



## TACTICS AND TECHNIQUES OF THE NATIONAL WOMAN'S PARTY SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGN

### Introduction

Founded in 1913 as the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (CU), the National Woman's Party (NWP) was instrumental in raising public awareness of the women's suffrage campaign. The party successfully pressured President Woodrow Wilson, members of Congress, and state legislators to support passage of a 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (known popularly as the "Anthony" amendment) guaranteeing women nationwide the right to vote. The NWP also established a legacy defending the exercise of free speech, free assembly, and the right to dissent—especially during wartime. (See [Historical Overview](#))

The NWP had only 50,000 members compared to the 2 million members claimed by its parent organization, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Nonetheless, the NWP effectively commanded the attention of politicians and the public through its aggressive agitation, relentless lobbying, creative publicity stunts, repeated acts of nonviolent confrontation, and examples of civil disobedience. The NWP forced the more moderate NAWSA toward greater activity. These two groups, as well as other suffrage organizations, rightly claimed victory on August 26, 1920, when the 19th Amendment was signed into law.

The tactics used by the NWP to accomplish its goals were versatile and creative. Its leaders drew inspiration from a variety of sources—including the British suffrage campaign, American labor activism, and the temperance, antislavery, and early women's rights campaigns in the United States. Traditional [lobbying and petitioning](#) were a mainstay of party members. From the beginning, however, conventional politicking was supplemented by other more public actions—including [parades, pageants](#), street speaking, demonstrations, and mass meetings.

In its western campaigns of 1914 and 1916, the CU sent out contingents of organizers and speakers to states where women already were enfranchised. They targeted candidates for congressional office and urged voters to use the ballot to express their dissatisfaction with the lack of action on behalf of a federal suffrage amendment. Transcontinental auto trips, speaking tours, motorcade parades, banners, billboards, and other methods helped spread the word and educate the public about suffragists and suffrage issues.

Four years into their campaign and shortly before the United States entered World War I, NWP strategists realized that they needed to escalate their pressure and adopt more aggressive tactics. Most important among these was [picketing](#) at the White House—a concerted action that lasted for many months and led to the [arrest and imprisonment](#) of many NWP activists.

The willingness of NWP pickets to be arrested, their campaign for recognition as political prisoners rather than as criminals, and their acts of civil disobedience in jail—including hunger strikes and the retaliatory force-feedings by authorities—shocked the nation and brought attention and support to their cause. Through constant agitation, the NWP effectively compelled President Wilson to support a federal woman suffrage amendment. Similar pressure on national and state legislators led to congressional approval of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in June 1919 and ratification 14 months later by three-fourths of the states.

## Lobbying and Petitioning

From its outset in 1912, the purpose of the Congressional Committee of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), spearheaded by [Lucy Burns](#) and [Alice Paul](#), was to exert pressure upon Congress to pass an amendment to the U.S. Constitution giving the right to vote to women across the nation. Lobbying for a federal amendment remained integral to the committee's successor organizations, the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (CU) and the National Woman's Party (NWP).

Women's use of lobbying as a democratic technique for social change was not new. The practice of exerting pressure upon officeholders to change existing discriminatory laws limiting women's opportunities or curtailing their rights as political beings or as private citizens was a well-established tradition in the women's rights movement. At the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, reformers framed resolutions which they brought to the attention of legislatures and courts and used to educate the general public.



Suffrage petition for all NWP sections carried to the U.S. Senate by Annie Fraher, Bertha Moller, Bertha Arnold, and Anita Pollitzer, campaign of 1918. Harris & Ewing.

[About this image](#)

individual's public career, their values, favorite projects, prior votes, and the issues of greatest concern to their constituents. CU organizers consulted these files to prepare its lobbyists for meetings with members of Congress, so as to best address suffrage from a perspective that would be most meaningful and persuasive to the lawmaker.

