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# Considerations in Historical Research: NWP Strategies – A Case Study

*Demery Little, Augsburg University*

## Abstract

**H**istorical research is most often focused on deconstructing stories from the past in order to better understand our current situation. In this way, proper historical research is vital to the continuing improvement of any part of society; whether that is through understanding systems of government or religion, or through understanding cultural and societal norms in the context in which they came to be. Because of the impact historical research can have on our society, it is important to consider biases in both sources and in the researcher themselves when evaluating historical research. The American women's suffrage movement, and more specifically, the National Women's Party, provide a perfect case study for examining the way in which researcher and source bias can affect the presentation and understanding of historical events. This paper seeks to answer the question of just how much bias plays into our understanding of historical events using the lens of a women's history movement.

The American women's suffrage movement is marked by many complicated systems all working together to fight for and against the enfranchisement of women in the United States. Groups such as the National Women's Party (NWP) and the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), among other smaller groups, took different approaches to achieve the enfranchisement of women. While NAWSA focused on state-by-state legislation, the NWP focused their efforts on the creation of a federal bill for suffrage. Because of this difference in focus, the two groups also had a difference in strategies; NAWSA focused on legislation and lobbying individual state congressmen while the NWP used larger-scale approaches such as large parades through Washington D.C. on Inauguration Day or picketing in front of the White House using signs featuring direct quotes from the president about the importance of full democracy.

Because of the stark differences in approaches, there are interesting comparisons to be made between the different ways in which the strategies of the more large-scale NWP are analyzed and described in different types of sources. There are many different mediums used to tell history, and each medium has its own specific goals and



limitations. Many popular newspapers from the time talked about the NWP's strategies in a negative light, sometimes comparing their tactics to the more militant suffragettes in Britain. Primary source newspaper articles seek to inform the general population at the time, but often reflect the personal biases of the reporters and editors who write the articles and the audience they are writing for. Audience bias is an important factor to consider when approaching any type of source. For example, museums and archives are also seeking to inform the general population, but their audience is a more modern one, and their approach will often put more modern values onto the historical events and will also often provide shorter bits of information in order to better engage their modern audience. Professional historians are often seeking to add something to the academic debate, which is both their goal and their limitation as they often end up writing for a small audience. Films seek to entertain a larger audience and often sacrifice historical accuracy for the storyline. Each of these types of sources approach the NWP differently. This paper will seek to better understand the limitations associated with writing in history and some of the important considerations that must be made when analyzing any source on a historical event by analyzing the way in which different sources discuss the strategies of the NWP, specifically their 1913 parade through Washington D.C. and their White House picketing campaign.

## The Suffrage Movement in Whole

Before any analysis can be

made of the various interpretations seen in different kinds of historical sources of the strategies of the NWP, a brief overview of the American women's suffrage movement must first be put forth. It is important to understand the basics of the movement and the main differences between the two main groups fighting for suffrage: the NWP and NAWSA. As stated previously, NAWSA focused their efforts for suffrage on securing legislation on a state-by-state basis, believing that the only way a federal suffrage amendment could be passed was if the minimum number of states required to ratify such a bill already had suffrage amendments in their own state constitutions. This approach focused on lobbying individual state legislators and on a nationwide movement of small-scale parades, speeches, fundraisers, and committees. The NWP, on the other hand, focused their time on the passing of a federal amendment, believing that a federal amendment would be a more immediate solution and that the state-by-state approach taken on by NAWSA would only prolong the passage of a suffrage bill and further delay the enfranchisement of women. Their approach focused on large-scale strategies such as parades involving thousands of women, major public speeches, picketing in front of the White House, mass meetings, civil disobedience, nonviolent confrontation, hunger strikes, and relentless lobbying of federal legislators.<sup>1</sup> These approaches were often derived from the British suffragettes' militant tactics in England, which the leader of the NWP, Alice Paul, experienced during her time supporting the suffrage movement in England. It

was because of these more militant-esque tactics that the NWP was sometimes referred to as “suffragettes,” a term used to describe militants rather than the more politically focused “suffragists.”

The NWP started in 1912 as a smaller organization within NAWSA, the Congressional Committee, formed by Alice Paul and Lucy Burns in an effort to get NAWSA to focus more on a federal amendment. In 1913, Paul and Burns along with the Congressional Committee organized the 1913 suffrage parade in Washington D.C. In February of 1914, Paul and Burns separated from NAWSA completely to become an independent organization fighting for women’s suffrage. In June of 1916 they became the National Woman’s Party. The combined effort of the NWP and NAWSA led to the eventual passing and ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which states that “the right of 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.”<sup>2</sup> The amendment passed Congress in 1918 and was ratified by the minimum three-fourths of the states and officially became an amendment to the Constitution in 1919.

