



John Nicholas Brown
Center for Public Humanities
and Cultural Heritage
BROWN UNIVERSITY

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John Nicholas Brown Center and Lippitt House Museum Collaborate on Voting Rights Website

Brown and RISD students collaborate with the Lippitt house Museum to create a new website about the history of voting rights in Rhode Island.

May 26, 2020-- Providence, RI—Students in a Brown University American Studies course have collaborated with Providence’s Lippitt House Museum to create a new website, “[Suffrage in Rhode Island: A Lippitt Family Perspective](#).” The website includes an interactive timeline about the complicated history of voting rights in Rhode Island and original memes designed by students that comment upon the long struggle for full suffrage in Rhode Island.

2020 is the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment to the federal constitution, which stated a person’s right to vote can’t be denied because of sex. In commemoration, the [Lippitt House Museum](#) and the students in "Shrine, House, or Home: Rethinking the Historic House Museum," a course in Brown University's American Studies department and the [John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage](#), have collaborated to examine the history of suffrage rights in Rhode Island, highlighting the involvement of the Lippitt family, which produced two Rhode Island governors and a US Senator.

The story of women’s suffrage in America tends to emphasize large metropolitan areas like Washington, DC and New York, overshadowing the role played by individual states like Rhode Island in gathering support for eventual ratification of the 19th Amendment. The website examines the 19th Amendment in the context of struggles for voting rights in Rhode Island. At different times, women, African Americans, working class people, and immigrants worked together and in opposition to advance their causes. The story is also not complete without including the significant numbers of women, some from the Lippitt family, who opposed the 19th Amendment for a variety of social, economic, and political reasons. The website’s interactive timeline chronicles this history.

Today less than half of young Americans vote, even in presidential elections, despite the efforts so many undertook to gain suffrage. Public trust in government is at less than 20%, and voter participation has reached its lowest point since 1996, with only 55% of voting-age citizens casting ballots in the 2016 presidential election. Disenfranchisement continues to affect Americans today, particularly in immigrant and African American communities. Without a stronger collective understanding of the history of government and suffrage rights, voter apathy will continue to undermine American democracy. The memes included on the website comment on the uneven progress in achieving full suffrage, and the students hope they will be shared widely on social media.



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As we celebrate the anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment and those who fought for this basic right, we should remember those who are still excluded, even today. The organizers of this project hope to contribute to greater civic literacy by providing an opportunity for people to become more knowledgeable and better engaged citizens.

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