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HUMÁN TUDOMÁNYI SEKCIÓ

**Whose Body, Whose Voice? The Century-Long
Struggle for Women's Autonomy: From Suffrage to
Abortion Rights**

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Introduction: Methodology and the Birth of Women's Activism

At the dawn of the Progressive Era in the United States, in a time when women's voices were silenced in the political arena, a bold vision began to take shape—a vision of a future where women's words could carry weight, their votes held power, and their dreams could no longer be ignored. At the heart of this transformative movement stood, with her iconic hat perched perfectly atop her head, a young Quaker named Alice Paul, a woman who would go down in history as trailblazer for women's rights activism.

With unyielding determination and a fire that refused to be extinguished, Paul quickly became a force to be reckoned with within the suffragist movement of the United States in the early 20th century. She was no ordinary leader, her passion electrified followers and her resolve inspired women from every corner of the country. For Paul, the right to vote wasn't just a goal—it was a necessity, a promise of equality that she was determined to claim for generations to come (Cassidy 50). Her story became the spark that lit the flame of change, a testament to what could be achieved when courage met conviction. Paul and her fellow suffragists made history through relentless activism, introducing militant activist tactics such as organizing parades, picketing the White House, and even the controversial hunger strikes. Some viewed these women as radicals, others as heroes, but their unwavering commitment and sacrifice were not in vain as it forced America to confront the long-overdue issue of women's disenfranchisement. After years of struggle, on August 18, 1920, their hard-fought victory was achieved with the passing of the 19th Amendment, which gave millions of American women a voice that had been silenced for centuries.

Alice Paul's methods were instrumental in the movement's success. Drawing inspiration from the British suffragettes, Paul embraced militant tactics, believing that bold, disruptive actions were necessary to secure swift results. Her innovative strategies fundamentally shaped the fight for the 19th Amendment and left a lasting legacy on women's rights activism. However, the struggle for women's rights did not end with suffrage. Today, the 21st century women of America face new challenges, particularly in the realm of reproductive rights. In 2022, the American Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, the court case that legalized abortion in the United States in 1973 and protected abortion rights in many states for nearly 50 years. This decision has left abortion rights regulations up to the individual states, creating disparities in access to reproductive healthcare. This ruling has breathed new fire into activism,

with advocates drawing on the tactics once employed by suffragists in their fight for women's rights, thereby continuing the ongoing discourse on women's autonomy in the United States.

This essay aims to compare the radical activism of Alice Paul and the suffrage movement with contemporary reproductive rights campaigners, showcasing how militant tactics in women's rights activism have evolved and changed throughout the years. Moreover, the essay sheds light on the ways in which changing gender norms and the rise of the internet have influenced a shift from the suffragists' silent and symbolic forms of protest to the more vocal and assertive rhetoric seen in present-day pro-abortion advocacy.

By drawing this unique parallel, the essay offers a fresh perspective on the enduring impact of Paul's bold, confrontational strategies and their reinvention in today's battles for equality. It examines the effectiveness of militant tactics in women's rights activism through these two movements, highlighting how contemporary reproductive rights activists continue to draw inspiration from Paul's methods, and exploring the limitations of employing such tactics in modern advocacy.

This analysis utilizes a multi-level methodological approach to provide a comprehensive perspective on feminist activism's evolution and significance. Drawing on historical context, this essay examines the historical characteristics of the respective eras through primary sources including letters, interviews with Alice Paul, and archival material revealing her planning of pivotal suffrage events. Additionally, speeches and memoirs by suffragists like Harriot Stanton Blatch and Doris Stevens are utilized, alongside personal accounts from modern-day activists such as Amelia Bonow and Alejandra Pablos. Court cases, such as *Roe v. Wade*, and *Dobbs v. Jackson*, are examined, supported by statistics on contemporary issues like voting rights and abortion access across states.

The strategies of historical movements, such as the National Women's Party in the 20th century, are compared with those of 21st-century organizations like Shout Your Abortion and Jane's Revenge, highlighting how militant tactics have evolved over time. Furthermore, secondary sources are referenced, including for example, *Mr. President, How Long Must We Wait?* by Tina Cassidy, Marshall McLuhan's theories on media evolution, and Deborah Cantrell's studies on the meaning and impact of silent protest. By integrating historical context, legal analysis, and contemporary media studies, the study underscores the transformation of feminist activism and its persistent significance through centuries.

Activism in America and the Origins of Militancy

Activism has long been woven into the fabric of American history. Whether it was dumping entire shipments of tea into Boston Harbor in 1773 to protest British taxation or organizing sit-ins and boycotts during the fight for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s, militancy has often been used in America as a form of protest to disrupt social order and directly challenge authority. Militant activism includes the use of direct, disruptive, or radical actions to push for rights and its tactics can range from marches, picketing, and hunger strikes to property destruction and even arson. Importantly, this form of activism implies a higher degree of intensity and willingness to confront opposition, however it does not inherently involve violence (“Militant”).

Researchers have long studied the effectiveness of militant tactics in achieving social change. One such researcher named William Gamson found that “unruly groups—those employing violence, strikes, and other forms of disruption—tend to achieve their objectives at above-average success rates” (87). This suggests that the strategic application of militant methods can significantly enhance the likelihood of success for social movements, particularly when traditional approaches prove insufficient. Militancy can arise as a form of protest for many reasons in a given era. Frustrations with slow progress as well as urgency for change and a need for public and political attention may motivate activists to employ more drastic measures in their advocacy, such as in the case of suffrage, and presently in reproductive rights.

Thus, by the 20th century, militancy was far from new in the landscape of activism in the United States. What was not common in America, however, was for women to uncharacteristically speak up and demand rights for themselves, all the while challenging the very government under which they were expected to remain silent, obedient and deferential. This begs the question: what exactly prompted these otherwise perfectly sensible middle class white women to turn to such “un-ladylike” methods and demand a transformation of their social and political status, thereby sending shockwaves through the entire country?

Where It All Began: The Roots of Women’s Suffrage

The 19th century saw a rise of industrialization, urbanization, and the emergence of the nuclear family, which reinforced the already rigid gender models of the era (Maika 85). Women were idealized as “The Angel in the House,” a term popularized by Coventry Patmore, which defined women’s primary role as nurturing caregivers who maintained the household, while men fulfilled the role of breadwinners (Maika 85). These social norms left many women feeling

constrained and dissatisfied with their lack of opportunities and autonomy. However, these pre-established norms began to shift and change near the end of the 17th century. Due to the Civil War, which caused large numbers of men able-bodied man to leave their homes and participate in the war effort, women were forced to take on traditionally male jobs, and many were surprised to find that they were not at all bad at it. After the war was over and men returned to their families, many women lamented having to return to their domestic, subordinate roles as mothers and wives. Sowing the seeds for change, emerging ideologies began to challenge the societal norms of the time, suggesting that perhaps not only all men, but rather, all men and women were created equal.

