

“To Ask Freedom for Women”: The Night of Terror and Public Memory

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On November 14, 1917, 33 suffrage picketers from the National Woman's Party were sentenced for ostensibly obstructing traffic in front of the White House, where the so-called Silent Sentinels had been protesting President Wilson's lack of intervention on women's suffrage. Thirty-one of these women were transferred to Occoquan Workhouse in Virginia. In what would become known as the "Night of Terror," those women were greeted violently by Occoquan Superintendent W.H. Whittaker and around 44¹ club-wielding prison guards. They were kicked. Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, was widely reported to have had her arms twisted behind her, after which she was slammed over the back of an iron bench multiple times. Lucy Burns, who co-founded the National Woman's Party ("NWP") with Alice Paul, was handcuffed to the bars of her cell with her arms over her head.

Stories of the Night of Terror were sensational, but contemporary memorialization of the event marked it as turning point in the fight for universal suffrage. Author Louise Bernikow (2004) wrote "For all the pain, this brutal night may have turned the tide...It would take three more years to win the vote, but the courageous women of 1917 had won a new definition of female patriotism" (para. 7). Another blog post on feminist site AMightyGirl.com argued that media coverage of the event turned the tide in favor of suffrage: "Once the story broke, it received broad coverage in the media, outraging man readers and contributing to the growing public support of the suffragists' cause" (Katherine, 2017, para. 16). Historical memory of this event paints a glowing picture of media reports seemingly creating public sentiment in favor of the suffragists and the National Woman's Party, which was widely known as the more radical subset of the American suffragists.

Using mainstream newspaper reports gathered from the database *Chronicling America*, issues of *The Suffragist*, the NWP's official paper, and contemporary digital memorialization

gathered from Google searches, this article contrasts the coverage of the Night of Terror in *The Suffragist* with coverage of the event in mainstream periodicals. *The Suffragist* is important to study because it was written, edited, and published by the National Woman's Party, meaning that it provides the clearest view into the philosophies, reactions, and thought processes of the NWP's membership—particularly its leading women, who were most heavily represented in the pages. In addition to reportage, photography of events, and cartoons, the pages often included the women's own commentary on events and editorializing about women's voting rights in general. In its lack of objectivity and bent toward activism, *The Suffragist* was emblematic of the suffrage presses more generally. The suffrage periodical editors "rejected professional principles and business practices of the 19th century commercial press, did not promise facticity and objectivity, and often made decisions on moral or personal rather than professional grounds" (Burt, 2000, p. 74). Using *The Suffragist* gives an insight into the National Woman's Party's framing and promotion of the Night of Terror. Contrasting that with mainstream papers shows the different meanings that professional journalists wrote into the event, both to promote and to challenge the suffragists. This article then contrasts those historical documents with memorialization of the event around 100 years later in the 2000s and 2010s to understand how contemporary readers encounter the Night of Terror and come to understand it as part of the broader arc of history.

These articles show *The Suffragist* focusing on first-hand accounts from the women themselves, some of which were smuggled out of Occoquan by their lawyers, former Wilson presidential campaign strategist Dudley Malone and Washington attorney Michael O'Brien. While *The Suffragist* stoked sympathies with its first-hand accounts of the abuse women encountered in Occoquan, mainstream newspapers provided mixed accounts, with some favoring the suffragists and others trying to undermine their credibility, revealing the gender dynamics

active through politics of the time. Feminist framing of memorialization is a relatively new field, with Hirsch and Smith (2002) tracing the first attempts at developing a feminist field of memory to the latter half of the 1980s. However, as this analysis will show, “gender is an inescapable dimension of differential power relations, and cultural memory is always about the distribution of and contested claims to power. What a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony, and thus with gender” (Hirsch and Smith, 2002, p. 6).

In mainstream accounts, gender and race were inextricably linked in framing the suffragists either as sympathetic characters or as aberrations of femininity who deserved the treatment they received at Occoquan. As will be shown, many mainstream accounts framed the NWP suffragists as perfect examples of middle-class/upper-middle class white women who were forced to share quarters and clean up after the Black women criminals. None of the reports referred to other white women incarcerated at Occoquan. Those mainstream papers that condemned the suffragists associated the suffragists’ aberrant femininity—e.g., women who dared to enter the political sphere were violating feminine norms of the time—with un-American political movements. There were personal attacks on the women themselves and on their lawyers that framed the women as violent, unladylike “Bolsheviks,” “socialists,” “pacifists,” and “anarchist” militants who were unpatriotic, unreliable reporters of the Night of Terror. *The Suffragist* embraced the power of personal stories, using the women’s first-hand accounts of the Night of Terror to drive public sympathy and drum up support for the women’s plight. As the NWP’s official publication, *The Suffragist* ostensibly represented the organization’s members’ perception of the events of the Night of Terror and put the spin on those events that they wanted the broader public to see. Looking at contemporary accounts of the Night of Terror, it is

significant to note that historical memory has embraced the NWP's framing of the event, not the mainstream attitudes of the time, thereby ceding the power of historical memory to women.

Memorial as Media Practice

Media, whether it's visual, written, or spatial, creates memorial as it provides narratives that give context and meaning to spaces and events. Memory is fragmentary (Hirsch and Smith, 2002), and “cultural memory is most forcefully transmitted through individual voice and body—through the testimony of a witness” (Hirsch and Smith, 2002, p. 7). Marcellus's (2010) account of the conversation around suffrage ratification in Tennessee shows how the gendered narratives conveyed in papers influenced readers' support for the initiative. “Through myth,” Marcellus (2010) wrote, “each paper helped to shape this long and controversial struggle, in its final weeks, into a distinctly southern story, making suffrage part of a longstanding discursive battle for regional identity” (p. 242). Using individual experiences gave the suffrage story significance for each audience. Making the gendered story of suffrage a part of regional identity empowered audiences to recognize their places in the ratification story.

