

Decoding the Video: Bad Romance (Women's Suffrage)

Analysis of historical references in [Soomo Publishing's](#) *Bad Romance: Women's Suffrage*

Video Link: <http://soomopublishing.com/suffrage/>

The Glass of Wine (0:10-0:12)

- Perhaps the most famous photo of Alice Paul (and the one featured on her biography page at the National Constitution Center's National Tree) depicts her raising a glass to suffrage in front of a National Women's Party banner.¹ The photo, taken in Washington on September 3rd, 1920, came just over two weeks after Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the 19th Amendment. Alice Paul's glass was most likely not filled with wine, but grape juice; there are several reasons why one might safely make this assumption. She was raised in a Quaker family (a faith strongly associated with temperance), suffragists were generally allied with the dry cause, and the 18th Amendment had been in effect for over eight months at that point. While one could still legally make and consume wine, its transportation (and therefore consumption in public) was prohibited.

National Women's Party (0:16-0:29)

- This shot lingers on several tricolor sashes before the words "National Women's Party" fill the frame. The colors purple, white, and yellow were associated with the NWP, founded by Alice Paul and Lucy Burns. The NWP tricolor combines the yellow (or gold) and white with which American suffragists were identified with the purple, white, and green banners of the British suffragists by whom Paul and Burns had been inspired. The American yellow and white theme had been in use since 1867, when the campaign for women's suffrage in Kansas borrowed the state flower (the sunflower) as its symbol. The purple of the NWP was a nod to the Women's Social and Political Union, the militantly pro-suffrage organization in Britain for which both Alice Paul and Lucy Burns had labored in the early 1910s. After the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1919, the National Woman's Party would add a gold or purple star to its flag for each state that had ratified the amendment. The addition of the 36th star would mean the amendment was ratified and women's suffrage had become a reality. It should be noted that the spelling in the video uses the plural "women," while the NWP used the singular National Woman's Party.²

The 15th Amendment (0:45-0:59)

- The lyrics here reference the 15th Amendment, which protected the vote of free men of all races, but did not specifically guarantee the vote regardless of gender. For this reason, prominent suffragists such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton initially opposed the amendment. It was this opposition that led to things "getting ugly," as mentioned in the song. The debate about the 15th Amendment split the suffrage movement between Anthony's National Woman Suffrage Association

¹ Image courtesy of the Library of Congress. (<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97500088/>)

² National Women's History Museum. (http://www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits/votesforwomen/tour_02-021.html)

and Lucy Stone's American Woman Suffrage Association. Later, Susan B. Anthony and others would argue that, by not explicitly excluding women, the 14th and 15th Amendments guaranteed the ballot and all rights of citizenship to women as well as men. These lyrics are something of an anachronism; the 15th Amendment was ratified fifteen years before Alice Paul was born.

Suffragist Mother (1:36-1:40)

- This segment shows women of various backgrounds abandoning their “women’s work” in order to join the National Women’s Party and campaign for suffrage. The clip of a mother handing her crying baby off to her husband is reminiscent of [anti-suffrage cartoons](#) from that period.³

Force-Feeding Alice Paul (1:44-1:54)

- Throughout the video Alice Paul is occasionally depicted in a straightjacket, and during this particular segment she is held down by guards and force-fed. In October 1917, Alice Paul was sentenced to seven months in the Occuquan Workhouse in Virginia for picketing the White House. In November 1917, while imprisoned, Paul began a [hunger strike](#) to protest the deplorable condition at Occuquan and the mistreatment of the suffragists there.⁴ Fearing her death (and the outrage that could trigger), prison officials regularly force-fed high protein liquids to Alice Paul, especially raw eggs. This procedure is depicted in [awful detail](#) in the film *Iron Jawed Angels*, with Hilary Swank portraying Alice Paul.⁵ While Paul was in kept in solitary confinement and force-fed, other suffragists at Occuquan were subjected to is now referred to as the “Night of Terror.” On November 15th, 1917, prison superintendent W. H. Whittaker authorized the severe beating of over two dozen suffragist inmates. The assault drew [widespread condemnation](#) and increased sympathy for the inmates, to the extent that twenty-five of them were freed or transferred ten days later.⁶

Woman Suffrage Parade of 1913 (1:58-2:06)

- Alice Paul and the National American Woman Suffrage Association organized [a parade and protest](#) in Washington D.C. on March 3rd, 1913, the day before Woodrow Wilson was to be inaugurated as President.⁷ The estimated eight thousand marchers were harassed throughout much of the parade, with the police being of little to no help as the suffragists made their way to the Daughters of the American Revolution’s Constitution Hall.⁸

Anti-Suffragette (2:22-2:38)

- This segment is modeled on a political cartoon from the October 9th, 1915 issue of *Puck*.⁹ Both the cartoon and the video clip suggest that the fraction of the female population that opposed suffrage

³ Image courtesy of the Library of Congress. (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/pnp/cph/3a50000/3a51000/3a51800/3a51845v.jpg>)

⁴ The New York Times.

