

Dear Sylvanie Williams,

It is March 3, 2023, and it has been 102 years since your death. So many things have changed. However, there are some things that haven't changed much at all. I don't think you would be surprised by this, considering the history you lived through. There were a lot of ups and downs in your life. When you were born the Emancipation Proclamation was still 8 years away, but by the time you were 19 the foundations of Reconstruction had already crumbled.

Women have gained many more rights in the last 100 years. I am aware this was one of your main goals. I know you worked hard for women's suffrage, and you must have been really excited in 1920 when the 19th Amendment was ratified. Sadly, it would have taken another 45 years before you would have been able to vote in Louisiana. Many African Americans were excluded when the 19th was passed, and all women only truly got to vote in 1965 via the Voting Rights Act.

The Voting Rights Act allowed the US population to fully show who they supported, which resulted in much more diversity in the government. In 2008 we elected our first Black president, Barack Obama. In 2018, New Orleans got its first female African American mayor. However, in 2013 the Supreme Court decided that a main part of the VRA was to be terminated.

The argument was that racism is not a problem anymore \*rolls eyes\*. Many people believe that this reversal has made it easier for states to enact policies like requiring photo ID that make it harder for people to vote. In 2012 we had the highest percentage of African Americans participating in national elections ever, but since the reversal the percentage has diminished.

As you know, education for African American kids has not always been easy, or even allowed. I'm sure you had so much hope when Thomy Lofon School opened, and so much anguish when white rioters burned it down. But after you died, things continue to trade off. In 1960, at just 6 years old, Ruby Bridges was the first person to integrate a white school in New Orleans! But now, segregation has largely returned to New Orleans schools. In New Orleans, 58% of the population is African American and 30% are white. But in public schools, the average white to black ratio is 9% to 72%! That is a big difference, and way too big to be ignored, but it has been. Luckily, there are a few bright spots. For example, Bricolage Academy, a public school, (from my personal experience) has an amazing mix of cultures and cracks down on any type of racism in the school or anywhere in general.

I think it's very interesting that no matter what part of history we trace, there will always be a pattern of ups and downs. We make progress and then we lose it. When women finally got the right to vote, it still took years to include Black women. When the voting system started to represent everyone, the protections that made that happen were discarded. When schools were no longer allowed to be segregated, school segregation continued in a much sneakier

fashion. I know you lived this roller coaster, so you probably won't be surprised by this. But I think you would be proud of all the people who kept on fighting.

Sincerely,

Noah Hochron