



BULLETIN

/lwva.com

January 2025

Calendar

January 14	Tuesday 7 p.m.	LWVA Board Meeting via Zoom teleconference. The meeting URL will be sent to attendees; email one of the Co-Presidents if you would like to attend.
January 20	Monday 6:30 p.m.	37th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Birthday Observance, Town Hall Auditorium, 730 Mass. Ave. The LWVA is a co-sponsor. Doors open at 6 p.m. Details on page 9.
January 27	Monday 7 p.m.	Annual meeting of the Arlington Land Trust in the back room of Donut Villa, 319 Broadway, with speaker and raptor expert Eric Roberts on bald eagles in Arlington, and an update on the Mugar property.



Host Pamela Meister and guest speaker Juli Brazile, Town Clerk, at the Holiday Party in December. See article on pages 10-12.

Photo by Kim Haase

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Co-President's Message

Dear League Members,

As I write this message, it is a rather foggy, gloomy day. A bright spot over the past few days has been a wreath of bird seeds, which was hung from a tree branch in our side yard. Chickadees, juncos, tufted titmice, and a red-bellied woodpecker have had a feast.

A wonderful, welcoming setting for the League's holiday gathering was provided by our hosts, Pamela and Stephen Meister. The weather outside was frightful with a blanket of fog. Our speaker, Town Clerk Juliana Brazile, was very forthcoming. (See page 10 for information about her presentation.) Her husband, Robert Brazile, commented that Juli did not get much sleep around the federal election day.

The LWVA has long been a sponsor of the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Observance, to be held January 20. See page 9 for more information. I hope to see you there.

At the 2023 League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) Convention, delegates voted by a wide margin to conduct a study to determine whether the LWVMA should adopt, by consensus, a position on reparations for black Americans. The scope of the study is to review the evidence for and against taking a position in support of reparations for Black Americans (or for a more limited group, the descendants of enslaved African Americans). If local Leagues and subsequently Convention decide to support such reparations, local Leagues will be able to advocate for reparative activities in their localities, while the State League will be able to advocate statewide for legislative and other action in support of such reparations. A consensus meeting will be held in February, the location and date to be determined. (See pages 3-9 for some background information and the consensus questions.)

The LWVUS is changing the dues collection process. Beginning in 2025, dues will be collected at the National level and a portion of the dues returned to the local leagues. This will be done via something called Stripe. I have been having difficulty setting up a Stripe account. Hopefully, all will be resolved over the coming weeks.

At the urging of LWVA member Sue Fish, the league has ordered and received a set of Arlington Votes signs. The original signs, put together by Phyllis Maddox, were in various states of disrepair.

Wishing you a bright and healthy new year,

Carolyn Parsons

The BULLETIN is published monthly except during the summer and December by the League of Women Voters of Arlington, PO Box 461, Arlington, MA 02476.

Preparing for the Consensus Meeting for the LWVMA Reparations Study for Black Americans

From the State League

At the 2023 League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) Convention, the LWV Amherst proposed a study of reparations to determine whether the LWVMA should adopt, by consensus, a position on reparations. Delegates voted by a wide margin to form a study committee. The proposal was set against a background of a number of recent and on-going reparations efforts, including but not limited to:

- The town of Amherst, MA, created a reparation fund, and assigned creating a plan to its African Heritage Reparations Assembly (AHRA).
- Other Massachusetts cities such as Boston and Northampton are considering studies of reparation.
- A bill proposing a commission to study reparations had been filed in the Massachusetts Senate (currently SD2393) as had a bill creating reparations for the descendants of American slavery. (SD2019).
- HR40 has been introduced at every Congressional session since 1989; in April 2021 it was for the first time moved to the House floor for full consideration, but did not receive a vote. It was reintroduced in January 2023.

The Study Committee undertook to answer the questions that are proposed in the consensus meetings. It has produced a series of documents for LWVMA members to study. These materials and more can be found at <https://lwmva.org/lwmva-reparations-study/>.

- Study Guide with consensus questions, background, and arguments in favor and against (25 pages)
- Study Report addressing the four questions: Why, Who, What, and How (85 pages)
- Additional resources list including links to readings, talks, and other materials (5 pages)

LWVMA Reparations Study Consensus Questions

From the State League (edited)

What follows is a condensed version of the material in the 25-page Study Guide, with the consensus questions and introductions. For the arguments for and against, consult the Guide.

