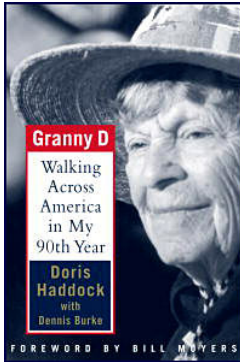


**Let Us Follow in Susan B.  
Anthony's Footsteps**

Speech given to Friends of Susan  
B. Anthony  
Hilton Conference Center at  
University of Florida, Gainesville  
26 August 2006



**When** I was a little girl my mother told me about Susan B. Anthony and other great people who served as an inspiration to her. My mother shocked our neighbors when she took some old tan-colored corduroy trousers that belonged to my father, cut off the legs just below the knees, put elastic around the bottoms, and said they were 'bloomers' and just perfect to wear when she was out in the fields picking raspberries. It was her way of taking a stand, of showing solidarity with Susan B. Anthony who died four years before I was born, but she was very much alive in our house. And she still is.

We honor certain people in history not so much for what they did during their turbulent lives, but for what they inspire us to do after they are gone. Women did not get the vote until sixteen years after Susan B. Anthony died. Others gained that victory for her and for us, but she gave them the courage and the tools they needed. Such heroes come back to us in our imaginations, so that we might think about our present problems and get their good advice.

So let us bring Susan B. back into the room, here and now. While we are sending out invitations, let us also

include Fanny Lou Hamer, Emma Goldman, Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Do we have some extra seats available? Let's also bring in Sojourner Truth, and Eleanor Roosevelt.

And there is nothing wrong with men, so let's bring in a few:

Martin Luther King, Abe Lincoln, Frederick Douglass and maybe Sam Adams, if he will bring the beverages.

Let Ben Franklin in, but watch out for him, ladies.

Tecumseh, Black Elk, Chief Cornstalk, Chief Joseph, welcome! Cesar Chavez, welcome!

We can bring these great souls among us whenever we need them. If they were here in body, and they asked us to update them on our political situation, what a meeting we would have! Would they be angry with us for letting things go so far?

So far that we now have elections as crooked as any backcountry dictatorship.

So far that our Congress no longer represents the people, but instead represents the corporations and the wealthy elite who fund their reelection campaigns and hire their spouses and their friends.

So far that the great middle class is dissolving, and the great divide between rich and poor once again grows and undermines all our progress and erodes the only soil democracy can ever stand upon.

So far that the very natural order of the planet is damaged, and our coasts, our

cities, our crops, our water and the living systems that we rely upon are at grave risk.

So far that the scrambling by corporations for resources, and the failure to develop sustainable systems, has set the people of the earth against each other in warfare in a time when weapons of mass killing may be obtained by anybody.

So far that our leaders have removed our very jobs and our livelihoods from our land, so that the wealthy may prosper further.

So far that our newspapers are now owned by the corporations, and so far that only millionaires have the ability to run for elections--and, even then, the votes of the people are not fairly counted.

So far that our culture has embraced cruelty as entertainment in countless television shows where real people are humiliated.

and

So far that our country now tortures people and that this torture is orchestrated from the highest office in the land.

Would the esteemed heroes of our past not be a little surprised that we have let thing go so far? That we have not made great progress in the years since their day? That we have not called upon them sooner before things got out of hand?

"You should have called," Tom Paine might grouse. I can see Sam Adams squirming back there as we make our report. He really was the guiding spirit of the American Revolution, you know, and I think he would wonder what kind of cowards we must be. He might offer to

send us a copy of a document he thinks might be of interest to us. It was a declaration they drafted back in the day.

Yes, we say, we have it in a safe place in Washington. We know it well.

"Really?" he might reply. "Have you read it lately? – particularly the second paragraph, that claims the right of the people to change governments when the old governments no longer represent them and protect their interests?"

Yes, Sam, we have read it. It goes on to say that such changes should not be made lightly, that there is much to say for maintaining a settled order and peace. It says that changes should only be made in extreme instances, as when a long string of abuses makes clear that a change is unavoidable.

But then, perhaps we have arrived at that point.

My friends, look around. Think ahead. What are we leaving to our children and our grandchildren? A healthy democracy? A strong and growing middle class? Peace and justice in the world that makes us all safer every day? A sustainable way of living that protects the earth upon which our grandchildren must depend for every breath, every drink of water, every bit of food? Have we done our jobs? Can we rest comfortably that things are in order? Have we engaged our courage and our intelligence to move America and the world in great and good directions?

Or has our comfortable cowardice doomed them to a world where they will suffer great catastrophes, and where the growing hunt for scapegoats launches endless witch hunts for torturing the poor, those of certain religions, certain genders, certain sexual orientations?

Will they curse us in their great cities, when they lose their Venice, their Amsterdam, their Manhattan, when they are taken by the deluge we have allowed?

I can see Sam Adams get up and tell us that it is simple enough to set things straight. Organize, educate, prepare to create a new order based upon our higher principles.

Someone among us informs him, however, that there may not be enough of us to do much; so many of the people are asleep, or caught up in angry lies sold to them, or too worried about surviving the month to think of the long future. We may not be many enough, we explain. There is disillusion abroad in the people, someone might say.

