



“This Is a Symbol of My Power,” She Said

By Caitlin Shayda Jones and Jonathan Menon

Published: May 20, 2012

Permalink: <http://239days.com/2012/05/20/this-is-a-symbol-of-my-power-she-said/>.

JOAN OF ARC’S SILVER SUIT SHONE IN THE LATE AFTERNOON SUN, but you couldn’t hear her milk-white horse’s hooves click against the pavement unless you were standing right next to her. Instead, the whistles of traffic officers blew, marching bands played, and cheers rose from the crowd, packed thick along the sidewalk.

The women’s suffrage march in New York had taken place two weeks ago, on May 5, 1912, while ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was in Chicago. At five o’clock sharp, an army of women and men began to march from Washington Square three miles up Fifth Avenue to Carnegie Hall at 57th Street. There were 10,000 of them, including 618 men. It was a parade “the like of which New York never knew before,” said the *New York Times*. Nearly 400,000 people emptied themselves out of the surrounding buildings to look on.

This afternoon, May 20, 1912, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stood before a woman’s suffrage meeting at the Metropolitan Temple in New York, at Seventh Avenue and 47th Street. “It has been objected by some,” he told the audience, “that woman is not equally capable with man and that she is by creation deficient. This is pure imagination. The difference in capability between man and woman is due entirely to opportunity and education.”

“In some countries,” he said, “men went so far as to consider women to belong to a sphere other than the human sphere. . . . God has proved that this is a great mistake.”

Women on horseback trotted around the east side of the Washington Arch to begin the march. Marie Stewart was the one dressed as Joan of Arc. Behind her 100 women carried painted green soapboxes. Instead of handing out literature to the spectators and risking a mess of discarded paper in their wake, they were going to place themselves strategically among the crowd, and to speak in support of the vote on their soapboxes.

Harriet Stanton Blatch, the organizer of the march, had published a “Final Word to Marchers” the day before: “March with head erect,” she told the women.

“Eyes to the front. Remember, you march for the mightiest reform the world has ever seen.”

“In past ages,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told his audience, “noted women have stepped into the field of action and surpassed men in their accomplishments. Among them was Zenobia, Queen of the East, whose capitol was Palmyra. . . . Her husband died and she assumed the royal diadem in his stead. . . . Afterward she conquered Syria, subdued Egypt and founded a most wonderful kingdom with the utmost skill and thoroughness.”

As the first of the marchers left the square, more women joined their ranks along the way. Miss Albert Hill’s contingent entered at the north end of Washington Square. She had just come from Albany where she has been trying to convince unwilling state senators to support the women’s vote. Professional women — doctors, lawyers, writers, musicians, artists, librarians, lecturers, and social workers — merged with the army at East 9th Street. They met 2,000 industrial workers coming from the other direction along 9th — milliners, dressmakers, shirtwaist makers, laundresses, and domestic workers. Businesswomen joined one block up: managers, buyers, tea room proprietors, secretaries, bookkeepers, stenographers, and telephone operators. Then the suffrage pioneers turned left into the marching masses at the corner where the Church of the Ascension stood at Fifth Avenue and 10th Street. The Reverend Antoinette Brown Blackwell walked with them, America’s first female ordained minister. At the age of eighty-seven she was the oldest woman in the march. Little Harriet Blaten de Forrest was the youngest: she was just two years old, pushed in a stroller by her mother.

“The Roman Empire sent a tremendous army against her,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continued. When the army reached Syria, Zenobia led her soldiers into the field herself. “On the day of battle she bedecked herself with variegated garments, placed a crown upon her head, mounted a horse and rode forth sword in hand.”

Frederick S. Greene, leader of the men’s division of the parade, said that last year, in 1911, they had marched “amid a storm of hissing and missiles.” His group “had a wet towel thrown at us from one of the windows opposite the Waldorf.” But this year things were different. Even Inspector McClusky, head of the NYPD detective’s bureau, tightened his belt at 23rd Street: “It’s about time to give them the vote,” he said. “I wish to God they would. I’d be with ‘em.”

Zenobia destroyed the Roman army. Finally, the Emperor Aurelian marched into Syria himself with 200,000 men. He besieged Palmyra for two years, finally

cutting off the city's water supply. Zenobia, faced with her city's starvation, was forced to surrender.

Aurelian, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said, marched Zenobia into Rome with a golden chain around her neck. A procession of elephants, lions, tigers, birds, and monkeys preceded her, and on her head she wore a crown. "Verily, I glory in being a woman and in having withstood the Roman Empire," she told the crowd with queenly dignity. "And this chain about my neck is a sign not of humiliation but of glorification."

"This is a symbol of my power," she said, "not of my defeat."

The sun began to set around 7:30 p.m. on May 5. The women brought out torches, turning the street into a river of fire. When they finally convened at Carnegie Hall, piece-by-piece, their line formed an audience.

Joan of Arc dismounted her horse and blended in with the crowd.

How to Cite this Article

The formatting below is from the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th Edition. For other academic citation styles, please adapt accordingly. Since the **239 Days** site and its contents may be updated from time to time, we recommend you include a “last modified” date, which is provided at the top of both the web and PDF versions of this article.

FOOTNOTE / ENDNOTE:

Caitlin Shayda Jones and Jonathan Menon, “‘This Is a Symbol of My Power,’ She Said,” *239 Days in America*, ed. Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett, May 20, 2012, <http://239days.com/2012/05/20/this-is-a-symbol-of-my-power-she-said/>.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Jones, Caitlin Shayda, and Jonathan Menon. “‘This Is a Symbol of My Power,’ She Said.” *239 Days in America*. Edited by Jonathan Menon and Robert Sockett. May 20, 2012. <http://239days.com/2012/05/20/this-is-a-symbol-of-my-power-she-said/>.

HOW TO CITE THE *239 Days in America* WEBSITE IN A BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Menon, Jonathan, and Robert Sockett, eds. *239 Days in America*. <http://239days.com/>.

Terms of Use

239 Days in America™ and the 239Days.com website is licensed under a Creative Commons 3.0 License as specified at this link: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. **This PDF file** is shared with you with the following additional terms:

YOU MAY quote from this PDF file with proper attribution. Your citation must include the author's name and the **239 Days in America** project's name. You may download and print this PDF file, and you may share individual PDF files in print or electronic form.

Although we want to make our work easy to share, we also wish to maintain the unity and integrity of **239 Days in America** as a whole. Therefore,

YOU MAY NOT republish or rebroadcast our PDF files in a public forum—such as by uploading them to a blog, app, or other web property, publishing them in print form, or distributing them widely using electronic means—without our prior written consent. We invite you to discuss such opportunities with us by contacting the Editor-In-Chief at editor@239Days.com. Otherwise, please share the permalinks displayed at the top of each file.

YOU MAY NOT extract pages from this file, recombine this PDF file with other documents, assemble its contents into any free or paid product, app, ebook, collection, compilation, or archive, nor remove this page of Terms. The **Adobe PDF**™ security features employed in this document have been selected to prevent such use. You may not circumvent these security features in any way.