## The 1913 Suffrage Parade

Many historical publications focus on specific events or tactics as a means of securing the constitutional amendment. Examples include the parades that the NWP held in cities across the nation including in Washington, D.C. The first parade that Alice Paul held as the leader of NAWSA’s Congressional Committee occurred on March 3, 1913, in Washington, D.C., the day before Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration.<sup>3</sup> The march consisted of more than 5,000 marchers, nine bands, three heralds, four mounted brigades, and twenty-four floats.<sup>4</sup> The march was organized by Alice Paul, and it drew large crowds of spectators who were in town for Wilson’s inauguration. The parade started as planned but, as the march wore on, the crowds began to push onto the street and block the marchers from proceeding. Some marchers were pushed, grabbed, tripped, and jeered at by the crowds. This march was the first event organized by Alice Paul in the United States, and it reinvigorated the movement on a national level.

Newspaper coverage of the 1913 parade in mainstream newspapers was minimal compared to later parades organized by Alice Paul. Many of the

<sup>1</sup> “Tactics and Techniques of the National Woman’s Party Suffrage Campaign.” *Library of Congress-American Memory Collection*, Accessed 8 Dec. 2018. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/static/women-of-protest/images/tactics.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Const. amend. XIX.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Costello, “Picketing the White House: The Suffragist Movement During the Great War,” *The White House Historical Association*, Accessed 11 Dec. 2018, <https://www.whitehouse-history.org/picketing-the-white-house>.

<sup>4</sup> Sheridan Harvey, “Marching for the Vote: Remembering the Woman Suffrage Parade of 1913,” *Library of Congress: American Memory*, Accessed 1 Dec. 2017, [memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhtml/aw01e/aw01e.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhtml/aw01e/aw01e.html).



articles written about the day focus on Woodrow Wilson's inauguration while treating the parade as a footnote despite the fact that it was a major event that took place during the inauguration festivities. For example, an article written for the *New York Times* on Wilson's inauguration mentioned the women's march very briefly. The article did compare the large crowds at the march to the lack of crowds at Wilson's arrival, and it mentioned how the parade was in the part of Washington, D.C., that was decorated for Wilson's arrival so that Wilson had to drive through residential neighborhoods that were not decorated and largely deserted. The article mentioned the women's march only to show what an inconvenience it was to Wilson's arrival. The article made no mention of the reasoning behind the suffrage parade and barely discussed the actual events of the parade.<sup>5</sup> Other articles written around the same time for the *New York Times* do focus on the parade and describe in detail the number of women, bands, and floats participating on that day. One such article gives information about the various suffrage leaders who came to Washington, D.C., to participate in the march as well as information on the contents of the various floats. However, this article makes no mention of Alice Paul and only talks about NAWSA, Anna Howard Shaw, and

Carrie Chapman Catt as organizers and important figures in the parade and the movement. This article also focuses on the fashion and decorative aspect of the parade, traditional feminine ideals, and therefore doesn't give the parade the weight that it deserved in the movement.<sup>6</sup> *The Evening Star*, a newspaper out of Washington, D.C., published a few articles about the march as well, mostly focusing on the beauty of such a parade and the crowds that cheered the suffragists on along their route. One such article states that "the beauty and dignity of [the] great parade impresses throngs."<sup>7</sup> Another article published in Washington, D.C., this one by *The Washington Times*, stated that the suffragists who marched were cheered by the spectators. This article stated that 10,000 women marched in the parade, a number that is double what almost every other newspaper cites, and that the police were supportive of the marchers.<sup>8</sup> Both of these articles also give a lot of attention to the fashion and decoration put into the parade, choosing again to focus on the traditionally feminine aspects of the parade instead of the political significance of the event. This is representative of the way that journalists of the time treated the suffragists. By using language such as "suffragette" and "militant" and by focusing their articles on the traditionally feminine

<sup>5</sup> "Wilson Takes Office To-Day as 28th President," *New York Times* (New York City, NY), Mar. 3, 1913.

<sup>6</sup> "Women Await Order to Fall in Line," *New York Times* (New York City, NY), Mar. 3, 1913.

