Crystal Eastman

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Crystal Eastman, feminist and political activist

Born
Crystal Catherine Eastman
June 25, 1881
Marlborough, Massachusetts

Died
July 8, 1928 (aged 47)

Nationality
American

Occupation
Lawyer

Known for
Feminism, socialism, Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, The Liberator, and as a co-founder of both the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and American Union Against Militarism

Spouse(s)
Wallace Benedict, Walter Fuller

Children
Jeffrey Fuller and Annis Fuller

Parent(s)
Samuel Elijah Eastman and Annis Bertha Ford

Relatives
Max Eastman (brother)
Crystal Catherine Eastman (June 25, 1881 – July 8, 1928) was an American lawyer, antimilitarist, feminist, socialist, and journalist. She is best remembered as a leader in the fight for women's suffrage, as a co-founder and co-editor with her brother Max Eastman of the radical arts and politics magazine *The Liberator*, co-founder of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and co-founder in 1920 of the American Civil Liberties Union. In 2000 she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York.

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Early life and education

Crystal Eastman was born in Marlborough, Massachusetts, on June 25, 1881, the third of four children. In 1883 their parents, Samuel Elijah Eastman and Annis Bertha Ford, moved the family to Canandaigua, New York, where her brother Max was born. The following year their older brother died at age seven. In 1889, their mother became one of the first women ordained as a Protestant minister in America when she became a minister of the Congregational Church. Her father was also a Congregational minister, and the two served as pastors at the church of Thomas K. Beecher near Elmira. This part of New York was in the so-called "Burnt Over District." During the Second Great Awakening earlier in the 19th century, its frontier had been a center of evangelizing and much religious excitement, which resulted in the founding of the Shakers and Mormonism. During the antebellum period, some were inspired by religious ideals to support such progressive social causes as abolitionism and the Underground Railroad.

Crystal and her brother Max Eastman were influenced by this progressive tradition. Their parents were friendly with the writer Mark Twain. From this association young Crystal also became acquainted with him.

Main article: Max Eastman

She was the sister of the socialist activist Max Eastman, with whom she was quite close throughout her life. The two lived together for several years on 11th Street in Greenwich Village among other radical activists. The group, including Ida Rauh, Inez Milholland, Floyd Dell, and Doris Stevens, also spent summers and weekends in Croton-on-Hudson.

Eastman graduated from Vassar College in 1903 and received an M.A. in sociology (a relatively new field) from Columbia University in 1904. Gaining her law degree from New York University Law School, she graduated second in the class of 1907.

Social efforts

Social work pioneer and journal editor Paul Kellogg offered Eastman her first job, investigating labor conditions for The Pittsburgh Survey sponsored by the Russell Sage Foundation. Her report, Work Accidents and the Law (1910), became a classic and resulted in the first workers' compensation law, which she drafted while serving on a New York state commission.

She continued to campaign for occupational safety and health while working as an investigating attorney for the U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations during Woodrow Wilson's presidency. She was at one time called the "most dangerous woman in America," due to her free-love idealism and outspoken nature.

Emancipation

During a brief marriage to Wallace J. Benedict which ended in divorce, Eastman moved to Milwaukee and managed the unsuccessful 1912 Wisconsin suffrage campaign.
When she returned east in 1913, she joined Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, and others in founding the militant Congressional Union, which became the National Woman's Party. After the passage of the 19th Amendment gave women the vote in 1920, Eastman and three others wrote the Equal Rights Amendment, first introduced in 1923. One of the few socialists to endorse the ERA, she warned that protective legislation for women would mean only discrimination against women. Eastman claimed that one could assess the importance of the ERA by the intensity of the opposition to it, but she felt that it was still a struggle worth fighting. She also delivered the speech, "Now We Can Begin" following the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, outlining the work that needed to be done in the political and economic spheres to achieve gender equality.

Peace efforts

Crystal Eastman was a noted anti-militarist, who helped found the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

During World War I, Eastman was one of the founders of the Woman's Peace Party, soon joined by Jane Addams, Lillian D. Wald, and others. She served as president of the New York branch. Renamed the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1921, it remains the oldest extant women's peace organization. Eastman also became executive director of the American Union Against Militarism, which lobbied against America's entrance into the European war and more successfully against war with Mexico in 1916, sought to remove profiteering from arms manufacturing, and campaigned against conscription and imperial adventures.

