



301 N. Orange Grove Blvd. Pasadena, CA 91103 (626) 449-3470 information@neighborhooduu.org

Growing up, I was a church nerd from a very young age. My favorite item of clothing for many years was my “Unitarian Universalist women” sweatshirt, which boasted the names of dozens of famous women who had shaped our tradition and the culture at large. As a budding feminist, I was so thrilled to see people I recognized on the list—the author Beatrix Potter of Peter Rabbit fame, Clara Barton, and, of course, the early suffragists Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, liberal theology and openness to women’s spiritual leadership produced a cadre of poets, writers, philosophers, musicians and well-known pioneer ministers. Our congregations served as places where women could build power which was not always available to them in the larger political and social landscape.

Throughout history, Unitarians, Universalists and Unitarian Universalists have played a significant role in advancing the rights of women, particularly women’s right to vote. Democratic principles are built into the fabric of our faith. Unitarianism has at its core a fundamental spiritual belief in the divine value of every person and an individual right of conscience, which motivates each person to advocate for oneself and on behalf of one’s neighbor. This notion was summed up by the words of abolitionist Unitarian Minister Theodore Parker: ‘Democracy means not “I am as good as you are,” but “You are as good as I am.”’ Susan B. Anthony was influenced by Parker, who encouraged her to see the work she did to end slavery and advocate for women’s right to vote as theologically rooted in the democratic movement to uplift the human spirit—“to bend the arc of the moral universe towards justice.” Here’s a snapshot of Susan B. Anthony’s life’s work:

In 1856, Anthony began working as an agent for the American Anti-Slavery Society. She spent years promoting the society’s cause up until the Civil War. After the Civil War was over, Anthony began focusing more on women’s rights. She and Elizabeth Cady Stanton established the American Equal Rights Association in 1866, calling for the same rights to be granted to all regardless of race or sex. In 1868, Anthony and Stanton also created and began producing *The Revolution*, a weekly publication that lobbied for women’s rights. The



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newspaper's motto was "Men their rights, and nothing more; women their rights, and nothing less." In 1869, Anthony and Stanton founded the National Woman Suffrage Association. Anthony was tireless in her efforts, giving speeches around the country to convince others to support a woman's right to vote. (for source material, click [here](#) and [here](#))

She even took matters into her own hands in 1872, when she voted illegally in the presidential election. Anthony was arrested for the crime, and she unsuccessfully fought the charges; she was fined \$100, which she never paid. "I shall never pay a dollar of your unjust penalty," she said—and she never did.

In her later years, Anthony never gave up on her fight for women's suffrage. In 1905, she met with President Theodore Roosevelt in Washington, D.C., to lobby for an amendment to give women the right to vote. However it wouldn't be until 14 years after Anthony's death — in 1920 — that the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving all adult women the right to vote, was passed. On November 2, 1920, more than 8 million American women voted.

The story of Susan B. Anthony is one we should not forget in this age where women's participation in democratic life is at an all-time high. Her steadfast commitment to the rights of women laid the groundwork for today's political landscape. In January of 2017, women's marches took to the streets of dozens of major United States cities. Thousands of women came together to bring a renewed focus on political organizing, which produced the incredible blue wave this November which brought more women into Congress than ever before. Not only that, but we now have a litany of new "firsts"—the youngest woman in Congress, the two first Native American Congresswomen, the first Muslim Congresswomen, the first Somali-American Congresswoman, the first Palestinian American Congresswoman, the first Ecuadorian American Congresswoman, the first openly bisexual Congresswoman. Many states made their own "firsts"—Massachusetts and Connecticut sent their first black Congresswomen, Minnesota sent its first openly lesbian Congresswoman. This list of firsts is the result of a long history of women's commitment to a democratic process that uplifts the human spirit by building grassroots political power. These women leaders are already facing



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great challenges. They are breaking barriers not simply with their identities, but by speaking openly about controversial issues that deserve free and public dialogue—climate change, sexual harassment, campaign finance reform, voter suppression, White Supremacy, and Israel/ Palestine.

