

Suffrage Cantata by Andrea Ramsey

Narration	Lyrics
<p><i>1830. Of the twenty four United States, half were slave states. Of the 2 million enslaved, half were women. For those women not enslaved: voting, speaking in public, preaching in church, and a formal education were not permitted. When a woman married - usually at a young age, her property became her husband's. Her body was not hers to control. She was expected to bear many children and raise them while tending to the labors of a 19th century household...</i></p>	<p>Deeply, deeply have I felt the degradation of being a woman.</p>
<p><i>If a woman wanted to work, there were few options. She could be a teacher, seamstress, housekeeper or mill worker, but she would be paid one-third what men in the same positions were paid, yet expected to pay taxes in full. Even what she earned was not her own, as her husband could collect her wages from her employer at any time.</i></p>	<p>Deeply, deeply have I felt the degradation of being a woman. Not the degradation of being what God made woman, but what man has made her.</p>
<p><i>Legally, she was her husband's property. If he beat her, she had no remorse. If he abused her, she could not divorce him.</i></p>	<p>Deeply, deeply have I felt the degradation of being a woman</p>
<p><i>If he wanted a divorce, he could take her children and leave her destitute.</i></p>	<p>It will be said that the husband provides for the wife feeds, clothes, and shelters her. Yes he keeps her... as he keeps a favorite horse and by law they are both his property.</p>

The United States women's rights movement of the 1800s came to life in the ancestral home of the Haudenosaunee (dubbed Iroquois by French and English settlers). This land — called the state of New York after colonization, was home to a variety of women's lived experiences.

Middle class white women aired the frustration of their constrained realities to one another. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who would go on to be a leader in the women's rights movement, described attending a small tea party of disgruntled women, where in addition to serving tea, she also "poured out the torrent" of her "long accumulating discontent."

Meanwhile, Black women were living in a state that had just ended slavery. Full emancipation arrived in 1827 for New Yorkers. Women like Harriet Jacobs and Sojourner Truth had both endured the torture of slavery, and were now sharing their personal stories as activists for abolition and supporters of women's rights.

And the women of the six Indigenous nations of the Haudenosaunee were living in communities that modeled women's equality to men. They owned property, had a voice in

Oh, the degradation, I ask no favors for my sex,
just take your feet from off our necks,
Permit us to stand upright, Oh the degradation
It is time we gave man faith in woman,

And still more, the time we gave woman
faith in herself!

religious life, nominated leaders, and removed them if necessary.

Some early women's rights leaders had interactions with the Huadenosaunee, including Matilda Joslyn Gage, who was adopted into the Wolf clan of the Mohawk nation and given a name meaning "she who holds the sky."

*Charlotte Woodward, 19 years old: "At first, we traveled quite alone, but before we had gone many miles...
...we came on other wagon loads of women, bound in the same direction. At different crossroads, we saw wagons coming from every part of the country, and before we reached Seneca Falls, we were a procession."*

When Charlotte's wagon reached the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, over 300 people were there including forty men who were permitted inside, but not allowed to speak for the first day. When Elizabeth Cady Stanton presented the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments, her voice was so quiet that many struggled to hear her. The document, modeled after the Declaration of Independence, contained eleven resolutions to be voted upon the following day.

One day, the women got tired,
One day, the women got tired,
One day, the women got tired,
got tired enough to move.

One day, the women got tired,
One day the women got tired,
One day the women got tired,
got tired enough to move.

All resolutions passed easily, except the one Stanton had authored alone, which called for the enfranchisement of women. One man stood to defend the resolution. His name was Frederick Douglass, and after he spoke, it passed by two votes.

1853. Broadway Tabernacle, New York.

Sojourner Truth had endured much in her life...

... but she refused to let her life's light be determined by the darkness that surrounded her

Movement II

Three years after Seneca Falls, Elizabeth Cady Stanton became friends with a woman whose name would one day be synonymous with women's suffrage. Susan B. Anthony. Susan was unmarried and able to travel and lecture while Elizabeth was busy tending to many children at home. A partnership was formed – or as Elizabeth forget, "I forged the thunderbolts and Susan fired them."

We have all been thrown down so low (so low),
We have been long enough trodden now (long trodden),

But we will have our rights (but we will have our rights),
see if we don't (And if you can't keep us from them)!
See if you can (see if you can!),
See if you can!

