

EARLY YEARS

Alice Paul was born in Mount Laurel, New Jersey, on January 11, 1885. Her family was made up of devout Quakers, who traced their ancestry back to William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania. Like most Quakers, the Pauls were against war and believed in fairness and equality. They felt that everyone, including women, should have a voice in discussions and decisions.

Paul's father, William, was a successful businessman. Paul's mother, Tacie, was a member of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and attended meetings supporting equal rights and the vote for women. Sometimes her mother even took Alice along to meetings.

The Pauls were affluent, but they didn't flaunt their success. They owned a large farm, called Paulsdale, and felt that people should live simply and close to nature. They were proud of Alice, their eldest child. She was smart and capable from the time she was a young girl. Her father often said, "If you want something hard and disagreeable done, I bank on Alice to do it."

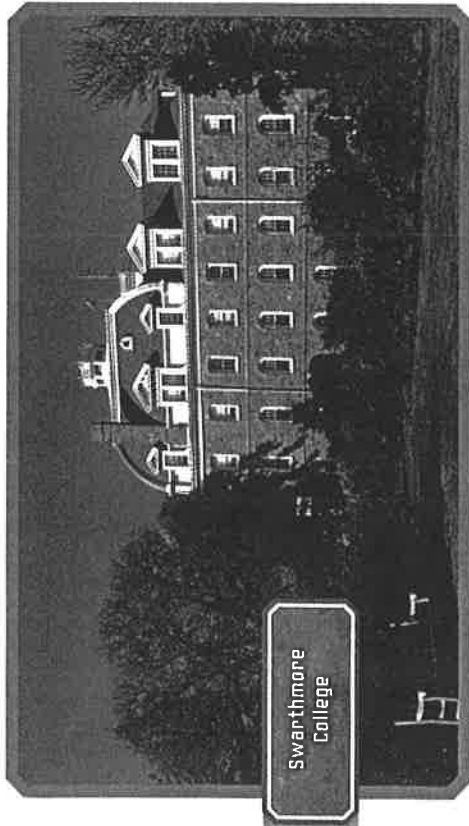
Paul attended the Friends School and graduated first in her class in 1901. At sixteen, she began studies at Swarthmore College, a coeducational school her grandfather had founded in 1864. It was also where her mother had been

ALICE PAUL



"Mr. President, how long must women wait to get their liberty? Let us have the rights we deserve."

ALICE PAUL fought long and hard to pass the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, granting women the right to vote. She endured jail, hunger strikes, and force-feeding for the cause she believed in. The Nineteenth Amendment was passed in 1920. Paul continued to work toward equal opportunity for women for the rest of her life.



Swarthmore
College

a student. Going away to school was exciting. Paul liked the camaraderie of her fellow students. She liked being able to wear colorful clothes instead of the drab, severe clothes the Quakers favored. She liked being exposed to music and dance.

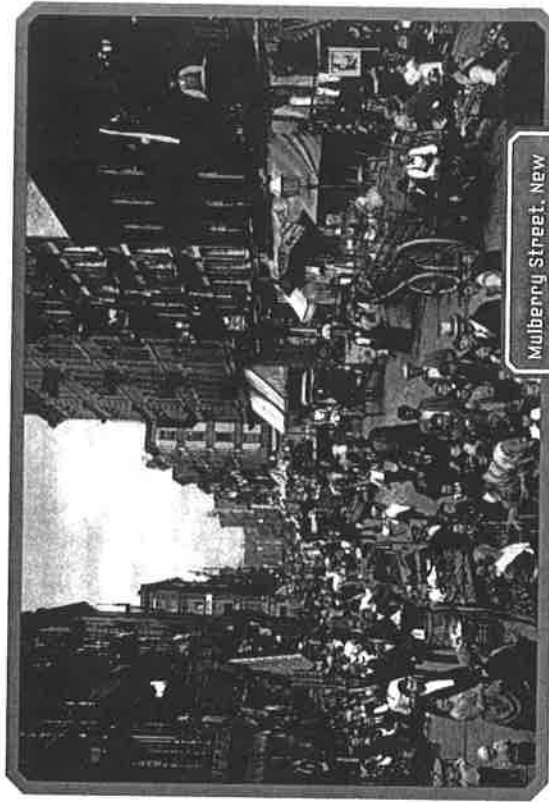
HELPING OUT

As a biology major, Paul was taught by some of the best female teachers of the time. But toward the end of her four years at Swarthmore, she decided to switch directions and pursue studies in social work, a newly recognized profession. Its focus was to support people in need. Paul decided that was just what she wanted to do—help improve people's lives. She was excited to get a scholarship after

graduation, and set off for New York's Lower East Side. There, she'd work among immigrants, mostly from Europe, who flocked to the neighborhoods' crowded streets.

