

**The 19th Amendment and how it has
Impacted our Country Today**

Reese Blanchard

Junior Division

Historical Paper

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I know nothing of man's rights, or woman's rights; human rights are all that I recognize.

-Sarah Moore Grimke (Grimke)

Introduction

Would the women who fought for the 19th Amendment be content with the rights women have today? When Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony fought tirelessly together for the Women's Suffrage Movement, they were not expecting how many more rights women would have to fight for in the future. In 1848, a women's convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York. This was viewed by suffragists as the launching of the movement. Through the relentless charge for peoples rights, Stanton and Anthony formed the Woman's National Loyalty League in 1863. This League crusaded for full citizenship for blacks and women and it also battled to abolish slavery.

Historical Context

On November 12, 1815, a girl named Elizabeth Cady Stanton was born into this world. Little did anybody know that she would grow up to become a powerful, inspirational leader for everyone. Coming from a family with so many boys, it was inevitable that she would realize the need to fight for women's rights. After growing up with her father as slave owner, it may have inspired her to become an abolitionist. When Stanton graduated from Johnston Academy at age 16, she came to the stark realization that she was not allowed to enroll in college. She then

attended Troy Female Seminary where she experienced hard core religion. After having a breakdown, she rejected religion for the rest of her life (A&E).

Stanton found her husband, Henry, in 1840, but insisted on not including “obey” in their wedding vows when they got married. Even though she and her husband attended the World Anti-Slavery Delegation as representatives, Stanton and the other women were not recognized. Stanton’s husband studied law with her father and eventually became an attorney. They lived in Boston, but after hearing about well-known abolitionist’s insights, they moved to Seneca Falls, NY (A&E).

As every mother empathizes, Stanton was a busy woman. She gave birth to six kids, while still fighting for the new amendment. During this chaotic time of raising multiple kids, Stanton helped organize the Seneca Falls Convention with Lucretia Mott, Mary Ann M’Clintock, Jane Hunt and Martha Coffin Wright. She also assisted in writing the Declaration of Sentiments which was modeled after the Declaration of Independence. This was one of the many trails that the women endured for the rights of women and should be compared to the Founding Fathers fight for independence against the British (A&E).

Stanton co-authored the first three volumes of the *History of Woman Suffrage* along with *The Woman’s Bible*. She quoted, “We cannot accept any code or creed that uniformly defrauds woman of her natural rights.” (The Woman’s Bible). She never stopped fighting for women rights even when her health started to decline. When she died on October 26, 1902, from heart failure, she requested that her brain be donated to science to debunk the myth that the mass of men’s brains made them smarter than women (A&E).

Stanton's life long friend, Susan B. Anthony, was born February 15, 1820 in Adams, Massachusetts. In her early life, she developed a robust sense of justice in her Quaker family. For 15 years, she served as a teacher. Anthony became an educational reformer when she was 26, earning a salary of about \$110 a year. Throughout her years of teaching, she went to the state teachers convention and spoke about how the pay for women teachers needed to be raised and that they should have a voice at the convention and privileges to assume committee positions. Anthony called for equal opportunities regardless of race for every school and college. She also stated that there should be coeducation for boys and girls and for people who had been enslaved (National Susan B. Anthony Museum). By 1900, most universities had opened their doors to women or were at least considering the possibility (Conkling 172).

Anthony came from a large family of activists which embedded her desire to bring equality to America. She encountered many toils with the public whilst planning meetings, putting up posters, and making speeches. Stanton and Anthony were bitterly disappointed when women were not allowed to go to a campaign for the 14th and 15th Amendments. Over the years, she became active in temperance but was not allowed to speak at rallies because she was a woman. After meeting Elizabeth Stanton, she joined the women's rights movement and dedicated her life to woman suffrage (Hayward).

Anthony accomplished more during the 86 years of her life than most people ever will. She died on March 13, 1906, succumbing to pneumonia. Anthony and Stanton never got to see their devotion come to fruition. Anthony was compassionate and inspirational and a wonderful role model to all (Hayward).

