

SHE IS ELLA

Rena Reid, Diversity and Inclusion Committee

Have you ever wondered how many people have touched the same ground you walk on? As I move through the streets of Pittsburgh, I cannot help but imagine whose footsteps my feet are planted in as I stroll through the snow – whose soul has first etched the same path that I am walking. Are their life stories written in gold and seeped in the never-ending stories of the world, or are they forgotten, already withered in the minds of those who are long gone? There is one story that has not been adequately told. This story is Ella's.

Ella, born to sharecroppers in a family of eight, had a dream of being an educator. Education was something she never took lightly. But in the 1900s, there were limited options for where a black girl could attend. After graduating high school, she worked as a bookkeeper in a pharmacy. This was where she changed her career path and was driven to become a pharmacist. The now known University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy was where she turned to earn her pharmacy degree. She graduated with high marks as the first black female graduate from the school, becoming the first black female licensed pharmacist in Pennsylvania and one of the first in the country.

If only it was that easy... the year is 1914. Deep racism, hatred, and oppression covers America. specifically, the University of Pittsburgh. After applying several times to the School of Pharmacy, Ella was denied because of the color of her skin and her gender. The School stated there was no room for her there and admissions were closed. But Ella had a drive, she had a passion, and she had a fight. She continued to apply. Eventually, she was accepted into the school. While a student, she was segregated from the rest of her classmates. At this time, the school was organized with whites up front, Jews after, then Blacks in the back. Ella graduated in 1916 where she continued to work as a

pharmacist, businesswoman, civil rights activist, women's rights leader, and a spokeswoman across the globe.

I, a black woman student pharmacist at the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy, have never heard of Ella P. Stewart. I, a black woman student pharmacist at the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy have heard of Jonas Salk, a white man. I have heard of Larry Merlo... another white man. Long story short, I have heard the names of many white men listed as "noteworthy alumni". The problem is that the name of Ella P. Stewart is not recognized nearly to the extent that this school is capable of.

Ella P. Stewart in her lifetime was President of National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACWC) Inc., served as a delegate for NACWC on the International Council of Women of the World, and is featured on the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame, the National Advisory Committee on the White House Committee on Aging, the Women's Advisory Committee on U.S. Defense Manpower by the U.S. Department of Labor, and the Executive Board of the U.S. Commission of United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and goodwill ambassador for the U.S. Department of State. The School of Pharmacy named Ella P. Stewart a distinguished alumna in 1969.

That is not nearly enough for the woman who overcame barriers, one being the School of Pharmacy, to fight racism and sexism. She paved the way for black females and, in her legacy, has shown that education is a tool that can be used to uplift the oppressed.

But this story is not only Ella's. It is the story of Claudette Colvin, Charlotta Bass, Madam C.J. Walker, Tarana Burke, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tameti, Jalaiah Harmon, missing black women attacked and killed by police, and this story is mine. Black women's accolades have continuously been

wiped from history. There is a lack of awareness that black women face every day in America — one that Ella P. Stewart is experiencing now: black women erasure. It is not only the case of Ella's, but also what I am experiencing. A male counterpart's name is remembered, a white male's name is embroidered. This must change. She must be honored and recognized for her achievements. She must be used as a beacon for all students to show that adversity exists, and it will be overcome. And she is Ella.