This transition led to the emergence of what Sarah Grand called the “New Woman” in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a figure defined by increased independence and a rejection of traditional gender norms (271). These “New Women” began to challenge their exclusion from political life, a system which had long been deeply rooted in patriarchal traditions. Women were increasingly dissatisfied with their social standing, as once married, they forfeited their property and legal identity to their husbands (Maika 85). Discontentment was not merely present among the working-class but started to be recognized even by the aristocracy during the mid-19th century. Queen Victoria, then Queen of Great Britain, lamented in an 1858 letter to her daughter, Princess Frederick William of Prussia: “All marriage is such a lottery—the happiness is always an exchange—though it may be a very happy one—still the poor woman is bodily and morally the husband’s slave. That always sticks in my throat” (Queen Victoria.)

As women engaged more with societal and political matters, they recognized that laws disproportionately impacted them without their input. As legislative chambers across the United States decided on issues central to women’s lives—such as education, property rights, and family law—women watched from the sidelines, powerless to influence the outcomes that shaped their futures. For example, coverture laws in the 19th century ensured that married women could not own property, sign contracts, or control their own wages, rendering them legally dependent on their husbands (National Women’s History Museum). Women were also excluded from decisions on education policies that reinforced gender hierarchies, such as the 1873 exclusion of women from Harvard University’s new annex for higher learning (Harvard Library).

For suffragists, this exclusion was more than frustrating; it was a profound injustice. They argued passionately that it was unacceptable for women, the very people most affected by

these decisions, to have no voice in the process (Pateman 566). Their grievances mirrored the colonial frustrations of taxation without representation. Just as colonists were subjected to laws created by a distant parliament that ignored their voices; similarly, women saw their lack of voting rights not just as disenfranchisement but as a denial of full citizenship. As Pateman noted, rather than out of a wish for equality, many early suffrage advocates viewed their demands as a “means to enhance and protect, not undermine, women’s special sphere of domestic life” (566). To many, suffrage was not merely a privilege, but a fundamental right tied to their identity as American citizens. These revelations sparked an emerging movement where women actively campaigned for suffrage, framing their exclusion as an issue of justice and liberty, essential to the nation’s democratic ideals.

Despite these ideological shifts, women’s pursuit of suffrage and equality encountered significant resistance. Many individuals, particularly those with conservative or traditionalist views, resisted the disruption of established gender roles and questioned women’s capacity to form political opinions. Suffragists were often stigmatized as unladylike and radical, facing criticism for defying social norms and even enduring physical violence for asserting their autonomy.

These challenges prompt us to ask: how are the battles fought by early suffragists mirrored in the contemporary struggles faced by reproductive rights activists? Although movements for gender equality and feminism in the 21st century have enhanced society’s view of women as equal citizens, the negative labeling of women who confront societal norms continues, as illustrated by the divisive discussions around abortion rights. The intricacy of abortion discussions arises from their essence, as they extend beyond political influence to encompass wider concerns of healthcare, privacy, and personal independence. This inherent complexity makes the conversation about reproductive rights both multifaceted and controversial. The intricate dynamics of moral, ethical, and religious elements that define discussions on reproductive rights lead to increased stigmatization of pro-choice advocates. Despite significant progress in society’s perception of women, both suffragists and abortion rights activists have had to endure substantial resistance in their efforts to expand women’s rights.

From Seneca Falls to the 19th Amendment: A Legacy of Suffrage

The public’s opinion, however, was not enough to deter women from fighting for what they believed in. The fight for women’s suffrage in the United States began in earnest with the

1848 Seneca Falls Convention, helmed by figures like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott (Wellman 6). This landmark event was the first organized effort to address women's rights on a national stage, where the attendees issued the *Declaration of Sentiments*, modeled after the Declaration of Independence, asserting that "all men and women are created equal" (Wellman 24). The document outlined grievances against the systemic denial of women's rights, including their exclusion from the right to vote. Stanton and her contemporaries ignited a movement that would span decades, though not without facing significant opposition from both the public and political institutions. Despite this early mobilization, progress was painstakingly slow and met with resistance from various places. The 14th (1868) and 15th (1870) Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which respectively introduced the word "male" into the Constitution and prohibited voter discrimination based on race but not gender, underscored the systemic exclusion of women from political life.

Despite these setbacks, the women would not give up; thus, the movement's persistence laid the groundwork for its successes. In 1869, activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony formed the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), which initially adopted non-militant tactics, advocating for incremental change by lobbying for voting rights at the state level (Britannica). This approach led to recognizable success, as by the late 19th century, individual states in the West, such as Wyoming and Colorado, began to grant women the right to vote. Wyoming, while still a territory, granted women the right to vote and hold public office on December 10, 1869 (Wyoming History Day). Colorado followed by passing women's suffrage through a state referendum on November 7, 1893, making it the first state to enact women's suffrage by popular vote (Colorado Encyclopedia). However, national suffrage remained elusive, as many lawmakers continued to dismiss women's suffrage as unnecessary or even dangerous to the established order (Larson 45). It became more and more apparent that the state-to-state campaigning method was time-consuming, expensive, and ultimately insufficient in securing national suffrage. By 1918, only 15 of the then 48 states granted women the right to vote, therefore, the 19th Amendment was a massive victory, as it was responsible for the enfranchisement of 50.7% of the population, thus slightly more than half of the population of the United States (Larson 3).

The Road to Bodily Autonomy: Reproductive Rights in America

On the other hand, when we look at the history of reproductive rights, we recognize that the road towards bodily autonomy has been no less bumpy than the road towards the ballot.

Abortion was criminalized from the mid-19th century through restrictive laws driven by the medical community and morality campaigns. In 1857, Dr. Horatio Storer, a prominent American physician and anti-abortion advocate, initiated the physicians' crusade against abortion, aiming to elevate the medical profession's status and consolidate authority over reproductive health (Reagan 10-11). Racial anxieties played a significant role in abortion rights restrictions. Concerns about declining birth rates among white Protestant women led to fears of being outnumbered by immigrant and minority populations. The total fertility rate in the United States fell from 7.0 in 1835 to 2.1 in 1935, indicating a substantial decline in birth rates over the century (Hacker and Roberts). The decline was particularly pronounced among native-born white women. Therefore, this "race suicide" panic motivated efforts to criminalize abortion, aiming to increase birth rates among white women to maintain demographic dominance (Beisel and Kay 722). Furthermore, moral and religious sentiments significantly fueled the anti-abortion movement. Victorian-era values emphasized traditional gender roles and viewed abortion as a violation of women's maternal duties. Religious leaders and moral reformers campaigned against abortion, framing it as immoral and sinful, which influenced public opinion and legislation (Luker 87). All these efforts culminated in the enactment of the Comstock Act in 1873, named after Anthony Comstock, a prominent anti-vice crusader. This legislation explicitly targeted writings or instruments pertaining to contraception and abortion, framing such materials as threats to morality and societal order, thereby significantly restricting reproductive rights and reinforcing Victorian-era norms about gender and sexuality (Luker 94).