One day, the women got tired,
You may hiss as much as you like (one day the women got tired),
but it is coming (one day the women got tired),
coming, coming, (tired enough to move).

it is coming (it is coming),
it is coming, one day.

On November 5th, 1872, Anthony voted – illegally – setting into motion a plan she hoped would eventually gain the women’s vote. The Fourteenth Amendment contained ambiguous language. Stanton and Anthony hoped it could be exploited for the cause of women’s suffrage. If all persons born in the United States were citizens, didn’t that include women? Weren’t women citizens?

Seeing an ad in a Rochester paper that encouraged registration for the upcoming election, Susan took her three sisters and eleven other women down to the local barbershop. At first they were ignored, and then asked to leave, but when Susan read the Fourteenth Amendment to the registrars and threatened to sue, the men surprisingly agreed. They were convinced by Susan’s promise that she would pay their fines if the government ever came after them. Her act of voting became a national story, yet thirteen days later, a federal marshal knocked at her door. Seeming embarrassed, he indicated Susan would be arrested and should come downtown, but no rush. Susan insisted that if he believed her to be a criminal, he should arrest her just as he would any man. She went to change, and upon returning, presented her wrists to the officer for handcuffing. He would not cuff her but did accompany her. As they boarded the trolley, the driver asked for her fare, and she announced – loudly enough for every passenger to hear, that she was traveling at the expense of the federal government. Pointing at the marshal, she said...

After her lawyer bailed her out of jail, Susan B. Anthony spent the months before her trial delivering a lecture titled: “Is it a crime for a citizen of the United States to vote?” She gave this lecture in all 29 towns of Monroe county

Ask him for my fare!

and convinced so many people of her reasoning that the prosecution had to move the case to a neighboring county.

United States vs. Susan B. Anthony took place in June of 1873, and lasted two days. With an all-white, all-male jury and a judge who had written his decision before any of the evidence was presented, it was hardly a fair trial.

Susan had not been allowed to speak until the final day when the judge ordered her to stand and asked: "Has the prisoner anything to say why the sentence shall not be pronounced?"

The judge ordered Susan B. Anthony to sit down (something he would have to do six separate times before she was finished) and he sentenced her to pay a fine of one hundred dollars plus the cost of prosecution, but Susan had thoughts on that...

Susan B. Anthony kept her word to the judge. She never paid the \$100 fine for as long as she lived. Traveling in frozen railcars,

We the people, formed this Union.
Women as well as men.
It is mockery to talk of the blessings of liberty while we are denied the ballot!

Yes, your honor, I have many things to say, for your verdict of guilty you have trampled, trampled, trampled, every vital principle of government!

Robbed of citizenship,
I am degraded to the status of a subject under this so called form of government!

I rebel against your manmade, unjust forms of law that tax, fine, imprison, and hang women while they deny them representation in government,

I shall urge all women:
"Resistance to tyranny is obedience to God!"

bone-jarring carriages, and often being refused hotel rooms because she was alone, she tirelessly lectured, lobbied and petitioned – devoting her entire life to the cause of women’s rights.

She encouraged younger women to “try their wings,” as she put it, by cultivating their writing and speaking abilities, and through she did not live to see the day women could vote, she knew that day would come. In the year of her passing, at age 86, she was still inspiring those who would carry her banner forward:

Movement III

Ida B. Wells-Barnett was born in Mississippi, six months before the Emancipation Proclamation.

After losing both parents and a sibling to yellow fever, she convinced the school board in Memphis that she was eighteen years old so she could be hired as a teacher and provide for her younger siblings. Eight years later, Ida was fired from teaching for writing about school corruption in a newspaper column. A talented writer, Ida decided to start her own newspaper.

I am here for a little time only,
then my place will be filled
The fight must not cease,
you must see that it does not stop.

With such women consecrating their lives,
failure is impossible.

I stayed in Susan B. Anthony’s house,
had a speaking engagement in Rochester.
The next morning, she had some errands in town,
so she said I could use her stenographer.

Ida's paper grew to be a successful endeavor. She boldly called out white supremacy and shined the light of truth on the horrors of lynching in the South. But when her friends who owned a grocery business were lynched, and she published their lynchings were because they were economically successful black men, an angry white mob destroyed her newspaper building while she was away on a trip. Armed men waited outside her home to kill her, and friends warned her that she could not return to Memphis...

