

## Gerrit Smith speech at the Syracuse National Convention, 1852

The audience called upon Hon. Gerrit Smith for a speech. His rising was received with cheers. This was Mr. Smith's first appearance upon our platform, although in letters to different Conventions he had already expressed his sympathy. His commanding presence, his benevolent countenance, and deep rich voice, made a profound impression, and intensified the power of his glowing words. Being well known in Syracuse for his philanthropy, his presence added dignity and influence to the assembly.

Mr. Smith said:

The women who are engaged in this movement are ridiculed for aspiring to be doctors, lawyers, clergymen, sea captains, generals, presidents. For the sake of argument admitting this to be true, what then? Shall we block the way to any individual aspiration? But women are totally unfit for these places. Let them try, and their failure will settle the matter to their own satisfaction. There is not the slightest danger of a human being holding any position that he is incapable of attaining. We can not lay down a rule for all women. Because all women are not born with a genius for navigation, shall we say that one who is by skill and education able to take observations, who understands the chart and compass, the dangerous shores, currents, and latitudes, shall not, if she chooses, be a sea captain? Suppose we apply that rule to man. Because I can not stand on my head, shall we deny that right to all acrobats in our circuses? Because I can not make a steam engine, shall all other men be denied that right? Because all men can not stand on a platform and make a speech, shall I be denied the exercise of that right? Each individual has a sphere, and that sphere is the largest place that he or she can fill.

These women complain that they have been robbed of great and essential rights. They do not ask favors; they demand rights, the right to do whatever they have the capacity to accomplish, the right to dictate their own sphere of action, and to have a voice in the laws and rulers under which they live. Suppose I should go to vote, and some man should push me back and say, "You want to be Governor, don't you?" "No," I reply, "I want to exercise my God-given right to vote." Such a taunt as this would be no more insulting than those now cast at women, when they demand rights so unjustly denied.

I make no claim that woman is fit to be a member of Congress or President; all I ask for her is what I ask for the negro, a fair field. All will admit that woman has a right to herself, to her own powers of locomotion, to her own earnings, but how few are prepared to admit her right to the ballot. But all rights are held by a precarious tenure, if this one be denied. When women are the constituents of men who make and administer the laws, they will pay due consideration to their interests and not before. The right of suffrage is the great right that guarantees all others.

Mr. Smith set forth the education, the dignity, the power of self-government, and took his seat amid great applause.

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady; Anthony, Susan B.; Blatch, Harriot Stanton; Gage, Matilda. HISTORY OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE Trilogy – Part 1