These strict bans on abortion were enforced for nearly 100 years until a turning point in 1973, thanks to the court case called *Roe v. Wade*. Roe, an unmarried and pregnant woman, sought to terminate her pregnancy through a safe and legal abortion in Texas but was barred by state law since her life was not at risk. She argued that the Texas statutes were unconstitutionally vague and infringed on her right to personal privacy under multiple constitutional amendments (*Roe v. Wade* 120). This decision was not made in isolation but intersected with *Doe v. Bolton*, a related case brought by John and Mary Doe, which challenged Georgia's restrictive abortion laws.

John and Mary Doe, a married couple, filed a complaint similar to Roe's, seeking aid for alleged constitutional violations. They claimed Mrs. Doe, who had a neurochemical disorder and was advised against pregnancy, would want an abortion if she became pregnant despite it not posing a serious risk to her life. The Does also sought to represent all couples in similar situations by amending their complaint (*Roe v. Wade* 121). While *Roe v. Wade* addressed the

broader question of whether the right to privacy encompassed a woman's choice to terminate a pregnancy, *Doe v. Bolton* focused on the procedural barriers imposed by state regulations, such as requiring approval from multiple physicians and a hospital committee. In a pivotal ruling, the Supreme Court decided both cases on the same day, January 22, 1973, declaring that overly restrictive state laws violated constitutional protections. The combined decisions in *Roe* and *Doe* effectively struck down numerous state-level abortion restrictions and legalized abortion on the federal level on account of the right to personal privacy, protected by the First, Fourth, Fifth, Ninth, and Fourteenth Amendments (*Roe v. Wade* 122).

Most recently, however, the case *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) overturned the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision, thereby removing the federal right to abortion. In *Dobbs v. Jackson*, Justice Samuel Alito wrote in the majority opinion,

“We hold that *Roe*...must be overruled. The Constitution makes no reference to abortion, and no such right is implicitly protected by any constitutional provision, including the one on which the defenders of *Roe*...now chiefly rely—the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment” (*Dobbs v. Jackson*).

This ruling returned the authority of abortion regulation to individual states, leading to a fragmented landscape of abortion laws across the country. At present, approximately 56% of states allow abortion access without significant restrictions, reflecting a more progressive stance on reproductive rights (McCann and Walker). However, with the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, 26 states have passed legislations restricting or outlawing access to abortion, with 14 states outright prohibiting the operation as of October 2023 (Mitchell). This turn of events does not only affect the future mothers who may not have a say in the matter, but the children being born under these circumstances suffer the consequences as well, as stated by health economist Dr. Ashley O'Donoghue: “With the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*...many states [are] already facing overburdened foster care systems” (Mitchell).

The decision has ignited a wave of public uproar and galvanized activism on an unprecedented scale. Across the nation, people took to the streets, staging massive protests and marches to voice their outrage and demand the restoration of reproductive rights, with hashtags like #BansOffOurBodies trending globally and organizations such as Planned Parenthood and NARAL Pro-Choice America reported record levels of donations (Jones).

Breaking Barriers: The Militant Activism of Alice Paul

Much like today's debates over reproductive rights, the struggle for women's suffrage in the early 20th century was marked by division and resistance. Between 1890 and 1910, the American woman suffrage movement experienced limited progress. Although Utah and Idaho granted women the right to vote during this period, bringing the total to four states, no additional state victories were achieved by 1910. Several state referendums took place, including three in Oregon, but none succeeded in expanding women's suffrage (Bland 657). Though annual hearings on the bill before Senate and House Committees had become routine, notably, women's suffrage had not been debated on the Senate floor since 1887 and had never been addressed on the House floor. The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), initially maintained consistent pressure on Congress by holding annual meetings in Washington, D.C. However, after deciding in 1893 to convene in the capital only every other year, this persistent lobbying effort began to wane (Bland 657).

By the time suffrage pioneer Susan B. Anthony passed away in 1906, the NAWSA was struggling with internal challenges. The organization's then president, Anna Howard Shaw, faced criticism for her ineffectiveness as both an administrator and an organizer. Shaw pushed forward an evangelical rhetoric and rural perspective, which alienated the urban professional women and union organizers who were critical in advancing the suffrage movement in major cities. Instead of catering to women in urban areas, Shaw focused on working with evangelical churches and temperance advocates in small frontier towns, where the suffrage movement found some success. However, her leadership style reflected the outdated "woman in her place" ideology that hindered NAWSA's ability to connect with urban progressives and labor forces in the eastern cities (Bland 657). This lack of modernization left the organization stagnant, with interest in a federal constitutional amendment reaching an all-time low point.

During this period of stagnation in the suffrage movement, it became evident that fresh, militant leadership was needed to revive momentum. This was the context into which Alice Paul emerged, bringing with her a strong resolve to secure women's voting rights at the federal level. After graduating from Swarthmore College in 1905 with an interest in social service, Paul pursued further education, earning a Master of Arts in Sociology from the University of Pennsylvania (Bill of Rights Institute). Her studies took her to Britain in 1907, where her exposure to the militant tactics of British suffragettes, particularly under the leadership of Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, profoundly shaped her approach to activism. Deeply influenced by her Quaker upbringing and commitment to social justice, Paul returned to the

United States determined to reinvigorate the suffrage movement with these bold strategies (Gilder Lehrman Institute).

Alice Paul's first notable use of militant activism was the organization of the Woman Suffrage Procession on March 3, 1913. Deliberately timed for the day before President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration, the march was designed to disrupt traditional political ceremonies and draw public attention to the suffrage cause. Featuring thousands of women marching down Pennsylvania Avenue in a bold and highly visible demonstration, the event was a surprising spectacle, and defiance of societal expectations for women (Bland 657). The decision to hold the event the day before the president's inauguration was a strategic move, to ensure maximum visibility, as the marchers could capitalize on the large crowds drawn to the capital, their cause reaching the ears of many passersby. Moreover, it was militant in nature, as it deliberately redirected public and media attention from the incoming president to the suffrage cause, thereby subtly challenging authority, marking the beginning of more overtly defiant tactics to follow.

Recognizing the power of public perception, Alice Paul understood that the success of the Woman Suffrage Procession would depend on strategically engaging the media. In early 1913, Paul began sending daily news briefings about the parade to *The Woman's Journal*, ensuring consistent media attention and boosting public interest in the suffrage movement (Bland 668). Her collaboration with editor Alice Stone Blackwell helped secure widespread coverage, elevating the National Woman's Party's advocacy efforts. Harriet Stanton Blatch, daughter of pioneer suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, described Alice Paul's idea for the parade as brilliant and expressed her hope that it would yield significant results (Blatch and Lutz 2).