While NWP legislative committee officers testified at congressional hearings, petitioned Congress, and monitored and helped to shape legislative action, the leaders of the CU, and later the NWP, focused much of their lobbying efforts on President Woodrow Wilson. The Democratic president was initially receptive to a series of CU delegations, each representing different groups of women—working women, professional women, women from various states or occupations, social workers, reformers, and others. Nonetheless, he remained largely unmoved by their appeals. Wilson claimed that he could not go against the will of his party. He persisted in taking a states' rights stance—reiterating his position that women's voting rights were best determined locally.



Deputation to the House Rules Committee. Buck. July 1914.

[About this image](#)

Petitioning—the gathering of signatures in support of resolutions and the formal presentation of these documents to political representatives—in order to demonstrate graphically the “will of the people” also was a time-honored political tradition. The CU presented petitions to members of Congress, and occasionally organized large delegations to gather on the steps of the U.S. Capitol, with members from various states set to visit their respective representatives.

The CU legislative committee compiled a congressional card index with information about every member of the House and Senate. These files contained background about the



U.S. Senate petitioner motorcade, Hyattsville, Maryland. W. R. Ross. July 31, 1913.

[About this image](#)

In early 1917, Wilson rebuffed a delegation of more than 300 suffrage supporters who presented him with resolutions drafted at the memorial for [Inez Milholland Boissevain](#). The NWP thereafter significantly shifted its strategy toward overt forms of public protest and civil disobedience. (See [Picketing and Demonstrations](#) and [Arrests and Imprisonment](#)) While the more formal political work of the NWP legislative committee continued, the NWP picketing campaign—its banners fully visible to the president as he came in and out of the White House gates—became its own form of lobbying. Picketing the White House also sought to influence international opinion by pointing out the irony of advocating democracy abroad while limiting the exercise of political rights at home.

As the ratification campaign of 1919-20 commenced, NWP lobbying necessarily shifted to the state level. NWP officers and organizers fanned out to influence ratification at special sessions of state legislatures and to persuade state party leaders to back the amendment. In states where the votes were very close, lobbying by NWP representatives was crucial in convincing the conflicted or undecided to support the amendment.

After the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment officially became part of the U.S. Constitution in August 1920, the NWP continued to use lobbying and petitioning techniques to work for their new campaign—the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Beginning in the 1920s, and continuing until 1972, the organization worked to introduce the amendment to various sessions of Congress and urged state governments to support equal rights legislation. NWP activists also supported the campaigns of women running for office and drafted pieces of legislation guaranteeing or protecting women’s rights. They lobbied on behalf of the ERA as delegates at both Democratic and Republican national conventions.



Lobbying for the Equal Rights Amendment, U.S. Capitol. Edmonston. ca. 1923.

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The ERA was finally approved in 1972 by both houses of Congress after decades of NWP lobbying. Over the next decade, NWP members shepherded the measure through ratification at the state level, falling short of ratification by only three states in 1982. Following the failure of the ERA campaign, the NWP regrouped and reassessed its goals. The party ceased its political lobbying function officially in 1999, when it became a nonprofit educational organization.

## Parades

As soon as [Alice Paul](#) and [Lucy Burns](#) were appointed to the National American Woman Suffrage Association’s Congressional Committee, they began planning a large and elaborate suffrage parade for Washington, D.C., on the eve of President Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration. (See [Historical Overview](#)) This celebrated event was the first *national* suffrage parade in the United States, but it was inspired by earlier and larger suffrage processions.

The first American suffrage parades took place in 1908. In February of that year, a small band of 23 women, affiliated with a



Inez Milholland Boissevain preparing to lead the March 3, 1913, suffrage parade in Washington, D.C. Harris & Ewing.

[About this image](#)

new militant organization calling itself the American Suffragettes, marched up Broadway in New York City to a meeting hall on East 23<sup>rd</sup> Street. A few months later, 300 suffragists in Oakland, California, marched into a state political convention holding banners and streamers demanding the right to vote. That same month, 100 women in Boone, Iowa, paraded through the streets with suffrage banners welcoming national leader Anna Howard Shaw to their state suffrage convention.



Crowd converging on marchers and blocking parade route during March 3, 1913, inaugural suffrage procession, Washington, D.C. Leet Brothers.

