

Lucy Burns

1879–1966



Arrested while picketing the White House during a campaign of civil disobedience, Lucy Burns spent more time in prison than any other suffragist.

Lucy Burns showing the strain of hunger strikes and repeated imprisonment.
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English Lessons

Studying in England, Burns joined the British movement for women's suffrage and adopted the militant tactics of Emmeline

Pankhurst. Arrested several times, she met Alice Paul in a London jail. They decided to bring bolder British tactics to the United States (but not violence). In England, Burns' activities included interrupting speeches by major political figures, throwing rocks through windows, and attempting to break into a meeting through the ceiling. One English magistrate described her as "setting an extremely bad example."

Academic Ambitions

Lucy Burns was born in Brooklyn, New York. Her father was a banker who supported her educational ambitions. She graduated from Vassar College and studied at Yale, the Universities of Berlin and Bonn, and Oxford University.

The Woman's Party

Returning to the United States, Burns and Paul served on the Congressional Committee of the National American Woman Suffrage Association working for a national suffrage amendment. Seeking more autonomy they changed the name to the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage before founding the National Woman's Party in 1916 to engage in bolder protest.

Lucy Burns receives a mixed reaction from the audience.
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The Night of Terror

Arrested while picketing the White House, she was sent to the Occoquan Workhouse in Lorton, Virginia on October 10, 1917. That evening, later called the "Night of Terror," 27 women were attacked by guards "in a rage of frenzy." "Its perfectly unexpected ferocity stunned us," wrote one suffragist. The warden said that he would stop the picketing "and it will cost the lives of some of these women but we are going to stop it."

The Lucy Burns Museum

Several buildings in the former Occoquan Workhouse were designated for the National Register of Historic Places. One section houses the Lucy Burns Museum, telling her story and the role of the facility in suffrage history. The museum opened in January 2020.



The Occoquan Workhouse site today.
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



By any means necessary... Lucy Burns took to the air in Seattle in 1916 and dropped leaflets during a west coast suffrage campaign.
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Forced feeding was used on hunger strikers in Britain and the United States. Lucy Burns reported that it took five men to hold her down at the Occoquan Workhouse.



Lucy Burns and several other former inmates made a national speaking tour on a train dubbed the Prison Special.

Later Years

After Passage of the 19th Amendment, Lucy Burns withdrew from further political activism. "I don't want to do anything more. I think we have done all this for women, and we have sacrificed everything we possessed for them, and now let them fight for it now. I am not going to fight anymore." In later years she was active in the Catholic Church.