

1860-1865. Elizabeth Cady Stanton: Abolitionist and Advocate for Women's Rights

Sources: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAWstanton.htm>

<http://www.nps.gov/wori/ecs.htm>

<http://womhist.binghamton.edu/malesupp/doc19.htm>

<http://www.nyhistory.com/jerryrescue/stanton.htm>

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was born in Johnstown, New York in 1815. As a young woman, her father, who became a New York Supreme Court judge, guided her in the study of the law. Her cousin was Gerrit Smith, a leading New York State abolitionist and she met numbers of escaped slaves at his home in Peterboro. She later married a lawyer named Henry Brewster Stanton and they both became active members of the American Anti-Slavery Society. In 1840, Henry and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. The women were furious when they were denied their seats as delegates and refused permission to speak at the meeting. They resolved to hold a convention as soon as we returned home and form a society to advocate for women's rights. In 1848, they organized the Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York that issued what has come to be known as the Seneca Fall Manifesto. It was modeled on the Declaration of Independence and declared that all men and women are created equal. Staton broke with many leading male abolitionists, including William Lloyd Garrison, Gerrit Smith, Wendell Phillips and Frederick Douglass, over the idea that the right to vote for black men after emancipation should take precedence over suffrage for women. Elizabeth Cady Stanton died in New York City in 1902.

A. Document A is an excerpt from a speech by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in May, 1860 to the American Anti-Slavery Society. In this speech, she credits William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips and other American abolitionists for their fight against the oppression of both Africans and women.

[I]n spite of noble words, deeds of thirty years of protest, prayers and preaching, slavery still lives, the negro toils on in his weary bondage, his chains have not yet melted in the intense heat of the sun of righteousness. . . . Marys and Marthas have gathered around the prophets of our day. With noble words and deeds, and holy sympathy, they have cheered these exiles from the love and honor of their own false countrymen. At their family altars they have been remembered, and unseen spirits of the brave and the good have hovered over them, and rejoiced in these true sons of earth. Yes, this is the only organization on God's footstool where the humanity of woman is recognized, and these are the only men who have ever echoed back her cries for justice and equality. I shall never forget our champions in the World's Anti-Slavery Convention; how nobly [Wendell] Phillips did speak, and how still more nobly Garrison would not speak, because woman was there denied her rights. Think of a World's Convention and one half of the world is left out! Shame on the women of this nation who help to swell the cry of 'INFIDEL' against men like these! All time would not be long enough to pay the debt of gratitude we owe these noble men, who spoke for us when we were dumb, who roused us to a sense of our own rights, to the dignity of our high calling. No the mission of this Radical Anti-Slavery Movement is not to the African Slave alone, but to the slaves of custom, creed and sex as well; and most faithfully has it done its work. . . . As we rejoice this day in our deliverance from the sad train of fears and errors that have so long dwarfed the greatest minds of earth. . . , let us seek a new and holier baptism for the work that lies for each of us in the future.

B. Document B is an excerpt from "Reminiscences," The History of Woman Suffrage (Chapter XIII). In this selection, Elizabeth Cadt Stanton described efforts to disrupt abolitionist meetings in central .New York after the election of Abraham Lincoln but just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. Source: womenshistory.about.com/library/etext

In the winter of 1861, just after the election of Lincoln, the Abolitionists decided to hold a series of Conventions in the chief cities of the North. . . . I was invited to accompany Miss Anthony (Susan B.

Anthony) and Beriah Green to a few points in Central New York. But we soon found, by the concerted action of Republicans all over the country, the Conventions were broken up at every point. This furnished one occasion on which Republicans and Democrats could work harmoniously together, and they made common cause against the Abolitionists. The John Brown raid the year before had intimidated Northern politicians as much as Southern slaveholders, and the general feeling was that the discussion of the question at the North should be altogether suppressed . . . Thirty years of education had somewhat changed the character of Northern mobs. They no longer dragged men through the streets with ropes round their necks, nor broke up women's prayer-meetings; they no longer threw eggs and brickbats at the apostles of reform, nor dipped them in barrels of tar and feathers; they simply crowded the halls, and with laughing, groaning, clapping, and cheering, effectually interrupted the proceedings.

Thus we passed the two days we had advertised for a Convention in St. James' Hall, Buffalo. As we paid for the Hall, the mob enjoyed themselves at our expense in more ways than one. At the appointed time every session we took our places on the platform, making at various intervals of silence renewed efforts to speak. Not succeeding, we sat and conversed with each other and many friends who crowded the platform and ante-rooms. Thus among ourselves we had a pleasant reception and a discussion of many phases of the question that brought us together. The mob not only vouchsafed to us the privilege of talking to our friends without interruption, but delegations of their own came behind the scenes from time to time, to discuss with us the right of free speech and the constitutionality of slavery.

