

# 'ON WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE'

## BY SUSAN B. ANTHONY, 1873

### (SPEECH)

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.

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 forever 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 is every one against Negroes.

## Questions for "On Women's Right to Vote" by Susan B. Anthony, 1873

### LEVEL 1

#### **General Understanding**

- What happened?
- Why is Susan B. Anthony delivering this speech?
- Who is she speaking to?

#### **Key Details**

- Why was she arrested?
- Which historical documents does Susan B. Anthony refer to?
- Where is she?
- Who are Webster, Worcester, and Bouvier?
- How does Susan B. Anthony connect the plight of the African American to that of women? Why does she relate the two?
- What election did she vote in?

### LEVEL 2

#### **Vocabulary**

- What does "sex" represent in this text?
- She repeats "to them" several times throughout her speech (specifically in Paragraph 6). Who is she speaking of?
- Define all unknown words and terms in Paragraph 6. Discuss your findings with your partner/table. Reread the paragraph again. What is she saying?

#### **Structure**

- Discuss the effectiveness of the use of evidence throughout her speech.
- Read the speech out loud to a partner or table. Discuss the length of the speech. Is it sufficient?

#### **Author's Craft**

- Discuss the persuasive techniques used and their effectiveness.
- What is the tone of this speech? Why do you think this?
- How does Susan B. Anthony justify her actions?

## LEVEL 3

### ***Author's Purpose***

- What does the right to vote represent to Susan B. Anthony? Where specifically does she insinuate the importance of voting for women?
- How does Susan B. Anthony discuss class?

### ***Intertextual Connections***

- Research Susan B. Anthony's life in other texts and examine where her motivation for the women's suffrage movement began.

## LEVEL 4

### ***Opinion With Evidence or Argument***

- Susan B. Anthony asks the question, "Are women persons?" Discuss the rights of women in 1873 versus their rights today.
- What type of person is Susan B. Anthony, as evidenced solely in this speech?
- Women were finally granted the right to vote in 1920 with the passing of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution, which reads, "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." This was passed 48 years after Susan B. Anthony's death. Research what happened between the time she delivered this speech and the time women were finally granted the right to vote.
- Even though women were granted the right to vote in 1920, numbers of women voting did not match numbers of men voting until 1980. Currently, a higher percentage of women are voters than men. President Obama had 55% of his votes come from females. What is changing in society? Why are more women voting now?