

The Voter

A Publication of the League of Women Voters of Seattle-King County

Summer 2020
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Observer Corps Has Its Eyes on Government

by Heather Kelly and Lauren Pixley

With so many pressing issues in the headlines and City Councils scrambling to respond, it seemed like the perfect moment to reboot Observer Corps. Observers monitor and report on public meetings. Simply by their presence, Observers enhance transparency and accountability in our government. We also encourage Observers to submit a brief report on each meeting so we can keep the public updated on government business.

We are thrilled to report that over the last few weeks, we have signed up 18 new Observers! And word got out beyond League—a family reached out to us and joined League so their son could become an Observer. (Welcome, Aidan Penticoff!) Thanks to those of you who have volunteered so far. It is exciting to have so many people interested in continuing this League tradition!

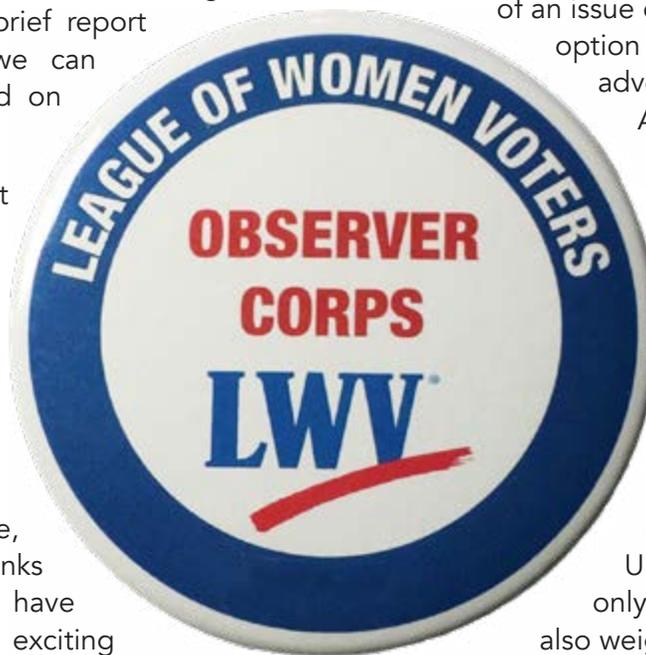
As we get the program up and running again, we'll start by focusing on law enforcement issues. We chose that topic because all across the country people are questioning the role of police in society. Here in King County, Councils are actively debating topics such as whether to reallocate police dollars to other causes, outlaw certain neck restraints, elect or appoint the Sheriff, and how to reduce racial bias in the justice

system. Observers will monitor and report back on how our government responds to these pressing questions. We plan to expand Observer Corps to cover other topics as we grow our capacity to take on volunteers.

Observers who develop a deeper knowledge of an issue over time will have the option of stepping into an advocacy role by joining the Action Committee. In fact, the path from Observer to advocate is itself a League tradition. President Truman appointed some of our first Observers to monitor U.N. proceedings in 1945. In 1997, the League was granted special consultative status at the U.N., meaning that we not only monitor meetings, but also weigh in on policy. Of course, it takes time to develop the subject matter expertise to become an advocate, but in the meantime Observers improve government accountability simply by monitoring meetings.

So Observers learn and inform the public, but is this any fun? Yes! Although we cannot gather in person for now, Observer Corps works as a team. We will create opportunities for Observers to connect with other League members, share observations, ask questions, and catch up.

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MISSION STATEMENT

The League of Women Voters of Seattle-King County, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Connecting with LWV Leadership

by Alyssa Weed, President, League of Women Voters of Seattle-King County



White silence is white violence.

White silence isn't just choosing not to speak out against racism. It's also a refusal to learn more about the experiences of Black people in our communities that may be different than yours. At its core, white silence is a choice to uphold injustices because they either benefit white people or they don't affect white people.

Most of you at this point have read my previous letter about my experience with police brutality during the protests here in Seattle. My goal is to continue this discussion with you, while expanding on what our next steps as an organization can look like in the coming months and how you can become involved.

The LWVUS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy makes our charge clear:

The League of Women Voters is an organization fully committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in principle and in practice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to the organization's current and future success in engaging all individuals, households, communities, and policy makers in creating a more perfect democracy.