Memorialization comes in three categories, according to Gloviczki (2015): *Form*, which can be either physical or virtual in our current mediated world, can refer to websites, blogs, newspapers, or broadcasts, among other mediated formats; *content*, which can include text, images, sound, or video; and *context*, the content of which is dependent upon the form of the memorial but tends to give additional information about a person, place, or thing and can be interactive in virtual spaces or participatory in a physical space (p. 66). No matter the form, content, or context of the memorial, the purpose of the memorial is always the same: to convey a message (Gloviczki, 2015, p. 66).

Pierre Nora first noted in 1989 that memorialization in media creates history, although because **media outlets** rely on individual memories to create memorials, the history that is created is often episodic rather than a full story. Memorials created in media rely on the agentic experiences of individuals, and those individuals direct the story that's documented for the historical record. **The ways media sources select how an event will** be packaged for historical significance is "a purely social decision" that has "profound collective meaning" (Kitch, 2006, p. 14).

This analysis relies on news reports for much of the information captured for the historical memorial of the Night of Terror. The process of memorial is seemingly antithetical to the process of capturing memories in news reports, as news is supposed to provide immediate gratification with new information about the latest breaking event (Gloviczki, 2015, p. 65).

However, contemporary news media have embraced their new role as cultural meaning makers: "News media considered themselves historians of American culture at the end of the twentieth century and the second millennium, self-consciously taking on the role of selecting the most important people and events of the past and explaining their historical significance" (Kitch, 2006, p. 14). Digital media is providing a space where memorial can evolve with an event, meaning that historicizing is no longer concrete. Virtual mediated memorial allows an on-going conversation that evolves as an event itself is unfolding or evolving within public memory itself (Gloviczki, 2015, p. 67).

The Night of Terror

The Night of Terror was the culmination of 11 months of visible, confrontational picketing by the NWP. The NWP was advocating for the passage of the Susan B. Anthony amendment, which would give universal suffrage to women across the United States, a cause that

was at odds with President Woodrow Wilson's and the National American Woman's Suffrage Association's (NAWSA)'s stances. NAWSA, which was the NWP's parent organization and much larger, argued that states should have the right to decide whether or not their women should vote. Their hope was that enough states adopting suffrage would result in a critical mass that would eventually lead to universal suffrage. The states-rights stance had been slow going, at best, with only 11 states giving women the vote by 1917 ("Map: States," 2006), although New York adopted suffrage in 1917. The advent of WWI also put the two sides at loggerheads as NAWSA embraced a line stating that they were giving up suffrage politicking to support the war effort while the NWP continued their push for the vote.

On January 10, 1917, the first of what would come to be called the NWP's "Silent Sentinels" unfurled two signs in front of the White House gates. The first asked narrowly reelected President Woodrow Wilson, "Mr. President What Will You Do For Woman Suffrage?", and the second blared the National Woman's Party's battle cry, "How Long Must Women Wait For Liberty?" The picketers were meant to stand in front of the White House until the Susan B. Anthony Amendment became law (Cassidy, 2019, p. 135). The instructions Paul gave to her Sentinels were strict: in addition to keeping silent, the Sentinels were supposed 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" (Cassidy, 2019, p. 133). Media outlets were not friendly at first, though the Silent Sentinels made headlines throughout the nation (Lanctot, 2008, p. 5).

America's entry into WWI in April 1917 turned the Silent Sentinels from an entertaining sideshow into a threat to Wilson's authority and the solidarity of the American people against the threat of German socialism. Lanctot (2008) noted that the war revealed the fragility of

American's consensus over free speech. "The combination of patriotic fervor in support of the entry into the European conflict coupled with a systematic government propaganda campaign on an unparalleled scale, produced an atmosphere in which virtually any form of dissent was viewed as treason and anything less than full-throated support of Administration policies was seen as helping the Kaiser" (p. 5). This patriotic fervor did not deter the Silent Sentinels; the women stepped up their strategy with more inflammatory banners.

In June 1917, the first six pickets were arrested. The women had shifted to using the "so-called 'Russian banners,' which provocatively, some said treasonously, linked Wilson's war aims with the Russian Revolution" (Ware, 2019, p. 244). These banners provoked crowds to violence, and banners were torn from their pickets and women were spit upon and physically attacked and provoked by passers-by. The first six women were tried in municipal court and to serve terms in District Jail. Over the next six months, the Silent Sentinels were sentenced to service terms ranging from 30 days to seven months—the longest sentence was reserved for ring-leader Paul—on the charges of "disorderly conduct and obstructing sidewalk traffic" (Ware, 2019, p. 244). The spectacle of middle-to-upper class white women serving sentences in Occoquan garnered the suffragists a considerable amount of support from across the United States.

The events of the night of November 14, 1917 vary greatly from account to account, with some accounts even disagreeing on whether the Night of Terror should be considered November 14 or 15², although many facts are repeated among accounts. The pickets were definitely first arrested on November 10, 1917, and they were sentenced and sent to Occoquan on November 14. Accounts vary in the number of women arrested, with one claiming as many as 41 (Lanctot, 2008, p. 7). Tina Cassidy (2019) notes that there were 41 picketers outside the gates, and 31 of

those were arrested (p. 190). Most accounts seem to agree that 33 were arrested, and 31 were eventually transferred to Occoquan Workhouse after refusing to pay their \$25 fines.

