

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS**  
**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK**  
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I am grateful and honored to be with you today as we celebrate the 100 anniversary of NY state woman suffrage, and the 98<sup>th</sup> birthday of the NY state League. I deeply respect your work to revitalize democracy through election law, ethics and lobbying reform and through thoughtful analysis take principled positions on environmental law, health care and women's issues. My Mom was a League member and I think I learned my passion for justice through her work.

But I must warn you. Full disclosure: I am a dangerous woman. No, seriously. I'm officially designated by the U.S. government as a dangerous woman. This is my FBI file, obtained through the Freedom of Information Act in the 1980's, which documents my activism in the anti-war and women's rights movement. I had never broken the law. I had simply been a patriotic citizen, following in the footsteps of my social justice ancestors opposing the government when it was wrong. Patriotism is not "my country right or wrong" it is "my country, right NOT wrong." This file contains a form signed by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover with the box marked potentially dangerous person checked. I have spent my life trying to live up to J. Edgar Hoover's expectations of me.

I tell you this because I hope that the information I'm going to give you is potentially dangerous. I'm sharing it. That is the potential. Whether or not it is dangerous depends upon what you do with it.

We're now well into a major state celebration this year, the 100th anniversary of women gaining the vote in New York, as you well know and the build-up to the celebration of the federal amendment in 2020 which guaranteed suffrage to women.

Celebrations of significant historical events need the real history of those historical events to be meaningful. That's pretty obvious, I know. But here's the problem. The history of woman suffrage that we know is straight-up fake news.

Let me give you a couple examples.

If I said "Women finally gained their political voice in this land in 1920" would you agree? Well, sorry, that's fake news. Real news: women in our own land, the area of New York, had political voice before Columbus! The Haudenosaunee or Iroquois confederacy was founded, according to the best scholarship, in 1142. From that moment to this one, the traditional clan mothers have nominated, held in office and removed, if they found it necessary, the chiefs. The women have this responsibility because the Mother of Nations, Gee-goon-sa-say was the first person to accept the message of peace when the peacemaker came. Her doing so brought about an end to wanton killing and suffering. The Haudenosaunee achieved this through what they call the power of the good mind. "We must believe," my Seneca friend and colleague Pete Jemison explains "that our enemies possess the power of reasoning and that we can talk with them." Perhaps a lesson for us today?

These women, the clan mothers, watch the boys of their extended family growing up and they look for one who watches out for others, doesn't put himself first, and has a thick skin – 7 spans thick, they say. Three hard and fast rules: the man cannot have committed a murder, a theft or abused a woman. You know how hard it is to explain to my Haudenosaunee women

friends why we have not removed Donald Trump, or why we let him ever get into his position? If he was a chief, he never would have been chosen by a clan mother. And he would have faced the consequences of his abuse of women. Some say a deposed chief became virtually invisible and the community shunned them.

This news is potentially dangerous. Women had political voice on this land before the arrival of the European settlers and lost it, only to regain it almost 800 years later. It disturbs the standard narrative, that history begins with white people. It begins to shake the foundations of what we think we know. The ground starts to shift. If we don't know this, what else don't we know?

Imagine that women have the right to choose all political representatives, removing from office anyone who doesn't address the wishes and needs of the people looking to the seventh generation ahead. Living in a world free from violence against them, women have the final say in matters of war and peace and have the absolute right to their own bodies. Economically independent, women are also responsible for planning the spiritual ceremonies.

This is not a dream. Haudenosaunee (traditional Iroquois) women have had this authority – and more -- since centuries before Christopher Columbus came to these shores.

Things for New York women were the polar opposite. Under New York State law, (and all states into the 19<sup>th</sup> century) women were considered dead in the law once they married, as you well know. Having no legal existence, she couldn't sue or be sued, serve on a jury, or, of course vote. She had no right to her property, or even her children. A husband could will away an unborn child. Marital rape was legal, as generally was beating your wife, as long as you didn't inflict permanent damage.

When women in New York State began to organize for their rights in 1848, they took their cue from the nearby native communities, where women lived in the world that non-native women dreamed. Haudenosaunee women fired the revolutionary vision of early feminists by providing a model of freedom. EuroAmerican women learned and were inspired by the decisive political power, control of their bodies and property, religious voice, custody of their children, satisfying work, and absence of rape and domestic violence women experienced in Haudenosaunee nations.

