



## FEMINOMENON Feminist Music Through History

Monday, February 17, 2025

5:30pm refreshments, 6:00pm program

Artworks

105 N. Michigan Avenue, Big Rapids

Featuring singer/songwriter Kelley Sacra's &  
Dr. Tracy Busch, historian & curator of FSU Museum of Social Objects.  
Learn about the Suffragist Anthems, Women's Liberation 60's-'70's Ballads  
and today's genre-defying artists  
Beyoncé - Taylor Swift - Chappell Roan.



Celebrate the powerful and transformative impact of feminist music!

Any Questions please contact: [aaubigrapids@gmail.com](mailto:aaubigrapids@gmail.com)





**Advocating for women and girls since 1881 and into the future!**

**Mission**  
 To advance gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy.

**Vision**  
 Equity for all.

**Values**  
 Nonpartisan, Fact-based, Principled, Inclusive and Intersectional.

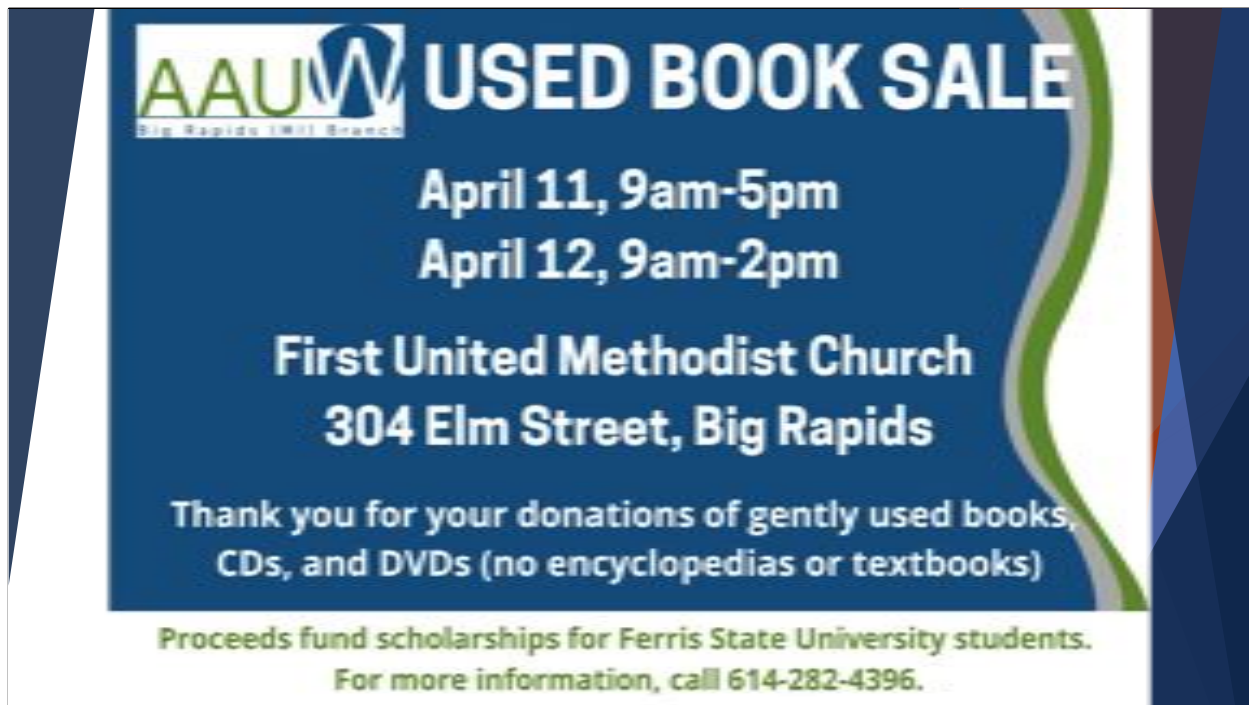
**OUR FOCUS**

**Economic Security**  
 We've been working to narrow the gender pay gap, which greets women as soon as they enter the workforce and widens throughout their working lives. Unequal wages stand in the way of a woman's ability to pay off student debt, build wealth and save for a secure retirement.

