



JOHNETTA PAYE ESQUIRE

NEWS/PRESS MARCH 8, 2017

Women's History Month tribute: Elizabeth Cady Stanton



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If taking excerpts out of law books could invalidate the law, there would be quite a few empty law books in legal firms today. In real life, the legal system just doesn't work that way. But that didn't stop a young Elizabeth Cady Stanton from plotting on this theory during the time she hung out in her father's law office. According to [History.com](#), the eighth (of 11 total) child of Margaret Livingston and Daniel Cady would spend time reading law books from her dad to further understand how the legal system works.

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Her opinions on women’s rights were sometimes controversial and ruffled many feathers, including some of her closest allies, but she didn’t budge on much once her mind was made. Here are 10 more facts about Stanton in celebration of Women’s History Month.

1. In traditional wedding vows, there is a line that says: “I [insert name] take you to be my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward; for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, **and obey**, till death us do part, according to God’s holy law.”

Stanton required that the term “obey” be removed from her wedding vows before she married her husband, abolitionist lecturer/journalist Henry Stanton. She also chose to keep her maiden name Cady incorporated in her name, instead of becoming Mrs. Henry Stanton. The two were married for 37 years from 1840 to 1887 up until he died on January 14, 1887. (Sources: [Albany.edu](#), [Cornerstone Christian Church](#), [History.com](#), [NPS.gov](#))

2. In 1870, Ada Kepley was the first woman to earn a formal law degree in the U.S. (The first African-American woman lawyer earned hers in 1872.) Stanton — who was born on November 12, 1815 — spent her childhood reading law books before women were accepted into law school. Unfortunately, she was also denied entry into the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention alongside her husband. She could only sit in a separate section of the convention without speaking or voting on abolitionist topics. (Sources: Haymarket Books “[101 Changemakers](#),” [Stanford University](#))

Recommended Reading: “[Black History Month legal tribute: Charlotte E. Ray](#)”

3. In 1848, Stanton formed the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, with the help of another activist, Lucretia Mott. Mott, who was raised in a Quaker community, met Stanton in London where the two teamed up to create this society to improve women's rights. (Sources: Haymarket Books "[101 Changemakers](#)," [History.com](#))

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4. Out of 300 total, 100 attendees at the Seneca Falls Convention voted in support of the complaints and demands, including the right to vote, that Stanton read aloud. Her speech was entitled the “Declaration of Rights and Sentiments,” modeled after the Declaration of Independence. Frederick Douglass attended and wrote about the event in his newspaper, *The North Star*, observing that “the wise and the good of our land” would regard the “rights of animals with far more complacency ... than would be a discussion of the rights of woman.”

Douglass’s views on voting rights for women clashed with Stanton’s and came to an abrupt halt in camaraderie after his comments in New York City’s Steinway Hall in 1869.

“When women, because they are women, are hunted down through the cities of New York and New Orleans; when they are dragged from their houses and hung from lampposts; when their children are torn from their arms and their brains dashed out upon the pavement; when they are objects of insult and rage at every turn; when they are in danger of having their homes burnt down... then they will have an urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own.” — Frederick Douglass

(Sources: Haymarket Books “[101 Changemakers](#),” [New York Times](#))

5. She lost a few allies and may have ruffled feathers with black women and men alike with this statement regardless of her anti-slavery views. She said it would be better for a black woman “to be the slave of an educated white man, than of a degraded, ignorant black one.” Frances Dana Barker Gage, also a feminist and an abolitionist, spoke out against Stanton’s views on the 15th amendment, which allowed black men the right to vote. According to Gage: “Could I with breath defeat the 15th amendment I would not do it. That amendment will let the colored man enter the wide portals of human rights. Keeping them out, suffering as

right to vote. According to Gage: "Could I with breath defeat the 15th amendment I would not do it. That amendment will let the colored man enter the wide portals of human rights. Keeping them out, suffering as now, would not let me in all the sooner." The 15th amendment still did not allow women of color, Native Americans or immigrants the ability to vote. (Source: [Columbia University](#), [History.com](#))

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6. Speaking up about forced conjugal sex after marriage, Stanton referred to some marriages as “legalized prostitution”: “A man in marrying gives up no right, but a woman, every right, even the most sacred of all, the right to her own person.” Lucy Stone, who had a well-known “anti-marriage” to Henry Blackwell, also spoke up for Stanton’s views on women’s rights in some marriage, stating: “I very much wish that a wife’s right to her own body” should be a topic of discussion at these conventions. (Source: “[Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Feminist as Thinker: A Reader in Documents and Essays](#),” [New England Historical Society](#))

7. Referring to women sticking together to improve their civil rights, Stanton stated: “There will be no response among women to our demands until we have first aroused in them a sense of personal dignity and independence.” (Source: “[Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Feminist as Thinker: A Reader in Documents and Essays](#)”)

8. Although Stanton could not be as physically active in the women’s rights movement while her children were small, she was the composer of activist Susan B. Anthony’s speeches. Stanton gave birth to seven children between 1842 and 1859, but in between bathing them and cooking meals, she would write speeches for her unwed, single friend Anthony. (Source: [History.com](#))

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9. After finding out that there was no law against a woman running for national office, Stanton decided to run in New York's U.S. House of Representatives. Running as an Independent, she received 24 of the 12,000 votes cast. (Source: [Center for American Women and Politics](#), [History.com](#))

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10. Stanton published the first volume of “The Woman’s Bible,” which criticized how organized religion could hurt women’s rights. Susan B. Anthony was opposed to her views on religion, along with other Christian members involved in the National American Woman Suffrage Association. This resulted in her book being denounced and Association members dissociating with her. (Source: [History.com](https://www.history.com))

Stay tuned for more Women’s History Month posts. Feel free to visit [J. Paye in Brief’s News](#) to read the entire six-part Black History Month legal series tribute, honoring [former President Barack H. Obama](#), [former first lady Michelle Obama](#), [Nelson Mandela](#), [Loretta Lynch](#), [Kamala Harris](#) and [Charlotte E. Ray](#).

Shamontiel L. Vaughn compiled this blog. Find out more about her at [Shamontiel.com](#).

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