Ok, time for another fake suffrage news alert. Here's the news: Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton alone led the women's rights movement. Fake. There were three. The leadership of the National Woman Suffrage Association, trading leadership positions, were Anthony, Stanton and the one written-out of history: Matilda Joselyn Gage. Gage and Stanton were the two major theoreticians and writers (Anthony had a paralyzing writer's block). Gage and Stanton both had contact with, and their sense of possibility was shaped by their contact with their indigenous women neighbors in upstate New York. "Never was justice more perfect; never was civilization higher" Gage wrote about the Haudenosaunee. Stanton wrote: "The women were the great power among the clan, as everywhere else. They did not hesitate, when occasion required, 'to knock off the horns,' as it was technically called, from the head of a chief and send him back to the ranks of the warriors. The original nomination of the chiefs also always rested with the women." Lucretia Mott spent a month with Seneca women before the Seneca Falls convention, and watched them in political action.

About Gage: While she was equally important with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, she lost her place in history when she opposed the suffrage movement's later embracing of orthodox Christian women who wanted to destroy the wall of separation between

church and state set by the founding fathers, and create a Christian nation. The mother-in-law of L. Frank Baum, Gage was his intellectual mentor, the one who told him to write the Oz books, and the visionary behind the social justice themes in the 14 Oz books. Offering her home as a station on the Underground Railroad, Gage also exposed sex trafficking and the sexual abuse of children and women by priests in her 1893 classic, *Woman, Church and State*. Writing about the superior position of Haudenosaunee women, Matilda Joselyn Gage supported treaty rights and sovereignty. If that's not enough, here's the kicker: Gage was issued a Supreme Writ and had to defend herself in court for voting for a state school position in 1893, when women had only won the vote in local school board elections. She lost her case. Found guilty of voting illegally in New York State, the same year she was given an honorary adoption into the Wolf Clan of the Mohawk Nation, along with a name. She wrote her daughter that she might be given a position in the Council of Matrons, which would give her a political voice in her adopted native nation. Arrested for voting in her own state, she may have been given a political voice in her adopted Native nation.

Here is another countering of fake news. Indians are not past tense. Despite the brutal assimilation policy of the United States, Haudenosaunee women still maintain much of their authority today and are reclaiming all of it today. They understand the natural authority of women and we can learn from their modeling today, just as our foremothers did.

What's the effect on us of not knowing this? I'll speak personally. Taking the helicopter view, the biggest issue facing us today is that the very existence of life on this planet hangs in the balance. We of the Western tradition don't have a very good track record; in fact, we are the engineers barreling this train toward the brick wall of the end of all life on the planet. Knowing

there are folks around us who are still here, and still practicing their traditional ways of living in harmony with all life, we have mentors who can show us how to stop this train.

OK. Side trip ended. Back to suffrage. Fact or fake news: Women worked singly for the vote from 1848 to 1920 and were finally given it. Fake news on so many fronts that even Sean Spicer couldn't spin this one. Fake news #1: The issue of women's rights for non-native women didn't start in 1848; it was on the table from the time of white settlement. Propertied women voted sometimes in the colonies and they continued to vote in New Jersey until 1807. The suffragists said, we are not asking for a new right; we are asking for the restitution of the right to vote that our foremothers had. Abigail Adams warned John not to adopt the repressive Blackstone code of common law, or the ladies were "bound to foment a rebellion." Woman suffrage was brought up in Constitutional Conventions in New York before the 1848 Seneca Falls convention and the legislature finally passed a woman's property rights bill that had been proposed for over a decade in the spring of 1848, several months prior to the Seneca Falls convention.

Fake news #2. Women were given the vote. They were given nothing; they won it. And not alone. They had strong male allies, like Frederick Douglass who swayed the convention toward adopting woman suffrage at the 1848 convention. And Syracuse Unitarian minister Samuel J. May, who preached a dynamic woman's rights sermon three years before Seneca Falls in which he called for women to become more aggressive and men to become more Christ-like.

Fake news #3. Women worked singly for the vote. Real news: The vote was only one of many rights that 19<sup>th</sup> century suffragists demanded.

Let me give you just a couple examples: By the late 1850's the phrase "Equal pay for equal work" was old-hat in women's rights conventions. Women then made 50% of what men made. Today it's what? A little over 75%. That's a 25% increase in over 150 years. So do the math. Does it mean we wait 150 years to get pay equity? Makes you mad, doesn't it? If we think we just started talking about this in 1970, the injustice doesn't seem quite as bad does it? Ooh, dangerous historical fact.