Retellings agree that the pickets were tortured by Whittaker and his guards. The women were kicked, spat upon, beaten with clubs, dragged down stairs, and thrown into cells. One had a heart attack because another woman was thrown into her cell and hit her head, rendering her unconscious, and the first woman thought the second dead. The woman who had a heart attack, Alice Cosu, was denied medical care until the following morning. Dorothy Day had her arms twisted behind her and was slammed over the back of an iron bench, and Burns was handcuffed to the bars of her cell with her arms twisted above her; how long she was shackled varies among accounts. Reports of the Night began trickling out of the Workhouse speedily due to the efforts of Malone and the writings of women who were released earlier than the rest of the group, such as Mary Nolan, a 73-year-old suffragist from Jacksonville, TN, whose account of that night will be detailed below.

Methodology

To examine contrasting accounts of Night of Terror, this article primarily will use the November 24 and December 1 issues of *The Suffragist* because those are the issues that focus on the events of that night and the first-hand descriptions from the women. Next, the article will examine two themes that arose from a close reading of 48 articles gathered from the *Chronicling America* database. Finally, the article will contrast the historical accounts with contemporary **digital** memorials to understand the ways **internet memorials create historical** memory that gratifies modern readers' cultural needs and builds cultural heritage. This article uses close reading, which is "a descriptive term for traditional historical practices involving provenance

assessment, critical evaluation and contextualization of archival material” (Phillips & Osmond, 2015, p. 286-287).

Google search terms used for contemporary sources included “Night of Terror” and “Night of Terror AND suffrage” and “Night of Terror AND 1917.” Articles from History.com, A Mighty Girl, and *The Washington Post*, and an article on the Silent Sentinels from Wikipedia featured among the top five results. The author also used the Turning Point Suffrage Memorial and the Lorton Reformatory’s, which is the contemporary name for the Occoquan Workhouse, website. The only way that most casual readers would even know to look for the Lorton Reformatory’s site would be if they read an article about the Night of Terror in a pop culture publication, like A Mighty Girl’s social media sites, which recirculate the story of the Night of Terror annually. Therefore, even articles on seemingly fluffy or unreliable sites are important because they raise contemporary readers’ awareness of the Night of Terror; online readers can do further research by following links embedded in the online posts or by doing a search themselves.

To find mainstream newspaper articles from November and December 1917, the author used ChroniclingAmerica.loc.gov. Search parameters were narrowed to an advanced search that considered only articles from 11/01/1917 to 12/31/1917. All states and all newspapers were included. Search terms included “Occoquan Workhouse,” “Suffragists,” and “Night of Terror.” “Night of Terror” was searched as a phrase first and only returned six pages, two of which were the same serial fiction story by Rex Beach. All of the other four articles referred to happenings in WWI in Europe. This indicates that the “Night of Terror” was a phrase coined by the National Woman’s Party itself to refer to the events of November 14, 1917, **and it had not been widely adopted by mainstream newspapers of the time. Contemporary usage of the event, then, takes the**

language of the NWP as its primary framing for the event. Adding together “Occoquan Workhouse” and “suffragist” returned 76 results, of which 48 were selected for close reading for this article. The news pages were selected only if they specifically referred to the NWP’s Night of Terror, a talk given by one of the suffragists who had endured it, or to any of the subsequent legal proceedings that stemmed from that night.

The National Woman’s Party

The NWP’s creation of a memorable image for the arrests of the 33 suffragists and the Night of Terror lay in the hands **Nina Allender, who was** the cartoonist and image-maker **for** the radical suffragists. “Use of the political cartoons gave the NWP the ability to take back their narrative and provided women with a positive, self-respecting, and independent role model” (Albright, 2018, para. 5). The front page of the November 17, 1917 issue of *The Suffragist* shows a picketer walking the “straight legal road” through parting seas of “murder,” “crime,” “broken laws,” “brutality,” “theft,” and “drunkness.” Her banner reads, “To Ask FREEDOM For Women Is Not A Crime. Suffrage Prisoners Should Not Be Treated As CRIMINALS.” **This banner was a replication of a sign carried by the Silent Sentinels.** While this was only two days after the Night of Terror and accounts of the event had only just begun to trickle out, this is obviously an early response to the picketers’ arrest. Her cartoon on the cover of the November 24, 1917 issue shows Lady Liberty shining a lamp lit with “Democracy Over Here” trying to lead hordes of blindfolded men running various directions declaring “over there” and “over there” in each direction. Finally, her image for the Dec. 1, 1917 issue, “The Court of Last Resort,” shows a hand entitled “public opinion” holding up a magnifying glass to an imprisoned woman in Washington, D.C. The weary woman asks the NWP’s rallying cry, “How Long Must Women Wait For Liberty?” The overtones of this cartoon referred to the literally imprisoned women **as**

an allegory for women everywhere, who were in a prison because they could not vote. The court of public opinion had seen the imprisoned women, and according to this cartoon, would release both the actually imprisoned women and the broader group of disenfranchised womankind.