Section A: Why Should Reparations Be Provided? Consensus Question

Introduction

The Study Committee is reserving until the end of the Consensus Questions the basic question: should or should not the LWVMA adopt a position on reparations? Views on reparations vary widely, often depending on Who is to receive them; What the reparations will consist of; and How they are to be delivered. At the consensus meetings, local Leagues would determine who, what, and how before answering the question "Should we take a position or not?"

(Continued on page 5)



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Consensus Study Questions (Continued)

Yet whether or not we choose as a state league to take a position on reparations, the work of the study committee led to discovering how much there is to learn about the Black American experience since Emancipation. The committee also learned how little many white, Asian, and Latino Americans know about this subject. Question A-1 is the result.

Question A-1: Should the LWVMA support educational campaigns developed to raise awareness of the harms caused by systemic racism in the US?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ No consensus

Section B: Who Should Receive Reparations? Consensus Questions**Introduction**

The original proposal passed at LWVMA Convention did not define who should receive reparations. In organizing the Study Committee, it was decided to focus first on the traditional view that reparations are owed to the descendants of Africans enslaved in the U.S., and to them only. Reparations, it has long been argued, are due the descendants of enslaved Africans to repair the damages and suffering caused by the institution of slavery, practiced in the US from its beginnings to 1865. Over time, however, some organizations have expanded the understanding of reparations to cover the harms up to and including those of the Jim Crow era and beyond.

In addition, as Nikole Hannah-Jones and many others have pointed out, the Civil Rights Act (1964), though it has improved aspects of Black American life, has not prevented many harms from continuing, and indeed there has been retreat from the gains of civil rights legislation. (See *Why Are Reparations Needed?* in the study report.) As a result, the concept of comprehensive reparations has been developed, which includes reckoning with the ills experienced since the late 19th century through today.

These later ills, the consequences of slavery, have been experienced by all Black Americans, not only the descendants of enslaved Africans. For this reason, some reparations organizations have changed their definition of whom should receive reparations to include all Black/African Americans.

The Reparations Study Committee presents both views.

Answer yes on no more than one, Question B-1 OR Question B-2: If reparations are provided, which group should be provided reparations?

Question B-1: Only descendants of Africans enslaved in the US from 1619 to 1865?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ No consensus

(Continued on page 7)

LWVA Welcomes New Member

We extend a warm welcome to our newest member, Lu Leveille.



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Consensus Study Questions (Continued)

Question B-2: All Black/African Americans living in the US, with preference given to descendants of Africans enslaved in the US from 1619 to 1865?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ No consensus

Section C: What Reparations Could Be Given? Consensus Questions

Question C-1: Should the LWVMA support the provision of the broad range of possible reparations to Black/African Americans?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ No consensus

Question C-2: Should the LWVMA support reparations in the form of cash payments to descendants of Africans enslaved in the US between 1619 and 1865?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ No consensus

Section D: How Should Reparations Be Provided? Consensus Questions**Introduction**

Reparations for the descendants of Africans enslaved in this country from 1619 through the end of slavery is a widely discussed topic, recently broadened by some to include all Black/African Americans (see Who Should Receive Reparations? Consensus Questions). Yet few arguments thoughtfully critique reparations in relation to the specific type(s) of organizations that could provide them: for example, government, private, religious, or educational organizations at the national, state, or local level. In the points of view that follow, we give the best arguments, pro and con, we have found.

Question D-1: Should the federal government provide the bulk of the funding for reparations to whichever group is identified in Section B as the rightful recipients?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ No consensus

(Continued on next page)

Consensus Study Questions (Continued)

Questions D-2 through D-6: Should the following levels of government and other organizations participate in efforts to redress the harms caused to whichever group is identified in Section B as the rightful recipients?

Question D-2: Federal government

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ No consensus

Question D-3: State governments

In relation to Questions D-3 to D-6, a word of caution is in order because of the long standing LWV position on "Meeting Basic Human Needs," which suggests that it is unwise to have state or local governments or private enterprises dominating the provision of any basic human needs. "The federal government should set minimum, uniform standards and guidelines for social welfare programs and should bear primary responsibility for financing programs designed to help meet the basic needs of individuals and families. State and local governments, as well as the private sector, should have a secondary role in financing food, housing and health care programs." [Impact, p 146]

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ No consensus

Question D-4: Local governments

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ No consensus

Question D-5: Business enterprises

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ No consensus

Question D-6: Other organizations (private institutions, universities, faith-based groups, etc.)

