

Discover

Whose Revolution?

POWER, GENDER, EQUALITY, AND THE LIMITS OF REPRESENTATION

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In 1851, Sojourner Truth asked whether the virtues of being a “lady” are reserved for white women. “Ain’t I a Woman?”

- Sojourner Truth gave this speech live at the Women’s Conference in Akron, Ohio, without written notes – she was illiterate. Frances Dana Gage, who transcribed the speech, is said to have added a stereotypical Southern plantation dialect that Truth never spoke in.
- Truth’s speech is a landmark historical text. It challenges the exclusion of Black women from standard definitions of womanhood and addresses the specific experiences of Black maternal trauma.
- Speaking from her lived experience, combined with rhetorical force, Truth critiques paternalism, dismantles the notion of female frailty by citing her own labor as an enslaved person, and spotlights the distinct experiences of Black womanhood.
- More than a century later, Dr. Maya Angelou – the esteemed poet and Black literary icon – lends her voice to Truth’s historic speech in a moving elocution of history in the modern day.



VIDEO RESOURCE

This resource is a recitation of Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" read by Dr. Maya Angelou (1928-2014), an American memoirist, essayist, poet, and civil rights activist. The historic speech was delivered by Sojourner Truth extemporaneously at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) was an American abolitionist and activist for African American civil rights and women's rights.

RACE, GENDER, AND CLASS: RATIFYING THE 19TH AMENDMENT

Whose Revolution?

The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits the federal government and states from denying citizens the right to vote based on sex. Passed by Congress on June 4, 1919, and ratified on August 18, 1920, it marked a massive milestone for the women's suffrage movement.

But the 19th Amendment did not come from nowhere.

As early as 1776, before the founding of the United States, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband, future President John Adams:

*“I long to hear that you have declared an independancy—and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. **Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands.** Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticular care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to foment a Rebellion , and **will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.**”*

• Original spelling retained and unedited •

Women were not included as equal citizens in the Declaration of Independence or the United States Constitution.

It would take another 144 years.

Abigail Adams Warns John Adams, "Do Not Put Unlimited Power into the Hands of the Husbands"

For use with the Expert Learner Activity.

Expert Annotations

What did she line through?

Founders Online

ABIGAIL ADAMS TO JOHN ADAMS, 31 MARCH 1776

3 months before the signing of the Declaration of Independence

Abigail Adams to John Adams = John Quincy Adams (6th president) was their son (1744-1818) (1735-1826) Braintree March 31 1776

Adams' and wife of → First VP of USA & 2nd president

I wish you would ever write me a Letter half as long as I write you!

group of warships / naval vessels

What sort of Defence Virginia can make against our common Enemy? Whether it is so situated as to make an able Defence? Are not the Gentry Lords and the common people vassals? are they not like the uncivilized Natives Britain represents us to be? I hope (their) Riffel Men who have shewn themselves very savage and even Blood thirsty; are not a specimen of the Generality of the people - are they representative? Who are they? (George Washington then Commander in Chief of army)

"Vassals" = Colonial subjects (give loyalty and in return, get "protection")

I am willing to allow the Colony great merit for having produced a Washington but they have been shamefully duped by a Dunmore = the last royal governor of Virginia colony → ironic.

I have sometimes been ready to think that the passion for Liberty cannot be Equally Strong in the Breasts of those who have been accustomed to deprive their fellow Creatures of theirs. Of this I am certain that it is not founded upon that generous and christian principle of doing to others as we would that others should do unto us. What's talking about the British, not slavery, right?

Do not you want to see Boston; I am fearfull of the small pox, or I should have been in before this time. I got Mr. Crane to go to our House and see what state it was in. I find it has been occupied by one of the Doctors of a Regiment, very dirty, but no other damage has been done to it. The few things which were left in it are all gone. Cranch has the key which he never delivered up. I have wrote to him for it and am determined to get it cleand as soon as possible and shut it up. I look upon it a new acquisition of property, a property which one month ago I did not value at a single Shilling, and could with pleasure have seen it in flames along, girl! Wrench Tore = A cry, fiend, passionate, intense = happen suddenly unexpectedly, or prematurely

The Town in General is left in a better state than we expected, more owing to a precipitate flight than any Regard to the inhabitants, tho some individuals discover a sense of honour and justice and have left the rent of the Houses in which they were, for the owners and the furniture unhurt, or if damaged sufficient to make it good. = moral, empathy, respect, humanity

Others have committed abominable Ravages. The Mansion House of your President is safe and the furniture unhurt whilst both the House and Furniture of the Solisiter General have fallen a prey to their own merciless party. Surely the very Friends feel a Reverential awe for Virtue and patriotism, whilst they Detest the paricide and traitor.

