

VOTES FOR WOMEN

A Program of the York Diversity Forum

Narrator: Long after the nation’s founding, American women lacked basic rights of citizenship. Early activists seeking equality were influenced by local communities of matriarchal Iroquois, abolitionists, and egalitarian Quakers.

Reader: “I ask no favors for my sex, I surrender not our claim to equality. All I ask of our brethren is that they will take their feet from off our necks, and permit us to stand upright on the ground which God has designed us to occupy.”

— Sarah Moore Grimke. 1837. Writer and speaker for women’s rights whose ideas were so different, that people burned her writings and angry mobs protested her speeches.

Narrator: In the mid 1800’s, abolitionists and suffragists were working together for constitutional rights. 1848 produced the first United States women’s rights convention with its Declaration of Sentiments. Based on the Declaration of Independence, the document listed the rights of women and included Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s contentious voting resolution.

Reader “We are assembled to protest against a form of government existing without the consent of the governed – to declare our right to be free as man is free, to be represented in the government which we are taxed to support, to have such disgraceful laws as give man the power to chastise and imprison his wife, to take the wages which she earns, the property which she inherits, and in case of separation, the children of her love; laws which make her the mere dependent on his bounty. It is to protest against such unjust laws as these that we are assembled today and to have them, if possible, forever erased from our statute books, deeming them a shame and a disgrace to a Christian republic in the nineteenth century... And, strange as it may seem to many, we now demand our right to vote according to the declaration of the government under which we live...”

The right is ours. Have it we must. Use it we will. The pens, the tongues, the fortunes, the indomitable wills of many women are already pledged to secure this right. The great truth that no just government can be formed without the consent of the governed we shall echo and re-echo in the ears of the unjust judge, until by continual coming we shall weary him...

We do not expect our path will be strewn with the flowers of popular applause, but over the thorns of bigotry and prejudice will be our way, and on our banners will beat the dark storm clouds of opposition from those who have entrenched themselves behind the stormy bulwarks of custom and authority, and who have fortified their position by every means, holy and unholy.

But we will steadfastly abide the result. Unmoved we will bear it aloft. Undaunted we will unfurl it to the gale, for we know that the storm cannot rend from it a shred, that the electric flash will but more clearly show to us the glorious words inscribed upon it, 'Equality of Rights'."

— *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Women's Rights Convention, Seneca Falls, NY 1848*

Narrator: At the May 1851 Ohio Women's convention prominent abolitionists and suffragists spoke for equal rights. A former slave and itinerant abolitionist moved the audience to tears.

Reader "Well Children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?"

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man-when I could get it-and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! Ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in my head; what's this they call it? (member of audience whispers "intellect") That's it honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours hold a quart wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with him. If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say".

— *Sojourner Truth, Women's Rights Convention, Akron Ohio 1851*

Narrator: Temperance workers, suffragists and abolitionists continued efforts for women’s rights until the Civil War diverted most of their activities to the home front.

Reader “We shall someday be heeded, and when we shall have our amendment to the Constitution of the United States, everybody will think it was always so, just exactly as many young people believe that all the privileges, all the freedom, all the enjoyments which woman now possesses always were hers. They have no idea of how every single inch of ground that she stands upon today has been gained by the hard work of some little handful of women of the past.”

— *Susan B Anthony, 1894. Devoted her life to racial, gender and educational equality giving as many as 75 to 100 speeches per year. Co-founder and key force of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.*

Narrator: After slavery was abolished, the proposed 14th & 15th Amendments offered citizenship and voting rights only to African American men. The debate was framed as women’s rights versus African American rights, creating deep division in the suffrage movement.

Reader "Elective franchise is withheld from one half of its citizen...because the word “people”, by an unparalleled exhibition of lexicon graphical acrobatics, has been turned and twisted to mean all who were shrewd and wise enough to have themselves born boys instead of girls, or who took the trouble to be born white instead of black.”

— *Mary Church Terrell, Educator, suffrage activist and one of the first African American women to earn a college degree. She was president of the National Association of Colored Women 1899 - 1904.*

Narrator: Born into slavery and freed by the Emancipation Proclamation during the Civil War, Ida B Wells investigated and documented lynching. Outspoken regarding her beliefs as a Black female activist, she faced public disapproval from both the civil rights movement and the women’s suffrage movement. Nevertheless, she continued to fight for both causes throughout her life.

Reader “Brave men do not gather by thousands to torture and murder a single individual, so gagged and bound he cannot make even feeble resistance or defense.”

The government, which made the Negro a citizen, gave him the right to vote, but denied him the protection, which should have maintained that right. The Negro clung to his right of franchise. He believed that in that small white ballot there was a subtle something which stood for manhood as well as citizenship, and thousands of brave black men went to their graves, exemplifying the one by dying for the other.

The white man's victory soon became complete by fraud, violence, intimidation and murder. And they invented the third excuse — that Negroes had to be killed to avenge their assaults upon women.

It is his regret, that, in his own defense, the negro must disclose to the world that degree of dehumanizing brutality which fixes upon America the blot of a national crime.

We plead not for the colored people alone, but for all victims of the terrible injustice which puts men and women to death without form of law."

— *Ida B. Wells, 1890 Investigative journalist, feminist, lecturer and co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.*

Narrator: In the late 1800's women won some voting rights, and elections, in selected states. Elsewhere, they continued to petition and speak before Congress. They protested taxation without representation and tested the 14th Amendment by attempting to vote.

Reader “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”.