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ No consensus

Continued on next page)

Consensus Study Questions (Continued)**Section E: Concluding Consensus Question****Introduction**

This study guide, using its accompanying study report for background and contextual details, has laid out consensus questions addressing why reparations are needed, who exactly could receive reparations, what reparations could be made, and how reparations could be provided.

Finally, the overarching question must be asked whether the LWVMA should take a position on reparations, so that local leagues can either advocate and educate citizens about local and state reparations programs, plans, policies, and legislation; or not.

Further, if the LWVMA should not take a position on reparations, should the league oppose reparations?

In his Letter from Birmingham Jail, The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., reminds us, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” [MLK]

Question E-1: Should the LWVMA take a position in support of reparations?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ No consensus

MLK Event Set for January 20

By Carolyn Parsons

Preparations are underway for the 37th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Observance celebration. This event honors the life and achievements of the civil rights pioneer. The MLK Committee also supports progressive initiatives for justice and equity, especially in our public schools.

Kellie Carter Jackson will be the keynote speaker this year. Ms. Jackson is an Associate Professor of Africana Studies at Wellesley College. She has written two highly regarded books: Force and Freedom and We Refuse: A Forceful History of Black Resistance. The LWVA has long been a sponsor of this event. I hope to see you there.

Guests Learn from Town Clerk at Holiday Party

By Kim Haase

League members and guests socialized over a delicious potluck dinner and then had an engaging and informative question-and-answer session with Arlington's Town Clerk, Juli Brazile. The event took place December 10 at the home of Pamela and Stephen Meister.

Juli Brazile began with her history in Arlington, which began when she and her husband Robert moved here in 1991. With a degree in English, she worked in communications and as a paralegal. In town, she volunteered with organizations including Envision Arlington and served as a Town Meeting Member (TMM). She ran for Town Clerk when there was a vacancy in 2020 and won.

Brazile noted that for the League, scheduling Candidates' Night before the Town Election is now a bit tricky, since early voting will already have begun before our usual event date of about 10 days before the election. In local elections, she reports that voters are surprised not to find any information on candidates on the elections and voting web page, except for optional statements from Town Meeting candidates (the League stopped doing Voters' Guides a few years ago because of a lack of volunteers).

COVID caused a good deal of turnover in Town Meeting because of the difficulty of virtual meetings. Also, more people are running for Town Meeting since the Town changed the way it elects candidates to 1- or 2-year terms when a TMM leaves before their term is up. People no longer have to run for either a 3-year term or a shorter one. Instead, when there are 5 openings, for example, the candidate with the fifth highest number of votes wins the short-term position.

We have a very high voter registration rate, but low turnout in local elections. Adding early voting and voting by mail hasn't increased turnout; it just spread it out.

It's very expensive to send the postcards that allow people to request to vote by mail in elections. This year Brazile plans to enclose a form with the town census in January that will allow an entire household to sign up for mail-in voting.

Brazile noted that Burlington has a higher turnout in local elections than Arlington does, possibly because they offer voting to young people under 18. Because all precincts are located in the same building, the town created a special precinct for kids K-12, and the kids' results are reported along with the others, though they don't count. It gives youth a chance to get in the habit of voting before they go off to college. It would be a lot harder to do this with our multiple polling places, though. Burlington also has an active civic engagement group that publishes candidate information.

The town election gives us a chance to try things out, Brazile commented. They are working on short videos on filling out registration forms, applying for mail-in ballots, and the like, to try to prevent errors; the office currently spends a lot of

(Continued on next page)

Holiday Party (Continued)

time helping people correct their applications. Brazile noted that people put ballots from Medford, Winchester and even other states in our drop boxes. A League member wondered if it would be helpful to put "Arlington Residents Only" on the drop boxes.

Another League member who's a precinct warden commented that quite a few people come in as inactive voters because they forgot to send in the town census, and wondered if the census form could point out this penalty for not sending it in. Brazile noted that one purpose of the census is to keep state voter rolls accurate. Renewing a driver's license activates you as a voter, or filling out the form on Election Day. She added that once you go on the inactive list you are sent a postcard notification. Only after failing to vote in two November elections are you removed from the voter rolls.