**Education**  
 We champion equal opportunities in education. Though more than 60% of college graduates are women, they face barriers and biases throughout their schooling. From pre-school to graduate school, girls and women are unconsciously steered into certain fields of studies and away from lucrative ones, such as in STEM.

**Advocacy**  
 Our members, supporters and staff work on local, state and federal levels to support laws and policies that enable women's success. Our work in statehouses and the U.S. Capitol has helped pass hundreds of pieces of legislation. Our Legal Advocacy team has supported plaintiffs in more than 125 gender equity legal cases.

Before I get started, I want to give a 30-second promo for AAUW. AAUW started in 1881 as the American Association of University Women and is the oldest women's advocacy organization in the U.S. The mission of the organization is gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy. AAUW is a major funder, if not the largest funder, of graduate fellowships and grants for women in the United States.

A promotional poster for a used book sale. The background is dark blue with a white and green wavy graphic on the right side. The text is in white and green. At the top left is the AAUW logo with 'Big Rapids/Wil Branch' underneath. To the right of the logo is the text 'USED BOOK SALE'. Below that are the dates and times: 'April 11, 9am-5pm' and 'April 12, 9am-2pm'. The location is 'First United Methodist Church, 304 Elm Street, Big Rapids'. A thank you message follows: 'Thank you for your donations of gently used books, CDs, and DVDs (no encyclopedias or textbooks)'. At the bottom, it says 'Proceeds fund scholarships for Ferris State University students. For more information, call 614-282-4396.'

**AAUW** **USED BOOK SALE**  
Big Rapids/Wil Branch

April 11, 9am-5pm  
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The Big Rapids branch was chartered in 1946. Members of our chapter were among the leaders of the effort to have Anna Howard Shaw inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame. In recent years, we've sponsored a panel discussion of women in local government and the last candidate forum for the Big Rapids City Commission. We also award scholarships for nontraditional Ferris students through our annual used book sale, which is coming up in April.



Tonight's presentation is going to take you on a whirlwind tour of music representing the major waves on feminism. The Suffrage era is considered to be the first wave of feminism. The 1848 Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, NY, is regarded as the start of the Suffrage period, and era ends with ratification of the 19th amendment granting women the right to vote in 1920. I'm going to concentrate on music from the decade before ratification.

Here we have some images of women's suffrage bands. I particularly enjoy all the brass instruments and drums, since I imagine they were not seen as the most feminine of instruments during this time period. At left we have the line up for the National American Woman Suffrage Association parade to the U.S. Capitol on March 3, 1913. Notice that the marchers are organized by country, state, occupation, and there are at least four bands. The iconic Inez Millholland on her horse is at the front of the procession. Anna Howard Shaw, who was President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1913, is also near the front. The photo at top right is one of the bands in the parade. The photo of the smiling woman with the horn is also from 1913, but not from this parade. The bottom image is from Hackensack, NJ and assumed to be from between 1914 and 1920.



In general, songs from the suffrage movement can be categorized as parlor music in the form of sheet music to be played on the piano and sung in the home and rally songs. We're going to start with parlor music. Before we look at some examples of pro-suffrage music, let me note that there was also plenty of anti-suffrage music. These are images of sheet music from the 1910s. The anti-suffrage rose was an emblem of the Women's Anti-Suffrage Association. You'll notice the use of the term "suffragette," which generally had a more derogatory and mocking connotation than "suffragist." Many of these images reinforce men's fears that allowing women to vote would just be the start of a complete reversal of traditional gender roles. We see women abandoning their homes and children to take up picket signs and go marching, a mother who abandons her child to the questionable care of her husband to go cast her vote, a woman who is dressed as a man; and in the last image, we see a man who is made small and completely dominated by his wife now that she has become a suffragette. In addition to mocking the suffrage movement, this song also makes fun of Italian immigrants. The husband has to give all of his money to his wife and sleep alone with his monkey, and since his Margarette has "become-a-da-Suffragette," he can no longer "eat da sphagett."