The procession was meticulously planned. Alice Paul did not intend for the Washington demonstration to be merely a large gathering. She emphasized artistry and pageantry to make the procession noteworthy for its beauty. Drawing inspiration from British suffragettes and Harriot Blatch, Paul sought to elevate the event beyond the "somewhat amateurish showmanship" of earlier suffrage parades (Bland 662). To achieve this vision, she enlisted two professional pageant producers, both of whom agreed to contribute their services to the suffrage cause. In a letter dated January 18, 1913, addressed to Mary Blackwell, Paul expressed her concerns about the potential turnout and outlined her plans to focus on the procession's aesthetic appeal (Paul). The parade featured golden chariots and other ornate elements, creating a striking visual spectacle that appealed to the general public (Bland 663). Heading the procession, was

local celebrity Inez Millholland, a prominent suffragist and labor lawyer, who became an iconic figure in the women's suffrage movement. She led the parade astride a white horse named Grey Dawn, dressed in a white cape and golden tiara, embodying the image of a herald of the future and symbolizing the New Woman of the twentieth century.

Paul and many other suffragists recognized the strategic value of emphasizing femininity, designing the parade to highlight women's aesthetic appeal in ways that conformed to societal expectations. As the NWP itself noted,

In many ways, suffragists were challenging gender norms, while simultaneously using them to their advantage to advance their cause. They were staking their claim to the public sphere and demanding that their voices be heard in a world that tried to marginalize them. However, many suffragists also indulged in existing gender norms, emphasizing their femininity to make the idea of voting women more palatable to the opposition (Olson 9).

The parade was an extraordinary sight and represented an important milestone, as nothing of this kind had happened previously. Nonetheless, it swiftly spiraled into disorder, with near riots erupting along the path. The nearly 5,000 participants encountered significant animosity, battling to progress from the outset. The advancement was gradual, requiring more than an hour to traverse the initial ten blocks, during which numerous participants were brought to tears by taunts and verbal abuse from spectators (Bland 669). Many had pointed to police negligence as the stem of the issue, which the women used to garner more sympathy for their cause. On inauguration day, Harriot Stanton Blatch sent a telegram to President Wilson, on behalf of her own state suffrage society, calling the president's attention to the fact that while he rode "in safety and comfort" to the Capitol, "the Government which is supposed to exist for the good of all, left women while in peaceful procession in their demand for political freedom at the mercy of a howling mob on the very streets which are being at this moment efficiently officered for the protection of men" (Blatch and Lutz 197).

Despite this fact, the angry reactions from the crowd actually boosted the morale of the suffragists, especially those participating in the parade, strengthening their belief in the righteousness of their cause. This sentiment was captured in a letter from a young marcher to her father, who noted, "The whole event has caused quite a stir, and we've gained many sympathizers we wouldn't have otherwise" (Hedges). Paul intended the parade to garner the attention of the media and sympathy from the public, and in this, they succeeded.

Building on her militant approach, the next step Paul took after her successful march was introducing picketing as a form of protest, directly confronting the seat of power by organizing demonstrations outside the White House. The decision to implement this strategy was a well-thought-out one. In an interview on the subject, Alice Paul later reflected:

We had quite a long discussion—I guess many days and weeks, maybe—before we decided to start any pickets. When you start, you have to be prepared to come through for a long time or it is ineffective. So [when] we finally decided to do it...Women volunteered to go right away (Fry 174).

Thus began the phenomenon, documented in countless pictures of the era, of the Silent Sentinels, coined by Harriot Stanton Blatch. They were shifts of women who stood silently at the gates of the White House, holding up banners that demanded voting rights for women. The name itself signifies something deeper. Silent refers to the way in which these women protested, not using their actual voices, but instead, their mere presence in and of itself was a form of protest. Moreover, the word sentinel according to the Cambridge Dictionary means “a person employed to guard something” (“Sentinel”); however, if they were not defending their voting rights, which they had not yet obtained, then what exactly were these women safeguarding? Why was this name chosen?

The Power of Silence: A Strategic Choice

Equality, democracy, and justice—the fundamental principles upon which the United States was built—these were the ideals being protected by the Silent Sentinels. These ladies exposed the absurdity of a country that professed liberty while methodically denying it to half of its citizens. More than just protestors, these women appointed themselves to stand as living reminders of the government’s failure to uphold these principles, all while gathering outside the office of the person who had the greatest opportunity to further their cause but chose not to, President Woodrow Wilson. In doing so, the Silent Sentinels wielded moral authority. Their peaceful, disciplined presence demanded reflection from the public and government alike, making it clear that the exclusion of women from the democratic process was an affront not only to women but to the core values the United States claimed to uphold. Thus, they were not only advocating for their enfranchisement but also challenging the nation to live up to its professed ideals of liberty, equality, and justice for all. As Blatch posed to potential recruits, “Will you not,” she asked, “be a ‘silent sentinel’ of liberty and self-government?” (Stevens 59).

According to Cassidy, Paul gave the sentinels strict instructions on how to conduct themselves while picketing. Along with remaining silent they were meant to avoid being “provoked into physical or verbal confrontation, don’t make eye contact with angry bystanders . . . and keep your backs to the gates for safety and to make sure the public can read the signs” (137). Banners with messages like “MR. PRESIDENT, WHAT WILL YOU DO FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE?” and “HOW LONG MUST WOMEN WAIT FOR LIBERTY?” captured the essence of the Silent Sentinels’ protest. The public reaction to the Silent Sentinels varied widely. Most were stunned by the display, while some dismissed the demonstration as laughable, others expressed admiration and support. A group of visiting Comanches from Oklahoma observed the protest with curiosity and confusion, asking the women, “What are you doing?” The Silent Sentinels, true to their name, remained silent, letting their presence and banners speak for them (Cassidy 139).

Though they received mixed reactions from passersby, the Silent Sentinels made headlines throughout the nation. These women’s silence was their strength, using discomfort to challenge societal norms and authority, confronting passerby with the truth of their oppression. But why was the employment of silence so effective and why was it the form of protest that Paul ultimately decided on?

According to Deborah Cantrell in her essay on the use of silence in protests, “Protestors use silence as a way of affirmatively expressing the ways in which those in control are falsely portraying protestors as destructive and menacing” (91). In the case of the Silent Sentinels, Alice Paul received a slew of critiques for her militant approach to picketing the White House. Many called it a means of embarrassing the president, and a shaming of the country (Cassidy 140). “As an argument it ranks with the small boy’s thrusting out his tongue. As a demonstration of fitness for the vote it is idiotic,” said The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (140). However, these tactics proved more than successful, allowing women not to have their words be misconstrued, using their banners to speak for them in a concise manner. They could not be targeted for what they said, only what they stood for. As Cantrell points out, protesting in silence prevents those in power from condemning the protestor’s speech as improper, disruptive, or threatening (95). Conversely, however, silent protestors often face the issue of ventriloquism coined by Bell Hooks, which involves others “filling in the meaning of silence”, interpreting and assigning meaning to the silence on the protestor’s behalf (Cantrell 95). To avoid this, the banners and signs served to make sure the Silent Sentinels could not be misunderstood, their message rang loud and clear, without any words needing to be spoken.

