

Susan B. Anthony: The Right to Vote

Imagine growing up in a world where women didn't have the same rights as men. Women didn't own property. They couldn't have the same jobs as men. They weren't allowed to vote. It's hard to visualize, but that was the reality for women in the United States during the 1800s. But some women started working to attain more rights. One woman, Susan B. Anthony, spent most of her life fighting for equal treatment of women, especially the right to vote.



The United States Constitution

Susan B. Anthony was born in 1820 to a Quaker family in Massachusetts. In the Quaker religion, all people were viewed as equal. This gave Susan an advantage from the time she was born. She was expected to be able to do anything boys could do. This included getting an education. Susan's parents taught her to read and write at the age of three. This achievement would have been unusual for any child. But, for Susan, it was unusual because she was a girl. The Anthony family thought it was important to give all of their children the same opportunities in life.

When Susan started school, she saw that things were not as fair in the real world. One of her teachers refused to teach her long division because there was no reason for a girl to learn so much about math. The teacher thought it would be a waste to teach Susan something that only boys would ever use. Her parents didn't agree and took Susan out of school. They taught her at home instead.

Susan learned important lessons from her parents. She learned to speak out for what was not fair. She learned to be a good citizen and to stand up for the rights of others. The whole Anthony family was active in the movement to abolish slavery. Susan's parents taught her skills that would help her become an activist later in life.



When Susan was 26 years old, she became a schoolteacher at a girl's academy. It still bothered her that boys and girls learned separately from each other. She fought for the rights of boys and girls to learn together. She wanted them to learn the same things. Susan also fought for the rights of former slaves to have their children learn in these same classrooms. She knew that not every fight could be won, but she had to make her views known.

When she turned 28, Susan found the fight that would keep her busy for the rest of her life. A women's rights activist, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, gave a speech about women gaining the right to vote. This was an exciting idea to Susan, and she knew she had to be part of this effort. She attended the conference with her parents and sister, and they all signed the documents to support the fight. Of course, the fight was not that simple.

Susan began working with Elizabeth Cady Stanton for voting rights. Their efforts were known as the suffrage movement. Voting would be an important step toward equality. Casting a vote would allow a woman to have a say on issues that directly affected her. It would strengthen a woman's position in society.



Statues at the Women's Rights National Historic Park in New York

Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton worked tirelessly for suffrage. They gave speeches around the country and started a weekly newspaper. They also founded an organization called the National Women's Suffrage Association.

Susan knew that public demonstrations were an important way to get attention. In 1872, she was arrested for trying to vote in an election. Susan didn't really think that her vote would count. She just wanted others to become aware of the issue.

The struggle for suffrage took 72 years. With the passing of the 19th Amendment in 1920, women finally gained the right to vote. Susan wasn't alive to see it happen, though. Susan B. Anthony died in 1906, but her efforts helped pave the way for women to hold important roles in the United States government.



A postage stamp from 1936, honoring Susan B. Anthony