

On Women's Right to Vote

by Susan B. Anthony, 1873

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

6 The preamble of the Federal Constitution says:

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

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

17 For any state to make sex a qualification that must ever result in the disfranchisement of one
18 entire half of the people, is to pass a bill of attainder, or, an ex post facto law, and is therefore a
19 violation of the supreme law of the land. By it the blessings of liberty are forever withheld from
20 women and their female posterity.

21 To them this government has no just powers derived from the consent of the governed. To them
22 this government is not a democracy. It is not a republic. It is an odious aristocracy; a hateful
23 oligarchy of sex; the most hateful aristocracy ever established on the face of the globe; an
24 oligarchy of wealth, where the rich govern the poor. An oligarchy of learning, where the
25 educated govern the ignorant, or even an oligarchy of race, where the Saxon rules the African,
26 might be endured; but this oligarchy of sex, which makes father, brothers, husband, sons, the
27 oligarchs over the mother and sisters, the wife and daughters, of every household—which
28 ordains all men sovereigns, all women subjects, carries dissension, discord, and rebellion into
29 every home of the nation.

30 Webster, Worcester, and Bouvier all define a citizen to be a person in the United States,
31 entitled to vote and hold office.

32 The only question left to be settled now is: Are women persons? And I hardly believe any of
33 our opponents will have the hardihood to say they are not. Being persons, then, women are
34 citizens; and no state has a right to make any law, or to enforce any old law, that shall abridge
35 their privileges or immunities. Hence, every discrimination against women in the constitutions
36 and laws of the several states is today null and void, precisely as is every one against Negroes.