The November 24, 1917 issue opened with a blistering editorial against the Wilson administration and its handling of the Occoquan Night of Terror. The editorialist wrote:

Fifty years from now this week of the federal amendment struggle will read a black page in our political history. The next generation will hardly conceive that women could war in this against a Democratic Administration for the simplest democracy, and that the Democratic Administration could fight back with persecution unworthy a czar ("A week," November 24, 1917, p. 7).

This quote shows that the women were aware of the historical legacy they were leaving behind; they were controlling the narrative with their own version of events and framing those events in *The Suffragist*. They deliberately compared their battles with the war being fought in Europe to create shock and arouse disgust among their readers.

The most powerful accounts run in *The Suffragist* were first-hand narratives supplied by survivors. The Dec. 1 issue featured "The Prison Notes of Rose Winslow: Smuggled to Friends from District Jail" and a heart-rending account of the night by Mary A. Nolan, the oldest picketer at 73 who had been released after just six days because of ill health. Rose Winslow's account, like those of the sympathetic national newspapers appealed to "chivalry": "We still get no mail; we are 'insubordinate'...I am interested to see how long our so-called 'splendid American men' will stand for this form of discipline" (Winslow, 1917, p. 6). The women reiterated their right to be considered "political prisoners" at every turn, and in fact were waiting to tell Superintendent Whittaker this when they were attacked on November 14. Winslow states, though, that the women in prison reiterated the phrase in as many ways as they could. She wrote, "All the

officers here know...that women fighting for liberty may be considered political prisoners” (Winslow, 1917, p. 6).

The *piece de resistance* of the woman’s capturing of the public’s imagination, though, is the first-person account of the Night of Terror by Nolan. The 73-year-old woman with a lame foot, outside of which, she noted, she was quite well, volunteered because she considered the President “picayunish about suffrage, promising, backing down; giving a bit, then another bit. That is not big, and this is a big question” (Nolan, 1917, p. 7). To indicate that the trial was a sham, she put trial in scare quotes and noted that none of the women **paid any attention to it** because they knew they would be convicted and toted off to prison “just as the hundred and more other women who had done this thing for suffrage” (Nolan, 2019, p. 7). Nolan noted that the women demanded to see Superintendent Whittaker and that the woman who checked them in said they’d sit there all night if they insisted on seeing him. During this interchange, Nolan saw men file onto the porch outside, but she “didn’t think anything about it.” Nolan’s name was called. She refused to answer. Nolan reported: “The police woman who came with us begged us to answer our names. We could see that she was afraid” (Nolan, 1917, p. 7).

From there, Nolan’s account turns into a flurry of sound and motion. The door “burst open and Whittaker rushed in like a tornado” followed by men who “looked as much like tramps as anything” (Nolan, 2017, p. 7). Nolan was seized and dragged down the steps begging the men to be careful of her lame foot. She described the punishment cells as “dungeons.” Nolan saw Dorothy Day, “A slight girl,” “banged” twice over the arm of an iron bench as she heard a man yell, “The [Damn]—suffrager! My mother ain’t no suffrager. I’ll put you through [Hell]—” (Nolan, 2017, p. 7). When Nolan was taken to Whittaker’s office, she challenged his authority and asked, “Is there no age limit on your workhouse? Would a woman of seventy-three or a child

of two be sent here?” This made him think, and Nolan was sent to a doctor. She was released from Occoquan six days later. She wrote, “I burst into tears as they led me away, my term having expired. I didn’t want to desert them like that, but I had done all that I could” (Nolan, 1917, p. 14).

Close reading of *The Suffragist* shows that the NWP was aware that their publication would direct future readings of the Night of Terror. They used furious rhetoric that framed the President as a tyrant, akin to the Kaiser of Germany. They put the words of the women who endured imprisonment at the forefront of their publication to add an element of both pathos and ethos to the accounts. It’s hard not to feel infuriated about the abuse of a 73-year-old grandmother with a lame foot and that of the “slight girl” and other women with whom she was arrested. This, perhaps, is why contemporary readings about the Night of Terror all read from NWP’s and Nolan’s perspectives, in particular.

National Headlines of the Time

National stories that ran during the period of November 1917 and December 1917 reveal gender power relations of the time. By their choice to either frame the women as sympathetic characters or as anti-American crusaders, the newspapers played to gender norms that expected women to be submissive and silent in the public sphere. As the NWP itself notes, “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” (Albright, 2018, para. 1). The suffragists themselves played with gender norms to manipulate public opinion, sometimes brashly speaking

out in public and at other times presenting the perfect, middle-class white woman with long, perfectly groomed hair and clean, well-appointed dresses.

Building sympathy for suffragists

Those articles that were sympathetic to the women often used race framing to replay descriptions of horrifying conditions in the Workhouse, including rats, maggots in food, and the spectacle of middle-to-upper class “proper” white women having to clean up after and live with “negro prostitutes” and criminals (“The punishment,” November 26, 1917, paras. 2-6; “Says National,” Nov. 23, 1917, p. 10). They emphasized the women’s use of the term “political prisoners” and claimed that suffrage may be adopted by their individual states “as a form of retributive justice, born of that strangest of all our emotions, human sympathy and regard for the decent treatment of a *white woman*” (Emphasis added; “Tells of,” Nov. 15, 1917, para. 1; “The punishment,” Nov. 24, 1917, N.P.).

These articles relied heavily on capturing the women’s memories and promoting those memories as the authoritative narrative of events from the Night of Terror. This second part goes along with both the National Woman’s Party’s tactic of promoting their first-hand versions events for what happened on the Night of Terror and for garnering public sympathy. In addition, contemporary narratives also rely on the memories of the women captured at the time.