<sup>7</sup> "Suffrage Crusaders in Thrilling Pageant Take City by Storm," *The Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), Mar. 3, 1913.

<sup>8</sup> "Suffragettes in Great Pageant Cheered by Inaugural Throngs," *The Washington Times* (Washington, D.C.), Mar. 3, 1913.

aspects of the parade, the journalists were revealing their bias against the suffragists and the movement itself. These biases affected the way that the movement was portrayed in the media, therefore affecting the way that the general population understood the movement.

Several articles were written following the march about the spectators that crowded the streets and the aftermath of those actions. For example, an article published for *The New York Times* discussed how the crowds tried to push their way past the police and into the street in order to get at the marchers, stating that the parade had to be halted several times in order for the crowds to be pushed back. This article emphasizes the efforts put forth by the police in order to keep the spectators back and to protect the marchers, portraying the police officers in a much more positive light than other representations of this event do.<sup>9</sup> In the following days, a few articles were published following up on the events of the day and the investigation into the claims made by the suffragists.<sup>10</sup> These articles are mostly negative towards the suffragists and often disregard the crowding of the marchers as simple

overcrowding due to the large number of people in town for the inauguration.<sup>11</sup> These articles are the only ones that mention Alice Paul and mainly do so in a negative light.

Because of the biases held by many journalists of the time, it was difficult for suffragists to tell their stories in a way that felt true to them. Because of this, many suffragists wrote memoirs following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. For example, Doris Stevens, a suffragist who worked with Alice Paul, wrote *Jailed for Freedom*, a book about the events of the women's suffrage movement. Her book, unlike the newspaper coverage of the parade, focuses on the ideals and goals behind the march and the overall meaning that the parade had for the movement. Stevens discusses how the women wanted to "dramatize in numbers and beauty the fact that women wanted to vote."<sup>12</sup> Stevens' book focuses on how the parade started bringing attention to the movement. She discusses how this march, the first demonstration organized under the leadership of Alice Paul, brought into the national spotlight the importance of the suffrage movement and the vast number of women who believed in the movement.

<sup>9</sup> "5,000 Women March, Beset by Crowds," *New York Times* (New York City, NY), Mar. 3, 1913.

<sup>10</sup> "Senate Police Inquiry On," *New York Times* (New York City, NY), Mar. 5, 1913.

<sup>11</sup> "Says Lies About Parade Aroused Entire Country," *New York Times* (New York City, NY), Mar. 14, 1913.

<sup>12</sup> Doris Stevens, *Jailed for Freedom* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), 21.

<sup>13</sup> One important consideration to make when assessing such a book as Doris Stevens' is the bias that a member of the movement brings to an interpretation of what is important to focus on in the movement and how successful the various tactics were. In this case, Stevens shows some of her bias by only dedicating a small portion of her book to this first parade, therefore de-emphasizing its possible importance due to Stevens' perceiving this particular event as less important than, say, the first three months of picketing (to which she devotes an entire chapter).



Stevens also discusses the failure of the police to protect the marchers, in contrast to the newspaper accounts which either ignore that aspect of the parade or defend the police by blaming the large inauguration crowds. However, even Stevens' account is brief; she discusses this first march for only about a page and a half before she switches focus to other tactics used by the suffragists.<sup>13</sup>

Professional historians have been very influential in shaping the public portrayals of the suffragists. Each historian adds a new layer to the debate, which then affects the next historian who decides to focus on the same event. For example, Christine Lunardini's book, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 1910-1928*, discusses the women's suffrage movement of the United States from the perspective that Alice Paul and the NWP were the main driving force behind the success. This is very different from previous historical publications that focus on NAWSA and largely ignore the NWP. Because Lunardini takes this position, she discusses the suffrage parade of 1913 in great length, analyzing the politics behind NAWSA granting Paul leadership of the Congressional Committee and the authorization to hold a parade the day before Wilson's inauguration. Lunardini discusses how important the parade was, not just from the perspective that it brought media attention to the movement like Stevens' book suggests, but also from