Let's get tough. How about Reproductive justice? Certainly women weren't talking about that 150 years ago, or we would know about it, right? Fake fact. Here's the True Fact: Gage and Stanton demanded that every woman have the right to her body, to be "the absolute sovereign of herself," as Stanton said. A woman should have the right "to become a mother or not as her desire, judgment and conscience may dictate," contended Stanton. Gage said, "My blood always boils at advice from a man in regard to a family. That, at least, should be the province of woman alone. To say when and how often she chooses to go down into the valley of the shadow of death, to give the world another child, should be hers alone to say."

They also focused on the rights of the child, but in a very different way than the religious right today. They focused on the right of every child born to be wanted and chosen. No births forced by church or state. Every birth absolutely chosen voluntarily by the woman birthing. Hmm. Wonder if that might be a dangerous idea to plant in the minds of a roomful of women activists for justice.

Remember when I said in the beginning that this is a major celebration of women's rights. Did I say major? Sorry. That's fake news. Because women are marginalized. In 2012 the New York State legislature budgeted \$450,000 for events commemorating the War of 1812. In 2016 the New York State legislature budgeted \$500,000 for events commemorating the entry

of one-half the population into political life. And that's to oversee the celebrations from the state's in 2017 to the federal in 2020. That is the best they could come up with in their \$90 billion budget. We are almost as important as one single men's war.

We are eternally grateful for crumbs. Despite our marginalized funding over and over we get things done. We do it if it needs to be done and we do it on a shoestring. We are the bake sale queens.

There's a name for this. The Matilda Effect. Seriously. Robert K. Merton in 1968 came up with the title, 'Matthew Effect', based on Matthew 13:12 in the Bible, to describe science's non-merit based hierarchy. Why do the prizes go to those whose names are known, not necessarily the ones who create the breakthrough? Them what has, gets. Along came Margaret Rossiter, a Cornell scientist, who said, well, the opposite it also true. The women who create the breakthroughs are not recognized. Them what don't have, don't get. She named her phenomenon, The Matilda Effect after, guess who? Matilda Joslyn Gage, who wrote about women in history, made history and was written-out of history. The European Union picked this up, naming their master's in women's history The Matilda Program. And France has now named their gender equity curriculum Matilda. So our very own Matilda Joslyn Gage, written out of U. S. women's history, is now a household word in Europe. Full disclosure: I am the Founder and Director of the Matilda Joslyn Gage Center for Social Justice Dialogue in Fayetteville, New York, and the biographer of Gage. Probably should have told you that earlier. We're 20 minutes away – come visit.

Let's get out of Matilda Effect thinking. Let's think big. Let's think about what we could do with \$12,548,710.60 — the cost of one drone, a single MQ-9 Reaper unmanned



aircraft. The Air Force ordered 10 of them. Let's tell them to get by with 9. Or none. What could we do with \$12 and a half million dollars?

True news: Let's see what men do with their money in New York. I Love New York signs – 514 of them – were put up along Interstate 90 promoting agriculture and tourism. It turns out the signs violate federal highway rules, which no one apparently bothered to check before they spent \$8.1 million on them. The Federal Highway Administration threatened to cut \$1billion in transportation funding if the signs aren't taken down. It will cost another chunk of change to take them down.

Truth in History: You know what Nicholas Kristoff found when he studied international funding? Give the money to men and they spend it on hookers and booze. Give it to women and they spend it on education, health, and building the community. Upstate needs economic development. And the state government threw money at it. You know what we got when New York state gave money to men to develop upstate's economy? Felony charges of rigged bids, extortion and bribes. A \$15 million state-of-the-art film studio that sits vacant. \$90 million for a manufacturing facility whose construction may be shut down because of the corruption case. Give a fraction of that money to fund women's rights and we WILL develop upstate economically. And we won't end up in jail.

Let's start with sites: where it happened. I'm on the Governor's 14-member Woman Suffrage Centennial Commission and in our last meeting in Albany we learned that I love New York has a huge marketing budget to draw visitors from around the country to the birthplace of women's rights, right here in our area. But that's getting the cart before the horse. As Commission member Sen. Betty Little said, "What if we bring all these visitors to the suffrage houses and they're in a state of disrepair?" I ask further, "What if the lights aren't on?" Most of

our houses and sites operate on half a shoestring. We need to begin with the physical infrastructure of our story. Make sure it's sound. Fill the sites with interactive, state of the art exhibits and innovative programs that launch dialogues about the remaining issues of women's rights, the ones our foremothers began demanding, like economic and reproductive justice.

What's the reality: Because of Donald Trump's hiring freeze, Women's Rights National Historic Park in Seneca Falls was down to being open 3 days a week, the same number of days a week the Gage Center was open. OK, remember my Full Disclosure. I have a vested interest in this.