The category of national articles that built sympathy for the women blatantly appealed to white American’s lingering racist instincts and sought to bring up images of horrifying conditions not fit for any modern, white woman to inhabit. Racism was a strategy used by both NAWSA and the NWP. “Both of them rebuffed repeated efforts by African-American suffragists to join the mainstream movement, eager to persuade southern lawmakers that enfranchising women need not increase the number of black voters” (Neuman, 2017, p. 1014). This racist

rhetorical strategy is reflected in the first-hand accounts that newspapers chose to carry at the time. The women framed the white women picketers as **gentlewoman victims** of the prison system who had to endure horrifying conditions with people who actually deserved the punishments, i.e. the black women who were also incarcerated at Occoquan. The *Evening Capital and Maryland Gazette* from Annapolis, MD carried an account of a tea featuring Nolan³ and fellow picketer and Occoquan survivor Lucy Branham. The front page-account sets up readers to be sympathetic to the two women's accounts with subheads that blared, "Guests of Honor Two Victims of Occoquan Workhouse; THE THRILLING EXPERIENCE" (emphasis original). This headline deliberately uses the term "victims" to show the women in a more sympathetic light than terms such as "prisoners" or "convicts." "Grandmother Picketer" Nolan then continued to tell of "horrors mental and horrors physical" endured "in the dungeon cell, in the hospital and later in the jail," and "indignities heaped upon these gentlewomen by the Superintendent; and his deputies" ("Mrs. Murray," Dec. 20, 1917, paras, 5, 7, & 9).

Another article in *The Evening Capital and Maryland Gazette*, reported "The Punishment of the Washington Pickets: Southern Paper Aroused over Treatment of Suffrage Picket." This article, in particular, shows the overlap between the racism that was highlighted by the women's imprisonment and the appeal to "chivalric" instincts made by various papers. The article reported,

Ordinarily we may be safe in presuming that the South will be the last section of the Union to declare for suffrage of any sort. But a few more stories told as Miss Younger told the story of the "picketing" to the men of Macon Thursday night from her automobile rostrum, and the South may be found suddenly assuming the lead in this movement as a form of retributive justice, born of that strangest of all our emotions, human sympathy and regard for the decent treatment of the white woman ("The punishment," November 26, 1917, para. 9.)

This followed Younger recounting to the men a list of indignities heaped upon white women: white women were scrubbing areas “set aside for negro prostitutes and drunks”; scraping paint from benches “in the recreation rooms of the lowest types of confined negroes, without gloves”; stripping, bathing, and being clothed like the “filthiest type of negro prisoners”; sleeping “in rooms with drunken negro women”; and being housed in the cells that had just been vacated by the “lowest type of negro women of the town” without even a change of bedclothes (“The punishment,” November 26, 1917, paras. 2-6).

Other sympathetic articles highlighted the conditions of the prison to arouse sympathy, and they emphasized the women’s use of the framing of themselves as “political offenders” or “political prisoners.” Others used quotes that, like the NWP’s own rhetoric, linked the torture with Wilson’s administration. Miss Sarah Tompkins was quoted in the Philadelphia *Evening Ledger* as saying “The whole behavior of the warden was shifty and evasive at every point...He made it plain that he is acting under orders of those ‘higher ups,’ and hardly dares to accord our pickets considerate treatment, even were he so inclined” (“Tells of,” Nov. 15, 1917, para. 5). The “higher ups” in this quote referred to the Wilson administration.

Anti-suffrage framing

Articles personally attacking the suffragists grouped them with socialists and anarchists; anti-suffrage articles framed them as “militants” (“Case of,” Nov. 23, 1917, p. 1; “24 pickets,” Nov. 24, 1917, p. 13). While the women were drawing comparisons between the German enemies and President Wilson to try and draw sympathy and force public attention on the way the government treated them, the anti-suffrage crowd was busy trying to lump the women in with the same enemies. The November 19 *Richmond Times-Dispatch* detailed how the “Occoquan Guards Show Marks of Picket Battle,” and then in subheads noted that the guards were “tired of

being kicked on shins, scratched, punched, and bitten by suffrage prisoners.” This article is almost an exact mirror description of the pro-suffrage framing of the women’s treatment by the guards except that the treatment is reversed (“Occoquan guards,” November 19, 1917, p. 7). The women were not ladies or refined in any way, according to this framing. One of the officials was quoted as saying, “Ladies! Why, man, they’re Bolsheviki!” (“Occoquan guards,” Nov. 19, 1917, p. 7).

The idea that the women were unladylike was repeated in various descriptions, like this image of suffragist O.H.P. Belmont of New York: She was “masculine...and she repelled because there was not a trace of the refinement which is inseparable from womanly grace and gentrification.” Because of this lack of womanly class, the author concluded that she “is more in need of the seclusion of the home than of publicity” (“Says she,” Nov. 22, 1917, p. 4).

Linking the women with anti-government agents showed them as anti-patriotic during wartime. As all prison mail was screened, one letter from an anarchist urging imprisoned suffragists to more militant action than just standing and picketing particularly caught national attention. The author noted that the police had found no evidence thus far that the “suffragist picketing movement is a part of the German propaganda in America or that the national woman’s party has direct affiliations with disloyal organizations”; however, the letter, the author continued to note, “makes it appear likely that some of the suffragists now in jail are connected with organized movements to oppose the administration on grounds other than the suffrage question” (“Imprisoned suffragist,” Nov. 26, 1917, p. 1). This letter provided damning evidence that the suffragists were against American interests and were in league with the enemy.

