

Susan B. Anthony:
Overcoming Tragedies and Empowering Women to Ensure Suffrage for All

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“What an absurd notion that women have not intellectual and moral faculties sufficient for anything but domestic concerns.”¹

The Women’s Suffrage Movement was a significant turning point in history in the fight for women’s rights. Susan B. Anthony was one of the most influential women in the nineteenth century and was crucial in the ratifying of the nineteenth amendment. Although Anthony died before she could see the fruits of her labor, she inspired women all around the country, and in doing so, trained the next generation to see her goals fulfilled. In 1852, Anthony joined the fight to vote. Although she faced tragedies and hardships such as discrimination, objectification, and oppression, she emerged triumphant with suffrage for women. Through powerful speeches, Susan B. Anthony earned her place in history by motivating a powerful base of women and creating a foundation for modern feminism.

Background information

Prior to the passing of the fifteenth amendment, most states only allowed white, male, property owners to vote. Ratified in 1870 just on the heels of the thirteenth and fourteenth Reconstruction era amendments, the Fifteenth Amendment states, “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.”² This amendment granted all *men* the right to vote, however, the term men was narrowly defined and did not include women. The next logical step, in gaining the right for all citizens to vote was achieving suffrage for women.

Susan B. Anthony grew up in a Quaker family with core beliefs that both sexes should be treated equally, but Anthony was very young when she first experienced blatant sexism. Her school teacher told her that only boys needed to learn long division. Because Anthony’s parents

¹ Colman, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: a Friendship that Changed the World

² The Constitution to the United States of America

disagreed with this opinion, her father created a school of his own for his children to attend.³ Although her father firmly believed in women and men being treated equally, he did not always live up to what he taught his children. Once, when he was explaining to Anthony how his mill was run, he explained, “it would not do to have a woman overseer.”⁴ Influences and experiences like this throughout her childhood compelled Anthony to advocate for not only women’s suffrage, but also for temperance and civil rights.

Tragedies of the Women’s Suffrage Movement

The Women’s Suffrage Movement, though triumphant in the end, had to overcome many tragedies in order to secure the promise of never having to fight for the ballot again. Suffragists, advocating for women’s rights, had to deal with trials such as discrimination and objectification, as well as overcoming governmental oppression. Susan B. Anthony argued that “every discrimination against women in the constitutions or laws of the several states is today null and void,”⁵ because women were considered citizens, although denied the right to vote. Before and during the suffrage movement, “women...were considered deficient in the rational capacities and independent judgement necessary for responsible citizenship.”⁶ In the 1800s, nearly all people saw women as obedient, passive creatures, bound to the domestic sphere. The Women’s Rights Movement in the late nineteenth century gave women an opportunity to show the world that they were much more than what society had confined them to.

Girls and women in the nineteenth century were unceasingly objectified; seen as something to purchase when they were wed, something that was only worth what their outside

³ Pollack, *Who Was Susan B. Anthony*

⁴ Pollack, *Who Was Susan B. Anthony*

⁵ *On Women’s Right to the Suffrage*

⁶ *Oxford Encyclopedias*

appearance had to offer. Anthony spoke up about this matter and saying, “[Women] are shamelessly exposed to the public market, and whose beauty of face and delicacy of complexion, symmetry of form, and grace of motion, do but enhance their moined value, and the more surely victimize them to the unbridled passions of their proud purchasers.”⁷ At the time, women were only seen for their beauty and domestic capabilities. This made it hard for women to be heard, and for them to try to share their message of equality. Anthony implied that women do not even get to choose the circumstances of their lives by saying that, “The only possible way to accomplish this great change is to accord to women equal power in the making, shaping and controlling of the circumstances of life.”⁸ From the moment women were born to the moment they died, everything was chosen for them, primarily by men- fathers, brothers and husbands. The suffragists who were advocating for voting rights were not simply advocating for the ballot, they were fighting for their freedom from the domesticity of the home.