Moreover, protesters can use silence as a way to highlight how those in power seek to silence them. For women in the 20th century the issues of being silenced not just in political life but in the domestic sphere was still a present issue. As per, “The Angel in the House”, from an early age, girls were conditioned to believe that true femininity meant being fair, quiet, kind, gentle, and considerate (Maika 86). They were taught to be passive, with their ultimate aim being a favorable marriage (96). By remaining quiet, but holding up signs which advocated for their equality, suffragettes were reclaiming their silence and using it as a weapon. This rhetoric of reclaiming something that was once used against you, a term, a slur, or your voice, would become a major centerpiece of the “woke” movement which gained major popularity in the 2010s. Thus, the Sentinels began movements beyond just the fight for suffrage but inspired oppressed groups with protest tactics for generations. At the time though, things were less than bright. Interest in the women, posted outside the White House day after day, began to wane. In retrospect, Paul revealed that she did not think that the decision to picket had an immediate impact on public opinion regarding suffrage. She believed that the pivotal moment in the movement occurred “when people were willing to continue with that picketing when they knew they would be arrested” (Fry 214).

The arrests started with the arrival of the Russians. When World War I broke out, public support for the suffrage movement dramatically shifted toward the war effort. When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, the perception of the Silent Sentinels shifted from being viewed as a minor spectacle to a significant challenge to President Wilson’s leadership and a potential disruptor of national unity in the fight against German socialism (Olson 5). Many questioned how women could advocate for suffrage during such a somber time, when men were sacrificing their lives on the front lines. Patriotic zeal for the war effort, fueled by an unprecedented government propaganda campaign, created an environment where any disruptive efforts were equated with treason, and anything less than unwavering support for the administration was seen as aiding the enemy (Lanctot 5).

In 1917, Russian envoys visited President Woodrow Wilson as part of a diplomatic mission to solidify the alliance between the United States and Russia during the war. Notably, Russia was among the countries that allowed women the right to vote. Paul criticized the Wilson administration for commending Russia’s new embrace of freedom while failing to address the disenfranchisement of women in the United States. She believed this hypocrisy warranted public discourse (Cassidy 156). Paul and her Sentinels strategically coordinated their banners to coincide with the arrival of the Russian delegations in front of the White House, as Lucy

Burns and Dora Lewis held up their banner with the following wordy message on it, addressing the delegation directly:

To the Russian Envoys,

President Wilson and Envoy Root are deceiving Russia. When they say “We are a democracy, help us with the world war so that democracy may survive,” we, the women of America, tell you that America is not a democracy. Twenty million American women are denied the right to vote. President Wilson is the chief opponent of their national enfranchisement. Help us make this nation really free. Tell our government it must liberate its people before it can claim free Russia as an ally (Stevens 92).

Their banners highlighted the hypocrisy of America’s fight for democracy abroad while disenfranchising half its population at home. While a brave act, it was more militant than anything the suffragists had attempted up to this point. Enraged men violently destroyed the suffragist protest sign, pushing Burns and shredding the banner while onlookers watched in horror. Security guards approached to break up the chaos, but another man tore off the final piece before they could intervene. Despite the aggression, Burns and Lewis stood resolute, clutching their poles firmly (Cassidy 157). Though no arrests were made that day, Paul along with her fellow activists, would face severe consequences for their actions. In June 1917, Lucy Burns and Katherine Morey were the first two picketers arrested while demonstrating outside the White House, for refusing to relinquish their signs to police (Dismore). Although they would never be taken to trial, soon after, in the same month, six more picketers would be arrested and sentenced to terms in the district jail. The charges? “Obstructing [sideway] traffic” (Stevens 96). In truth, these accusations were little more than excuses to silence the women who were challenging the government’s power. The war served as a convenient pretext. During sentencing, Judge Alexander Mullaney told the women, “You know the times are abnormal now. We are at war, and you should not bother the President” (Lanctot 1). His words insinuated that the women were pestering the president with such a trivial matter as suffrage, which pales in comparison to the war effort. As enraging as it must have been for the Sentinels to hear those words, this was only the tip of the iceberg.

From June through October, picketers would continually be arrested for charges all relating to the notion of “obscuring traffic” (Library of Congress). Sentinels were routinely taken to Occoquan Workhouse throughout the summer of 1917, and the backlash against the remaining protestors grew increasingly violent. On one occasion, Alice Paul joined the

picketers and was brutally knocked down by a sailor, who then dragged her across the sidewalk in an attempt to rip off her suffrage sash (Cassidy 188). Overall, roughly 168 women were sent to serve prison time for suffrage activities (Library of Congress). Paul got the harshest sentence, being condemned to seven months in jail, the longest of any of the suffragists. When reporters asked her what she thought of the ordeal, she replied, “We are being imprisoned, not because we obstructed traffic, but because we pointed out to the President the fact that he was obstructing the cause of democracy at home, while Americans were fighting for it abroad” (Stevens 214), thereby further cementing her cause in the eye of the public.

Paul continued to push forward her militant tactics even in captivity. Instead of the workhouse, she was taken to an old district jail, where she encouraged the property destruction of the prison, after their jailors denied them the opening of a window to aid an asthmatic inmate (Cassidy 193). The women began to throw tin cups, lightbulbs, and even books at the windows in an attempt to shatter them, but they only managed to crack the glass and were thereafter escorted to solitary confinement for their disobedience. In captivity, the women began to employ an array of militant tactics to be recognized as political prisoners instead of regular criminals, in order to get better treatment. These methods included a refusal to work, coordinated disruptions and most notably, the hunger strike, —a tactic borrowed from their British suffragist sisters who had famously used such methods in Holloway Prison to demand political rights. Alice Paul stated she would refuse to eat until they were given better treatment and recognized as political prisoners, instead of common criminals. This led to the women experiencing the brutalities of force feeding, the process through which they were strapped down and force-fed food through a tube up their nose, funneling milk and raw eggs down their throats in an effort to keep them alive and cease their strike (Cassidy 197).

Regrettably, these were not the only brutal acts that suffragists were subjected to in their time spent in captivity. The more women were omitted into the prisons, the more impatient and harsher the guards’ treatment of them became, leading to the “Night of Terror” in November of 1917, during which the prisoners endured brutal treatment by the guards, including beatings, chokings, and being chained to cell bars (American Woman Suffrage Association, 1922). Of the suffragists, Lucy Burns was the one who spent the most time in prison. On the “Night of Terror”, she spent the whole evening with her hands shackled above her head, while another prisoner suffered from a heart attack in the same night, due to the brutal treatment of the guards (Olson 2).