It is our role as League members to take this commitment seriously, and it is my role as president to ensure that our chapter is onboard with this statement both in how we operate internally and the way we conduct our work in our community. I understand that these conversations are uncomfortable and challenging. But we cannot continue to operate as we have and ignore the reality of systemic racism, specifically its pervasiveness in our county's justice system.

I am extremely grateful for our members, a lot of whom are new (Hi! Welcome! So glad you're here!), who recently joined our Observer Corps under the guidance of Heather

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STAY HEALTHY, STAY STRONG, STAY INFORMED!

As the League does its part to help slow the spread of COVID-19, this issue of *The Voter* will be distributed in digital format only—all print production and mailing of the newsletter is temporarily suspended. This is an interactive PDF, meaning you can click on hyperlinks (in **bold blue font**) and page numbers to navigate the document. The 🖱️ symbol at the bottom of each page will take you to the top of the newsletter.

From the Leadership, cont'd from p. 3

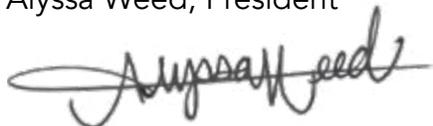
Kelly to keep an eye on and report back what happens at public meetings about law enforcement. More information about the Observer Corps and how to get involved is contained in this issue of **The Voter**.

This issue of **The Voter** also includes resources about systemic racism, police brutality, and the damaging effects centering whiteness has on our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities. My hope is that regardless of how you feel about preliminary policy positions that have been presented in the media, you'll give these resources a chance.

And lastly, I promise that we will be doing our due diligence prior to signing on to supporting any specific policy changes. We will continue to center our organization's commitment to anti-racism and equity during those policy discussions. Anything less than that would be a disservice to all of us.

Should you have any questions or comments about our positions as they relate to racism, police brutality, city budgeting, government accountability, or really anything, please do not hesitate to reach out. We will do our best to be communicative and available during our community's ongoing discussions about police reform, as well as the steps our organization will be taking to engage in this dialogue.

Black lives matter. Stay powerful.
Alyssa Weed, President



Recommendations for Further Learning

READ: BOOKS



So You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo

How do you tell your roommate her jokes are racist? Why did your sister-in-law take umbrage when you asked to touch her hair—and how do you make it right? How do you explain white privilege to your white, privileged friend?

White Fragility by Robin Di Angelo

This book outlines the dynamics of White Fragility and how we might build our capacity in the ongoing work toward racial justice.

What Does it Mean to be White? by Robin Di Angelo

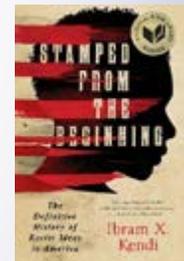
Written as an accessible introduction to white identity from an anti-racist framework, this book is an invaluable resource for members of diversity and anti-racism programs, study groups, and students.

Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race by Reni Eddo-Lodge

Reni Eddo-Lodge offers a timely and essential new framework for how to see, acknowledge and counter racism. It is a searing, illuminating, absolutely necessary exploration of what it is to be a person of color today.

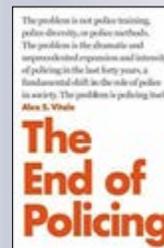
Stamped from the Beginning by Ibram X. Kendi

While racist ideas are easily produced and easily consumed, they can also be discredited. In shedding much-needed light on the murky history of racist ideas, Stamped from the Beginning offers us the tools we need to expose them—and in the process, gives us reason to hope.



Me and White Supremacy by Layla F. Saad

This book leads readers through a journey of understanding their white privilege and participation in white supremacy, so that they can stop inflicting damage on black, indigenous and people of color, and in turn, help other white people do better, too.



The End of Policing by Alex S. Vitale

This book attempts to jog public discussion of policing by revealing the tainted origins of modern policing as a tool of social control and demonstrating how the expanded role of the police is inconsistent with community empowerment, social justice—even public safety.

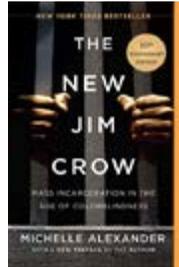
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From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America by Elizabeth Hinton

Challenging the belief that America's prison problem originated with the Reagan administration's War on Drugs, Elizabeth Hinton traces the rise of mass incarceration to an ironic source: the social welfare programs of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society at the height of the civil rights era.