Not only were these political activists, or suffragettes, persecuted by their fellow American citizens, and even direct family members, they were also oppressed by the government. Some judges and political figures refused to aid Anthony on the grounds that it was unconstitutional for women to vote. In response to those who dismissed her plea for help to gain the right to a ballot, Anthony stated, “It was we, the people, not we, the white male citizens.”⁹ In the Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States of America, written by the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), the NWSA accused America of being in “direct opposition”¹⁰ to the Constitution by usurping power over women. Many obstacles tried to keep

⁷ Make the Slave’s Case Our Own

⁸ Social Purity

⁹ On Women’s Right to the Suffrage

¹⁰ Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States of America

Anthony and the suffrage movement from experiencing success, but they continued to rise, and in a triumphant show of resiliency, proved to America that not only do women deserve the right to vote, but that they will continue to fight against any hardships that stand in their way of obtaining the ballot.

The Power of Speeches

Susan B. Anthony used her strong voice to become a prolific orator. Through powerful speeches, she empowered women all over the country to stand up for their right to vote. While teaching at Canajoharie Academy, Anthony joined the Daughters of Temperance. In 1848, Anthony gave her first ever public speech at a Daughters of Temperance supper. While this was the first of many speeches over Anthony's career, it was a pivotal moment in her quest for women's suffrage, because it was the beginning of her journey as a public speaker. Anthony's speeches had an irreversible impact on the women of the country. For example, in her speech, "Social Purity" Anthony spoke, "We have had quite enough of the sickly sentimentalism which counts the woman a heroine and a saint for remaining the wife of a drunken, immoral husband."

¹¹ In the nineteenth century, women were not allowed to divorce their husbands, even if they were abusive or drunkards. Anthony, along with the Daughters of Temperance, advocated for women's rights to divorce husbands who were not fit to be spouses. This speech helped to explain that laws were wrongly used to punish people whose actions were impelled by desperate circumstances.¹² Anthony's work in the temperance movement was only the beginning of decades of inspiring speeches and calls to action.

¹¹ Social Purity

¹² The American Feminist

Because Anthony was one of the most vocal suffragists, she was also one of the most successful. Anthony was dedicated to triumphantly granting voting rights to all citizens and gaining her a place in history forever. In 1869, Anthony and a fellow advocate, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, founded the National Woman Suffrage Association, or the NWSA. This was an organization dedicated to the passing of the nineteenth amendment. In the Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States by the National Woman Suffrage Association, it states, “Bills of Attainder have been passed by the introduction of the word ‘male’ into all the state constitutions, denying to women the right of suffrage, and thereby making sex a crime.”¹³ The NWSA accused the entire government of sexism because of failure to recognize women in the constitutions to the states and the country. By calling out the United States government, the suffragists demanded the attention of the whole nation, and they challenged the world’s definition of what a woman was and what a woman could do.

Gaining the Ballot

The goal of the women’s suffrage movement was always to ratify the nineteenth amendment and gain a vote for women. In one of Anthony’s speeches titled, “On Women’s Right to the Suffrage” she asked the question, “Are women persons?”¹⁴ Such a simple question provoked profound thoughts about what made a woman a person, if not the right to vote. She followed the question by stating that the dictionary definition of a person is “entitled to vote and hold office.”¹⁵ Anthony referenced the United States Constitution in the same speech, and submitted, “It was we, the people, not we, the white male citizens...who formed the union.”¹⁶

¹³ The Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States of America

¹⁴ On Women’s Right to the Suffrage

¹⁵ On Women’s Right to the Suffrage

¹⁶ On Women’s Right to the Suffrage

Anthony argued that women, as well as men, should have the opportunity to “secure the blessings of liberty”¹⁷ In the same speech, Anthony said, “It is downright mockery to talk to women of their enjoyment of the blessings of liberty while they are denied the use of the only means of securing them provided by this democrat-republican government- the ballot.”¹⁸ During the 1800s, many people thought women took advantage of the “Blessings of Liberty”.¹⁹ Suffragists did not see it that way. Suffragists fought for the ballot because they believed that in order to secure the blessings of liberty, they needed to express an opinion about the leaders of their country. Anthony and certain other suffragists decided to exercise what they thought was their rightful privilege and vote in the 1872 presidential election.