We are coming up on the 100 year anniversary of women's suffrage. What have we learned in these 100 years, and what lessons are we still learning? While marked by incredible strides for progress and huge political achievements, those early years of the women's suffrage movement were plagued by in-fighting and struggles to advance justice that was truly intersectional for its time. While Susan B. Anthony began her advocacy to end slavery during the Civil War, her women's suffrage work became at times overly narrow and single-issue, and her political relationships, and arguably the larger Civil Rights movement, suffered as a result. Anthony was openly in disagreement with Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, who urged the movement for suffrage to include the suffrage for both black women and men. In 1851, Sojourner Truth famously delivered her speech in front of the Iowa women's convention, bravely asking her white sisters for inclusion in the suffrage struggle with her potent question "Ain't I a Woman?" The women's rights struggles to be fully inclusive of race, gender identity, class and religion are still very much present. When it came time for another women's march this year, accusations of anti-semitism and anti-black racism were so contentious that members of the Women's March key leadership parted ways and led separate demonstrations. Transgender women are still fighting for full inclusion in women's movement spaces. The fallout within the movement has prompted doubts and confusion which held many people at home with their pink hats in a drawer rather than participating fully in public marches and rallies.

As we look to today's landscape of contemporary feminist politics, the women's movement has built incredible power but continues to be plagued by persistent tensions which manifest around race and religion. A woman's voice is still a dangerous voice, one that by nature becomes political and politicized in public. Women in politics still have to fight for their voices to be considered fully representative of more than simply her identities. We



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see representative Ilhan Omar criticized for her comments about Israel and raising the question of “dual loyalty,” and yet as a Somali-American Muslim woman, visibly so as the first Congresswoman to wear a hijab, her voice is inherently suspect of having multiple loyalties. Ilhan has been publically vilified and falsely attacked by Republicans for having links to terrorist groups. In the same way that Sojourner Truth asked a convention of white women “Ain’t I a woman,” Ilhan and other “firsts” in Congress are asking if a Congresswoman can be American and also Somali-born? Can she be fully American, and also Muslim? Can she be fully American, and also black? Ilhan has publicly apologized for her comments, but the debate which arose from her speech about Israel moved Congress to pass a sweepingly inclusive resolution condemning hate speech, including Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Finalized at over 1,000 words, here is a short snapshot of what was resolved:

Whereas whether from the political right, center, or left, bigotry, discrimination, oppression, racism, and imputations of dual loyalty threaten American democracy and have no place in American political discourse; Whereas white supremacists in the United States have exploited and continue to exploit bigotry and weaponized hate for political gain, targeting traditionally persecuted peoples, including African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other people of color, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, the LGBTQ community, immigrants, and others with verbal attacks, incitement, and violence; Now, therefore, be it Resolved, That the House of Representatives—
encourages all public officials to confront the reality of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism, and other forms of bigotry, as well as historical struggles against them, to ensure that the United States will live up to the transcendent principles of tolerance, religious freedom, and equal protection as embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the first and 14th amendments to the Constitution.

E Pluribus Unum: out of many, one.



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From the most diverse Congress that has ever been assembled, comes a groundswell of diversity, begging to be unified into one voice. Within this patchwork of a resolution is the rich tapestry of women's voices, using their power to advance the rights of the whole. What will matter in the coming years of leadership is the priority of action over words. Can this affirmation translate into legislation which defends, protects and safeguards our nation, from a place of unity and not division?

As the world mourns with the Muslim community after the horrific massacre of Muslim worshipers in Christchurch, we witnessed women's political leadership in action. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, known before this terrible tragedy by making history with her youth and her recent childbirth while maintaining office, has been the face of true leadership. Her words of mourning were not merely performative gestures of compassion, but accompanied by bold unparalleled action. She quickly named the attacks for what they really were: terrorism. She called for a nationwide ban on assault rifles, to remove weapons designed for mass killing from the hands of bigots. She then visited the grieving families at a national refugee center, showing her respect by wearing a headscarf and offering to support funeral expenses. Her swift actions showed the nation the strength of women's leadership, and the exercise of democracy in action. While the actions of one politician can never bring back the lives of the loss, her actions have already brought healing and set in motion a different future.

Unitarian Suffragette and author of the Women's Bible Elizabeth Cady Stanton once said:

The best protection any woman can have... is courage.....

The moment we begin to fear the opinions of others and hesitate to tell the truth that is in us, and from motives of policy are silent when we should speak, the divine floods of light and life no longer flow into our souls. Every truth we see is ours to give the world, not to keep for ourselves alone, for in so doing we cheat humanity out of their rights and check our own development.

**Neighborhood Unitarian
Universalist Church**



She Persisted
Rev. Lissa Gundlach
March 17, 2019

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One hundred years after women's suffrage was won, lingering injustices still await the efforts of all people of good will and liberal faith and demand our unity. Our strength is not in our words, but in our courageous actions. Our success will be marked not by the performance of democracy, but by its practice. Persist, persist, persist.

May it be so, and amen.