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The first sizable suffrage parade, however, took place in New York City on May 21, 1910. More than 400 women marched and many more rode in automobiles. This parade, as well as the increasingly larger ones in May 1911 (an estimated 3,000 marchers), May 1912 (10,000), and November 1912 (20,000), were organized principally by Harriot Stanton Blatch, who like Paul and Burns, participated in the British suffrage campaign.

The earliest American suffrage parades were influenced both by British suffrage processions as well as a long tradition of parades in the United States. The American tradition included patriotic marches commemorating July 4, temperance demonstrations, religious processions, May Day parades organized by socialists and labor groups, and marches and street demonstrations by striking workers, such as those organized by female factory workers in Lynn, Massachusetts, in the 1860s, and by New York City shirtwaist workers in 1909-10.

Although many women moved freely in the public sphere—including those who worked outside the home in paid and volunteer positions—the prevailing notion among middle-class circles in the early 1900s was that only women of supposedly poor character (for example, prostitutes) walked the streets. Suffragists, conscious of the boundaries that they were crossing, steeped their parades in pomp and pageantry, developing highly organized and theatrical processions. Their intent was to dazzle and impress onlookers, attract recruits, grab the attention of legislators who found it easy to ignore suffrage petitions, and dispel unfavorable perceptions of suffragists as pathetic spinsters or aggressive shrews who neglected their families and browbeat their husbands.

Marchers were instructed by parade organizers to walk with dignity and convey a serious, respectable demeanor compatible with that of a responsible voter. Watching women of all classes parading down public thoroughfares demanding voting rights was disturbing to many men and even some women, including initially, moderate suffragists. Carrie Chapman Catt, for example, declined to participate in a 1909 parade saying: “We do not have to win sympathy by parading ourselves like the street cleaning department.” The controversy within the suffrage ranks over the propriety of parades reflected why such events were newsworthy—they challenged existing conventions of how women should behave in public.



Members of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage pasting advertisements announcing the May 9, 1914, procession to the U.S. Capitol to present resolutions to Congress. May 1914.

[About this image](#)



Women and young girls on “Votes for Women” float, winner of first prize in Vineland, New Jersey, suffrage parade. ca.1914.

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In organizing their March 3, 1913, parade, Paul and Burns borrowed elements from many of the earlier parades. To reinforce the notion of a universal demand for suffrage, women marched in well-identified groups by state or occupation (including teachers, lawyers, actresses, nurses, librarians, and factory workers). This structured procession reflected, in part, the decentralized aspect of the suffrage movement and the role of the national organizations in bringing together the state chapters and branches. College students and mothers—some marching with children and infants—had their own sections, as did men’s suffrage leagues.

Bands and opulent floats provided visual relief from the steady stream of marchers. Some participants wore special color-coordinated outfits; others wore white dresses (in the temperance tradition) adorned with colorful sashes—gold for NAWSA and later, purple, white, and gold for the militant Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage. Hats, dresses, pins, buttons, and sashes were made or purchased from local department stores that stocked suffrage supplies.

Carefully designed and sewn or embroidered banners were used as rhetorical devices to convey political messages. Banners commemorated famous women who inspired the suffragists, identified the diverse groups who had come together to support the cause, and were critical in conveying who these women were and why they were marching. They also helped transform the traditionally masculine streetscape into a forum for women’s viewpoints.



College section of the March 3, 1913, suffrage parade in Washington, D.C.

[About this image](#)

## Pageants



“Liberty and her Attendants”—  
Florence F. Noyes in “The  
Allegory” tableau.  
Washington, D.C. L & M  
Ottenheimer. March 3, 1913.

[About this image](#)

A critical component of the first national suffrage [parade](#) on March 3, 1913, in Washington, D.C., was the elaborate tableau, “The Allegory,” produced by pageant designer [Hazel MacKaye](#). Through sheer persistence and moxie, [Alice Paul](#) secured permission from government officials to use the grand steps of the Treasury Building during working hours to mount a feminist pageant. The performance included 100 classically costumed women and children representing ideals such as Freedom, Justice, Peace, Charity, Liberty, and Hope as well as outstanding female historical figures including Sappho, Joan of Arc, and Elizabeth of England. More than 20,000 people reportedly watched the pageant, including a reporter from the *New York Times* who gushed that it was “one of the most impressively beautiful spectacles ever staged in this country.”

