

Libby Larsen

CHAIN OF HOPE

for SATB Chorus, Solo Baritone, Actress, and Piano

FULL SCORE

*Libretto by
Jeanne Soderberg,
Kathleen Holt, and Libby Larsen*

*Based on the writings of
Frederick Douglass, Amy Post,
Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton*

KENWOOD EDITIONS

Libby Larsen

CHAIN OF HOPE

for SATB Chorus, Solo Baritone, Solo Alto, Actress, and Piano

Commissioned by Madrigalia, Ltd

Premiered in April of 2010 in Rochester, NY,
the final resting place of Frederick Douglass,
Susan B. Anthony, and Amy K. Post

Dedicated in memory of John Hope Franklin, friend

Duration: 15 minutes

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CHAIN OF HOPE

- I. (1830 - 1848) - Slavery
- II. (1848 - 1869) - Women's Rights
- III. (1870 - 1895) - Human Rights

Solo BaritoneFrederick Douglass
ActressAmy Post, Susan B. Anthony

SATB Chorus
Piano

The stage is set so that Mrs. Post is seated, in her own space, from where she comments throughout the piece. The chorus is set on the floor asymmetrically, allowing a free space towards the center of the stage for use of the three soloists. If lighting is available, use three pools of light: Mrs. Post, the Choir, the solo area.

I. (1830 - 1848) - Slavery

Amy Post reads from The Northstar, a newspaper. Then noticeably moved, puts the paper down ...

Actress Frederick Douglass dropped dead in the hallway of his residence on Anacostia Heights this evening at 7 o'clock. He had been in the highest spirits, and apparently in the best of health, despite his seventy-eight years, when death overtook him.
Frederick Douglass ... dead? No ... not my Frederick. I've just had this letter from him ...

Amy Post picks up a letter from a parcel of letters she has carefully kept close to her.

Frederick Douglass My dear friend Amy Post,
... You were among the first of American women to give me shelter & make me feel at home... a kindness I never forget. ... Your family was always dear, very dear to me;
you loved and treated me as a brother before the world knew me as it does now...
Yours Truly - ⁱ

Actress Frederick.....40 years, a friend...and our particular partnership...

ⁱ Liverpool England, June 10, 1887

Frederick Douglass & Actress (*He sings, she orates*)

Recognize the fact that the rights of the humblest citizens are as worthy of protection as are those of the highest, and your (the) problem will be solved....

Actress our work...

She picks a tattered note, an Underground RR pass, from the group of letters, handling it as treasure....

Frederick Douglass My Dear Mrs. Post: Please shelter this sister from the house of bondage till five O'clock - this afternoon - She will then be sent on to ... freedom.

Chorus In 1830, there were 2 million slaves in the USA. In 1840 there were 2.5 million slaves. In 1850 there were 3 million slaves. In 1860 there were 4 million slaves. In 1870 there were 4.9 million free blacks.

In 1830 there were 2 million slaves in the USA.

Actress Two million slaves in 1830 and Frederick, himself in chains...

Frederick Douglass I am fast in my chains and I am a slave.ⁱⁱ I am fast approaching manhood...year after year have passed and I am *still a slave*. These thoughts rouse me - I must do something. I therefore resolved that 1835 should not pass without witnessing an attempt on my part to secure my liberty.ⁱⁱⁱ

Actress And Frederick Douglass escaped...and Frederick Douglass spoke out.

Chorus In 1830 there were 2million slaves in the USA. In 1840 there were 2.5 million slaves

DUET

(Frederick Douglass and Actress)

Actress (*Narrating in the place of Frederick Douglass, she and he create a seamless line of utterance*)
...while attending an antislavery convention at Nantucket on the 11th of August 1841, He felt strongly moved to speak... It was a severe cross... I took it up reluctantly.

Frederick Douglass The truth was I (still) felt myself a slave... the idea of speaking to white people weighed me down.

Actress He spoke but a few moments...