In response to a question, Brazile said that they post election information to YourArlington, the Arlington List, and other venues. Another questioner wondered if there could be a separate thread for election news in the town email notices for those who want to be informed specifically about this topic. Brazile agreed this might be a good idea.

A League member asked about the many things the Town Clerk's office does in addition to elections. Brazile listed some of them: dog licenses, raffle permits, removal permits for buried oil tanks, vital records (births, marriages, deaths), business certificates. The state is gradually updating its systems for recording births and deaths. Funeral homes are involved in the process. A League member noted that loved ones can serve as their own funeral director; Brazile commented that it involves a great deal of paperwork. The Town Clerk also swears in all elected officials and police officers (but not firefighters).

Brazile reported that although some Town Clerks officiate at weddings as a JP, she does not: Town Hall is such an attractive venue that she would have time for nothing else.

The Town Clerk also keeps the official records of Town Meeting and is involved in assembling the Warrant. She also handles public records requests, though some go to the Deputy Town Manager for Operations, Christine Bongiorno. The Town Counsel sometimes needs historical records from past Town Meetings when reviewing warrant articles.

A League member noted that up to 2/3 of ballots now come in early, but must be opened and counted on Election Day, which is a lot of work for poll workers during high-turnout elections. He wondered if there was any alternative. Brazile responded that it might be possible for the ballots to be checked in and opened early, then flattened and sent to the precincts to be fed into the tabulators. In 2020, with no in-person voting, they rented a high-speed scanner and processed 20,000 ballots beforehand. However, one advantage of having 21 precincts is that with fewer voters per precinct than in most towns, workers can usually process all the ballots in good time. In the future they might be able to cooperate with another town to share a high-speed scanner to time-stamp the ballots quickly when they come in.

(Continued on next page)

Holiday Party (Continued)

At every election, the state requires 3% of precincts to be audited after the election. This happened with one of Arlington's precincts in November; all the ballots were recounted by hand, and any discrepancies with the machine count were recorded. Discrepancies sometimes happened if, for example, pencil or pink ink was used.

Brazile reported that Arlington got 500 ballots from overseas in November; they come in online, are printed as PDFs, and are then hand-counted on Election Night by the office staff. In response to a question, Brazile said that people living overseas are able to vote in local, state, and federal elections in the last jurisdiction where they were registered. Overseas ballots that come in by mail are counted by the Board of Registrars.

The Board of Registrars, Brazile explained, is a group of four, including the Town Clerk -- two from each party are appointed by the Select Board based on recommendations from the party committees. In the distant past, they used to register voters; now the function is largely symbolic. They oversee recounts and adjudicate challenges to voter registration. A member of the Clerk's Office staff is designated the Registrar but is officially the assistant to the Board of Registrars.

Asked her views on same-day registration, Brazile replied that she could see some advantages, but that it would be cumbersome to implement. She thought that improving the Registry of Motor Vehicles and the online registration systems would make a big difference: people often think they have registered, but they haven't. Also, the Postal Service's change of address form implies that it changes voter registration, but it doesn't.

In response to a question, Brazile agreed that the Automark machines for the disabled (primarily the visually impaired) are not in good condition. They will be very expensive to replace, however, and since many of the disabled now vote by mail, they are not much used.

"First Amendment Auditors" have come to the Town Clerk's office and other town offices, Brazile reported. These are usually a couple of people with a microphone and video camera whose purpose is to get thrown out so that the "auditors" can post the video online and generate revenue. Town officials try to avoid interacting with them except to answer fact-based questions.

Editor's Note: Juli Brazile's current term as Town Clerk expires in 2026. In the 2024 Town Election, voters approved a ballot question to make the Town Clerk's position appointed instead of elected; this is a position advocated by the LWVA for the past 50 years, and supported by Brazile as well. The next Town Clerk will be appointed by the Town Manager.

We welcome new members and renewals at all times. Join online (see next page for instructions) or by using this form. Thank you!

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_____ Housing/Zoning/Community Development
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You can still renew by printing the form on page 7 and mailing it to the LWVA with your check.

January 2025

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