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The Suffragettes: Alice Paul

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The Suffragettes: Alice Paul

Abstract

One cannot study the history of democracy in the United States without investigating the courageous vision of Alice Paul. In *From equal suffrage to equal rights*, Christine Lunardini has written the definitive history of Alice Paul's contribution to equality and democracy. Lunardini (xiii) documents the efforts of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Carrie Chapman Catt of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), and Lunardini observes that Carrie Chapman Catt, as leader of NAWSA in 1913, thought that woman suffrage would not be attained in her lifetime.

Keywords

Suffragettes, Alice Paul, Susan B. Anthony, NAWSA, Women's Rights, Nineteenth Amendment, Democracy

The Suffragettes: Alice Paul

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We have taken care to be certain that many aspects of multiculturalism are addressed in our professional education program at Wright State University. All of our professional education courses have a multicultural component infused. In addition care is taken to provide for extensive diversity education in our initial foundations course and in a new general education course on democracy and education. Following the initiation of the democracy and education course we discovered a dramatic omission in regard to the role of women in democracy. The following article explains the fascinating study of one of the last century's most powerful thinkers on women's rights: Dr. Alice Paul.

The Nineteenth Amendment - Women's Suffrage Rights provides for the following:

Section 1. The right of the citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. (National Archives and Records Administration).

Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

One cannot study the history of democracy in the United States without investigating the courageous vision of Alice Paul. In *From equal suffrage to equal rights*, Christine

Lunardini has written the definitive history of Alice Paul's contribution to equality and democracy. Lunardini (xiii) documents the efforts of Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Carrie Chapman Catt of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), and Lunardini observes that Carrie Chapman Catt, as leader of NAWSA in 1913, thought that woman suffrage would not be attained in her lifetime.

Historically, women have always been involved in leadership in America. One can explore the prehistoric Native American matriarchies to the historical Native American matriarchies to revolutionary times to find evidence of women's influence and leadership. Joseph Ellis in *Passionate Sage* explains influence of women in democracy with the historical letters of John and Abigail Adams. Fisher Ames noted "that the good Lady his wife (Abigail) has often been as talkative in a similar strain, and she is as complete a politician as a Lady in the old French Court (21)."

The influence of Abigail Adams has been well documented by historians. During the Jefferson presidential campaign both Adams argued that Jefferson has placed party above principle. Joseph Ellis in *Founding Brothers* (210-211) summarizes the Adams' view as follows:

We can be reasonably sure that Abigail was speaking for her husband as well as herself in this brief volley of letters. The Adams team, then, was charging Jefferson with two serious offenses against the unwritten code of political honor purportedly binding on the leadership class of the revolutionary generation. The first offense, which has a quaint and anachronistic sound to our modern ears was that Jefferson was personally involved in his own campaign for the presidency and that he conducted the campaign with only one goal in mind-namely, winning the election.... His second offense was more personal. Namely he had vilified a man whom he claimed was a long-standing friend. He had sponsored Callendar's

polemics against the Adams administration even though he knew them to be a gross misrepresentation.

Joseph Ellis in *His Excellency: George Washington* laments the historical destruction of letters between George and Martha by Martha (42), and observes that history records over a thousand letters between John and Abigail Adams, “the most fully revealed marriage of the age.” McCullough (2005, 43) supports the influence of Abigail Adams in recounting that when John Adams described Washington as “amiable and brave”, Abigail wrote to John that “he has hardly said enough” about Washington.

Ellis (2003, 72-73) explores the effect of Abigail on Jefferson as follows:

... the deep emotional bonding of the two men occurred in France in 1784-85.... Abigail was the link between questions of foreign policy and family priorities, probably the first woman Jefferson came to know well who combined the traditional virtues of a wife and mother with the sharp mind and tongue of a fully empowered accomplish in her husband’s career.

In another account describing the influence of Abigail Adams on John, McCullough (2001, 479) writes that during the Adam’s Presidency concerning the affair with the French, Adams “confessed to being totally exhausted and begged her to come to his rescue:”

I must go to you or you must come to me. I cannot live without you.... I must entreat you to lose not a moment’s time in preparing to come on, that you may take off from me every care of life but that of my public duty, assist me with your councils, and console me with your conversation.... The times are critical and dangerous, and I must repeat this with zeal and earnestness. I can do nothing without you.

However much women had influence, neither the constitution nor the Bill of Rights granted women the franchise and formal political power and influence. Democracy was

extended to the U.S. with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment on August 26, 1920 (<http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data/constitution/amendment19/>). The dramatic challenges faced by Alice Paul in the ratification process are a vital component of the university's Democracy and Education courses and the social studies method courses (<http://www.alicepaul.org/alicep.htm>).

