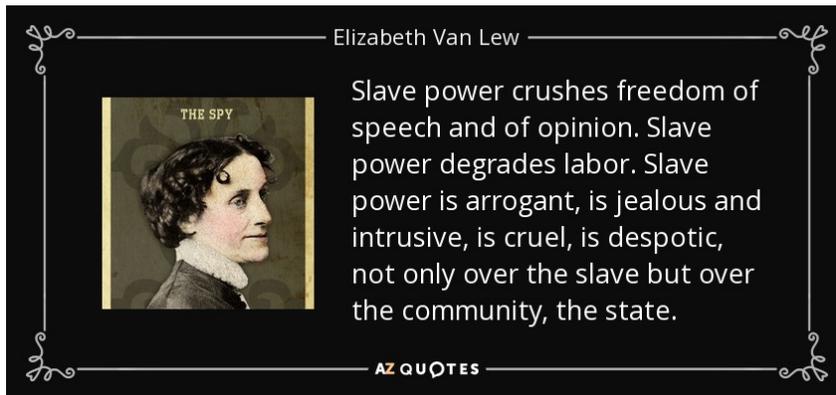


Elizabeth Van Lew



Elizabeth Van Lew was born on October 12, 1818, in Richmond, Virginia. She was educated in a Quaker school in Philadelphia, which solidified her view against slavery. She was an abolitionist and philanthropist, who built and operated an extensive spy ring for the United

States, during the Civil War. After her father's death, she freed the slaves her father owned and kept many of them as paid employees. Elizabeth used her entire cash inheritance of \$10,000 to purchase and free some of their former slaves' relatives. Elizabeth's brother was a regular visitor to Richmond's slave market, where, when a family was about to be split up, he would purchase them all, bring them home, and issue papers of manumission.

Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, she along with her mother, cared for wounded and captured soldiers, providing food, medicine, and books. These activities were frowned upon by the Confederacy. She harbored and aided escaped soldiers, hiding some in her large home. Prisoners passed on information that she shared with the Union commanders. She aided civilians on both sides. Her feminine skills, including female charity, and at times odd behavior aided her in not being exposed. Her status as a wealthy woman from a prominent family also helped. She is credited with gaining "the greater portion of intelligence in 1864-65". Upon meeting Grant, after the war, he stated, "You have sent me the most valuable information received from Richmond during the war." He appointed her postmaster in Richmond. Just as victory was in sight, she raised the giant (18 ft x 9 ft) flag over her home. It was the first United States flag to fly in the city since Virginia had seceded.

After the war, it was understood she was a spy. She had used her entire large fortune to assist in intelligence activities. She found herself deserted and without funds after trying in vain to receive a pension from the federal government. However, she received funds from the grandson of Paul Revere, Union Col. Paul Joseph Revere, whom she had aided, along with other Bostonians. But she remained a social outcast in her local community for the remainder of her life.

She died on Sept 25, 1900, age 81. She was buried in a vertical position facing North, as she had wished. Elizabeth Van Lew was **inducted into the Military Intelligence Hall of Fame** in 1993. Several books & films & TV series were made about her life.

Read more:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Van_Lew

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/elizabeth-van-lew-an-unlikely-union-spy-158755584/>

<http://www.americancivilwarstory.com/elizabeth-van-lew.html>