These injustices brought about a massive turning point in the suffrage movement. Word spread quickly about the cruel treatment of the Occoquan inmates, with multiple newspapers covering the event, featuring the testimonies of the survivors of the “Night of Terror”. The brutal treatment of the suffragist inmates made headlines across the nation, except for Washington, D.C., where local media had enforced a press blackout (Lanctot 55), likely driven by concerns that public outrage could escalate into riots. Similarly to present day activists, the press has played a monumental role in helping women bring the injustices and hypocrisy of the government to light, media narratives being largely responsible for public opinion siding once more with suffrage advocates. Thus, with enough pressure from suffragists, the general public, and most surprisingly even President Wilson—who shocked the nation by publicly endorsing the suffrage amendment on January 9, 1918, calling it an “act of right and justice to the women of the country and of the world”—Americans finally saw the House of Representatives pass the amendment with the required two-thirds majority just one day later (Lanctot 62).

After all they had endured, the women could feel like all their suffering, hard work and employed militant tactics paid off. Although they still had to wait more than two years for the Amendment to be added to the Constitution, the relentless efforts of Alice Paul and her fellow suffragists finally culminated in the ratification of the 19th Amendment on August 18, 1920. This historic moment granted women the right to vote, enfranchising half the population of the United States, and marking a monumental achievement in the fight for women’s rights and equality.

New Frontlines: From Suffrage to Modern Tactics in Reproductive Rights Advocacy

Though women achieved the voting rights they had fought so hard for, their fight for autonomy was far from over. Alice Paul knew this all too well. In an attempt to safeguard the rights of future American women, Paul co-wrote the proposition for the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923, which would explicitly prohibit gender-based discrimination in the United States (Editors). Sadly, it has not yet been passed, thus Paul’s vision for women’s rights has not yet been realized in its entirety. Despite this, the militant tactics pioneered by Alice Paul and her associates during the suffrage movement continue to resonate with contemporary activists, particularly in the most prominent area of today’s women’s rights activism: reproductive rights. Early 20th-century suffragists utilized methods such as marches, silent picketing, and hunger strikes to challenge societal norms and government inaction. Similarly,

modern abortion rights advocates have adopted both traditional and innovative approaches to their forms of protest, reflecting shifts in mediums and strategies over time.

Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian philosopher and communication theorist examined the media's evolution and transformation over the years. His main idea "the medium is the message" provides a valuable explanation for the changes taking place in terms of technology from the early 20th century to today which have influenced the tactics employed by activists. McLuhan proposed that the traits of the medium itself shape society more than the content it conveys (McLuhan et al. 9). By "medium," McLuhan refers to the channel or technology through which communication takes place—such as print, television, or the internet—emphasizing how the characteristics of the medium influence the way messages are perceived and how they impact society as a whole.

In the 1920s, suffragists relied on physical presence as their primary medium. Silent picketing, exemplified by the Silent Sentinels, used the visual impact of women standing stoically in protest to communicate their message. The hunger strikes of imprisoned suffragists further emphasized their resolve, forcing the public and media to confront the physical toll of their activism. These mediums were effective in an era where personal sacrifice and physical demonstration were paramount forms of protest. Newspapers and magazines published tales of their challenges, victories, and sacrifices, generating a ripple effect that went beyond local confines. Most significantly, it fostered connections with local communities, engaging individuals who could readily support their mission. This included acquiring more Sentinels or securing benefactors to advance their cause. The immediate supporters—those closest and most able to contribute—were the ones they could reach the quickest and thus were deemed the most valuable, making them the primary focus of activists, as in the case of the Suffrage March, organized by Paul. These connections fostered grassroots movements, encouraged local advocacy and provided a foundation for broader national support through the press.

In contrast, due to the emergence of the television industry, the internet, and social media, activists today have a much wider toolset at their disposal to help them spread their message to the masses. In ideas such as the global village, McLuhan observed how the media had been able to overcome any physical distance, bringing the inhabitants of the earth closer and turning the earth into a great global village (McLuhan et al. 63). This concept is particularly relevant in analyzing modern activism. Digital platforms not only collapse spatial barriers but also allow movements to transcend national boundaries, fostering global solidarity. Today, individuals on the other side of the world, unable to attend marches or picket lines in person

due to physical distance, can still show their support and solidarity. They do so by posting online, using hashtags, or making donations to the cause, transcending space even across oceans to support worthy causes. Such advancements have given activists the opportunity to reach a much wider audience than the suffragists could have ever dreamed of.

Moreover, McLuhan's insights also highlight how mediums reflect and influence societal attitudes. The suffragists' silent tactics mirrored a society that expected women to express their dissent within the constraints of decorum. By standing in silence or undergoing hunger strikes, they leveraged the power of passive resistance to expose the hypocrisy of a government that claimed to champion democracy while disenfranchising women. Conversely, modern vocal activism focuses more on digital engagement, as it has become more accessible for a society increasingly focused on visibility, immediacy, and sharing one's personal story. Hashtags, viral posts, and public storytelling emphasize the importance of individual voices in creating collective movements, but they also raise questions about the depth of engagement and the risk of "performative activism", referring to actions taken to support a cause primarily to enhance one's social image, rather than out of genuine commitment. As argued by Yoo, performative activism still has value, since the idea of activism is centered around visibility, thus, performative activism signifies that a movement has entered the mainstream consciousness, which is positive, as it draws attention to the cause and spreads awareness, even if it remains surface level (1). The real downside is the spreading of misinformation, which is not easy to counter in a world where online posts are often limited by character, and videos by certain length. Still, pro-abortion activists have achieved much headway through online activism, making the media an indispensable asset for modern-day activists. However, this does not imply that in-person activism has diminished, rather, it is precisely offline where activists adopted many of Paul's aggressive strategies.

Something Borrowed, Something New: Marches, Celebrities, and Narrative-based Activism in Pro-Choice Movements

The Women's March on Washington on January 21, 2017, serves as a key example of modern-day, offline activists utilizing the methods set into motion by Paul. While suffragists employed silent defiance, the Women's March embraced vocal activism, with chants, speeches, and vibrant signs becoming central elements (Women's March). Traditional outlets like *The New York Times* and *The Atlantic* highlighted the event's historic scale, while hashtags like #WomensMarch and #WhyIMarch allowed participants to share personal narratives, fostering

a sense of global solidarity. With an estimated 3 to 4 million participants, it was one of the largest single-day protests in the United States, mirroring the suffrage movement's marches in its use of public spectacle.

To raise awareness, the organizers took a page out of Paul's book and held their event the day after the Inauguration Day of President Donald Trump, who has been known for his support of anti-abortion policies (Walters). Thus, just like the suffragists, the women capitalized on the media coverage surrounding the president's inauguration and even more explicitly challenged the President, making clear demands directed at him, showing a much bolder defiance of authority than earlier suffragists.

