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**Civics 101**

# Democratic Party

**CPB Grant:** [00:00:00] Civics 101 is supported in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

**Katie Couric:** [00:00:03] You can see on this map there are a number of undecided states of the Democrats in Pennsylvania. A little concerned about Sarah Palin's...-

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:13] When were talking about political parties, we tend to talk a lot about election night. Right?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:19] Right.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:20] And there's this moment that I think is the most exciting. And it's where they've got this giant map in the studio, and there's an empty silhouette of a state, and then it flickers and it snaps either red or blue.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:33] Yeah. That's when you as a political person, your heart either rises or sinks. Right? When you see a state go for one candidate or another.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:42] Do you know when that started? Red states? Blue states?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:46] Have we not had that for like forever? For decades and decades?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:50] Right, here let me play you something. This is from election night, 1980-.

**News Anchor:** [00:00:52] -Electoral votes. And so we will put on our map in blue, for those of you who are [00:01:00] watching in color, we'll make Florida our projected winner for Reagan.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:04] Blue for Reagan! This is 1980?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:07] Yeah, hold on check this out.

**News Anchor:** [00:01:09] - We'll color those in now. Red across the western rim, the Pacific Rim of the United States, for Bill Clinton. And just a few blue spots on that map for George Bush. 362-

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:20] That was NBC coverage of the 1992 election. Democrats used to be red. And then they sort of switched. One station switched it to red for Republicans because they said "we're coloring it red for Reagan". In the 1996 election, Clinton v. Dole, that was the first year that all three major networks had red for the GOP and blue for Democrats. But the terms "red state" "blue state" they did not enter our common parlance until-.

**News Anchor:** [00:01:48] It appears that there will be a recount in the state of Florida. They still need to wait for- what is it?- overseas ballots.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:59] Bush v. Gore? [00:02:00]

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:00] Yeah, because of the closeness of that race, the ensuing recount, America had been staring at a red and blue map for days. I saw VOX video about this, actually, and it said that David Letterman was one of the first. He made a joke about blue states and red states. And the term just stuck it too soon.

**David Letterman:** [00:02:16] Here's how it's gonna go,George W. Bush will be president for the red states. {laughing} Al W.Gore will be president for the blue states. And that's-

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:26] And now Democrats embrace their blue. They put it in their campaign logos. We have terms like "blue wave" versus a "red tide". And that division, that color polarity, is really new.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:37] It's hard for me to wrap my mind around this idea that a party can rebrand itself that quickly based on this arbitrary choice made by a news network.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:47] You think that strange Hannah hold on your little purple hat.I'm Nick Capodice.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:53] I'm Hannah McCarthy.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:55] And this is Civics 101. And today we're talking about the Democratic Party, capital [00:03:00] D. What it is. What it was. What it will be. And if we're gonna talk about how the party has evolved over the years we have to say what they're all about today. So let's go with their own words in their 2016 Democratic platform the planks of which included, "addressing economic inequality, college debt, climate change, and access to health care." It is also today the party of inclusivity when it comes to issues like same sex marriage, women's rights, and immigration.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:31] So let's go back now, the genesis of the Democratic Party. How did it start?

**Heather Wagner:** [00:03:36] The Democratic Party, to make things really clear, began actually as the Republican Party.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:44] Oh come on!

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:44] I know. I'm sorry. I know. This is Heather Wagner, by the way. She wrote the book, The History of the Democratic Party.

**Heather Wagner:** [00:03:50] So the Democratic Party was founded by Thomas Jefferson, and other men like him, who were dissatisfied with [00:04:00] the direction the country was going under George Washington and John Adams. And they felt George Washington, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton were believers in a very strong central government.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:04:14] And Jefferson wants a smaller federal government with more power given to the states. And he is our first Democratic president even though he was called, sorry again, a Republican. But pretty quickly, the name gets changed by his opponents, funnily enough.

**Heather Wagner:** [00:04:30] His critics said that he and his supporters were too much like the radical French. Who had sparked the French Revolution and led to bloodshed and violence in France. And as a critique they would call this group of Republicans The "Democratic Republicans." It was meant to be a dis. Jefferson and his supporters decided to adopt [00:05:00] this points of honor and called themselves the "Democratic Republicans".

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:05] And this was the founding of what we know today as the Democratic Party.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:09] And how are their beliefs related to what we think of now when we think of Democrats?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:14] Okay, here is Keneshia Grant. She is a professor of political science at Howard University.

**Keneshia Grant:** [00:05:18] So when we think about the Democratic Party at that time, we don't think of anything like the Democratic Party at this time. The Democratic Party at that time is "liberal with a lower case L", as scholars say. And that means that they don't want to see the government being very active. The government should not be involved in your life telling you what to do. The government should just kind of be around to make sure that things don't fall apart. Which is different from the party as we think about it today. We think about a Democratic Party today as one who is willing to step in to try to correct some of the perceived wrongs, they they might say, in the economy. Or some of the perceived wrongs in the way that we treat humans [00:06:00] and these other kinds of things.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:06:02] How does it change? Because that to me is like 180 degrees.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:06:07] All right, we'll get there. And that is Keneshia's particular bailiwick. But first, there is a big shift and it starts with Andrew Jackson in 1829.

