

Gender and Equity, Political and Economic Justice in Gertrude Stein's Opera Libretto *The Mother of Us All*

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Women's right to vote in state and federal elections was recognized by the United States only in 1920. By then women's voting rights had been established in Russia and more than twenty other nations. British women were first allowed to vote in national elections in 1928, Frenchwomen in 1944. In the US Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) was the best-known leader in the fight for 'woman suffrage' (as the goal of the movement was called). Her career inspired the Virgil Thomson/Gertrude Stein opera *The Mother of Us All*. A performance by the New York City Opera Company I saw in March 2000 at Lincoln Center suggested research that led to this paper. So I should say at once that the point of this paper is not to praise that praiseworthy performance, or even to praise the way that, scoring brilliantly to her libretto, Virgil Thomson's music brings out Stein's rhythms and her pointed wit, turning to advantage Stein's eccentric style. Rather, here I will consider aspects of technique and theme in Stein's libretto in a historical perspective.

Stein's libretto for *The Mother of Us All* centers on the character Stein casts as Susan B. Susan B. is Stein's interpretation of the historical Susan B. Anthony who fought for woman suffrage: figuring her, the libretto is necessarily concerned with gender and equity. In what follows, I discuss definitions of gender and equity; they are both old terms whose meanings have changed (and not changed) over the centuries in significant ways. I discuss Stein's background and literary style and her collaboration with the composer Virgil Thomson, together with excerpts from the opera where characters sing of matters to do with social justice. Also, I show a role the American Declaration of Independence played in the foundation of the Women's Rights Movement. This combined evidence, I propose, supports a judgment that the overall theme of Stein's libretto is the need for political and economic justice, the one being necessary to the other, and both being necessary to social justice.

The term Equity.

Stein does not use the word "equity" in *The Mother of Us All*; she uses the related term "right", many times, as we see below. When Stein speaks of a woman's right to suffrage, she refers to a principle in equity. Human rights (such as the rights to life and liberty) that are inherent and civil rights (such as the right to vote) that are legislated are thus distinguishable,

but discrimination in the conferral of civil rights may violate inherent human right, such as liberty and its social expression in equality, as when the civil right of suffrage is allowed to certain classes of citizen but not to others. Human rights inhere in human beings. Other factors such as gender, color, religion, etc., do not limit that inherence, that is, cannot limit inborn natural rights, even if these are not recognized.

In its ordinary every-day sense, equity means 'what is right and fair', as it meant in the 14th century (OED: v.1374 Chaucer Boeth. iv. vi. 144 Amonges these thinges sitteth the heye makere...to don equite:.. (among these things sits the haymaker... to do what is right). As to legal contexts medieval/Renaissance/post-Glossatorial jurisprudence built on the work of Roman jurists. "*Aequitas*, or equity, adjusts the absolute formulas of law to particular cases" states a line of development, for instance, from before Gratian (c1150) and Aquinas (c1250) to Lucas de Penna (c.1350) and after (Ullman, 40ff). The OED cites current usage, saying equity is, in jurisprudence, "The recourse to general principles of justice (the *naturalis Aequitas* of Roman jurists) to correct or supplement the provisions of the law". *The American Heritage Dictionary* says equity is "Justice applied in circumstances covered by law yet influenced by principles of ethics and fairness". In a broad manner, equity may be invoked when a particular stated or statute law or a practice occurring in a framework of such law does not express a basic principle that precedes, and is a basis of, expressed or positive law. Relations between justice, rights, equity, natural law, and enacted or positive law are a complex historical study mostly beyond considering here. Below, however, we shall glance at incongruity that concerned Stein: a gap between the Founding Law of the US, namely the Declaration of Independence which declares general principles of justice, and actual practice. For, as to suffrage, particular expressed statute, amendment or provision of law did not support civic extension of human rights, did not acknowledge women's right to vote, in the lifetime of Susan B. Anthony. Before returning to the subject of gender, I will give some details about Stein and about Anthony.

Gertrude Stein.