I feel very differently at the approach of spring to what I did a month ago. We knew not then whether we could plant or sow with safety, whether when we had toild we could reap the fruits of our own industry, whether we could rest in our own Cottages, or whether we should not be driven from the sea coasts to seek shelter in the wilderness, but now we feel as if we might sit under our own vine and eat the good of the land.

I feel a gaiety de Coar to which before I was a stranger. I think the Sun looks brighter, the Birds sing more melodiously, and Nature puts on a more cheerfull countenance. We feel a temporary peace, and the poor fugitives are returning to their deserted habitations. Beautiful literary writing!

Tho we felicitate ourselves, we sympathize with those who are trembling least the Lot of Boston should be theirs. But they cannot be in similar circumstances unless Pusillanimity and cowardise should take possession of them. They have time and warning given them to see the Evil and shun it. - I long to hear that you have declared an independancy - and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation. overstates OK, BADDIE huy, now! 70 years before suffragists movement about a century before the Women's Liberacon Movement (feminism)

"Girl" + Friends + "Christian principle" → strong framing about

Expressing profound frustration @ British loyalists inside the American colonies (eg. "Dunmore")

"Parricide" = the act of killing one's own father. Symbolically, she likely means a metaphor = treason against the American Revolutionary cause / continental Army.

"Pusillanimity" → faint-heartedness, cowardice. Fanning fathers loved this word...

Born during "King George's War"; 1754-63 = French and Indian War, Treaty of Paris; 1765 = Stamp Act ("No Taxation w/out Representation"); March 1770 = Boston Massacre; 1773 = Boston Tea Party; 1775 = Lexington and Concord

Rhetorical device → allusion / antonomasia (metaphor or symbols to rep. opposing actions, values, or stances) → juxtaposition

**Allusion = a reference to a well-known person or event that carries meaning.*

"Fiend" = an enemy in the worst sense, like a satanic evil spirit, a cruel, wicked, or malicious foe.

"'t under our own vine" = from religious scripture; Washington and Abigail Adams both used this imagery, and it's also in the play, Hamilton!



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[Download Annotations](#)

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SUFFS the Musical

Tony award-winning musical about the suffragist movement in the United States. Explores themes of gender, race, the labor of mothers and women, and civil rights.



[Watch on PBS](#)

EXTRA CREDIT

Project

OPTION 1

Write a script with a debate between at least two characters about: The ethical conflicts activists face when movements exclude marginalized voices. Why did it take so long for the 19th Amendment to pass? What obstacles did reformers face during the Suffs movement, and how did they overcome them?

OPTION 2

Choose a modern or historical song that reflects the struggles and goals of the women's suffrage movement. Write a brief analysis explaining the connection and why it resonates.

OPTION 3

Select a character from Suffs who you found intriguing or wished to explore further. Write or record a short monologue (1–2 paragraphs) from this character's perspective. Consider what they might express in a private moment, revealing layers not overtly presented on stage.

Beyond the Vote

While Watching *SUFFS*

Identify the appearances of recurring themes by writing notes in the table as they occur while you are watching. Add your examples in the four rows, where they fit best. Include time stamps for each entry. You must fill in examples for at least two columns (events/scenes, words/phrases, quotes, choices made) per theme.

	Events/scenes	Words/phrases	Quotes	Choices made
CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED				
EQUALITY	NARRATIVE			
INCLUSION/EXCLUSION	LANGUAGE			
FORMS OF RESISTANCE	LAWS			
OBLIGATION	PERSPECTIVE			
AGENCY	GENDER STEREOTYPES	PATIENCE		
FAILURE	STRATEGY	LEGACY		
SACRIFICE	BURNOUT	INHERITANCE		
	RESILIENCE	Question (answer in 3-5 sentences): Identify a scene in <i>Suffs</i> where characters disagree — for example, over race, strategy, or generational differences. How did the actors' body language, tone, or blocking highlight that conflict? Reflect on how theater made the tension feel real.		
	LIBERTY			
	EMOTIONS (E.G., RAGE, HYSTERIA)			

[Download Activity](#)

POLITICS OF INCLUSION & THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT