August 18, 2020

Dear LOC Community:

This week, we as a nation, commemorate the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th amendment to the United States Constitution, an amendment giving women the right to vote. This right did not arrive easily and took decades of leadership and sacrifice as well as a campaign by relentless suffragettes to get all of the states to ratify. The state of Tennessee ratified the amendment on August 18, 1920 and cast the decisive vote required for a constitutional change.

This week, a number of Tennessee women have been recognized for their leadership in the movement, including several Black women suffragettes who have roots in Memphis. Ida B. Wells, born in Holly Springs, Mississippi who later moved to Memphis and attended classes at LeMoyne College. She is well known for using her journalistic skills to bring awareness to the malicious lynchings (People's Grocery owners) in Memphis and across the south. She was also actively engaged in the suffragettes' movement, attending the first (1913) National American Women Suffrage Association's parade in Washington DC along with 60 other Black women and demanding that they be allowed to march alongside the white women delegates and not in the back as initially directed. After leaving Memphis due to threats on her life, Ida B. Wells worked aggressively to get out the vote in Illinois.

Mary Church Terrell, a daughter of former slaves, was the daughter of Robert Reed Church who was recognized for his business acumen and being among the first known millionaires in the south. Mary Church Terrell was a civil rights activist who worked with black and white suffragettes and founded the National Association of Colored Women in 1896. She worked with fellow suffragette Ida B. Wells to educate and organize voting in the Black community. Although not from Memphis, Frankie Pierce worked in Nashville (1912) with black and white suffragettes and the Tennessee League of Women Voters' efforts to ratify the amendment that would give women the right to vote. These are only few of the many examples that led this movement and changed the face of voting in this nation.

As we approach this election season, we are reminded of the many who sacrificed to ensure that all of our citizens have the right and opportunity to participate in voting without poll tax, literacy tests, or threats to their livelihood. We are also reminded of our own responsibility as an historically Black college to educate our students and prepare them to study the policy issues, elevate their voices and most importantly exercise their right to vote. We must continue to
educate the broader community about our history and legacy of being active social justice warriors preparing leaders for the next generation of work.

Division Chair Michael Robinson, Professor/Attorney Damita Dandridge, and a team of faculty, staff, and student leaders are working to help make sure that our LeMoyne-Owen students are fully engaged, registered to vote, and informed about the census count, candidates, and policy issues that impact our community and our democracy. The pandemic and our remote environment present unusual challenges for our students and we will need to work differently to connect with those who live in Memphis, and others who live outside of Tennessee. "MAGICIANS VOTE!" is an initiative to educate and mobilize the civic engagement of our students through teaching, reading, service learning, and events. The initiative will connect students with other local community organizations, as well as national groups (example: the Andrew Goodman Foundation) as we identify resources to support these activities. You will be hearing more about "MAGICIANS VOTE!" in the next few weeks, and while this project has started in the Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and will be further supported through Student Services, we invite everyone across the campus to join us as we celebrate the 19th amendment and the opportunity to help students to become more civically informed and engaged.

Sincerely,

Carol Johnson Dean
Interim President