Seemingly everyone knows Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) wrote the famous sentence "A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose". For some people, it is mere redundancy, approaching nonsense. To others, "A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" has a serious point, as a comment on the limits of words, on the thingness of things, on the need of human subjectivity to negotiate through an actual world of objects. Stein's famous "rose" sentence might remind us that Stein studied under William James, founder of the school of American philosophy he called Pragmatism, and the person who coined the term "stream of consciousness": What one may call "pragmatic obviousness" and "repetitive streaming of consciousness" are everywhere in Stein's writing. After entering Radcliffe College in 1893, she took Professor James's course at Harvard. James eventually

told her, "I hope you will pardon me if you recognize some features of my ideal student as your own." During final exams on a beautiful spring day she wrote at the top of her paper in James's course: "Dear Professor James, I am sorry but really I do not feel a bit like an examination paper in philosophy today." The next day James sent her a postcard saying, "I understand perfectly how you feel I often feel like that myself." James gave her the highest grade in the course, according to a now-legendary story.

Stein moved to France in 1903 and lived in Europe until her death in 1946. Her last work is the libretto for the opera *The Mother of Us All*, first produced in New York City at Columbia University in May 1947, months after her death.

Some Critics' Reactions to Stein's Repetitive and Allusive Style.

Stein's writing style is noticeably repetitious. Her style prompted the eminent American critic Edmund Wilson to call her later writing "absolutely unintelligible even to a sympathetic reader", and Wilson also found impossible to read all the way through her 1906/08 *The Making of Americans*--first published two decades later, one of her earliest works--which the editor of the *Saturday Review* William Rose Benet (1886-1950) called a "perfect imitation" of what occurred at "that tall tower" of Babel. The short-story writer Katherine Anne Porter thought it unreadable but necessary: she said "reading it is... a sort of permanent occupation. Yet to shorten it would be to mutilate [it],... it is a very necessary book" (qtd Sorenson, 211). The very stylistic features of repetition, circular logic and sentence structure that distressed such critics also occur in *The Mother of Us All*. Yet one may contrast these responses to the fact that *The Mother of Us All* became a favorite in American schools, where thirty years after its 1947 premiere, over one thousand productions could be counted, all due to the many roles it offers on and off stage, its easily sung 'American' music, and its "easy-to-hear vocal writing" (Roquemore, 22). Verbal repetition, lack of sequence can make tuneful sense when set to suitable music.

Stein's Collaboration with Thomson; Versions of Her Libretto

Collaboration between Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson had begun in 1927, with a first opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Thomson suggested that they collaborate on another opera that would be "about 19th century America, with perhaps the language of the senatorial orators quoted" (NYCOC *Stagebill*, 20), not so strange an idea, considering Stein's earlier concerns in her 1906/8 *Making of Americans*. In 1946, twenty years after *Four Saints in Three Acts*, Thomson then aged 50, and Stein 72, put together *The Mother of Us All*. Or, rather, Maurice Grosser, the painter-intellectual and long-time associate of Thomson, again shaped a libretto from Stein's prose, as he had fashioned the libretto for Thompson/Stein's earlier opera.

Grosser's organization of Stein's libretto may explain a difference between the *Mother of Us All* libretto as published in Carl Van Vechten's edition *Last Plays and Operas of Gertrude Stein*

(1949) and the abridged and rearranged performance version used in the New York City Opera Company production I saw in March 2000. The opera's Prologue that begins the text in the Van Vechten edition is transposed, in the New York City Opera version, to begin Act One, Scene two. The libretto sold at the New York City Opera performance adds synopses of scenes. For instance, before Act 1, Sc. 2, we read, "Virgil T. opens the proceedings and announces the subject of the meeting, which is economic and social justice" (NYCOC libretto, n.p.).

Aspects of style: manner and matter

Virgil T. is Virgil Thomson the composer of the score; Gertrude S. is also a character in the opera. Putting figures of themselves into their opera about a 19th century woman suffragist is of course not mere whimsy or jocosity; but, rather, as Stein explained about her methods of writing for theater, in her essay entitled "Plays", "Real time is integrated into dramatic time". Now a familiar "modernist" device, diachrony treats persons and things from different time periods in the same temporal plane. Stein herself called this diachronism a "landscape" (Stein, "Plays" I-iii) method, in her essay "Plays", the year after her operatic success with *Four Saints in Three Acts*. Her term landscape suggests that Stein's organization is spatial, in something like a sense explained by Joseph Frank years ago in his classic essay "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" but about different modernists.

