

# Legacy

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Volume 18 | Issue 1

Article 4

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2018

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### Recommended Citation

Bottrell, Jenny (2018) "Alice Paul and the Fight for the Nineteenth Amendment," *Legacy*: Vol. 18 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/legacy/vol18/iss1/4>

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Alice Paul and the Fight for the Nineteenth Amendment

Jenny Bottrell

HIST 392- Historical Research & Writing

Alice Paul created and led the National Woman's Party (NWP) to secure the Nineteenth Amendment, granting women suffrage in the United States. Known for her militant tactics in lobbying for suffrage, Paul alienated Carrie Chapman Catt, head of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), who believed such tactics were counterproductive. Moreover, the NWP and NAWSA disagreed on issues of race, equality, and overall strategies for securing woman suffrage. In March of 1913, Paul organized a procession in Washington D.C. to call attention to the woman suffrage movement. Despite Paul's best efforts, the march faced substantive opposition among anti-suffragists and conservatives. Overall, Paul's march was successful in garnering the public's attention. Both organizations, however, appealed to President Woodrow Wilson for support of suffrage. President Wilson was initially reluctant to offer his endorsement. Regardless of the opposition from within the suffrage movement, Alice Paul's radical tactics for winning the vote: the formation of a separate suffrage organization, the woman's march on Washington, the acceptance and attempted inclusion of African Americans in the suffrage movement, the campaign against the Democratic party, the lobbying of western women voters, and the picketing of the White House, were essential to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

Alice Stokes Paul was born on January 11, 1885. She grew up on her family farm, Paulsdale, in New Jersey. Her parents were active members of the Quaker community and raised their children to believe in equality between the sexes. Alice was an astute student with a strong desire to learn about the world. In 1901 Alice attended the prestigious Swarthmore College, which boasted a coeducational program. She excelled in her studies and soon went on to study social work at Hull House in New York City and Woodbrook in England.

While overseas, Alice inhabited activist spaces as she joined fellow suffragettes, Lucy Burns, and the Pankhurst mother-daughter duo, Emmeline and Christabel. Her involvement with Emmeline Pankhurst and the British suffragette movement led to her radicalization. While in Europe, Paul engaged in militant protests via acts of civil disobedience. She was arrested several times, but her first encounter with force-feeding was not until her hunger strike in Holloway Jail in 1909. When asked about her demonstration Paul said, “those were the recognized tactics among the suffragettes. Last October the custom of forcible feeding was introduced, and I was one of the victims of the practice.”<sup>1</sup> After being released from Holloway Jail, Paul shifted her attention to the woman suffrage campaign in America.

Alice Paul returned to the United States in 1910 and became an active member in suffragist circles and formed her own suffrage organization, The Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (CU) in 1916. The CU later developed into the National Woman’s Party, formed by the amalgamation of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage with the former Woman’s Party.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the formation of the CU, Paul teamed up with fellow suffrage organization, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). During her time with NAWSA, Paul’s position as militant leader of the Congressional Committee (CC), a branch of NAWSA, starkly contrasted that of conservative NAWSA leader, Carrie Chapman Catt.

NAWSA’s conservative approach and disapproval of Paul’s tactics did not hinder her campaign. In March 1913, Paul led a procession in Washington D.C. on behalf of NAWSA’s Congressional Committee. The march was to be held on March 3, the day before President-elect

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<sup>1</sup> “Alice Paul Returns Home,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 1910 (1857-1992), <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.siu.edu/docview/97110614?accountid=13864>.

<sup>2</sup> “To Head Woman’s Party: Miss Alice Paul Elected President,” *The New York Times*, March 4, 1917, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.siu.edu/docview/9813560?accountid=13864>.

Woodrow Wilson's inauguration. Paul knew from her experience with militant suffragettes in Britain that she could not miss such a grand and dramatic opportunity to advocate for woman's suffrage. Despite Paul's motives, the march was not embraced by all, and Paul worked to overcome the opposition posed by her adversaries. Paul faced resistance from anti-suffragists as well as her fellow suffragists.

