

EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN
 SPEECH AT THE TWENTIETH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE
 NEW ENGLAND WOMAN SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION,
 TREMONT TEMPLE, BOSTON, MAY 28, 1888

Mrs. Stone then introduced Frederick Douglass:
 ADDRESS OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS.

Madame President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

While I esteem it an honor to stand on this New-England woman suffrage platform, I do not feel that I have a right to the prominence you have been pleased to give me in this your proceedings, by calling me at this time. It is, perhaps, about time that I should decline to be a speaker on occasions like the present. Having survived the anti-slavery conflict, and lived to rejoice in the victory over slavery, and being no longer as young as I once was, I am a little too late for efficiency and prominence in the great cause you have in hand. My special mission in the world, if I ever had any, was the emancipation and enfranchisement of the negro. Mine was a great cause. Yours is a much greater cause, since it comprehends the liberation and elevation of one-half of the whole human family. Happily, however, I have two good reasons for coming upon this platform to-night. The first is, I live near the city of Washington; not a very strong reason, perhaps, but I come to you from an atmosphere largely pervaded with the woman suffrage sentiment, and am so much in sympathy with it, that it is more difficult to be silent than to speak in its favor. In the second place, this cause has a valid claim upon my "service and labor," outside of its merits. The New England Woman Suffrage Association is composed in part of the noble women who dared to speak for the freedom of the slave, at a time when it required far more courage to do so than is required to speak in the woman suffrage cause at this day.

I have said I reside near Washington, the capital of the nation. Let me say a word about that city in connection with this and kindred reforms. Its behavior of late has been worthy of praise. In the old times, prior to the war and the abolition of slavery, there was no room in it for woman suffrage or negro suffrage or many other good things. It shuddered at the thought of a new idea—slavery, the slave trade, slave auctions, horse-racing, duels, and revivals of religion were the popular excitements in the Washington of that

day. But now old Washington has passed away, and a new Washington has come into existence. Under our much-abused Gov. Shepard, its physical features have been visibly improved, and under the influence of Northern ideas, its moral features have equally improved. The time is not distant, I hope, when it will symbolize all that is good, great, glorious and free, and much of the glory of that result will be due to the efforts of women.

It will be next year the theatre of a grand international exposition. Its attractive power is destined to increase with every year, and Boston itself as a reformatory centre may begin to look to its laurels.

Boston was once known as the hot-bed of abolitionism. Washington, if it keeps well on its way, will soon become the hot-bed of woman suffrage. One of the most imposing demonstrations in favor of the rights and dignity of woman was held there only a few weeks ago. You may have heard something of this before. Women from the East, women from the West, women from the North, and women from the South; women from home and women from abroad, met there in International Council, and united in a solemn demand for a larger measure of liberty, and a fuller participation in the government of the world, than has ever yet been accorded to woman. No assemblage to my knowledge, can be pointed to in the history of this republic, which ever presented a more sublime spectacle than did this International Council. Its presence was an argument in favor of its cause. Its refinement, earnestness, ability and dignity repelled criticism and overcame opposition. In the hope and enthusiasm it inspired, some of us were made to think, or rather to feel, that the year of woman's jubilee had already dawned.

But this Council has adjourned, and although its beneficent influence will continue to be felt far and wide over the world, we are still confronted with the same old conflict, and must fight it out on the line of agitation though it shall take a century. There is still a delinquent, tardy, and reluctant Massachusetts to be converted, there is still a mass of bigotry and superstition to overcome. There is still a Methodist Episcopal Conference confronting us and barring the way to woman's progress, as it once barred the way to emancipation. There is still a great nation to be brought to a knowledge of the truth. We are not to be appalled by the magnitude of the work, or discouraged by this or any other form of opposition.

We old abolitionists never allowed ourselves to be dismayed by repulses, however grievous. Those engaged in this cause are of the self-same material. In some respects this woman suffrage movement is but a continuance of the old anti-slavery movement. We have the same sources of opposition to contend with, and we must meet them with the same spirit and determination, and with much the same arguments which we employed against what Charles Sumner called the "seven-headed barbarism of slavery."