As soon as she arrived, she was astonished at how different the Lower East Side was from her home in rural New Jersey. The bustling streets were lined with pushcarts brimming with unfamiliar food. There was constant noise, and the air was thick with strange smells. People were poor, often sick, living in unsanitary conditions, and had little medical help or means to find better housing.

Paul threw herself into her work, but it was often unrewarding. There wasn't much she could do to really



Mulberry Street, New
York City, circa 1900

make people's lives better. She told her mother, "You couldn't change the situation by social work." Without government assistance and new laws, a social worker had limited resources. After a year, Paul realized that she couldn't go on working this way, and social work wasn't for her. She decided to return to school and get a masters degree in sociology. When a Quaker group awarded her a scholarship to study in England, she accepted it.

SPEAKING UP

In England, Paul was busy with classes, volunteering at a settlement house, playing tennis, bicycling, and making new friends. And then one day, she attended a meeting that propelled her in a whole new direction.



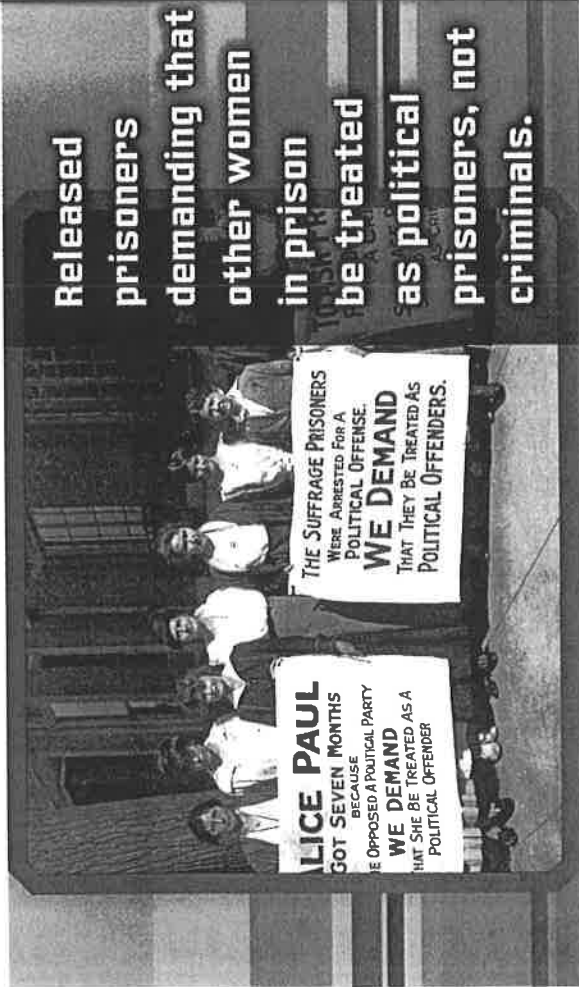
It was a talk by Christabel Pankhurst about equal rights for women, and it made a huge impression on Paul. Pankhurst was fearless and passionate. She and her mother, Emmeline Pankhurst, were at the forefront of the women's rights movement in England. Their motto was "Deeds, not words." Paul couldn't believe how these strong English women were

met with jeers and protests. Paul was used to the quiet and agreeable manner in which Quakers held discussions. When she witnessed how the English audience treated Pankhurst, she felt sympathy and admiration for the cause of women's rights and the women who fought fearlessly for change.

On a clear June day in 1908, the English suffrage movement held one of the largest demonstrations that England had ever seen. Thirty trains carried women from seventy different towns to the capital. They marched, made speeches, and proclaimed, "Votes for Women." Watching the parade, Paul was impressed with the passion of the speakers and their courage. But even after that large demonstration, British Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith refused to alter his views or take any action in support of women's rights.

Paul knew that she wanted to become part of this powerful women's rights movement and began attending meetings. She was convinced that this was the way to make real changes in women's lives. If women had the vote, they could help make better laws.





Released prisoners demanding that other women in prison be treated as political prisoners, not criminals.

