Women Fight for the Right to Vote

It is 1912. Every year, since 1869 (when Wyoming became the first territory to grant female suffrage), women from the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)—and their predecessors—have traveled to Washington, D.C.

What was the purpose of those many trips? To present petitions, requesting the federal government to give American women the right to vote.

Despite millions of signatures on the petitions, every year the women are turned down. Members of Congress think so little of their request that not a single petition has ever been debated in the House of Representatives.

Then, in November of 1912, Alice Paul has an idea. Woodrow Wilson has just been elected President, and his inauguration will take place on March 4th. What if the suffragists also hold a parade on the same day (or the day before)?

We learn more details about the event from the Library of Congress:

> *In November 1912, as suffrage leaders were casting about for new means to ensure their victory, Alice Paul arrived at the NAWSA annual convention in Philadelphia. A twenty-eight-year-old Quaker from New Jersey, she had recently returned to the United States fresh from helping the militant branch of the British suffrage movement. She had been arrested repeatedly, been imprisoned, gone on a hunger strike, and been forcibly fed, an experience she described in an interview as "revolting."*
>
> *Paul was full of ideas for the American movement. She asked to be allowed to organize a suffrage parade to be held in Washington at the time of the president's inauguration, thus ensuring maximum press attention. NAWSA accepted her offer when she promised to raise the necessary funds and gave her the title chairman of the Congressional Committee.*
>
> *In December 1912, she moved to Washington where she discovered that the committee she chaired had no headquarters and most of the members had moved away or died.*

Life was not easy for women who were trying to change the system. Alice and her friends were about to experience significant resistance, including from the American federal government.

See, also:

Alice Paul and Lucy Burns - Building the Base

Suffragette Parade - March 13, 1913

Success and Resistance - Alice Paul Keeps Fighting

Breaking Ranks within the Women's Movement

Lucy Burns - Let's Picket the White House

Lucy Burns and Alice Paul - Advocates for Women

Lucy Burns - Imprisoned at the Occoquan Workhouse

Alice Paul - Imprisoned

Alice Paul - Force Feeding

Victory - The 19th Amendment is Ratified

Credits:

Clip from "Iron-Jawed Angels" (2004), an HBO film about suffragettes fighting for a constitutional amendment, giving American women the right to vote.

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Director:

Katja von Garnier

Producers:
Len Amato
Lydia Dean Pilcher
Robin Forman
Paula Weinstein

Writers:
Sally Robinson
Eugenia Bostwick-Singer
Raymond Singer
Jennifer Friedes

Starring:

Hilary Swank - Alice Paul
Frances O'Connor - Lucy Burns
Molly Parker - Emily Leighton (a fictional character portrayed as a senator's wife)
Laura Fraser - Doris Stevens
Lois Smith - Rev. Dr. Anna Howard Shaw
Vera Farmiga - Ruza Wenclawska (also known as Rose Winslow)
Brooke Smith - Mabel Vernon
Patrick Dempsey - Ben Weissman (a fictional character)
Julia Ormond - Inez Milholland
Adilah Barnes - Ida Wells-Barnett
Anjelica Huston - Carrie Chapman Catt

Music:
Reinhold Heil
Johnny Klimek

Cinematography:
Robbie Greenberg

Editing:
Hans Funck

Distributor:
HBO Films

Release date:
February 15, 2004

Running time:
125 minutes

Quoted passages from an article by Sheridan Harvey, online at the Library of Congress - American Memory - web site.

For more details about this period of American history, as women struggled for the right to vote, see this American Memory story (in PDF format) from the Library of Congress.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Women-Fight-for-the-Right-to-Vote

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Women-Fight-for-the-Right-to-Vote