Another increasingly prominent tactic today—which was not as prominent in the 20th century—is the strategic use of celebrities in advocacy. For instance, during the 2017 Women's March on Washington, celebrities significantly amplified the event's message, particularly regarding reproductive rights. Integrating this approach with the previously noted emphasis on storytelling, many celebrities have also begun sharing their personal experiences with abortion, further humanizing the cause. During the procession, actress Scarlett Johansson delivered a compelling speech, sharing her personal experiences with Planned Parenthood. She recounted accessing their services as a teenager, emphasizing the critical role these institutions play in providing healthcare to millions of women. Johansson stated, "Planned Parenthood provided a safe place where I could be treated with gentle guidance" (McNamara). In addition, she directly challenged the president, openly expressing her disagreement with his election and highlighting the hypocrisy of his support of anti-abortion laws. She boldly stated:

"President Trump, I did not vote for you. That said, I respect that you are our President-elect and I want to be able to support you...First, I ask that you support me...Support my daughter, who may actually — as a result of the appointments you have made — grow up in a country that is moving backwards, not forwards, and who potentially may not have the right to make choices for her body and her future that your daughter Ivanka has been privileged to have." (Romano)

This speech hauntingly echoes the messages on the Silent Sentinels' banners, which urged President Woodrow Wilson to support their enfranchisement. It also reflects the poignant final words of Inez Milholland, the iconic leader of the suffrage procession, who directly addressed Wilson with her famous plea: "Mr. President, how long must women wait for liberty?" (Library of Congress). Johansson's testimony resonated deeply with many, further

demonstrating how personal narratives can spread awareness and humanize broader political issues. The suffragists, although vocal about their oppression, rarely shared tales about how their lack of rights affected them in their personal lives. Instead, they relied on intellectual arguments, appealing to logos through American ideals of justice and equality, unlike today's pathos-centric narratives, which aim to foster empathy. This shift likely reflects changing narratives in history, where the rise of feminism has given women's personal experiences a more prominent platform.

The emergence of feminist historiography, most prominently in the 1970s and 1980s marked a transformative era in historical scholarship. Historians such as Joan Kelly, author of *"Did Women Have a Renaissance?"*, and Gerda Lerner, who wrote *The Creation of Patriarchy*, played pivotal roles in redefining the field by focusing on women's experiences and challenging the androcentric nature of traditional history (Murphy 21-22). These scholars questioned the absence of women in historical narratives, coining terms like "herstory" to highlight the need for a gender-inclusive lens. This advancement gave women greater freedom to express themselves and to articulate the oppression and neglect they had previously endured, cast aside to the margins of history. This has led to today's women's rights activists pushing forward personal stories in an effort not only to highlight who they are as women, but who they are as individuals. In contrast, the Silent Sentinels relied on a collective expression of their frustrations through placid silence, embodying the opposite of individualism—a focus on solidarity and shared purpose. They prioritized unity over personal identity, presenting themselves as part of a cohesive movement defined by their common grievance: the denial of the vote and the broader refusal to recognize women as full citizens. Thus, this shift is a result of the evolving narratives surrounding women throughout history.

Beyond Johansson, numerous other celebrities lent their voices to the Women's March and the fight for reproductive rights. Actress America Ferrera opened the march with a stirring speech addressing the challenges faced by marginalized communities, including threats to reproductive healthcare. She called out, "We are America, and we are here to declare that we refuse to go backward. We will not be silenced, and we will continue to fight for equality and justice for all" (Walters). Her words further highlighted the renouncement of silence. Once the main form of protest, silence is no longer viewed a tool for change but instead something to be avoided and fought against at all costs.

We can also observe more militant, aggressively defiant speeches such as the one delivered by singer Madonna, who performed and delivered a controversial speech at the event.

She called for resistance against policies undermining women's rights, emphasizing the need for solidarity and perseverance. Her remarks, including the metaphorical statement about "blowing up the White House," garnered significant media attention and polarized public opinion (Stack). As was observed in the suffragist's calls to the Russian envoys, statements like these could be interpreted by many as dividing the country rather than bringing it together and may prove to hurt the cause more than advance it.

The strategic use of celebrity influence in modern activism reflects an evolution of tactics pioneered during the early suffrage movement. As we have seen, in the 1913 Woman Suffrage Procession, Inez Milholland emerged as an iconic figure, embodying the visual and symbolic power of the movement. Her near-celebrity status attracted significant attention to the suffragist cause, utilizing the power of spectacle to capture public imagination and galvanize support. Modern activists have expanded upon this approach, integrating the global reach and immediacy of social media to maximize celebrity influence.

Figures like Scarlett Johansson, America Ferrera, and Madonna have not only drawn attention but also mobilized action through speeches, performances, and online platforms. Their participation in events like the Women's March on Washington in 2017 combined the visual impact reminiscent of Milholland's symbolic procession with the expansive reach afforded by contemporary media platforms. In Marshall McLuhan's terms, this epitomizes the global village, where the reach and speed of digital and broadcast platforms enhance celebrity influences, transforming personal stories into fuels for activism and change.

Following the Supreme Court's 2022 decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which overturned *Roe v. Wade*, a shift rippled through the reproductive rights landscape. In response, advocates have amplified their efforts, their tactics beyond marches have shifted from pickets to public storytelling and social media campaigns to destigmatize abortion and mobilize support.

The "Shout Your Abortion" campaign, for instance, utilizes public storytelling events and social media to destigmatize abortion. SYA has hosted various public storytelling events and social media campaigns. For instance, in January 2019, activists gathered in Des Moines' East Village to share individual testimonies and condemn restrictions on abortion services (Calvin). The "Shout Your Abortion" movement started with the now-famous article by Amelia Bonow, titled "My abortion made me happy". A controversial and polarizing title, in the article Bonow recounts her experience with Planned Parenthood. She describes how her abortion,

instead of leaving her with fear and shame, filled her with gratitude and joy for having the ability to choose whether to have a child or not, stating “I felt certain that I would not feel guilt or sadness about the procedure after the fact. My conviction felt righteous in the most positive sense of the word” (Bonow). Such a message introduced a different, more positive perspective into the conversations surrounding abortion, potentially helping individuals feel seen or overcome shame. In her article, Bonow used powerful language, with words such as “righteousness”, which is reminiscent of the Silent Sentinel’s convictions when describing their own cause (Stevens 56). Overall, the “Shout Your Abortion” movement has played a significant role in normalizing and destigmatizing societal preconceptions about reproductive rights, showcasing the importance of storytelling in advocacy.

