

## Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Stand for Justice

- **Compelling Question**
  - How does the pursuit of justice help shape our purpose and identity?
- **Virtue:** Justice
- **Definition** – Justice is the capacity to determine and preserve our common rights.
- **Lesson Overview**
  - In this lesson, students will learn about Elizabeth Cady Stanton's role in the women's s movement. They will explore how her actions conformed to the ideas of justice and the many obstacles she had to overcome in achieving her purpose. Through her example, they will learn how they can pursue justice in their own lives.
- **Objectives**
  - Students will analyze Elizabeth Cady Stanton's role in the women's rights movement
  - Students will understand how they can be just in their own lives
  - Students will apply their knowledge of justice to their own lives
- **Background**
  - In the early decades of the nineteenth century, a Second Great Awakening, or religious revival, swept through the United States. The evangelical fervor spawned numerous reform movements such as abolitionism, temperance, and prison reform. Reformers sought to alleviate harsh conditions, work for equality for all, eliminate vice, and create a utopian society. In general, they wanted to achieve a more just society.

These reform movements created organizations that engaged in politics and civil society. They sent out speakers to raise awareness, spread knowledge through pamphlets and newspapers, lobbied politicians in various levels of government, and learned how to create strong organizations. Many of the reform movements were controversial because of the change they sought. For example, the abolitionists had many detractors and were often the victims of mob violence.

Women were able to enter public life and participate in all of the reform movements because of their inherent moral quality. Women, however, generally suffered inequality in most social and political institutions. They could not vote, could not own property, and could not serve on juries. Women did not have the same educational or economic opportunities as men. When women engaged in other reform movements for equality and justice, they began to gain a greater understanding of their own inequality. Moreover, women even experienced discrimination in the reform movements they joined.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was one of the pioneers for women's rights. She was the guiding force behind the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 that argued for equal rights including women's suffrage. Although the goal of women's suffrage would not be achieved for decades when the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified after World War I, the struggle for justice for women began with Stanton's courageous actions.

- **Vocabulary**
  - Abolition
  - Temperance movement
  - Alleviate
  - Vice
  - Suffrage
  - Unbecoming
  - Bristled
  - Vanguard
  - Oratory
  - Grievances
- **Introduce Text**
  - Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the "Walk-In-The-Shoes" question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.

- **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**
  - As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
    - What challenges are you facing?
    - What fears or concerns might you have?
    - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?
- **Observation Questions**
  - What role did Elizabeth Cady Stanton play in the drive for women’s rights?
  - Why was this role so important for the movement?
  - What did Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s stand for justice say about her identity?
- **Discussion Questions**
  - Discuss the following questions with your students.
    - What is the historical context of the narrative?
    - What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
    - How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
    - How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
    - How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
    - What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
    - Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
    - How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?
- **Additional Resources**
  - Ginzberg, Lori D. *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: An American Life*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2009.
  - Matthews, Jean V. *Women’s Struggle for Equality: The First Phase, 1828-1876*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997.
  - *Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions*, 1848.
  - "National Women's History Museum." Education & Resources. <https://www.nwhm.org/education-resources/biography/biographies/elizabeth-cady-stanton/>

## Handout A: The Stronghold of the Fortress: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Women's Rights, and Justice

### Background:

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, a Second Great Awakening, or religious revival, swept through the United States. The evangelical fervor spawned numerous reform movements such as abolitionism, temperance, and prison reform. Reformers sought to alleviate harsh conditions, work for equality for all, eliminate vice, and create a utopian society. In general, they wanted to achieve a more just society.

These reform movements created organizations that engaged in politics and civil society. They sent out speakers to raise awareness, spread knowledge through pamphlets and newspapers, lobbied politicians in various levels of government, and learned how to create strong organizations. Many of the reform movements were controversial because of the change they sought. For example, the abolitionists had many detractors and were often the victims of mob violence.

Women were able to enter public life and participate in all of the reform movements because of the perception that they had an inherent moral quality that men did not. Women, however, generally suffered inequality in most social and political institutions. They could not vote, could not own property, and could not serve on juries. Women did not have the same educational or economic opportunities as men. When women engaged in other reform movements for equality and justice, they began to gain a greater understanding of their own inequality. Moreover, women even experienced discrimination in the reform movements they joined.

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### Narrative:

In the spring of 1840, twenty-five-year-old Elizabeth Cady Stanton was preparing to go aboard the *Montreal* to sail to London on her honeymoon with her new husband, Henry Stanton. They were among forty Americans who were traveling across the Atlantic on various ships to attend the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. While they were waiting, a bored Elizabeth began chasing her brother-in-law around the wharf as part of their standing game of tag. Her behavior was a little unbecoming, and few observers might have guessed that she would soon be widely known for her work advocating the radical reformation of women's suffrage.

