

[Mrs. Sarah Clay Bennett speaks before the U.S. Senate Committee on Woman Suffrage](#)

Discussion published by Randolph Hollingsworth on Wednesday, October 26, 2016

Along with other members of the [National American Woman Suffrage Association](#), Sallie Clay Bennett spoke before the U.S. Senate Committee on Woman Suffrage arguing that all U.S. women already had the right to vote. The group of activists before the Senate committee hoped that Congress would declare this status to be true and halt the states from denying women their right to vote. Here is the [transcript from her speech](#) (from the LOC's American Memory's [Votes for Women: Selections from the National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection, 1848-1921](#)):

"Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen: Black men and women voted in the State of New Jersey for about eighteen years when our National Government was first organized, New Jersey having entered the Union with a constitution adopted in 1776, and did not prescribe either whiteness or masculineness as a qualification for voting. So it is impossible for any person to hold that the right to vote for members of the United States House of Representatives is derived from our National Constitution, without admitting that black men and women are qualified to vote for members of Congress by the people of the United States, when they said in the first article of the Constitution that the House of Representatives shall be composed of members chosen every second year by the people of the several States. But in 1870, after the fourteenth amendment was adopted, which declared that no State should make or enforce any law for the abridgment of the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States, black men were authorized to vote at all elections at which they were otherwise qualified to vote, and Congress passed an act to punish any person who shall try to prevent black men from voting for members of Congress. So when Virginia Minor came before the judges of the Supreme Court of the United States asking to be protected equally with black men in voting at public elections in the State of Missouri under that clause of the fourteenth amendment which said: "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States," the judges of the Supreme Court were placed between the two horns of this dilemma--either to hold with the Congressmen of 1870 that the right to vote for the elective officers of the United States was derived from the Constitution and laws of the States, and thus declare Federal suffrage nonexistent, or to hold that persons were qualified to vote for the elective officers of the United States by the people of the United States, and thus declare the Congressional act of 1870 to be unconstitutional. In their Virginia Minor decision the judges of the Supreme Court took hold of the first horn of the dilemma, first declaring that women had been citizens of the United States from the foundation of our National Government and entitled to "all the privileges and immunities of citizens of the United States," and that the fourteenth amendment prohibited the State of which she is a citizen from abridging any of her privileges and immunities as a citizen of the United States."

Resource:

"Remarks of Mrs. Sarah Clay Bennett, of Kentucky." Hearing before the U.S. Senate Committee on Woman Suffrage, February 21, 1894 (53rd Congress, 2nd session, no. 121),

Citation: Randolph Hollingsworth. *Mrs. Sarah Clay Bennett speaks before the U.S. Senate Committee on Woman Suffrage*. H-Kentucky. 10-26-2016. <https://networks.h-net.org/node/2289/discussions/150264/mrs-sarah-clay-bennett-speaks-us-senate-committee-woman-suffrage>

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<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbnawsa.n8349>.

Related date:
February 21, 1894