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LUCY STONE

VOTING RIGHTS FOR ALL

IN APRIL 1839, just two years after Mount Holyoke Seminary opened its gates, 21-year-old **Lucy Stone, class of 1839**, arrived on campus. The second youngest of nine children, she was determined from an early age to obtain an education, even after being told by her father that he would not pay her expenses as he had for her brothers. Beginning at the age of 16, Stone taught at a local common school for one dollar a week, working to save the $60 to cover tuition, room and board.

After only one semester, Stone was forced to return home to care for her two nieces after her sister Rhoda died. She later enrolled at Oberlin College, graduating just before her 30th birthday and becoming the first woman from Massachusetts to earn a college degree. Invited to write a commencement speech, she soon learned that, in keeping with Oberlin's policy prohibiting women from speaking in public, a male faculty member would read her words. Stone declined in protest — just one act in a life of speaking up.

BEGINNING THE WORK

In 1848, when Stone accepted William Lloyd Garrison's offer to join the lecture circuit for the American Anti-Slavery Society for six dollars a week, she and other women abolitionists were regularly harassed and occasionally even physically attacked for speaking out.

Still Stone became a popular orator, drawing as many as 2,000 people to her lectures, where she spoke both about abolition and the importance of women's rights. Though Garrison supported women's suffrage, he urged Stone not to include language about granting women the right to vote in her speeches about abolition, fearful it would only dilute her message about the immorality of slavery.

> "Laws pass over our heads that we cannot unmake."

Stone's response was to split her time, agreeing to speak about abolition during weekend lectures and on women's rights on weekdays. She took a lowered salary of four dollars a week, and then, like others on the lecture circuit, charged admission for her speeches about women's rights — earning more than $7,000 in three years.

Stone linked the battle for emancipation with female suffrage, believing that both enslaved people and women — particularly married women — were viewed as chattel and denied the legal rights promised in the founding of America as a democratic society.

"Wives, widows and mothers seemed to have been hunted by the law on purpose to see how many ways they could be wronged and made helpless. A wife by her marriage lost all right to any personal property she might have," Stone said in a later speech.

GETTING ORGANIZED

In 1850, drawing on friends from the Anti-Slavery Society, including Abby Kelley Foster, Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass, Stone spoke at the first National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester. She sought to build and expand on the success of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott's Seneca Falls Convention two years earlier by inviting female suffrage supporters and abolitionists from around the United States to attend. The Seneca Falls Convention drew 300 people — more than 900 attended the national convention, including Mott. Stanton did not participate.

"All over this land women have no political existence. Laws pass over our heads that we cannot unmake. Our property is taken from us without our consent. The babes we bear in anguish and carry in our arms are not ours," Stone said at that first national convention.

It was Stone's convention speech that converted a young Susan B. Anthony to the cause of women's rights.

MAKING THE WORLD BETTER

But Stone disagreed with Stanton, who was outraged when a Republican Congress introduced and then lobbied for the passage of the 15th Amendment granting African American males the right to vote before enfranchising well-educated white women. As founder of the National Woman Suffrage Association, Stanton refused to support its ratification, and Anthony went along with that decision, wanting to push faster and harder for women's rights.

Stone viewed the plight of recently freed enslaved people, immigrants and women as one and the same in terms of disenfranchisement and for being treated as either "ignorant or too weak of character" to deserve the vote. Furious with Stanton and Anthony's stance, Stone resigned her role in the NWSA in protest, co-founding the American Woman Suffrage Association with Julia Howe instead.

Through the AWSA, Stone strongly advocated for universal suffrage. In 1867, two years after the end of the Civil War, she was asked to testify at a hearing before the New Jersey State Legislature to convince it to amend its state constitution by dropping the words "white" and "male" from the clause granting adult state citizens the right to vote.

"We are asked in triumph: 'What good would it do women and negroes to vote?' We answer: What good does it do white men to vote? Why do you want to vote, gentlemen? Why did the Revolutionary fathers fight seven years for a vote? Why do the English workingmen want to vote? Why do their friends — John Bright and Thomas Hughes and the liberal party — want the suffrage for them? Women want to vote, just as men do, because it is the only way in which they can be protected in their rights. To men, suffrage stands for 'a fair day's wages for a fair day's work.' The workingmen of England do not get that because they have had no vote. Negroes and women in America do not get it, because they have no vote," Stone argued.

Though she only attended Mount Holyoke briefly, Stone's time there clearly made an impact. In her last public speech before she died, given before the Congress of Women at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, Stone devoted an entire paragraph to Mary Lyon and the importance of Mount Holyoke, stating, "It lifted a mountain load from woman. It shattered the idea, everywhere pervasive as the atmosphere, that women were incapable of education, and would be less womanly, less desirable in every way, if they had it." She donated to Mount Holyoke her own copy of the transcript of the proceedings from the first National Women's Rights Convention, no doubt hoping to inspire future generations of female activists, to, as she said in her final words to her daughter Alice Stone Blackwell before she passed, "make the world better."

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