



SUFFS

THE MUSICAL

Education Guide

Forward by Elaine F. Weiss, suffrage scholar and author of the highly-acclaimed narrative history *The Woman's Hour: The Great Fight to Win the Vote*

When the curtain rises on SUFFS we witness the first, tense meeting of two of the greatest political leaders of the 20th century. Alice Paul is a headstrong 27-year-old activist with bold ideas. Carrie Chapman Catt is 53, protégé of Susan B. Anthony, leader of the American women's suffrage movement, and one of the most famous women in the world. American women's struggle to win the right to vote is entering its seventh decade, with a third generation of dedicated activists trying to convince the nation that "We The People" also includes women. After hundreds of state and local campaigns across the country, little progress has been made.

Alice Paul and her generation of suffragists have had enough. Paul challenges Carrie Catt's plan of astute, but slow political persuasion. It is a clash of will, of ego, of strategy and vision. Two brilliant women of different generations dedicated to the same cause, but convinced of their own methods of achieving equality. It falls on the dedicated Black suffragist Ida B. Wells to remind them of their obligation to fight for all women, not just white women. We are headed into the maelstrom of one of the most pivotal political battles in American history, with the enfranchisement of half of the citizens of the nation at stake.

The fight for women's suffrage is one of the defining civil rights struggles in our history, one that cuts to the heart of what Democracy means: who gets to participate in our government. Yet the debate over women's suffrage was never just a political argument; it was also a social, cultural, and moral debate about women's role in society. That debate is, of course, still ongoing.

SUFFS is a tale of women's rights and voting rights, racism and sexism, political expediency and moral obligation. It is about how citizens can work to make change; why protest is patriotic. The women of SUFFS try to answer the question they ask themselves: "How can we do it if it's never been done?" A question for all of us to ponder today.

—Elaine Weiss

SUFFS
THE MOVIE

Timeline

The first women's rights convention is held in Seneca Falls, New York.

1847

Carrie Chapman Catt is born.

1859

The Woman's Suffrage Amendment is introduced in Congress. Many more variations on a suffrage amendment are introduced and fail over the next several years.

1877

After tensions dissipate, NWSA and AWSA combine to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. NAWSA's mission is to lobby for women's voting rights on a state-by-state basis.

1890

Alice Paul is born.

1885

Carrie Chapman Catt becomes the President of NAWSA.

1904

Alice Paul and Lucy Burns form the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage. Their focus is lobbying for a federal constitutional amendment to secure the national right to vote for women.

1913

The first ever Women's March on Washington is held on Pennsylvania Avenue the day before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration calling for a federal suffrage amendment.

March 3, 1913

A revised Woman Suffrage Amendment fails again without President Wilson's support.

1915

Inez Milholland dies. Her memorial is the first ever held at the U.S. Capitol for a woman.

1916

The Suffrs, calling themselves the Silent Sentinels, picket the White House in the United State's first-ever silent protest. For two and a half years, more than 2,000 women protest Wilson.

1917

Alice Paul and other picketers are arrested over charges of "obstructing traffic" and taken to Occoquan Workhouse where they go on hunger strike and are forcibly fed.

1917

The 19th Amendment is adopted and officially becomes part of the U.S. Constitution.

**August 26,
1920**

Tennessee becomes the 36th state to ratify the Woman Suffrage Amendment, solidifying it into law.

**August 18,
1920**

A revised Suffrage bill is introduced, this time with President Wilson's support. The 1918 Suffrage Bill passes the House with only one vote to spare but fails the Senate by two votes.

1918

Alice Paul authors the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and it is introduced in Congress that same year and subsequently reintroduced in every session of Congress for half a century.

1923

The Woman Suffrage Amendment is passed by the House of Representatives and Senate.

1919

Alice Paul passes away at 92-years-old at her home in Moorestown, NJ.

1977

The ERA is stopped three states short of the requisite number of state ratifications by Congress' deadline and is not adopted as a Constitutional amendment.

1982

Virginia becomes the 38th state to ratify the ERA. However, the amendment's future remains uncertain.

2020

The battle to pass the ERA continues.

Today

Meet the Suffs

The National Woman's Party (NWP)



Alice Paul

Co-founder and head of the National Woman's Party (NWP).



Lucy Burns

Alice's best friend and co-founder of the NWP.



Inez Milholland

Labor lawyer and socialite. The public face of the NWP.



Ruza Wenclawska

Polish factory union organizer in the NWP.



Doris Stevens

College student, writer, and secretary of the NWP.



Dudley Malone

President Wilson's aide turned Suffrage ally.



Alva Belmont

Philanthropist divorcee who funds the NWP.

The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)



Carrie Chapman Catt

President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).



Mollie Hay

Carrie's second-in-command at NAWSA.

The National Association of Colored Women (NACW)



Ida B. Wells

Co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), prominent journalist and anti-lynching rights activist.



Mary Church Terrell

American civil rights activist, journalist, and teacher.



Phyllis Terrell

Suffragist and civil rights activist who worked alongside her mother, Mary Church Terrell.

Other Historical Figures



President Wilson

28th President of the United States.



Harry Burn

Youngest member of the Tennessee state legislature who casts the deciding vote in favor of ratifying the Nineteenth Amendment.



Phoebe Burn

Mother of Harry Burn and the reason Harry Burn voted in favor of women's suffrage.

Places to Visit:

Locations that were pivotal in the American Women's Suffrage Movement

1420 F Street NW (Washington, DC)

The National American Women's Suffrage Association's Congressional Committee (CU) made its first home in a basement office at 1420 F Street NW in DC at the end of 1912 and began planning the 1913 March there.

