

CHAPTER
9

Section 2

PRIMARY SOURCE from “The Status of Woman”
by Susan B. Anthony

For more than 50 years, Susan B. Anthony worked for woman suffrage. As you read this excerpt from an article Anthony wrote in 1897, think about her assessment of women’s status before and after the Seneca Falls Woman’s Rights Convention.

Fifty years ago woman in the United States was without a recognized individuality in any department of life. No provision was made in public or private schools for her education in anything beyond the rudimentary branches. An educated woman was a rarity and was gazed upon with something akin to awe. The women who were known in the world of letters, in the entire country, could be easily counted upon the ten fingers. . . .

Such was the helpless, dependent, fettered condition of woman when the first Woman’s Rights Convention was called just forty-nine years ago, at Seneca Falls, N. Y., by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. . . .

From that little convention at Seneca Falls, with a following of a handful of women scattered through half-a-dozen different states, we have now the great National Association, with headquarters in New York City, and auxiliaries in almost every state in the Union. These state bodies are effecting a thorough system of county and local organizations for the purpose of securing legislation favorable to women, and especially to obtain amendments to their state constitutions. As evidence of the progress of public opinion, more than half of the legislatures in session during the past winter have discussed and voted upon bills for the enfranchisement of women, and in most of them they were adopted by one branch and lost by a very small majority in the other. The legislatures of Washington and South Dakota have submitted woman-suffrage amendments to their electors for 1898, and vigorous campaigns will be made in those states during the next two years.

For a quarter of a century Wyoming has stood as a conspicuous object lesson in woman suffrage, and is now reinforced by the three neighboring states of Colorado, Utah, and Idaho. With this central group, standing on the very crest of the Rocky Mountains, the spirit of justice and freedom for women cannot fail to descend upon all the Western and Northwestern states. No one who makes a careful study of

this question can help but believe that, in a very few years, all the states west of the Mississippi River will have enfranchised their women.

While the efforts of each state are concentrated upon its own legislature, all of the states combined in the national organization are directing their energies toward securing a Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. The demands of this body have been received with respectful and encouraging attention from Congress. . . .

Until woman has obtained “that right protective of all other rights—the ballot,” this agitation must still go on, absorbing the time and energy of our best and strongest women. Who can measure the advantages that would result if the magnificent abilities of these women could be devoted to the needs of government, society, home, instead of being consumed in the struggle to obtain their birthright of individual freedom? Until this be gained we can never know, we cannot even prophesy, the capacity and power of woman for the uplifting of humanity.

It may be delayed longer than we think; it may be here sooner than we expect; but the day will come when man will recognize woman as his peer, not only at the fireside but in the councils of the nation. Then, and not until then, will there be the perfect comradeship, the ideal union between the sexes that shall result in the highest development of the race. What this shall be we may not attempt to define, but this we know, that only good can come to the individual or to the nation through the rendering of exact justice.

from Susan B. Anthony, “The Status of Woman, Past, Present, and Future,” Arena, May 1897.

Discussion Questions

1. How does Anthony view the condition of women 50 years after the first Woman’s Rights Convention was held?
2. How would you describe Anthony’s attitude toward women gaining the right to vote?