Like parades, suffrage pageants and tableaux had deep historical roots, which the suffragists tapped when looking for ways to attract publicity and new members. Some suffragists were drawn to the idea of

linking artistic inclinations with political activism. Others preferred performing on a stage or assisting behind-the-scenes rather than marching in a parade.

MacKaye, the best known of all pageant directors, created four pageants for the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage (CU) and National Woman's Party (NWP) between 1913 and 1923. She claimed that nothing surpassed pageants "for the purpose of propaganda," believing that these events could convert followers, raise money, and elevate morale among suffrage workers. By making women, both mythical and real, the central figures in these plays, MacKaye and other pageant organizers empowered both the participants and the women who watched these tableaux.

The year after directing "The Allegory," MacKaye created "The American Woman: Six Periods of American Life," a multi-part tableau sponsored by a New York men's suffrage league and



Eleanor Van Buskirk (left) and ritualists from the "Forward into Light" pageant at the NWP's "Women for Congress" conference. August 1924.

[About this image](#)

staged at a regimental armory in New York. The CU promoted this feminist pageant and hired MacKaye to produce a third pageant, titled "Susan B. Anthony," for its December 1915 convention in Washington. MacKaye spent months researching Anthony's life and pouring over copies of the *History of Woman Suffrage*. The result was so impressive that it reportedly inspired CU members to carry on Anthony's militant tradition of suffrage activism.

Pageants outlived parades as a publicity tool and were brought forward into the NWP's equal rights campaign. MacKaye's final two pageants for the NWP were held respectively in July and September 1923 in Seneca Falls, New York, and in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Both pageants



Agnes Lester, Marjorie Follette, Emily Knight, Elizabeth Van Sickle, and Carol Lester as warriors in the "Dance Drama Depicting the Progress of Woman," Seneca Falls, New York. Underwood & Underwood. July 20, 1923.

[About this image](#)

## Picketing and Demonstrations

In December 1916, after nearly four years of lobbying, petitioning, parading, and engaging in one clever publicity stunt after another (See [Historical Overview](#)), [Alice Paul](#) and several key members of the Congressional Union's executive committee felt that their tactics were growing stale and ineffective. Harriot Stanton Blatch, daughter of suffrage pioneer Elizabeth Cady Stanton, told the committee: "We can't organize bigger and more influential deputations. We can't organize bigger processions. We can't, women, do anything more in that line. We have got to take a new departure."

The NWP had already withstood mob violence while demonstrating with anti-Wilson

banners outside a Chicago auditorium during the October 1916 presidential campaign. Blatch believed that the time had come for suffragists to escalate the pressure on President Woodrow Wilson, whom she supposedly told: “I have worked all my life for suffrage, and I am determined that I will never again stand in the street corners of a great city appealing to every Tom, Dick, and Harry for the right of self-government.” What Blatch had in mind was picketing, a tactic used effectively in New York by her former organization, the Women’s Political Union, and with which she—and Paul—were familiar from their experiences with British suffragists.

No one, however, had apparently ever thought or dared to picket the White House and convincing the other committee members to picket the White House was not easy. This situation changed, however, when Wilson summarily dismissed a deputation of suffragists who tried to present him with a series of suffrage resolutions passed during [Inez Milholland Boissevain](#)’s memorial service. The next day, on January 10, 1917, a dozen determined women left the Congressional Union (CU) headquarters at Cameron House and marched to the White House. They carried tricolor purple, white, and gold flags as well as two banners. One read, “Mr President, What Will You Do For Woman Suffrage?” The other banner featured words taken from Milholland’s last speech. It asked, “How Long Must Woman Wait For Liberty?”



Wage-earning women march to the White House gates to picket on their day off, Sunday, February 18, 1917.