Accordingly, Stein does not follow a narrative line. "As early as her first play *What Happened*, Stein had decided that a play doesn't have to tell a story. What happened was the theater experience itself. In other words, the creation of an experience was more important than the representation of an event" (Marranca ix). Stein's idea of writing a play was to present images, not a narrative of events. Her idea of a scene is that it presents not drama but image, an image that requires completion by the one/those watching/hearing her play or opera. That is why much of her writing does not "make sense", that is, not narrative sense; it is not narrative and the whole story is not given. The reader or hearer of a Stein play or opera has to complete what is before him or her: what is before him/her is fragmentary. This aspect of "modernism", hers as well as some others', it can be argued, expands into a structural device what in the Renaissance was usually a rhetorical one, the device they called "glancing" (allusion to current affairs the reader or hearer is expected to catch): it had been a favorite technique of Shakespeare's and Ben Jonson's.

The Prologue in the first book-publication of her libretto, Van Vechten's edition, becomes the beginning of Act 1, sc. 2 in the libretto used by the New York City Opera Company. This change breaks up a long passage sung by Virgil T., making it into a stichomythia (a rapid dialogue) between Virgil T. and the Chorus. In the Van Vechten edition the Chorus is not heard until late in Act 2, and the Prologue is sung by Virgil T. alone. Either way, sung by Virgil T.

alone or with Virgil T. in dialogue with the Chorus, the passage is a "glance" at the subject of economic justice. As dialogue the passage is more dramatic, better musical theater, better opera. Having the Chorus rather than Virgil T. sing the question "Why?" etc, the New York City Opera Company version socializes, democratizes Virgil T's warning about consequences of economic injustice by making it part of a dialogue.

Virgil T.

(haranguing the chorus)

Pity the poor persecutor.

Chorus

Why?

Virgil T.

If money is money, isn't money money?

Chorus

Why?

Virgil T.

Pity the poor persecutor.

Chorus

Why?

Virgil T.

Is money money or isn't money money?

Chorus

Why pity the poor persecutor?

Virgil T.

Pity the poor persecutor because

Chorus

Why?

Virgil T.

The poor persecutor always gets to be poor.

Chorus

Why?

Virgil T.

Because is money money or isn't money money? That's why, when the poor persecutor is persecuted, he has to cry.

Chorus

Why? Why? Why?

Virgil. T.

Because the persecutor always ends by being persecuted. That is the reason why.

Chorus

Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?

Chorus

That is the reason why. (*The Mother of Us All*, Act 1, sc. 2., NYCOC libretto. n.p.)

This 2002 New York City Opera version of the libretto text is the same as that used in the 1976 Santa Fe Opera recording, the only recording commercially available. Beyond that, the libretto sold at the NYCO performance which includes synopses and clarification, as I suggested above, explaining that this scene features a meeting about political and economic reform, is doing some of the work of interpreting the scene's images. Nevertheless, Stein's notion of drama as image, not as narrative representation of an event, expects the audience to figure out for themselves what the image enacted on the stage is doing. (As mentioned above, Van Vechten's edition does not include synopses of scenes in the text.)

The next several pages of this scene (Act 1, sc. 2) like the rest of the opera are not narrative, but fragments, a series of allusive images: that is, on first exposure one uninstructed might not

realize that the whole scene is about economic justice. The scene continues: The Chorus sings, "My father's name was Daniel" and then Gertrude S. is singing, "My father's name was Daniel." (In actual life Stein's father's name really was Daniel.) Then a parade of politicians enters, Daniel W. among them; he is singing, "He digged a pit, he digged it deep, he digged it for his brother. Into the pit he did fall in, the pit he digged for his brother." Read as imagery, this passage, unconnected narratively with the opening of the scene, connects thematically : the persecutor of the poor ends up persecuted and poor; the digger of the pit for his brother lands in the pit he dug. Related images rather than narrative exposition show the point: people who deny the economic rights of others risk losing their own economic rights, people who deprive others of life or liberty are in danger of bringing the same loss on themselves. And by inference people who deny civil rights to others risk loss of their own civil rights.

