

# Suffrage in Texas Expanded

## A HISTORY UNCOVERED PROJECT

By Veronica Popp, Susan Whitmer and Amanda Zerangue

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*“The Women Voters Not Easily Bluffed; Will Vote or Else”*  
– THE HOUSTON INFORMER, 1920

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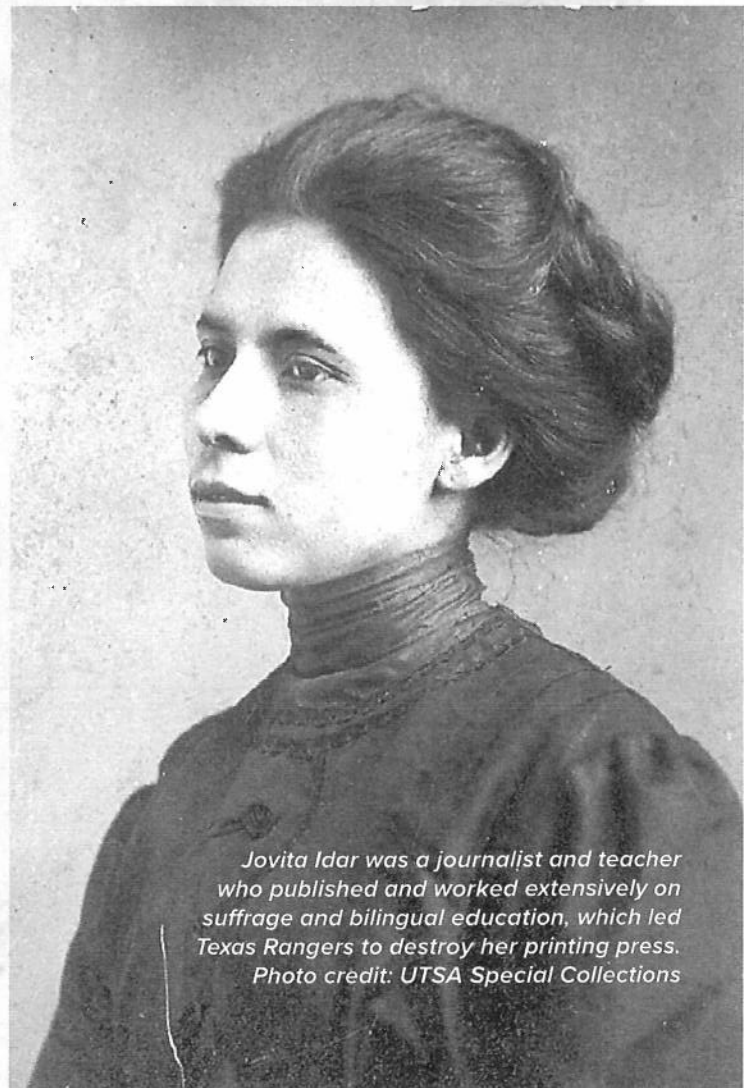
Suffrage in Texas Expanded (SITE) is a digital humanities project that was initiated by members of the Texas Woman’s University Libraries’ Digital Scholarship & Initiatives Work Group. We were inspired by the Constitution Day 2020 programming that celebrated the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, Women’s Right to Vote. The Digital Scholarship & Initiatives Work Group (DSIWG) researched an alternative history of Suffrage in Texas, a history that includes traditionally marginalized peoples.

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The DSIWG was led by Amanda Zerangue, organizational support was provided by Susan Whitmer. The lead researcher, Dr. Veronica Popp, expanded the scope of the project as an intersectional analysis of voting rights in Texas – how race, gender, class, region, education, and religion all played into how women organized for their rights at the ballot box, in what they believed was a human right. Dr. Popp’s research process led to the creation of the SITE LibGuide, [libguides.twu.edu/SITE](http://libguides.twu.edu/SITE). The **SITE LibGuide** contains articles, videos, legal documents, oral history, dissertations and more. It’s a comprehensive and inclusive chronicle of the struggle for women’s suffrage in Texas.

