the educated govern the ignorant, or even an oligarchy of race, where the Saxon rules the African, might be endured; but this oligarchy of sex, which makes father, brothers, husband, sons, the oligarchs over the mother and sisters, the wife and daughters of every household--which ordains all men sovereigns, all women subjects, carries dissension, discord and rebellion into every home of the nation.

Webster, Worcester and Bouvier all define a citizen to be a person in the United States, entitled to vote and hold office. The only question left to be settled now is: Are women persons? And I hardly believe any of our opponents will have the hardihood to say they are not. Being persons, then, women are citizens; and no State has a right to make any law, or to enforce any old law, that shall abridge their privileges or immunities. Hence, every discrimination against women in the constitutions and laws of the several States is today null and void, precisely as in every one against Negroes.

Vocabulary

Define each word below, as Susan B. Anthony uses it in her speech. If you cannot determine the meaning, look it up and write it down.

- suffrage
- 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution
- Seneca Falls Convention
- indictment
- allege
- preamble
- secure
- posterity
- ordain
- mockery
- ballot
- disenfranchisement
- attainder
- ex post facto
- derive
- odious
- aristocracy
- oligarchy
- endure
- sovereign
- subjects
- dissension
- discord
- hardihood
- abridge
- immunities
- null
- void

Thinking Critically

Answer each question completely, using well-formed sentences. Although there is no "correct" answer, please support your answer with evidence from the text.

1. What "crime" was Susan B. Anthony arrested for? Does she think she committed a crime? What textual evidence can you offer for support?
2. According to Anthony, do governments have the legitimate authority to give people their rights? What evidence from the text can you offer to support your answer?
3. What is a "Bill of Attainder"? Why does Anthony call a law that does not allow women the right to vote a bill of attainder?
4. Anthony writes, "An oligarchy of learning, where the educated govern the ignorant, or even an oligarchy of race, where the Saxon rules the African, might be endured." However, she also writes, "every discrimination against women in the constitutions and laws of the several States is today null and void, precisely as in every one against Negroes." Is this a contradiction? Why do you think Anthony says one thing in one paragraph, and something seemingly different in another?

Writing Assignment

Susan B. Anthony delivered variations of this speech several times between 1872 and 1873. Obviously the situation for women, at least in the United States, has changed significantly since then. Examine the role that women have in politics, business, law, organized religion, education, or government. Please limit your scope to one of these areas. Do you perceive any disparities between the opportunities for men and women for advancement and achievement in any of these areas? Are there differences in expectations? In a 500 – 750 word essay discuss whether disparities between women and men exist in any of these areas; use examples. If you perceive that no disparities exist, assert that belief as your thesis and support your thesis with examples. You may use research as well as your own observation to write this essay.