Frederick Douglass ...and felt a degree of freedom and said what I desired with considerable ease...^{iv}

ⁱⁱ Frederick Douglass' autobiography

ⁱⁱⁱ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, page 72

^{iv} *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, page 96

Actress ... Go search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.^v

but ...

Chorus (*underscoring Frederick Douglass' following words*)

God save our gracious Queen,
 Long live our noble Queen,
 God save the Queen:
 Send her victorious,
 Happy and glorious,
 Long to reign over us:
 God save the Queen.^{vi}

Frederick Douglass Persecuted, hunted, outraged in America, I have come to England, and behold the change! The chattel becomes a man. I breathe and I am free...^{vii}

Actress My Dear Amy,
 I am living a singular life. No insults to encounter, no prejudice to encounter, ... I am treated as a man an equal brother. I am afraid it will unfit me for the proslavery cuffs and kicks at home...^{viii}

Chorus In 1830 there were 2 million slaves in the USA. In 1840 there were 2.5 million slaves. In 1850 there were 3.2million slaves.

Actress Ah... Frederick DID return home, to speak out loudly, tirelessly...

The chorus underscores the following with "America"

Chorus My country,' tis of thee,
 Stronghold of slavery, of thee I sing;
 Land where my fathers died,
 Where men man's rights deride,
 From every mountainside thy deeds shall ring!

My native country, thee,

^v July 4, 1852

^{vi} Mackay, Charles (1851). *The Book of English Songs: From the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century*. p. 203.

^{vii} Newspaper account of speech made by Frederick Douglass at the breakfast given in his honor at Belfast January 6th 1846

^{viii} April 11, 1848, Letter to Amy Post

Where all men are born free, if white's their skin;
 I love thy hills and dales,
 Thy mounts and pleasant vales;
 But hate thy Negro sales, as foulest sin

Let wailing swell the breeze,
 And ring from all the trees the black man's wrong;
 Let every tongue awake;
 Let bond and free partake;
 Let rocks their silence break, the sound prolong.

Frederick Douglass

Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak today?
 What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him,
 more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he
 is the constant victim.

To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your
 national greatness, (your)swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and
 heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, (your) brass fronted impudence; your
 shouts of liberty and equality, (your) hollow mockery;

your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious
 parade and solemnity, are, to Him, ... bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, ...
 hypocrisy - a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages.
 There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody
 than are the people of the United States, at this very hour. This Fourth of July is
yours, not *mine*. *You* may rejoice, I must mourn.^{ix}

^{ix} July 5, 1852 at an event commemorating the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Corinthian Hall,
 Rochester, NY

II. (1848 – 1869) - Women's Rights

Susan B. Anthony I saw him first before a Boston audience freed from the land of bondage. He stood there like an African prince, conscious of his dignity and power, grand in his physical proportions, majestic in his wrath, as with keen wit, satire, and indignation he portrayed the bitterness of slavery...^x

Chorus (*The New America - sung to the tune of America: My Country 'Tis of Thee*)^{xi}

Our country, now from thee	Women in every age
Claim we our liberty	For this great heritage
In freedom's name	Tribute have paid
Guarding home's altar fires	Our birth-right claim we now
Daughters of patriot sires	Longer refuse to bow
Their zeal our own inspires	On freedom's altar now
Justice to claim	Our hand is laid

Actress (*Speaking over the choir*) Frederick and I formed friendship when we both lived here, in Rochester, N.Y., our friendship continued for many decades. What a pair!

Here, Frederick, let me read it.

... thus marking the initiative in the appearance of women as actors in public gatherings.

Sons, will you longer see
Mothers on bended knee
For justice pray?
Rise now, in manhood's might
With earth's great souls unite
To speed the dawning light

DUET

(Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, and Choir Ensemble)

Susan B. Anthony & Frederick Douglass

Why should women any more than men be governed without their own consent. And why therefore, is not woman's right to suffrage precisely equal to man's...^{xii}

Actress Frederick took the cause of Suffrage as his own cause. Oh! How diligent he was! How hard he worked!

