Statement: “The Fifteenth Amendment”

**“The Fifteenth Amendment” A Statement from the Black Political Empowerment Project (B-PEP) Wednesday, March 25, 2020**

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. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

The fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, guaranteeing the right to vote to Black men, became law in 1870 after ratification by the required twenty-eight states. Pennsylvania was the 12th state to ratify the Amendment on March 25, 1869. The women’s suffrage movement split into two camps, one opposing the amendment because it did not include women and the other in favor of giving black men the right to vote. It wasn’t until 1920 that Congress passed the Nineteenth Amendment giving women the right to vote.

To this day White supremacists are determined to keep Blacks and now others of the global majority from voting in order to consolidate political power in the White community. Immediately after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment the Ku Klux Klan and other White supremacist groups used terror and lynching to discourage Blacks from voting. The Colfax massacre in Louisiana, described by historian Eric Foner as the “worst incidence of racial violence during Reconstruction” saw the murder of at least 150 Black men after they surrendered at the promise of clemency in the aftermath of the contested election of the Governor of Louisiana. The violence continued and intensified after reconstruction into the 20th century. Literacy tests and poll taxes, which did not apply to White voters, were also used to disenfranchise Black voters in the south. Today, mass lynching has given way to mass incarceration.

According to The Sentencing Project, today an estimated 5.85 million Americans labeled felons “have currently or permanently lost their voting rights as a result of a felony conviction”. Also, according to the Sentencing Project “2.2 million African Americans or 7.7% of Black adults are disenfranchised, compared to 1.8% of the non-African American population”. In Florida, Kentucky and Virginia at least 20% of the Black population are disenfranchised. Almost 100 years after the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment congress attempted to enable Section 2 by passing the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Almost 250,000 African Americans registered to vote in 1965. The U.S. Supreme Court gutted the Act in 2013 by rendering the pre-clearance provision unenforceable. That provision applied to several states and required Federal approval of legislation involving voting rights.

After the U.S. Supreme Court decision, Texas, North Carolina, South Carolina and Mississippi enacted laws that had previously been denied preclearance, thus demonstrating the importance of the provisions contained in the original 1965 Voting Rights Act. Unfortunately, not all American citizens want to do everything possible to insure that ALL citizens have an unimpeded opportunity to VOTE in EACH and EVERY election!!

Those persons and entities who proactively take steps to prevent some citizens of this nation to vote, are in fact violating ‘the spirit of America’. All persons, regardless of party, should have an ongoing steadfast commitment to seeking new and creative ways to encourage voting for all citizens of the United States of America! The Black Political Empowerment Project (B- PEP) is continually fighting against intrusion into the 15th Amendment and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, from the purging of voter lists, to racial and political gerrymandering, and to voter intimidation at the polls. It is the opinion of the Black Political Empowerment Project that the original spirit of the 15th Amendment has suffered, and that the voting rights of African Americans continue to be challenged to this date. B-PEP salutes the 15th Amendment and continues to fight to keep its original intention alive and well, and to seek that the original intention become a true reality for ALL Americans!