Soon, Paul was also giving speeches and handing out newsletters in support of the women's rights cause. She was eager to help Pankhurst and their militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). They were determined to force the prime minister out of office if he didn't listen to their demands for rights. The WSPU believed that polite requests, petitions, and reasonable discussions hadn't worked. It was time to be confrontational. They were even ready to hurl rocks at windows and disrupt elections to ensure that politicians paid attention. Their assertive actions brought them public attention and front-page headlines in the newspapers.

And Paul was right there in the middle of it all. She dressed as a cleaning lady to disrupt a meeting in Scotland. She heckled members of Parliament and climbed up on the roof to throw stones at the prime minister's window. She later claimed that she had personally broken forty-eight windows.

But despite her active involvement in WSPU meetings, Paul didn't neglect her studies. She was often the only woman and the only American in her classes. She impressed her professors with her hard work and keen intelligence. Soon she decided to take her studies beyond a master's degree and work toward a doctorate. Her family



Members of the WSPU on a horse-drawn bus covered with posters advertising their cause

FREEDOM HEROINES

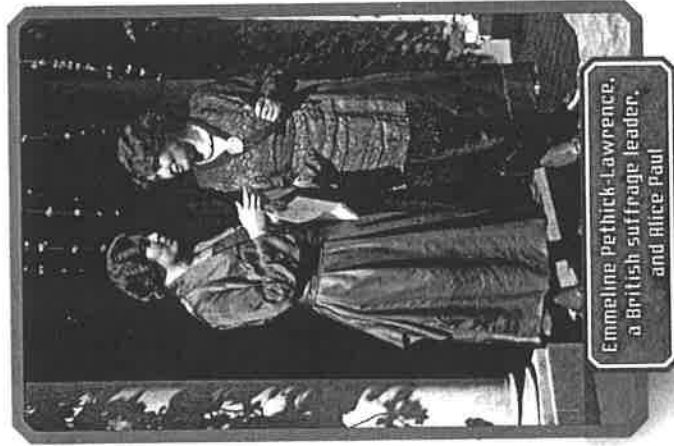
didn't approve of her plans. They thought it was time for Paul to come home. They refused to help her any longer with tuition or living expenses, but Paul was determined. She wanted to stay in England, continue her studies, and work for women's rights.

And if she couldn't get financial help from her family, she'd find a job. She soon found work in a rubber factory and boarded

in a small, damp attic room. She also kept studying and fighting for the cause that had become so important to her.

JAILED

By the fall of 1910, Paul had been jailed three times for her activities supporting women's rights. She refused the money her mother offered to pay for fines and keep her out of prison. Like other suffragettes, Paul felt she'd been arrested on flimsy charges and was being treated like a common criminal. Suffragettes were searched and forced



Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence,
a British suffrage leader,
and Alice Paul

ALICE PAUL

to wear uncomfortable clothing, sleep on plank beds, do endless demeaning chores, and eat miserable meals. Sometimes they were even thrown into solitary confinement.

But to Paul and other militant suffragettes, being jailed was also a form of protest. Paul wrote her mother not to worry: "Other women are doing it. Why should not I?" And when

Paul, like other suffragettes, went on a hunger strike and then were force-fed at the orders of the government, she coped—although she admitted later that it was torture. She hoped never to be force-fed again. Nevertheless, Paul's hunger strike hadn't gone unnoticed. It had even made headlines in the U.S.

By 1910, Paul decided to return home to the United States. She loved England, but she missed her family. After a rough Atlantic crossing, she stepped off the ship, greeted by her family and a few reporters. She was back, ready to continue her studies and her fight for women's rights.



Lucy Burris
in prison

THE FIGHT GOES ON!

Paul finished her doctoral dissertation in the U.S. and continued her activities in the women's rights movement. She gave speeches and interviews about her experiences in England and the importance of the women's rights movement. She believed that women had to pressure U.S. politicians if they were going to be granted the vote. She said, "The militant policy is bringing success . . . the agitation has brought England out of Her lethargy, and women of England are now talking of the time when they will vote, instead of the time when their children would vote, as was the custom a year or two back."

Now that there was a new president, Woodrow Wilson, in the White House, Paul wanted to make the case for women's rights strongly and directly to him. It wasn't going to be easy. Wilson was opposed to giving women the vote.

Paul and the NAWSA staged a huge parade on Pennsylvania Avenue to gain publicity for their cause. It would coincide with Wilson's inauguration in 1913. They turned the women's suffrage event into an elaborate pageant with people dressed up in costumes. Pageants were in fashion at the time and people flocked to see them. When male opponents began to attack the group, the police looked away. The parade and the cause of women's rights made national headlines.



