

Second Place Winner
Division I– 7-9th Grades
Defining American Democracy
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"We women of America tell you that America is not a democracy. Twenty million women are denied the right to vote." These are the words of famous feminist, and activist Alice Paul. From the founding of the United States of America, many citizens were not granted the right to vote, including but not limited to women. For years the Women's Suffragist Movement protested and fought for their right to vote, facing monumental challenges. Alice Paul, a Quaker born in New Jersey, was one woman who looked in the face of discrimination and sought to end it. Alice Paul demonstrated moral courage and ultimately shaped the United States' definition of democracy through facing silencing, illegal arrests, physical and mental distress, and devotion to the rights and liberties of women.

Paul was born and raised a Quaker, a religious group that believed strongly in equality for both men and women. Paul's mother was a proud feminist. This brings little surprise that Paul would grow up to be involved in the fight for women's rights. Paul first became involved with the British suffragette in London, 1909 with fellow suffragette, Lucy Burns. Paul and Burns met in a police station in London, after being arrested during a protest. There the women learned how to protest, picket, and how to gain attention for their cause (Flynn 111). Paul and Burns would continue to work closely throughout their careers. Author Kay Weisman quotes Susan Campbell Bartoletti, "After returning to the U.S., they worked together to lobby for a constitutional amendment and organized the first Washington, D.C. suffragist parade, held on March 3, 1913" (Weisman 62). This march would include over 8,000 women and would be one of the biggest women's marches in history. This historic event occurred one day before the inauguration of President Woodrow Wilson, who would eventually begin working with the movement later on. The march would be nowhere near Paul's last protest in Washington D.C., as the women would follow with an over a yearlong protest.

Women's suffragists protested in Washington D.C. for over a year from 1916 to 1917, which resulted in over 500 arrests. Most women were arrested on charges of "blocking traffic." Among these women was Paul. This event would pave the way of the political climate in the United States because, "The women believed they were actually imprisoned for their political beliefs and became the first U.S. citizens to claim that their government held them as political prisoners" (Cullen-Depont 281). Paul was convicted to seven months in prison from this charge. However, she and 16 others served 60 days in the Occoquan Workhouse. Paul famously said during the trial, "We do not consider ourselves subject to this Court since, as an unenfranchised class, we have nothing to do with the making of the laws which have put us in this position." To protest the conviction, Paul and other suffragists went on hunger strike. They were forced fed, and Paul was held in solitary confinement. From there Paul was transferred to a psychiatric

hospital, where she was imprisoned in her room, with her windows boarded over. It was later ruled in 1918 by the D.C. court of appeals that, "Each one of the suffragists had been "illegally arrested, illegally convicted, and illegally imprisoned."" (Cullen-Dupont 283). Paul was eventually released and continued to fight for the vote until the 19th amendment was ratified in 1920. She worked with the National Women's Party, President Wilson, Lucy Burns, and many other people. Not only did Paul fight for women's rights but following the passage of the 19th amendment Paul worked for equal rights for African Americans. Paul passed away in 1977, leaving behind a legacy that would pass on from generation to generation, telling the tale of a woman who displayed moral courage throughout her every action.

It is incontrovertible that Paul was extremely valiant. I see Paul as a role model in many ways. She was a woman who fought for what she believed in, no matter the harm she faced, because she understood the importance of equality. She never succumbed to the societal and governmental pressure around her. Paul's story encourages me to continue to educate myself and others on the history of women, something that I have always had an interest in. Beyond the education of women in history, I push myself to consider how I will make my impact on the world. While I may only be in middle school, I believe that it is never too early or too late to begin leaving your legacy, through small actions such as showing kindness, compassion, integrity, empathy, and loyalty to those around me. I also believe that education about the world is important, as myself and everyone around me will be inheriting the Earth. From learning about nature, culture, religion, to the importance of recycling, these little things affect how we treat the Earth. Alice Paul inspires me to push myself to be a better person to myself, others, and help make much needed changes in the world.

Alice Paul is a symbol of American Democracy. She demonstrated how democracy should function through every citizen and should not be limited to one sex or race. Paul faced political silencing from her status as a woman. She was arrested, convicted, and illegally imprisoned. She faced physical and mental distress at the Occoquan Workhouse through hard labor, force-feeding, solitary confinement, and an abusive psychiatric hospital. She experienced all of this for the rights and liberties of women. Thanks to Paul's display of moral courage, women now know the United States as a place where not only can they vote but can have roles in the legislation.