### AMANDA ZERANGUE ON THE GRANT PROCESS

The celebration of the ratification of the 19th Amendment held at Texas Woman’s University (TWU) sparked the idea for this



*Jovita Idar was a journalist and teacher who published and worked extensively on suffrage and bilingual education, which led Texas Rangers to destroy her printing press.  
Photo credit: UTSA Special Collections*



research project. During a moderated discussion, the panelists emphasized that ratifying the 19th Amendment, which granted women the right to vote, did not ensure the right to vote for women of color, including women of color in Texas.

While there is extensive information documenting the struggle for voting rights by women of color in Texas, it is located within various archives, newspapers, oral histories, and legal documents across Texas and online. Simultaneously, the DSIWG members expressed an interest in exploring grant writing. The workgroup decided to pursue an internal research grant funded by TWU's Jane Nelson Institute for Women's Leadership (JNIWL) to develop a digital research collection that consists of a webliography (online annotated bibliography) of resources that chronicle a more inclusive vision of the struggle for women's suffrage in Texas.

At the time, the JNIWL grant proposal process consisted of a two-page document describing the project, detailing the benefit or contribution to the area of women's leadership, the budget, and measurable deliverables to TWU and the JNIWL. The proposed project, *Suffrage in Texas Expanded (SITE)*, requested funding for a graduate assistant and stipends for an advisory panel of faculty scholars at TWU to review the project for accuracy, diversity, and breadth.

The proposal detailed that the project researcher/graduate assistant will create a digital hub of resources, including links to available primary source documents, articles, books, interviews, documentaries, visual resources, cultural heritage resources, etc., which document Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) suffrage groups and movements in Texas.

<sup>1</sup> The Civil rights act of 1964 and Voting rights act of 1965 gave women of color, equal access to the voting booth and public spaces (with continued extensions for language barriers and discrimination).

<sup>2</sup> When annotating vast quantities of research I have two main takeaways: I aim to finish any document within thirty minutes or less, and make the annotations three sentences each. I introduce keywords in the opening sentence and the thesis or conclusions in the second clause including the topic, literature it refers to, and important theories in the opening line.

Upon completion, the measurable deliverables will include:

1. A digital hub of resources that document BIPOC suffrage groups and movements in Texas;
2. Instructional videos which describe and provide examples of how Project SITE may be utilized in expanding curriculum and lessons about suffrage in Texas to include women of color; and
3. A website or webpage or another dynamic platform that provides global access to the information.

The DSIWG proposal was funded, and Dr. Veronica Popp was hired to begin the research process.

#### **DR. VERONICA POPP ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

For women of color, winning suffrage in Texas didn't end in 1919, it had just begun. Both before and after the ratification of the nineteenth amendment, I discovered a rich history of unheard voices and stories. These women labored as teachers, nurses, organizers, housewives, and mothers, paid and unpaid. The struggle would be to maintain universal suffrage<sup>1</sup>.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTION/Framework**

How did women of color in Texas change their stature in society, up to and including gaining suffrage? BIPOC women had to become organizers, persons who actively recruit potential members to join their political cause. White women entirely abandoned or ignored women of color after the ratification of the nineteenth amendment. BIPOC women continued to organize against the legal roadblocks that were initially placed against them by society, including poll taxes, literacy tests, the white primary, segregated public spaces, the inability to vote in local elections or serve on juries, the intentional language barrier, and patronage politics.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