Alice Paul, far left,
in New York City

PRESIDENT WILSON

Paul and a group of other women from the suffrage movement met President Wilson in the White House for the first time in 1913. The women tried to persuade the president that granting women the vote fit into his ideals of democracy. He brushed them off, discounted their opinions, and said he was busy and needed more information. When the group came back to discuss the issues again, Wilson found other excuses to dismiss their arguments. Paul was now convinced that the only way the president would change his attitude was through pressure. She was determined to spearhead that pressure.

Paul and her colleagues in the NAWSA began staging more dramatic events to highlight their goals. A cross-country automobile caravan of women traveled from coast to coast to gather petitions that were delivered to Congress. During Wilson's 1916 State of the Union speech, the women unfurled a banner that read: "Mr. President, what will you do for woman suffrage?"

Paul used the skills she'd learned in the British suffrage movement to raise money and awareness. She opened her headquarters right across from the White House. She was adept at raising money and promoted a newspaper, *The Suffragist*. She sent women out to the streets of Washington, D.C., to sell their papers. She hired a cartoonist to portray



Paul, second from right, and suffragists picketing outside the Metropolitan Opera House

Wilson as a confused captain of a ship and a drowning man rescued by women. She encouraged women to stand up and speak out and not be afraid. She courted wealthy women, like Alva Vanderbilt Belmont, to help the cause by donating money. She spoke to classmates from Swarthmore and enlisted their help. She created an all-female advisory board of distinguished women. But no matter whom she brought to help the cause, Paul always maintained control of its direction.

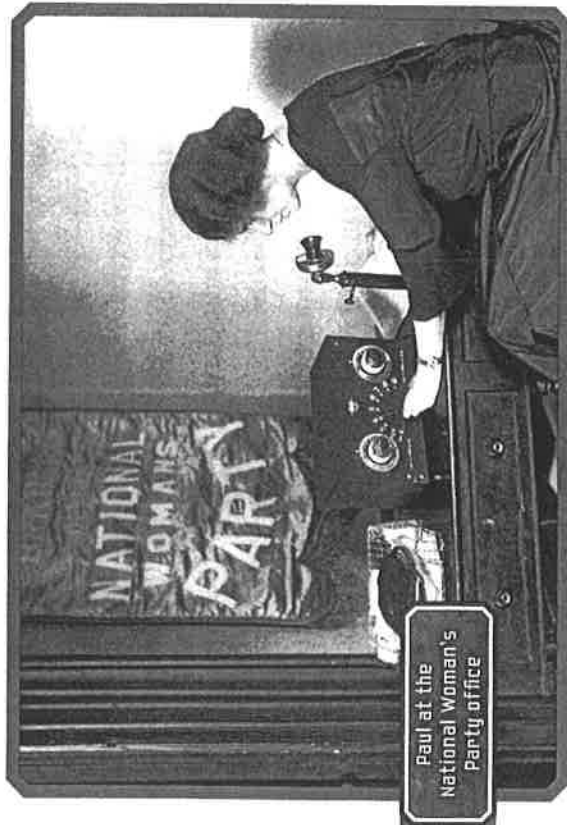
She was forceful and focused, and never took no for an answer.

A TENSE TIME

As time went on, Paul and the NAWSA increasingly disagreed about timing and tactics. The NAWSA leadership didn't like Paul's strong, direct approach with President Wilson. They supported the president and considered his party, the Democrats, allies. Paul believed that the only way



