

Title of Essay: Alice Paul's Fight For Suffrage

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August 18, 1920, marks the date that the Nineteenth Amendment – granting American women above the age of eighteen the right to vote – was ratified. Though society has come a tremendous way since women were dismissed, disenfranchised, and imprisoned for fighting for their rights, it has only been one hundred years, and there is still more to accomplish. While countless women are credited with achieving the right to vote, one suffragist who fought with the best of her power was New Jersey born and raised Alice Paul. Born January 11, 1885 in Mount Laurel, New Jersey, Paul played an essential role in the feminist movement and passing the Nineteenth Amendment.

Raised in an enlightened environment, with a family who fiercely supported the progression of society, Paul quickly understood that women were not treated the same as men. Instead of leaving it be, she followed in her parents' footsteps and decided to create change in an unjust system. After graduating from Swarthmore College, the New York School of Philanthropy, receiving a Ph.D from the University of Pennsylvania, and studying social work in England, Paul continued her mission to advance women's rights. While in England, she protested at the British Commons, which resulted in several arrests and imprisonments. But it was not an entirely negative experience. She met other suffragettes in Britain, many of whom inspired her ideas and tactics in how to create change.

Back in the US, not only did she organize protests, Paul led organizations and committees, and joined the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Later, she served as chairwoman for the National Woman's Party, organized the Congressional Union for Woman

Suffrage, and held a picketing campaign at the gates of the White House for eighteen months beginning in January 1917.

In spite of being arrested for her demonstrations, Paul did everything in her power to progress the independence of women. She welcomed her arrests as an opportunity to make the public aware of this essential issue. She especially wanted to gain the support of President Woodrow Wilson. According to womenshistory.org, “Doctors threatened to send Paul to an asylum and force-fed her, while newspaper accounts of her treatment garnered sympathy and support for suffrage. By 1918, Wilson announced his support for suffrage.”

Paul’s resilience resulted in her receiving the president’s backing, which swayed many people’s opinions about the right to vote. In 1920 when women’s suffrage was finally ratified, Paul was regarded as having played an integral part in the process. But she did not stop there – Paul believed she had more work to do. In 1923, she drafted what is now known as the Equal Rights Amendment to ensure that there was no possibility of the country going backwards in terms of gender equality.

We still can learn so much from Alice Paul and her fellow suffragettes’ dedication to their cause. Without their unending perseverance, it is quite possible society would not have progressed as much as it has today, at the near-hundredth anniversary of women’s right to vote. It is incredible how women in history were able to change the law that bound them. Alice Paul’s intelligence, determination, and persistence is an invaluable lesson: never give up, even in the face of oppression.

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