the perspective that it was Alice Paul's first demonstration as the leader of NAWSA's Congressional Committee.<sup>14</sup> Lunardini describes in more detail the events leading up to the parade than any other source previously discussed, emphasizing how the parade was organized and how that affected the event itself. Lunardini also discusses how the issue of race affected the parade and discusses it as an important issue that went into the planning of the parade.<sup>15</sup> Lunardini also discusses the racial biases of Alice Paul herself, an idea which none of the primary sources seem to consider. Like the previously discussed sources, Lunardini discusses the issue of police protection at the parade and the riot that ensued as the parade was underway. Lunardini portrays the riot as an extremely violent and poorly handled situation that resulted in several minor injuries and media outcry for months. This is extremely different from the previously discussed sources, as they mention the riot as being mostly verbal and inconvenient. Although the articles and book mentioned earlier do also discuss the lack of police intervention, Lunardini's account uses much more militant language, more so especially than the newspaper accounts or the archival exhibits, which causes her book to take on a more accusatory tone than the others. Also unlike the other previously discussed sources, Lunardini spends almost no time discussing the design of costumes, banners, and

<sup>14</sup> Christine Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 1910-1928* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 21.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

floats which effectively eliminates the traditionally feminine aspect that the newspapers focused on and the possible effect that the design had on the media attention that Doris Stevens focuses on. Since the Nineteenth Amendment passed, many museums and archives have produced articles and exhibits about the suffrage movement. The Library of Congress' American Memory collection contains one such article. This article agrees with many of the facts laid out in the early newspaper accounts and Doris Stevens' book (with the exception of the article that cited 10,000 women participating in the parade). The article makes the same claims as Stevens' book and discusses how important it was that this parade brought the suffrage movement to the media's attention. Similar to Lunardini's book, the article discusses the issue of race in relation to the march, an issue which is not discussed at all in either the newspaper accounts or Stevens' book.<sup>16</sup> The article does not go into very much detail regarding the race issue, however, but the fact that it is mentioned at all gives the impression that this is a more complete analysis of the suffragist parade than the primary sources

themselves are. Another government resource that discusses the suffrage parade of 1913 is the Smithsonian Museum's National Woman Suffrage Parade, 1913, exhibit. This exhibit was a brief paragraph in a larger exhibition of women's suffrage history. It briefly discussed the importance of the parade as the first demonstration in the capital and the media attention that the parade received. The exhibit does mention the riot that occurred during the parade but gives barely any information about it other than the fact that a riot nearly occurred. Similar to the newspaper accounts and the article from the American Memory archive, the exhibit takes the time to discuss the costumes, decorations, and banners used by the suffragists. Unlike the newspaper accounts, however, the exhibit suggests that the costumes and banners help to illustrate the impact of the parade instead of just shifting focus from the politics of the parade.<sup>17 18</sup>

In the film *Iron Jawed Angels*, the 1913 parade is depicted as the first event that Alice Paul participated in as part of the American women's suffrage movement. It becomes a pivotal moment in the film as it is because of the idea of

<sup>16</sup> Sheridan Harvey, "Marching for the Vote: Remembering the Woman Suffrage Parade of 1913," *Library of Congress: American Memory*, Accessed 1 Dec. 2017, [memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/aw01e/aw01e.html](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/awhhtml/aw01e/aw01e.html).

<sup>17</sup> "The National Woman Suffrage Parade, 1913," *Smithsonian*, Accessed 3 Dec, 2017. <https://www.si.edu/Exhibitions/The-National-Woman-Suffrage-Parade-1913--4953>.

<sup>18</sup> An important consideration when it comes to using museums and archival documents in historical research is that museum exhibits are often short snippets of information to place archival documents in perspective so that the average viewer can get a glimpse of the importance of such a document. The information contained within museum exhibits is often a brief overview of an event and usually leaves out information about conflicting narratives or interpretations in favor of a simplified explanation in order for the viewer to understand. Because of this, when viewing archival documents in a museum exhibit, it is important to remember that there is often much more to the story than is portrayed within the exhibit.



a parade that Paul is able to become leader of NAWSA's Congressional Committee. The parade itself is a large affair, with bands, floats, banners, and thousands of women marching through the streets of Washington, D.C. These facts are all consistent with the facts found in the primary sources and the professional publications written about the event. However, the movie portrays the events leading up to the parade in an oversimplified manner compared to Lunardini's book. Where Lunardini devotes almost an entire chapter to the discussion of the preparations made for the parade, the film limits these preparations to convincing Inez Milholland to be the herald, discussing whether they have ever organized a parade, recruiting working women, and briefly handling the issue of African American women marching in the parade. The film dramatizes the ways in which women were recruited to the march in order to entertain. This is especially an issue when it is considered that Alice Paul meets Inez Milholland in the movie through an entirely fictional character. This confuses the actual history behind the recruitment of women to the cause and the suffrage parade of 1913. The film

