THE ART OF VOTING

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THE 15TH AMENDMENT AT 150

March 30, 2020 marked the 150th anniversary of the 15th Amendment's ratification. The Amendment prohibited the denial of citizens' right to vote based upon "race, color, or previous condition of servitude" in America, and its passage reflected the nation's reckoning with the causes and results of the Civil War.

Those who lived under oppressive Black Codes that limited employment, wages, and access to legal standing, sought the rights of United States citizens. Stopgap measures, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1866, attempted to guarantee citizenship rights immediately following the Civil War. However, Black Americans and Abolitionist advocates, feared future repeal of these laws. To enshrine these basic citizenship rights, Congress passed the 13th and 14th Amendments to end involuntary servitude "in cases other than used as punishment for a crime" and create birthright and naturalized citizenship. These measures affirmed the legal rights of Black men and women, including rights to personal property and equal standing in the law.

Extending suffrage to Black men was a hard-won fight. Universal suffrage and prohibiting barriers such as poll taxes and literacy tests were denied as the amendment was debated in Congress. Advocates of women's suffrage fractured over supporting the 15th Amendment after voting rights for women were not included.

Though officially ratified 70 January 1870, the Amendment was contested by Secretary of State Hamilton Fish on March 30, as 4 states, one the 25th state to ratify the amendment, dung up on January 19, 1870.

> "The State of Kansas, the first to intend to ratify the fifteen amendment, has, owing to some informality, let safely among the best, Tennessee placed herself right upon the record, and stands committed in favor of universal suffrage. The fifteenth amendment was yesterday ratified by the House of Representatives with but an insignificant vote (in opposition, it having already been ratified by the Senate. 'We need gore' searching on.'
>
> The Lawrence Tribune, Jan 20, 1870

"FRAGILE"
Ursula Minor, 2019

"The piece speaks to the struggle it took to get the right to vote and persistence in the fight for the right to vote. The clear ballot represents the fragility of the right that was granted"

- Ursula Minor

QR CODE

Scan the QR Code and listen as Ursula Minor discusses the meaning of her sculpture, "Fragile."

Ursula Minor, 3D mixed media artist from Lawrence KS, Using various found, edible beads, jewelry, and found objects, she creates colorful one of a kind pieces. Ursula is a self-taught artist who is passionate about her work.

You may contact Ursula at ursaminoraart@gmail.com

"THE PROGRESSIVE BATTLE"
Rachel Trusty, 2019

"The intention of this piece Dire Prerequisites Battle, is meant to show the ongoing struggle for suffrage in the United States. While history books mark certain moments such as the passage of the 15th and 19th Amendments, the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1965 and 1968, the struggle to gain suffrage and the push to vote continues to be an ongoing movement for both progress and equity."

- Rachel Trusty

THE DENIAL OF RIGHTS

The 15th Amendment didn't protect voting rights, it prevented the denial of rights. But even so, enrolling, the refusal by some states to enforce the order, and southern "Black Codes" attempting to reenact pre-war slavery restrictions, motivated congress to take additional action.

The Enforcement Act of 1870 and the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1872 were created by congress to provide Black men in the south some measure of support to access their rights of citizenship.

LITERACY TESTS, POLL TAXES, & GRANDFATHER CLAUSES

When Federal support of Reconstruction ended in the 1870s, southern states began to enact voting laws and poll taxes that prevented Black men from voting.

But in some areas of the country literacy tests had the effect of also preventing illiterate white voters from voting, so state legislatures created grandfather clauses. These clauses allowed exemption to literacy tests if the voter could prove their grandfather legally voted.

As nearly all the grandparents of Black citizens in 1915 had been either enslaved or not recognized as citizens, they were unable to vote.

In 1915, the Supreme Court decided grandfather clauses were violations of the 15th Amendment.

"The images on this timeline go off the right and left sides of the panel to illustrate that the struggle to gain personhood and the rights that come with that is the US began before the 15th Amendment and continue today and into the future."

- Rachel Trusty

Many early voter suppression laws, including literacy tests, lasted into the 1960s.

During the Civil Rights movement of the 60's, organizers voiced the need for continued protection from voter suppression. These demonstrations led to two important legislative actions: In 1962, the 24th Amendment abolished poll taxes. Then, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was enacted, seeking to eliminate the last measures of unequal access to the ballot box.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Rachel Trusty is an artist, art educator, and independent curator originally from central Arkansas. Her artwork and curatorial practice is conceptual, focused on making techniques, queer art history, and on gendered maternality. Trusty currently resides in Lawrence, KS and attends the PhD program in Women, Gender, and Sexuality at the University of Kansas.

QR CODE

Scan the QR Code and listen as Rachel discusses her work.

> "The operation of equal human rights and equal citizenship rights, the maintenance of operation and fidelity to the democratic ideal and equal and exact justice for all are indispensable to the highest development.
>
> Therefore, let all your action be in the interest of multicultural liberty and the vindication of the equal rights of all mankind, using the term in its most comprehensive sense.
>
> Adrian Cox, Senior Henry quotes in the Daily Kansas Tribune, Sept. 15, 1869

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