Stein's method an arrangement of images, not of narrative.

As I have said, Stein's method is an arrangement of images, not of narrative. Her Susan B character is not a person but a portrait of a person involved in recorded events. In her essay entitled "Plays" Stein explained that from early in the century, before she wrote plays and operas, she "had written a great many portraits":

"I came to think that since each one is that one and that there are a number of them each one being that one, the only way to express this thing about each one being that one and there being a number of them knowing each other was in a play. And so I began to write these plays. And the idea in [my first play which was called] What Happened, A Play was to express this without telling what happened, in short to make a play the essence of what happened" (Stein, "Plays", xliv). Just so, in her opera *The Mother of Us All* Stein does not tell what happened in the life of Susan B. In the opera Stein does not represent events, she makes images that allude to events. The various characters sing as living embodiments, active images interacting on stage: making up present moments of musical theater, happening one by one until the opera ends. That is, Stein's project is to make portraits, of present moments, in which "each one being that one" can be shown. The "each one being that one" that Susan B. was, was a woman fighting for the rights of people whose rights were unrecognized.

Daniel Webster and Debate: the pronoun 'he' and the US Congress

Act one, scene 2, continues on the theme of names. The parade exits, and Daniel W. with it. Susan B. enters with two women friends. She sings, "Susan B. Anthony is my name", several times. Gertrude S. sings again "My father's name was Daniel". Susan B sings, "I had a father, Daniel was not his name." The parade enters again, Daniel W. again sings about the pit and the brother. The synopsis of the scene in the NYCOC libretto says that the scene is a debate about economic and political justice. Is this a debate? Well, according to Stein's avowed technique,

we do not get a "representation of an event", we get images Stein intends us to read as a sort of "landscape" that presents elements of debate, that is, issues that are debatable and lead to debate.

Several pages later, still in Act 1, Sc. 2, something that seems more like debate begins, with Susan B. and Daniel W. its only two participants. But it is a very "cubist" debate, shall I say, nothing follows the manner of any actual received debating style; this part of the scene is an imitation of juxtaposed quotations from the speeches or writings of Webster and Anthony.

A detail, however, is significant: the use of the pronoun he. The debate scene, so-called, in the opera continues with Susan B. and Daniel W. singing as if in reply to one another, words similar to those from speeches or writings that in real life, Miss Anthony and Sen. Webster had spoken or written, though of course not to each other and not at the same time. What Stein's libretto character Daniel W. says are words resembling Sen. Webster's actual Senate speeches, in which Senator Webster addressed various "honorable members" by the pronoun "he". Since no women were in the Senate then, "he" is the necessary pronoun the historical Daniel Webster used in the Senate, addressing colleagues. In Stein's libretto Daniel W. uses "he", as in speeches Webster gave in the US Senate, to speak of Susan B. Being called "he" in Stein's libretto, her gender denied, Susan B as the "honorable member" to whom Webster replies, in this debate scene, becomes a dramatic image of the non-recognition of female persons, a sort of political non-existence or half-existence of women, in nineteenth-century America's official political arrangements. Daniel W's calling Susan B. "he" in the opera's "debate" scene is a dramatic image of the institutional refusal of 19th century America to recognize the equality of female gender, an image of refusal of women's right of participation in official government, an image of refusal to see a woman as in the political sense a full person. Stein's libretto proposes juxtaposition of actual speech by Sen. Webster and Miss Anthony, putting such words into the mouths of her characters Daniel W. and Susan B. Juxtaposition as dialogue, in this scene of the opera, puts the speaking characters into action. As speaking images, they dramatize 19th century America's acknowledgement of full political rights to male persons only.

