



Keep Marching: Suff's the Musical Bring the Suffrage Fight into 2025

Description

Salt Lake City, UT On November 6, 2025, *The New York Times* briefly ran the headline *Did Women Ruin the Workplace? And if so, can conservative feminism fix it?* Within hours, editors quietly changed it to *Did Liberal Feminism Ruin the Workplace?* a small linguistic pivot revealing just how volatile the word *women* remains when used collectively. The edited headline went viral but for all the wrong reasons prompting a deeper question: whose feminism, and whose workplace, are we really talking about?

As I watched Shaina Taub's Tony Award-winning musical *Suff's* directed by **Leigh Silverman**, now on its first national tour at the Eccles Theater, I found myself sitting with that very question.

Set in the turbulent decade leading up to the ratification of the 19th Amendment, ***Suff's*** follows the young activist Alice Paul and her allies as they battle for women's right to vote against Congress, the president, and often, each other. The musical traces the suffragists' march from parlor meetings to prison cells, revealing the generational and racial fractures that shaped the movement. Taub's book, music, and lyrics transform what could be a history lesson into a kinetic, emotionally charged portrait of women who refused to wait their turn. It's both a chronicle of progress and a meditation on how unfinished that progress remains.

When *Suff's* opened, Taub pulled a Lin-Manuel-Miranda-level hat trick writing, composing, and starring in a musical chronicling the decade leading to the 19th Amendment. It dramatizes the generational split between the older, respectability-minded leadership of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and the impatient, militant energy of Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, who demand a federal amendment now. That tension—be patient versus we don't have time—isn't just the musical's central conflict; it's the heart of every modern movement.

Musically, *Suff's* doesn't reinvent the Broadway form the way *Hamilton* did, but it delivers something equally radical and urgent: a full-bodied, intersectional history lesson set to anthemic, emotionally charged music. It's brought to life by an all-women and non-binary cast something that has never been done on Broadway before.

Taubâ??s score is witty and rhythmic, steeped in harmonies that feel communal rather than showy. The ensembleâ??s sound makes the production feel both theatrical and ritualistic, as if the very act of telling the story becomes a political gesture.

A theatrical performance scene from *Suffs*, featuring a diverse cast of women dressed in white costumes. Monica Tulia Ramirez as Inez Milholland and SUFFS Company. PC: Joan Marcus

Cast Highlights: Big Voices, Bigger Convictions

The national tour features a powerhouse ensemble led by **Maya Keleher** as *Alice Paul*, whose crystalline belt and fierce stillness anchor the showâ??s moral center.

- **Monica Tulia Ramirez**â??s Inez Milholland dazzles with both visual and vocal pageantry, delivering a performance as commanding as the icon she portrays. Her voice rings with clarity and conviction, carrying the mythic weight of a woman who led movements from horseback and from the heart.
- **Danyel Fulton** electrifies the stage as Ida B. Wellsâ??her presence fierce, her voice powerful enough to fill the Capitol Rotunda and still have resonance to spare. She brings both fire and gravity to a role defined by uncompromising truth-telling.
- **Trisha Jeffrey** as Mary Church Terrell and **Victoria Pikel** as Phyllis Terrell embody a moving portrait of intergenerational strength and sisterhood. Their shared scenes radiate dignity, resolve, and a love for community that spans decades.
- **Joyce Meimei Zheng** brings sharp humor and a revolutionary edge to Ruza Wenclawska, infusing every moment with both wit and bite. She is a live wire onstageâ??unpredictable, charismatic, and delightfully rebellious.
- **Gwynne Wood**â??s Lucy Burns is beautifully castâ??soft-spoken yet steadily persistent, she captures the familiar arc of a woman whose initial hesitance deepens into courage. Her performance is grounded, relatable, and quietly powerful, tracing the transformation from bystander to leader with emotional truth.
- **Livvy Marcus**â??s Doris Stevens serves as the showâ??s narratorâ??the groupâ??s archivist and secretaryâ??and she is impossible not to adore. Bubbly, a touch timid, yet unwaveringly determined, she reminds us that revolutions are carried not only by those who march, but by those who record, preserve, and give language to the movementâ??s heartbeat.
- **Brandi Porter** as Dudley Malone and Jenny Ashman as President Woodrow Wilson provide textured, compelling counterpoints to the suffragistsâ??a duet of establishment voices set against the rising call for change. Their performances sharpen the stakes and expand the world of the play.

These are not just performances; they are acts of remembering.

A woman in period costume stands at the forefront, holding a book and looking confidently at the audience. Maya Keleher as Alice Paul and SUFFS Company. PC: Joan Marcus

The design of *Suffs* is unified in vision and purpose, each element amplifying the storyâ??s emotional and political charge. **Lighting by Lap Chi Chu** is exceptional; the use of backlighting and silhouettes turns illumination into metaphor, revealing both the individual and the collective within each scene. The play of shadow and stark white light underscores the duality at the heart of the show: this is a movement of many voices, but each one burns distinctly.