^x from Frederick Douglass Eulogy

^{xi} National-American Woman's Suffrage Convention, 1891

^{xii} 1853 ...the Just and Equal rights of women (signed by Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony)

- Susan B. Anthony** Dear Douglass. – We...are appointed to a Committee to go before our New York State Legislature. We all think the appeals and arguments may, if we make them grand (enough), be most powerful means of agitation of any possible thing we can do. Will you go?^{xiii}
- Frederick Douglass** When I ran away from slavery, it was for myself; when I advocated emancipation, it was for my people; ... when I (stand) up for the rights of women, self (is) out of the question...^{xiv}
- Susan B. Anthony** Of all the men who signed that famous declaration of 1848 – I think you are the only one left this side of the big (pond)...hence we want you to make a 20-minute address
- Frederick Douglass** In respect to political rights... there can be no reason in the world for denying to woman the elective franchise.

The *Chorus* sings the following intertwined with *Susan B. Anthony* and *Frederick Douglass*:

- Chorus** I have a neighbor, one of those
Not very hard to find
Who know it all without debate
And never change their mind
I asked him, “What of woman’s rights?”
He said in tones severe-
“My mind on that is all made up,
Keep woman in her sphere.”
- Susan B. Anthony** You – (Douglass) – you – ...make the speech that shall kindle the fires of freedom and equality...in all hearts – young as well (as old)!!!^{xv}
- Frederick Douglass** Woman, however, like the colored man, will never be taken by her brother and lifted to a position. What she desires, she must fight for.
- Chorus** I saw a man in tattered garb
Forth from the grog-shop come
He squandered all his cash for drink
and starved his wife at home...
- Frederick Douglass** Recognize the fact that the rights of the humblest citizens are as worthy of protection as are those of the highest, and your problem will be solved;
- Chorus** I asked him “Should not woman vote”
He answered with a sneer-

^{xiii} Syracuse, December 15, 1866

^{xiv} Frederick Douglass on Women’s Rights, page 14.

^{xv} Susan B. Anthony, Washington, DC, Feb 6, 1888

“I’ve taught my wife to know her place,
Keep woman in her sphere.”

Frederick Douglass ... Let Woman *take* her rights, and then she shall be free.^{xvi}

Chorus I met an earnest, thoughtful man
Not many days ago
Who pondered deep all human law
The honest truth to know.
I asked him, "What of woman’s cause?"
The answer came sincere ~
“Her rights are just the same as mine,
Let woman choose her sphere.”

Frederick Douglass (Speaking) Time and strength are not equal to the task before me. But could I be heard by this great nation, I would call to mind the sublime and glorious truths with which, at its birth, it saluted and startled a listening world...a nation, based upon human brotherhood and the self-evident truths of liberty and equality...

^{xvi} from “Women’s Rights Convention”. *New York Daily Tribune* (October 26, 1850).

III. (1870 – 1895) - Human Rights

Light fades to Amy Post. She reads, again from The Northstar.

Actress ...he attended the sessions of the Women's Council in the forenoon and the afternoon, returning to Cedar Hill, his residence, between 5 and 6 o'clock. After dining, he had a chat in the hallway with his wife about the doings of the council. He grew very enthusiastic in his explanation of one of the events of the day, when he fell upon his knees, with hands clasped. He dropped dead in the hallway of his home on Anacostia Heights at 7 o'clock in the evening. He had been in the highest spirits, and apparently in the best of health, despite his seventy-eight years, when death overtook him.

She is quiet a moment.

Chorus (Psalm 125) Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion,
 which cannot be moved, but abides for ever.
As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
 so the Lord surrounds his people,
 from this time on and for evermore.
For the sceptre of wickedness shall not rest
 on the land allotted to the righteous,
 so that the righteous may not stretch out
 their hands to do wrong.
Do good, O Lord, to those who are good,
 and to those who are upright in their hearts.

Finally, she picks up another letter from her parcel of letters. She reads... and the lights fade.

Actress He said... We are all subject – parts of a great whole in the hands of a supreme power and you and I have decided that that power is good. Leave all to the supreme good and be calm.^{xvii}

END

^{xvii} Letter to Amy Post, August, 4, 1852.