In reform, as in war, it is always a point gained to know just where the enemy is, and just what he is about. It is not easy to deal with an enemy in the dark. It was a great thing for the abolition cause, fifty years ago, when the Methodist Episcopal Conference at Cincinnati declared itself opposed to abolitionism, and that it had no right, wish, or intention to abolish slavery. It is now equally something to know that this same organization takes its stand against the movement for the equal rights of woman in its ecclesiastical assemblies. That older conference was not able, by its opposition to abolitionism, to save slavery, nor will this later conference be able to continue the degradation of woman, by denying her a voice and a vote in its councils. The Methodist Church is rich in resources, but it cannot well afford to enforce this Mahometan idea of woman upon American women—an idea in which woman has no recognized moral, social, or religious existence. In the mosques of the East, her presence among the faithful is held a defilement. She is deemed incapable of self-direction—a body without a soul. No more distressing thing confronted us during our recent tour in Egypt than this social and religious annihilation of women. Religion there strikes woman dead. Her face is not to be seen; her voice is not to be heard; her moral influence is not to be exerted. She is cushioned, cabined, confined and guarded, and treated more like a criminal than like an innocent person. She sees the world only through a veil, or from behind a lattice-work. She is constantly under the surveillance of a sentinel, wearing the human form, but destitute of all manly sympathy. This Methodist attempt to exclude woman from the conference of the church, has in it a strong element of this Mahometan idea of the proper sphere and treatment of woman.

Whatever may be said of the pious Mahometan, men and women here will ask, and demand to know, what harm could possibly come to the Methodist Church and its ministers, from the presence of a

few or many Christian women in its conference? The sexes meet together in prayer-meeting, in class-meeting, in "love feast," and in the great congregations of the church. Why should these gospel preachers, who mingle everywhere else in the church with women, be afraid to meet women in their conferences? What work have they to do there which women should not know? I will press this question no further, but I call upon the Methodist Church to assist us in separating woman's condition in America as far apart from her condition in Egypt as the east is from the west. We have heard a great deal of late as to what Christianity has done for woman. We have a right to call upon these Christian ministers to show that what has been done, has not been done in spite of the church, but in accordance with its teachings. One thing is certain, when the chains of woman shall be broken, when she shall become the recognized equal of man, and is put into the full enjoyment of all the rights of an American citizen, as she will be, church and ministry will be the first to claim the honor of the victory, and to say, "We did it!"

It is hardly necessary for me to say, after what I have already said, that I am a radical woman suffrage man. I was such a man nearly fifty years ago. I had hardly brushed the dust of slavery from my feet and stepped upon the free soil of Massachusetts, when I took the suffrage side of this question. Time, thought and experience have only increased the strength of my conviction. I believe equally in its justice, in its wisdom, and in its necessity.

But, as I understand the matter, woman does not ask man for the right of suffrage. That is something which man has no power to give. Rights do not have their source in the will or the grace of man. They are not such things as he can grant or withhold according to his sovereign will and pleasure. All that woman can properly ask man to do in this case, and all that man can do, is to get out of the way, to take his obstructive forces of fines and imprisonment and his obstructive usages out of the way, and let woman express her sentiments at the polls and in the government, equally with himself. Give her fair play and let her alone.

But we are told that suffrage is not a right, that it is neither a right for man nor for woman, but that it is simply a privilege. I do not know when or by whom this startling discovery was made, but it is evidently deemed very important and highly satisfactory by the opponents of woman suffrage.

Well, for argument's sake, let it be conceded that suffrage is not a natural right, but that it is simply a privilege, something that is created and exists only by conventional arrangement; something that can be granted or withheld at the option of those who make it a privilege. I say let all this be conceded, which I do not concede. Several important questions must be answered by those who support this pretension, before the friends of woman suffrage can be silenced or be made to accept it as final.

In the first place we have a right to know by what authority, human or divine, suffrage was made a privilege and not a right; we have a right to know when, where, how, and in the light of what doctrine of human liberty, suffrage was made a privilege and not a right. We have a right to know if men, acting alone, have the right to decide what is right, and what is privilege where their action in the case is to determine the position of woman. We have a right to know, if suffrage is simply a privilege, by what right the exercising of that privilege is conferred only upon men. If it is a privilege, we have the right to know why woman is excluded. If it is a privilege, we have the right to know why woman is not as fully, fairly entitled to exercise that privilege as man himself.

After all, we see that nothing has been gained by the opponents of woman suffrage, by sheltering themselves behind this assumption that suffrage is a privilege and not a right. The argument is an old one, and has been answered a thousand times, and will, perhaps, have to be answered a thousand times more, before woman suffrage shall be the law of the land.

I suppose we must do here, as was done in the case of the anti-slavery agitation, give line upon line and precept upon precept, as we had to do forty years ago.

