

THE BALLOT AND ME

The Negro's Part in Suffrage

An

Historical Sequence

by

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CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

NARRATOR	Contemporary
SAMUEL FRANCES**	George Washington's period
SOJOURNER TRUTH**	(1797-1883)
FREDERICK DOUGLASS**	(1817-1895)
JEFFERSON P. LONG	
JOSEPH H. RAINEY	
ROBERT O. DeLARGE	
ALONZO J. RAINER	
ROBERT B. ELLIOTT	
BENJAMIN S. TURNER	
JOHN R. LYNCH	
JAMES T. RAPIER	Representatives in Congress
JOSIAH T. WALLS	during Reconstruction 1869-1889
REICHARD H. CAIN**	
CHARLES E. WASH	
JOHN A. HYMAN	
JENE HARALSON	
ROBERT SMALES	
HIRAM R. REVELS	
BLANCHE K. BRUCE	Senators - 1870-1881 period
JOHN M. LANGSTON**	
THOMAS E. MILLER	
GEORGE W. MURRAY	
JAMES E. O'HARA	Representatives 1863-1877
HENRY P. CHEATHAM	
GEORGE H. WHITE	
BOOKER T. WASHINGTON**	At time of 1895 Atlanta speech

NOTE: Speaking parts are marked with asterisks**. All except Sojourner Truth may read speeches from rostrum, and even she may read her long speech, but should learn rest of dialogue. Frances has only one line. "And I voted."

THE BALLOT AND ME

SETTING: A rostrum
TIME: The present, with flashbacks
ACTION: A Narrator comes to the rostrum
and shouts four words very loudly
as if opening a Town Meeting.

NARRATOR: Ballot!
Suffrage!
Franchise!
Vote!

(NARRATOR BANGS HIS GAVEL)

The dictionary says:

"Ballot---the method of secret voting; originally
by means of small balls placed in an urn or box."

"Suffrage---a vote given by a member of a body,
state, or society, in assent to a proposition or
in favor of the election of a person."

"Franchise---the right of voting at public elections."

"Vote---an intimation that one approves or disapproves,
accepts or rejects, a proposal, motion, candidate for
office, or the like."

NARRATOR (cont'd): The right to cast a ballot, to exercise suffrage, to vote is one of the basic rights of citizens in a democracy---a democracy, that form of government in which control is vested in the people is ~~an~~ ~~as~~ ~~hole~~. The ballot is basic.

Negro Americans---you, me---are very much a part of this democracy. We're 15 million---and our vote counts. From the national to the local level, your vote counts. It counts in more and better jobs---in diplomatic posts abroad to local political patronage. It counts in education, in housing, in civil rights, in cleaner streets, in better garbage collection. The vote has value. Don't neglect your right to vote. Don't waste it. Don't forget it.

Maybe all of us would value the right of suffrage more if we stopped to look back a moment at what the struggle for the vote has cost. Back in the Middle Ages few people had control over their own lives, let alone over the land or the country. Kings and barons and chiefs and over-lords ran everything and everybody. Then came the Magna Carta in 1215 in England, and almost 400

NARRATOR (cont'd): years later the Bill of Rights, many of whose provisions were incorporated into our own Constitution in 1787 and into the American Bill of Rights in 1791. Some of these rights, we, the Negro people of America, are still trying to secure in full.

We came to these shores first as explorers--- with Cortez, with Balboa, with Columbus. But we did not migrate in large numbers. The majority of our ancestors were brought to the Americas by force as slaves, dating from 1619. Slaves, like serfs in Europe, could not vote. But very early in our history, after the colonies won their freedom from the British--- Crispus Attucks of Boston, a Negro, being the first man killed when resistance to the British started---free Negroes in the New England colonies voted. Some Negroes in our country have always voted from the very beginning of our United States, and fought to keep the vote and extend it to others. But sometimes it was a hard battle. You who have the vote here in New York, keep it, use it, and help others to get it.

After the Revolutionary War, free Negroes could vote anywhere, but in 1789 the Southern slave-holding states sensed danger in letting free Negroes vote, and began to disfranchise them. By 1834 no Negroes could vote in the

NARRATOR (cont'd): South, and some Northern states like Pennsylvania and Indiana denied them the ballot, too. But colored men in New York, could vote if they owned property and had lived here for three years. This man could vote.

(SAMUEL FRAUNCES ENTERS IN COLONIAL KNICKERS)

Samuel Fraunces. He was the owner of Fraunces Tavern at Broad and Pearl Streets in New York City. At his tavern George Washington often dined, and when Washington became President, he made Samuel Fraunces his chief steward.