As previously mentioned, the shift from silent defiance to vocal engagement reflects the changing dynamics of activism in the 21st century, where storytelling and dialogue take precedence. McLuhan’s theory underscores how new mediums not only reshape methods of activism—such as the utilization of articles and tweets, which are just a click away for anyone around the globe—but also influence the message itself. In the case of women’s rights, the shift has been profound. From silent pickets—once the most effective form of demonstration—to loud, active, vocal engagement featuring click-bait headlines and emotionally charged language; this evolution allows for a broader reach and fosters deeper emotional connections, transforming how movements connect with and inspire their audiences.

At the most radical end of the spectrum, we must mention pro-abortion groups like Jane’s Revenge, which adopt more radical and destructive tactics, aiming to shock the public with violence as a form of protest. Following *Dobbs* in 2022, Jane’s Revenge targeted at least thirty organizations that opposed abortion, including “Crisis Pregnancy Centers”, which are non-profit, faith-based organizations whose goal is to discourage pregnant women from getting abortions. Vandalism or property damage accounted for 84% of these attacks, with at least five of those cases escalating to attempted arson (Bridging Divides Initiative). Such extremist groups as Jane’s Revenge, which often employ provocative slogans like “If abortions aren’t safe, then neither are you” (Reingold), raise critical questions about the ethics and effectiveness of militancy taken to the extreme. While these tactics provoke attention, they receive harsh backlash, risking the alienation of potential allies and the generation of fear rather than support for their cause. The suffragists’ hunger strikes and misconduct in prisons were just as shocking, but they ultimately won public sympathy, shifting the tide of public opinion and putting pressure on the authorities. Yet, with Jane’s Revenge the backlash has been sharp, thus highlighting the

downsides of the employment of militant tactics, reminding one of the fine line activists must walk when choosing their approach, constantly wondering whether their actions are pushing the conversation forward or undermining the very cause they fight so hard for.

As we have seen, protests of this caliber are often met with resistance. Though many may not believe so, today's pro-abortion activists endure just as much violence as their predecessors. Following *Dobbs* in 2022, from May 2 to July 1, ACLED noted 25 occurrences of police intervention at pro-abortion rights demonstrations, with 22 cases involving tear gas, arrests, or other aggressive retaliations (Bridging Divides Initiative). Events involved the police using tear gas in Phoenix and forcefully subduing people in Los Angeles, including firing less-lethal projectiles at a woman and slamming actress Jodie Sweetin to the pavement. This latter case is hauntingly similar to Alice Paul's experience of being pushed to the ground by a sailor and pulled along the sidewalk (Cassidy 188).

Moreover, Alejandra Pablos, a prominent reproductive rights advocate and critic of U.S. immigration policies, exemplifies the ongoing dangers faced by modern activists. As a Latina immigrant and former detainee, her work highlights the interconnected struggles against systemic oppression. On March 7, 2018, during a routine check-in with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Tucson, Pablos, a field coordinator for the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health, was detained without the opportunity for a bail review (Gosztola). Before her detainment, Pablos recorded a video that was shared on Facebook. In the video, she expressed that ICE was attempting to undermine the immigrant rights movement and urged her supporters to take action, saying, "I need you to stand up for me. I need you to fight for me" (Gosztola).

This incident highlights a growing trend in ICE practices, where immigrant activists like Pablos are increasingly targeted for their advocacy on immigrant rights and social justice issues (Gosztola). Pablos has been vocal about the need for comprehensive reproductive healthcare access for all women, particularly those from marginalized communities affected by restrictive immigration policies and reproductive health legislation. Her detainment mirrors historical instances of repression faced by suffragists like Alice Paul, who were arrested and imprisoned for their militant activism in the early 20th century, proving that the price of militant activism remains just as costly as it had been a hundred years ago.

In light of all this, we may want to look to the future and see how women's rights activism may shift in the coming years. As we have seen through the exploration of suffrage

and reproductive rights history, dissatisfaction and mounting frustrations often serve as catalysts for the adoption of more militant tactics in advocacy. With the recent re-election of President Donald Trump, known for his anti-abortion policies, it is likely that reproductive rights activists will increasingly turn to militant tactics similar to those pioneered by Alice Paul and her contemporaries to combat restricting laws and fight until they too, reach victory. Thus, we can be sure, that the militant methods used by women, first introduced in America during the fight for suffrage, will continue to inspire modern women's rights activists for generations to come.

Conclusion: Passing the Torch

In conclusion, the fight for women's autonomy, as showcased from the suffrage movement of the early 1900s to modern conflicts over reproductive rights, demonstrates significant growth in activism. This paper has explored the crucial function of militant strategies, ranging from the disruptive and symbolic actions initiated by Alice Paul, using silence as a tool for strength and defiance, to the vocal and varied methods of contemporary abortion rights supporters. Alice Paul's guidance in the suffrage movement created a legacy of bravery and perseverance. Her creative approaches, including marches, picketing, hunger strikes, and utilizing media exposure, highlighted the transformative impact of daring actions in contesting societal standards and promoting women's political empowerment, ultimately leading to the suffragists' victory.

The suffragists' success in attaining the 19th Amendment in 1920 represented a significant milestone, granting voting rights to millions of women and proving that militant tactics could succeed against governmental indecision and oppression. Yet, the struggle for women's independence did not end with the suffrage movement. Today's reproductive rights activists face challenges that echo those of the early suffragists. While suffragists of the early 20th century were seen as radical and unladylike, criticized for disrupting norms and challenging traditional gender roles, modern reproductive rights activists contend with polarizing public opinions, stigma tied to morality debates, and targeted opposition. Both movements highlight how activism, whether by defying social expectations or enduring criticism, becomes a powerful vehicle for advancing women's autonomy.

The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 has reignited debates about bodily autonomy, emphasizing the persistent opposition to women's rights. Today, activists traverse a divided legal framework, using a mix of conventional and contemporary tactics, such as the utilization of various forms of media, celebrities, and vocal activism to challenge restrictive abortion

legislation. From the large gatherings of the Women's March to the narrative projects of the "Shout Your Abortion" movement, modern advocacy builds on the heritage of previous battles while adopting innovative approaches that highlight personal stories and online connections.

Ultimately, the continuous struggle for women's independence poses essential inquiries regarding advancement and fairness. Why do women have to constantly fight for rights that ought to be fundamental in a society that professes democracy? What is the right way to bring about change? How can advocates pave the way for lasting equality? These inquiries highlight that the quest for women's rights is an ongoing journey, requiring awareness, unity, and creativity. Finally, as Alice Paul herself stated when asked whether giving women the vote was truly the right choice, she responded,

"I think if we get freedom for women, then they are probably going to do a lot of things that I wish they wouldn't do...but it seems to me that isn't our business to say what they should do with it. It is our business to see that they get it" (Editors).

Paul's words are a reminder that pushing for change is not about controlling the outcome but about ensuring the opportunity. True progress demands that we persist, even in the face of uncertainty, because granting freedom is always the first and most crucial step toward justice.

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