These Buffalo rowdies were headed by ex-Justice Hingon, aided by younger members of the Fillmore and Seymour families and the Chief of Police and fifty subordinates, who were admitted to the hall free for the express purpose of protecting our right of free speech, which in defiance of the Mayor's orders, they did not make the slightest effort to do. At Lockport there was a feeble attempt in the same direction. At Albion neither hall, church, nor school-house could be obtained, so we held small meetings in the dining-room of the hotel.

At Rochester, Corinthian Hall was packed long before the hour advertised. This was a delicately appreciative jocose mob. . . . Here, too, all attempts to speak were futile. At Port Byron a generous sprinkling of cayenne pepper on the stove, soon cut short all constitutional arguments and paeans to liberty. And so it was all the way to Albany. The whole State was aflame with the mob spirit, and from Boston and various points in other States, the same news reached us. As the Legislature was in session, and we were advertised in Albany, a radical member sarcastically moved "that as Mrs. Stanton and Miss Anthony were about to move on Albany, the militia be ordered out for the protection of the city."

Happily, Albany could then boast a democratic Mayor, a man of courage and conscience, who said the right of free speech should never be trodden underfoot where he had the power to prevent it. And grandly did that one determined man maintain order in his jurisdiction. Through all the sessions of the Convention Mayor Thatcher sat on the platform, his police stationed in different parts of the Hall and outside the building, to disperse the crowd as fast as collected. If a man or boy hissed or made the slightest interruption, he was immediately ejected.

C. Document C is a letter to the National Anti-Slavery Standard, December 26, 1865. In this letter she responded to a speech by Wendell Phillips where he declared "this is the Negro's Hour" and that women's rights would have to wait. Critics argue that some of Stanton's comments in this letter are racist. Her defenders respond that they reflect frustration that African American men will receive rights denied to all women. Source: *Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, Ann D. Gordon, ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), pp. 54-55.

Sir, By an amendment of the Constitution, ratified by three-fourths of the loyal States, the black man is declared free. The largest and most influential political party is demanding Suffrage for him throughout the Union, which right in many of the States is already conceded. Although this may remain a question for politicians to wrangle over for five or ten years, the black man is still, in a political point of view, far above the educated women of the country.

The representative women of the nation have done their uttermost for the last thirty years to secure freedom for the negro, and so long as he was lowest in the scale of being we were willing to press his claims; but now, as the celestial gate to civil rights is slowly moving on its hinges, it becomes a serious question whether we had better stand aside and see "Sambo" walk into the kingdom first.

As self-preservation is the first law of nature, would it not be wiser to keep our lamps trimmed and burning, and when the Constitutional door is open, avail ourselves of the strong arm and blue uniform of the black soldier to walk in by his side, and thus make the gap so wide that no privileged class could ever again close it against the humblest citizen of the Republic?

"This is the negro's hour." Are we sure that he, once entrenched in all his inalienable rights, may not be an added power to hold us at bay? Have not "black male citizens" been heard to say they doubted the wisdom of extending the right of Suffrage to women? Why should the African prove more just and generous than his Saxon compeers?

If the two millions of Southern black women are not to be secured in their rights of person, property, wages, and children, their emancipation is but another form of slavery. In fact, it is better to be the slave of an educated white man, than of a degraded, ignorant black one. We who know what absolute power the statute laws of most of the States give man, in all his civil, political, and social relations, do demand that in changing the status of the four millions of Africans, the women as well as the men should be secured in all the rights, privileges, and immunities of citizens.

It is all very well for the privileged order to look down complacently and tell us, "this is the negro's hour; do not clog his way; do not embarrass the Republican party with any new issue; be generous and magnanimous; the negro once safe, the woman comes next." Now, if our prayer involved a new set of measures, or a new train of thought, it would be cruel to tax "white male citizens" with even two simple questions at a time; but the disfranchised all make the same demand, and the same logic and justice that secures Suffrage to one class gives it to all.

The struggle of the last thirty years has not been merely on the black man as such, but on the broader ground of his humanity. Our Fathers, at the end of the first revolution, in their desire for a speedy readjustment of all their difficulties, and in order to present to Great Britain, their common enemy, an united front, accepted the compromise urged on them by South Carolina, and a century of wrong, ending in another revolution, has been the result of their action.

This is our opportunity to retrieve the errors of the past and mould anew the elements of Democracy. The nation is ready for a long step in the right direction; party lines are obliterated, and all men are thinking for themselves. If our rulers have the justice to give the black man Suffrage, woman should avail herself of that new-born virtue to secure her rights; if not, she should begin with renewed earnestness to educate the people into the idea of universal suffrage.