also only devotes a short five minute scene to the issue of race in relation to the march, and although this is similar to many of the historical sources that do discuss the race issue, it again leads to an oversimplification of the actual issue. However, despite the issues that the oversimplification causes when analyzing the events leading up to the march, the portrayal of the march itself is fairly accurate. The film is able to emphasize the impact that the parade and the riot had on the movement and the media coverage of the movement in a simple way. In this case, the parade is not oversimplified, but simplified just enough so that the average viewer is able to get a better sense of the importance of the march than if they were to read some of the primary sources or go to a museum exhibit.<sup>19 20</sup>

### White House Picketing

In 1917, the newly minted National Woman's Party (NWP) began a new campaign in which groups of women representing both states that had already ratified suffrage amendments to their own state constitutions and states that had no amendment would stand as "silent

<sup>19</sup> *Iron Jawed Angels*, directed by Katja von Garnier (2004; HBO Films), DVD.

<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that the film is a work of historical fiction and should never be considered to be a reputable source for historical research. I have included it in this paper due to its use as a starting point for the curious researcher and its effectiveness when it comes to engaging a wider audience who is mostly likely largely unaware of many of the issues, events, and characters of the women's suffrage movement. While the film is often historically inaccurate, it does provide an interpretation of the historical events and could be mistakenly viewed as a reputable historical source. For these reasons I have included it in my discussion of considerations to be made when doing historical research.

<sup>21</sup> "Picket' White House: Suffragists, After Futile Appeal, Announce Daily Vigil," *The Washington Post* (Washington D.C.) Jan. 10, 1917.

sentinels” outside the White House gates.<sup>21</sup> These sentinels stood outside the White House almost every day throughout 1917, sometimes in small groups of twelve or fewer, sometimes in large organized demonstrations of 1,000 participants.<sup>22</sup> Even as the United States entered World War I in April of 1917, the NWP did not stop their campaign of picketing the White House, much to the chagrin of much of the country.<sup>23</sup> The “silent sentinels” carried banners with slogans such as “Mr. President how long must women wait for liberty”<sup>24</sup> and “Kaiser Wilson have you forgotten your sympathy with the poor Germans because they were not self-governed? 20,000,000 American women are not self-governed. Take the beam out of your own eye.”<sup>25</sup> Many of these “sentinels” were arrested, especially after the United States entered World War I. Eventually these arrests were declared unconstitutional.<sup>26</sup> This new tactic brought the NWP to the public’s attention and also forced the American government to recognize

the determination and commitment that these suffragists had to the issue of a federal amendment on women’s suffrage.

Because the picketing efforts lasted for about a year, there is no shortage of newspaper articles written covering the “silent sentinels.” However, depending on the article chosen as a source, some very different pictures of the “sentinels” will be created. Many of the mainstream popular newspapers of the time, such as *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, provided a broad overview of the picketing for their readers; however, the bias of the journalists and the audience they were writing for can be clearly seen in the language choices made in the articles. The vast majority of the articles written, that are not simply report numbers and names of the latest mass picketing demonstration or arrest of picketers, portray the “sentinels” as a nuisance and do not take the movement seriously. Case in point, an article that was published on the day of the first

<sup>22</sup> “Detailed Chronology- National Woman’s Party History,” *Library of Congress: American Memory*, accessed 11 Dec. 2018, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/static/women-of-protest/images/detchron.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Costello, “Picketing the White House: The Suffragist Movement During the Great War,” *The White House Historical Association*, Accessed 11 Dec. 2018, <https://www.whitehouse-history.org/picketing-the-white-house>.

<sup>24</sup> “Women of Protest: Photographs from the Records of the National Woman’s Party,” *Library of Congress*, accessed 11 Dec. 2018, <https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/connections/women-protest/history3.html>.

<sup>25</sup> “‘Kaiser Wilson’ Poster: Photograph of Suffragist with ‘Kaiser Wilson’ Poster,” *National Archives*, accessed 11 Dec. 2018, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/woman-suffrage/kaiser-wilson>.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew Costello, “Picketing the White House: The Suffragist Movement During the Great War,” *The White House Historical Association*, Accessed 11 Dec. 2018, <https://www.whitehouse-history.org/picketing-the-white-house>.