Approached in Act 1, sc. 2, this issue is pointedly mentioned in the second half of *The Mother of Us All*, in Act 2, sc. 2, following a political meeting in Act 2, sc. 1, where Susan B. has been very persuasive about drawing people to her cause of getting women's right to vote voted into practice. Now in Act 2, sc. 2, Susan and her friend Anne enter. They are singing about the political meeting that has just taken place.

Anne

Oh it was wonderful, wonderful, they listen to nobody the way they listen to you.

Susan B.

Yes it is wonderful as the result of my work for the first time the word male has been written into the Constitution of the United States concerning suffrage. Yes it is wonderful. (*The Mother of Us All*, Act 2, sc. 2, New York City Opera Company version; Act 2, sc. 7, Van Vechten edn.)

The language of the US Constitution had never expressly excluded females from voting until the passage of the 14th Amendment in 1868. As Susan B. sings in Stein's opera, the excluding insertion of the word 'male' in the Fourteenth Amendment was a response to pressure exerted by the woman-suffrage movement. Inserting the word male was an attempt to create facts, legal facts, which had not existed before, despite the behavioral facts of actual practice: in other words, the practice of excluding women from voting had no expression in Constitutional law until 1868. It was a special irony that Anthony and her co-suffragists had forced their opponents thus to fortify their weak position, for it was a weak position legally. Why else was the word male inserted in 1868, in a provision regarding suffrage, for the first time, 80 years after the 1788 ratification of the Constitution?

'Negro' suffrage and 'woman' suffrage

Miss Anthony had joined the fight for emancipation of slaves, enacted in the Constitution's 13th Amendment in 1865. But "Negro" suffrage had not yet been recognized by 1868 when Anthony failed to prevent the inclusion of the restricting word "male" in wording of the 14th Amendment about the right to vote. The 14th Amendment, Section 2 (about Apportionment of Representatives), seeks to protect the "right to vote... of male inhabitants of [the several States]..." Anthony wanted to link Negro and woman suffrage together as one united cause. Her attempt to forge this alliance failed. The 15th Amendment was passed in 1870; it reads: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." This referred to males. It does not mention women, women were citizens, but by custom (and by dubious law, inconsistent with the nation's Founding Law, as I show below) they were not included in the meaning of the 15th Amendment, just as it is apparent that black males, former slaves, were not considered to have been included in the 14th Amendment.

An image of this situation is presented in *The Mother of Us All* where sitting on her front porch Susan B. sings aloud a reverie. "She sees, in a day dream, a negro (sic) man and woman and realizes, on questioning them, the negro (sic) man, whom she has helped to enfranchise, can not help her in her fight for woman suffrage," says the NYCOC libretto synopsis to Act One, Sc. 4. The scene begins when Susan B. sings, "I do not know whether I am asleep or awake, awake or asleep, asleep or awake. Do I know?" The following stage directions tell us: "(A

snowy landscape; a Negro man and a Negro woman.) (*Jo* [the Loiterer, a fictitious male character] *at side of stage.*)" *Jo*, speaking, not singing, assures her she is awake: "I know, you are awake Susan B." Susan B. then sings to the Negro man about the Negro woman and the vote: "Negro man, would you vote if only you can and not she?" The Negro man says, "You bet." Susan B. sings, reminding him, "I fought for you that you could vote, would you vote if they would not let me?" The Negro man says, "Holy Gee," avoiding her question. *Jo* exits. Susan B. sings: "If I believe that I am right and I am right if they believe that they are right and they are not in the right, might, might there be what might be?" (NYCOC libretto, np)-- a passage in a style typical of Stein, that is difficult to read, a nightmare for typesetters, but upon analysis, not quite the nonsense it approaches being. Through all the wordplay with "might" and "right" we can see that Stein is glancing at injustice. What is all but said are the words "might is right": for "might is right" is the case when any group (in this case, men) do not acknowledge other persons' rights: in this case, assure to women citizens a citizen's right to vote.

The "negro" man and "negro" woman in unison reply: "All right Susan B. all right." It is a multileveled reply. "All right Susan B. all right" can mean: Calm down, Calm down, Let it go, Stop now, Give it up, or something of that sort. In another sense it is a dramatic or rather an operatic irony: because at this point in the opera "all right" hasn't yet occurred: only male right, not female right, to vote.

