

The Impact of Susan B. Anthony on the World of Women

Meg Baltes

Mr. Glider

APUSH Block Blue 3

1 June 2019

Susan B. Anthony is one of the most intriguing women in American history specifically regarding her involvement in social justice and reform during the mid to late 1800s. She held many important relationships with other important figures at the time including Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Connections like these pushed Anthony to delve further into activism. Even relationships that held negative undertones were manipulated by Anthony to further her own success along with the success of what she was fighting for. While she was an activist in many different areas, some of the most important work she did was within the women's rights movement as she used her platform to help women who lacked a voice begin to play an active role in creating their own future. Without Anthony revitalizing the lives of those around her, the future of equality would have looked much different. She not only influenced and inspired members of the movement but was a leader and creator of many official documents that led to the political success of the movement. This essay will inquire about what motivated and inspired Anthony to establish the women's rights movement and how she used this new-found influence to transform the lives of American women for eternity.

As a girl who grew up in a family with a passion for social justice, it is no wonder that Anthony became a prominent figure in the women's suffrage movement of the 1800s. Born on February 15, 1820, Anthony spent her childhood in Massachusetts where she was raised with strict Quaker beliefs.¹ Her father, Daniel Anthony, and her mother, Lucy Read Anthony, believed that outside entertainment would distract their eight children from building a strong relationship with God, so they forbade many objects including toys. This gave Anthony lots of free time to

¹ "Anthony, Susan B." In *Biographies*, edited by Carol Brennan, Kathleen J. Edgar, Judy Galens, and Roger Matuz, 11-19. Vol. 3 of American Social Reform Movements Reference Library. Detroit, MI: UXL, 2007. Gale Virtual Reference Library (accessed May 17, 2019).

contribute to helping her family house the men that worked for her father by cooking. Tasks like these taught Anthony the importance of her relationship with God and kept her from resenting the choices her parents made on her behalf. These beliefs helped to shape Anthony's views on equality and her faith in the power of God. By having a belief in a higher power, Anthony could foresee a future of tolerance and liberty, which gave her the motivation to take an active role in ensuring this future became a reality.

Quakerism also helped Anthony to better appreciate her own life and the lives of others. Quakers are known for their less radical stances on issues. This led Daniel Anthony to use cotton in his mill that had not been a result of slave labor, giving Anthony her first experience with social issues. Her father also contributed greatly to her education which proved very beneficial for her future as an activist. When he felt that his daughters were being subject to a sexist curriculum in school, he started to homeschool them with a private tutor. This shaped Anthony's thirst for knowledge and eventually, she was sent to a boarding school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.² Here she started to develop a love for education and a desire to teach.

The relationships that Anthony cultivated were important to the transformative experience she had during the 1800s. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was her partner through much of this time, as together they tackled the issue of women's suffrage. It was Stanton herself who introduced Anthony to the women's rights movement in 1851.³ Stanton was the daughter of Judge Daniel Cady, who first implanted the ideas of fighting for justice in her mind. When Stanton would become furious at the injustices she saw around her, Judge Cady would tell her

² Brennan et al, 13

³"Biographies." n.d. *National Women's History Museum*. Accessed May 23, 2019.

that the only way to fix it would be to change the law⁴. By doing so, he fostered a desire for change in Stanton and in turn, helped push her to become the woman that would first guide Anthony.

Anthony and Stanton both brought different attributes to the table, resulting in a strong partnership where they both relied heavily upon each other. Stanton has been known to be the one focused more in philosophy and new ideas, while Anthony has been seen as the one responsible for holding up the movement. She took on the struggle of organizing, inspiring others to join the movement, and is the one that pushed the importance of writing what was happening within the movement⁵. Stanton, being her elder, had been involved in the movement for longer, as she had been at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, which was the first women's rights convention. While Anthony did not attend the convention, her mother and sister did⁶. This gave her family the ability to inspire Anthony to join the movement and set up Stanton to mentor Anthony at the beginning of their relationship.