A little lad with curly hair  
Stood by his father's knee  
You could see that he was crying  
He was sad as he could be

He sobbed and said, "I feel so blue"  
As tears ran down his cheeks  
"Oh father, where is mother  
She has not been home for weeks"

His pa said, "Lad, the tale is sad  
She's down at Suffrage Hall  
She's gone to fight for women's rights  
Why, there's the bugle call"

Hear the tramp of their feet  
As they march down the street  
Gee, those girls look sweet  
They're all dressed up so neat

Here are the lyrics to another song about a woman who has abandoned her child for the cause of suffrage.



This is a collection of sheet music covers of pro-suffrage songs. Many of these covers lack illustrations but notice that the covers that do have pictures include patriotic images and smiling mothers who have not abandoned their babies. Also note that the images all feature White women. The White leaders of the suffrage movement pretty much excluded Women of Color, and the lyrics of some of the pro-suffrage music is tainted with elements we would consider racist today. Using language we would no longer find acceptable, the lyrics of “Is it Right?” ask if it is right that Black, Chinese, and Japanese men as well as “the tramp and the old whiskey bloat” can vote and the poor, presumably White widow who runs a small, heavily mortgaged farm cannot.

**The Woman's Battle Song**  
*By Mrs. C. C. Johnson. (Boston: D. D. Heath & Co., 1875.)*

The image shows a two-page musical score for the song "The Woman's Battle Song". The score is written in a standard musical notation with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are printed below the musical staves. The first page contains the first two verses, and the second page contains the third and fourth verses. The lyrics are as follows:

**Verse 1:**  
 We are the women of a Christian nation,  
 We are the women of a Christian nation,  
 We are the women of a Christian nation,  
 We are the women of a Christian nation.

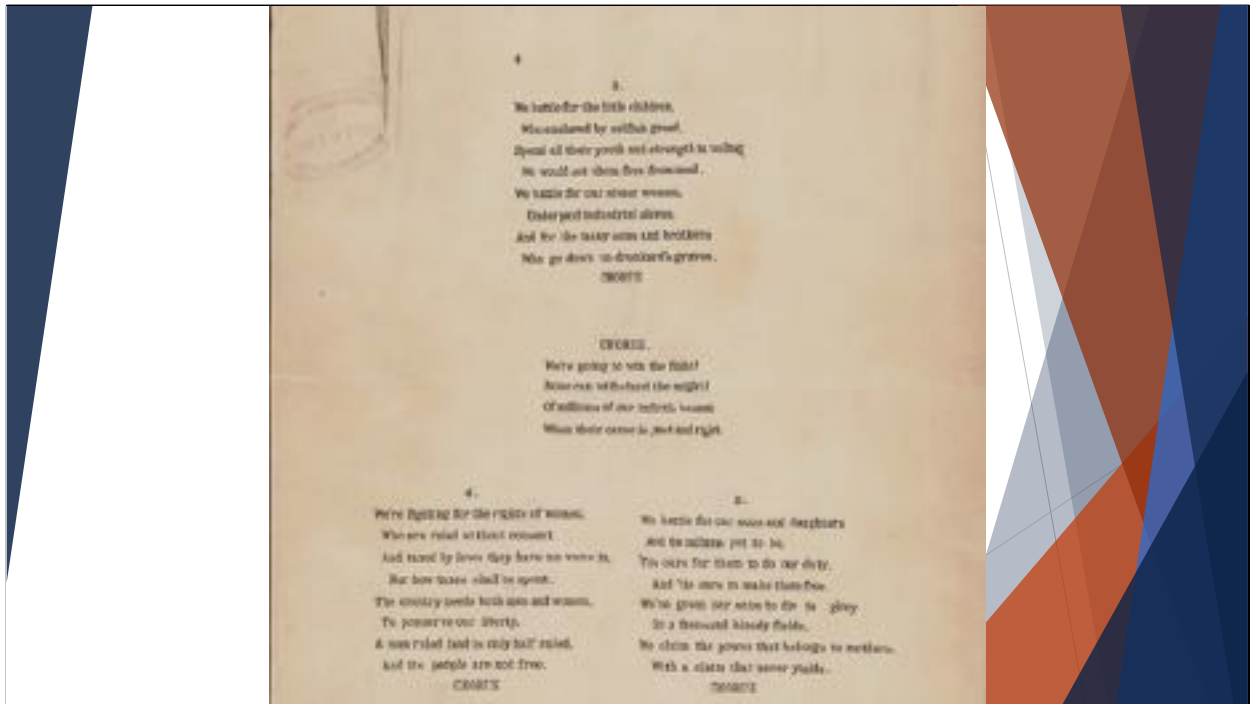
**Verse 2:**  
 We are the women of a Christian nation,  
 We are the women of a Christian nation,  
 We are the women of a Christian nation,  
 We are the women of a Christian nation.