<sup>27</sup> “‘Picket’ White House: Suffragists, After Futile Appeal, Announce Daily Vigil,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.) Jan. 10, 1917.



pickets describes the suffragists appeal to President Wilson the day before, the failure of which sparked the picketing movement, as “futile” and “pleading.” The author explains the purpose of the picketing by saying that “the purpose is to make it impossible for the President to enter or leave the White House without encountering a sentinel bearing some device pleading for the suffrage cause.”<sup>27</sup> At first glance this is a simple reporting of the stated purpose of the tactic; however, the word choice by the author emphasizes his/her perceived hopelessness when it comes to the success of the movement. By using weak words such as “pleading” to describe the picketing, the author emphasizes the femininity of the suffragists, a common strategy used by the popular media at the time to de-emphasize the importance of the women’s suffrage movement.

Other articles emphasize the helplessness of the picketers, especially

during the cold winter months<sup>28</sup> and during episodes of mass arrests of picketers.<sup>29</sup> These articles emphasize the generosity of President Wilson in offering the suffragists his assistance when they could not stand the freezing weather and the strength of character of President Wilson in “[sweeping] by” the picketers and “[taking] no notice” of the suffragists.<sup>30</sup> They also emphasize the strength of character and will of the administration and the police force in Washington, D.C., by describing the immediacy with which the police “broke” the suffrage line during a large picketing demonstration.<sup>31</sup> Both these articles, and several others, also emphasize the general negative attitudes that surrounded the picketing by describing the picketing as “attacking” or “assaulting” Wilson,<sup>32</sup> by claiming that the suffragists were “heckling and annoying the man who bears the responsibility of leader of the forces of civilization fighting for its

<sup>28</sup> “Freezing Suffrage ‘Sentinels’ Ignore Invitation by Wilson to Come Inside and Get Warm,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.) Jan. 12, 1917.

<sup>29</sup> “Arrest 41 Pickets for Suffrage at the White House,” *New York Times* (New York City, NY) Nov. 11, 1917.

<sup>30</sup> “Freezing Suffrage ‘Sentinels’ Ignore Invitation by Wilson to Come Inside and Get Warm,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.) Jan. 12, 1917.

<sup>31</sup> “Arrest 41 Pickets for Suffrage at the White House,” *New York Times* (New York City, NY) Nov. 11, 1917.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> “No Time for Heckling,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.) Oct. 22, 1917.

<sup>34</sup> “Charge Suffragists Menace Wilson’s Life: Antis say Picketing of White House is an Invitation to the Assassin,” *New York Times* (New York City, NY) Jan. 17, 1917.

<sup>35</sup> George Foster, “‘Bad Manners, Mad Banners’ of the White House Pickets,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.) April 23, 1917.

<sup>36</sup> “Militants Again at the White House,” *New York Times* (New York City, NY) Jul. 22, 1917.

<sup>37</sup> It is important to note that there were articles published which were written in support of the picketing; usually these articles were written by suffragists and were accompanied by headlines such as “Excuses for White House Picketing” or “Declares Picketing Right.” These were usually very brief accounts of statements gathered by the journalists or editorial letters.

life,”<sup>33</sup> by publishing statements from anti-suffragists who claim that the picketing “ranks with the small boy’s thrusting out his tongue,”<sup>34</sup> by referring to the picketing as “bad manners and mad banners,”<sup>35</sup> and by referring to the suffragists as “militants.”<sup>36 37</sup>

The use of the term “militants” or “suffragettes” in reference to the NWP in popular news media of the time requires some analysis by historians when assessing the bias of the source being read. The term “militants” or “militancy” refers to confrontational or even violent methods used by people or organizations in pursuit of a political cause. In the realm of women’s suffrage, militant suffragists were referred to as “suffragettes,” and this descriptor was mostly used in reference to the British women’s suffrage movement rather than the American movement. However, in the case of the NWP, many considered their tactics to be confrontational enough to warrant the use of these terms. One big consequence of this choice, however, is the association of the tactics of the NWP with the bombing and arson campaigns being undertaken by the British suffragettes. This led to many negative attitudes toward the perceived “suffragettes” in the NWP and their “militant” tactics, despite the fact that the picketing, lobbying, and parades which the NWP employed in their fight for suffrage did

not equate to the same level of violence as the militants in Britain were using.

