**(9:19) Susan B. Anthony Demands the Right for Women to Vote (1873)**

Source: http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/anthony.html

**Background:** In 1872, abolitionist, feminist, and suffragette Susan B. Anthony tried to vote in the Presidential election. After casting a ballot in Rochester, New York, she was arrested, indicted, tried, and convicted for voting illegally. She was sentenced to pay a fine of $100 and court costs. In her defense, Anthony went on a speaking tour. Her speech was titled “Is it a Crime for a Citizen of the United States to Vote?”

**Questions to Consider**

1. According to Anthony, what is the source of individual rights?

2. Why does Anthony argue that the ability to vote is essential for women?

3. What request does Anthony make of juries and judges?

4. In your opinion, should someone be punished for breaking an unjust law?

A. 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. Our democratic-republican government is based on the idea of the natural right of every individual member thereof to a voice and a vote in making and executing the laws. We assert the province of government to be to secure the people in the enjoyment of their unalienable rights.

B. Nor can you find a word in any of the grand documents left us by the fathers that assumes for government the power to create or to confer rights. The Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, the constitutions of the several states and the organic laws of the territories, all alike propose to protect the people in the exercise of their God-given rights. Not one of them pretends to bestow rights.

C. One-half of the people of this nation to-day are utterly powerless to blot from the statute books an unjust law, or to write there a new and a just one. The women, dissatisfied as they are with this form of government, that enforces taxation without representation, that compels them to obey laws to which they have never given their consent, that imprisons and hangs them without a trial by a jury of their peers, that robs them, in marriage, of the custody of their own persons, wages and children, are this half of the people left wholly at the mercy of the other half, in direct violation of the spirit and letter of the declarations of the framers of this government, every one of which was based on the immutable principle of equal rights to all.”

D. “It is upon this just interpretation of the United States Constitution that our National Woman Suffrage Association . . . has based all its arguments and action the past five years.

We no longer petition Legislature or Congress to give us the right to vote. We appeal to the women everywhere to exercise their too long neglected ‘citizen’s right to vote’ . . . We ask the juries to fail to return verdicts of ‘guilty’ against honest, law-abiding, tax-paying United States citizens for offering their votes at our elections . . . We ask the judges to render true and unprejudiced opinions of the law, and wherever there is room for a doubt to give its benefit on the side of liberty and equal rights to women, remembering that ‘the true rule of interpretation under our national constitution, especially since its amendments, is that anything for human rights is constitutional, everything against human right unconstitutional’.”