The word right is a key word in the opera, it occurs in several scenes, much played upon and repeated. An instance is a Quaker connection.

The Quaker Connection and the words Right, Justice, Law, and Equity.

I have mentioned Susan B. Anthony's Quaker background. Quakers exerted a moral influence on 19th century American social issues that extended beyond their own circles. The first Women's Rights Convention, for instance, occurred because a group of Quakers met for a tea party on July 13, 1848, in upstate New York. They found themselves agreed on issues of injustice and decided to hold a convention the next week three miles away in Seneca Falls. The catalyst in these events was Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

A five-women committee that Cady Stanton supervised wrote a Declaration of Women's Rights. Entitled the "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions", the document drafted at Seneca Falls was a restatement of the Declaration of Independence. Since "all Men [human beings] are created equal" was not in practice, Cady Stanton's committee in their document declared, "all men and women are created equal" and "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights..." These natural rights belong equally to women and men, but the male "has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and to her God." The result has been "the

establishment of an absolute tyranny over her" (qtd. Rynder).

Before the passage of the 19th Amendment, Natural Law and positive law were at odds as regards the issue of Women's rights. (Natural law is law that is not man-made. Law put forth, actively enounced by human act is called positive law.) Customary behavior and enacted man-made laws had disabled women, but in natural law, what Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence calls "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God", mankind's members are equal before God. One person who understood this difference between natural and positive or political law was the founder and editor of the New York *Tribune* Horace Greeley (1811-72). His telling response to the first Women's Rights Convention was to find the demand for equal political rights improper, yet "however unwise and mistaken the demand, it is but the assertion of a natural right and as such must be conceded" (qtd. Rynder).

This Quaker background is glanced at in *The Mother of Us All* in a single reference when Susan B. sings, "...Yes the Quakers are right..." (2:2, NYCOC libretto). As this is a "glance", Quakers are not otherwise mentioned in the opera.

Relations between Concepts and Action

Earlier I mentioned William James and his influence on Stein. James had borrowed another Harvard professor's, C. S. Pierce's term "pragmatism", changed its meaning (differences between Pierce's meaning and James's for the term are beyond present scope), and used it to summarize his philosophic attitude. What James says in his book *Pragmatism* (1907) amplifies his ideas about relations between mental concepts and action. According to his notion of the pragmatic, an idea has meaning only in terms of its consequences in the world of feeling and action. Gertrude Stein's literary style may be seen in this light. She is concerned, for example, to show Susan B. Anthony in *The Mother of Us All* in terms of the effects her suffragism had in her feelings and actions. And Stein's style itself aims to enact relations between mental concepts and action.

Rich and poor; political and economic rights

The character Jo in Act One, sc. 4, asks Susan B.

"... What is the difference between rich and poor, poor and rich, no use to ask the V.I.P. they never answer me..."

And Susan B. answers: "Rich, to be rich, is to be so rich that when they are rich they have it to be that they do not listen and when they do they do not hear, and to be poor, to be poor, is to be so poor they listen and listen and what they hear well what do they hear, they hear that they listen, they listen to hear, that is what it is to be poor, but I, I Susan B. there is no wealth nor poverty, there is no wealth, what is wealth, there is no poverty, what is poverty, has a pen ink, has it?"

In paraphrase, the NYCOC libretto synopsis of Act 1, sc 4, explains: "If people are rich, says Susan, they do not listen to anybody; and if they are poor, they listen; but all they perceive is the fact that they are listening. As for me, says Susan, there is no wealth nor poverty, as long as my pen has ink to write", but the style of Stein's phrasing, I suggest, says more. The phenomenal, circular style, arranged in non-sequiturs, I suggest, shows Stein's difference with Anthony's position about economic justice.