Woman's claim to the right of equal participation in government with man, has its foundation in the nature and personality of woman and in the admitted doctrine of American liberty and in the authority and structure of our Republican government. When the rich man wanted someone sent from the dead to warn his brothers against coming where he was, he was told if they heard not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead. Now our Moses and our prophets, so far as the rights and privileges of American citizens are concerned, are the framers of the Declaration of Independence. If the American people will not

hear these, they will not be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

According to the Declaration of Independence and to the men who signed that great charter of human liberty, all rightful powers of government are derived from the consent of the governed.

No man has yet been able to state when, where and how woman has ever given her consent to be deprived of all participation in the government under which she lives, or why women should be excepted from the principles of the American Declaration of Independence. We are told that man derived his authority thus to disenfranchise woman from Nature; well, we should all have great respect for Nature. We cannot too often listen to her voice and learn the lessons she teaches. She is the great storehouse of knowledge, wisdom and truth. It was here that Hooker learned that beautiful sentiment that law has her seat in the bosom of God and her voice is the harmony of the universe. I think the friends of woman suffrage have no reason to refuse to have the question of their rights tried in this august court we call Nature.

Let us begin then with Nature in the family. This is the starting-point of life, the natural starting-point of organized society and of the State. Here are a son and a daughter in the same household. They have nursed at the same breast in their infancy; they have been supplied from the same board; they have talked, sung, prayed, and played together on equal terms in their youth; they have grown into manhood and womanhood together; in a word, they have been equal members of the same family together all their young lives with substantially the same rights and privileges in the common family; they have received the same moral and intellectual training, and have enjoyed the same freedom of thought and expressions around the family board—the right to ask and to answer questions. They are equal in moral and intellectual endowments, or if not so equal, the one is as likely to be superior as the other, the daughter as the son, the sister as the brother. Now the question to be answered at this point is just this: At what time and under what conditions does nature step in to change the relations of these two people and make the son and brother the ruler of this daughter and sister? When does Nature say that he shall elect law-makers, and make laws, institute governments, define for her the metes and bounds of her liberty, and that she, a rational creature like himself, shall have no voice or vote in determining any question concerning the govern-

ment under which she, equally with him, is to live? They were equal in the cradle, equal in the family, equal in childhood, equal in youth, equal at maturity, equal in the right to life, to liberty, and to the pursuit of happiness. I demand to know, then, what fiat of nature, what moral earthquake from below, or what thunder-bolt from above, has driven these two people asunder—raised one to the sky and struck the other to earth—one to freedom and the other to slavery. The only answer that Nature is alleged to give here in opposition to woman, is one which no just and generous man can or should accept, for it bases a moral and intellectual conclusion—one which excludes woman from all freedom of choice in the affairs of government—upon a purely physical fact. The logic is that man is physically stronger than woman, and that he has the right to make her a subject of his will; that since she cannot shoulder a musket and fight, she shall not select a ballot and vote—that though she may have the ability to think, she shall not have the right to express her thought and give effect to her thought by her vote. There is no getting away from the conclusion here other than that the essence of this anti-woman suffrage doctrine is that might makes right. It is the right of the usurper, the slave-holder, the tyrant, the robber and pirate—a right which better befits wild beasts than reasoning men and women—a right which no woman ought to admit and no man should claim. The only thing that saves it from execration is the fact that men are too humane and too civilized to make their practice conform to the full measure of their theory. They deny rights, but admit influence. She may not vote herself, they say, but she may influence the man who does vote, and it is precisely this which constitutes the vice of this relation, for it gives influence and excludes responsibility. A sense of responsibility is an essential element in all our exertions and relations. We need it; woman needs it, not less than man, to work out the best results of her conduct. Divest woman of power and you divest her of a sense of responsibility and duty—two of the essential attributes of all useful exertion and existence.

In tracing the moral and intellectual progress of mankind from barbarism to civilization, we see that any and every advance, however simple and reasonable, has been sternly resisted. It appears that the more simple the proposition of reform, the more stern and passionate has been the resistance. Victory has always been found, when found at all, on the other side of the battlefield.

The proposition underlying the anti-slavery movement was one of the plainest that ever dropped from the lips of man. It was so simple and self-evident that argument seemed a waste of breath, and appeal an insult to the understanding, and yet this simple proposition held within itself an explosive force more powerful than dynamite—a force which divided and drove asunder the nation, rent it in twain at the centre, and filled the land with hostile armies. The fundamental proposition of anti-slavery was simply this: Every man is himself, or in other words, is *his* self, or, which is the same thing, every man is the rightful owner of himself. Nothing could be plainer than this, yet press and pulpit, church and State, saint and sinner, North and South, denounced the proposition as full of mischief and one to be put down at all hazards. Man's right to his religious faith, to believe what he could not do otherwise than believe, shared the same fate and filled Europe with nearly a century of war. With these and other and similar examples before us we are not to think it strange that the proposition to enfranchise woman, to clothe her with all the rights and dignity of American citizenship, meets with resistance.