A woman selling *The Suffragist* on the street

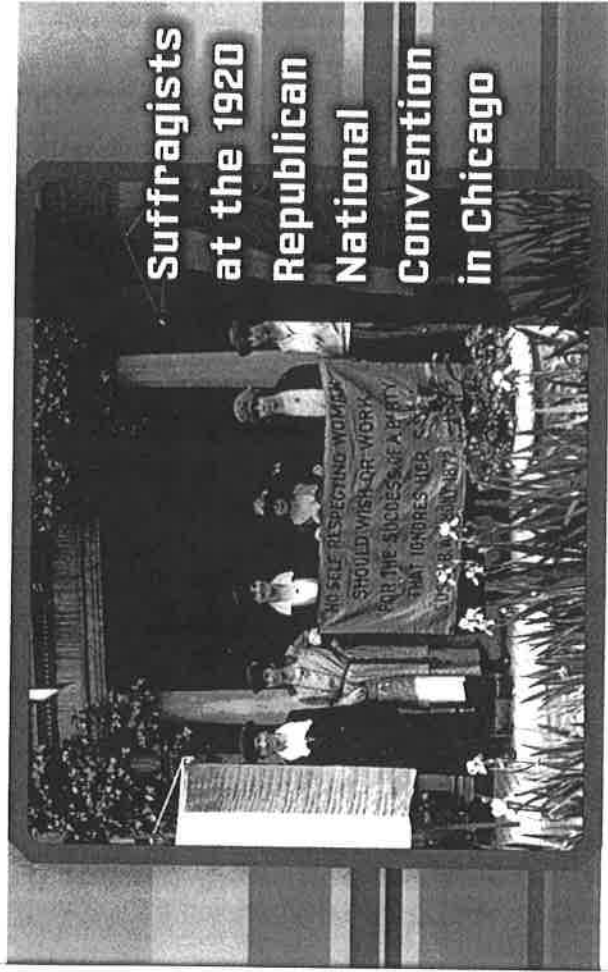


to make change was never to back down. She thought it was important to use every opportunity to keep the pressure on a reluctant and sometimes disdainful president. After all, Wilson had described women's suffrage as "this cause . . . for which you can afford to wait." Paul felt that women had waited too long already. They couldn't wait for the president to change his mind. They had to change it for him.

Tensions were so heated that Paul and her followers were tossed out of the NAWSA, and in 1916 formed the National Woman's Party (NWP). The NWP continued picketing the president even when the U.S. entered World War I. Throughout 1917, they stood outside at their posts near the

White House and stayed there despite rain, sleet, and snow. They picketed every day except Sunday.

To promote their cause, they used Wilson's own words about making the world safe for democracy. Their banner read: "We will fight for the things we have always held nearest our hearts, for Democracy, for the right of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own government." They asked Wilson why he wasn't bringing democracy to American women. Didn't they deserve the right to help choose their own government just like citizens of any other country?



**Suffragists
at the 1920
Republican
National
Convention
in Chicago**

In June 1917, the NWP's banners were ripped. Some think it was done on the orders of the White House. Soon, a mob attacked the picketing women when they replaced their banners. The police looked on and did nothing to stop the mob. And when the women wouldn't budge despite the harassment, they were arrested on flimsy charges of "obstructing traffic." When they were jailed, they refused to pay the fines. Tossed into rat-infested prison cells, they staged hunger strikes and were brutally force-fed by prison guards.

The day the NWP protesters were arrested, Paul was home, sick with fatigue, digestive problems, and possibly Bright's disease, a disease that had killed President Wilson's first wife. But luckily Paul recovered. She didn't have Bright's disease, and she was soon back on the picket lines. On October 20, 1917, Paul was arrested and sentenced to seven months in jail. Despite the threat of jail, more women picketed and more were arrested. Soon the jails were full of women



whose only action was to picket. As more women poured into the jail, the guards decided they didn't want Paul to influence them, so they isolated her.

When news filtered out about the brutal treatment of the women in jail, the public was outraged. There was a demand for their immediate release. More people embraced the fight for women's rights, and sympathy for the cause grew.

By November 28, the suffragists were released. Some of the women were sick. Some were close to a total collapse. The judge's excuse for releasing the women was that "further imprisonment might be dangerous to their health." It was terrible being jailed, but the women had not given in despite horrific conditions. The battle for women's rights had not been won yet.

Alice Paul left prison thinner, but more determined than ever. She was convinced that what they had done and how they'd refused to budge from their position would change everything.

THE NINETEENTH AMENDMENT

There was now more general support for granting women the vote. Even President Woodrow Wilson knew it was time to change his attitude. Wilson called his sudden support a "war measure" and in 1919, after continued

lobbying, picketing, and pressure, Congress finally passed the Nineteenth Amendment. They called it the Susan B. Anthony Amendment.

What was needed now was **ratification** from three-fourths of the states. Paul knew it was going to be hard to secure all the needed states to ratify. There were different state governments with opposing opinions and contradictory agendas. Paul knew that most of the southern states, like Georgia and Alabama, would vote no to the amendment, and they did. It was touch and go with some other states, like New Jersey and Oklahoma. But they finally supported the amendment.

In the end, it all came down to Tennessee. The majority of the state legislature had to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, and then it would become law. For a while, it looked hopeless. At the last minute, the youngest member of the state

senate, twenty-four-year-old Harry Burn who was about to vote no, received a letter from his mother. It read: "Hurrah and vote for suffrage and don't keep them in doubt." Burn voted yes. With his vote, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified after a seventy-two-year struggle.