**Verse 3:**  
 We are the women of a Christian nation,  
 We are the women of a Christian nation,  
 We are the women of a Christian nation,  
 We are the women of a Christian nation.

**Verse 4:**  
 We are the women of a Christian nation,  
 We are the women of a Christian nation,  
 We are the women of a Christian nation,  
 We are the women of a Christian nation.

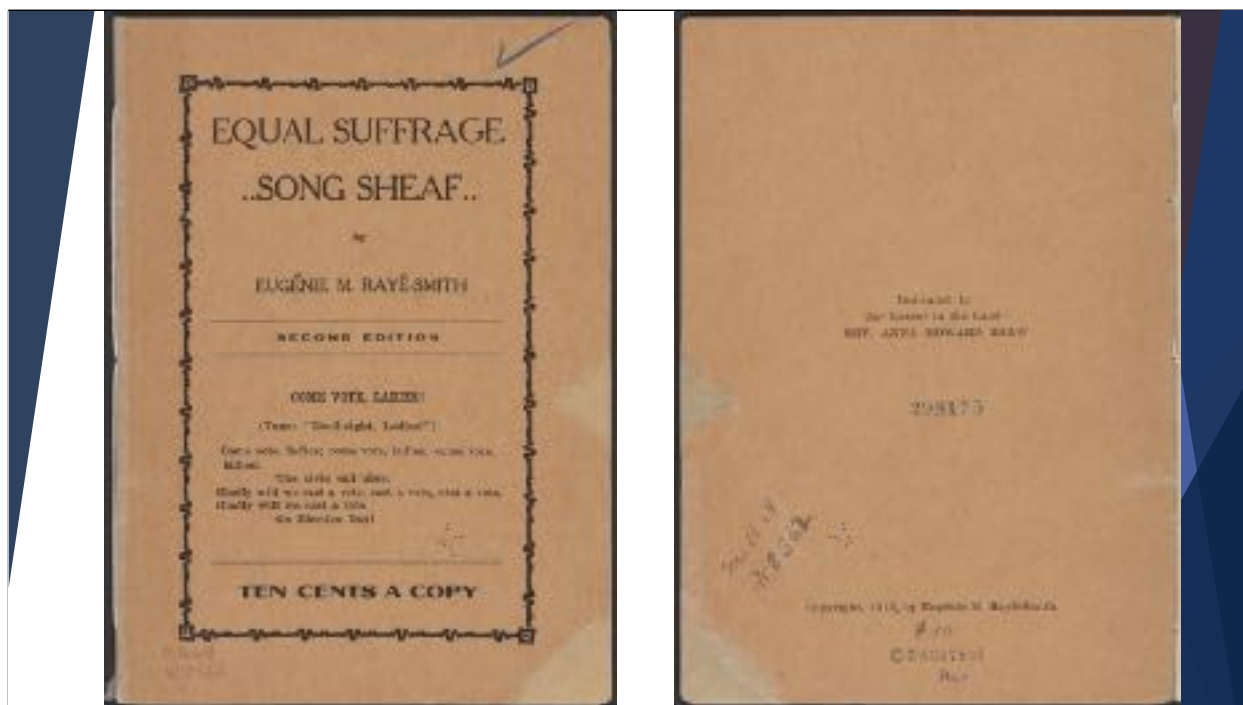
Here are the lyrics to another pro-suffrage song. Like many such songs, this piece refers to suffrage as a just and righteous cause and a right that women of a Christian nation should be entitled to enjoy. Note the bias against “pagan” Chinese in verse 2.