FRAUNCES: And I ^{could} voted.

NARRATOR: Fraunces was a man of means, a solid citizen, interested in the affairs of the day. Free Negroes in New York then could vote.

(SUDDENLY THE SPOTLIGHT FOCUSES ON A BONNETED WOMAN SITTING IN THE AUDIENCE IN THE CORNER OF A PEW WHO QUICKLY SPEAKS UP LOUDLY. SHE IS SOJOURNER TRUTH)

SOJOURNER: Could I vote? I lived in New York.

NARRATOR: No, Sojourner Truth. You were a woman, and in those days only men could vote.

SOJOURNER: Which were wrong! I believed everybody should vote, black and white, men and women! And I said so.

NARRATOR: I know you said so. You went to the first women's suffrage meetings, and you joined with Abby Kelly and Lucretia Mott and Frances Gage, white women, in speaking not only for Negro freedom, but for the freedom of women. You were a runaway slave who made yourself free.

SOJOURNER: And I wanted to vote.

NARRATOR: When they wouldn't let you sit on the platform because you were a Negro at the National Woman's Suffrage Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1852, you sat where you are sitting now *in the audience.*

SOJOURNER: I did---until the going got hot, (SHE RISES) and the men speakers started baiting the women, and talking about the women is weak, not strong as men not smart as men, and they even have to be helped into carriages. (SHE COMES TO THE ROSTRUM) Then I just walked up on that platform, sir, and told them men: 'Nobody ever helped me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or give me any best place. Ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me. And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man--- when I could get it---and bear the lash as well--- and ain't I a woman? I has had five chillun and seen 'em most all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus

heard
(SOJOURNER): heard---and ain't I a woman? They talks about this thing in the head---intellect. What's that got to do with women's rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint and yourn holds a quart, wouldn't ye men be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full? If the first woman God made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, I guess all us women together ought to be able to turn it back and get it right side up again. And now that they is asking to do it, the mens better let 'em."

(SHE RETURNS TO HER PEW)

NARRATOR: But it was almost three-quarters of a century before the country got around to giving you the vote, Sojourner Truth, before the 19th Amendment granting women's suffrage was passed.

SOJOURNER: It were finally passed---and about time, too! I took my freedom, but I didn't live long enough to vote.

NARRATOR: Freedom! That was the first thing most Negroes had to get. Before the Civil War most of us were slaves. But some Negroes, even in the South, had never been slaves. Some were born free, some were given their freedom, and some ran away to freedom in the North. Among the great runaways was Frederick Douglass who escaped from a Maryland

(NARRATOR:) plantation in 1838, and devoted his life to fighting for freedom for all, and for full citizenship rights for all. In his middle age:

(DOUGLASS ENTERS, WHITE HAired,
WHITE BEARD, DIGNIFIED, IMPOSING)

After Emancipation, after the Civil War was over, he made many speeches concerning the franchise.

X DOUGLASS:

I see no chance of bettering the condition of the freedman until he shall cease to be merely a freedman and shall become a citizen. I insist that there is no safety for him or anybody else in America outside the American government; to guard, protect, and maintain his liberty the freedman should have the ballot; the liberties of the American people are depended upon the ballot-box, the jury-box, and the cartridge-box.

NARRATOR:

And it took the cartridge-box to protect the rights of the freed Negroes in the early days of the Reconstruction. In 1867 Congress divided the South into five military districts, proclaimed universal suffrage, and placed federal marshalls at the polls to protect the Negro's newly granted right to vote. This right was made permanent by the passage in 1870 of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. 700,000 Negroes were added to the voting rolls of the South, and many city and state offices were filled by the freedman. With Negroes in state legislatures,

9(NARRATOR:) new state constitutions were drawn up with provisions for free public schools for all, civil rights for all, and no property qualifications for voting---the most progressive acts of laws the South had ever known, many of them remaining on the books until today.

During the Reconstruction the Southern states sent 14 Negro Representatives and 2 Senators of color to Washington. The first Representative was from Georgia, elected in 1869, Jefferson P. Long.

(LONG ENTERS TO STAND BESIDE NARRATOR.

IN TURN, AS EACH MAN'S NAME IS CALLED, EACH ENTERS, ALTERNATELY AT LEFT OR RIGHT, TO FORM TWO LINES ON EACH SIDE OF THE PLATFORM)

Then in 1871 South Carolina elected four Negro Congressmen, Joseph H. Rainey.

(ENTER RAINEY)

Robert O. DeLarge.

