Open-mic event tunes into voices of the suffragettes who won a basic American right

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Dressed in the suffrage trade colors of purple, gold and white, two professors from Journalism and Communication help kick off “Women’s Voices, Women’s Votes: A Yearlong Celebration of Women’s Suffrage and Voting Rights.” At left is Candi Carter Olson, assistant professor of media and society, and, at right, Cathy Bullock, JCOM professor and head of the JCOM department.

Register to present a reading of a text, either personal or historical, reflecting suffrage struggles or our American right to vote.

Just a century ago — not that long considering that the telephone was already in wide use — women took to the streets in droves to support a basic America right we today take for granted: voting.

After decades of struggle, finally, in 1920, the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified by enough states to allow women to vote. The importance of this moment in ratification was highlighted by CHaSS Associate Dean Evelyn Funda who said, “It gave women a sense of having full citizenship. You can’t really be a citizen, in the complete sense of the term, unless you have a voice in how the republic is run, and the way you do that is with your vote.”

To help us connect with the players in that momentous point in history, the College of Humanities and Social Sciences is hosting “Women’s Voices, Women’s Votes: Kicking Off a Yearlong Celebration of Women’s Suffrage and Voting Rights.”

The event will be held from 12 noon to 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, March 26, in the Taggart Student Center’s Sunburst Lounge. An open mic format will allow students, faculty and community members to read short texts — either historical or personal — about women’s freedom to vote. Care to know what role the bicycle played in women’s suffrage? Want to hear songs from the Utah Woman’s Suffrage Song Book? Join us on Tuesday, March 26.

Those interested in reading can register for a time at https://chass.usu.edu/suffrage-kickoff-registration. If you don’t have a specific piece to read but are willing to participate, the event organizers will have a variety of preselected texts available (please register).

The event is free and open to the public, and anyone is welcome to attend, even if only to listen to the stories about suffrage and voting rights.

All are invited to wear the traditional suffrage colors that day to mark the centennial’s kickoff. Suffragettes were known by their robes and sashes of purple (loyalty), gold (enlightenment) and white (purity of person and purpose).

Women are the best-known fighters for suffrage, but the United States has seen other suffrage movements: 1870 (the 15th Amendment giving black men the right to vote) and 1965 (the Voting Rights Act of 1965, eliminating such obstacles to voting as literacy tests). Honoring all suffrage protests, said English professor Joyce Kinkead, “gives us an opportunity to ask who was left out? What challenges do we still face in voting rights today?”

Members of the committee planning events throughout 2019 and 2020 represent all departments in CHaSS, with CHaSS senator McKenna Allred playing a key role. Events are held in conjunction with the Better Days 2020 group, a statewide initiative meant to recognize Utah’s role in ratifying the 19th Amendment.

Among the upcoming events are the Mountain West Center’s 2019 Bennion Teachers’ Workshop (this year’s workshop will focus on media strategies used by the women’s suffrage movement); a visit in spring 2020 by scholar Dr. Carol Anderson, author of the widely praised history, One Person, No Vote; and an exhibit of works by Nina Allender, a political cartoonist known for her pro-suffrage art in the early 20th century.