The connection between Anthony and Stanton is what kept both of the women passionate and gave them the ability to tackle complex tasks as they had the support of another who was fighting for the same kind of equality. Without Stanton, it is doubtful that Anthony would have become a social reformer or even joined the movement. After Anthony joined, the two formed a deep connection as they rivaled against a women's rights group in Massachusetts headed by

⁴ Brennan et al, 14

⁵ Kern, Kathi. "'I Pray with My Work': Susan B. Anthony's Religious Journey." In *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights*, edited by Ridarsky Christine L. and Huth Mary M., by Hewitt Nancy A., 86-114. Boydell and Brewer, 2012.

⁶ "Biographies."

Lucy Stone and Henry B. Blackwell. The turmoil between the groups led to strained relations between Stone and Anthony which would continue for years⁷.

While the two had once worked side by side, in 1869, Stone created the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) which went against views of the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), a group created by Anthony and Stanton. The biggest difference between the two was their take on the issue of black rights and the role it played with women's rights, especially regarding the 15th amendment⁸. This amendment, passed in 1870, granted the right to vote to African Americans, even those who were former slaves. Stone thought that this law should be supported while Anthony and Stanton fought against this law, as they believed it should also grant voting rights to women. As a result of this disagreement, the two separate groups were formed⁹. The break between Anthony and Stone was important as it revitalized Anthony and led her to lead the NWSA to complete important work separate from the activists in the AWSA. The shift, which Anthony helped create, forever changed what the women's rights movement looked like and how it would function.

The work they did separately helped the groups accomplish many different goals. The NWSA wrote a document entitled the Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States on July 4, 1876. It stated what the group was fighting for and called for action to be taken¹⁰. It

⁷ Armstrong, Henrietta Krone. *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 79, no. 4 (1955): 525-26.

⁸ Brennan et al, 17

⁹ Armstrong, 525

¹⁰ "Image 2 of Susan B. Anthony Papers: Scrapbooks, 1876-1934; 1876-1903." *The Library of Congress*. Accessed April 26, 2019.

was one of the first major documents proving to male politicians that women would no longer stand idly by while injustices were placed upon them. Often the NWSA would hold conventions where women would gather to discuss certain subtopics of suffrage and brainstorm ideas. Here, you could see the real impact Anthony had on people's lives and how she inspired them to change. An article was published about the convention in 1903 with a collection of memorable quotes with one woman at the convention saying, "I believe that the best incentive to the development of the mind and of the character, the surest thing to drive away aches and pains, the tonic that will keep mind and body vigorous and assure a staunch old age, is to have a great aim in life and to be consecrated to it. Look at Susan B. Anthony."¹¹ After the NWSA and AWSA had their own success, the two reconciled and decades later the two groups merged back together to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Anthony helped be part of this merge and was even made president from 1892 to 1900¹².

Anthony also had a significant impact on the women's rights movement apart from her work with organizations, especially through her actions. The fifteenth amendment was ratified on February 3, 1870, which granted black citizens of America the right to vote. As previously stated, Anthony was angered by the fact that even after all her fighting for equality, women were still being overshadowed in politics. To combat this, she went to a barbershop in Rochester, New York where voter registration was taking place. In tow were three other abolitionists carrying copies of the U.S. Constitution. Anthony convinced the men to let all four women vote, sparking

¹¹ "Image 9 of Susan B. Anthony Papers: Scrapbooks, 1876-1934; 1902-1903." *The Library of Congress*. Accessed April 26, 2019.

¹² Armstrong, 525-26

a movement in Rochester, as fifty other women were inspired to register from the precedent Anthony set. Twenty days later, on November 28, 1872, a U.S. deputy marshal arrested Anthony on the charge of illegal voting¹³.

As her trial approached, Anthony went around the country speaking out about the injustices that had fallen upon her and using them as an opportunity to spark a larger conversation among her subordinates. She stated that "Being persons, then, women are citizens; and no state has a right to make any law, or to enforce any old law, that shall abridge their privileges or immunities."¹⁴ Basically, Anthony is directly using the Constitution to prove her point that as a woman, she is a citizen, and therefore has the right to vote. While this tactic did not result in the charges being dropped, it did something much more important. It blatantly illustrated the oppression of women. The action of withholding voting rights for women could now be argued to be unconstitutional by the people who followed Anthony and listened to this speaking tour.

