

**Susan B.  
Anthony  
and  
Elizabeth  
Cady  
Stanton**

In 1851, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton embarked on a collaboration that evolved into one of the most productive working partnerships in U.S. history. As uncompromising women's rights leaders, they revolutionized the political and social condition of women in American society. Stanton was the leading voice and philosopher of the women's rights and suffrage movements while Anthony was the powerhouse who commandeered the legions of women who struggled to win the ballot for American women.

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Born on November 12, 1815, in Johnstown, New York, Elizabeth Cady grew up amidst wealth and privilege, the daughter of Daniel Cady, a prominent judge, and Margaret Livingston. In 1826, the death of her brother Eleazar drove her to excel in every area her brother had in an attempt to compensate her father for his loss. She attended the progressive Troy Female Seminary, where she received the best education available for a young woman of the early 1830s.

After her graduation in 1833, she became immersed in the world of reform at the home of

her cousin Gerrit Smith. There she fell in love with the abolitionist Henry Brewster Stanton. Following their marriage in 1840, she met the woman who would become her most important mentor in her development as a feminist, the abolitionist Lucretia Mott.

When the Stantons moved from Boston to the village of Seneca Falls, New York, in 1847, Elizabeth suffered from the lack of an intellectual community. From this despair emerged her resolution to transform women's place in society. With Mott and three other women, Elizabeth spearheaded the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls in July 1848. At this gathering, she presented their Declaration of Rights and Sentiments, a document she composed. The Declaration and its 11 resolutions demanded social and political equality for all women, including its most controversial claim, the right to vote.

The second of Daniel and Lucy Read Anthony's eight children, Susan B. Anthony was born on February 15, 1820, in Adams, Massachusetts. Daniel, a respected Quaker, mill and factory owner, and reformer, made sure that his daughters as well as his sons received excellent educations. As a Quaker, Susan grew up in a culture that permitted women to freely express

themselves. Following her education, she worked as a teacher.

In 1848, after ten years of teaching, Anthony began her reform career as a temperance activist. She joined the Daughters of Temperance in 1848, left teaching in 1849, and soon became a recognized temperance leader in New York state. Through temperance, she encouraged women to seek legal solutions to protect their families from the poverty and violence caused by their husbands' alcohol abuse.

During the early 1850s, Anthony also longed for involvement in the abolitionist and women's rights movements. In the months following her first meeting with Stanton in March 1851, the two women not only developed a deep friendship but also helped each other prepare themselves to change women's lives. Anthony thrived under Stanton's tutelage—soaking up her knowledge of politics, the law, philosophy, and rhetoric. Stanton, confined to her home by motherhood (she gave birth to her seventh and last child in 1859), was stimulated by Anthony's thoughtful critiques of her ideas. Anthony became the propulsive force behind all their activism. She did not permit Stanton to be idle, always pushing her to write one more speech,

one more manifesto.

Frustrated by obstacles that arose during their first project—their leadership of the Woman's State Temperance Society in 1854—Anthony and Stanton began their women's rights campaign to expand New York's Married Women's Property Law of 1848.

As would become customary, Anthony, who was unmarried and free of family demands, organized and ran the campaign. She traveled statewide, speaking throughout 54 New York counties. Stanton did the legal research, drafted the literature Anthony distributed, and wrote the speeches for them both. Finally, in 1860, following Stanton's eloquent speech before the New York state legislature, the Married Women's Property Law of 1860 became law. Married women gained the right to own property, engage in business, manage their wages and other income, sue and be sued, and be joint guardian of their children.

In 1856, the American Anti-Slavery Society hired Anthony to be its general agent in the state of New York. Until 1861, she and her troupe of antislavery orators (including Stanton) crisscrossed the state, confronting

hostile mobs wherever they spoke.

During the Civil War, Anthony and Stanton formed the Women's Loyal National League, the first national women's political organization. Through the WLNL, 5,000 women gathered 400,000 signatures to persuade Congress to pass the 13th Amendment guaranteeing the freedom of African Americans.

In 1866, Stanton and Anthony helped establish the American Equal Rights Association, dedicated to securing the ballot for African-American men and all women. Though the two suffragists believed that woman suffrage could be enacted through the 14th, and later, the 15th Amendments, many of their abolitionist colleagues rejected the plan—arguing that votes for African-American men must take precedence.

Feeling abandoned and betrayed, in May 1869, Anthony and Stanton formed the National Woman Suffrage Association, a woman-led organization devoted to obtaining a federal woman suffrage amendment. In retaliation, their estranged abolitionist colleagues formed the more conservative American Woman Suffrage Association in November 1869, a move

which solidified the painful rupture in the woman suffrage movement.

During these dark days, from 1868-1870 Anthony and Stanton published the radical women's rights newspaper *The Revolution*. Stanton was the principal writer and editor, Anthony the publisher and business manager. Although the paper was a financial failure, it provided a much-needed forum for Stanton and Anthony to broadcast their views to their allies and the public.

