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The 100-Year March: Celebrating Delta Sigma Theta and Alice Paul

March 5, 2013 By [Kate Noftsinger](#) [Leave a Comment](#)



While celebrating the past this weekend at the

Suffrage Centennial Celebration, women were also looking toward the future, as “there is still more to accomplish.” Or, as members of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority say, “We’ve got work to do.”

The Deltas were commemorating their own 100-year anniversary while hosting a re-enactment of Alice Paul’s century-old parade in Washington, D.C. In 1913, the march for women’s suffrage was the newly formed organization’s first public event. The only African American women asked to join, they were also told to march in the back.

Yesterday, Deltas were at the front, leading the way down Pennsylvania Avenue. Proud sorority members carried a banner that read “Tracing the Footsteps of Our Founders.” But they weren’t the only ones reliving the past.

Members of the National Organization for Women, the League of Women Voters, the National Women’s History Museum and several other women’s organizations joined the Deltas—many dressed as suffragists. Sashes and historically inspired hats were plentiful, as were signs demanding votes for women.



“Alice Paul” was in attendance, dressed in white and waving her flag, surrounded by those grateful for her many sacrifices. Paul endured imprisonment and force-feedings as she fearlessly pursued passage of the 19th amendment.

Another source of inspiration was Inez Milholland. Recognized as a Joan of Arc figure, Milholland rode a white horse through the 1913 parade. Despite her crippling anemia, Milholland traveled around the country promoting women’s rights. Her last words, before she died in 1916 at the age of 30, were “Mr. President, how long must women wait for liberty?”

Women would wait four additional years to be enfranchised.

Reverend Dr. Gwendolyn Boyd, former president of Delta Sigma Theta and chairwoman of the group’s centennial celebration, welcomed many special guests, including descendants of the international sorority’s

founders and descendants of the original suffragists.

One after another, exceptional women spoke at the steps of the Capitol. Boyd introduced her friend, [Cathy Lanier](#), a self-described teen mother with a 9th grade education who went on to earn two master's degrees and a very prestigious position: Lanier became the Metropolitan Police Department of D.C.'s first woman Chief of Police in 2007.

Provoking others to dream big, she told the crowd, "For those of you with your sights set on the White House, I look forward to escorting you down Pennsylvania Avenue."

U.S. Rep. [Joyce Beatty](#) from Ohio joined her sorority sisters on stage and praised the founders for their bravery. With the help of 22 re-enactors dressed as Delta Sigma Theta's original members, the crowd was reminded that these young collegiate women couldn't leave campus without their male chaperon—a Howard University professor.

A sea of red, accented with purple and yellow, covered the lawn of the Capitol Building. Snow started to fall just before the march began, but this demonstration could not be stopped. Participants insisted they were



“fired up and ready to go.”

After passing by the White House, the parade ended with a rally in front of the Washington Monument, where speakers were careful to qualify their congratulatory statements.

As they mentioned the recent passing of the [Violence Against Women Act](#) and the record number of women in [Congress](#), everyone's sights were set on making additional progress. In hopes of furthering women's rights, the to-do list included securing [voting rights](#), earning [equal pay](#) for equal work, building a [women's history museum](#) in the national mall—and, of course, electing the first [woman president](#).

Like the Deltas said, "We've got work to do." But rest assured, it will get done.

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