This month, as we celebrate the freedoms conferred by the hard work and moral commitments of our forebears, we are reminded that, as William Faulkner wrote, "the past is never dead, it’s not even past."

We still are bearing the fruits of their civic labors, and this month we observe the anniversaries of the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Their sacrifices for us live, as long as we vote.

Both events were seismic in transforming our nation’s journey toward a more perfect union, providing at least the opportunity to vote for African Americans and for women, who long had been denied a voice and a vote in their governing.

Big doings this month, in celebration of Women’s Equality Day in Louisville, but first, let’s re-visit the history made by brave women and men who wanted to empower us with possibilities denied to so many of them...

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**Voting Rights Act**

**Aug. 6, 1965**

African American men had been granted the right to vote by the 15th Amendment (women would still have to wait), but had been prevented from exercising that right by suppression efforts that ranged from horrific violence to outrageous state and local tests and taxes designed to prevent their suffrage. A whole movement throughout the South, known as “Jim Crow,” took hold after the Civil War, segregating black Americans in every way — including voting — from white, giving rise to another movement, one whose prize was equality. The civil rights movement grew in the courts, in the streets, in homes, in churches, and in the halls of Congress. And, finally, in the voting booths.

The federal Voting Rights Act of 1965, passed just five months after the “Bloody Sunday” police beatings of peaceful civil rights marchers in Selma, Alabama, was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on Aug. 6, 1965. It was one of greatest glories and victories of the civil rights movement, reinforcing federal guarantees of voting rights and
superseding state barriers enacted to prevent African-American suffrage. It also was an indication that the better angels of our nature had prevailed where it counted: the law. It was one of greatest glories and victories of the civil rights movement, reinforcing federal guarantees of voting rights and superseding state barriers enacted to prevent African American suffrage.

“Today is a triumph for freedom as huge as any victory that has ever been won on any battlefield,” President Johnson said when he signed the law, with Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis and other civil rights leaders as witnesses.

Another time, a look at how the act has been chipped away at with subsequent court decisions and voter suppression efforts.

Click to read more about the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and The Voting Rights Act at 50: How It Changed the World

Aug. 26, 1920

The Voting Rights Act was necessary, even after the ratification of the 19th Amendment in August 1920, which finally recognized women as full citizens by allowing them to vote throughout the country.

A century’s worth of suffragist effort to land the vote came down to a Tennessee mother and son in a nailbiter of a showdown as the Volunteer State teetered on whether it would become the deciding 36th state in the ratification of the 19th Amendment.

Harry Burn, a young state legislator, had planned to vote against women’s suffrage, until he re-read a letter written to him by his mother, known as “Febb,” a college-educated farm widow and inveterate reader who urged her son to vote for women’s rights.

According to the League of Women Voters, Febb Burn wrote in part of her letter, "Dear Son: Hurrah, and vote for suffrage! Don’t keep them in doubt. I notice some of the speeches against. They were bitter. I have been watching to see how you stood, but have not noticed anything yet... Don’t forget to be a good boy and help Mrs. Catt with her "Rats." Is she the one that put rat in ratification, Ha! With lots of love, Mama."

Later, Febb’s son, Harry, explained his vote for women: “I want to state that I changed my vote in favor of ratification first because I believe in full suffrage as a right; second, I believe we had a moral and legal right to ratify; third, I knew that a mother’s advice is always safest for a boy to follow...
and my mother wanted me to vote for ratification; fourth, I appreciated the fact that an opportunity such as seldom comes to a mortal man to free seventeen million women from political slavery was mine; fifth, I desired that my party in both State and nation might say that it was a republican from the East mountains of Tennessee, the purest Anglo-Saxon section in the world, who made national woman suffrage possible at this date, not for personal glory but for the glory of his party."

The momentous vote was on Aug. 18, 1920, but was certified — and made official — on Aug. 26, 1920, when U.S. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby signed it in private at his Washington, D.C., home — even as members of the Tennessee legislature tried to nullify the vote! (See above.)

In 1971, U.S. Rep. Bella Abzug pushed to have Women’s Equality Day observed every Aug. 26, and so it has been since.

Big doings in Louisville this Women’s Equality Day — activities will be on Saturday, Aug. 24 — so keep reading!

