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## It's time to vote in record numbers

JENNIFER O'HARA • SEPTEMBER 9, 2008

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With the Democratic and Republican national conventions behind us, we can all turn our attention to deciding which ticket will get our vote. A recent mass e-mail and an HBO film, "Iron Jawed Angels," about the history of women's suffrage, leave me hoping that a record number of women make the decision to vote in this election.

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The means by which women gained the right to vote in 1920 via the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution were both brilliant and violent. Courageous pioneers like Elizabeth Stanton and Susan B. Anthony inspired many early 20th-century women to speak out and stand up for their right to participate in democracy. Their stories are well known and reliably taught.

Meanwhile, the tragedies of lesser-known suffragette heroes remain largely glossed over and effectively deleted from our collective conscience. But thanks to HBO and millions of women sending stories and links to their friends, women will now know what was endured for the privilege of voting. Lucy Burns, Dora Lewis and Alice Paul are likely to

become names as familiar as Stanton and Anthony.

After picketing the White House in 1917, Burns was jailed, beaten and left hanging from cell bars, bleeding and gasping for air through the night. Lewis was knocked unconscious when her head was crashed into an iron bed and her body was thrown into a cell. There exist numerous other accounts of guards dragging, pinching, kicking and otherwise humiliating women who dared to demonstrate for the right to vote.

In 1917, 33 women were imprisoned for "obstructing sidewalk traffic" and sent to the Occoquan Workhouse in Virginia. For weeks, they were fed worm-infested "slop" and contaminated water. When Alice Paul, a movement leader, protested by waging a hunger strike, she was tied to a chair, forcibly intubated and fed until she vomited. Allegedly, when a group of men tried to persuade a doctor to have Paul permanently institutionalized for insanity, the doctor refused, noting her strength and remarking: "Courage in women is often mistaken for insanity." Alice Paul eventually penned the first proposed Equal Rights Amendment in 1923.

The current mass dissemination of women's suffrage stories in an effort to encourage women to vote is cosmic good timing. In this presidential election, candidate platforms will include issues that tremendously impact women directly: the Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, the expansion of the Family and Medical Leave Act, increased funding for after-school programs, reproductive rights and health care.

Although women vote in greater numbers than men, only 60 percent of eligible women vote. Perhaps now, more of us will pay attention, do our research ([www.procon.org](http://www.procon.org) is one of many resources listing the candidates' positions on the issues), and vote both to choose a leader and express appreciation to the women who risked everything so that we could pull a lever, punch a card or touch a screen.

**Jennifer O'Hara, of Big Flats, is a full-time mom and visiting lecturer at Corning Community College. Her column, The Real Deal, appears each Tuesday in Twin Tiers Life.**

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**MrCrapantski** wrote:

you struck gold once again Mr. C. excellent job.

9/14/2008 10:00:11 PM

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**MrCrapantski** wrote:

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“

Replying to jonescourt:

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*This is not a college professor that I am talking about here. This columnist is a temporary instructor.*

*No, no, no you've got it wrong, again. The real crime is such that when you acknowledge their right to vote and voice their thoughts they are accused falsely of lack of seriousness and then you judge others that have been politely asked to write a column. I don't know why you don't complain fiercely to the boss of the paper if this writer causes you to convulse and suffer fits of a bad nature. It might be unhealthy and you could win. Who knows it's worth a try.*

good one Mr. C!

9/14/2008 9:59:18 PM

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9/14/2008 9:57:23 PM

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guyinelmira wrote:

Why pin this on college professors only? This same behavior takes place right here everyday where someone pushes the candidate they favor, even making crap up counting on the uninformed buying it and voting their way. I agree people should research for themselves but these people are counting on the fact that they won't. What's the point of all those annoying yard signs? I'm not going to vote for a specific candidate simply because a neighbor is, but people do it all the time. Some people are just that stupid and other people are counting on it that they are. Just as many are not college students. I find actually that college students being fresh to exercise a right to vote take it more serious, and it's the older ones who will look at a yard sign and just cast their vote not even bothering to care who they voted for

9/10/2008 12:26:40 PM

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