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Valdosta State University's Odum Library & Women's & Gender Studies Program Receive Grant for Women's Suffrage Book Discussion Project

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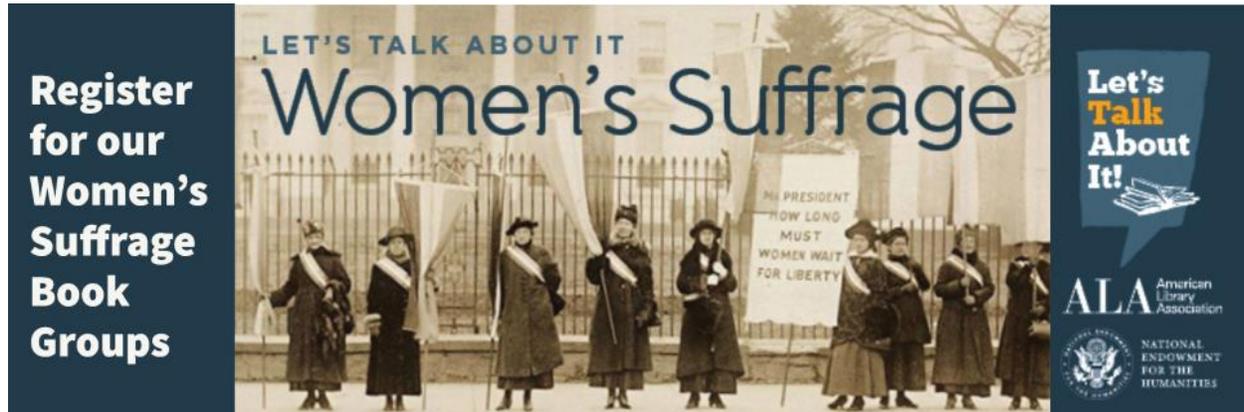
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Valdosta State University's Odum Library & Women's Studies Program Receive Grant for Women's Suffrage Book Discussion Project



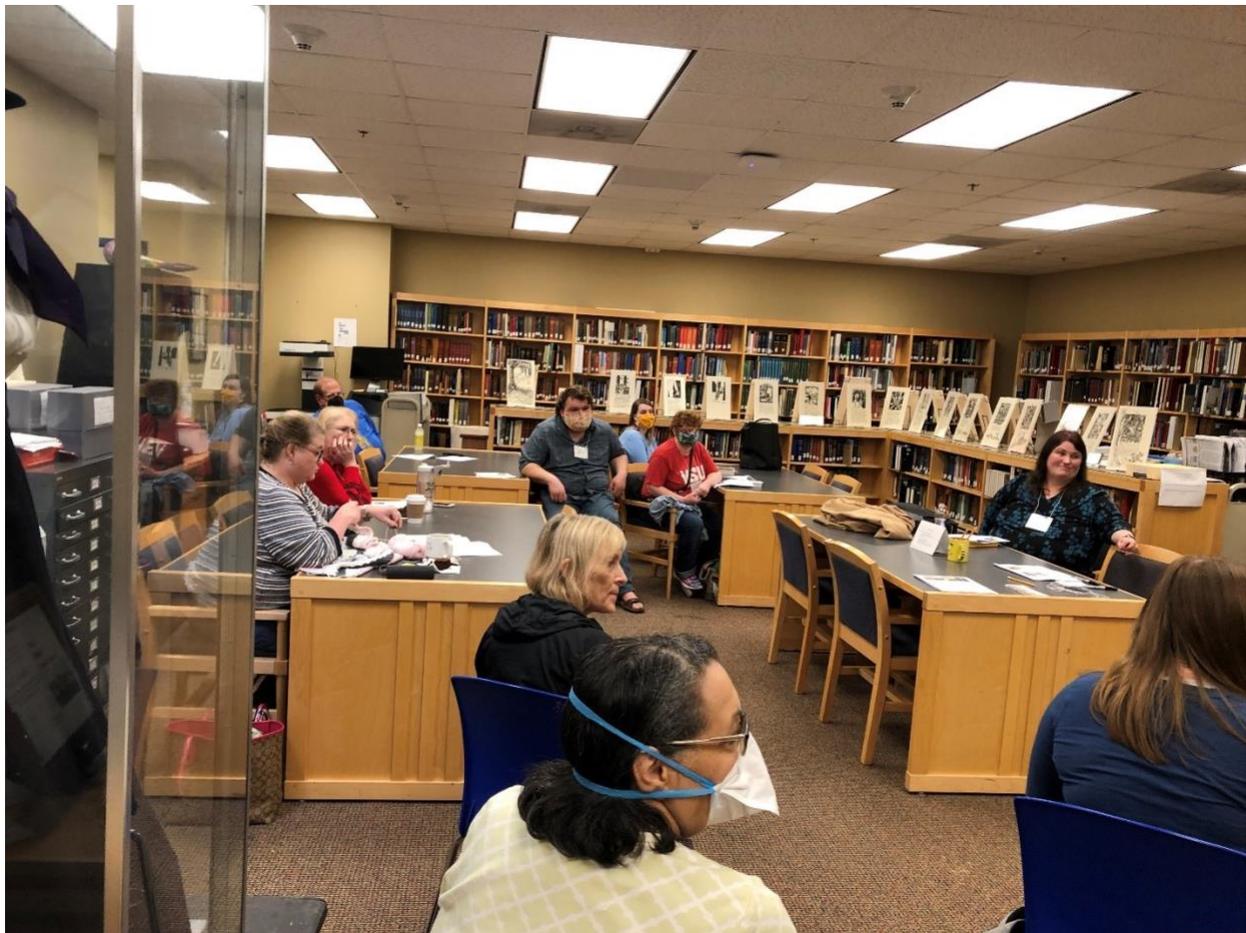
VSU's Odum Library promoted the women's suffrage book discussion program via online registration through the library's website.