Paul's radical tactics also translated into the organization of the procession, as she proposed the inclusion of African American suffragists in the day's activities. Paul's upbringing in the Quaker community bred her strong convictions in regards to securing equality for African Americans. Prior to the Civil War, Quakers were steadfast in their commitment to the abolitionist movement. While Paul was a prominent advocate for the rights of African Americans, conservative members of NAWSA were less than enthusiastic about Paul's plans.<sup>3</sup> Many of NAWSA's more rigid traditionalists were unwilling to march alongside African Americans as they worried it would cause added risk to marchers' safety. The march symbolized the struggle between races and the privilege white women held over African Americans. Anti-suffragists were constant in their disapproval of white suffragists but were even more vocal in their opposition to African American suffragists. The threat of violence combined with the potential of alienating white southerners proved too much for NAWSA members, and African Americans were segregated from white suffragists. Paul believed the integration of African Americans could strengthen the movement's numbers, but she also recognized that conservatives would be unwavering in their refusal to march alongside black women. Paul did not want to divide her supporters over the logistics, however, Paul's militant approach and refusal to ignore African

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<sup>3</sup> Christine Lunardini, *Alice Paul: Equality for Women* (Philadelphia: Westview Press, 2012), 52.

American voices ultimately garnered enough support that she was able to bypass the negative sentiments of NAWSA's conservatives.<sup>4</sup>

Despite initial apprehensions, Paul managed to alleviate tensions between white and African American suffragists, but other issues remained, including where to hold the procession, the collection of monies to fund the march, and the provision of security for marchers. To fund the march, Paul relied heavily on NAWSA's financial supporters. Paul's reliance on NAWSA's benefactors to raise money for the march was successful but displeased the leader of NAWSA, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who believed Paul's march took away from NAWSA's potential funds. Paul argued that the earnings collected for the march were to benefit the collective woman suffrage movement. The issue of monetary funds was merely the first of many signs leading to a schism in tactics between Stanton and Paul.

Securing the route for the procession proved to be a laborious task, but Paul refused to give in. Police Chief Richard Sylvester was initially reluctant to provide Paul access to Pennsylvania Avenue. Paul specifically planned the procession to coordinate with the inauguration ceremonies of President Woodrow Wilson. Paul knew Washington D.C. would be crowded with politicians and affluent members of society, so this was an ideal time to hold the procession to garner attention from policymakers and the public. Coordinating the procession was more difficult than Paul had initially expected but her efforts proved fruitful.<sup>5</sup>

Paul was unconcerned about the harsh reaction she received from Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other conservative members of NAWSA. Paul deemed security for marchers to be the more important issue. Paul had been promised police escorts for marchers, but on the day of the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 54.

march, police officers lined the streets, but did little to assist the marchers as they were attacked by protesters. Paul was furious with the officers on duty during the procession, and publicly denounced Police Chief Richard Sylvester for his negligence.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the lack of security, the march proved successful as it had attracted over half a million spectators, received overwhelming praise from the media, and garnered public support of a federal suffrage amendment. Prominent newspapers expressed their admiration for the marcher's ability to continue with the procession even though they were at risk due to negligent security measures. *The New York Times* sympathized with suffragists and openly shared the trauma they experienced in the march at the expense of Police Chief Sylvester's credibility. Two days after the march, the *New York Times* exposed the danger suffragists were exposed to due to the incompetence of the on-site security. Then NAWSA President, Dr. Anna Howard Shaw was quoted by the *New York Times* describing the procession as "one of the most beautiful parades that I have ever seen. It would have been a distinct feature of the inauguration if we had not been so disgracefully treated."<sup>7</sup> Regardless of security's refusal to protect marchers, the procession had raised awareness of the proposed federal amendment, while simultaneously garnering compassion towards gender equality. Paul with the support of her fellow radical suffragists had managed to make the fight for enfranchisement front-page news.

While the march itself heightened awareness of the suffragists' movement, the organization of the procession aided in the growing polarity between radical and conservative

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<sup>6</sup> Sidney R. Bland. "New Life in and Old Movement: Alice Paul and the Great Suffrage Parade of 1913 in Washington, D.C.," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society, Washington, D.C.* 71/71 (1971): 657-658. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40067792>.

<sup>7</sup> "Parade Protest Arouses Senate: To Ascertain Why Pennsylvania Avenue Was Not Clear For Suffragists," *The New York Times*, March 5, 1913, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.siu.edu/docview/97434293/466B1EE7AE994CFEPQ/1?accountid=13864>.

suffragists. Paul's tactics were far too militant not only for her opponents but also for many in her suffrage organization, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). The leaders of NAWSA and the American woman's suffrage movement were staunch adversaries of the militant approach adopted by suffragettes in London. NAWSA viewed British tactics as too forceful and feared that they would alienate conservatives. NAWSA believed women were above such things as hunger strikes and argued that women served as the moral compasses of society.<sup>8</sup>