In Doris Stevens’ book, *Jailed for Freedom*, she devotes an entire chapter to the first three months of picketing alone, unlike the few pages which she dedicates to the first parade. Stevens places great emphasis on the importance of the picketing movement in “[rousing] the government out of its half-century sleep of indifference,” saying that the picketing “produced the sharply-drawn contest which forced the surrender of the government in the second Administration of President Wilson.”<sup>38</sup> In these statements there are already sharp contrasts between the newspaper coverage of the picketing and this account by Stevens; the newspapers largely portrayed the picketing as a futile attempt to force their agenda onto Wilson, but Stevens firmly believed in the immediate success of the movement as the main reason behind the Wilson administration finally considering the issue of women’s suffrage. Stevens’ account of the picketing also comes into sharp contrast with other primary source accounts when she says that “in retrospect it [picketing] must seem to the most inflexible person a reasonably mild and gentle thing to have done.”<sup>39</sup> Unlike the majority of the popular newspaper coverage of the movement, Stevens emphasizes the “inspiring, gallant, and impressive”<sup>40</sup> sight of

<sup>38</sup> Doris Stevens, *Jailed for Freedom* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), 63.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 63.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 67.

<sup>41</sup> Christine Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman’s Party, 1910-1928* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 104.

<sup>42</sup> Christine Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman’s Party, 1910-1928* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 104.



the picketers standing outside of the White House, thus showing her bias as a member of the campaign toward confidence in the eventual success of women's suffrage being a result of her own group's participation in the movement.

In her book, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party*, historian Christine Lunardini discusses the picketing in a chapter titled "The Home-Front War: 'A Poor Business.'"<sup>41</sup> This chapter, dedicated entirely to the picketing movement, focuses mostly on a telling of the facts of the picketing campaign while also managing to create a "hero-narrative" of Alice Paul as the leader of the campaign. Lunardini's book, while not explicitly a biography of Alice Paul, does emphasize Paul's leadership and involvement in the NWP and, because of this, sometimes falls into the trap of creating a narrative or a hagiography. It is important for any historian to remember, when writing on a historical event or movement through the eyes of a historical figure as Lunardini is doing for the women's suffrage movement through the lens of Alice Paul, to be careful to avoid making a hero out of the person. In the case of Lunardini's chapter on the picketing campaign, she emphasizes the great success that the campaign had when it came to forcing the Wilson administration to consider the issue of a federal amendment on women's suffrage. In this way Lunardini's account of the picketing campaign is similar to Stevens' but very different from the newspaper accounts discussed earlier. At this point it is important to note that the specific goals that Lunardini

has in writing this book are very different from the goals of the average journalist who might have written one of the newspaper accounts previously discussed. As a professional historian, Lunardini is seeking to provide a new argument or elaborate on a previous argument regarding a particular historical event. In the case of this book, Lunardini is seeking to establish the importance of a group of women who are often overlooked in the discussion of the women's suffrage movement: Alice Paul and the NWP. Because of this, and because of the fact that Lunardini has the advantage of hindsight and the full picture of historical context surrounding the picketing campaign, her account will naturally differ from the newspapers of the time whose goal was most likely to simply tell their readership the facts and possibly to push a particular journalist or newspaper's agenda. In order to achieve her goal, Lunardini must present the facts as she understands them and must do so in a way that supports her main thesis. Lunardini even goes so far as to say that the picketing campaign "culminated with the evolution of Woodrow Wilson from a states' rights advocate to a federal amendment evangelist."<sup>42</sup> Lunardini argues her point very well throughout her book, but as a source for future historical research, her book must be vetted carefully for the bias that comes from arguing a specific point about a historical event.

The various museum exhibits specifically on the picketing campaign are often focused around a single historical item as a way of gathering interest about the topic and then only provide brief background information

about the campaign. For example, the Smithsonian National Museum of American History has an online exhibit on the “silent sentinels” called “A Scrap of Suffrage History.”<sup>43</sup> This exhibit focuses around a scrap of the famous “Kaiser Wilson” banner which the author uses to frame the information that she provides on the picketing itself. In the exhibit, the author emphasizes the history of the “Kaiser Wilson” banner specifically, providing information on the first use of the banner and providing details of the day on which it “was seized by District of Columbia police. It remained in their possession for 25 years, until the department gifted it to the National Woman’s Party Headquarters.”<sup>44</sup> The exhibit provides basic background information that is consistent with the information found in the primary sources already discussed. Another exhibit which focuses on the picketing campaign is the “National Women’s Party and Militant Methods” online exhibit from the National Women’s History Museum.<sup>45</sup> This exhibit is not centered around a single historical artifact as the Smithsonian exhibit is, rather it is a brief background of the “militant methods” used by the NWP which provides a gateway to an

