

*Alice Paul: Claiming Power***J.D. Zahniser and Amelia R. Fry****New York: Oxford University Press, 2019 (reprint)****408 pages****ISBN: 0190932937****DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14713/njs.v6i2.218>**

In *Alice Paul: Claiming Power* J.D. Zahniser and Amelia R. Fry craft a compelling biography of the New Jersey suffragist. Paul hailed from Moorestown and played an outsized role in the ultimate passage of the 19th Amendment granting America women the right to vote. She has often been underrepresented in the historiography, though this is the latest in a recent flurry of books on Paul. Amelia Fry first undertook a Suffragist Oral History interview with Paul for Berkeley's Bancroft Library, and then spent decades working to unearth information and preserve her legacy in the history. She passed away in 2009, and Zahniser, an independent scholar, then stepped in to take over the research and complete the biography. So, the book has been a long time coming.

Zahniser and Fry's purpose here is to provide an updated look at Alice Paul—a complex portrait of a someone who embodied a new position in the national political landscape: a woman with “raw political power.” (2) Paul's embodiment of this power made her controversial, both in her lifetime and in the history. These authors attempt to “untangle gender-bound notions of power from our understanding of Alice Paul so we can gaze at her with a fresh eye. For the first time her story is told from her point of view.” (2) Their strategy reveals the portrait of a deeply human, remarkably ambitious, tenacious, and flawed character, one willing to put her own life on the line to win the right to vote.

The narrative begins with Paul's Quaker family life and education, her time at Swarthmore, and her travels abroad. Her Quakerism, they argue, played a fundamental role in the kind of leader she became, honing her social conscience and her self-mastery. Readers see Paul as a budding

intellectual in England where she engages in academic pursuits and an unsatisfying stint of social work. Then Paul has a profoundly formative experience: she finds herself drawn in to the work of the Pankhursts and their militant suffrage movement for some six months. Here Alice Paul's transformation into a seasoned speaker and organizer began. The authors provide vivid descriptions of Paul and her comrades scaling buildings, and barreling through police lines in an effort to confront a young Winston Churchill. After a hunger strike in Holloway prison, and enduring nearly a month of forced feeding, Paul made her way home, and here Zahniser and Fry present her at a crossroads. While not very knowledgeable about the American suffrage movement in 1910, and unsure of her next steps, Paul arrived home as something of a celebrity due to her notoriety in Britain. Once she was recognized as a leader, she began to use all she had learned to inhabit that position with ease. The authors note, "when she finally stepped into the leadership vacuum of the American suffrage movement, she stood ready to sow the wind." (4)

The second half of the narrative covers the years between 1912 and 1920, where Paul quickly became a force to be reckoned with on the American political scene. Paul and her more militant Congressional Union—later the National Woman's Party—clashed with the dominant mainstream suffrage organization, the National American Women's Suffrage Association. This tension is a key issue, and the authors argue that Paul carved out a militant space for women in the political arena, one that challenged traditional gender norms in a way that NAWSA would not. Paul saw the amendment as the best path forward well before the leaders of NAWSA, who were still working on state campaigns in addition to the federal campaign until late 1916. She worked to achieve this with two different strategies. First, she utilized what she called a "political strategy," whereby enfranchised women voters, who first existed only in Western states, would vote against the party in power—the Democrats—for as long as they refused to support the passage

of the Susan B. Anthony amendment. Here women appeared as naked partisans in their own self-interest, voting against President Woodrow Wilson even though he was being wooed by suffrage activists.

This tactic proved controversial, but Paul's second strategy drew even more criticism, and it arguably cements her significance in the history of non-violent protest in America. In January of 1917 Paul upped the ante, orchestrating a picket of the White House by a group of women dubbed "Silent Sentinels." With this placement of women in the public square, engaged in a political protest, Paul "constructed the banner bearers as American Womanhood, exercising the sacred right of petition." (256) Critics on all sides decried the lack of propriety shown by these women, and NAWSA issued statements calling the pickets an "annoyance and embarrassment" to the president. (257) But Paul persisted, dreaming up one pageant of political theater after another, repeatedly capturing the media spotlight.

The US entrance into WWI in mid-1917 raised the stakes considerably, but Paul did not shrink back. She recognized "in the call to war an opportunity to intensify her critique of the federal government's failure to enfranchise women." (263) So the NWP spent the remainder of the war highlighting the very hypocrisy of Wilson waging a "war for democracy" while denying it to the nation's women. The boldness of these efforts led to several waves of arrests, and months long prison sentences where Paul and her second lieutenant Lucy Burns went for broke by calling for hunger strikes that they themselves undertook. Forced feeding followed, along with an onslaught of sympathetic attention in the press. By the time Wilson finally came out in support of the amendment and it secured passage in the House and in the Senate, widespread sentiment existed in favor of votes for women.

Zahniser and Fry delve into the historiography on suffrage in subtle ways. They complicate understandings of Black women's inclusion in the famous 1913 suffrage march Paul orchestrated in Washington, D.C., citing evidence that Paul herself did create space for Black women to march with their state or educational delegations, and did not force them to march at the back. But they still portray Paul as single-minded in her drive for the amendment. She was unwilling to appreciate the true needs and positions of Black and working women in the process, and "expedience trumped ideals" for her time and time again. (204) Zahniser and Fry also argue that the federal amendment passed at the time that it did due largely to Paul's efforts, her political strategies. While they foreground her "historical good fortune," they assert that Paul successfully inhabited a political role in the 1910s like few women before her.

The book is highly readable, truly a page turner for women's history devotees once it moves into Paul's work with the British suffrage movement. This strength makes it all the more disappointing that the narrative seems to end so abruptly with just a quick glance at the amendment's ratification process. The reader hears nothing of the fate of very well sketched out players like Lucy Burns (who left the movement by 1920) and Dora Lewis. For all of its detail, the book also is not able to fill in the more personal and intimate facets of Paul's life, a fact which the authors themselves lament in noting the lack of surviving sources. All told, Zahniser and Fry have crafted a remarkably compelling narrative that offers evidence of Paul's great significance in American history as a women's rights activist, a political strategist, and an early architect of non-violent protest. Despite her flaws, Paul's fearlessness, resourcefulness, and self-mastery made her a suffrage leader of considerable talent and great import, one who deserves her place in the history books.

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