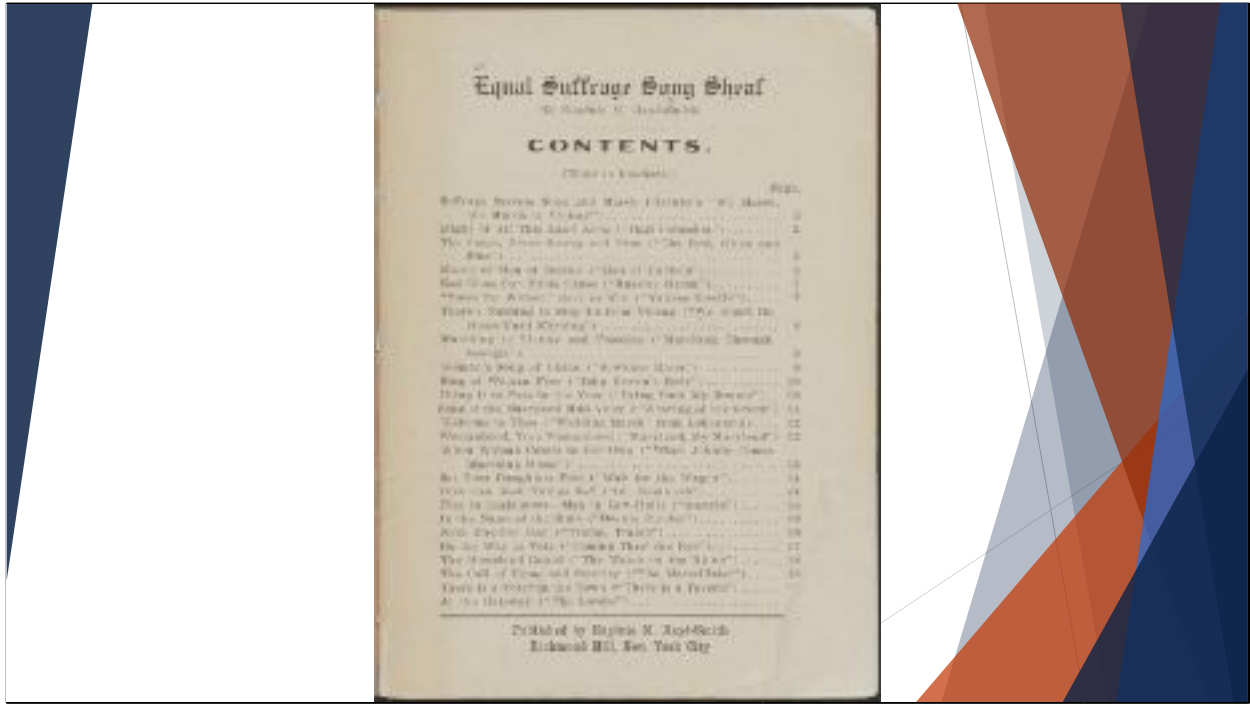


The subsequent verses include many of the arguments of the suffrage movement: Women are fighting on behalf of child laborers, working women, and the temperance on the behalf of “the many sons and brothers who go down to drunkard’s graves.” Suffragists are fighting for women who are taxed without representation and for their own sons and daughters, and they claim the power of mothers who have lost sons in battle.