Follow the links to read more about the ratification of the 19th Amendment, Harry and Febb Burn, and Women’s Equality Day

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**What is a Vote Worth? program to be featured at conference**

A new collaborative inquiry based web resource for educators What is a Vote Worth? launched in the spring to share the struggles women and minorities faced in earning the right to vote. Activities, questions, and resources are all housed in one location [www.whatisavoteworth.org](http://www.whatisavoteworth.org) to make it user-friendly.

Jefferson County Public Schools and Frazier Museum worked together to create the tool as a companion to the upcoming year-long exhibit in honor of the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment and the 55th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act. Individual donations and support from the Metro Louisville office for Women and a Library of Congress Grant funded the work.

The group was selected to present the work at the National Council for the Social Studies’ annual conference in Austin, Texas. In the workshop, teachers will share how Kentucky’s students are learning about the Women’s Suffrage Movement and other voting rights movements.

Organized around three core concepts—Questions, Tasks, and Sources—workshop participants will craft meaningful inquiry-based learning experiences to help their students grapple with the value of a vote, past and present. This workshop reflects the collaboration with C3 Teachers and the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources program.
Women’s Equality Day celebration

The official day to observe women’s equality is Aug. 26 each year, but in Louisville the third-annual observances sponsored by the League of Women Voters, the Frazier History Museum and the Louisville Metro Office for Women will be spread over two days:

— Aug. 23, an evening reception for Coline Jenkins, the keynote speaker for the next day’s celebration, will be held at Lang House, the headquarters for the League of Women Voters. The 5:30-7 p.m. reception will offer wine and refreshments, and a conversation with Jenkins, who is the great-great-granddaughter of legendary suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Tickets for the evening are $25 in advance and $30 at the door. Reserve your spot for the welcoming event
— Aug. 24, a celebration, Vote = Power, begins with networking and shopping at 10 a.m. and a program from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Frazier Museum, 829 W. Main St., on the fourth floor.

The event is free, and all ages are welcome.

The dynamic program will commemorate the 99th anniversary of the right for women to vote in the United States, and will celebrate and acknowledge the struggles of women from the days leading to ratification and through today.

There will be surprises in the program, as well as announced appearances by Hannah Drake, spoken word artist; keynote speaker Jenkins, mentioned above; and Mackenzie Berry, founder of Young Poets of Louisville.

For more information, visit fraziermuseum.org

Attend the Aug. 22 Community Meeting

The next meeting for community organizations to share what they are doing to celebrate the Voting Rights Act and the 19th Amendment throughout this year and next, and to learn what others are doing is 2 p.m. Aug. 22, at the Frazier Museum. Please come, share your plans and meet others who are celebrating.

Stay in the loop!

We’re here to keep you in the loop about the Women Vote 100 commemoration.

- Don’t forget the “cultural pass” available to schoolchildren of Metro Louisville, Bullitt County, and Southern Indiana. The program, now in its fifth year, offers one-time general admission to about 40 participating venues from June 1 through Aug. 10. The purpose is to promote the arts and culture for children, and to provide education and stimulation to students while they’re out of school. To find out more about the program, click here

- The above details and more are found on the Women Vote 100 calendar that will be updated and kept throughout the commemoration.

- We encourage your organization to add an event to the calendar

- To get an idea of what has been planned for 2020, please read this overview by Penny Peavler, president and CEO of the Frazier History Museum.

- And, of course, please keep current with the calendar and if you would like your voice heard, fill out our form!

- Sign up to receive our monthly newsletter!
In 1868 women in Wyoming were given the right to vote if they were over the age of 21. Wyoming was almost denied statehood because of this law but the state refused to budge. Wyoming became the 44th U.S. state in 1890, 30 years before women in the rest of the states would be allowed to vote.

“In 1965, at the time of the passage of the Voting Rights Act, there were six African American members of the U.S. House of Representatives and no blacks in the U.S. Senate. By 1971, there were 13 members of the House and one black member of the Senate.” reported the History Channel.

Wise Words

“We are bringing women into politics to change the nature of politics, to change the vision, to change the institutions. Women are not wedded to the policies of the past. We didn't craft them. They didn't let us.”


“I want history to remember me ... not as the first black woman to have made a bid for the presidency of the United States, but as a black woman who lived in the 20th century and who dared to be herself. I want to be remembered as a catalyst for change in America.”

U.S. Rep. Shirley Chisholm, first African American woman elected to Congress, first African American candidate for a major party’s presidential nomination, first woman to appear in a presidential debate, and co-founder of the National Women’s Political Caucus