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness by Michelle Alexander

Written by a civil rights litigator and legal scholar, this book explores race-related issues specific to the mass incarceration of African American men.



READ: ARTICLES

["When Feminism is White Supremacy in Heels"](#) by Rachel Cargle

From tone policing to whitesplaining, white women's feminism is more toxic than we realize.

["Dear White Women"](#) by Rachel Cargle

A letter reminding modern white feminist of their relationship with black women throughout history.

["The Moments that Mattered: We need white women to call to their sisters and be the influence they need"](#) by Roxane Gay

Roxane Gay reflects on the current resistance and its roots in the women's liberation movement.

READ: LOCAL ARTICLES

["What defunding Seattle Police could look like"](#) by Katie Wilson

["A Reflection on Racism in Seattle"](#) by Knute Berger

["Dear white Seattle: Young Black leaders want to talk about racism"](#) by Lilly Fowler

["How a history of racism, police brutality and a pandemic led to an extraordinary moment"](#) by Naomi Ishisaka

["Does the City Council want to 'fire half the police department overnight'? Fact-checking the Mayor and Police Chief's claims"](#) by Erica Barnett

WATCH

["Whose Streets"](#) directed by Sabaah Foleyan and Damon Davis (Amazon Prime Video)

Told by the activists and leaders who live and breathe this movement for justice, an unflinching look at the Ferguson uprising. When unarmed teenager Michael Brown is killed by police and left lying in the street for hours, it marks a breaking point for the residents of St. Louis, Missouri.

["13th"](#) directed by Ava DuVernay (on Netflix and [available on YouTube](#) for a limited time)

In this thought-provoking documentary, scholars, activists and politicians analyze the criminalization of African Americans and the U.S. prison boom.

["What defund the police really means"](#) by Vox (YouTube)

Short breakdown of what "defund the police" means.

LISTEN: PODCASTS

[Code Switch](#) by Shereen Marisol Meraji and Gene Demby (NPR)

"Fearless conversations about race that you've been waiting for! Hosted by journalists of color, our podcast tackles the subject of race head-on. We explore how it impacts every part of society—from politics and pop culture to history, sports and everything in between."

[The United States of Anxiety](#) by Kai Wright (WNYC)

A show about the unfinished business of our history and its grip on our future. Many of the political and social arguments we're having now started in the aftermath of the Civil War, when Americans set out to do something no one had tried before: build the world's first multiracial democracy.

[About Race](#) by Reni Eddo-Lodge

Featuring key voices from the last few decades of anti-racist activism, this podcast looks at the recent history that lead to the politics of today.



[1619](#) by Nikole Hannah-Jones (New York Times)

An audio series from the Times observing the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery.

[Throughline](#) by Rund Abdelfatah and Ramtin Arablouei (NPR)

Every week at Throughline, Rund Abdelfatah and Ramtin Arablouei "go back in time to understand the present" to understand the history of systemic racism in America.

[Call Your Girlfriend](#) by Aminatou Sow and Ann Friedman

Aminatou and Ann discuss the intricacies of pop culture and the latest in politics. They're highbrow and lowbrow, fiercely opinionated, and not afraid to real-talk with each other about everything from menstrual cycles and body shaming to racism and workplace drama. They highlight women who are agents, creators, movers, and shakers who have smart, interesting things to say.

[Running from COPS](#) by Dan Taberski

Dan Taberski investigates COPS, the longest running reality show in TV history and its cultural impact on policing in America.

LWV in Action

Observer Corps, cont'd from p. 1

You'll be a part of engaging conversation on current topics as they are evolving.

If you are interested in joining Observer Corps, please reach out! It has never been easier to monitor government meetings since for now they are taking place virtually. We are particularly interested in developing this program beyond Seattle. Councils are engaged in fascinating conversations about policing in many of our smaller jurisdictions, too.

The more eyes we have out there, the better. If you are interested in focusing on an issue other than law enforcement, we'd still love to hear from you about what topics we should tackle next! Finally, if you have friends, co-workers, neighbors, or family members interested in learning more about police reform, please invite them to join League and become an Observer.

