

Play will examine voting rights fight in American history

By Kelli Kellogg

If historical research applied in a Lincoln drama is any indication, the Founding Fathers perhaps should have written "all white men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence — as least as far as voting is concerned.

Struggle for the Vote: The History of Voting Rights for Blacks, Native Americans and Women, a three-act historical drama, is scheduled for its second presentation today at 7:30 p.m. at the Malone Community Center, 2032 U St. The play was written and directed by Lincolnite Don Winslow. It was based on evidence gathered by John Schneider, UNL associate professor of history, and Michael Combs, UNL associate professor of political science.

The play uses three actors in nine monologues to dramatize the problems faced by women and minorities in their struggle to gain voting rights. Sue Samson, project director, said that even in the 1980s, voting power still is not distributed equally.

"This year, getting minorities out to vote is a big issue nationally," she said. "They've never been a power as far as voting is concerned."

However, since the play is funded by a \$2,000 grant from the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities, Samson said, "We're not advocating anything."

That didn't matter to Corky Ford, one of the three principal actors in the drama. The 25-year-old actor, who has acted in episodes of *M*A*S*H* and *Trapper John, M.D.*, said he was so inspired by the play that he plans to vote this year for the first time.

"I'm not voting just because of the play, but it was an inspiration," Ford said. "I know I'll feel better putting in what I can."

In the play, Ford portrays an old man of the 1800s, a black minister of the 1960s and a black man of today. Ford said he liked the part of the preacher best.

"In the '60s the preachers, such as the Rev. Jesse Jackson and Martin Luther King, Jr., were leaders for us," he said.

Ford said he found the part of the old man "the most challenging" of the three, and he said he was most comfortable with the role of today's black man.

Felix White, a Winnebago tribal chairman, portrays John Elk in the play. Elk was an American Indian assimilated into the world of white men, but denied citizenship by the Supreme Court in 1884. White also plays a World War I veteran and an Indian of today.

Barbara Svoboda, who will attend the New York University graduate school of drama in the fall, also acts in the Lincoln drama. Svoboda portrays a minister's wife in the 1800s, a suffragette and a woman of today.

Actors researched their parts thoroughly, Ford said.

"Each has a message and touches a different category of people," he said. "I didn't know the struggle to vote took so much time."

The play is co-sponsored by seven groups, including the Lincoln Public Schools and the Lincoln-Lancaster Commission on the Status of Women. *Struggle for the Vote* can be seen again May 4 at 7:30 p.m. at the Indian Center, 1100 Military Road. Admission is free.

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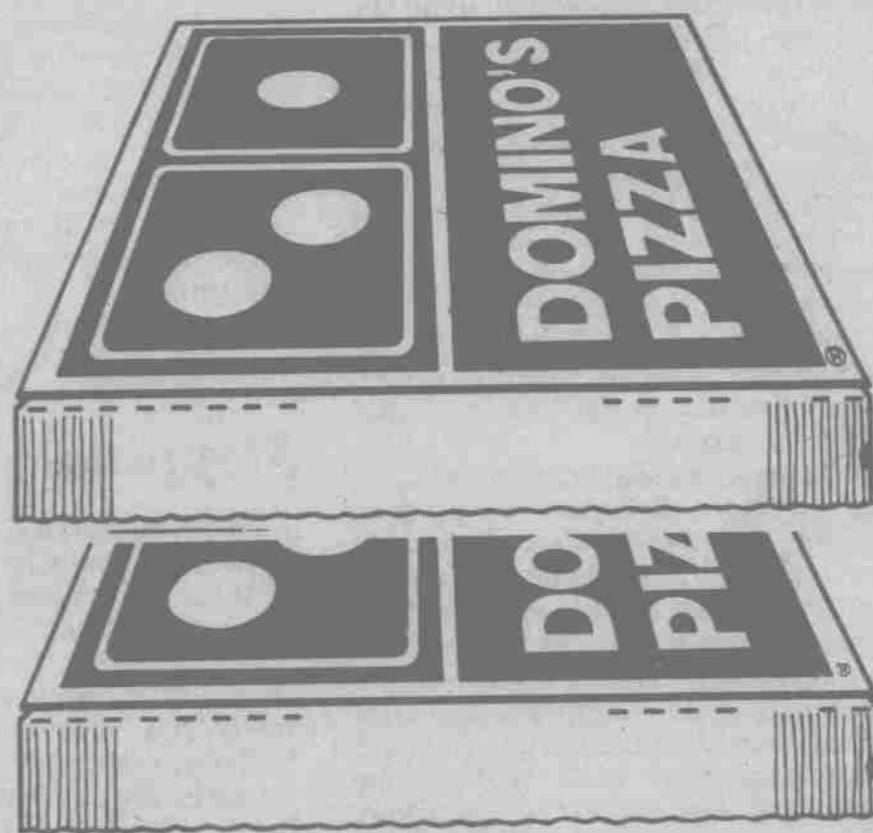
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