The biggest subset of anti-suffrage coverage directly attacked the women’s claims that they were being mistreated in jails. On November 23, 1917, *The New York Tribune* ran a full

personal account of the wonderful conditions in the women's jails followed by an Associated Press brief reinforcing that the "Pickets' Jail Given Clean Bill of Health." The main commentary by reporter James Arthur Seavey claimed that Seavey had been able to tour the jails and found that "A jail is neither a fashionable hotel nor a country house, and an inmate cannot reasonably expect to find there all the comforts of home. But as jails go, this one is far above the average in cleanliness, in airiness, in sanitation and in light, both natural and artificial" (Seavey, 1917, p. 14). The headline set up the entire argument of the article, which was that the "White House Pickets [Were] Well Treated in Jail" (Seavey, 1917, p. 14). The reporter refuted claims of small windows, airless rooms, rats and other vermin throughout the cells. The entire article implied the suffragists were liars trying to sway public opinion, but an unbiased outsider could find their untruths easily, if he or she should take the time to do so.

Another account noted that "grapevine" news had reached the *New York Tribune* and stated that Burns and Day were still manacled to the bars of their cells; however, the unbylined article goes on to note that this can't possibly be true: "This information must be a bit incorrect, because there are not enough cells at Occoquan to accommodate the suffragists imprisoned there, even if two were put in a cell, and Cameron House is informed that Superintendent Whittaker has given orders that only one of the crusaders shall occupy a single cell" ("2 pickets," Nov. 18, 1917, p. 1). The brief goes on to note that, unlike the women's claims that they were forced to wear prison clothes and do hard labor at the workhouse, only "five of the women are at work," and thirteen were wearing prison clothes, with the "balance retaining their own clothes" ("2 pickets," Nov. 18, 1917, p. 1). The report puts the women's complaints first and then immediately throws doubt upon those same claims by ending with a refutation from the viewpoint of the Workhouse officials. This "she said, he said" framing was common in articles

that threw doubt upon the suffragists' claims of mistreatment. Another article noted, "Suffrage headquarters declare Miss Paul is being treated 'brutally,' *but authorities assert* she is being shown every consideration under the circumstances" (Emphasis added; "Marines at," Nov. 18, 1917, p. 8).

Modern Interpretations

Digital memorial, whether via social media or established websites, allows feminist voices to control narrative and direct historical remembrances of a specific person or event, showing clearly how memorial is wrapped in gender and power structures. Parasocial interactions on social media, for example, give individuals agency to direct mourning, memory, and memorial because of "its globalized network, ability to reach across barriers, and its means of enacting personalized and ritualized mourning meaningful to the mourner" (Widmayer, 2017, p. 59). Modern memorials of the Night of Terror range from blog posts and news articles to podcasts and YouTube videos. As one example of a digital memorial using new media tools, the Turning Point Suffragist Memorial produced a series of tweets in 2014 detailing the timeline of events of the Night of Terror, the contents of which seem to have been based on first-person accounts ("Night of," 2014). Using the first-person accounts, particularly Nolan's, to create the timeline empowers the NWP's narrative.

The Lorton Reformatory currently operates as the Workhouse Arts Center. In 2018, the Reformatory also started renovations on the 10,000 square feet of on-site prison barracks to create the Lucy Burns Museum, which the website says should be celebrating its grand opening on May 9, 2020 ("Lucy Burns," N.D., para. 1). The website itself features a timeline of events, an overview of the workhouse itself, and a page dedicated to the suffrage history and its connections to the Lorton Reformatory. A summary of the upcoming Lucy Burns Museum runs

through the Workhouse's history with brief mentions of the suffragists: "As a site on the National Historic Registry," the site reads, "the Workhouse legacy is rich with stories of our American heritage. Suffragists picketing the White House for women's right to vote were imprisoned and force fed" ("Lucy Burns," N.D., para. 3). The paragraph then goes on to list several notable and notorious prisoners and says no more about suffrage.

The page dedicated to the suffrage cause has four paragraphs and ten pictures from the latter days of the suffrage crusade with no descriptive commentary beyond short titles like "Suffragists," "Lucy Burns at the Workhouse," "Imprisonment Protested," and "Imprisonment Picketed." The four paragraphs on the page give a brief history of the Workhouse and the women's quarters. Then there is one paragraph on the women picketers who were sentenced to Occoquan, and the following paragraph details President Wilson's capitulation and the eventual passage and ratification of the 19th amendment. The final paragraph gives an overview of the curators' goals in featuring the suffrage battle in their contemporary museum: "The site is considered hallowed ground for the suffragists and for the modern women's movement. It (the museum) will provide an historical context to the movement toward franchise and also provide individual stories of the women who helped bring about the ratification of the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution" ("Suffrage History," N.D., para. 4).

A subset of contemporary memorialization articles about the event focused on the Workhouse itself rather than the women, validating the Reformatory website's claim that the site "is considered hallowed ground for suffragists." The *Los Angeles Times* ran a travel article focusing on Lorton Reformatory in 2017. The article promotes the former Occoquan Workhouse as a gorgeous, contemporary tourist attraction and identifies the Night of Terror itself as *the* pivotal suffrage event. "The beauty of the artworks made here and the energy that accompanies

their creation are a surprise in a place where ugly events once were the norm, including one so horrifying it was called the Night of Terror” (Hamm, 2017, para. 4). The author is already setting up the article to tell the story as written 100 years previously by the National Woman’s Party.

