

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Elizabeth Cady was born to a wealthy and politically important family in New York. Although the Stantons had eleven children, many of them died in infancy. When the last surviving son died, eleven-year-old Elizabeth's father said to her, "O, my daughter, I wish you were a boy!" That remark stayed with Elizabeth, and she was determined to be equal to any male.

Mr. Cady supported the idea of women's rights and often shared stories from his law practice of abused women or wives who were viewed as property of their husbands. Elizabeth was angered by this mistreatment and lack of human rights for women.

In 1840, Elizabeth Cady married Henry B. Stanton, who was a known **abolitionist** [anti-slavery activist]. She omitted the phrase "to obey" from their marriage vows because she refused to obey someone who was her equal. She also chose to be called Elizabeth Cady Stanton rather than Mrs. Henry Stanton, which publically demonstrated her belief that women had rights and should be recognized for their value, their intelligence, and their equality with men.

By 1848, she organized the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York. Mrs. Cady Stanton and the other attendees wrote a "Declaration of Sentiments" that promoted treating women as equals with men and arguing for giving women the right to vote. In addition to the right to vote, she wanted women to have rights related to property ownership, employment, parental custody, divorce laws, and decisions about child-bearing. Many women attending the convention were not in agreement with Stanton's position, however, a resolution calling for women's **suffrage** (right to vote) was passed.

During the Civil War (1861-1865), Stanton and her friend Susan B. Anthony started the National Women's Loyal League, which sought to pass an Amendment (the thirteenth) to end slavery in the United States. Stanton and Anthony's goal was to bring about the former slaves' right to vote alongside women's right to vote.

In 1890, two women's suffragist groups united and forged ahead for women's rights. At that convention, many women voiced their objections to the women's movement because of the actions that women had to take. Actions such as speaking in public, getting their names in the newspaper, and speaking from a platform were thought to be immodest. In response to these concerns, Stanton remarked, "Really, ladies, you surprise me; our Conventions are not as public as the ballroom where I saw you all dancing last night. As to modesty, it may be a question in many minds whether it is less modest to speak words of soberness and truth, plainly dressed with one's person decently covered on a platform, than gorgeously arrayed with bare arms and shoulders, to waltz in the arms of a strange gentleman..." The women who voiced the objections walked away speechless.

Stanton and Anthony continued their efforts to rouse women to some sense of their natural rights. They delivered petitions to groups and to legislators in order to form an Amendment. Despite the hardships and humiliation they encountered, they persevered because they believed in their cause.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were true leaders of the women's suffrage movement. Given the times in which they raised awareness, no power could have met the prejudice and bigotry of that period more successfully than they did, "who so bravely and persistently fought and conquered the fight."



Questions:

1. What influenced Elizabeth Cady Stanton to be such a valiant advocate for women's rights?
2. What did she believe was "right" for women?
3. How did she handle her opponents?
4. What kept her pursuing this work for so many years?
5. In what ways did she show integrity?

