

Torture of Suffragists in 1917; Curriculum Materials with the Film 'Iron Jawed Angels' – Publication Announced by TeachWithMovies.com

Behind the iconic photographs of the suffragist ladies in their long white dresses picketing the White House in 1917, there is a tale of attempted suppression by the government, employing false arrest, unfair trials, imprisonment, and torture. These events are accurately portrayed in the movie "Iron Jawed Angels". TeachWithMovies.com announces the publication of curriculum materials that include oral history interviews with two suffragists, historical background, a description of what is and is not accurate in the movie, discussion questions, and assignments. Learning about the nonviolent protests, their brutal suppression, and the public outrage that helped pass the 19th Amendment will add interest to any class in U.S. History or in World History dealing with the role of nonviolent protest in creating the modern world.

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TeachWithMovies.com announces publication of curriculum materials to assist American History teachers who are developing lesson plans on the suffrage movement in the U.S. Classes in World History or on nonviolent mass action as a world-wide method for causing social change, will also derive great benefit from showing the film. The materials are centered around the HBO movie, "[Iron Jawed Angels](#)", a film which accurately portrays the false imprisonment and torture suffered by militant suffragists who refused to stop picketing the White House during the First World War. The classroom materials offered by TWM include oral history interviews with two suffragists, detailed historical background that includes an examination of both original and secondary sources, a description of what is and is not accurate in the movie, discussion questions, and writing assignments.

A full description of this important story is left out of most history textbooks.

American students who study the women's suffrage movement are shown pictures of ladies in long white gowns peacefully holding picket signs at the gates of the White House. In fact, when America entered the First World War in June of 1917, the public, including most suffragists, demanded that in the name of national unity, the "Silent Sentinels" put away their signs and join the war effort. A militant minority, led by Alice Paul, a mild mannered Quaker, refused to stop the protests. Their argument was that they had not been permitted to vote for the public officials who declared War on Germany and therefore they had no obligation to support the war.

President Wilson was in favor of women's suffrage but insisted that change come only on a state-by-state basis. This was a slow process that would leave women in the conservative American South without the vote for the foreseeable future. Alice Paul and her militant suffragists insisted that only a federal constitutional amendment would provide the vote for all American women. When the War came, in order to keep the pressure on President Wilson to support a constitutional amendment, the picketers stayed at their posts. Most Americans wanted them to stop. The more moderate suffragists thought the picketers were hurting the cause of suffrage. The public was so angry that crowds of men assaulted the picketers as the police looked on.

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When the Silent Sentinels persevered, the federal government took action. The police falsely arrested the women for blocking the sidewalk. The courts convicted them in trials that were grossly unfair. When the suffragists refused to pay their fines, the government imprisoned them in harsh conditions and subjected them to treatment that today would be considered torture. Despite the assaults by the crowds, the arrests, the imprisonments, and the torture, Alice Paul and her militant ladies stood at their posts, continuing to put pressure on President Wilson, holding up signs asking why the U.S. was sending boys to die for democracy overseas when it denied the right to vote to half of its own citizens.

When the mistreatment of these housewives, mothers, and daughters of the middle and upper classes became known to the public, the outcry was immense. It was a pivotal factor in forcing President Wilson to support the women's suffrage constitutional amendment. Wilson was an immensely popular war president and his support, along with continued lobbying by all wings of the suffragist movement, led to passage of the 19th Amendment prohibiting the states from denying the vote to women.

This movie can be used to vividly impress upon students the following important lessons that are often not taught in history classes:

- (1) when women used nonviolent protests to demand the vote, they were assaulted by crowds of men and denied police protection;
- (2) our own democratically elected government tried to suppress the militant suffragists nonviolent protests with false arrests, unfair trials, imprisonment in harsh conditions, and torture; and
- (3) the suffragists, led by Alice Paul, independently developed tactics of nonviolent protest which were strikingly similar to the methods of promoting political and social change being developed at about the same time by Mahatma Gandhi.

The film and the curriculum materials on this subject, provided in TWM's Learning Guide to "Iron Jawed Angels", will show American history in a new light and provide another example of the power of nonviolent mass action.

TeachWithMovies.com is the premier site on the Internet showing teachers how to use feature films and other video resources to enhance the classroom experience. The site offers thousands of pages of lesson plans and curriculum materials on more than 350 feature films. The price for access to all TWM curriculum materials is \$11.99 per year per teacher. Discounts are available for bulk purchases.

Sources:
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