

This score represents well over a year of research, planning, and composing. The journey took me places I never imagined. I explored multiple suffrage exhibits in Washington, D.C., visited Susan B. Anthony's home, stood in the parlor where she was arrested for illegal voting, and held the handwritten letters of Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, and Carrie Chapman Catt while at the University of Rochester archives. When I began this, I had no idea the 19th amendment represented seventy-two years of struggle. I didn't know any of these women's names, save Susan B. Anthony, who only received passing mention in my history books growing up. Walking through a bookstore, have you ever noticed how little of the history section is comprised of women? In working through this project, I have dwelled with women who were American heroes, but in many cases dismissed or outright silenced by the major authors of history. Even within the women's suffrage movement, women silenced other women. Leading white suffragists were dismissive of and in some instances intentionally omitted the efforts of suffragists of color from historical records.

My personal commitment to include diverse perspectives from the movement intensified the process in ways I hadn't anticipated. For every scrap of information I could find on Mary Church Terrell or Mabel Ping-Hua Lee, I could find 50 to 100 more documents on Susan B. Anthony or Alice Paul. Instances like this challenge us to critically examine the history we are presenting. Who is telling the story? How do their experiences impact the story? And, if we are fortunate enough to write a story ourselves, are we sharing all the voices we can?

Some of the most revered figures in the U.S. Women's Suffrage Movement have been romanticized in ways that omit massive flaws of judgment. In the teaching and learning of American history, there has for too long been a desire for narratives that fit neatly on their specific shelves and generally allow us to observe only one facet of a historical figure. This approach, while tidy on the surface, can cause us to look away from complexities and injustices we deeply need to acknowledge. History is immensely messy. Many of the very suffragists who fought so hard to end slavery were deeply racist and classist (e.g. Elizabeth Cady Stanton). Others (even the Quakers like Susan B. Anthony and Alice Paul) were permissive of racist thinking when they felt it would expedite their efforts (i.e. how Alice Paul handled segregation in the 1913 parade). It is easy for many to dismiss this as simply being "how things were" or an unfortunate condition of the times. However, if women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton could be revolutionary enough in independent thought to see that women should be treated as equal to men, it stands to reason those same women could think radically and independently regarding Americans of color as well.

When I began the work, I naïvely thought, "I'll only include the 'good suffragists.'" While touring the Belmont-Paul Equality House in Washington, D.C. (former headquarters of the National Woman's Party), I arrived early and had a moment to talk with the guide before the tour. In our conversation, I told her of my project and said something to the

effect of: “I know some of the white suffragists were racially problematic...” She stopped me and said, “Oh, they were all racially problematic.” As I moved through the tour, I saw women who had been arrested, jailed, beaten and tortured for the right to vote— but who were also deeply flawed.

Planning for this work began in May of 2019. In less than a year, our own history was shifting dramatically with the arrival of a global pandemic, sustained protest, and racial upheaval. We are influenced by our environments, and I know this work is different, and likely stronger, as a result of composing in this season of self-examination. I have tried to craft a work that is honest about the heroism of these figures while also acknowledging their flaws.

The music for the work is original, with the exception of a brief portion of movement 3, which quotes “Fall in Line,” a Suffrage March by Zena S. Hawn. Published in 1914, it is quite possible this march was performed at or inspired by the 1913 suffrage parade in Washington, D.C. The entirety of the original sheet music to this march is available for free online through the Library of Congress digital collections, which include many other suffrage tunes as well.

While movements 1 and 3 include some original lyrics, the bulk of the texts used in the work are historically sourced. The original lyrics of “one day the women got tired” provides a simple message as the women move forward in their various ways (e.g. Charlotte Woodward in her wagon, Sojourner Truth speaking at Broadway Tabernacle, Elizabeth Cady Stanton reading the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments.) The original lyrics in movement 3 were crafted to relay stories from Ida B. Wells’s autobiography “Crusade for Justice” as well as textbook accounts of the events within the Illinois delegation on the day of the 1913 parade in Washington D.C.

Apart from these original lyrics, the rest of the texts were pulled from historical content: banner messages, programs, speeches, writings, and letters of suffragists. Using mostly prose for the lyrical content required some additional creativity. In many instances, I would find (and even color code) similarly themed texts so I could parse together whole sets of lyrics. The opening chorus of movement four is a perfect example: a rapid-fire thread of quotes from five different suffragists summoning the women to battle. In some instances (e.g., movement 2) I needed to paraphrase for the sake of rhythmic coherence and lyricism. Susan B. Anthony’s verbosity did not always translate smoothly to melody, so occasionally, I removed/adjusted a few words without altering the overall meaning. In other moments, I would pull together fragments of descriptive text to create a mosaic effect (e.g. the Silent Sentinels banners, and Night of Terror sequences in movement 4).

This work is about a distinct moment in history, but it was also composed during a critical moment in history. The music and texts capture the struggle for suffrage among women who were separated by the color line, but united in an understanding of the importance of women having the capacity to participate as full and equal citizens. Just as the women

involved in suffrage raised their voices, artists must also make their desires for a better world clear, and that is why I implore you to involve singers who embody the women characterized in this work as authentically as possible, so that audiences can connect to the conflicts and triumphs of the road to suffrage. Careful attention must be given for coherent and respectful representation of the characters, especially the mezzo soprano soloist(s) representing African-American women.

---Composer, Andrea Ramsey