At right, an example of an Observer Report edited for space. The ellipses (...) indicate where text has been omitted. More Observer Reports are available on [the League's website](#).



Sample Observer Report

Information you submit may be made public. You'll receive confirmation of your report being received within 4 days.

* Required

1) **Email address***: action@seattlelww.org

2) **Name***: Heather Kelly

3) **Are you a general member of the public or an Official League Observer?** Official League Observer

4) **Date of the meeting:** July 17, 2020

5) **Location:** Virtual Zoom hosted by ACLU's People Power group (non-partisan)

6) **What meeting did you attend (name of the body, whether it was a regular or special meeting, etc)?** Private meeting with Councilmember Andrew Lewis

7) **Did you attend the whole meeting? If no, please add more detail as "Other" answer.** Yes.

8) **Tell us about public input: Did it happen? How was it conducted? Did it seem adequate?** CM Lewis granted this private hour-long meeting specifically to address the questions and concerns of the host group. People Power and CM Lewis both support the requests of Decriminalize Seattle and other community groups seeking to reduce the SPD budget by 50%. At the end of the hour, there were several outstanding issues the group wished to discuss and CM Lewis offered to meet again in the next week and half to cover the whole agenda.

9) **Tell us about the government: who was there? Were they attentive? Were they prepared? Were they courteous with each other and the public?**

The meeting was hosted by Shannon Cheng of ACLU People Power. There were approximately 10 members of that group in attendance in addition to me. I introduced myself as a member of League Observer Corps and stated I was not there to advocate, but to observe.

CM Lewis was very gracious about some technical difficulties that delayed the meeting. He listened attentively to personal stories from group members who had suffered or witnessed violence at the hands of the police. He was prepared to address all questions and was able to cite specific examples to support his positions on the issues.

• • •

10) **Want to tell us anything else: about the process used, the content of the meeting, decisions made, adherence to laws and regulations, etc?** Below are my notes from the meeting capturing CM Lewis's comments, slightly edited for clarity:

- He supports Decriminalize Seattle goals, including a path forward to defunding SPD at 50%

- Looking at CAHOOTs (Eugene, OR) for practical solutions

- SPD presented on 9-1-1 calls, showing that 56% of calls are non-criminal. He found that extremely interesting and was surprised. We know at the time of dispatch that these events are not criminal but are some type of disturbance or a citable offense.

• • •

- Possible collab. w/LEAD. It's going to become completely untethered from the police. They are going to lose their historic gatekeeping role with LEAD. Going to end in this summer budget session. Even SPD acknowledges that's outdated. That might free up LEAD to take on a community-centered role.

- Talking about a cornucopia or suite of things to replace police, not just one thing. Need more specialized services.

- CM Lewis's ask: Please engage in public education. Do outreach where it is hardest. Example: Go on NextDoor.

Agenda for next meeting: Upcoming labor negotiations, police reaction to all of this, Mayor Durkan mischaracterizing what City Council is trying to do.

What happens next?

When you submit your report, the Action Chair is notified. They may take four days to review your submission. You'll then get an email with feedback and next steps.

Contacts

- **Submit reports to:** action@seattlelww.org
- **For questions, contact:**
 - Heather Kelly—hejokelly@gmail.com
 - Lauren Pixley—lauren.d.pixley@gmail.com

Meet the New Board Members!

Please give a warm welcome to our incoming Seattle-King County Board Members and read about why they joined the League of Women Voters. They join President Alyssa Weed; 1st V.P. Christy Wood; 2nd V.P. Heather Kelly; Secretary Janice Camp; and Directors Roslyn Duffy, Kiku Hayashi, Chelsea Jordan, and Melissa Taylor.

Maureen Brinck-Lund, Development Chair

November 8, 2016 scared me into action. Then and there, I committed to find ways I could speak up for and help protect two essential ingredients of democracy: freedom of the press and voter's rights. Being a League member allows me to join with others, past, present and future, in the continuing — 100 years-long — effort that has done so much to educate voters and protect and secure voting rights.

Katie Dudley, Treasurer, Ed Fund

The League strives to add reason to an otherwise unreasonable discourse in American politics and strives to provide voters with the tools they need to make informed voting decisions. Because of this, the League is the kind of organization I wish to be involved in.

