Voting Rights Symposium: An Interview with Alyssa Hughes and Tammy Proctor

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Alyssa Hughes and Tammy Proctor in the Halloween-themed history department.

Alyssa Hughes is the Undergraduate Research Assistant for the Voting Rights Symposium. A junior majoring in political science and minoring in history, Alyssa hopes to put her new skills to use in law school or local government. She is also a figure skater and loves getting involved in the politics of gender. Tammy Proctor is Distinguished Professor of History and the current Department Head. She teaches modern European and world history and is at work on a study of American humanitarian aid in Europe from 1914-1924.

Alyssa, congratulations on your appointment as an Undergraduate Research Assistant! It is, I know, a huge undertaking to plan a symposium like this. What kind of projects are you working on? How do you spend your days when you’re in the history department? Any big challenges or surprises yet?

Thank you! It is a great opportunity and I am enjoying it a lot! I am currently working on creating the website, running social media, and handling communication with our speakers and sponsors. I have meetings with people who are also helping with the symposium, and I handle other forms of communication. I am researching women’s voting rights, current struggles certain groups have with the vote, and other interesting stories on voting rights. Then I usually send and answer some emails and work on our website. The biggest challenge has been learning the website software, but it is coming along nicely now.

In March, you’re hosting a two-day interdisciplinary symposium called Voting Rights 1870, 1920, 1965, 2020. Can you talk a little about how this symposium came about? Why does it feel important to host this event here at USU. And why now?

Well, 2020 is the 100th anniversary of voting rights for women after the passage of the 19th amendment in 1920. The symposium also recognizes other milestones in voting rights (1870 – Utah Women, 1965 – Voting Rights Act) and raises questions about barriers to voting that still exist today. We are working with the University’s Year of the Woman committee, so our conference will be amplified in its impact. It is important to have events like this at our University to keep students involved in these issues, and to show University support for such issues.

You’ve invited Carol Anderson and Lisa Tetrault to each give a keynote address. Why did you choose these scholars as keynote speakers?

We actually have three featured keynotes: Carol Anderson of Emory University is the headliner because her recent work focuses on continued barriers to voting in the United States. She will be talking about her book, One Person, No Vote.

The other two keynote speakers look at the issue of women’s suffrage historically. Lisa Tetrault, who will speak on “The Myth of Seneca Falls,” and the sociologist Selina
Gallo-Cruz will speak on “Invisibility, Resistance, and Women’s Political Power”. Her talk is global, and it focuses on her research into women’s movements in Latin America that have challenged state violence. We wanted to provide a range of talks from different disciplinary backgrounds and different periods. In addition, we will host two panels, one on the larger implications of women’s suffrage in 1920 and one on Utah Voting Rights issues.

In addition to the featured presenters and the keynote speakers, there will also be community events. Can you tell me anything more about these?

We will have student and teacher poster sessions, a suffrage sing-a-long, a showing of Unladylike (a series of short films), some library events, and a poetry walkabout. The Unladylike films will feature four different women and their struggles with the vote.

If people are interested in finding more information on the event, where should they look?

For more information, check our website at https://history.usu.edu/voting-rights-symposium/index. The symposium is on March 19 and 20, 2020, and is free and open to the public.