The three-week voyage was largely uneventful except for Elizabeth's accepting a captain's dare to be hauled to the top of the mast on a chair. Besides getting to know his wife better, Henry took advantage of the trip to provide her with a reading list in abolitionist tracts and to tutor her on the fundamentals of the anti-slavery movement. The couple stayed at the grimy lodging house of an abolitionist in Cheapside, London. Nevertheless, they enjoyed touring around the capital and engaging other abolitionists in conversation.

On Friday, June 12, the meeting of some 500 abolitionists convened in Freemasons' Hall. Elizabeth and dozens of other women bristled when they were seated behind the bar and therefore not seated on the floor of the convention as official participants. Some American men spoke up to protest the unequal treatment of women. One said his credentials were no more important than any of the women. Another praised women for being the first leaders of the abolitionist movement. Wendell Phillips, a famous abolitionist, stated that excluding women was akin to excluding black delegates. William Lloyd Garrison, who had not yet arrived, later averred that, "If women should be excluded from its deliberation, my interest in [the convention] would be about destroyed." Nevertheless, the English hosts were adamant that the women would not be seated however high the regard they had for the ladies because it was the custom of the country. It was a turning point in Stanton's life.

Stanton had suffered discrimination at the hands of those who were at the vanguard of abolitionist reform. In addition to experiencing injustice, Stanton struck up a friendship with women's rights advocate, Lucretia Mott. Stanton revered the older Mott and was struck by her oratorical ability when she preached at a London Unitarian Church. "Mrs. Mott was to me an entire new revelation of womanhood," Stanton recalled. During a sightseeing walk, the two women agreed to hold a convention and organize a society dedicated to women's rights. After lingering in

London on their honeymoon, the newlyweds sailed home in December with Elizabeth dedicated to a new cause for justice.

Over the next few years, the couple had several children and moved to Boston where Henry practiced law. Stanton's time was largely consumed by domestic affairs though she was still very interested in women's rights. When Elizabeth's father offered her a piece of property with a farmhouse in her own name in 1847, the family moved to the smaller Seneca Falls in upstate New York. The humble town would soon be the site of a historic meeting for women's rights.

On Sunday, July 9, a small gathering of a half-dozen Quaker friends assembled in nearby Waterloo. The women met at that time in order to include Mott, who was visiting from Philadelphia, to discuss a controversy in Quaker matters. Mott encouraged them to invite Stanton who hopped on a train for the short ride. The issue of women's rights was raised, and the women resolved to call a meeting to "discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women." They placed an ad in the local newspaper and in black abolitionist Frederick Douglass's *North Star* announcing the convention for two weeks hence. In the meantime, Stanton penned a series of resolutions on her own that she intended to present, and more importantly, a Declaration of Sentiments with Elizabeth McClintock who was at the Waterloo meeting.

On July 19, a blistering hot summer day, more than 100 women assembled in Wesleyan Chapel in their long skirts. Although the women had much experience in reform movements, they asked James Mott to chair the convention perhaps to give it legitimacy to the outside world. Stanton and others delivered speeches on the subordination of women and their inequality.

The following day was just as hot, but more than 300 women and men squeezed into the crowded church to consider the Declaration of Sentiments and a series of resolutions. Henry Stanton had warned his wife that if she planned to bring up women's suffrage, he would stay away. "You will turn the proceedings into a farce," he told her. Since she definitely would advocate women's suffrage, he spent the day lecturing in another town.

The assemblage then heard the Declaration of Sentiments and listened to familiar words since it was modeled after the assertion of universal rights in the Declaration of Independence, though with a significant alteration. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal." Just as the original Declaration had a list of grievances against the George III, the Declaration of Sentiments included a list of grievances and stated that the "history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman."

The list of grievances included examples of political, civil, economic, and educational inequality. Men had compelled women to follow laws "in the formation of which she had no voice." It continued, "He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead." Moreover, "He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns." Men had allowed women "but a subordinate position" in church affairs. Most importantly, and most controversially, their declaration asserted: "It is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise."

Although the Declaration of Sentiments was a document ahead of its time in proposing women's equality, few of its proposals seemed as radical, or were as central to women's civil and political equality, as suffrage. All of the resolutions at the convention passed unanimously, however, the vote on women's suffrage was highly contentious. Mott told Stanton, "Lizzie, thee will make us ridiculous." The Quaker women, who were not interested in civil affairs, demurred. Frederick Douglass was the only man to support the resolution. In the end, the resolution barely passed, and as predicted, was the center of ridicule in the press. Of the 68 women and 32 men who signed the convention's statement, several were cowed by the public clamor and removed their names.

Stanton never even considered withdrawing her signature. The individual right to vote was at the core of citizenship and political participation in the republic. She stated that women's suffrage was the "stronghold of the fortress" of women's equality. The long struggle for women's suffrage began with the unflinching fortitude of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her dedication to the cause of justice for women.