

WHY WOMEN SHOULD VOTE

Susan B. Anthony was among the most active organizers for women's voting rights. These arguments (condensed here) are from a speech she gave after being arrested in Rochester, New York. Her "crime" was voting in the presidential election of 1872.

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 [descendants], but to the whole people – women as well as men.



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 government – the ballot.

For any state to make sex a qualification that must ever result in the disfranchisement [loss of voting rights] of one entire half of the people 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 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. [Aristocracy and oligarchy are terms for rule by a select elite.]

Another famous advocate for women's rights was Amelia Bloomer. She was the first woman in America to own and edit a newspaper for women. These lines are condensed from an 1895 essay.

There is no positive rule by which to fix woman's sphere, except that of capacity. It is to be found, I should say, wherever duty or interest may call her, whether to the kitchen, the parlor, the nursery, the workshop, or the public assembly.

It is objected that it would be immodest and "unbecoming a lady" for women to go to the ballot-box to vote, or to the halls of the capitol [building] to legislate.

A few years ago it was thought very unladylike and improper for women to study medicine, and when Elizabeth Blackwell forced her way into the Geneva, New York, medical college people were amazed at the presumption. But she graduated with high honors, went to Europe to perfect her studies, and now stands high in her chosen profession.

Now there are several colleges for the medical education of women, and women physicians without number. And so of many other departments of trade, profession, and labor that within my recollection were not thought proper for woman, simply because she had not entered them.

Women are debarred [prevented] from voting and legislating, and therefore it is unfashionable for them to do either; but let their right to do so be once established, and all objections of that kind will vanish away.

Group Discussion: *What is the basic argument each woman makes about voting rights for women? Which woman do you think makes the best argument? Why?*