Fareed Zakaria in *The Future of Freedom* notes, "in 1900 not a single country had what we would consider a democracy" (Zakaria, 13). The Alice Paul movement resulted in a real American democracy as well as the successful suffrage campaign that resulted in the right to vote for all American women. Alice Paul truly applied issues of race, ethnicity, class, and gender in her life's work for social equality.

Lunardini bridges the historical gap between the suffrage movement led by Susan Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to the National American Woman Suffrage Association led by Carrie Chapman Catt to Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party (ix-xiii).

Kraditor (41) summarizes the prevailing view of Elizabeth Cady Stanton as follows:

Here is the classical natural right theory on the verge of change. Unlike the eighteenth-century Robinson Crusoe, the female Robinson Crusoe of the nineteenth century could not create her own destiny. Equal in natural right, she was unequal in condition. Her equality was in the future, not something given but rather a potential to be developed. Mrs. Stanton was demanding for woman not the right to manifest her equality but the right to become equal. For this she needed education and the vote. Hence the claim to equality; it required concrete demands for specific social and political rights.

Gurko (303) in writing *The Ladies of Seneca Falls* observed that the fears of Mrs.

Staunton and Mrs. Catt were realized:

In later decades of the twentieth century, women were still regarded as a second sex, inferior or “different” in a sense that implied inferiority. And this in spite of the visible advances—the vastly expanded and vocational opportunities, the larger social and sexual freedoms (sic). Though the pressures were subtler, girls were still being steered into exclusive domestic lives and attitudes, or made to think that they were less than their brothers in everything from playing tennis to the capacity for abstract thought. And being less implied an automatic confinement to the kitchen or typists’ pool.

Eleanor Cliff in *Founding Sisters and the nineteenth amendment* illustrated the typist opportunities (4-5). Cliff recounts her career:

My own career parallels the women’s movement. I started at *Newsweek* as a secretary in 1963, with no expectation of becoming a reporter or writer. With rare exceptions, women at the newsmagazines were confined to clerical and research positions. I was grateful to work in a place where what I typed was interesting. When feminist Gloria Steinem appeared on the cover of *Newsweek* in March 1970, there was no woman of staff whom the editors would entrust to write about her. An outsider brought in, journalist Helen Dudar, who did a first-rate job interpreting the new feminism sweeping the country as a long-lasting movement with consequences for men and women alike. But the fuse was lit. The women at *Newsweek* brought a class action suit against the magazine for discrimination. Nora Ephron, a *Newsweek* researcher, was among the plaintiffs. The *Washington Post* owns *Newsweek*, and when publisher Katherine Graham learned of the lawsuit, she asked, “Which side am I supposed to be on? She was management, but she was also a woman. The case was settled out of court, and *Newsweek* agreed to a system of goals and timetables to advance women at the magazine. I applied for an internship, and the biggest hurdle I had to get over was convincing the chief of correspondents that I could handle out-of-town assignments because I had young children. Soon after my internship, I was assigned to cover Jimmy’s Carter’s first presidential campaign. When he won, I was named White House correspondent for *Newsweek*. I call it my Cinderella story.

Too often both men and women of all races and classes take voting and democracy for granted. Democracy and Education courses must take care to review the vital history of

women suffrage and study issues of race, ethnicity, class, and gender as core components of social justice.

Women have outnumbered men on college campuses since 1979, and on graduate school campuses since 1984. More American women than men have received bachelor's degrees every year since 1982. Undergraduate levels rose from 41% to 56% between 1969 and 2000. Issues of race, ethnicity, class, and gender are core components of a course on Democracy and Education.

I have found that many university students simply have little knowledge of Alice Paul and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment on August 26, 1920. The results found that many university students simply have little knowledge of women's history, women's issues, and women's leadership roles.

The history of American education is linked with the history of democracy in the U.S. In teaching the Education and Democracy course, the author found both men and women were fascinated with the study of Alice Paul. Many students commented in class and in private that this was the very first time that they had any idea of the 1912-1920 suffrage movement.

Sections of the recent film, *Iron Jawed Angels* were viewed and discussed (*Iron Jawed Angels* and <http://www.hbo.com/films/ironjawedangels/>)

Iron Jawed Angels recounts for a contemporary audience a key chapter in U.S. history: in this case, the struggle of suffragists who fought for the passage of the

19th Amendment. Focusing on the two defiant women, Alice Paul (Hilary Swank) and Lucy Burns (Frances O'Connor), the film shows how these activists broke from the mainstream women's-rights movement and created a more radical wing, daring to push the boundaries of political protest to secure women's voting rights in 1920. Breathing life into the relationships between Paul, Burns and others, the movie makes the women feel like complete characters instead of one-dimensional figures from a distant past.