But Gage and Stanton's sites are not alone. There are so many projects out there already for 2017 to 2020, shoe stringing it along; trying to squeeze a little bit of funding through the small funding pots available. Throw an MQ-9 Reaper drone amount of money at them and see what they do.

History lies dormant in every village, town and county, like a Pandora's box, open that box and--watch out. Partner with teachers to work with students digging through newspapers to uncover the women's rights story in their town. Pay historical societies to mine their collections, those boxes of stuff nobody's had time to go through, and we'll uncover treasures, like the superb collection of woman suffrage posters in the Howland Stone Store Museum – and the piece of Susan B. Anthony's birthday cake they have!

Let's fund a grass roots, state-wide history project to get every community involved in discovering their stories, claim their part in this transformation of society. Let's repopulate history, bring it alive and share it.

2020 is coming up fast. Our own Sen. Gillibrand has introduced legislation to establish a commission to plan it. Already the turf war has begun. Who will own the centennial of woman suffrage nationally, who will take leadership?

Massachusetts can claim it – they held the first national woman’s rights convention, or Pennsylvania, the birthplace of democracy.

Let’s tell New York: we want to claim it. Not with War of 1812-funding, but with what-women-deserve funding.

We are the real birthplace of Democracy, on the shores of Onondaga Lake where the Five Haudenosaunee Nations before Columbus created the world’s oldest continuing democracy in the world, the model for our own government. And in upstate we have the birthplace of the second American revolution – when women finally became citizens of the United States.

We have the suffragists and women’s rights activists –the National Woman Suffrage Triumvirate: Anthony, Stanton and Gage – whose homes are equidistant from each other off 90 – (is that perfect for tourism?) We have the Civil War heroes Mary Walker and Harriet Tubman; the first ordained women ministers, Antoinette Brown Blackwell (irregularly ordained by the Congregationalists) and Olympia Brown (her ordination recognized by her denomination, the Unitarians). We have the richest landowner in the state of New York, Gerrit Smith, who used his wealth to fund every social justice cause in upstate New York, which was the hotbed of radical reform. We have Victoria Woodhull, that communist stockbroker (fact check me!) and Belva Lockwood, the first woman lawyer to plead a case before the Supreme Court, both of whom ran for President before women could vote.

Fake or real: These were respectable women who politely asked men to give them the right to vote. You’ve got this one. They were dangerous women who launched a tax protest on the 100 anniversary of the Boston Tea Party demanding no taxation without representation; they impeached the government for its treatment of women in 1876 during the centennial celebration and issued a Declaration of Rights of women; they protested at the unveiling of the Statue of

Liberty, calling it the greatest hypocrisy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that liberty was represented as a woman in a country where women did not have political liberty. They chained themselves to the White House and called out President Wilson for fighting for democracy across the ocean while denying it to women at home. We honor these women lightly by voting but we honor them deeply by picking up the issues they began, demanding full equality and self-determination in every part of our collective lives. And by returning our country on the path to democracy, as the League of Women Voters leads the way in demanding the citizen's right to know and participate in government.

Our foremothers worked to get constitution protection for the vote for 72 years. We picked up their issue and have worked for equal rights to be guaranteed to women in the constitution for 93 years and we still don't have an equal rights amendment! And to add insult to injury, the U.S. is the only democracy that has not ratified CEDAW, the International Bill of Rights for Women.

Will we enter 2020 an embarrassment in the eyes of the world because the U.S. arrogantly demands human rights from other countries while refusing to recognizing equal rights for women in our own country?

When New York suffragists demanded and won the right to vote in school elections in 1880, Governor Lucius Robinson vetoed the bill, declaring that *the God of Nature did not intend women for public life*. When he ran again for governor, the women resolved *that the same power should retire Mr. Robinson from public life*. They defeated him and the next governor promptly signed the bill.

Matilda Joslyn Gage, who led the fight, left us this message in 1880: *When men begin to fear the power of women, their voice and their influence, then we shall secure justice, but not*

*before. When we demonstrate our ability to kill off, or seriously injure a candidate, or hurt a party, then we shall receive "respectful consideration." . . . We must be recognized as aggressive.*

We are far too well-behaved. It's true, well-behaved women seldom make history. Let's stop being nice girls. Nice girls don't make history. Let's get dangerous. Let's be like our foremothers, the mass of angry, militant feminists that make men once again fear the power of women. Let's stop being well-behaved women. Let's kick us some ass and make us some history!

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