[About this image](#)

Every day for the next few months, regardless of the weather, a group of women marched from CU headquarters to the White House to take up their stations as “silent sentinels.” NWP organizers carefully planned every detail. Banners were made and volunteers were recruited and scheduled for shifts of several hours. Nearly 2,000 suffragists traveled from 30 states to take turns on the picket line. Special days were set aside for women representing specific states, schools, organizations, and occupations. When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, however, some women resigned from the NWP because they viewed picketing as unpatriotic as well as unwomanly. These departures, however, were offset by new recruits—including many socialists, labor organizers, and average working women—who were attracted to the militancy, justice, and free speech aspects of the campaign.

Some suffragists found picketing an exhilarating and bonding experience, even more so after the first [arrests](#) on June 20, 1917, further raised the spirit of determination and moral purpose. Other suffragists, however, described how the “sockets of their arms ache[d] from the strain.” [Doris Stevens](#) wrote of the tedium, “anything but standing at the President’s gate would be more diverting,” and explained that she and others spent their time thinking “when will that woman come to relieve me.”<sup>1</sup> At times, the pickets had more to worry about than achy arms and boredom. Mob violence grew after the United States entered World War I, with two especially



NWP members picket outside the International Amphitheater in Chicago, where Woodrow Wilson delivers a speech. October 20, 1916.

[About this image](#)

noteworthy attacks on the suffragists in the summer of 1917. These attacks followed the initial unfurling of banners comparing the president of the United States with the Russian czar and the German kaiser as far as denying citizenship rights in their respective countries. (See [Detailed Chronology \[PDF\]](#) and [Historical Overview](#)).

Banners, emblazoned with thought-provoking messages, were essential elements of the picketing campaign. They were the medium for explaining the picket's purpose and for embarrassing and pressuring Wilson into action. Many years later Paul still expressed pride, noting, "Our banners were really beautiful."<sup>2</sup> The banners also sometimes inflamed onlookers and became targets of vandalism. The first of the famous "Russian" banners lasted less than a day. Pulled away from its bearer, it survived only a few minutes before the crowd shredded it to pieces. The same fate befell the "Kaiser Wilson" banners. Many of the most effective banners carried quotes lifted directly from Wilson's own speeches. Parroting Wilson's words helped to highlight the government's hypocrisy in supporting democracy abroad while denying its women citizens the right to vote at home. Also, as one historian noted, the tactic may have helped the suffragists avoid prosecution under federal espionage and sedition laws during a period of unprecedented government repression.<sup>3</sup>

Even if mob violence was the exception rather than the rule, underlying tension and intimidation existed on almost any given day. Suffragist Inez Haynes Irwin wrote of the "slow growth of the crowds; the circle of little boys who gathered about . . . first, spitting at them, calling them names, making personal comments; then the gathering of gangs of young hoodlums who encourage the boys to further insults; then more and more crowds; more and more insults. . . . Sometimes the crowd would edge nearer and nearer, until there was but a foot of smothering, terror-fraught space between them and the pickets."<sup>4</sup> When skirmishes broke out, the police invariably stood and watched, or else they arrested the women on charges of obstructing traffic.

The White House was not the only venue for picketing. Demonstrations also took place in nearby Lafayette Park, where in August and September 1918, the NWP burned copies of Wilson's speeches and his picture in effigy. The U.S. Capitol and Senate office buildings were also targeted; picketing at the latter began in October 1918, when the NWP grew tired of waiting for the Senate to pass a suffrage amendment.



NWP "watch fire of freedom" burns outside the White House. Harris & Ewing. January 1919.

[About this image](#)

In January 1919 the focus again returned to the White House with the burning of "watch fires of freedom." Cauldrons were set up outside the White House and in Lafayette Park to burn Wilson's speeches and pressure him to use his influence to secure the remaining two votes necessary for Senate passage of the amendment. Risking arrest, demonstrators kept the fires burning continuously. (See [Detailed Chronology \[PDF\]](#) and [Historical Overview](#)).