Jason Crystal's sound design is clean and resonant, allowing every harmony, protest chant, and whispered prayer to carry clearly through the theater. **Christine Peters's scenic design** for the tour is elegant in its restraint—minimal but imaginative—giving the performers room to command the stage while moments of spectacle, like Inez Milholland's iconic white horse, strike with mythic force.

Paul Tazewell's costumes serve as a visual language of transformation: the suffragists's regal purples speak of dignity and defiance, while the washed-out grays of the imprisoned women quietly convey endurance and grief. Together, under **Leigh Silverman's direction**, these choices coalesce into a tableau that feels both historical and urgently alive—a world lit, scored, and stitched together by women who refused to disappear into the margins of history.

The orchestra, led by **Music Director and Conductor Dani Lee Hutch**, with **Associate Conductor Kerianne Brennan** on keyboard, **Edward Hamilton** on acoustic and electric bass, and **Daniel Santiago** on drums, weaves a lush and varied soundscape that grounds the production. Under **Andrea Grody's expert music supervision**, the score glows with texture and balance, its harmonies alternately shimmering and dissonant, evoking both beauty and unrest. The voices that fill the theater are unmistakably powerful and unapologetically feminine, carrying the emotional weight of the story.

Historical poster depicting the torture of women in prison, highlighting the struggle for women's suffrage. This ca. 1910 poster by the National Women's Social and Political Union dramatically illustrates prison torture allegations. (Courtesy of Library of Congress) [Enlarge Image](#)

The hard parts the show refuses to sand down

What elevates *Suffs* beyond civics-page inspiration is its willingness to stage the contradictions within the movement itself. During America's racial nadir—the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when Jim Crow laws, racial terror, and disenfranchisement intensified—white suffragists debated whether Black women could march. Mary Church Terrell led anyway, straddling loyalty and exhaustion. When Taub's characters sing, "Why are you fighting me? I'm not the enemy," it lands with a sting of recognition. The show captures the intimate pain of movements fracturing from within—the friction between women whose visions of justice diverge, even as their goals align.

Three women in period costumes representing suffragists, engaged in a moment of emotion on stage. Danyel Fulton as Ida B. Wells, Trisha Jeffrey as Mary Church Terrell, Victoria Pekel as Phyllis Terrell. PC: Joan Marcus

Taub also refuses to let the story end in triumph. The Silent Sentinels's 18-month picket of the White House—the arrests, the hunger strikes, the force-feedings—are staged as acts of both courage and trauma. When the 19th Amendment finally passes, the victory feels uneasy: exhilarating, yes, but shadowed by the erasure of Black and Indigenous women, whose votes would remain obstructed for decades. Even Alice Paul's determination to begin the next fight, for the Equal Rights Amendment, reads as both visionary and tragic.

Does *Suffs* capture every racial complexity of the suffrage movement? Of course not—and that's precisely the point. Its power lies not in completion, but in confrontation: a willingness to reveal the fractures that history so often smooths over.

A performer in period costume passionately singing on stage, with flags in the background, portraying

Monica Tulia Rameriz as Inez Milholland. PC: Joan Marcus

â??Great American Bitchâ??: Irony, Reclamation, and the Politics of Voice

Taubâ??s â??Great American Bitchâ?• transforms one of the most charged words in the English language into a defiant anthem of liberation. Its biting humor and bold theatricality reclaim *bitch* from the archive of insult, turning it into a rallying cry for self-definition. What was once a weapon of control becomes a badge of defianceâ??wielded with irony, rhythm, and unapologetic joy.

The title itself is a provocation. By pairing *Great American* with *Bitch*, Taub mirrors the contradictions of democracy: a nation that celebrates freedom while policing the behavior of women. To be â??great,â?• the song insists, is to dissent, to make noise when silence is expected. The ensembleâ??s joyful profanity becomes a kind of patriotismâ??a reclamation of both voice and nation. The drinking-game refrainâ??â??Drink if theyâ??ve called you a nagâ?! a slutâ?! a shrewâ?•â??turns insult into ritual, shame into solidarity. The laughter that follows is subversive, a shared release from centuries of constraint.

A scene from the musical 'Suffs' featuring a group of women in period costumes, with one woman singing. Joyce Meimei Zheng as Ruza Wenclawska and SUFFS Company. PC: Joan Marcus

Musically, â??Great American Bitchâ?• struts between vaudeville parody and barroom anthem, collapsing a century of feminist struggle into one irreverent, full-throated shout. It sounds like something that should be sung in a barâ??raucous, defiant, and unashamedly fun. When Lucy hesitatesâ??â??Iâ??m sorry, honestly I just donâ??t love that wordâ?•â??the moment acknowledges the unease of reclamation. But that hesitation dissolves in collective insistence as the women raise their glasses: â??Hereâ??s to our coven, and long may we love to bewitch.â?• Their voices, layered in harmony and laughter, transform the slur into a spell of resistance.

By the final note, irony has done its work. *Bitch* no longer woundsâ??it roars. Taubâ??s satire isnâ??t mere comic relief but a rhetorical strike: through humor, she exposes the fragility of the systems that sought to define womenâ??s worth, and through song, she imagines a democracy wide enough to hold womenâ??s rage, pleasure, and joy.