The article emphasizes the event as “so horrifying it was called the Night of Terror.” The author then continues to emphasize that the event changed not just the suffrage movement, but the entire path of the country: “Not ringing a bell? Not surprising. But what happened here on Nov. 14, 1917...changed U.S. history” (Hamm, 2017, para. 5). This article is framed to memorialize the Night of Terror as the single momentous moment within the entire, many-decades-long arc of the suffrage battle.

Other articles focusing on the workhouse played directly to the pathos of the event, flattening the history to violence rather than its significance in the overall suffrage battle, and in some cases, they got details flat-out wrong in the rush to write a sensational tale. The UK’s *Daily Mail*, which is, admittedly, known for writing more salacious stories, published pictures of what remains of the Lorton Reformatory in 2015. The story repeatedly noted that a 74-year-old woman had been bashed between her eyes with “the broken staff of her banner,” a detail that was not found in either the NWP’s account of the night or the national accounts of the night. If this tidbit is referring to Nolan, who was the oldest woman involved in the Night of Terror, even her account does not include this, and she said she was 73 years old, not 74.

The picture captions use loaded rhetoric meant to shock the reader and keep them scrolling through the pictures of the crumbling workhouse: “Haunting legacy: In the notorious ‘Night of Terror’ 33 suffragettes were locked up and tortured by Lorton’s guards at the command of cruel superintendent W.H. Whittaker” (Akbar, 2015, caption 4). The photo featured with this caption shows a long, cement hallway with what look like deserted shower stalls fronted by

deteriorating, ripped, and stained shower curtains. The picture captions show the author's bias toward supporting the NWP's version of events completely. Another caption under a picture of Lucy Burns says "she was determined to expose the hypocrisy of President Wilson who wanted to make the world 'safe for democracy' when there was none at home" (Akbar, 2015, caption 6).

Both of these articles focus on the Night of Terror as the pivotal event of the suffrage movement even as they're focused on the site of the event as a physical memorial for the contemporary viewer. Between the pro- and anti-suffrage articles, the supportive articles won the day in the modern-day framing of the Night of Terror. In particular, Nolan's wrenching account of being abused that night was repeated in several modern-day accounts. This could be because Nolan's account and diary entries written by NWP co-founder Lucy Burns were reprinted in Doris Steven's 1920 memoir *Jailed for Freedom: American Women Win the Vote*. Other women published their memoirs, as well, including Dorothy Day's 1952 work *The Long Loneliness*. In guiding future memorials of the Night of Terror, the women of the NWP were media savvy in producing their own narratives and driving the conversation toward a sympathetic interpretation, i.e., *their* interpretation, of the night's events.

Many of the modern day remembrances of the Night of Terror are designed to evoke the sense of horror that contemporaries of the Silent Sentinels would have felt at seeing the torture of middle-to-upper-class white women in a government-run prison. These articles sometimes outright say that they focus purely on the women's remembrances of the event, relinquishing the power of historical framing to the women. *The Blackbird Archive* (Spring 2018) dedicated an entire issue to recreating the events of 1917, the Silent Sentinel's work, and the Night of Terror. Their opening notes, "We have summoned here the suffragists who stood as Silent Sentinels at

the gates of the White House, urging citizens and government officials to consider the enfranchisement of women” (“1917 suite,” 2018, para. 1).

There were modern interpretations of the Night of Terror that tried to create a more balanced view of the event. History.com, for example, starts with a headline that seems to refer to the women’s accounts of torments. The headline says, “The Night of Terror: When Suffragists were Imprisoned and Tortured in 1917.” The rest of the article, however, intersperses the women’s viewpoints with interpretations from an academic and gave broader context of the suffrage movement beyond the night itself to give readers a more in-depth view of events (Pruitt, 2019).

Conclusion

This article examines the idea of memory and **finds modern retrospectives almost universally favored the perspectives of the National Woman’s Party in the case of the Night of Terror**. Examining historical documents alongside the contemporary memorials undertaken by media reveals a few common themes.

Suffrage and racism

Early work on women’s suffrage periodicals found that at least three of these publications advanced the suffrage cause through four main themes: “motherhood, women’s moral superiority, female altruism, and that women were equal to men” (Lumsden, 2019, p. 8). To these ideas needs to be added the race-baiting frame that came through in the women’s first-person accounts that were reported in mainstream papers of the time. White women used racial frames in mainstream newspapers to gather support, particularly from Southern newspapers, for the suffrage cause. Black women technically received the right to vote in 1920; however, they

were not widely allowed to exercise this right until the Voting Rights Act was passed on Aug. 6, 1965.

Terborg-Penn (2004) wrote that there were at least 90 Black women leaders who endorsed the suffrage amendment, and during the 1910s, Black women's organizations rallied their troops to get the amendment passed (Terborg-Penn, 2004). Grasso (2019) found that many of the women's pro-suffrage arguments were the same across races; however, even within the radical arms of the movements, Black women were denied the label of "radical." Grasso (2019) writes, "When an African American woman such as Nannie Burroughs proclaims in a pro-woman suffrage statement, 'the Negro woman is the white woman's as well as the white race's most needed ally in preserving an unmixed race,' is this not a radical, Black Nationalist position when considered in the context of white men's systemic rape and defamation of black women?" (Grasso, 2019, p. 98).