Cameron House (Washington, DC)

On January 30 1916, the CU moved into Cameron House, a mere block from the White House on Lafayette Sq. When the CU evolved into the National Woman's Party (NWP) later that year, Cameron House became the NWP's headquarters. The NWP was evicted by the Fidelity Trust Company of Philadelphia on July 27, 1917 because of the allegedly "unpatriotic, improper and unreasonable behavior" while picketing President Wilson at the White House gates.

The White House Pickets (Washington, DC)

On January 10, 1917, the suffragists began picketing the White House in an effort to pressure President Woodrow Wilson into passing a constitutional amendment that would guarantee women's suffrage. These pickets, led by Suffrs calling themselves Silent Sentinels, were the first instance of a silent protest in US history. Over the course of two years, some 2,000 women lined up at the White House gates with banners that read, "Mr. President, how long must women wait for liberty" and "Mr. President, what will you do for woman suffrage?" Many of the Suffrs were arrested on charges of "obstructing traffic" and taken to Occoquan Workhouse.

Occoquan Workhouse (Lorton, VA)

The Occoquan Workhouse (later Lorton Reformatory and Lorton Correctional Complex) was a minimum-security jail facility used by the District of Columbia. From June to November 1917, Paul, Burns, and about 168 Suffrs were arrested for picketing the White House and imprisoned at Occoquan. In August, six were charged with obstructing traffic, hauled off to a judge, and then jailed in the workhouse. The women suffered pitiable conditions. A workhouse matron, discharged because she tried to befriend the suffragists, stated the women were forced to undress and to shower using the same bar of soap. Their mail was censored. Some went on hunger strikes and were force fed. On the evening of November 14, 1917, following orders from the workhouse superintendent about 40 guards abused 33 suffragists, including Lucy Burns, in an event that became known in suffrage history as "The Night of Terror." In 2008, the space was turned into the Workhouse Arts Center, and while the original building where the "Night of Terror" occurred no longer stands, the center engages visitors with the "Lucy Burns Museum" to interpret the site's suffrage legacy.

Lafayette Square (Washington, DC)

On August 6, 1919, forty-eight of the NWP's members were arrested when they attempted to hold a suffrage rally at the Lafayette Monument in Lafayette Park, across from the White House. This is where they burned an effigy of President Wilson to protest his inaction and lack of support for a suffrage amendment.

Hermitage Hotel (Nashville, TN)

A decade after its opening in 1910, The Hermitage Hotel became the headquarters for both opposing factions in the fight for women's suffrage in Tennessee, the last state to vote to win passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. Tennessee's Governor called a special session to debate this hotly contested issue on August 18, 1920, leading pro- and anti-suffrage leaders, special interest groups, and journalists to descend upon Nashville from across the country. The eyes of the nation were on the Tennessee – the last remaining state with the power to ratify, or nullify, the 19th Amendment. Leading up to the final vote, The Hermitage was filled to the brim with Pro- and Anti-suffrage campaigners tirelessly debating, earning its nickname “The Third House.”

Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument (Washington, DC)

In 1929, the National Woman's Party (NWP) purchased the Sewall House to use as their headquarters where they remained for 90 years. The NWP renamed the property the “Alva Belmont House” in honor of Alva Belmont's contributions as their benefactor. It also functioned as a hotel and the NWP's founder Alice Paul lived there for 43 years. Threats of losing the headquarters arose during the construction of the Hart Senate Office Building in the 1960s. The NWP lobbied and fought to have the historic importance of the house recognized. As a result of their efforts, the property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972 as the Sewall-Belmont House and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1974. In 2016, the NWP donated the house and property to the National Park Service and President Barack Obama established the site as the Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument.

Alice Paul Institute (Paulsdale, New Jersey)

Alice Paul's birthplace and family home, which was saved by a group of ERA advocates in the 1980's and now serves as the Alice Paul Institute.

The Meadowmount School of Music (Westport, New York)

The estate of Inez Milholland's family in the Adirondack Mountains that is now a prominent music school.

Up for Debate:

Post-SUFFS Discussion Questions

As SUFFS demonstrates time and again onstage, there's power in speaking up and inspiration in pushing the envelope. Below are some post-show discussion questions for you and your fellow Suffs to dig into and expand on.

1. Why is voting important? Do you know someone who votes?
2. Is 18 an appropriate age for voting? If not, what age is appropriate and why?
3. What is the difference between equality and equity? Is voting rights an equality issue or an equity issue? What about women's rights?
4. What is the most significant barrier to women's empowerment and equality?
5. What personal experiences motivate you to think and/or care about women's empowerment and equality?
6. What are ways men can be good allies in the fight for gender equality? What do we need to do to engage and inspire male advocates?
7. What is the point of Women's History Month?
8. In your opinion, who was the most influential leader of the women's suffrage movement? Why?
9. Why did so many states deny women the right to vote? Why was women's suffrage legal in some states but not others?
10. What role did state governments play in extending voting rights to women? What role did the federal government play?
11. What tactics and strategies did women use to win the right to vote? Which were successful? Which were not successful?
12. What protest tactics used by the Suffs do you still see in action today? What are new methods and strategies of protest?

Sources:

- <https://sos.oregon.gov/archives/exhibits/suffrage/Pages/events/sentinels.aspx>
- https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_education/programs/19th-amendment-centennial/toolkit/suffrage-timeline/
- <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/alice-paul-woodrow-wilson-and-the-battles-for-liberty.htm>