â??I Was Hereâ?• and the Desire to Leave a Mark

â??I Was Hereâ?• closes the show as a quiet, collective hymn to remembrance rather than triumph. Its plainspoken sincerity transforms personal vow into generational chorus.

â??I want my mother to know I was hereâ?;
I want my sisters to know I was hereâ?;
I want my great-granddaughter to know I was hereâ?!â?•

The song reframes legacy through relationship rather than fameâ??a lineage of women who built the foundations of freedom without ever seeing its full fruition. Each repetition, *I was here*, becomes both archive and affirmation: an insistence that visibility itself is resistance.

By the end of the song, I found myself thinking about my own ancestors—the ones whose names were never written down. The song felt less like a finale and more like a shared benediction, reminding us that history moves forward only because someone dared to leave their mark.

A historical photograph of a suffrage parade featuring a woman in a long white dress riding a white horse. [Inez Milholland Boissevain, wearing white cape, seated on white horse at the National American Woman Suffrage Association parade, March 3, 1913.](#)

Lessons for 2025

For younger audiences (the show is recommended for ages 10+), *Suffs* is as educational as it is galvanizing—a blueprint for civic engagement built on disagreement, fatigue, and persistence. For adults, it holds up a mirror: the same tensions over strategy, race, and respectability that divided the suffrage movement still shape activism today.

More than a century later, the Equal Rights Amendment remains unratified, and familiar questions persist about whose feminism counts, who's too angry, or who's gone too far. Watching *Suffs* the same month a national newspaper asked if women had ruined the workplace, the show feels less like a history lesson than a dispatch from the present. The work of equality, it reminds us, is not a completed project—it's a conversation that refuses to end. Beautifully sung and fiercely felt, *Suffs* leaves you with one lingering message: the work isn't done. And neither are we.

A scene from the musical *Suffs*, depicting a diverse group of women activists dressed in early 20th-century attire. Photo by Danyel Fulton as Ida B. Wells and SUFFS Company. PC: Joan Marcus

The end of the row

At the close, Alice Paul quotes her mother: "When you put your hand to the plow, you can't put it down until you get to the end of the row." In 2025, that row stretches farther than ever—past Dobbs, past the pay gap, past the persistent absence of women in top political office.

So, did women ruin the workplace? *Suffs* answers with a laugh and a hymn. What women ruined, if anything, was the illusion that equality could exist without confrontation. What they built instead—through exhaustion, conflict, and song—was the unfinished architecture of freedom.

"Keep marching," the cast sings. Not as a slogan. As an imperative.

Show Information: *Suffs*

Venue: Eccles Theater, Salt Lake City, Utah

Run Dates: November 11–16, 2025

Showtimes: Weekdays at 7:00 p.m.; Weekends at 7:30 p.m.

Running Time: Approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes, including one intermission.

Tickets: \$45–\$145, available at [Broadway-at-the-Eccles.com](https://www.broadway-at-the-eccles.com) or by calling 801-355-ARTS (2787).

Accessibility: ASL-interpreted and captioned performances available. Student discounts are available for every performance one hour before the performance with a student ID. For accessibility assistance,

contact artix@saltlakecountyarts.org.

For information about SUFFS visit suffsmusical.com. Follow on [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#), [X](#), [YouTube](#), and [Facebook](#) @SUFFSMusical

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Collage of cast members from the musical [_Suffs_](#), showcasing headshots of female actors including

A promotional image featuring the cast members of the musical [Suffs](#), with individual headshots of e

Special events: Free

Eccles Theater's McCarthy Plaza Free Event (All are welcome)

Friday, November 14th from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Saturday, November 15th from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

The Voices of Women Festival features a who's who of local women's organizations, community groups, Better Days and Utah Women's History Initiative, along with women-owned businesses. Together, they celebrate Utah's women as leaders and pioneers for equality. Join in the fun with family-friendly activities, live music, fascinating historical exhibits, captivating storytelling, inspiring special speakers, and a surge of pride in our Utah heritage.

[More info](#)

Graphic promoting the Voices of Women Festival, featuring silhouettes of three women with the tagline

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1. Reviews
2. Musicals

Tags

1. 19th Amendment
2. Alice Paul
3. Broadway
4. Broadway at the Eccles
5. Broadway National Tour
6. Eccles Theater
7. Equal Rights Amendment
8. Feminist Broadway Musical
9. Feminist Theatre
10. Ida B. Wells
11. Intersectional Feminism
12. Keola Kinghorn
13. Keolanani Kinghorn
14. Leigh Silverman
15. performance as archive
16. political theatre
17. Review
18. Salt Lake City
19. Salt Lake City Arts
20. Salt Lake City Theatre
21. Shaina Taub

- 22. Suffrage Movement
- 23. Suffs
- 24. Suffs Eccles Theater
- 25. Suffs Musical
- 26. Suffs Musical Review
- 27. Suffs National Tour
- 28. Theatre
- 29. Theatre Review
- 30. Tony Award Musical
- 31. Utah theatre
- 32. Women in Theatre
- 33. Women's History
- 34. Women's Rights

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keola06

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