



Community Voices

“Women’s March Address” Introduction

By Laura Herbek

Like King’s “I Have a Dream,” Kelly Bushnell’s “Women’s March Address” advocates peaceful assembly as a means of achieving justice. On January 21, 2017, a crowd of 2,000 demonstrators gathered in downtown Pensacola’s Plaza de Luna during an organized march in support of women’s rights. Bushnell began her address to the crowd by submitting the words of fellow demonstrators, who were marching because “if we don’t now, we might not get another chance” and because “sexual assault has become a rite of passage for women in this country.”

Bushnell’s speech is powerful in part because of its kairotic moment. Bushnell reminded her audience of Pensacola’s “difficult and even violent history” by referencing events such as “the lynchings of black men just blocks away in Plaza Ferdinand” and “the arson of the women’s clinic on 9th Avenue just five years ago this week.” Bushnell acknowledged that marching in Pensacola “means more. It demands more courage.” This concept was further amplified by the rainy weather that speakers and demonstrators alike endured that day.

The Pensacola Women’s March occurred in solidarity with the larger Women’s March on Washington. As an official “sister march,” Pensacola’s event demonstrated *ethos* by following the general guidelines outlined by Women’s March DC organizers. Out of respect for these guiding principles, Bushnell stressed hope, inclusiveness, and unity in her speech. Though some audience members expressed anger and frustration at the rhetoric of the newly-formed Trump administration, “Women’s March Address” avoided confronting President Trump by name in favor of emphasizing social justice and grassroots activism.

Pensacola Women’s March Address

By Kelly Bushnell

21 January 2017

I want to begin not with my own words, but with yours. One of the best things about organizing this march is that Janet



and I have gotten to meet so many women and allies in this community and learn their stories. Sarah says she is marching so her LGBT, nonwhite, and non-Christian friends know they have an ally in her. Carol is marching for her wife, sisters, students, for access to healthcare, and because Black Lives Matter. Karen wrote to say she is marching because she's 67 and doesn't want to see us go backwards. And Margaret commented simply, "Same age! Same reason!" Sandra is marching "because if we don't now, we might not get another chance." Azura is marching for her missing and murdered trans and Native sisters, because if we don't keep them in our memory they will find no justice. Vickie is marching for those who can't: the hardworking single moms and dads, our undocumented neighbors, the differently abled, the tired, the poor. Nancy is marching because she hopes this will be her last march. Jessica is marching because surviving sexual assault has become a rite of passage for women in this country. Amanda says she is marching because she has feet!

And here in Pensacola is a particularly historic place to march. Only a hundred years separates us from the lynchings of black men just blocks away in Plaza Ferdinand under Jim Crow. There are people here today who remember a legally racially segregated Pensacola. There are people here today who remember the police raids on local gay bars in the 1970s and who remember the clinic bombings of 1984 and the doctors and escorts murdered in the early 1990s. And many of us remember the arson of the women's clinic on 9th Avenue just five years ago this week.

But there are also people here today who remember the lunch counter sit-ins of the 1960s on Palafox. Or that those raids on the gay bars in the 1970s led to Pensacola's being an LGBT vacation destination on Memorial Day weekend. There are people here today who marched with the National Organization for Women after the clinic murders and who marched for immigrants' rights in MLK Plaza in 2006.

Marching here, with this city's often difficult and even violent history, is different than other places. It means more. And it demands more courage. Thank you for having the courage today to march for our sisters, and especially for our daughters and our students. Many of the veterans marching today have told me they feel it is their patriotic duty to do this, to hold this country to the ideals it stands for, and I'm reminded of a speech by President Obama in which he says that loving your country isn't just fireworks on the fourth of the July: "Loving your country must mean ac-

cepting your responsibility to do your part to change it. If you do,” he says, “your life will be richer, and our country will be stronger.” We are already 2,300 voices stronger together, to add to the 1 and a half million others doing this very same thing today.

As you heard—and certainly already knew—being a woman is not a monolithic identity. Though unity is our goal, it is just as important to celebrate our intersectionality and the incredible diversity of women’s roles in their communities, because it is our differences which make our unity meaningful, and our willingness to fight for our sisters from all communities.

We must remember, for instance, that the 19th Amendment in 1920 only granted white women the right to vote. For Native women, it was 1924. For Asian women: 1952. For black women: not until 1964. The march toward equality must not leave any women behind again. As Audre Lorde writes, “I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.”

I have also heard the anger in your voices as you tell us why you march. As a woman and an American, I am angry too. The most vulnerable among us have not only been insulted and threatened by the rhetoric of the past year, but that rhetoric has been normalized as permissible political discourse. I don’t accept that. And if you’re here, I don’t think you do either. It’s a tall order to turn anger into empowerment and empowerment into real change. We can only do it together, and not by putting aside our differences but by embracing them.

I’m still angry—but for the first time in a long time, looking at this incredible gathering of powerful women and allies, seeing your kids over there playing in the puddles, for the first time in a long time I also feel hopeful. I see a sea of women and allies who are ready for the fight: to stand in solidarity with women and marginalized communities for our rights, our health, and our safety, especially those most targeted by current or proposed legislation. Trans women and men: we will be with you—and pee with you—in any bathroom in this country. Muslim friends: if they try to register you, they’ll have to register us all. Immigrant neighbors: welcome to your new home. It needs some work, but that’s what friends are for, and you have a lot of friends. And they—we—are ready to make history in Pensacola and across our country. I’m so proud to make history with you today.