During World War I, Virginia Arnold holds a banner accusing President Wilson of forgetting to grant full democracy in this country while sending troops abroad to make self-government possible for the rest of the world. Harris & Ewing. August 1917.

[About this image](#)

Wilson could not escape the pickets by leaving town. In February 1919 NWP members, carrying banners reminding him of his pledge to support the suffrage amendment, met him in Boston upon his return from Europe. The police roughed up the demonstrators before arresting them. These pickets served eight-day sentences in the Charles Street jail. The next month, demonstrators were brutally attacked by police, soldiers, and onlookers when they picketed outside the New York Metropolitan Opera House, where Wilson was speaking.

At great personal cost to their health, safety, and reputations, American suffragists risked arrest and imprisonment to secure voting rights for women. Through their choice of tactics and nonviolent protests, they helped to defend for all Americans the right to assembly and freedom of expression.

## Arrests and Imprisonment

NWP activists—arrested, tried, and in many cases imprisoned on charges related to picketing, speaking at rallies in public parks, and other forms of demonstration—devised another series of tactics to deal with their experiences in court and in detention. Again, [Alice Paul](#) and [Lucy Burns](#)'s work in the British suffrage movement helped to frame responses in America. Paul's Quaker background provided her with a sophisticated view of the connections between ethical civil disobedience and political action. Burns's sympathy with labor organizations and the Left helped develop her responses.

Most important among the strategies used in court—and later in detention—in either the [District of Columbia jail](#) or Virginia's [Occoquan Workhouse](#), was the demand that arrested suffragists be treated as political prisoners. Arrested on criminal charges of obstructing traffic, NWP activists emphasized that their assembly on city sidewalks and their silent and peaceable picketing had been conducted entirely within legal grounds. Under the leadership of Paul and Burns they began insisting that the courts acknowledge that the real motivation for their arrests was politically based. They also placed the blame for the repressive response to their actions squarely on the Wilson administration.

Beginning in fall 1917, jailed NWP pickets backed up this insistence on the political nature of their imprisonment with action—or more accurately, inaction—within the jail and workhouse. Following the lead of Burns, Paul, and others, imprisoned pickets instituted a campaign of nonviolent, “passive” resistance. They refused to do their assigned sweatshop sewing and manual labor. Further, they refused to eat until their political status was acknowledged. Hunger strikes became one of the most powerful and graphic tools used by the NWP to gain public awareness of the dire nature of the denial of rights to women.

For many of the middle-class and wealthy pickets, jail was a shock. Conditions at both the District and Virginia facilities were uncomfortable at best. Sanitation was severely lacking. Bedding went unwashed and was reused by different prisoners for months. Food had little nutritional value or appeal, and worse, was often riddled with worms or insects. At one point, jailed suffragists sent a heap of worms removed from their soup to the warden on a spoon.

Most NWP activists came from sheltered, privileged backgrounds or enjoyed a highly



Vida Milholland in District of Columbia jail. Harris & Ewing. July 4, 1917.

[About this image](#)

respectable social status through their education, career, or marriage. Yet on principle and in defense of civil liberties, many chose to enter jail instead of paying a fine. Imprisonment often provided them with a firsthand education about how readily those less privileged could find their rights abridged within the court, police station, workhouse, and jail.

In order to emphasize the “common criminal” status of the NWP prisoners, wardens incarcerated them with women who had been detained for streetwalking, homelessness, or petty crime. In a time when Jim Crow racial segregation still prevailed, wardens also housed white demonstrators with African-American detainees. The pickets discovered these women had been imprisoned as a result of their acute poverty or even because they had been subjected to sexual exploitation or domestic violence. [Doris Stevens](#), one of the jailed NWP protesters, observed that the lessons learned about prison conditions and inequities encouraged many imprisoned suffragists to also turn to prison reform.



Lucy Branham protests the political imprisonment of Alice Paul. Harris & Ewing, 1917.