So Ida fled to Chicago.

The stenographer told Susan B. Anthony that she would not take dictation from a woman of color.

An activist on multiple fronts, Ida fought to help women gain the right to vote in Illinois, and confronted white women who ignored women of color in the movement. A founding member of the NAACP, she established the Alpha Suffrage Club, and lectured internationally. Taking on injustice was a lifelong pursuit for Ida. Even as a teacher in the South, she sued the railroad when they forcibly removed her from her car...

The stenographer never ventured upstairs, I simply assumed she was occupied, but when Susan B. Anthony got back from town, the mood intensified,

and downstairs she went swiftly, to ask the stenographer why she did not show...

Susan B. Anthony steeled her gaze, and she spoke calm and low: "An insult to my guest is an insult to me, Come get your bonnet and go!"

March 1913, the staging grounds near the Capitol filled with women finding their places. Washington, D.C. was about to experience a parade like no other. Horses neighed, wagons creaked, and musicians warmed up...

Women marching was a radical idea. Men marched – not women; but parade organizers, Alice Paul & Lucy Burns wanted to show how power did not rest only with men. They also knew this was the perfect day, given Woodrow Wilson's inauguration was the next day and there would be lots of press in town.

Inez Millholland led the charge. Riding a white horse, wearing a gold tiara – she would forever be known as the Joan of Arc of

A woman's place is a clean train car,
I paid thirty cents for my ticket,
when the conductor tried to put me in the
smoking car,
I told him, "Sir, won't go in it,"

And when he tried to move me,
I bit his hand,
bit it hard enough he had to get another man,
After the two of them took me to the smoke
and squalor

I sued the railroad, and won five hundred
dollars.
Yes, white women need the ballot,
but my women even more,
I'd like to buy a railroad ticket and choose my
own car.

When the men try to put you where you
don't belong,
You square your jaw and fix your gaze,
'Cause a women's seat is the seat she bought,
when a woman knows her place.

suffrage. Behind her, the first wagon of the parade bore a massive banner stating the women's demands.

There were eight thousand women on Pennsylvania Avenue in academic gowns and work uniforms. There were banners from almost every state – including a delegation from Illinois, the state that Ida B. Wells had traveled from Chicago to join.

Unfortunately, Illinois, like many states, wanted only white women in their delegation. These states worried that Southern voters would not support suffrage if Black women were seen marching alongside.

Ida was asked to march at the back of the parade with the rest of the Black women. At 52 years old, and having done more for suffrage than most of white Illinois delegates, she was incensed.

Wounded, but determined to take her rightful place, she did not go to the back, but instead waited on the sidelines. And when Illinois marched by, Ida stepped out of the crowd, linked arms with two allies near the front and marched the entire rest of the parade.

We demand an amendment to the United States Constitution
enfranchising the women of this country
We march to give evidence of our determination
that this simple act of justice be done.

A woman's place is the ballot box,
and we're marching steady to win it,
And when the people try to tell us we belong
in the house,
we say "Yes, the House and the Senate!"

Eight thousand women marching to take a stand

Movement IV

"We all believe in the idea of democracy...woman suffrage is the application of democracy to women." - Mabel Ping-Hua Lee, suffragist, and the first Chinese woman to earn a doctorate in the United States.

for the right to vote afforded every other man,
A woman needs a ballot far more than a petticoat,
Standing tall, marching steady for the right to vote.

When the world tries to put where you don't belong,
You square your jaw and fix your gaze,
'Cause a woman's palace is where ever she walks

When a woman knows her place.
When a woman knows her place.
When a woman knows her place.
When a woman knows her place.

It is our turn.
What are we going to do in answer to the call of duty?
When men are denied justice they go to war,
This is our war.
We fight with banners instead of guns.

Liberty must be fought for,
You cannot be neutral,
You must join with us who believe in the bright future,
or be destroyed by those who would return us to the dark past.

Women of the nation,
this is the time to fight!

When the doorkeeper got up to let Mabel Vernon sit down, her friend joked it was because she looked pregnant. Indeed, Mabel had secretly pinned a large banner under her skirts. President Woodrow Wilson was giving his December address to Congress, and at the opportune moment, Mabel unfurled the yellow sateen, dropping it over the balcony with the help of her friends.

