NWSA Statement on the End of 45’s Presidency and the Start of a New Chapter in History

Dear NWSA Community,

In 1972, as President Joseph R. Biden entered the Senate for the first time and Vice-President Kamala D. Harris started second grade, Representative Shirley Chisholm mounted her presidential campaign, becoming the first African American to seek the presidential office. She competed against a field of white men who did not take her or her campaign seriously. One in particular was George Wallace, the racist white supremacist governor of Alabama who once called for “segregation today, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever” and who, by the end, was supporting her bid. Chisholm’s “Unbought and Unbossed” campaign was primarily supported and funded by Black women, including members of her sorority, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Chisholm was known for her unconventional style (in other words, she was a Black woman who did not back down in the face of racism and sexism). She was bold. She was brilliant. She argued that if they do not give you a seat at the table, you should bring a folding chair. She spoke out against racism, stating that it was so universal in this country, so widespread, and deep-seated, that it was invisible because it was so normal. Chisholm said she ran for multiple reasons—not just to win the nomination and challenge Richard Nixon but to shift the prevailing belief that only white men could run for president. Chisholm said she ran to show that it could be done. Shirley Chisholm made herstory, standing tall, unmoved, and unafraid.

I thought about Shirley Chisholm all-day yesterday as I watched the inauguration and noted that Vice President Harris; former First Lady Michelle Obama (who always comes to slay); Former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton; and Senator Elizabeth Warren all wore purple. Now I am not sure if they did as a sign of bipartisanship (as red + blue = purple) or if it was done as a sign of respect, a nod, to the U.S Suffrage Movement that used purple, white, and gold as their colors. I prefer to believe it was the latter as it was the work of Shirley Chisholm and so many suffragists that opened the door and left it cracked so that other people—who are neither white nor cis-male—could kick it open and take their seat at the table to be in the room where it happens.

On this first morning of a brand-new day in America, the National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA) celebrates the opportunity for those of us on the freedom side to be struggling toward liberation from an offensive stance, as opposed to a completely defensive one. After four years of darkness and despair, it felt good to wake up this morning and see a glimpse of the sun again. As we prepare to continue to fight alongside each other to change this country, we invite you to join us in our struggle. This
year, we will host a series of Kitchen Table Talks, virtual get-togethers, and a virtual Conference, and we need your financial support.

Join us tonight as NWSA partners with the Karson Institute for Race, Peace, and Social Justice to host the Coffee and Convo: A Discussion about Agency, Activism, and the Struggle for Democracy with NWSA President Dr. Karsonya Wise Whitehead and NWSA’s former president Dr. Barbara Ransby. The event will begin at 7p EST and is free and open to the public, but registration is required.

Bending Toward Social Justice,
Karsonya Wise Whitehead, Ph.D., NWSA President

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