I feel I am something of a novice upon this platform. Born of a race whose inheritance has been outrage and wrong. Most of my life had been spent in battling against those wrongs. But I did not feel as keenly as others that I had these rights, in common with other women, which are now demanded.

About two years ago I stood within the shadows of my home. A great sorrow had fallen upon my life. My husband had died suddenly, leaving me a widow, with four children. I tried to keep my children together but my husband died in debt; and before he had been in his grave three months, the administrator had swept the very milk crocks and washtubs from my hands. I was a farmer’s wife and made butter for the market. But what could I do, when they had swept all away?

Had I died instead of my husband, how different would have been the result! By this time he would have had another wife, it is likely; and no administrator would have gone into his house, broken up his home, and sold his bed, and taken away his means of support.

I say, then, that justice is not fulfilled so long as woman is unequal before the law. We are all bound up together in one great bundle of humanity, and society cannot trample on the weakest and feeblest of its members without receiving the curse in its own soul. You tried that in the case of the negro. You pressed him down for two centuries; and in so doing you crippled the moral strength and paralyzed the spiritual energies of the white men of the country. When the hands of the Black were fettered, white men were deprived of the liberty of speech and the freedom of the press. Society cannot afford to neglect the enlightenment of any class of its members.

I do not believe that giving the woman the ballot is immediately going to cure all the ills of life. I do not believe that white women are dewdrops exhaled from the skies. I think, that like men, they can be divided into three classes: the good,
the bad, and the indifferent. The good will vote according to their convictions and principles; the bad as dictated by prejudice or malice; and the indifferent will vote on the strongest side of the question, the winning party.

You white women speak here of rights and I speak of wrongs. I, as a colored woman, have had in this country an education which has made me feel as if I were in the situation of Ishmael, my hand against every man and every man’s hand against me. Let me go tomorrow morning and take my seat in one of your streetcars—I do not know that they will do it in New York, but they will in Philadelphia—and the conductor will put his hand and stop the car rather than let me ride.

In advocating the cause of the colored man, since the Dred Scott decision, I have sometimes said I thought the nation had touched bottom. But let me tell you there is a depth of infamy lower than that. It is when the nation, standing upon the threshold of a great peril, reached out to its hands a feeble race, and asked that the race help it, and when the peril was over, said “You are good enough for soldiers but not good enough for citizens.”

We have a woman in our country who has received the name of Moses, not by lying about it, but by acting it out. A woman who has gone down to the Egypt of slavery and brought out hundreds of our people into liberty. The last time I saw that woman, her hands were swollen. That woman, who was brave enough and secretive enough to act as a scout for the American Army, had her hands swollen from the conflict with a brutal conductor who undertook to eject her from her place. That woman, whose courage and bravery won a recognition from our army and from every Black man in this country, is excluded from every thoroughfare of travel. So talk of giving women the ballot box. Go on! It is a normal school and the white women of this country need it. While there exists this brutal element in society which tramples upon the feeble and treads down the weak, I tell you that if there is any class of people who need to be lifted out of their airy nothings and selfishness, it is the white women of America.