(ENTER DeLARGE)

Alonzo J. Rainer.

(ENTER RAINER)

And Robert B. Elliott.

(ENTER ELLIOTT)

That same year Alabama elected Benjamin S. Turner.

(ENTER TURNER)

In 1873 Mississippi elected John R. Lynch.

(ENTER LYNCH)

(NARRATOR:) Alabama elected James T. Rapier.

(ENTER RAPIER)

Florida elected Josiah T. Walls.

(ENTER WALLS)

And South Carolina elected Richard H. Cain.

(ENTER GAIN)

In 1875 Louisiana sent Charles E. Nash to Washington.

(ENTER NASH)

That same year to the House of Representatives North Carolina elected John A. Hyman.

(ENTER HYMAN)

Alabama elected Jene Haralson.

(ENTER HARALSON)

And South Carolina elected Robert Smalls

(ENTER SMALLS)

The only Negro Senators in American history came at the very end of the Reconstruction period. The first, elected in 1870, was Hiram R. Revels.

(ENTER REVELS)

And the second in 1875 was Blanche K. Bruce.

(ENTER BRUCE)

Most of these men were as well qualified and as well educated as white officials of the times, and some better. Some were graduates of Oberlin or other leading Northern colleges. Elliott had studied abroad. Of those who served in Congress,

(NARRATOR:) the Republican leader, James G. Blaine, said, "They were as a rule studious, earnest, ambitious men, whose public conduct would be honorable to any race." Typical of the Negroes who served in the House of Representatives at Washington was Richard H. Cain, A.M.E. minister of South Carolina. Cain made a stirring speech in Congress regarding Civil Rights.

(CAIN STEPS FORWARD AND SPEAKS)

+ CAIN: I do not ask any legislation for the colored people of this country that is not applied to white people. All that we ask is equal laws, equal legislation, and equal rights throughout the length and breadth of this land. We do not come here begging for our rights. We come here clothed in the garb of American citizenship. We come demanding our rights in the name of justice, equity, and law, in the name of our children, in the name of our country."

NARRATOR: During the Reconstruction and in lesser degrees thereafter, many Negroes were active in state governments. For example, between 1868 and 1896 Louisiana elected 32 state senators of color and 95 representatives. P. B. S. Pinchback was Lieutenant-Governor and, in 1873, after the removal of the white incumbent, Pinchback became Acting-Governor of Louisiana. In Florida, Jonathan Gibbs, a Dartmouth graduate, became Secretary of State. And in South Carolina, the London-educated Francis L. Cardozo was from 1872 to 1876 the State Treasurer.

But when federal troops were removed from the South in 1877 and Negro voters no longer had protection at the polls, reaction set in. The Ku Klux Klan began to ride. Voters were intimidated, tarred and feathered, whipped, shot down. Black Codes were passed denying civil rights, and some states originated Grandfather Clauses which said that unless you or your parents had voted before the Civil War, you could not vote now --- which meant freedmen were not eligible. Negro political power faded in the South. For a brief period during the rise of the Populist Party of farmers and poor whites, both Democrats and Republicans again sought the Negro vote to keep ~~the~~ ^{the Populists} from becoming powerful. Then, from 1883 to 1897, six Negroes were elected as Representatives to Washington. They were:

from Virginia, John M. Langston

(ENTER LANGSTON)

from South Carolina, Thomas E. Miller and George W. Murray:

(ENTER MILLER AND MURRAY)

And from North Carolina, James E. O'Hara, Henry P. Cheatham:

(ENTER O'HARA AND CHEATHAM)

And the last of the Southern Representatives, George H. White of North Carolina, elected in 1897.

(ENTER WHITE)

NARRATOR (Ctd) When White completed his term in 1901, it was 27 years before another Negro went to Congress.

One of the outstanding colored politicians was John M. Langston, Congressman from Virginia, founder of the Law School at Howard University, and first president of Virginia State College for Negroes. Widely known as a speaker, Langston, in an address at Saratoga, New York, in 1876, concerning the use of the ballot, said some wise things.

(LANGSTON COMES FORWARD)

LANGSTON: Perhaps never in the history of our country was there a time when the duty of the American voter to consider well and wisely what vote to cast, what party to bring to power and support in power, was so imperative. In discharging our duty in this regard, while we are fearless, we should be impartial and just. Let us not make haste to condemn unduly, nor to accept without wise discrimination the claim of any candidate or party. We are called upon as intelligent and earnest, patriotic and devoted citizens, to determine, each for himself, how votes given for the Democratic or Republican party, will tend to sustain the dignity and power of the Government, and conserve our free institutions under the Constitution. Each of us is held responsible to his own conscience, posterity and God for the wisdom, or folly displayed in exercising our suffrage -- the most sacred, as it is the most valuable right which we possess on American soil.