Even if that were not so, how hard it would be for us to admit to ourselves that this great nation - this long experiment in human fairness and equality had run its course - had come to its conclusion? Are we even capable of thinking that thought?

I can see the heroes of our history standing to inquire: "Is there not something you can do to preserve the nation we worked to hard to improve? Can it not be changed in ways, here and there, that will change its course back to a government of its people?"

Can we see Mr. Lincoln, sad, but thinking hard for us? His Civil War - a struggle between those who would be free to exploit and those who would be free of exploitation never quite ended and he sees that now. He sees that the rise of the corporations which grew as his war organized the industrial muscle of the nation became the monsters he worried they might become?

Restore the Republic? Is it possible?

Restore it not as it ever was, for it has always been motion itself, always been improvement itself, and imperfection itself.

But restore the vision, the dream of the Republic - of how people might wisely govern themselves and provide for future generations. How might we do that? How might we buy time for the awakened generation now rising in this nation and in the world?

How do we avoid wrong steps that might make things worse, for example by moving with violence and anger instead of intelligence and love?

I am happy to see that Martin Luther King, Jr. has brought his good friend with him to this room: Mr. Gandhi. They seem quite serious, compared to the others, who are understandably upset. But they seem to be serene. I dare not put words in their mouths but just seeing them here reminds us of what they did and how they did it.

Mr. Gandhi taught Reverend King that there are five steps to follow if we would change the order of things for the better.

First, he said we must know the truth of a situation. Study it. Bring in the experts. Understand the problem. Well, we have done that. We know how Congress has turned against the people. We know what is being done to the planet. We know what is happening with our elections and our once-vigilant press. We have the facts.

Second, he said we must make our reasonable demands to those who have the power to correct the problems. We have done that. I have walked many

miles myself in that work. We have all done much.

Third, we must engage the consciousness of the entire community, so that the struggle becomes a wide social discussion and concern, touching itself against the higher values of civilization. Have we done that? Are we trying?. God knows we've sent out enough e-mails - though most of it is to each other, and we have much to do to continue the awakening of the people.

Fourth, we must demonstrate the moral importance of the issue by sacrificing our own comfort, safety and reputations.

Gandhi suffered baton blows. King did, as well. They put themselves physically in the way of injustice, so that the moral bankruptcy of the diseased order would be plain for all to see. King and Gandhi understood the fact that, if sufficient sacrifice is applied, defeat is impossible.

That is why the fifth step is to accept victory graciously, allowing everyone to save face and continue as brothers and sisters.

We are in the time of the fourth step. We are in a time when the Republic must be restored and the past condition of the Republic improved as I have said but the path of the Republic - the common dream of the Republic that is the essence of America.

We must restore honestly-counted elections, and do whatever needs to be done in love and peace.

We must drag the moneychangers out of our election campaigns by instituting free advertising and public funding of our elections in every state and at the federal level.

We must morally indict, quite publicly, all

public officials who represent - not those who elect them but those who pay for their votes. This massive conflict of interest must cause us now to interrupt their slick speeches and slimy hearings with the dollar and cent facts of their conflicts. Call them out and take the consequences.

We must - with love, with non-violence and courage - stop the great polluters of our air and our water so that solar and other sustainable sources of energy can become the least painful option for those who would operate and invest in power facilities. We must stand in the way of this abuse of our children's future with our bodies.

We must look at our own ways of living and understand that the larger problems of our age are but the concentrated effects of what we do individually.

We must change.

We must change.

We need not move into a life of harsh simplicity, for the natural world and the local community and its economy can be a grander banquet than any provided ready-made by the corporations that now sell our lives to us ready-made, at a cost to the future we must no longer pay.

Finally, we will need leadership. The heroes of our past we thank. They fade now from the room and here we are, you and I. And among us we must find leaders, make leaders, follow leaders into this new and beautiful time.

Do not look to the e-mail generals and bloggers. Do not look to the ego-driven political candidates.

Look to the real leaders: The labor

leaders, organizers of the poor, student movement leaders. In your work, in your organizing, help them help the poor to survive, to be respected, and they will help you to move the nation.

What is our alternative? Are we fruit flies on the Titanic, powerless and doomed, but happy in the ship scraps? Or are we Americans?

Is Mr. Lincoln yet standing outside, not quite willing to go until he knows his Union is back on track, that it has found people of courage?

It is time to restore the Republic - the dream - the future we must set back in motion for our children's children, as our legacy to them?

Are you brave enough for it? Are you ready to make your meaningful contribution? Your sacrifice?

Are you thrilled to think that we are no less than the heroes whom we have summoned here for advice and courage, and that our adventure will require as much from us as theirs did from them?

Move your concerns to action now. The time has come.

Do it! Do it with love, with intelligence, with careful – and above all, wise leadership.

But do not delay.

## **Links:**

**Granny-D PBS Documentary circa Oct, 2006**  
<http://www.grannyddoc.com/>

**Granny-D Website**  
<http://www.grannyd.com/>

**Walking Across America in my 90<sup>th</sup> Year**  
<http://www.toadbooks.com/NASApp/store/ShoppingCart;jsessionid=aZKoK6uKY1fnQSCv2?s=shoppingcart&operation=add&isbn=0812966910>

<http://goodgovernment.org/book.htm>

**Susan B. Anthony Website:**  
<http://susanbanthony.net/>