If librarianship is maintained along a single axis that is representative of the prevailing culture, beliefs like humanity and autonomy affect the research methods and methodologies that are thought appropriate, therefore, I had to ensure I was reading the documents in different ways. (Ettarh 2014). I approached the documents with historical, rhetorical, and intersectional lenses. My focus was to examine change over time and to see what and whom these documents left out of the narrative<sup>2</sup>.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Kimberle Crenshaw, an academic and legal researcher, pioneered the intersectional paradigm by examining three independent but linked incidents of discrimination against Black women employees in the legal industry. Crenshaw's critique is that these three legal cases only investigate discrimination based on sex and not the interrelated sexual, racial, and other vectors which contribute to Black women's status as employees (1989, 152). Women of color<sup>3</sup> in Texas had to think outside the box of legal systems, using imagination as a form of political social justice. In essence, they had to imagine themselves legally protected, even when the law failed them. Black women showed up ready to vote and if they were turned away or refused, channeled the organizing spirit into other interrelated issues, such as the creation of a third party in Texas (Black-Tan party) which was Republican leaning due to their anti-slavery policy and emphasis on civil rights, education, and desegregation of public spaces<sup>4</sup> (before suffrage, temperance was popular). Latinx women were inspired by the fervor of the Mexican Revolution and organized through labor rights and children's education, and often utilized bolder tactics<sup>5</sup>.

## RESULTS

Women frequently founded temperance, labor, education, and married ladies' groups and met privately in churches or family homes. These organizations later campaigned for women's suffrage and equal rights. The organization that took place was based on the whole worker; it not only promoted the right of women to vote but also discussed their own self-interest. Women of color in Texas did not undervalue the right to vote, and we do not now have room to undervalue the influence of the voting booth.

## ANALYSIS

The project scope focused on open access data<sup>6</sup>. A major location in finding primary sources was the Portal to Texas History. Places of interest and inspiration were *Civil Rights in Black and Brown: Oral Histories of the Multiracial Freedom Struggles in Texas through Texas Christian University*, *Houston Suffragist Project*, *Texas Historical Association*, and *Timeline of Texas Women's History*.

Lastly, the oral histories from both Denton community activist, Linnie McAdams and San Antonio-based community activist, Denise Hernandez, proved essential by emphasizing the significance of this ongoing organizing today in maintaining equal voting rights in Texas. The Woman's Collection at TWU held fantastic documents from women such as Dorothy Lofton, a clubwoman who organized to vote, Teresa and Andrea Villareal, who were political and social activists who organized for women's liberation, and Hattie Mae White, who served as the first black woman on a school board in Texas.

## CONCLUSION

I hope the research conducted through Project SITE offers a starting point in the conversation, especially for students of color, to continue to organize and fight for political equality for all women using these interconnections to build a more just society at home and at the university.

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<sup>3</sup>I had great difficulty locating sources for Native women in Texas save Wynema by Sophia Alice Callahan, a romantic novel endorsing suffrage for all women. I contacted the Native American Student Association at the University of Texas at Arlington, future collaboration through SITE is possible. The SITE LibGuide includes many historical resources and references to legal distinctions, noting there are only three recognized tribes in Texas: Alabama-Coushatta, Tigua, and Kickapoo.

<sup>4</sup>Rosa L. Yocome was the first to run for state legislature in 1920 ("Black and Tan Candidates Accept Nominations in Brilliant Speeches; they will wage vigorous campaigns"), while Barbara Jordan became the first to win in 1966 (Jordan 1967). Lulu B. White was essential in ending the white primary by taking the battle all the way to the Supreme Court (Hines 2003). Both Christia Adair (Adair 1976-1981) and Juanita Craft (Craft 2010) tied the inability of Black women to be present within public spaces such as Texas libraries and state fairs to their work to extend voting rights.

<sup>5</sup>Jovita Idar was a journalist and teacher who published and worked extensively on suffrage and bilingual education, which led Texas Rangers to destroy her printing press (Gibson 2002). Firebrands such as Emma Tenayuca salted (worked in a factory to organize) and planned a strike at a pecan shellers factory. She also worked on organizing women to fundraise for costly poll taxes (Tenayuca 1987). Lastly, Maria Jiminez was a political activist, who similarly fought and organized a third party, Baza Unida (Jiminez 2010).