One of only 25 libraries nationwide, Valdosta State University's (VSU) Odum Library, in collaboration with VSU's Women's & Gender Studies program, participated in the American Library Association Let's Talk About It (LTAI): Women's Suffrage program. Celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2022, the LTAI program brings together groups of people to read a selection of books chosen by scholars and discuss them in the context of an overarching theme. LTAI traditionally takes place over a series of 10 weeks, with one discussion led by a local humanities scholar every two weeks. Along with the American Library Association, it is supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

VSU faculty coauthors of the grant were Fuller E. Callaway Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies Dr. Christine James; Professor and Director of the Archives and Special Collections Deborah S. Davis; Odum Library Professor Emily Rogers; and Odum Library Assistant Professor Robert Taylor. The grant, designed to spark conversations about American history and culture through an

examination of the women's suffrage movement, came with a \$1,000 stipend to support programming costs and ten copies of the five books to be discussed. "We were incredibly honored to be grant recipients. The grant enabled us to host book discussions to increase the community's understanding of the diversity and challenges of the women's suffrage movement," said Emily Rogers, project director.

Book discussions took place in the William H. Mobley Reading Room inside the VSU Archives and Special Collections. The sessions included conversations focused on *The Woman's Hour* by Elaine Weiss, led by Dr. Christine James; *Women Making History: The 19th Amendment Book* compiled by the National Park Service, led by Dr. A. J. Ramirez; *Ida B. the Queen: The Extraordinary Life and Legacy of Ida B. Wells* by Michelle Duster, led by Dr. Josphine Chaumba; *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* by Martha S. Jones, led by Dr. Sarah Wolk FitzGerald; and *The Once and Future Witches* by Alix E. Harrow, led by Dr. Shelly Yankovskyy.



VSU's Fuller E. Callaway Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies Dr. Christine James leads a women's suffrage book discussion at the VSU Special Collections and Archives at Odum Library

The grant committee selected discussion leaders from among VSU's professors and humanities scholars. The meetings included refreshments donated by the VSU Archives and Special Collections which also hosted a local history exhibit titled "Georgia and Suffrage: Through a Racial Lens." One participant, Associate Professor Dr. Linda Most of VSU's master's of library and information science program said, "I really enjoyed the entire 'Let's Talk About Women's Suffrage' reading experience. I was exposed to books I would probably never have read otherwise, and I loved the conversations that grew around each book." Another participant and Valdosta resident Ann Kasun said:

I believed I had a reasonable understanding of the movement, but the readings and subsequent discussions deepened my

knowledge and brought the subject to life. Given the current threats to both voting rights and women's freedoms, the discussions could not have been more timely.

Rafiah Jenkins, local professor and resident, also participated in the book discussion series. She, her partner, and a small group of her students from an Introduction to Africana Studies course attended the discussion of *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All*. During the course, she and her students discussed many of the current national and global issues facing Black individuals through the lens of the Black experience. Rafiah and her students purposely did not read the text in preparation for the event but instead decided to attend to witness

how a White discussion leader would handle leading a conversation from a non-Black perspective to a room primarily filled with White participants. After the event she stated, "I was able to see what the participants took away from the book itself. I took away more information, and a copy of the book. Ultimately it led to further discussion in my class, which was very valuable." She also found the experience validating, saying "I liked that, as an academic, I got to see other academics address

these current issues, as a professor for my students and as an individual living in a complex society."

Emily Rogers is professor and reference and government information librarian at Valdosta State University's Odum Library

Rob Griggs-Taylor is assistant professor and gifts and cataloging librarian at Valdosta State University's Odum Library