When the United States entered World War I, Eastman organized with Roger Baldwin and Norman Thomas the National Civil Liberties Bureau to protect conscientious objectors, or in her
words: "To maintain something over here that will be worth coming back to when the weary war is over." The NCLB grew into the American Civil Liberties Union, with Baldwin at the head and Eastman functioning as attorney-in-charge. Eastman is credited as a founding member of the ACLU, but her role as founder of the NCLB may have been largely ignored by posterity due to her personal differences with Baldwin.[6]

Marriage and family

In 1916 Eastman married the British editor and antiwar activist Walter Fuller (British editor), who had come to the United States to direct his sisters’ singing of folk songs.[9] They had two children, Jeffrey and Annis. They worked together as activists until the end of the war; then he worked as the managing editor of The Freeman until 1922, when he returned to England. He died in 1927, nine months before Crystal, ending his career editing Radio Times for the BBC.

After Max Eastman's periodical The Masses was forced to close by government censorship in 1917, he and Crystal co-founded a radical journal of politics, art, and literature, The Liberator early in 1918.[3] She and Max co-edited it until they put it in the hands of faithful friends in 1922.[10]

Post-War

After the war, Eastman organized the First Feminist Congress in 1919.

She traveled by ship to London to be with her husband at times. In New York, her activities led to her being blacklisted during the Red Scare of 1919-1920. She struggled to find paying work.

During the 1920s her only paid work was as a columnist for feminist journals, notably Equal Rights and Time and Tide. Eastman claimed that "life was a big battle for the complete feminist," but she was convinced that the complete feminist would someday achieve total victory.

Death

Crystal Eastman died on July 8, 1928, of nephritis.[6] Her friends were entrusted with her two children, then orphans, to rear them until adulthood.

Legacy

Eastman has been called one of the United States' most neglected leaders, because, although she wrote pioneering legislation and created long-lasting political organizations, she disappeared from history for fifty years. Freda Kirchwey, then editor of The Nation, wrote at the time of her death: "When she spoke to people—whether it was to a small committee or a swarming crowd—hearts beat faster. She was for thousands a symbol of what the free woman might be."[6]

Her speech "Now We Can Begin", given in 1920, is listed as #83 in American Rhetoric's Top 100 Speeches of the 20th Century (listed by rank).[11][12]
In 2000 Eastman was inducted into the (American) National Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York.

**Work**

**Papers**

Eastman's papers are housed at Harvard University.[13]

**Publications**

The Library of Congress has the following publications by Eastman in its collection, much of it published posthumously:

- 'Employers' Liability,' a Criticism Based on Facts (1909)
- Work-accidents and the Law (1910)
- Mexican-American Peace Committee (Mexican-American league) (1916)
- Work accidents and the Law (1969)
- Toward the Great Change: Crystal and Max Eastman on Feminism, Antimilitarism, and Revolution, edited by Blanche Wiesen Cook (1976)
- Crystal Eastman on Women and Revolution, edited by Blanche Wiesen Cook (1978)

**Footnotes**

See also

People

- Alice Paul
- Lucy Burns
- Jane Addams
- Lillian D. Wald
- Roger Baldwin
- Norman Thomas
- Walter Fuller
- Jeffrey Fuller
- Max Eastman

Political groups

- National Woman's Party
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- Woman's Peace Party
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- American Union Against Militarism
- National Civil Liberties Bureau/American Civil Liberties Union
- First Feminist Congress

Other

- The Pittsburgh Survey
- Workers' compensation
- U.S. Commission on Industrial Relations
- 1912 Wisconsin suffrage battle
- 19th Amendment
- Equal Rights Amendment
- The Liberator

Additional reading


**External links**

- Wikimedia Commons has media related to [Crystal Eastman](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Crystal_Eastman).
- [Works by or about Crystal Eastman](https://archive.org/search.php?query=crystal%20eastman) at Internet Archive
- [Crystal Eastman Papers Finding Aid, Schlesinger Library](https://digitalcollections.radcliffe.edu/id/ref/1188885), Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.