archive with various types of artifacts and documents within. This exhibit provides very few details on the picketing as its main purpose is to serve as an attention grabber for the general public to look further into the digital archive provided. This exhibit provides much of the same information that the previously discussed sources do, stating that “newspapers across the country reported on the pickets, arrests, and jailed suffragists” and that the suffragists continued to picket the White House during World War I despite the public’s disapproval.<sup>46</sup> This exhibit serves mostly as a gateway into further research for those whose interest may be sparked by the brief background that the exhibit itself provides.<sup>47</sup>

The final type of historical source which I will examine is the film, *Iron Jawed Angels*. As stated during my earlier section on the 1913 suffrage parade in Washington D.C., *Iron Jawed Angels* serves to entertain its audience and create a narrative rather than provide accurate historical details. However, as stated previously, this source does succeed in engaging a wider audience in the material which includes an often overlooked character within the women’s suffrage movement, Alice

<sup>43</sup> Bethanee Bemis, “A Scrap of Suffrage History,” *Smithsonian National Museum of American History*, 13 Aug. 2016 Accessed 13 Dec. 2018, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/scrap-suffrage-history>.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Allison Lange, “National Woman’s Party and Militant Methods,” *National Women’s History Museum*, Accessed 13 Dec. 2018, <http://www.crusadeforthevote.org/nwp-militant/>.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> When it comes to museums and archives, the materials contained within usually do not serve any purpose besides to inform a curious general public and to provide a starting point for possible future research. As such the information contained within does not usually carry its own bias besides that which may be associated with the primary sources that the exhibit contains.



Paul, and because of this, and because of its use as a starting point for further research, I have included it in this discussion. The film accurately depicts the shock and confusion of the general public at the spectacle of the “silent sentinels,” a point which Lunardini also discusses in her chapter on the picketing campaign. The film, however, places people at the White House gates who were not necessarily always picketing or picketing at the same time such as Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, and Doris Stevens. This is most likely due to the fact that a film such as *Iron Jawed Angels*’ main goal is to create the best narrative for the audience, a goal which often leads to the distortion of historical fact. The film also accurately depicts President Wilson’s early disinterest in the campaign, as discussed in several of the newspaper articles and museum exhibits. However, the film has Wilson walking by the “sentinels” in this scene, despite the fact that each of the newspaper articles which discuss Wilson’s early reactions to the “sentinels” explicitly state that he drove past them each day. Again, this is most likely a product of the film’s goal of narrative-building. Despite the drawbacks of the film’s historical inaccuracy as a product of its quest for entertaining exposition, it is able to accurately depict the sentiments surrounding the campaign in a way that is easy to understand as a viewer, and it is often more clear in its depiction of the emotions of the picketing than the primary sources or professional

historical works are.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

The above paper hoped to provide the beginnings of an understanding of the various challenges that are faced when trying to understand a movement that still directly affects about half of the U.S. population. Although the suffrage movement itself occurred one hundred years ago, the effects that those women had on our democracy are still seen today in the right of any woman over the age of 18 to vote. The charge of the historian is to make sense of the past so that we can understand how we came to the world we currently live in. As the above discourse has made clear, there are many considerations to make when doing historical research. Each source presents a unique challenge in determining validity and biases before it can reasonably be used to make any sort of comment on a historical event, movement, group, or person. It is also important to consider our own biases which we bring to the reading of a particular source that may affect the way in which we understand the material as it is presented to us.<sup>49</sup> As such it is important that we review a wide variety of sources in order to hope to gain a more complete picture of history. Historians are presented the unique challenge of making sense of people and events which we cannot speak to directly or we have not

<sup>48</sup> *Iron Jawed Angels*, directed by Katja von Garnier (2004; HBO Films), DVD.

<sup>49</sup> Admittedly I am not perfect in this sense any more so than a professional historian writing a monograph would be, and I am sure that a future reader analyzing this paper could easily find my own bias throughout it.

experienced for ourselves. In this way we rely on our sources to place us in the minds of the people we are studying and the eras and events through which those people lived. It is an easy mistake for the historian to make to apply their own opinions or modern sensibilities

to historical events and people, but this only creates muddled understandings and prevents us from being able to fully apply historical knowledge to our current everyday lives.

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