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As the process of picketing, arrest, sentencing, and imprisonment continued from June into late fall 1917, former government leniency and pardons gave way to more severe sentences. Many of the suffragists arrested earlier in the campaign received sentences of a few days to a month, and sentences were sometimes truncated or suspended by pardon. In the new political climate, however, Alice Paul was sentenced to seven months, and Lucy Burns to six months. As the suffragists began

demanding political prisoner status, their situations became more threatening. Imprisonment became more closely synonymous with compromised health and bodily harm.

The dangerous situation inside the detention facilities escalated, peaking in November in with what became known as the “Night of Terror.” Occoquan Superintendent Raymond Whittaker threatened prisoners that he would end the picketing, even if it cost some women their lives. On November 15, 1917, he instigated the use of force by guards against a newly imprisoned set of pickets, a group that included many core NWP national and state organizers. Women were beaten, pushed, and bodily carried and thrown into their cells when they refused to cooperate and attempted to negotiate with the superintendent. Other means of physical intimidation also were used. [Dora Lewis](#) was knocked unconscious and Lucy Burns handcuffed with her arms above her head.

The next day, 16 of the women began a hunger strike, including Lewis and Burns. They followed the example set the previous month by Alice Paul and [Rose Winslow](#). During her protest, Paul was subjected to psychiatric evaluation, threatened with transfer to an institution for the insane, and force-fed. News of her treatment was leaked outside the facility. When Burns and Lewis grew weak from refusing food, they, too, were force-fed. Burns had a tube forced up her nose rather than through her mouth, resulting in bleeding and injury.

The assaultive nature of the force-feeding process was by all accounts a torturous



Kate Heffelfinger after her release from Occoquan Workhouse, 1917.

[About this image](#)

experience for the women, one that they withstood repeatedly. Verbal techniques of psychological duress also were used to weaken the women's resolve. Isolated from one another, some prisoners were told falsely during their force-feedings that they were the only person still maintaining the hunger strike—claims that they knew not to believe.

The campaign of civil disobedience and the public outcry over the prisoners' treatment led to the release of Paul, Burns, and other suffrage prisoners at the end of November 1917. The NWP subsequently staged a mass meeting in Washington, D.C., to honor the [women who had served time in jail or prison](#). A "Jailed for Freedom" pin, fashioned after one used in Britain, was affixed as a badge of honor on the formerly imprisoned women attending the meeting. The arrests, however, continued.

Picketing proceeded at the White House, in front of the U.S. Capitol, and at the Congressional office buildings. More NWP protesters were imprisoned and participated in hunger strikes in 1918. The watch fire demonstrations of 1919 put even more women behind bars for brief sentences. By the time that suffrage was won in 1920, 168 NWP activists had served time in prison or jail.



Speakers on "Prison Special" tour, San Francisco, 1919.

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The NWP used the experience of imprisoned pickets to help spread the call for a federal suffrage amendment. Ex-prisoners began traveling during a determined lobbying campaign to push the suffrage amendment through Congress. In February 1919 the "Prison Special" tour began from Union Station in Washington, D.C.—with former prisoners traveling on a train called the "Democracy Limited."

Mass meetings were held around the country—from Charleston, South Carolina, to New Orleans and Los Angeles, Denver, Chicago, and many [other cities](#), ending in New York in March.. Among the 26 speakers on this tour—often outfitted in prison dress, were veteran NWP organizers Vida Milholland, [Abby Scott Baker](#), [Lucy Branham](#), [Lucy Burns](#), and [Mabel Vernon](#) as well as the elderly and courageous [Mary Nolan](#)—often touted as the NWP's "oldest picket." Their message was well received and they drew large audiences. The "Prison Special" tour helped create a groundswell of local support for the ratification effort that began in the states a few months later, following the approval of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment by Congress in June 1919.

## Notes

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1. Linda G. Ford, *Iron Jawed Angels: The Suffrage Militancy of the National Woman's Party, 1912-1920* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1991), 127.

2. *Ibid.*, 126.

3. Linda J. Lumsden, *Rampant Women: Suffragists and the Right of Assembly* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 129.

4. Inez Haynes Irwin, *The Story of Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party* (Fairfax, VA: Denlinger's Publishers, 1920; reprint 1977).