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Katherine H. Adams, Michael L. Keene. *Alice Paul and the American Suffrage Campaign.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008. xix + 274 pp. $25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-252-07471-4; $60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-03220-2.

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"Our Fight Is Simply a Political One": Alice Paul's Persistent Struggle for Equal Rights

There is an oft-cited urban legend about activist Alice Paul claiming that at the height of her militancy to obtain support for the Nineteenth Amendment she chained herself to the White House gates to get President Wilson's attention. Indeed, this story was one feature of a 2007 resolution sponsored by Representative Shelley Berkley (D-NV) "to promote awareness of the importance of the women suffragists who worked for the right of women to vote in the United States." In addition to stating facts about equal rights leaders, including their picketing and parades, it erroneously declares: "Alice Paul and others chained themselves to the White House fence." [1] From various Internet sources, undergraduate students also frequently mention that Alice Paul's shackling of herself to the fence is evidence of her heroism and dedication to the suffrage cause; it is this militancy, according to many, that sets her apart from the older generation of suffragists in the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), such as Carrie Chapman Catt and Anna Howard Shaw. Although Paul deliberately orchestrated many controversial protests to promote the cause of equal suffrage, chaining herself to the White House gates was not one of them. In Paul's case, the truth is more compelling and evocative than the fiction.

Literary and rhetoric scholars Katherine H. Adams and Michael L. Keene question and clarify several common assumptions about Paul's persona and provide a nuanced contextualization of her radicalism. Analyzing the papers of the National Woman's Party (NWP) and NAWSA, utilizing the extensive newspaper coverage of the suffrage campaign, and examining in detail the NWP's *Suffragist*, the authors develop an innovative approach that focuses on Paul's use of "visual rhetoric." Adams and Keene argue that from the production of the *Suffragist*, to the massive 1913 parade in Washington and the controversial picketing of the White House in 1917, Paul used "the persuasive impact of visual images in combination with the written and spoken word" to "engage, to shock, to thrill, to shame, to pressure, and to convince" the American public, Congress, and particularly President Wilson of the efficacy and rationality of women's right to vote (p. xviii). Paul carefully and deliberately crafted these visual, verbal, and written rhetorical devices for their intended audience; in each message or presentation the meaning was similar: "suffrage is purely a political issue" (p. 44). That is, by the 1910s, women were beyond the point of requiring educational materials or historical background regarding the need for woman suffrage, and suffragists should work solely toward the passage of the federal amendment (as opposed to the state-by-state referenda of the NAWSA).

Paul's intentional methods and messages arose from her deep commitment to the Quaker faith and nonviolent social activism, two aspects of her radicalism that Adams and Keene explore with insight and sensitivity. In contrast to Christine Lunardini's otherwise excellent *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 1910-1928* (1986), which situates Paul's activism within the British suffrage movement's militant Pankhurst wing, Adams and Keene assert that Paul's social reform efforts were nonviolent rather than militant. Examining the religious and cultural milieu that surrounded Paul as a child and young woman in Quaker-founded Moorestown, New Jersey, and as a college student at Swarthmore, the authors conclude that as a Hicksite Quaker, the teachings of George Fox would have inspired Paul's life choices. His writings encouraged followers "to improve the lives of their fellows, changing the temporal world by their work for social justice" (p. 3). Similarly, a convincing case is made that Paul's reading in the late nineteenth century would have included the philosophical works of Henry David Thoreau and Leo Tolstoy, particularly the former's "Civil Disobedience" (1849) and the latter's *The Kingdom of God Is Within*

You (1894). Both were significant for their commentary on nonviolent resistance to governmental tyranny. Finally, and most persuasively, Adams and Keene make an important connection between the nonviolent methodologies and commitment of Mohandas Gandhi and Paul. They observe that Gandhi met Emmeline Pankhurst in London in 1906 (and possibly Paul in 1909) and later criticized the more violent turn in the British suffrage movement as a way of drawing contrasts between Pankhurst's methods and his conception of "soul force" or "nonviolence as a determined choice made from a strong commitment to justice and respect for humanity" (p. 28). It was Gandhi's "soul force," therefore, that Adams and Keene associate with Paul's radicalism, together with the methods of nonviolence: "persuasion by argument or noncooperation, strikes, boycotts, suffering, and hunger strikes" (p. 29).