During the early 1870s, Anthony and Stanton pursued a strategy that they believed would enfranchise women. The "New Departure" was founded on the premise that the 14th and 15th Amendments guaranteed all citizens the right to vote regardless of gender. Anthony and at least 150 other women tested its constitutionality by casting ballots in the 1872 presidential election. Several weeks later, Anthony was arrested. She was indicted by a grand jury in January 1873 and in June went on trial in Canandaigua, New York. The judge ordered the all-male jury to render a guilty verdict. In her comments to the court, Anthony exposed the trial for the travesty it was.

Anthony and Stanton abandoned the New

Departure in 1875 when the Supreme Court delivered the *Minor v. Happersett* verdict. Anthony then focused NWSA suffragists on the campaign for a woman suffrage amendment. In 1878, Stanton wrote and submitted NWSA's proposed amendment to the U.S. Senate. For the next 40 years, it would be brought before each session of Congress.

Throughout most of the 1870s, Stanton freed herself from her domestic cares and her troubled relationship with her husband to become a traveling lecturer, an occupation which allowed her to publicize her views on women's rights. Although her frequent travel made it impossible for her to be involved in the day-to-day work of NWSA, she still presided at conventions, inspired suffragists, and continued to be the ideologue of the suffrage movement. Unlike Anthony, Stanton was not only a suffragist. She was concerned with revolutionizing women's lives on many fronts—through marriage and divorce reform, dress reform, expanded educational opportunities for women, and her protests against organized religion's oppression of women.

During the 1870s and 1880s, it was Anthony who sustained NWSA. She was convinced that her primary task was to educate society—

legislators, the male electorate, and all women—to an understanding of the crucial importance of the ballot. She educated the public through her cross-country lecture tours, her relationship with the press, her lobbying of legislators, speeches in Congress, state suffrage campaigns, and her guidance of suffragists nationwide. For Anthony, these years were also marked by personal grief and loss. Always devoted to her family, she and her sister Mary Anthony nursed two of their sisters and their mother through the final weeks of their fatal illnesses.

During the early-mid 1880s, Stanton and Anthony once again worked in concert to produce the first three volumes of the *History of Woman Suffrage*, the story of the movement they created. In 1882 and again in 1886, Stanton traveled to England and Europe to visit two of her children and to investigate the possibility of an international suffrage movement. When Anthony joined her in 1883, they agreed to organize an international conference of women in 1888 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention. The International Council of Women proved to be the largest women's convention of its time. It stimulated cooperation among U.S. and foreign women

reformers, though to Anthony's disappointment, it did not advance the suffrage cause.

In 1890, Anthony and NWSA leaders merged their organization with the rival American Woman Suffrage Association to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Anthony knew that the ballot would never be achieved as long as the movement's forces were divided. To further bolster the suffrage ranks, Anthony also pursued an alliance with Frances Willard and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, despite Stanton's misgivings about NAWSA's increasing conservatism.

At the 1892 NAWSA convention, Stanton retired as president and delivered her "Solitude of Self" speech, the fullest expression of her feminist philosophy. In the 1890s, until Anthony retired as president in 1900, NAWSA concentrated on waging state suffrage campaigns, attempting to win the vote state-by-state. Concerned about NAWSA's future leadership, Anthony spent enormous energy cultivating the most capable of its young women leaders. The most promising of these candidates were Carrie Chapman Catt and Anna Howard Shaw, both of whom eventually

served as NAWSA presidents.

In 1891, Anthony made a home with her sister Mary at the family household in Rochester, New York. She hoped that Stanton would come live with them, but her old friend declined, deciding to live with two of her children in New York City. In the 1890s, Stanton was writing to her heart's content—submitting articles and essays to leading national newspapers and magazines. Her celebrity was at its peak.

In 1895, Stanton published the first volume of the *Woman's Bible*, the culmination of her lifelong interest in correcting biblical passages that are demeaning to women. It became an immediate bestseller and aroused widespread controversy. Within NAWSA, it ignited a firestorm. Despite Anthony's protests, the conservative leadership rejected Stanton's book and voted to censure her.

Two weeks before her 87th birthday, Stanton died of heart failure on October 26, 1902. Anthony was inconsolable. "I am too crushed to speak," she told a reporter. Anthony's health was failing, too. In 1900, at age 80, she had suffered a stroke. Though her doctor had warned her to take better care of herself, she decided it would be better to "die in the

harness” than to abandon her work. She was no longer president of NAWSA but still supervised most of its management.

In February 1906, the 86-year-old Anthony, ill and weary, delivered her final speech at the annual NAWSA convention in Baltimore. She reminded NAWSA suffragists that the day of women’s enfranchisement was at hand—that “Failure is Impossible.” Weeks later, Anthony succumbed to double pneumonia and heart failure. She died on March 13th. Fourteen more years of ceaseless agitation would be necessary before the 19th Amendment enfranchised women on August 26, 1920.

**About the Author:** Judith E. Harper, author of *Susan B. Anthony: A Biographical Companion* (ABC-CLIO, 1998). A graduate of Wellesley College and Boston University, Judith E. Harper specializes in the history of nineteenth-century American women. She is the author of **Susan B. Anthony: A Biographical Companion** (ABC-CLIO, 1998). She is currently writing **The Encyclopedia of Women During the**

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