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Dean Melanie Leslie's Remarks for the Launch of Women's Votes, Women's Voices: The 19th Amendment at 100 June 4, 2019

Good evening. Thank you for joining us for the launch of *Women's Votes, Women's Voices: The 19th Amendment at 100*. It's fitting that we're here tonight. There were many events that led to the passage of the amendment that granted women the right to vote, but there are some that are tied here, to New York City, to Greenwich Village, and even to the stretch of 5th Avenue in front of this very building.

Before the Constitution was written, First Lady Abigail Adams wrote to her husband to "Remember the ladies." Those three words were followed by the warning: "If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws which we have no voice or representation." That warning echoed through the nineteenth century and rang clear in Greenwich Village in the aftermath of March 25, 1911 when 146 garment factory workers died in the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, the vast majority of them young, immigrant women. For their contemporaries, it was impossible to not remember those ladies. Labor organizers organized protests and strikes that led to new laws in New York that would protect factory workers. As Dr. Paley will discuss later, after cutting their teeth on that issue, the ladies turned to suffrage. Among them was New York attorney Inez Milholland.

Before Inez Milholland led the 1913 Women's Suffrage parade in Washington DC, before she was the powerful speaker for the National Women's Party and garnered support for a federal amendment in the Western states, before she collapsed during a speech and passed away, making her a martyr to the

movement, Inez marched in a suffrage parade in New York City. On May 4th 1912, the parade began at Washington Square Park and continued up Fifth Avenue, past where we gather tonight. Like the suffrage parades that came before and after, there were banners. One in this particular parade read: “Women Suffrage has passed the stage of argument. You could not stop it if you would, and in a few years you will be ashamed that you ever opposed it.” There were 10,000 protesters marching with spectators watching from the streets and windows. A report from the parade told of a woman spectator who complained that the male spectators weren’t cheering the parade. (Women would be expected to cheer if the men were marching.) A man answered, “Madam, they cannot be expected to cheer, they are very, very busy thinking. Your parade is making the men think.”

These parades made many people think. The 1913 parade in Washington, DC, timed to draw attention from Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration, was an event that showed the rising power of suffragettes like Alice Paul and Lucy Burns who believed that a federal amendment was the best means to grant women the right to vote. This was a break from the state-by-state campaign favored by the National American Women’s Suffrage Association. Inez joined Alice and Lucy’s National Women’s Party and devoted her life to the cause. After her death, she still continued to inspire. At her memorial service on December 25, 1916 those gathered drafted what are referred to as the Milholland Resolutions. Those resolutions calling for a federal amendment were presented to President Woodrow Wilson on January 9, 1917. Wilson not only refused to support the amendment, he walked out on the delegation of women. On January 10, enraged by the Office of the President’s stance on women, the Silent Sentinels took up their picketing posts outside the White House. Those Silent Sentinels fulfilled the promise Abigail Adams made 141 years prior, and echoed through the waves of women who descended on Washington DC a century and 11 days later.

Inez Milholland marched in many parades. While the image of her on the white horse from the 1913 Washington DC parade may be her calling card, many have written about the banner they had seen her carry in other parades: “Forward out of error, leave behind the night. Forward through the darkness, forward into light.” The story of the 19th Amendment is one of forward movement. As we look back on its legacy we can acknowledge that the forward movement did not mean that we left behind error or darkness. The suffrage movement did not exist in a vacuum. Issues concerning race, class, sexual orientation, and gender identity existed within the suffrage movement. Passing the 19th Amendment was not a cure-all for American women. Many women were still not able to exercise the right to vote. The 19th Amendment was a step toward light, but, as we will examine throughout this series, there are still many steps we must continue to take as we make our way through the darkness.

In 1912, a parade marched up 5th Avenue that made people think. Today marks 100 years since Congress passed the 19th amendment. Throughout this next year, I call on you to think. Think on how far we’ve come. Think of how far we’ve yet to go. Think of what we can do today that will make a difference to those marking the 200th anniversary. Tonight is just the start. I hope you will join us throughout the next year as we examine the pivotal roles of women in our society, our evolving definitions of gender, and how the law is adapting to these changes.

This evening Councilwoman Carlina Rivera will present a proclamation recognizing and commending the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law for our commemoration of the 19th Amendment. After Councilwoman Rivera offers a few words, Professor Kate Shaw will discuss reproductive activists in our current political environment. Dr. Valerie Paley’s remarks will follow, focusing on the young,

immigrant social movement trailblazers I mentioned before, and why we should care about anti-suffrage arguments now. We will end the evening with a reception.

I am so thrilled that you could join us this evening. I would like to thank Dr. Selma Botman, Provost of Yeshiva University for joining us this evening. I would also like to give a special welcome to Cardozo's May students—you picked a great year to start at Cardozo. I hope to see everyone here tonight at our future events. There is a lot of ground for *Women's Votes*, *Women's Voices* to cover and we hope you will join us on the journey.