



The Fight for Equality

It is Election Day in Rochester, New York. The polls are open and United States citizens stand in line to vote for the next president of the United States. Among those in line are sixteen women voting for the first time. They cast their ballots and leave the polling place. Three weeks later, they are arrested.

The women, led by Susan B. Anthony, were all citizens of the United States, but the year was 1872. Women could not legally vote.

In 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution was passed. It stated that all people born in the United States were citizens and that no citizen could be denied legal privileges. Anthony and several women thought it was time to put this law to a test by voting. They felt they deserved the same rights as American men. Anthony, the most famous and outspoken, was the only one in the group that was ordered to stand trial.

While awaiting her trial, Anthony traveled across the country speaking out against the way women were viewed and treated in American society. Finally, on June 17, 1873, Anthony did stand trial. But the judge, who was opposed to women's suffrage, made his decision before the trial even began. He did not allow Anthony to testify on her own behalf. He ordered the jury to find her guilty of violating voting laws. He also fined her \$100-a fee she refused to pay and remains unpaid to this day. Anthony knew that if she were put in prison for not paying the fine, she would be able to test the law by having a new trial. The judge also knew this, and he did not imprison her for failing to pay the fine. This denied her the chance to appeal the court's decision and challenge the Fourteenth Amendment.

Anthony's brush with the law did not discourage her from continuing the campaign for equality. In fact, little in her life had ever discouraged this determined woman. Born to Quaker parents in 1820, Anthony experienced freedom and respect that many other girls were denied growing up in the U.S. Quakers were among the first groups to practice full equality for the sexes and races. Anthony's parents were strong supporters of the temperance (avoidance of alcohol) and the abolitionist (antislavery) movements. Quakers believed that slavery was morally wrong. They helped to organize and operate the Underground Railroad, which helped slaves escape

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to Canada. In her parent's home, Anthony learned independence, courage, and a passion for justice. Everyone in the Anthony home was dedicated to the movement to end slavery. It was the abolitionists and their actions who forced the nation to deal with the issue of slavery.

At seventeen, Anthony finished school and took her first paying job as a teacher, where her salary was about one-fifth of what male teachers made. Anthony thought this was unfair. When she protested and asked for equal pay, she lost her job. She found another teaching position. And she continued the fight to free all slaves.

At an antislavery meeting in 1851, she met a woman who became a life-long friend and political partner-Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The two also supported temperance. They spoke against the abuse of women and children by men who were alcoholics. At a temperance meeting, Anthony was not allowed to speak because she was a woman. She was told by the men to "listen and learn." In Anthony's upbringing, everyone in the family was allowed to express an opinion. It was after that meeting that she vowed to join Stanton and dedicate herself to gaining rights for women. Despite the horrible and unjust things that were said about her in the newspapers, Anthony continued to travel and make public speeches supporting women's rights.

In 1866, Anthony and Stanton founded the American Equal Rights Association. Three years later, a large portion of the group broke away to form their own group called the American Suffrage Association. The main difference between the groups was their approach to achieving the vote. Stanton and Anthony wanted to gain the vote for women at the national level. The new group wanted to gain the vote on a state-by-state basis.

Anthony worked for women's rights up until the day she died-March 13, 1906. When she died, women could vote in only four states: Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho, and Utah.

On June 4, 1919, fourteen years after Anthony's death, the Nineteenth Amendment was passed, giving women the right to vote.

Amendment 19 to the Constitution

Section 1. 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.