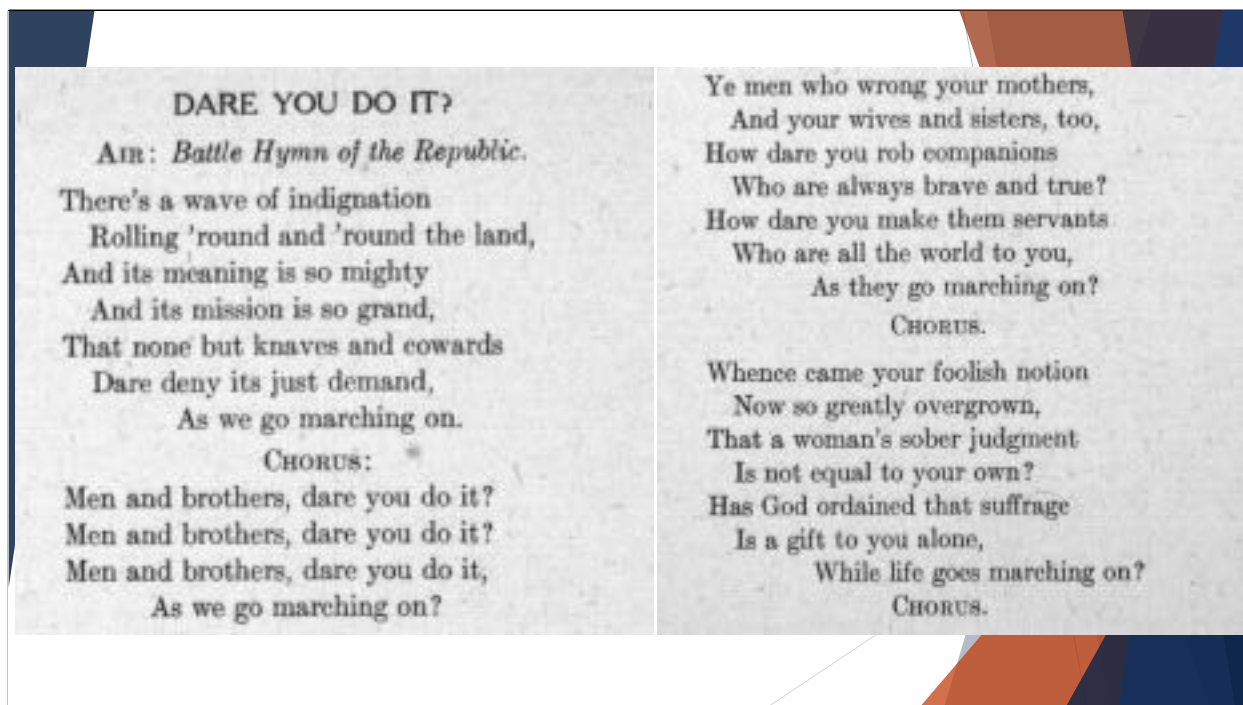




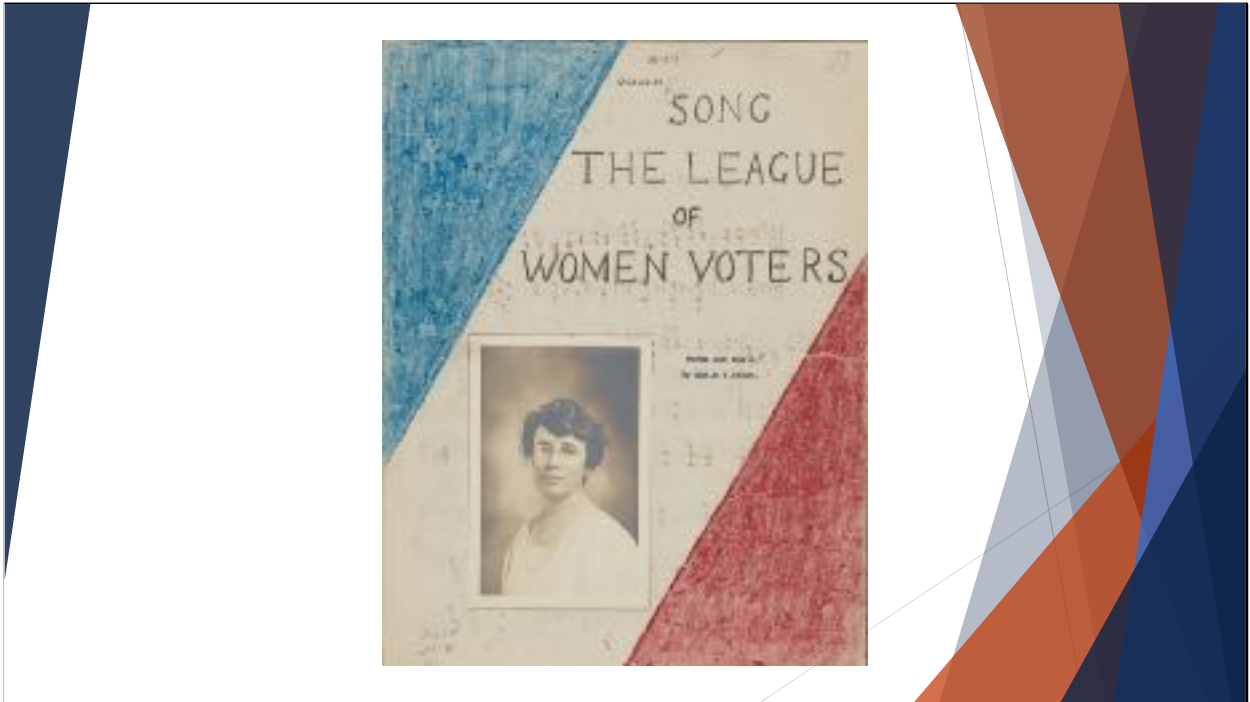
Next we're going to look at some of the rally songs of the movement. These songs were often collected into songbooks that could be used at rallies or meetings. The Equal Suffrage Song Sheaf was one of the most popular, and I've included an image of the dedication page since it references Anna Howard Shaw, who was president of the National Woman Suffrage Association at the time this songbook was published.