Trials

Before the women's rights movement made much headway, the Civil War interrupted the advocates' efforts. The 14th Amendment introduced the word 'male' to the constitution and the 15th Amendment gave free black men the right to vote. This created dissension upon the suffragists. Those who supported the 15th Amendment believed that it was more imperative for black men to vote over women. Stanton and Anthony publicly opposed the Amendment demanding universal suffrage (Oxford).

The American Equal Rights Association (AERA) formed in 1866 and supported both the 15th and 19th Amendment. After the association failed to achieve results, there was a division in opinion between voting rights for blacks or women. Stanton and Anthony felt that their male political support was not dependable so they formed the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) in 1869. Meanwhile, another group of women established the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). These two groups worked separately until they finally merged to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) in 1890 (Thoughtco).

At the turn of the century, these groups entered a time called "the doldrums". There was too much divisiveness among the activists. After the first generation of radicals passed away, a new group prevailed. This group consisted of privileged women who were concerned with proper behavior in females and did not believe in expressing themselves publicly. As a result, this group lost sight of the goal and did not bring any new strategies to the movement. Stanton and Anthony would have been saddened by the attitude of this new generation of women who believed that they had more of a right to vote than the men that they considered "inferior" or

those who were middle-class, racial-ethnic, or immigrants. Another challenge that the women's right movement faced was new anti-suffrage organizations were forming. The suffragists blamed politicians and manufacturers on 'liquor interests' as a reason for their losses. Leadership was lacking at NAWSA and the organization had trouble developing new strategies to motivate the new generation of suffragists (Oxford).

Triumphs

Finally, momentum started to move in the right direction for woman's suffrage. During World War I, women worked in the factories to support the war as well as taking more active roles in the war than ever before. When the war ended, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, led by Carrie Chapman Catt, repeatedly reminded Woodrow Wilson that the women should be awarded for their service. Wilson agreed that it was time to support woman suffrage. The battles for woman suffrage were won state-by-state. The first three states to ratify the amendment were Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan. While most of the holdouts were in the South, there was at last one more state required to ratify the 19th Amendment. The final battle came down to Tennessee. The incessant lobbying by both suffragists and anti-suffrage forces were relentless. On August 26, 1920, Tennessee's state senate passed the vote making the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution a victory (Library of Congress). This allowed women to vote in the fall elections including the Presidential election. Although the 19th Amendment was not passed until decades after Anthony and Stanton's deaths, they would have celebrated the achievement which they had passionately worked towards their entire lives (Mead).

Modern Day Trials and Triumphs

This leads us back to the question to whether the women, who tirelessly fought for the 19th Amendment, would be proud of our country's position on women's rights today. Now that it has been almost 100 years since the 19th Amendment was ratified, we see more female candidates running for office and winning primaries. Women are also the majority of voters in America. This would appear to be a major win for women if you were looking back from the time when Stanton and Anthony were fighting for women's right to vote (Newburger).

In today's world, women have other battles to contend with such as reproductive choice, sexual harassment at work, and equal pay (National Women's Law Center). Reproductive choice may not be as much of a women's right issue but a moral issue for some. There are women who feel that it is their right to terminate a pregnancy because it is "their body" but this dilemma comes under fire because it is a fine line on whether it is the woman's right or the unborn child's right. Sexual Harassment in the workplace can provide a hostile environment for women (and men). Although there are laws in place to combat sexual harassment, 40% of women still claim they have been victims of this workplace abuse (Bustle). According to recent studies, women are paid 80 cents to every dollar paid to men (NWLC). This includes women of every race. When it comes to education for women, they are passing up men in undergraduate enrollment (Holyoke). Despite the other obstacles women are up against, education does not appear to be one of them.

Conclusion

We are living in a time where our country is divided on so many issues. It would be encouraging for a new generation to come in with new ideas and a strategy to bring the country back together. History is so important because you can identify times when a new generation was not helpful with the progress that activists had made. We need to learn from our past mistakes and attempt to keep an open mind when new issues are identified. While women's rights are still on the forefront of many activists minds, we can see that great progress has been made. The issues may not be as black and white as some people may think and there may be other factors in each case. We should be proud of Stanton and Anthony and all of the other women who fought for our rights. They would want us to be the best people we can be and when a barrier comes into our path, remember their perseverance as a guideline to how to overcome these obstacles.

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