



Smith Mountain Lake Democrats

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NEWS RELEASE

SML Democrats Discuss 15th Amendment

Smith Mountain Lake, Feb. 28, 2022 - At their general meeting on February 28, 2022, the Smith Mountain Lake Democrats had a lively discussion with Dr. Nicole Greer Golda based on her program "The 15th Amendment: Broken Promises". Greer Golda, Assistant Professor of History and History Program Coordinator at Ferrum College, delineated the history and current usage of the Amendment.

Ratified in 1870, the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution reads "Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Section 2 adds "The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

Dr. Greer Golda explained that while designed to guarantee formerly enslaved men the right to vote, the Amendment has never effectively deterred state legislatures from enacting loopholes which keep people from exercising this right. She identified levying poll taxes and requiring literacy tests as "early methods of defeating the Amendment. Audience members enumerated gerrymandering, requiring certain IDs, limiting polling places and hours, purging voter rolls, and disenfranchising people convicted of felonies as current loopholes.

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“I don’t know if we’ve come full circle or never left the circle,” observed Kaye Hancock, Treasurer of SML Democrats, about continuing efforts to limit voting rights in contravention of the 15th Amendment.

Dr. Greer Golda reminded the audience what was needed to defeat these measures is personal action, “Every time an obstacle comes in the way of broad voter participation, such as poll taxes in the early twentieth century, the solution has been strong social movements aimed at challenging these restrictions. This was the case for Evelyn Butts and Annie Harper, whose work led to the end of poll taxes in Virginia in 1966.”

Dr. Greer Golda continues to teach American history, Virginia history, African American history and the histories of gender, sports, and crime at Ferrum College. The SML Democrats continue to meet on several occasions throughout the year to study and actively participate in politics and civil and human rights issues.

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