

# Woman's Rights to the Suffrage



by Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906)

*This speech was delivered in 1873, after Anthony was arrested, tried, and fined \$100 for voting in the 1872 presidential election.*

- 1 *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.
- 2       The preamble of the Federal Constitution says:
- 3       "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."
- 4       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.
- 5       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.
- 6       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.

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

8 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.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## QUIZ

### *Woman's Rights to the Suffrage*

*Directions: Circle the best answer.*

1. What is the central idea of this speech?
  - a. Anthony committed no crime by voting because she is guaranteed that right by the Constitution.
  - b. Women are just as good as men and should do everything men do.
  - c. Anthony is willing to go to jail to prove her point that she has the right to vote in presidential elections.
  - d. The preamble to the Constitution states "We the people."
2. What words best describe the tone of the speech?
  - a. antagonistic and logical
  - b. aggressive and insensitive
  - c. complaining and sarcastic
  - d. assertive and reasonable
3. Which statement is part of Anthony's argument that women are entitled to vote?
  - a. Oligarchies are a tried-and-true method of ruling fairly.
  - b. Anthony was falsely accused of voting in the 1872 presidential election.
  - c. Women are people.
  - d. States' laws can override the Constitution.
4. Why does Anthony quote the Constitution?
  - a. to explain the States' position on excluding women from voting
  - b. to argue that women are guaranteed the right to vote by this federal document
  - c. to demonstrate that she has knowledge of the law and history
  - d. to justify why African Americans have been denied the vote
5. The word oligarchy as used in paragraph 5 means
  - a. a club that includes women.
  - b. team of all age groups.
  - c. partnerships of men and women.
  - d. a small group who rules and governs.