

## READING

## Is It a Crime for Women to Vote?

Susan B. Anthony voted in the 1872 presidential election. Because women did not have the right to vote, she was arrested, put on trial, convicted, and fined \$100. The following is an excerpt from a speech she delivered in 1873, prior to her trial.

Friends and Fellow-citizens: I stand before you to-night 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 right, 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 this 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 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 . . .

To [women], 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 . . .

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 to-day null and void, precisely as is every one against negroes . . .<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from "[Is It a Crime for a Citizen of the United States to Vote?](#)" (speech), delivered April 3, 1873, transcribed in Susan Brownell Anthony, *An Account of the Proceedings on the Trial of Susan B. Anthony, on the Charge of Illegal Voting* (Daily Democrat and Chronicle Book Print, 1874), 151–178.