

# Our voices: no, we won't be 'ladylike'

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“Be polite.” “Watch your tone.” “That’s not very lady-like.” These are words of advice I’ve received over the course of my life, and I’m not interested in hearing them anymore.

Why is it that when women speak up or passionately state their position on a topic they are asked to “tone it down”? When I consider the women who have made their mark on history, I cringe to think about how the outcomes may have been different had they watched their tone.

For example, the great poet Maya Angelou became mute for almost five years as a child, but when she found and used her voice, I learned that I am a “Phenomenal Woman.”

What if Rosa Parks had been “polite” and given up her seat on the bus? We may have delayed the start of one of the biggest events during the Civil Rights Movement, the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Being “ladylike” meant something different to Indira Gandhi, the first woman to serve as India’s Prime Minister. She said, “To be liberated, a woman must feel free to be herself, not in rivalry to man but in the context of her own capacity and her personality.”

Madeleine Albright didn’t watch her tone when she became the first woman to serve as Secretary of State. In an interview later in her career she said, “It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent.”

Thankfully, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wasn’t concerned with being polite as a leader of the women’s rights movement in the U.S. during the mid to late 1800s.

I would be remiss if I didn’t recognize Kamala Harris, the first woman to serve as Vice President of the United States. Attention tone police: take a seat. A role such as this is far too important to be held by someone unwilling to speak her mind with the passion and emotion necessary to make an impact.

These are only a few examples of women who have refused to follow the advice, or in some cases the directive, from people attempting to dictate how they should speak and behave.

Without these women and countless others, would there be a Women's History Month? What would we have to celebrate? What major accomplishments would have been made by polite, "ladylike" women who watched their tone?

These courageous women have made it possible for me to write this piece without fear or concern of reproach. I won't, we won't, be silent. I have been, we have been, liberated. And I am, we are, phenomenal women.

I leave you with a piece of advice that I practice: Don't be afraid to be your authentic self, to speak with conviction, or to stand up for what you believe is right.

In the words of the late John Lewis, "Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble." After all, these women have proven that it doesn't get any more ladylike than that.

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