Paul's inability to persuade NAWSA to adopt a more radical approach forced her to create a new, more militant suffrage organization, the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (CU), in 1913. The two suffrage organizations, NAWSA and the CU, had conflicting ideas about how to campaign for woman's suffrage. The CU pushed for a federal amendment, while NAWSA enacted a state-by-state approach. The CU believed that the only true way to secure suffrage for women in America was to ratify a national amendment. NAWSA, on the other hand, focused on a campaign that would allow states to choose whether they would support woman's suffrage. On the issue of race, NAWSA was far less inclusive than the CU. Many members of NAWSA were self-proclaimed conservatives and did not want to isolate white southerners.<sup>9</sup> NAWSA was much more limited in its vision of equality for women, whereas the CU wanted equality and the vote. These contrasting ideologies on social constructs and the roles of women separated Alice Paul from conservative suffragists of NAWSA such as Carrie Chapman Catt.

Paul worked with militant suffragist organizations and continued the fight for a federal suffrage amendment. In 1916, the Congressional Union (CU) formed a secondary suffrage organization, the National Woman's Party (NWP). The NWP and CU "concentrated on the

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<sup>8</sup> Lunardini, 71.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



federal (rather than state) government and aimed to amend the United States Constitution to gain woman's rights... it employed a 'political' (rather than simply educative) strategy."<sup>10</sup> Suffragists in the NWP and CU attempted to persuade President Wilson to put suffrage on the Democratic agenda, but he refused to recognize suffrage as a national issue. Frustrated yet determined, Paul employed an anti-Democratic party campaign to counter President Wilson's policies. The campaign was designed to garner support from Republicans and Wilson's political adversaries to secure a federal amendment. At the Republican Convention of 1916, Alice Paul and fellow suffragists held a banner with a quote from prominent women's rights activist, Susan B. Anthony. The banner read, "No self-respecting woman should wish or work for the success of a party that ignores her self."<sup>11</sup> The banner was a clear critique of President Wilson and his refusal to support a federal suffrage amendment.

NAWSA once again disapproved of Alice Paul's radical tactics and denounced her campaign against the Democratic party. NAWSA President, Carrie Chapman Catt met with President Wilson and said, "she would recommend to the convention that it preserve its nonpartisan attitude."<sup>12</sup> NAWSA was unwilling to publicly alienate Republicans or Democrats and they maintained a neutral stance in their support of politicians and their respective political parties. Paul viewed Catt's actions as cowardly and refused to be swayed by NAWSA's neutrality.

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<sup>10</sup> Nancy F. Cott, "Feminist Politics in the 1920s: The National Woman's Party," *The Journal of American History* 71, no. 1 (1984): 43-68.

<sup>11</sup> National Photo Co., Washington, D.C., *Republican Convention. L-R: Mrs. James Rector, Ohio, Mary Dubrow, N.J., Alice Paul, N.J.*, Library of Congress, accessed March 4, 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mnwp000264>.

<sup>12</sup> "Suffragists Enter Fight for Congress," *The New York Times*, Aug. 07, 1916, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.siu.edu/docview/9786accountid=13864>.

To assist with her campaign against the Democratic party, Paul enlisted the help of women voters in the west. Western women had received the vote in order to attract women to western territories and swell the population to enable territories to become states. NAWSA was aware of women voters in the west but was not interested in lobbying there. NAWSA's primary goal was to ensure that the political rights of white southerners were not jeopardized by women voters. They were not concerned about women that already had the vote.<sup>13</sup> However, NAWSA did not approve of Paul's attempts to recruit women voters in the west to push for a federal amendment. In March 1917, Paul combined the NWP and CU into a single entity, the NWP, to strengthen and unify the voices of militant suffragists. Paul's radical tactics not only rejected conservative policies but fully embraced a militant approach that focused on the inclusivity of all women to secure a federal suffrage amendment.

Paul's campaigning in the western states proved extremely successful, with over four million women becoming eligible to vote for president. In 1916, "the twelve suffrage states control[led] ninety-one electoral votes. They control[led] one-fifth of the Electoral College. Women's political power [had] more than doubled since the last presidential election."<sup>14</sup> With the growing number of qualified women voters, support of the federal suffrage amendment grew accordingly. Paul's ambitions to make woman suffrage a national issue had become a reality. Politicians could no longer ignore the voices of women voters and suffragists.