The way in which Anthony manipulated the story in a way that went against the government and those who imprisoned her also resulted in the major differences in the way her case was handled. The judge, Ward Hunt, was known for his sexist politics and declared Anthony guilty before the trial even began. She was fined \$100, but as she opposed the charges and ruling, Anthony refused to pay. The court let this be, as they knew trying to enforce the fine

¹³ "United States v. Anthony, 1872." n.d. *Trial of Susan B. Anthony*. Accessed May 23, 2019.

¹⁴ Brennan et al, 17

would give Anthony more reason for appealing the ruling and would give her more traction among the higher-ups.¹⁵

The arrest was not the only instance where Anthony gave life-changing speeches to women. They became a way for Anthony to communicate her own ideas and the ideas of the movements she fought for. Her way with words inspired other women to take action against prejudice. In a famous speech of hers, “Is It a Crime For a U.S. Citizen To Vote?”, Anthony says “we propose to fight our battle for the ballot--all peaceably, but nevertheless persistently through to complete triumph, when all United States citizens shall be recognized as equals before the law.”¹⁶ Her unwavering spirit could ripple through a crowd as her words reached people of all races, genders, and ethnicities. Seeing a strong woman with power and influence was almost entirely unheard of at the time. Still, Anthony could stand up and control a group of thousands of people and help lead them down their own personal transformative path.

During everything Anthony went through, she understood the importance of storytelling. Through the NWSA, Anthony and Stanton got the opportunity to form a connection with Matilda Joslyn Gage. Together, the three women spent ten years writing the three-volume work named *History of Woman Suffrage* that held all together roughly 3,000 pages covering the 110 year time period between 1776 and 1886. *History* has become one of the most paramount pieces of literature as it outlined the trials and tribulations of the movement. Out of the three, Anthony had an unchanging desire to finish the project and continued to push its importance even when Gage

¹⁵ Brennan et al, 18

¹⁶ “Anthony, ‘Is It a Crime...,’ Speech Text.” n.d. *Voices of Democracy*. Accessed May 23, 2019.

and Stanton felt like giving up or when she was faced with opposition from other suffragists who opposed its publication.¹⁷ Anthony was the only one who fully understood the value of being able to control a movement by controlling the story. The history of a movement lies in the writing that will precede those who lived through it, a concept on which Anthony had a strong grasp.

After writing *History* with Gage and Stanton, Anthony went on to write a fourth volume as well as commission a three-volume biography titled *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony*. She chose Ida Husted Harper as the biographer, and the two worked closely together to produce the narrative of Anthony's life that she wanted to be shared. Per the orders of Harper, 20,000 handwritten letters used to help write the biography were destroyed in 1903¹⁸, proving how important it was to Anthony that her words not be skewed in the future, but presented only in the way she wanted. Together, these works give Anthony a total of 5,000 pages of writing which she contributed to, cementing her as the woman responsible for how history views the women's rights movement as a whole. Without her storytelling, the movement would have been regarded differently in the past and in the future.

This helped Anthony's impact on the world to extend far past her death. She has forever changed the political world as women were granted the right to vote in 1920 through the 19th amendment. Before it became an actual amendment it was called the Susan B. Anthony Amendment, showcasing the importance Anthony had on the issue of suffrage. Even though it

¹⁷ Tetraault, Lisa. "We Shall Be Remembered: Susan B. Anthony and the Politics of Writing History." In *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights*, edited by Ridarsky Christine L. and Huth Mary M., by Hewitt Nancy A., 15-56. Boydell and Brewer, 2012.

¹⁸ Armstrong, 525

was passed 14 years past her death, it would not have been possible without Anthony's relentless fighting as well as her encouragement to others¹⁹. As a result of women being part of the voting body of America, almost twice the amount of people can now vote, ensuring that politicians and laws are a more accurate representation of what American people want. This amendment being passed is still one of the most historic events for women and suffrage due to Anthony, with whom the dream of equality in regards to voting could become a reality. Anthony has been recognized for her accomplishments in a multitude of ways. In 1979, she became the first woman to be displayed on U.S. currency with the Susan B. Anthony coin²⁰. This was momentous, as it proved that women played an integral role in creating the history of the country, as the men on currency were considered to be important figures.