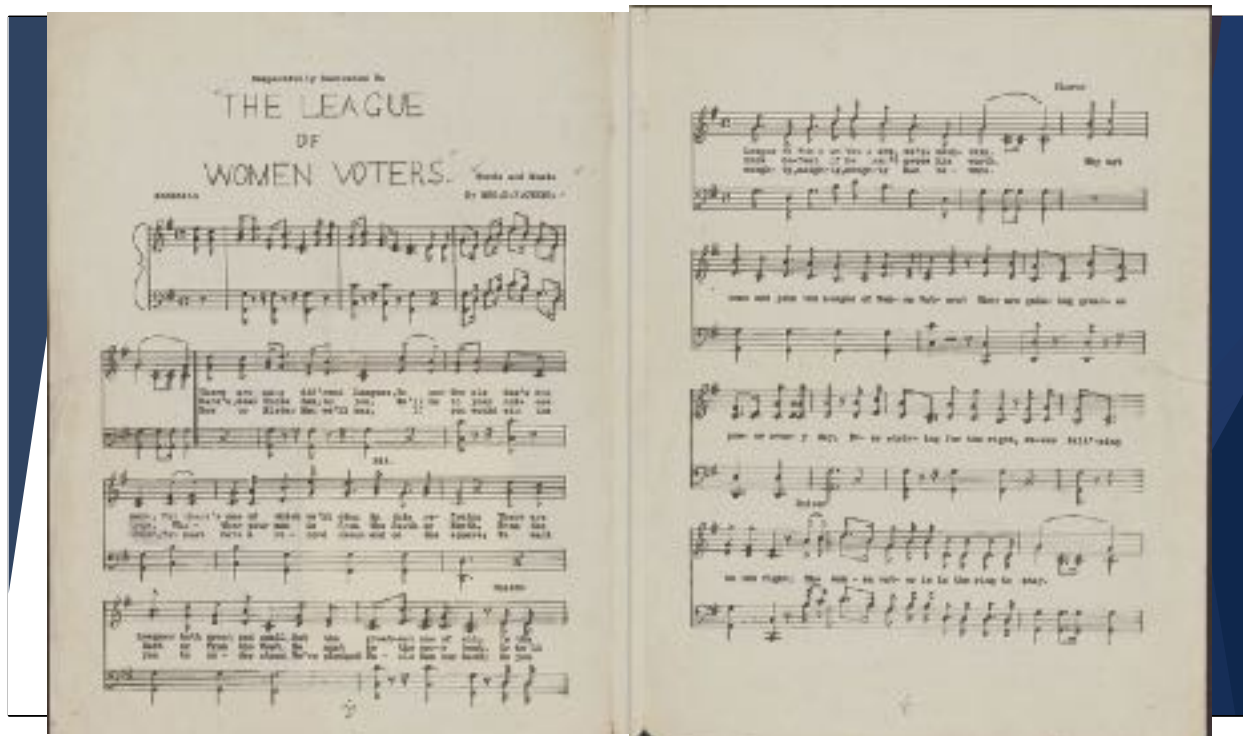
The radio and recording industries were both in their infancy at the time the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment was ratified in 1920, so most people wouldn't have learned suffrage music by listening to the radio or a phonograph player. Rally songs typically involved adding new suffrage lyrics to well-known tunes such as church hymns, folk songs, and military tunes.



The tune “John Brown’s Body,” or “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” has been a perennial favorite for use as a protest song for multiple causes, and I found four-five sets of suffrage lyrics to this tune. I was going to have us do this song as a singalong, but in the interests of time, I’ll just ask you to imagine what these lyrics would sound like set to this familiar tunr.



Six months before the 19th amendment was ratified in 1920, the suffragists of the National American Woman Suffrage Association formed The League of Women Voters to educate 20 million newly enfranchised women carry out their responsibilities as voters. I'm assuming this music was published about that time to celebrate the new League.



We're now at the end of the suffrage era, and I must say that suffrage era lyrics were not usually great poetry. I particularly like the last verse of this song warning male politicians that women voters will be checking that they "have a record clean and on the square" so "naughty, naughty men beware."

Susan is going to take over now and spring forward 40-50 years to discuss the music of second wave feminism.

**Sources:**

Daughters of Freedom

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/music.mussm-sm1871-02334/?sp=2&st=image&r=-0.35,-0.005,1.8,1.42,0>

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<https://www.loc.gov/resource/mussuffrage.mussuffrage-100010/?sp=1&st=image&r=-0.466,-0.004,1.921,1.515,0>

Ethel Smith: Composer & Suffragette

<https://www.londonmuseum.org.uk/collections/london-stories/ethel-smyth-composer-suffragette/>

“The March of the Women”

<https://blackbird-archival.vcu.edu/v17n1/gallery/1917-suffrage/e-smyth.shtml>

Music in the Women's Suffrage Movement

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/womens-suffrage-sheet-music/articles-and-essays/music-in-the-womens-suffrage-movement/>

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<https://www.loc.gov/item/lnas.200197395/>

The Suffrage Song Book

<https://www.kansasmemory.gov/item/204064>

Woman Suffrage Memorabilia: Sheet Music

<http://womansuffragememorabilia.com/woman-suffrage-memorabilia/sheet-music/>

Women's Suffrage in Sheet Music

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/womens-suffrage-sheet-music/articles-and-essays/highlighted-sheet-music-selections/>

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