During the presidential election of 1872, Anthony and three of her sisters, in addition to fellow suffragists, followed Virginia Minor, a fellow member of the National Woman Suffrage Association, in voting in the election. On November 5th, Anthony read the fourteenth amendment and the New York Constitution aloud to the registrars. When they refused to register her as a voter, Anthony proceeded to threaten to press charges and sue. The registrars finally gave in and allowed Anthony and her friends to register to vote. Eighteen days later, on November 23rd, Anthony was arrested in her home for voting illegally. Originally, Anthony’s bail was set at five hundred dollars, until she started to protest her arrest, when the judge raised her bail to one thousand dollars.²⁰ Anthony desperately wanted her case to go to the Supreme Court, like Virginia Minor’s did, but Anthony’s attorney, Henry Selden, paid her bail because he “could not see a lady” he “respected put in jail”²¹ and destroyed Anthony’s hopes of her case going to the

¹⁷ On Women’s Right to the Suffrage

¹⁸ On Women’s Right to the Suffrage

¹⁹ On Women’s Right to the Suffrage

²⁰ Kendall, Susan B. Anthony: Fighter for Women’s Voting Rights

²¹ Western New York Suffragists: Winning the Vote

Supreme Court.²² Prior to her trial, the judge overseeing Anthony's case had already made his decision regarding her conviction. He determined she was guilty, and Anthony was fined one hundred dollars, which she refused to pay for the rest of her life. Although Anthony was found guilty of voting fraud, some of the newspapers rallied around her and supported her brave decision. The New York Times wrote that Anthony's act, "Should earn her a place in history."²³ The Chicago Tribune noted "If Miss Anthony is ever to be rewarded, the reward should be deferred no longer."²⁴

Anthony had to wait many grueling years before she could begin to see the end of the war she fought so hard to win. Although she died on March 13, 1906, before she could witness the ratification of the nineteenth amendment, the next generation of women carried on her legacy. The New York Times wrote, "Miss Susan B. Anthony died at 12:40 o'clock this morning. The end came peacefully. Miss Anthony had been unconscious practically all of the time for more than twenty-four hours, and her death had been almost momentarily expected since last night."²⁵ On August 20th, 1920, Congress finally ratified the nineteenth amendment, guaranteeing all women the right to vote, a true triumph in Anthony's ceaseless devotion to her work.. The amendment 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 sex."²⁶ It was official, women in the United States of America would be able to exercise the right to vote. For every generation onward, the ballot would never be denied to a woman.

The Lasting Impacts of Susan B. Anthony's Activism

²² Kendall, Susan B. Anthony: Fighter for Women's Voting Rights

²³ New York Times

²⁴ Chicago Tribune

²⁵ New York Times

²⁶ The Constitution to the United States of America

Susan B. Anthony fought diligently for suffrage, and in doing so, she became an example to those around her. She trained the next generation of women to continue the fight for equality. Women all around the country, young and old, strived for equality, and it proved effective. These women opened doors to education for girls, more job opportunities, and the chance to be seen as a force to be reckoned with, as opposed to being viewed as submissive and obedient. Unbeknownst to her, Anthony's work during the 1800s laid the foundation for the feminist movements today. Anthony was a believer in women having their own choice concerning marriage. She said in her speech, "Social Purity," "Marriage, to women as to men, must be a luxury, not a necessity."²⁷ This passage reflects one of the many messages feminism is trying to get across today- that marriage should not be expected of a woman or of a man. Anthony advocated for equality in all that she did. She wanted equality in voting, in marriage and in abolition. Feminism today is, "the advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes."²⁸ Unaware of the future effects it would give rise to, Anthony brought about modern feminism today through advocating for equal rights for all.

