

## Speech given by Dr. Ellen B. Ferguson at the Great Mass Meeting at the Salt Lake Theatre on March 6, 1886

“Mrs. President, my Sisters and Fellow Citizens:  
“We are assembled here to-day in the capacity of a mass meeting, to lift our voices in protest against certain wrongs that are being perpetrated in this community, at the close of the nineteenth century, wrongs that would shame civilization two hundred years ago.

It is indeed a shame that in free America, among a people where men pride themselves upon being the defenders and protectors of woman, women are compelled to meet and protest against insult and indignity heaped upon them in the courts. Strange it is that while in New York Americans are erecting a statue to liberty that shall lift up the beacon light of freedom to all the nations of the earth, that here in one of the dependencies 20 of this republic women are led to prison and subjected to insult for no crime. Strange it is that here in Utah the purest, noblest and best of America’s citizens should be compelled to make public protest against injury and injustice received from those who have sworn to uphold and maintain the laws—but no less strange than true.

“Sixteen years ago the Legislative Assembly of Utah conferred upon the women of this Territory the right of franchise. Various causes led to this. There had been a great deal of agitation in the past over the ‘Mormon’ problem which was just then looming up for discussion, and among the plans proposed for its solution was that of giving the ballot to the women, in the belief that by it they would burst the chains in which they were held, and free themselves from the temporal and spiritual bondage of their masters—the ‘Mormon’ priesthood. In accordance with this spirit, and acting upon suggestions made in Congress for this purpose, our own Legislature was the first to place the ballot in the hands of woman, feeling assured that she would use it in the cause of justice virtue, purity and truth. The women of Utah were enfranchised and have held the ballot as a sacred trust ever since, and I defy any of our bitterest enemies to bring one single, solitary proof that any woman in Utah has cast an unrighteous ballot or voted for those whose lives or characters were stained with infamy or dishonor. We look for purity and integrity in our public officers and as far as we know them we have voted only for such men.

“Now the government of the United States, whose protecting care is particularly exercised over the Territories, they not being considered as having arrived at their majority, is seeking to deprive the women of this Territory of the right of suffrage, not because we have committed crime; not because we have used it unjustly—no—but



because we believe that our conscience should dictate our religious faith, and that as we have faith in God and in His revelations, so believe and so we act.

“There are various reasons urged for this measure. One that we most frequently hear mentioned is that the women of Utah vote under coercion and priestly dictation. This I most positively deny. At the same time do we hear these would-be protectors of the freedom of the ballot say anything about the priestly dictation to which the whole Catholic population of the United States is subject, where men instead of women vote according to the counsel and advice of priestly authority? No; this is altogether a different matter. They know and the master under whose instructions they are acting knows too well that here is to be the last great conflict between truth and error; between the religion of God and the religion of Lucifer. The women of Utah, the majority of them, belong to the kingdom of God, and because they exercise their rights and privileges so as to assist in building up that kingdom, for that reason they are to be deprived of them...

“In the interest of morality, so called, they put the honorable polygamist in prison, while the seducer walks the streets in the blaze of noonday unwhipped of justice. The man who destroys innocent girls, who dishonors his neighbor’s wife or daughter has no fear of a deputy marshal. They do not trouble such men; they are too much alike. ‘Birds of a feather will flock together.’ While they are perpetrating their acts of infamy, no deputy peeps through their windows to watch them, but if an honorable ‘Mormon’ associates with his family, spotters and spies are employed to watch his house, to skulk round his premises, or even to roost in the trees near by, to find out which wife he is with. “Are these the acts of American officials—of a free and enlightened government in the latter part of the nineteenth century? They are, I am sorry to say it to their shame.

“I am not a native born citizen of America, and years before I trod these shores I thought that the oppressed of every nation whether Jew or Gentile could here find a refuge and an asylum. So can every one except a ‘Mormon.’

“History repeats itself. We are doing to-day what our forefathers did one hundred and twenty-six years ago—protesting against injustice and oppression. When they found the tyranny of the English government could no longer be endured they met and protested against the wrongs they suffered and demanded a redress of grievances. As the English government paid no attention to their protest, they fought and gained their point by force of arms; and now, after controlling the government for more than a century, their descendants turn round, and by acts of persecution and wrong-doing compel us to meet as they had done, and petition for a redress of our grievances, and protest against cruel wrongs perpetrated in our midst, especially against the injustice of depriving us of the only means we have of expressing our opinions, and of showing to the world that we desire to uphold righteousness and virtue.

“The ballot in the hand of woman is a mighty power, and our enemies know it, and this is why they seek to take it from us. Silent as it is it voices to the whole world that women have never used it in the interest of vice. May the day never dawn that shall see the women of Utah without the ballot, but may that time speedily arrive when all the women of this nation will be alike blessed with us.

“It is time that the nation should call a halt. Let them remember ‘vox populi, vox Dei.’ When the people of any Territory unite in demanding redress for wrongs they are suffering, Congress would do well to listen without delay. There will come a day when those who are engaged in this cruel crusade against the Latter-day Saints will bitterly repent of their unjustifiable treatment of innocent and unoffending women. There is a tribunal before which

we must all appear to account for the deeds done in the body, when even-handed and exact justice will be meted out to all. I know not what excuse our enemies will then offer for their treatment of us as a people, certainly not the excuse of ignorance. I cannot see that

any justification is possible for them. We have not infringed upon the rights or liberties of any one. Our covenants belong not to the world, but are inseparable from our religion, and on these grounds are not subject to the control of the civil law.

“Madame Roland, one of the most illustrious victims of the French Revolution, exclaimed, ‘O Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name!’ And we may well say, O Religion and Morality, what crimes are committed in your names! The Constitution expressly states that ‘no religious test shall be required from any one holding a position of profit or trust under the United States,’ but in defiance and violation of this article a religious test oath has been formulated in Idaho, and is proposed to be enacted here, that debars any person from voting or exercising any rights of citizenship who simply believes in the doctrines of the ‘Mormon’ Church, and aliens are refused naturalization on the same grounds. 22 Will these test oaths move us? No. We know what the aim of our enemies is. It is to sweep ‘Mormonism’ from the face of the earth; but the work is of God, and they cannot do it.”