

Suffs: Not So Distant History

By Jen Barraza



What do Star Wars, Elvis Presley and one of America's most famous suffragists have in common?

1977

In 1977, audiences were introduced to Luke Skywalker, the world mourned Elvis Presley, NASA launched Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 into space, and Alice Paul, who had been arrested and imprisoned while fighting for women's right to vote, died at the age of 92.

The suffragist at the center of Suffs, who organized protests outside the White House, who was arrested fighting for women's right to vote and helped lead the push for the 19th Amendment, lived until 1977.

When we hear the words "women's suffrage," it is easy to picture black-and-white photographs and history books. But the real women behind Suffs lived lives that reached well into the modern age, and the issues they fought over continued long after the vote was won for many.

Alice Paul was the young radical who believed the movement needed to become louder and more confrontational. After the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920, she did not consider the fight finished. In 1923, she authored the Equal Rights Amendment and spent much of the rest of her life advocating for legal equality for women. Though not officially

recognized as part of the United States Constitution, Congress did pass the ERA in 1972, just five years before Paul's death.

And she was not the only Suffs historical figure whose life stretched closer to our own.

Lucy Burns, Paul's friend, fellow organizer and one of the movement's most fearless protesters, lived until 1966. She had spent more time imprisoned for suffrage activism than any other American suffragist.

Mary Church Terrell, portrayed in Suffs as one of the Black women challenging both racism and sexism within the movement, lived until 1954. An educator, writer, civil rights activist and suffragist, Terrell continued fighting for equality decades after women secured the constitutional right to vote.

These were not distant figures in an old chapter of American history. They were women whose lives overlapped with many generations of women today.

The 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920, after decades of organizing and protest. But even that victory did not guarantee equal access to the ballot for every woman in America, particularly Black women and other women of color who continued to face discriminatory barriers to voting.

The women of Suffs were strategists, journalists, lawyers, organizers, friends, rivals and activists. They made mistakes. They challenged one another. They disagreed about what progress should look like and how quickly it should come. They fought for a future they could only imagine. Their story may begin more than a century ago, but its impact is still all around us.

Suffs runs October 14th through November 29th on the Hormel stage at The Phoenix Theatre Company.

Details

Dates: Oct 14 – Nov 29

Location: The Phoenix Theatre Company, Hormel Theatre

Tickets: phoenixtheatre.com | (602) 254-2151

Audio Description and American Sign Language interpretation are available for this production. Performance dates and details can be found at phoenixtheatre.com.