Paul kept the momentum going when she, with the support of the NWP and CU, picketed the White House in January 1917. She elicited help from newspapers to force President Wilson to support a federal suffrage amendment to the Constitution. Newspaper reporters knew that the

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<sup>13</sup> Lunardini, *Alice Paul*, 28.

<sup>14</sup> "91 Electoral Votes Woman's Party Aim," *The New York Times*, Jul. 18, 1916, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.siu.edu/docview/97895169?accountid=13864>.

issue of suffrage was a controversial topic as it did not coincide with the president's political agenda. However, newspapers recognized that stories covering the suffrage movement sold, so they followed the continuing story of Alice Paul and the militant suffragists. Paul used the newspapers to her advantage to spread the advancements made by suffragists and make the ratification of a federal suffrage amendment a national issue.<sup>15</sup>

Initially, the public was sympathetic to picketers and provided them with blankets and hot beverages in bad weather. However, public opinion changed once the United States became involved in the Great European War. Those that had once supported the suffragists and their protests now accused them of being traitors. Anti-suffragists claimed that Paul and the Silent Sentinels, as the picketers were nicknamed, were advancing a political agenda at America's expense. President of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, Mrs. Arthur Dodge, warned, "that their threats against members of the House and Senate, who have refused to cringe before their demands are idle and absurd, does not alter the fact that they will be resented by the big majority of American people."<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, Paul refused to back down to her adversaries. The Silent Sentinels began to hold banners with quotes from President Wilson. The quotes were meant to show the ironies of the United States fight overseas for democracy, yet the denial of it to women in the states.<sup>17</sup> One banner held by picketer, Virginia Arnold read, "Kaiser Wilson Have you forgotten your sympathy with the poor Germans because they were not self-governed? 20,000,000 American

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<sup>15</sup> Lunardini, *Alice Paul*, 118.

<sup>16</sup> "Attacks Belmont Meeting," *The New York Times*, Aug. 24, 1914, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.siu.edu/docview/97574285?accountid=13864>.

<sup>17</sup> Sally Hunter Graham, "Woodrow Wilson, Alice Paul, and the Woman Suffrage Movement," *Political Science Quarterly* 98, no.4 (1983): 665-79.

women are not self-governed. Take the beam out of your own eye.”<sup>18</sup> Comparing the leader of the so-called free world with the militarist leader of Germany not only damaged Wilson’s public persona but gained the public’s attention.

Police arrested picketers for obstruction of justice in June of 1917. Yet Paul and others indicated that the arrests violated their first amendment rights. Initially, suffragists who were arrested were released after a short internment. Wilson expected the suffragists to grow tired and weary, but they did not. With each arrest, Paul believed they were edging closer to the precipice of a federal amendment. As the protests persisted, the consequences grew in severity. On October 19, 1917, the police warned suffragists that future picketers would receive six months in prison. The very next day, Paul led the picket line with a banner reading, “The time has come to conquer or submit for there is but one choice - we have made it.”<sup>19</sup> As the suffragists continued to picket they and Paul were sent to the Occoquan workhouse to serve their sentences. *The New York Times* reported that after having been arrested for picketing the White House, “Alice Paul, Chairman of the Woman’s Party, and Caroline Spencer... were sent to jail today to serve seven months for picketing the White House.”<sup>20</sup>

The conditions of the workhouse were unsanitary, the women were malnourished, and the guards and others prisoners treated the suffragists harshly.<sup>21</sup> On November 15, 1917, violence

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<sup>18</sup> Harris & Ewing, Washington, D.C. *Virginia Arnold holding Kaiser Wilson banner*, Photograph, retrieved from the Library of Congress, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mnwp00020/>.

<sup>19</sup> Harris & Ewing, Washington, D.C. [*The day after the police announce that future pickets would be given limit of 6 mos. in prison, Alice Paul led the picket line with banner reading “The time has come to conquer or submit for there is but one choice - we have made it.” She is followed by Mrs. Lawrence Lewis Dora Lewis. This group received 6 mos. in prison*], United States Washington D.C., 1917, Photograph, retrieved from the Library of Congress, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mnwp000219/>.

<sup>20</sup> “Alice Paul Sentenced,” *The New York Times*, Oct. 23, 1917, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.siu.edu/docview/99846914?accountid=13864>.

<sup>21</sup> Lunardini, *Alice Paul*, 127.

against the imprisoned suffragists escalated to new heights. Guards were instructed by Occoquan Superintendent, Raymond Whittaker, to intimidate the picketers by any means necessary.