It was a victory and a wonderful moment, but Paul knew that the fight for equal rights wasn't over. There was much more work to be done to make sure that women were treated equally by law and paid an equal wage for equal work.

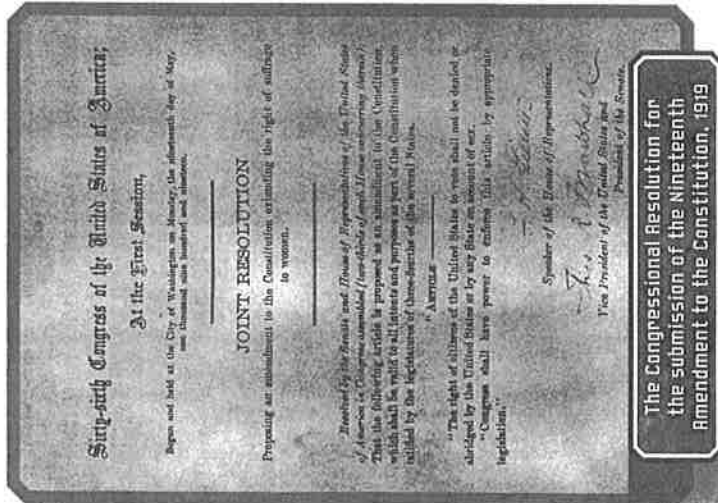
LATER YEARS

In 1923, on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Seneca Falls convention, which had started the women's rights movement, led by Paul's heroes—Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony—Paul announced that she would be working toward the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). This amendment called for "equal rights throughout the United States."

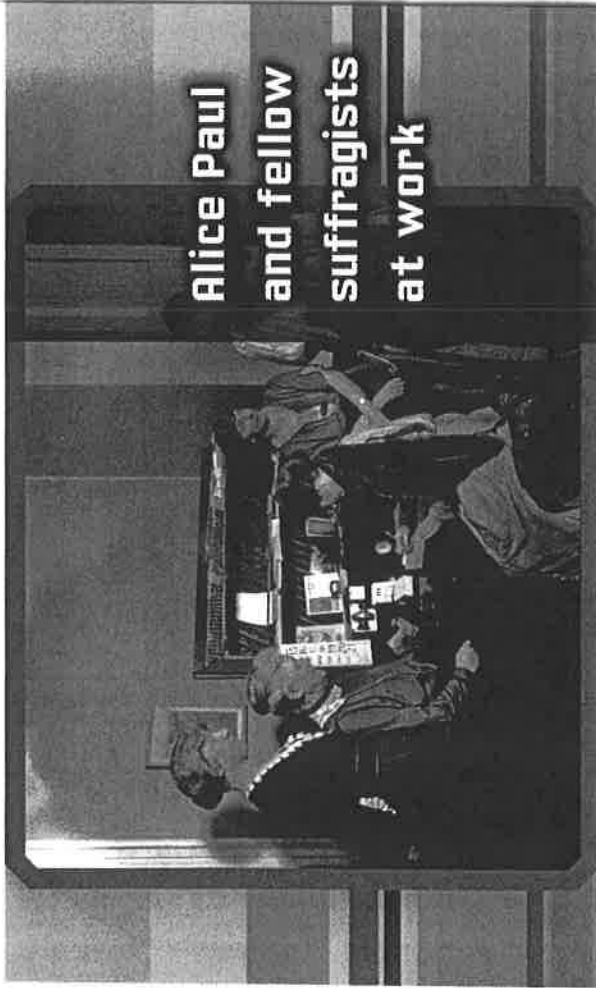
In 1943, it was named the Alice Paul Amendment. As Paul continued to push for the ERA, she also earned



Harry Burn,
a Tennessee
state senator



The Congressional Resolution for the submission of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, 1919



three law degrees. She traveled around the world advocating for women's rights. She worked to make sure the United Nations' charter included a commission on the status of women. She led a group that added a sexual discrimination clause into the Civil Rights Act of 1964. She was tireless, relentless, and always focused on her goals.

The women's movement picked up steam again in the 1960s. Once again, women marched and demanded equal pay and fairer laws. In 1972, the United States Congress finally passed the ERA. But to date, not enough states have ratified it to pass the amendment.

Alice Paul died at the age of ninety-two in 1977. Paul has been honored with stamps in the United States and Great Britain, and buildings at Swarthmore College and Montclair State University have been named in her honor. But perhaps her greatest legacy is the Nineteenth Amendment, which finally gave women a voice in their own destiny.