A murmur rustled through the floor, but in this moment, and in subsequent meetings, Woodrow Wilson Remained unmoved.

Harriet Stanton Blatch floated a new idea: the silent sentinels – an unceasing presence of women at the White House gates with messaged banners in the suffrage colors of purple, yellow, and white. This would be radical. Labor pickets were one thing, but to take up a grievance with the President?...

...No one had ever picketed the White House like this before. The first line of sentinels arrived in January of 1917.

The sentinels kept watch through all of winter and apart from the occasional insult, things had been fairly calm. But when the U.S. entered World War I in April, picketing a wartime president was seen as unpatriotic.

The banners were sharply worded – calling out the President and envoys from other countries. Angry mobs threw rocks and eggs. Banners were torn, and women were shoved, kicked, and dragged across the pavement.

For the next two years, almost 500 women would be arrested on ludicrous charges such as “obstructing traffic” or “meeting on public grounds”...

Mister President, What will you do for woman suffrage?

Mister President, What will you do for woman suffrage?
How long must women wait for liberty?

Democracy should begin at home. We demand justice and self government,

To Russian enjoys, Help us make this nation free...

Kaiser Wilson! Twenty million American women are denied self government.

...And as the women persisted, the prison sentences grew even longer.

When the leader of the National Woman's Party, Alice Paul, was sentenced to seven months in the district jail, she wrote her mother not to worry – reassuring her it would merely be a "delightful rest"...

*...but Alice's reality in prison would be far from delightful.
Before her sentence was over, Alice would be subjected to a foul-smelling cell...*

...meals of worm-ridden pork, placed in solitary confinement, deprived of sleep, and ultimately moved to the psychopathic ward, having her mental fitness questioned...

Alice went on hunger strike to protest the horrible conditions. Three times a day, she was strapped down, a tube shoved down her nose, and milk and raw eggs funneled down her throat.

Fellow suffragist, Rose Winslow, endured the same treatment, smuggling out details of their conditions on scraps of paper.

If the Wilson administration thought they would weaken the suffragists by torturing their leader, they were undoubtedly surprised on November 10th when the longest picket line yet appeared outside the White House.

(Mister President,) Take the beam out of your own eye.

How long must women be denied a voice?

No fresh air,
One feels so far forsaken (Raw salt pork,)
unremitting (Electric light sharp in my face,)
intimidation,

investigation of my sanity,
Forced a tube down my throat (gasping,
agony, the agony)

Forced a tube up my nose

We hear them outside cracking eggs,
everything turned black,
everything turned black,

Over thirty women were arrested, including Lucy Burns, who helped from the National Woman's Party with Alice Paul. All of them were sent into the Occoquan workhouse, away from Alice in the District Jail.

The women were greeted upon arrival by the workhouse superintendent and up to forty angry men wielding clubs.

Women were beaten, choked, and violently thrown into cells – some knocked unconscious. Lucy Burns's hands were tied over her head.

Her clothes stripped off, she was left with only a blanket. Calling out to the others, she was threatened with a gag and straightjacket.

One woman had a heart attack. When the others cried for help, the guards ignored their pleas. This evening would be known as the "The Night of Terror."

As many as thirty women would go on hunger strikes in protest of their horrible treatment in prison – many enduring forced feedings just as Alice Paul had. The administration – faced with negative press, and women who could not be broken, released all the suffrage prisoners by the end of November.

The warden threatened,
Men picked me up
They lifted her up and banged her down
twice
(I heard the cries and the blows,)

She didn't move (we thought she was dead)
banged her down twice,
the brace and the bit in our mouths
over an iron bench, so terrified (the straight
jacket on our bodies)

A cold wind blew
We were so terrified
We kept very still.

Upon their release, Alice Paul proclaimed: "We are put out of jail as we were put in – at the whim of the government. They tried to terrorize us...they could not, so they freed us." The Susan B. Anthony amendment passed the House in 1918, but failed to clear the Senate.

So the suffragists continued their protests. The "watchfires" involved burning the copies of Woodrow Wilson's speeches as the empty words that they were, and in February of 1919 a trainload of former suffrage prisoners went on a cross-country speaking tour telling of their experiences...