— *Susan B Anthony after her arrest for casting an illegal vote in the presidential election of 1872. She was tried and then fined \$100 but refused to pay.*

Narrator: In the 1890's, though suffrage referendums failed to pass Congress every year, women did make progress, with local civic improvements and national protections for workers, consumers, and conservation.

Reader “The world taught women nothing skillful and then said her work was valueless. It permitted her no opinions and said she did not know how to think. It forbade her to speak in public and said the sex had no orators. It denied her the schools, and said the sex had no genius. It robbed her of every vestige of responsibility, and then called her weak. It taught her that every pleasure must come as a favor from men and when, to gain it, she decked herself in paint and fine feathers, as she had been taught to do, it called her vain”

— *Anna Howard Shaw, 1904 Physician, suffrage leader and President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.*

Narrator: Few African American suffragists were part of (or permitted in) mostly segregated white women's suffrage associations. Though some did cross the color barrier, most were active in separate, local and national women's clubs, churches, and suffrage leagues.

Reader " ..lifting as we climb, onward and upward we go, struggling and striving, and hoping that the buds and blossoms of our desires will burst into glorious fruition ere long. With courage, born of success achieved in the past, with a keen sense of the responsibility, which we shall continue to assume, we look forward to a future large with promise and hope. Seeking no favors because of our color, nor patronage because of our needs, we knock at the bar of justice, asking an equal chance."

— *Mary Church Terrell, Activist for civil rights and suffrage. She and Ida B Wells helped develop the integrated NAACP in 1910. Later that decade she was among the first White House pickets, the National Women's Party's Silent Sentinels.*

Narrator: The National American Woman Suffrage Association continued state-by-state efforts. In 1913, its upstart offshoot, the Congressional Union, began to pursue a suffrage amendment using tactics learned from suffragists in the United Kingdom. Blaming the ruling Democrats and President Woodrow Wilson for congressional inaction, they organized

petitions, parade events, speeches, and the first ever pickets of the White House. Social movements ever since have learned from their peaceful resistance tactics & determination.

Reader “When I came into your hall tonight, I thought of the last time I was in your city. Twenty-one years ago I came here with Susan B Anthony, and we came for exactly the same purpose as that for which we are here tonight. Boys have been born since that time and have become voters, and the women are still trying to persuade American men to believe in the fundamental principles of democracy.

If woman’s suffrage is wrong, it is a great wrong; if it is right, it is a profound and fundamental principle, and we all know, if we know what a Republic is, that it is the fundamental principle upon which a Republic must rise.”

— *Anna Howard Shaw June 21, 1915 Address to the New York State legislature*

Reader “Mr. President how long must women wait to get their liberty? Let us have the rights we deserve”.

Alice Paul, 1913 political activist for women’s rights who spearheaded a militant movement that eventually led to the passage of the 19th amendment.

Reader “There is one thing mightier than kings and armies" -- aye, than Congresses and political parties -- "the power of an idea when its time has come to move." The time for woman suffrage has come. The woman's hour has struck. If parties prefer to postpone action longer and thus do battle with this idea, they challenge the inevitable. The idea will not perish; the party, which opposes it, may. Every delay, every trick, every political dishonesty from now on will antagonize the women of the land more and more, and when the party or parties which have so delayed woman suffrage finally let it come, their sincerity will be doubted and their appeal to the new voters will be met with suspicion. This is the psychology of the situation. Can you afford the risk? Think it over.

Gentlemen, we hereby petition you, our only designated representatives, to redress our grievances by the immediate passage of the Federal Suffrage Amendment and to use your influence to secure its ratification in your own state, in order that the women of our nation may be endowed with political freedom before the next presidential election, and that our nation may resume its world leadership in democracy”.

— *Carrie Chapman Catt, Address to Congress. 1917*

Narrator: With women’s strategic lobbying; ongoing acts of civil disobedience, and wartime efforts in mind, President Wilson finally endorsed women’s suffrage in a speech to Congress on September 30, 1918. The Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guaranteed American women the right to vote. It was passed by the House of Representatives on May 21, 1919, and ratified by the Senate two weeks later. The amendment met the required approval of 36 states on August 18, 1920, **making it the law of the land**. Maine ratified the amendment on November 5, 1919, 100 years ago this month.

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

Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”

— *The 19th Amendment of the United States Constitution*

Reader “The vote is the emblem of your equality, women of America, the guarantee of your liberty. That vote of yours has cost millions of dollars and the lives of thousands of women. 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!

The vote is a power, a weapon of offense and defense, a prayer. Understand what it means and what it can do for your country. Use it intelligently, conscientiously, prayerfully. No soldier in the great suffrage army has labored and suffered to get a “place” for you. Their motive has been the hope that women would aim higher than their own selfish ambitions, that they would serve the common good.

The vote is won. Seventy-two years the battle for this privilege has been waged, but human affairs with their eternal change move on without pause. Progress is calling to you to make no pause. Act!”

— *Carrie Chapman Catt, August 26, 1920, upon the passing of the 19th Amendment*

Reader After suffrage passed, Alice Paul penned the Equal Rights Amendment. Introduced in Congress in 1923, it remains unratified... And passage of the Nineteenth Amendment did not guarantee full voting rights for all women. It was 1924 when US law enfranchised Native American women, and 1934 for women in Puerto Rico. The 1965 Voting Rights Act was enacted to combat obstructive voting laws and other tactics preventing black

southerners from voting. Later, Latina and Asian efforts precipitated Voting Rights Act supervision in Texas & New York.

Reader “I never doubted that equal rights was the right direction. Most reforms, most problems are complicated. But to me there is nothing complicated about ordinary equality.”

— *Alice Paul, 1920*