The fundamental proposition of the woman suffrage movement is scarcely less simple than that of the anti-slavery movement. It assumes that woman is herself. That she belongs to herself, just as fully as man belongs to himself—that she is a person and has all the attributes of personality that can be claimed by man, and that her rights of person are equal in all respects to those of man. She has the same number of senses that distinguish man, and is like man a subject of human government, capable of understanding, obeying and being affected by law. That she is capable of forming an intelligent judgment as to the character of public men and public measures and she may exercise her right of choice in respect both to the law and the lawmakers. Than all this nothing could be more simple or more reasonable.

The generation that has come on the stage since the war can hardly now realize, in view of the fundamental principles of American government, that slavery ever existed here, that the pulpit and press, that the church and the State ever defended it. So, when this battle for woman suffrage shall have been fought and the victory won, men will marvel at the injustice and stupidity which so long deprived American women of the ballot.

Let me say in conclusion, if human nature is totally depraved, if

men and women are incapable of thinking or doing anything but evil and that continually, if the character of this government will inevitably be the expression of this universal and innate depravity—then the less men and women have to do with government the better. We should abandon our Republican government, cease to elect men to office, and place ourselves squarely under the Czar of Russia, the Pope of Rome, or some other potentate who governs by divine right. But if, on the contrary, human nature is more virtuous than vicious, as I believe it is, if governments are best supported by the largest measure of virtue within their reach, if women are equally virtuous with men, if the whole is greater than a part, if the sense and sum of human goodness in man and woman combined is greater than in that of either alone and separate, then the government that excludes women from all participation in its creation, administration, and perpetuation, maims itself, deprives itself of one-half of all that is wisest and best for its usefulness, success and perfection.⁶²

The Woman's Journal, June 2, 1888

**ADDRESS BEFORE WOMAN SUFFRAGE CONVENTION
(UNDATED)**

Ladies and Gentlemen: When I received from your honored President an invitation to be present this evening, I neither expected nor aspired to come before you at this important state of your proceedings. I am but only an humble layman in the woman suffrage church. I do not know that I am in good and regular standing, even that much of it which holds its annual meetings in the place where I reside. Yet I am sure that I am thoroughly in sympathy with the woman suffrage movement, and am working for its advancement. I can say however without the slightest affection of diffidence, that I preferred that some other person—some one of the noble women I see around me—who by ability, eloquence and devotion to this cause is entitled to and should occupy the post of honor now allotted to me. Man has at best a very moderate claim to prominence on this platform. He may well feel himself sufficiently honored if admitted even to take a back seat. He is the sinner. Woman is the preacher. She is her own best advocate. On such occasions as this, she holds the post of honor and the post of usefulness by virtue of

her moral sovereignty, and by right of her superior efficiency. No man, however eloquent, can speak for woman as woman can for herself.

Nevertheless, I hold that this cause is not altogether and exclusively woman's cause. It is the cause of human brotherhood as well as the cause of human sisterhood, and both must rise and fall together. Woman cannot be elevated without elevating man, and man cannot be depressed without depressing woman also.

I used to say if you want to keep a man out of the mud, you should black his boots. If you want him to expect something of himself you must expect something of him. I say the same of woman. Throw around her the robes of power and the dignity of complete citizenship, make her responsible for the good or ill of the Republic, make her see that she is something more than a cipher in this world, and she will develop a character higher than is now dreamed of in her present dwarfed condition. She will feel her responsibility. She will inform herself on the questions uppermost in the state, and qualify herself to pass upon them and be more fully a companion of man, than ever before. Exalted as she now is in this country over the women of the Eastern world, she will be more exalted when she shall, as she certainly will, achieve her complete citizenship and suffrage.

Ms., Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress
Manuscripts Division, Washington, D.C.

**WOMAN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT
ADDRESS BEFORE BETHEL LITERARY SOCIETY
(UNDATED)**

I propose to read to you, this evening, an essay on the Woman Suffrage movement, a subject upon which much has been said and written of late, but which has not, I believe, received any formal discussing in the forum of the Bethel Literary Society.⁶³

Forty years ago woman was hardly recognized as a factor in civilization. She had no public voice whatever. So far as the public was concerned, she was silent as the grave. For her, the stillness and solitude were so deep and unbroken that she started at the sound of her own voice, and shuddered at the shock she was giving her public