Marilee Fuller, Treasurer

I'd been an active League member for many years in Idaho before moving to Washington in 2011. I rejoined the League because voting matters (as I realized after the 2016 election).

Lauren Pixley, Volunteer Coordinator

I joined the League a few months after moving to Seattle because I wanted to continue to be politically active—an interest of mine that developed during my undergraduate career and was shaped by the 2016 election.

Adele Reynolds, Program Chair

I joined the LWV because I was new to the state, new to adulthood and motherhood, and I'd just met some women who knew a lot more than I did about my new home. Next they welcomed me to the LWV.



Units Unite Us

by Roslyn Duffy

It's summertime, and our units haven't exactly found the living so easy. Instead, they have been busy going digital. Zoom has quickly become our means of connecting. Thanks to this digital format, many of our members were able to attend either or both the State Council sessions and the US League conference.

In fact, since most of us aren't leaving town (let alone our homes), many units are continuing to meet over the summer and using these meetings to discuss our book club selections as well as gear up for the coming elections.

Speaking of the book club, for those of you who haven't yet read *The Woman's Hour* by Elaine Weiss, here is a passage that I found truly inspiring. (Also, the author is one of those featured in the current documentary, *The Vote*, which I hope everyone watches.)

In 1915, when suffrage was being voted on state by state, votes for women was on the legislative agenda in New York. Here is what happened in pursuit of the attempt to get it passed:

. . . after orchestrating 10,300 rallies, distributing 7.5 million leaflets, parading down Fifth Avenue with forty thousand marchers before more than a million spectators . . .

The measure lost. That evening, Carrie Catt was asked how long this setback would delay the fight for suffrage. She answered, "Only until we can get a little sleep. Our campaign will be on again tomorrow morning."

That is persistence and an excellent role model to for us all.



The League's North King County Unit registered voters at the the Capitol Hill Occupied Protest zone, also known as CHOP.

North King County Unit to the Rescue

A special recognition to our North King County Unit for discovering and fixing a big hole in our local voter registration system.

Unit members Sarah Phillips and Judy Deiro showed up at CHOP to register voters. They met several people new to our state, who said they were unable to get Washington State driver's licenses — the Department of Licensing (DOL) has been closed, and online voter registration requires a valid WA ID with signature — rendering them unable to register to vote.

However, a mail-in paper voter registration form just requires a social security number because new voters sign the form. After helping these folks

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Units Unite Us, cont'd from p. 8

register with paper forms, the unit members set out to fix the problem.

Sarah and Judy discovered that the DOL website did not include a link to the paper voter registration form, making online voter registration difficult to impossible to access for newcomers. They notified LWWVA voter services, who notified voter services across the state. Kathy Sakahara, LWWVA lobby team and unit member, worked with the DOL to help make the needed information more accessible on their webpage.

Well done to all! Many new voters can thank this team for having their backs! A big thank-you to everyone in the unit for resolving this unintended, pandemic-related glitch.

Postcards

Our units have also worked to pursue getting postcards ordered and ready for planned campaigns to get out the vote this fall. We will be ready to go.

Annual Meeting Recap and Summertime Happy Hour

This year, the League of Women Voters of Seattle-King County proved that a global pandemic would not get in the way of League business. With 79 members in attendance, the League's annual meeting had a quorum and then some!

Participants considered the slate of Board nominees, next year's proposed program and budget, and an amendment to the bylaws permitting virtual meetings. After the meeting adjourned, ballots were distributed to participants. All motions passed, and just like that, we're on to another year! Thanks to all of you who braved technical hurdles to join us.

Given the excellent turnout for the Annual Meeting, the Board wants to foster other opportunities for our League members to connect and socialize virtually. Stay tuned to your email for an invitation to a social hour later this summer! We hope League members will join us for some casual and engaging conversation and an opportunity to meet new Board members.

Unit Leader Retreat and New Units

Plans are underway for this summer's Unit Leaders Retreat, which will take place on August 22nd. If you or your friends are planning to begin a new unit, please do so ASAP so that you will be able to take part in the Unit Leaders Retreat. A new Unit only needs 6 or more members, and with Zoom, we no longer need to be tied to geographic membership.