Now, Anthony's legacy continues to inspire women all over the country and as a result, has influenced many groups. "The Susan B. Anthony List" is a conservative women's pro-life political action committee that was formed in 1992. The group was inspired by Anthony's religious experiences and how she connected them to her political views. Since it has been founded, the group has supported its mission statement "to support pro-life female politicians" and has financed or endorsed 75 members of Congress in the last 21 years²¹. Groups such as this would not exist if not for women like Anthony to give them a voice and a platform. Their actions in the past have motivated current people to fight for what they believe in, which has led to more positive social and political action being taken by the common person. By going through her own

¹⁹ "Biographies."

²⁰ Brennan et al, 18

²¹ Whitehead, Deborah. "Feminism, Religion, and the Politics of History." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 27, no. 2 (2011): 3-9.

transformative experience, Anthony has allowed others to do the same, even in the modern world.

Without her, thousands of men and women would not have been inspired to join the movement, the movement itself would have been less organized and would not have functioned adequately, and modern historians would not have the same level of detailed writing to analyze the events that transpired. Anthony could only create such a legacy through her relentless activism and education-centric upbringing, as well as through the strong relationships she formed with other prominent women of the time. Therefore, Anthony had a profound impact on the women's rights movement and is in turn, responsible for changing policies and promoting activism. This led to one of the biggest changes in society by giving all women the right to vote, making Susan B. Anthony the most prominent woman in American history.

Bibliography

- "Anthony, 'Is It a Crime...,' Speech Text." n.d. *Voices of Democracy*. Accessed May 23, 2019. <https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/anthony-is-it-a-crime-speech-text/>.
- "Anthony, Susan B." In *Biographies*, edited by Carol Brennan, Kathleen J. Edgar, Judy Galens, and Roger Matuz, 11-19. Vol. 3 of American Social Reform Movements Reference Library. Detroit, MI: UXL, 2007. Gale Virtual Reference Library (accessed May 17, 2019).
- Armstrong, Henrietta Krone. *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 79, no. 4 (1955): 525-26. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20088809>.
- "Biographies." n.d. *National Women's History Museum*. Accessed May 23, 2019. <https://www.womenshistory.org/students-and-educators/biographies>.
- Gordon, Ann D. "Knowing Susan B. Anthony: The Stories We Tell of a Life." In *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights*, edited by Ridarsky Christine L. and Huth Mary M., by Hewitt Nancy A., 201-34. Boydell and Brewer, 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt1x7425.11>.
- "Image 2 of Susan B. Anthony Papers: Scrapbooks, 1876-1934; 1876-1903." *The Library of Congress*. Accessed April 26, 2019. https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss11049.mss11049-005_00259_00469/?sp=2&r=-1.11,-0.18,3.22,1.337,0
- "Image 9 of Susan B. Anthony Papers: Scrapbooks, 1876-1934; 1902-1903." *The Library of Congress*. Accessed April 26, 2019. https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss11049.mss11049-006_00008_00151/?sp=9
- "United States v. Anthony, 1872." n.d. *Trial of Susan B. Anthony*. Accessed May 23, 2019. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5602e55fe4b053956b5cbfb1/560aa902e4b0c26a9ae00308/560c30c0e4b06ecc6a268148/1471963187916/sba-arrested.jpg>.
- Tetrault, Lisa. "We Shall Be Remembered: Susan B. Anthony and the Politics of Writing History." In *Susan B. Anthony and the Struggle for Equal Rights*, edited by Ridarsky Christine L. and Huth Mary M., by Hewitt Nancy A., 15-56. Boydell and Brewer, 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt1x7425.5>.
- Whitehead, Deborah. "Feminism, Religion, and the Politics of History." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 27, no. 2 (2011): 3-9. doi:10.2979/jfemistudreli.27.2.3.