By May, a newly elected, pro-suffrage majority of Congress would ensure the Susan B. Anthony amendment passed both the House and the Senate with relative ease...

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

Form here, the amendment would need to be ratified by 36 states. Though public sentiment on suffrage was shifting there was much work left to be done.

Movement V

Shout the revolution of women, of women,
Shout the revolution of liberty.
Rise glorious women of the earth,
the voiceless and the free, all shout!

Shout the revolution of women, of women,
Shout the revolution of liberty.
Rise glorious women of the earth,
the voiceless and the free, all shout!

Shout the revolution of women, of women,
Shout the revolution of liberty,

By a miracle, the nineteenth amendment has
been ratified.
We women now have a weapon we have
never possessed before.
It will be a shame and reproach if we do not
use it.

Alice Paul raised a toast and unfurled a celebratory banner outside headquarters. She'd been quietly sewing a new star on the banner for each state that ratified the 19th amendment, and now it was finished... 36 stars. 36 states. In August of 1920, all eyes were on Tennessee, the final state to ratify.

In Nashville, freshman legislator Harry Burn had an anti-suffrage red nose on his lapel, but the letter in his pocket weighed more heavily on his mind...

Mrs. J. L. Burn was a widowed, tax-paying landowner and when her son, Harry, cast his vote of "aye", the room gave way to confused gasps. Had it really happened?

Had women actually won the vote? The room exploded. There was weeping, screaming, and singing.

Woman is no longer a servant, but equal to man.

In her hands are possibilities,
in her hands are possibilities,
In her hands are possibilities,
The hour of degradation is past,

Woman is no longer a servant,
but equal to man.

Dear Son, Hurrah and vote for suffrage!
Don't keep them in doubt...
I have been watching to see how you stood,
I have not noticed anything yet

Don't forget to be a good boy...
Your mother.

nn, oo nn,
oo nn,
oo

Women, be glad today!
Let your voices ring out,
Let your voices ring out!
Though morning seems to linger,

O'er hilltops faraway,

Dr. Mary Walker was the first woman to win the Congressional Medal of Honor. A surgeon and a spy in the Civil War, she wrote...

...“Nothing but the ballot in woman’s hand will right these wrongs.” But for women of color, the struggle was more complex than this. Having picketed with the Silent Sentinels...

...Mary Church Terrell wrote: “A white woman has only one handicap to overcome – that of sex. I have two, both sex and race.”

Black suffragists worked hard in their churches and communities, often being ignored by white suffragists and written out of historical records.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper remarked: “I do not believe that giving women the ballot is going to cure all the ills of life. I do not believe that white women are dewdrops just exhaled from the skies...”

“...I think that like men, they may be divided into the good, the bad and the indifferent. The good would vote according to their convictions and principles; the bad as distanced by prejudice or malice;...”

“...and the indifferent will vote on the strongest side of the question with the winning party.”

The 19th amendment was a seventy-two year struggle, but for women of color, the struggle

The shadow bears the promise
of a brighter coming day.

Lifting as we climb,
onward and upward we go,
struggling and striving and hoping,
we knock at the bar of justice, asking equal
chance.

Lifting as we climb (Oo onward),
Onward and upward we go (onward we go),

would continue. Zitkala-Sa, of Yankton Sioux heritage, fought for Indigenous Americans to gain citizenship in 1924.

Their right to vote, however, was decided state by state with New Mexico and Arizona being the last in 1948. Chinese immigrants would vote in 1943, and for Black women repeatedly suppressed at the polls...

...the poll tax was ended in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act created in 1965. Voters with disabilities were given special protections in 1982.

As Carrie Chapman Catt said: "Women have suffered agony of soul which you can never comprehend, that you and your daughters might inherit political freedom. That vote has been costly. Prize it."

struggling and striving and hoping,
we knock at the bar of justice,

asking equal chance.

Forward out of darkness,
Leave behind the night,

forward out of error
forward into light,
Forward out of darkness,
Forward into light.

Forward out of darkness,
Leave behind the night,
(Lifting as we climb,)
Forward out of error

forward into light
(onward and upward we go,)
Forward out of darkness
(struggling and striving and hoping)

Forward into light
(we knock at the bar of justice,
asking an equal chance.)

Forward,
Forward,
Forward,
Forward into light.

Lifting as we climb.