“Women were beaten, pushed, bodily carried and thrown into their cells when they refused to cooperate and attempted to negotiate with the superintendent.”<sup>22</sup>

At the workhouse, Paul petitioned to be recognized as a political prisoner. She believed her actions were legitimate in protesting what she regarded as an unfair government action. She knew that newspapers would cover the story of the imprisoned suffragists, and she believed it could heighten awareness of the woman suffrage movement. While in the workhouse, Paul and her fellow suffragists went on a hunger strike and were force-fed. Paul knew the force-feeding of suffragists was controversial and hoped it would capture the public’s sympathy. While imprisoned, Paul refused to end her hunger strike and was taken to the psychiatric ward in the District Jail.<sup>23</sup> Paul had seen the effects of hunger strikes on the general public during her time with the Pankhursts and recognized that her militancy would garner the support and sympathy of Americans in the same way.

President Wilson attempted to limit communications between suffragists and newspapers. He claimed that it was a threat to national security to have suffrage advocates speaking against the president in times of war. He knew that the suffragists threatened his authority and he censored them.<sup>24</sup> Despite President Wilson’s attempt to silence the picketers, they refused to submit to his scare tactics. Wilson was eventually forced to release Paul and her fellow suffragist

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<sup>22</sup> “Tactics and Techniques of the National Woman’s Party Suffrage Campaign - Women of Protest: Photographs from the Records of the National Woman’s Party,” The Library of Congress, accessed May 01, 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/women-of-protest/articles-and-essays/tactics-and-techniques-of-the-national-womans-party-suffrage-campaign/>.

<sup>23</sup> Lunardini, *Alice Paul*, 128.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

prisoners. Wilson refused to credit Paul for his decision to support a federal suffrage amendment. Wilson claimed that he had chosen to support a federal suffrage amendment after his discussions with NAWSA. Ironically, many members of NAWSA were pacifists, but they had already declared their allegiance to Wilson's policies before the war. Catt believed that women must prove their loyalty to America in order to maintain a positive outcome within the suffrage movement.<sup>25</sup>

Shortly after Paul and the Silent Sentinels were released from the workhouse, President Wilson publicly announced his support for a federal suffrage amendment. "Alice Paul's tactics placed Wilson in an unattainable position... in order to maintain at least the appearance of integrity and consistency, made a political rather than a principled decision to support the woman suffrage amendment."<sup>26</sup> Wilson was forced to support the federal amendment and could no longer refuse to make it a national issue.

Wilson's failure to recognize Paul as a force in passing the federal suffrage amendment did not offend Paul. She was grateful to be released from the workhouse and knew that her actions had enabled a revolution in Washington D.C. Paul was not prideful and did not require official recognition of her accomplishments. For Paul, seeing the ratification of the federal suffrage amendment was enough gratification.<sup>27</sup>

On June 4, 1919, the Senate began the process of ratifying the amendment and on August 26, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was officially instituted. Alice and her fellow suffragists were elated at the news, but the question emerged of what the movement should do next. Many

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>26</sup> Christine A. Lunardini, and Thomas J. Knock, "Woodrow Wilson and Woman Suffrage: A New Look," *Political Science Quarterly* 95, no.4 (1980): 655-71.

<sup>27</sup> Lunardini, *Alice Paul*, 135.

felt that their job was done, but Paul continued her work for equality. After the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, Paul began to lobby for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Paul worked with women all over the country to unite under a single cause, complete equality. She lobbied Congress and continued her work for the NWP. American women were too divided in their views of equality. Some were satisfied with having the vote and preferred to remain in the private, domestic sphere. Others wanted to fulfill gender equality to the highest degree, and break down the societal constructs of designated gender roles. Striking a middle ground between the differing ideologies proved too difficult, and Paul was ultimately unable to win ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.<sup>28</sup> Still, she remained a vital voice for women's rights until her death in 1977.

While Alice Paul is no longer with us, her legacy lives on as the feminist movement remembers her militant approach that ensured women's right to enfranchisement and the progression of human rights in all sectors of society. It is easy to imagine that Paul would have been a prominent advocate for the radical women's movement currently taking place. As Paul aided in securing the vote through radical tactics such as the inclusion of African Americans in the early twentieth century, today's feminists continue the fight for human rights as they march on Washington alongside LGBTQ populations. The key to the success of American women's movements is the same today as it was in the twentieth century, the adoption of radicalism as introduced by Alice Paul and her contemporaries provides a voice to those outcast by a society that deems them as "others".

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 168.