For those who long have been impressed by the unyielding determination, enthusiasm, strength, forcefulness, and indefatigable spirit of Alice Paul, the connections made between the nonviolent philosophies and advocacy of Thoreau, Tolstoy, and Gandhi, and Paul's suffrage activism in England illuminate the interweaving of ideas and experience. While the authors ultimately separate Paul from the British suffrage movement, they do acknowledge that she learned the importance of visual rhetoric from Emmeline, Christabel, and Adela Pankhurst. It was Paul's activism with the Women's Social and Political Union in England that taught her the value of dramatic displays such as staging processions with beautifully dressed suffragists and holding rallies and speeches; as well as shocking public activities such as picketing the political party in power, inviting arrest, and choosing to hunger strike. Although she never would criticize the Pankhursts and their followers for rock-throwing and fire-setting, once she returned to America in 1910, Paul sought to distance herself from their militancy, placing her reform goals in the tradition of Quaker social justice advocacy.

Having established the roots of Paul's social justice activism, Adams and Keene move chronologically through her American suffrage efforts. Beginning with a discussion of Paul's appointment in 1912 to NAWSA's underfunded Congressional Committee, the authors chronicle her determined and single-minded focus to refashion it into the Congressional Union, a "subsidiary organization" that would concentrate solely on passage of the federal amendment (p. 98). Undaunted by opposition from NAWSA and its *Woman's Journal*, Paul intentionally crafted the style, content, and pictorial message of the *Suffragist*, to "convince readers that a federal amendment was the best route to suffrage and enable them to attain it" (p. 44). Reprints of *Suffragist* covers with Nina Allender's cartoons compellingly demonstrate how Paul carefully and deliberately informed, strengthened, inspired, and radicalized women to support the federal amendment.

Paul's enduring commitment to nonviolent social protest, her effective use of visual and verbal imagery, and her insistence on heightening the tension between suffragists and politicians is perhaps best illustrated in the campaign to picket the White House in 1917. Believing that well-dressed, silent, respectable women holding beautiful banners with the suffrage colors (gold, white, and purple) "could demonstrate the moral force necessary to enact change," Paul sent her "silent sentinels" on a continuous vigil that President Wilson viewed as "inappropriate" and "unnerving" (p. 162). In June 1917, while the nation was at war, Paul intentionally escalated the visual confrontation, creating banners with inflammatory messages that mocked Wilson's support for human rights abroad when women lacked equal rights at home. Although Wilson and his administration had tolerated the pickets' presence for six months, the suffragists' provocative banners changed the dynamics. They faced arrests for obstructing traffic and unlawful assembly from June 1917 onward, with sixty-day sentences dispensed to those who had participated in picketing on July 14–Bastille Day–carrying banners that elegantly stated "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, July 14, 1789" (p. 182).

Indeed, after several arrests during the summer, Paul deliberately walked the picket line in October, knowing she would face a harsh jail term, and believing a longer punishment would garner support for the suffragists' cause. Receiving a seven-month sentence in the District of Columbia Jail, Paul launched a hunger strike, together with Rose Winslow, to protest the warden's denial of their status as political prisoners; others followed suit from Occoquan Workhouse in Virginia. Adams and Keene vividly recount the brutality and horror of forcible feedings and the cruel treatment Paul endured first in solitary confinement and then in the psychopathic ward of the prison hospital. The authors analyze Paul's elaborate and calculated rhetorical strategies to escalate events during the summer and fall of 1917 as a successful effort to pressure Wilson to support the federal amendment; and they adeptly illustrate the endless flow of information–verbal and visual–that circulated within and outside the jail system to encourage and inform suffragists and the public regarding the subhuman prison conditions, thus continually highlighting the importance of the movement and the commitment of

suffragists. Most importantly, they make a convincing claim that "at the beginning of the twentieth century," Alice Paul "created the first successful nonviolent campaign for social change in the United States" (p. 247). There is no need, therefore, to invent stories about Alice Paul and her actions in front of the White House in 1917; her controversial, charismatic, determined efforts to secure the right to vote for women, as Adams and Keene so imaginatively present, are much more fascinating than the fiction.

Note

[1]. "House Approves Berkley Bill Honoring America's Suffragists," newsletter of Rep. Shelley Berkley, http://berkley.house.gov/legis/otr/press*releases/2007/pr*2007_050907.html (retrieved May 19, 2008). See also House Concurrent Resolution 105, 110th Congress, 1st session.

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