Although the protagonists have different personalities and backgrounds - Alice is a Quaker and Lucy an Irish Brooklynite - they are united in their fierce devotion to women's suffrage. In a country dominated by chauvinism, this is no easy fight, as the women and their volunteers clash with older, conservative activists, particularly Carrie Chapman Catt (Angelica Huston). They also battle public opinion in a tumultuous time of war, not to mention the most powerful men in the country, including President Woodrow Wilson (Bob Gunton). Along the way, sacrifices are made: Alice gives up a chance for love, and colleague Inez Mulholland (Julia Ormond) gives up her life.

The women are thrown in jail, with an ensuing hunger strike making headline news. The women's resistance to being force-fed earns them the nickname "The Iron Jawed Angels." However, it is truly their wills that are made of iron, and their courage inspires a nation and changes it forever.

Given this history Alice Paul (Lunardini, 5) emerged fresh from suffrage experiences in England to assume leadership of NAWSA's Congressional Committee. Alice Paul was born on January 11, 1885 to Tacie and William Paul, a Quaker family residing in Moorestown, New Jersey. It was from this Quaker background that Paul acquired the values of equality between the sexes. Alice Paul earned a number of college degrees (Lunardini, xiv) including two law degrees and a Ph.D. Lunardini concludes (xiv-xv) the following:

Yet Paul was an extraordinary personality, perhaps the single truly charismatic figure in the twentieth-century suffrage movement. Certainly she was the engine that powered the militant suffrage movement. She successfully mobilized both impatient and younger women and discontented older women. To these women, Paul represented the force that made them willing to take uncommon risks, including imprisonment and possible estrangement for family, friends, and peers. In the *Sociology of Religion*, written in 1922, Max Weber might have used Paul as his model in developing the concept of the charismatic leader.

Political scientists and historians have long observed the necessary role of education in a democracy. While it is logical for educators to discuss democracy and education, it seems that few colleges of education have taken the opportunity to provide a general education course on democracy and education. At a recent National Conference on Race & Ethnicity in American Higher Education in New York City the author (presenter) asked if any other universities provided a general education course on democracy and education; the answer was a resounding “no” (Helms, 2005). In Baltimore at the 84th Annual Conference of The National Council for the Social Studies the author (presenter) again found the same response (Helms, 2004). It is vital that students realize the importance that a single person or group of people may have in changing American society. The success of women in education is largely dependent upon the successes of women in American democracy.

For a review of electronic resources on leadership of women in education please refer to Finegan and Helms, *On the Net: Multicultural education* pages 102-105. The author recommends *Advancing Women: Women's Role in Education* at

<http://www.advancingwomen.com/womedu.html>

This site found the following:

Women who wanted to teach, historically, faced the same struggle as women who wanted to vote, and those today who want to become tailhook pilots, or to join the top echelon of leadership in education. Just as throughout the rest of society, in education patriarchal systems prevail, and male models for leadership dominate. The laws may exist on the books, but in the real world, support often evaporates, and those making it to the top are a token minority of the capable women available for those positions which will shape the future of education and ultimately, the future of our children and therefore the future for all of us.

Both female and male university students are quite engaged and thoughtful when presented with the story of Alice Paul and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment on August 26, 1920. Perhaps the student's interest is engaged because *Iron Jawed Angels* "recounts for a contemporary audience a key chapter in U.S. history." Perhaps the plot, storytelling, and dynamic acting engaged the student's interest.

At any rate university students may become very engaged with women's issues, and women's leadership roles given a thought blending of history and contemporary issues, the time to write reflective papers, and appropriate guidance in class discussion.

There is little question that women have made enormous strides in American society, government, and education. There is also little question that the youthful voters of today have the smallest voter turnout of any age cohort. It is as if the gains of the past 150 years are being taken for granted. Unfortunately, colleges of education may not depend on liberal arts colleges to engage students in the study of women's rights, education, and leadership.

At best professional educators must realize that women studies and leadership programs are primarily elective courses. There is every reason to infuse the goals and achievement of Alice Paul and others into education foundations and education methods courses. The NCATE strand of diversity must include education concerning women in leadership positions. Somehow, the current cohort of teacher educators must assume their

responsibility to promote and cherish the hard-won values of gender equity and female leadership into future generations.

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