Terborg-Penn (2004) wrote that Black women's on-going support and promotion of suffrage seemed to conflict with the era's treatment of African-Americans, in general, and white women's treatment of Black women, in particular:

Furthermore, the heyday of the woman suffrage movement embraced an era that historian Rayford Logan called "the nadir" in Afro-American history, characterized by racial segregation, defamation of the character of Black women, and lynching of black Americans, both men and women. It is a wonder that Afro-American women dared to dream a white man's dream—the right to enfranchisement—especially at a time when white women attempted to exclude them from that dream (Terborg-Penn, 2004, p. 66). Framing Blacks as the criminals who were deserving of the punishments exacted upon "good" middle-class white women at Occoquan forced Black women back into the box of those who

were unworthy of the vote. There was no mention of fellow white prisoners at Occoquan in any of the reports gathered for this analysis. There was only an emphasis on Black women prisoners and their **criminality to contrast with the suffragists' innocence.**

The first-person memorial

Modern mediated memorials and mainstream news reports of the time overwhelmingly embraced the emotion-laden first-person narratives the NWP chose to frame their version of events. Doing this, though, created a one-note representation of what actually happened during the Night of Terror. In discussing coverage of the broader anti-suffrage debate, Finneman (2019) notes of the period's media, "Overall, news coverage significantly employed episodic framing rather than thematic framing, without providing background explanation of the debate.

Journalists also were not in a habit of presenting both sides of the issue within a story or asking for further evidence, thereby allowing claims to be published without verification or context" (p. 133). The Night of Terror as framed by the NWP's women made for an attention-grabbing story that would sell papers across the nation. News print was at a premium, and providing context and/or multiple sides to either the NWP's tactics or the women's treatment didn't fit an overall narrative of sympathy for women who were treated in a way antithetical to the time's ideas of the frailness of white women and their need to be protected by the white man.

The NWP showed an interest in shaping future views of the suffragists and their work, and they were savvy about foregrounding narratives that drew emotional reactions in their media. Even the anti-suffragist article about the downtrodden prison guards who were supposedly kicked and scratched by the suffragists doesn't have nearly the impact of a 73-year-old, half-lame grandmother being thrown around by large, brutish men with clubs.

Signifying importance through modern memorials

Many of the contemporary memorials of the Night of Terror marked it as *the* turning point of the suffrage fight and ascribed to it the victory of getting the 19th Amendment passed two years later. This is a claim that could only be made with the perspective of time, so it is perhaps not surprising that accounts from the time do not assign the same meaning to the event. Media of the time acknowledged it as an unusually violent incident for the Silent Sentinels, and the balance of more supportive articles over oppositional articles shows the societal sentiment that the torments endured by the women was unacceptable for the government to impose on free American women. To see the Night of Terror as the single pivotal event of the suffrage fight erases decades of historical battle over the constitutional amendment, an erasure of context, while raising the Night of Terror itself as the contextualizing event that lead to the passage of the Amendment two years later. Modern memorials of The Night of Terror also seemingly adopt the viewpoint of the NWP's advocacy media, rather than exploring the range of opinions on the women's actions and their consequences, as presented in the mainstream presses of the time. As noted previously, the *Suffragist* used commentary and many of their articles, including Nolan's recounting of November 14, 1917, embraced pathos to move the audience to action. Modern memorials playing to that same pathos empowers the historical NWP's activist voice in a contemporary context. *Using The Suffragist's accounts allows the NWP's viewpoint to influence today's audience's perception of history.*

The digital memorials included in this article pulled on historical displays of the Lorton Reformatory and quotes from the NWP women to inscribe the memory of the event with contemporary cultural meaning. Those ideas are particularly linked with a celebration of the suffragists as warriors defending the American ideals of freedom and democracy by claiming votes for all citizens. The memorials used in this analysis do not consider anti-suffrage

arguments, a framing strategy that was common to the period, as well. As Finneman (2019) writes:

Negative, emotional rhetoric that played into public fears defined the antis' countermovement frame in 1917 press coverage, while the suffragists in the social movement were framed as providing reasoned progressive arguments that contradicted and undermined the antis. After all, how could women entering the public sphere to help with wartime shortages be unpatriotic and unable to handle an additional burden? (p. 142).

In the case of the Night of Terror, the anti-suffragists, represented by Wilson and the jailers at Occoquan Workhouse, were almost universally portrayed as violent and backward in contemporary accounts of the night, and the truth of this argument plays out in the eventual adoption of the 19th amendment. That victory alone proves the validity of the suffragists' cause in modern memorial.

Comparing mainstream media accounts with the National Woman's Party's accounts of the Night of Terror with contemporary memorialization of the event shows that the NWP's narrative of the night was almost universally reported across mainstream media in 1917 and in today's memorials. Those adoptions erase the women's casual racism, which was used to convince southern lawmakers—particularly white men—that the event was particularly heinous because it was endured by middle-class white women. Memorials also show the NWP's awareness of the power of first-person narratives in capturing public imaginations and driving attention to the suffrage battle. Finally, digital memorials identify the Night of Terror as a turning point in the battle for suffrage, an identity that could only be gained through the perspective of history.

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¹ The number of prison guards who attacked the suffragists ranges from “nearly 40” (Katherine, 2017, para. 12) to 44 (Bernikow, 2004, para. 6) to more than 80 in some of the women prisoner’s own accounts of the night.

² This article uses the 14th as the primary date because the Night of Terror began with the women’s sentencing and transfer to Occoquan on the 14th.

³ The author of this article calls Nolan “Noland.” I will use her correct name in reference to this article.