NARRATOR: Disfranchised in the South by state laws, trickery, or terror, no more Negro Congressmen came from ^{Dixie} ~~there~~ after Langston and White. But quietly behind the scenes, a practical-minded man of enormous political power emerged, consulted by national leaders North and South on all problems relating to the Negro,

NARRATOR (Ctd) ^{He was} ~~was~~ a friend of Presidents. That man was the great founder of Tuskegee Institute, Booker T. Washington.

(ENTER WASHINGTON)

WASHINGTON: Friends, the individual ^{of} ~~the~~ race that owns the property, pays the taxes, possesses the intelligence and substantial character, is the one which is going to exercise the greatest control in government, whether he lives in the North or whether he lives in the South. There is no defense or security for any of us except in the highest intelligence and development of all. Education must be digested and assimilated in order to make it significant. The science, the art, the literature that fails to reach down and bring ~~up~~ the humblest up to the enjoyment of the fullest blessings of our government is weak, no matter how costly the buildings or apparatus used, or how modern the methods of instruction employed. The study of arithmetic that does not result in making men conscientious in receiving and counting the ballots of their fellow men is faulty.

NARRATOR: Unfortunately, the unreconstructed rebels of the South continued to deny the right to vote, or failed to count, the ballots of Negro citizens at the turn of the century. When Charles H. White left Congress in 1901, it was more than a quarter of a century before we had there another national representative. In 1928 Oscar DePriest was elected to Congress from the First Illinois District -- being the first Northern Negro ever to sit in the national legislature. As the great migrations from the South increased after each war, and the black populations of our Northern industrial cities grew, so Negro political power grew. Municipal judges, city councilmen, county officials, and state legislators of color from New York to Los Angeles became not uncommon. From Illinois, Arthur W. Mitchell

NARRATOR (Ctd.) FOLLOWED De Priest to Congress, then came William L. Dawson serving now. From New York Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. was elected in 1945, and most recently ^{Charles C.} Diggs of Detroit became the 27th man of color to sit in Congress. There should be more — more Powells, Dawsons, and Diggses in Washington. ^{James} More Watsons and Bessie Buchanans in state governments, ^{as in New York,} More Hulan Jacks in more American city halls, ^{as in Manhattan,} and more judges such as Rivers, Paige, Stevens, Dickens and Jane Bolin on the benches of municipalities across the nation. And we all — you, me — must use our vote wisely and use it well to elect to all sorts of offices, particularly the national offices, men who will bring to bear ^{on} all public officials ~~our~~ our democratic forces to not only open up — but to protect — the ballot boxes of the South ~~again~~ — so that Negro citizens may vote in Mississippi and Georgia and Alabama and South Carolina again — and again send to Congress from the South black men —

(A WOMAN CRIES FROM THE AUDIENCE)

SOJOURNER: And black women!

(SOJOURNER TRUTH RISES AND JOINS THE OTHERS ON THE PLATFORM)

NARRATOR: Yes, and black women — representatives of the strength and calibre of those who served so nobly and so well in the dark and dangerous days of Reconstruction. Fellow citizens, your ballot has great value. Use it! When election time comes, to paraphrase by extension a young Negro leader in the South today, the Reverend Martin Luther King of Alabama, "If you can't fly, run! If you can't run, walk! If you can't walk, crawl — to the polls and vote!"

(VARIOUS ONES CRY IN TURN THE WORD "VOTE!")

FRAUNCES: Vote!
SOJOURNER: Vote!
DOUGLASS: Vote!
CAIN: Vote!
LANGSTON: Vote!
WASHINGTON: Vote!
NARRATOR: Vote!

(ALL THE CHARACTERS ON THE PLATFORM COME FORWARD,
POINT THEIR FINGERS AT THE AUDIENCE, AND CRY IN
UNISON SEVERAL TIMES THE WORD, "VOTE!")

ALL TOGETHER: Vote! Vote! Vote! Vote! Vote...VOTE!

(BLACKOUT.... LIGHTS UP AGAIN FOR BOWS. THEN ALL THE
CHARACTERS LEAVE THE PLATFORM EXCEPT THE NARRATOR
WHO CONTINUES WITH THE CONTEMPORARY PART OF THE
PROGRAM, INTRODUCING GUESTS FROM THE VARIOUS
POLITICAL PARTIES PRESENT)