Donations Requested

Many of you attended our author talk at Town Hall that complemented our first book club text, *Catching Homelessness* by Josephine Ensign. Attending the talk and sharing information was Pastor Rick Reynolds of Operation Nightwatch, a street ministry for the homeless.

This has been a difficult time for the organization. Pastor Rick, the CEO of Nightwatch, has just emerged from a three-month long battle with COVID-19. Thankfully, he is gradually recovering. If anyone would like to support the work of Pastor Rick and Operation Nightwatch, their address is PO Box 21181, Seattle, WA 98111. To find out more, please go to their website: www.seattlenightwatch.org

We're keeping on!

Mercer Island Unit Supports BLM Movement

by Julie Sarkissian

The LWV Mercer Island Unit attended the Mercer Island Black Lives Matter march and rally on Friday, June 12. The event was organized by Mercer Island High School students and Black Lives Matter, Seattle Chapter. We were impressed by the number of people who showed up in the rain—one estimate was 600 people—as well as all the speakers, many from the Black community on Mercer Island as well as State Representative Tana Senn, Mercer Island Mayor Benson Wong, and City Councilmembers David Rosenbaum and Craig Reynolds.

One of our longtime Mercer Island unit members, Rivian Smith, gave a moving talk from the perspective of a person who had fought for equality on Mercer Island for a lifetime and was glad to see a new generation taking up the fight. She discussed her personal struggle, fearing for her own children's safety on Mercer Island—an awakening for many of us. Another speaker said that to have a march on Mercer Island for racial equality is historic. The analogy was made with the '60s, when white people's involvement helped bring attention to the voting rights cause. It does seem that this time youth is leading the way.

It was also our first stab at social distancing outreach. We were pleased that everyone at the march and rally wore masks and attempted to keep physical distance. Many of the speakers emphasized the importance of voting. The organizers had given us a place under a tarp for voter registration, and at the end of the rally, Rivian gave a great shoutout reminding the audience about our voter registration spot. I created a poster with the [vote.wa.gov](https://www.vote.wa.gov) registration website as well as the scannable square QR code, which goes directly to online registration. We also had paper voter registration forms for teens who didn't have a driver's license.



As the speeches went on and the rain came down, the audience did begin to dwindle, but even the rain couldn't dampen this great event.

Photos: Top—Taking a knee at Mercer Island's busiest intersection. Bottom—Teens scanning the voter registration QR code.

Summer Book Club Selections

by Roslyn Duffy and Vicky Downs

Many things point to this summer's book club choices. Both are about voting rights. And both describe times of seismic transformation in American society.

The Woman's Hour by Elaine Weiss is a gripping tale of the fierce will it took to pass the 19th amendment, even though it was only the beginning of voting rights struggles in our country. The courage and determination portrayed are well-timed for the issues we must tackle in 2020 America.

Some of you may have read this book or even met the author a few years ago here in Seattle. Whether you are reading this for the first time or want a second go-around, plan a virtual gathering with other League members, your unit members or invite your friends to join you.

Discussion questions by Vicky Downs:

1. Is there one particular scene in the book that you will never forget?
2. What specific women or men seemed to be especially effective?
3. What are some differences between the way the women worked to achieve their goal 100 years ago, and the way we would do it today?
4. Is there any woman from the book whom you wish you could meet? Where would you like to go and/or what would you like to do with her?
5. What could we do today that would not only honor those women from 100 years ago, but would be likely to make them feel honored?
6. 100 years ago, there were big differences in the way many in the South felt about the lives they were leading and the way those in the North felt about their lives. How did that affect their take on the women's vote issue? What about values in the South and in the North today with regard to women's rights?

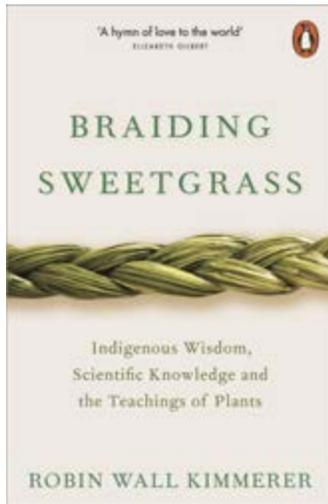
For a different kind of voting rights battle, consider ***Freshwater Road*** by Denise Nicholas. This is an older book that takes us inside the Freedom Summer of 1964, as Black citizens struggle to register to vote. It is a fictionalized story written from the perspective of a young black woman from Detroit who volunteers to work on the voter registration campaign and is sent to rural Mississippi during the early civil rights movement.

