

Better Days 2020 Reading Club

WEEK 7

THE GREAT SUFFRAGE PARADE OF 1913

The day before President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration in 1913, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) held a parade down Washington, DC's Pennsylvania Avenue in support of a constitutional women's suffrage amendment. It was the first large, organized, political march on the capital in U.S. history. The parade was organized by Alice Paul, who had studied in England and recently returned full of new ideas to invigorate the U.S. suffrage movement. Seven sections of marchers, from different states and professions, made their way down America's main street accompanied by floats, women on horseback, and actresses enacting symbolic scenes.

The parade was quite a spectacle. It was also a mess, as onlookers blocked the parade route and tripped and heckled marchers. But the resulting media coverage kept suffrage in the news for weeks. Due to disagreements over the parade, Alice Paul and others split off from NAWSA later that year, beginning a tradition of going straight to Congress and the President to fight for their political rights. The parade changed the future of suffrage in America in a single day.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How did the parade change the future of women's suffrage?
- What symbolism and imagery were used in the parade?
- Why were race relations a particularly fine point during this era of the suffrage movement?