Political equality does not mean that all citizens have the same power politically, but that there is a minimum acceptable exercise of right, such as the voting right, available to everyone. Likewise, economic equality does not mean leveling incomes to be the same; but is about provision of what is minimally necessary for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These inalienable natural rights of individual persons are the rights on which the existence of the US is founded, as declared in the Founding Law of the US. However, just as the US took so long to recognize women's rights, so it is taking a long time for the issue of economic equality (or, in more recent phrasing, equity) to become a "live" rather than a "dead" hypothesis (to name a criterion applied by William James, Stein's teacher).

Women's voting rights already existed in the US by the time Stein wrote her opera. In the nineteenth century such thinkers as Jeremy Bentham had propagandized for political but not economic equality, as if such rights are not linked rights. However, Stein's libretto anticipates what is now a growing concern about the dangers of too wide a gap in income levels: persons with less than minimum economic advantage (with less than a minimum living wage, for example) cannot exercise minimum political rights.

As we have seen, medieval thinkers' recognition of human rights as foundation of politics---ethics precedes politics, in the order of being, for Aristotle, whose ideas were developed by Aquinas and others---is the ancestor of the US Declaration. Likewise, in late medieval times, in fourteenth and fifteenth century Italy, in Siena and other cities the Franciscan Montes Pietatis and the City of Siena's subsequent Montes dei Paschi bank established a capitalism not for profit but for service to the population; in addition to lending capital to people, these institutions annually distributed surplus monies to be used for social well-being.

In contrast, Lester Thurow's 1996 *The Future of Capitalism* shows contemporary capitalist theory avoids reality, in holding "there is almost no need for government or any other form of communal activities" (271). About the Social Darwinism that pervades present capitalist practice and much present thinking in the US, Thurow writes:

"In a survival-of-the-fittest form of capitalism there is very little role for government.... In this view economic activity and growth take care of themselves. The goal of economic or social justice is unrecognized...Income redistribution, the major activity of all modern governments, is

an activity whose legitimacy is denied" (274).

"Biologically,... Man is [a social animal]. Any successful human society has to recognize this reality, but capitalism does not. Successful societies need to keep the two sides of humankind in balance. Yes, individuals are self-interested, but no, they are not just self-interested" (276).

"To ignore the social aspects of humankind is to design a world for a human species that does not exist. The near extinction of free market capitalism during the Great Depression... must be understood. The long successes yet ultimate failures in Egypt, Rome, and China are monuments to both human achievement and human stupidity" (277-8).

Stein had lived through the Great Depression of the 1930s. Perhaps that is why she showed that the theme of economic justice embraces all the themes of social/political justice, in her libretto. Economic justice as such was not Susan B. Anthony's issue; Quakers had espoused many rights, but not general economic rights: "The tactics used in the women's movement after 1848 had earlier been used by Quakers in voluntary associations for moral reform. Men and women Quaker reformers, generally middle or upper class, tended to ignore the increasing poverty of the working class and the emerging industrialism of America, but their radicalism and demand for social justice showed in their work for equal rights for Indians, blacks, and women" (Frost).

In the opera's final scene, after her death, a statue of Susan B. stands on a pedestal, about to be unveiled in a Congressional hall. Suffrage has been achieved. Before the statue is unveiled, we hear the voice of Susan B. sing: "The vote, women have the vote, all my long life of strength and strife, all my long life, women have it, they can vote, every man and every woman has the vote, the word male is not there anymore, that is to say, that is to say"...

When Virgil T. eventually unveils the statue, it is Susan B. Anthony herself, in a garnet velvet gown and black bonnet. She sings, "We cannot retrace our steps, going forward may be the same as going backwards..." She sings a long passage "My Life is Strife" about her life, while one by one women place a wreath beside the pedestal and leave. "... Life is strife, I was a martyr all my life not to what I won but to what was done. Do you know because I tell you so, or do you know, do you know. My long life, my long life" are the opera's final words; then the curtain falls.

In her opera Stein keeps the overview her own: *The Mother of Us All* does not merely serve its chief character's views. By the time Stein wrote her libretto, the fight for women's suffrage, a fight for political justice, had been won. Beyond that, in the opera's libretto Stein gives an emphasis to economic justice that Anthony in her lifetime could not. Stein's libretto celebrates Susan B. Anthony and points beyond to future responsibilities.

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