Conclusion

Susan B. Anthony's life was filled with tragedies, but ultimately, was successful. She accomplished so much, even with the hardships she faced. She trained future generations to carry on her fight, even long after she was gone. Anthony inspired women in the nineteenth century, and continues to inspire people today. Anthony proved to the world that women absolutely do have the "intellectual and moral faculties sufficient for anything."²⁹ Women are so much more than domestic concerns because of Anthony's work. The United States has come so

²⁷ Social Purity

²⁸ Dictionary

²⁹ Colman, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: a Friendship that Changed the World

far because of Anthony's efforts during the Suffrage Movement. We should celebrate Anthony today as the woman who started the fight for equality, and who guaranteed women the right to the ballot for every generation to come.

Annotated Bibliography

Anthony, Susan B. "Make the Slave's Case Our Own." 1859. Speech. This speech was used in my paper to illustrate the objectification in the 1800s. This speech compares slaves and women in order to juxtapose the disadvantages both of the groups of people are at.

"On Women's Right to the Suffrage." 1 Jan. 1873. Speech. This speech talks about how it is unfair it is for men to have the right to vote, but not women, because we are all citizens of the United States. it gave insight into Anthony's opinions about the charges against her, on the grounds of illegal voting. This source helped me in my paper by adding helpful details about inequality in voting.

Anthony, Susan Brownell. "Social Purity." 1895. Speech. This speech helped me understand the way Susan B. Anthony perceives the concept of marriage and how she spoke about the social circumstances that enable moral gender equality. It also provided details concerning the way women were treated in marriage in the nineteenth century.

Colman, Penny. *Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: A Friendship That Changed the World*. New York, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 2011. This book tells the story of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, fellow suffragists and friends.

Together they battled the hardships of trying to gain a vote for women and eventually emerged victorious. This book helped me understand the aspects of Susan B. Anthony's personal life and provides details about her friendship with Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Declaration of rights of the Women of the United States of America. 4 July 1876. *Feminist.org*,

Feminist Newswire,

feminist.org/blog/index.php/2014/07/04/july-4-1876-suffragists-present-declaration-of-ri

ghts-of-the-women-of-the-united-states-to-pennsylvania-senator/. Accessed 27 Feb. 2019. The Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States of America helped me understand the aim of the National Woman Suffrage Association in fighting the patriarchy. It also provides helpful details concerning the history of women's rights throughout the history of the world

Mead, Rebecca J., Ph.D. "The Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia*. *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*, Mar. 2018, oxfordre.com/americanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-17. Accessed 26 Feb. 2019. This encyclopedia outlines the key turning points of the Women's Suffrage Movement and describes how the movement was connected to social, economic, and political advances. In my paper, I used this to show the difference between what society thought of women and what society thought of men.

"Miss Anthony's Claims to Office." *Chicago Tribune* [Chicago], 7 Dec. 1872, p. 4. This newspaper article was written merely a few weeks after Anthony was taken into custody for illegally voting. The newspaper sided with Anthony in the sense that they thought she was a good candidate to become the first female voter. This article helped me show that, as time went on, Anthony gained many supporters for the Suffrage Movement.

"Miss Susan B. Anthony Died This Morning." *New York Times* [New York], 16 Mar. 1906, archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0215.html?scp=1&sq=. Accessed 27 Feb. 2019. This article describes how Susan B. Anthony peacefully died in her sleep. I used it to support the fact that she died before she could reap the fruits of her labor.

US Constitution. Art. Preamble. This part of the constitution was used in the speech "On Women's Right to the Suffrage" to show that it is unreasonable to expect women to sit idle while supposedly enjoying the "blessings of liberty", while not being able to vote. In my paper, I used this quote to argue that everyone should have equal opportunities.