(<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9A04E7D9123FE433A25754C0A9679D946696D6CF>)

⁵ *Iron Jawed Angels*, HBO Films. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pO70ZjZ0wrw>)

⁶ The New York Times. (<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9A06E5D7113AE433A25756C2A9679D946696D6CF>)

⁷ Image courtesy of the Library of Congress. (<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppmsca.12512/>)

⁸ The New York Times, (<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F40A1EFE345E13738DDDA00894DB405B838DF1D3>)

⁹ Image courtesy of the Library of Congress. (<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002720392/>)

was largely supported by the male-dominated interests most vulnerable to a female electorate – corrupt politicians, saloon-keepers, supporters of child labor, and militarists.

The 19th Amendment (2:38-2:46)

- Alice Paul reads the 19th Amendment as it is submitted to the states. President Wilson appears concerned as the anti-suffragists make the disapproval apparent. Early in his Presidency Woodrow Wilson took little action with regard to women’s suffrage, but by the middle of his second term he publicly offered his support to the cause. Despite Wilson’s advocacy, the amendment failed twice before receiving a two-thirds majority of the Senate on May 21st, 1919.

Silent Sentinels (3:14-3:26)

- The Silent Sentinels were a group of women, organized by Alice Paul, that conducted the first-ever pickets in front of the White House. Beginning in May of 1917, they would stand outside the gates of the White House six days a week, quietly holding National Woman’s Party banners and signs challenging President Wilson to do something about the cause of women’s suffrage.¹⁰ The Silent Sentinels were regularly subjected to insults and threats, and arrested on charges of “obstructing traffic” and disorderly conduct.¹¹ It was following an arrest while picketing the White House that Alice Paul began her hunger strike at Occuquan Workhouse. The crackdown on the Silent Sentinels ceased in 1918, after the D.C. Court of Appeals ruled that the arrests were unconstitutional, as the pickets were not an unlawful assembly unless an unlawful purpose or acts were shown. The Silent Sentinels’ protests ended after Congress passed the 19th Amendment in May of 1919.

“Remember the Ladies” (3:27-3:43)

- This segment concludes with what is likely the most famous quote made by Abigail Adams. On March 31st, 1776, she wrote John Adams, advising him to “remember the ladies” when he and his contemporaries would craft a new, independent government. That statement is followed with the warning that, “If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.” This statement appears to have heavily influenced Alice Paul and the National Woman’s Party. At this point in the video Alice is seen wearing what appears to be an American flag-themed toga, inspired by actress [Hedwiga Reicher’s “Columbia” costume](#) at the Woman Suffrage Parade of 1913.

“The War of the Roses” and Harry Burn (3:51-4:18)

- On August 18th, 1920, Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify the 19th Amendment. The vote in the Tennessee House of Representatives, the state’s lower house, was tense. Tennessee was the fourth state in five months to vote on the proposed amendment since it was passed by Washington on March 22nd. Over the previous few months Mississippi, Louisiana, and Delaware had rejected the opportunity to be the 36th and final state necessary for ratification, and the vote in Tennessee was expected to be close. On that day supporters of women’s suffrage wore yellow roses on their lapels (following the

¹⁰ Image courtesy of the Library of Congress. (<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/hec2008005262/>)

¹¹ The New York Times, (<http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F70A1EFC385F157A93C7A9178CD85F438185F9>)

tradition of associating yellow or gold with universal suffrage), while opponents sported red roses. The vote, ultimately, came down to a single representative. Harry Burn, at twenty-four the youngest member of the Tennessee House, represented that tiebreaking vote. Expected to cast his vote with the anti-suffrage caucus, and, according to legend, wearing a red rose on his lapel, Burn stunned the legislature by casting his vote in favor of the amendment. He later said that it was his mother who changed his mind, with a letter advising him to “be a good boy” and “hurrah and vote for suffrage.” In the uproar following his tiebreaking vote, it’s rumored that Burn had to sneak out of the state capitol building.¹² The controversial vote does not appear to have damaged his local political career (he was elected to one more term as a state legislator, and served in the Tennessee Senate from 1948 to 1952), but he was never elected to statewide office.

¹² Chattanooga Times Free Press, (<http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2012/aug/18/the-war-of-the-roses/>)