This story is often wrenching, at times gritty and almost unbearable—but it is a story whose roots we all need to understand. As we confront the results of the suppression, oppression, and entrenched racism that has remained a part of our country's reality, this backstory truly makes clear why Black Lives Matter is a long-overdue reckoning.

Discussion questions by Roslyn Duffy:

1. What do you think about the role of non-violence, then and now?
2. Name the differences that stood out to you about the life of a Black person in Detroit, rural Mississippi, or New Orleans.
3. Describe three social justice root issues that are portrayed in the lives of Black and white Pineyville residents. How have they continued to grow? What do they look like in today's society?
4. What women's issues show up in the lives of the various characters? Are those same issues part of today's landscape? How have they changed?
5. What do you think happened to Sissy? Was Celeste's teaching a factor?
6. If Celeste were alive today and taking part in Black Lives Matter protests, what demands might she be voicing? What has changed? What is the same?
7. What moved you most in reading this?

Book Review by Vicky Downs



Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teaching of Plants

by *Robin Wall Kimmerer*

Professor Kimmerer is a scientist specializing in botany, who teaches students how to use the tools of science to learn about plants. She is also a member of the Potawatomi Nation, and knows that plants and all of nature can teach us something parallel to but utterly different from scientific knowledge.

As a scientist, she describes the sugar maples near her home. In February the “dark bark absorbs the growing heat from the sun,” and the concentrated sugar gradually warming the roots uses osmosis to draw water from the soil. The sugary sap is mostly transported upward in the “thin layers of phloem tissue under the bark,” bringing energy that eventually arrives at “shoots that are only one millimeter long [and will become] full-fledged leaves.” As a scientist, she explains how hormones trigger changes that lead to making large molecules of sugar that provide energy.

The Potawatami have a different view. They have long been aware of the maples’ sugar-filled sap, but perceive it as a gift of nature. It “offers” sugary drips when it is ready to do so, depending on the weather. In response, tribal members believe we humans should take only what is truly needed. Taking a small amount, the tree reliably reacts by producing more sap. They see this as reciprocity.

To teach both approaches to the study of plants, Kimmerer takes her students to a wilderness field station where she teaches an ‘ethno-botany’ class, and the students “endure five weeks away from the wired world.”

“We’re going shopping across the lake today,” she says, “but the shop is the marsh.” The group then canoes across to the ‘store,’ whereupon they wade through sometimes waist-deep water, standing in muck that is rich in nutrients. They learn about cattails, which will “provide white starch that can become flour or porridge,” leaves that are a source of string and twine, an anti-microbial gel that protects skin, food with plenty of protein that tastes good, and a kind of foam that makes comfortable sleeping mats.

In another chapter, Kimmerer tells us how her people “make ready for the arrival of their brothers [the salmon] who bring food in the canoe of their bodies.” A group of Indians set up a beacon on a

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headland to bring their brothers home and make welcome feasts in their honor. As the salmon arrive, the "hook-jawed leaders are allowed to pass, to guide others and to carry the message to their upriver relatives that the people are grateful and full of respect." Only after "four days of fish have moved safely by, is the first salmon taken by the most honored fisher and prepared with ritual care."

In this book Kimmerer respects the precise quality of scientific words that name each little part of things. In contrast the Potawatomi describe action such as "Puhpowee" which means "the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth overnight." Her people see things as "it" only if they are dead. "Who" is used for beings. "If a Maple is an 'it,' we can take up a chainsaw. If a maple is a 'her,' we think twice."

This book shows us how nature showers us "every day with gifts, but they are not meant for us to keep." Our job is to respect offers from nature, take the little we need for the moment, and find ways to honor the gift as we can. Taking all the available maple sap in spring, like taking the entire stock of sanitizer in a time of health crisis, is destructive.

As we face climate change, this book suggests we would not do worse if we listened to and learned from our indigenous citizens.



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All contacts can be reached at 206-329-4848 unless otherwise noted

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