**Heather Wagner:** [00:06:16] By the time Andrew Jackson is president he has dropped the Republicans from his affiliation. So he identifies himself as a Democratic candidate. Andrew Jackson was the Southerner. He was a slave owner. He was a war hero. He champions- even though he was a wealthy landowner- he championed the idea of sort of the "ordinary man" "common man" around... his presidency was when white men, I should say, were given the right to vote based on age. As opposed to if you had property or paid a certain amount in... in landowning taxes. So it was the evolution [00:07:00] of voting rights towards white men over the age of 21 as opposed to landowners.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:07:06] Quick side note, opponents of Jackson, during the 1828 election, called him a word that means donkey... but it was an epithet that Jackson embraced. He even put images of donkeys on his campaign posters- and that is when that all started. And the party that went up against Jackson was the National Republican Party. But they were just as often known as the anti-Jacksonians. They did not like what Jackson had done to the role of president.

**Heather Wagner:** [00:07:33] He took steps to concentrate power and to make sure that he was a very powerful executive. He had taken certain policies that really infringed on the rights of Native Americans and the rights states. And this sort of sowed the seeds of what would gradually flare up into the start of the modern Republican Party. And also, the disagreements [00:08:00] that flared out into the Civil War.

**Keneshia Grant:** [00:08:04] So remember the- part of the story is that the parties want to maintain cohesion. They understand that is difficult for minor parties, third parties, or smaller parties to win the presidency. It's difficult for them to win Senate seats, or seats in the House of Representatives, and be appointed to Senate seats. And because they are worried about splitting their power they are trying to do everything they can to... to remain together. And one of the things that splits them up more than anything else, kind of- I would say the thing that stresses the party the most- is a conversation about slavery. And if we want to have a party that is unified in the north and in the south we can't have this conversation about slavery because people in the north are going to disagree from people in the South. So we end up with these parties that exist in different ways because the one thing that they probably [00:09:00] should be talking about they are not talking about. So we end up with these cleavages, kind of, for that reason- where we have a northern Democratic Party that looks different from a southern Democratic Party. But eventually they do have that conversation. And we end up with a Republican Party that's more dominant in the north, because they have had the conversation and come down on the side of black people. Come down against slavery- for various reasons, again, not all of them on the up and up- set up where we have a party, again Republican Party in the north. A Democratic Party that's kind of dominant in the south. And then we have some kind of debate about who's going to win the west, and what the farmers want, and whether or not the parties will be willing to bend to the demands of the people, who are in the West, and who now have the ability to vote and influence politics too.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:09:47] All right. Now I want to learn about that shift. How does the party that is the party of slavery, the party of the Ku Klux Klan, become the party of the civil [00:10:00] rights movement? The party that gives us our first African-American president?

**Keneshia Grant:** [00:10:05] So if you want to sound really smart with your friends, if you like know a political scientist and you want to get their gears going, you just say "re-alignment". Because that... that is the one word answer to that question. Realignment happens and the parties change. And so the political scientists argue about how realignment happens. I'm in the camp of people who think realignment is a slow and gradual process. The short version is that America changes. So in the story that we've been telling up to this point there are folks who live in the south, there are folks who live in the north. We don't yet have like a large wave of immigrants coming into the United States. So we get an industrial revolution and we get a world war. We get immigrants coming into the United States and we don't yet in the nation have rules that are structured to prevent them from participating, in the ways that we try to prevent them from participating now. And so it's kind of easier [00:11:00] to get to citizenship, easier to get to participation in politics. And so, a part of the answer about how the Democratic Party in particular becomes the party of the people, as opposed to the party of the slave owners or the party of Southern business interest, has to do with their decisions to or attempts to win elections. Particularly, I would say, at the state and local level and to to speak to the needs of immigrants.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:11:29] Now I do want to step in here and say that the North and the South are not just one unified thing, that's unfair. There were people who opposed slavery in the South. People who supported it in the north. Whites only signs. Other forms of segregation in schools, businesses, housing.Those existed in the North as well as the South. And as Keneshia told me, African-American voters are a huge part of the story.

**Keneshia Grant:** [00:11:52] It's not just immigrants who are flooding into the cities, black people are flooding into the cities. The Great Migration brings about [00:12:00] 6,500,000 black people from the south into the north. And parties on the ground, local party leaders, mayors, aldermen, governors have to contend with how they might get this bloc of voters to support them as well. Which makes them takes, kind of, steps towards civil rights that they might not otherwise take.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:12:22] And then we have the Great Depression in the 1930s, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his party, the Democrats, said "People are suffering. We need to do something." And what they did was the New Deal, relief reform, recovery.

**Franklin Delano Roosevelt:** [00:12:39] This is more than a political campaign. It is a call to arms-

**Nick Capodice:** [00:12:42] What this did was further cement the notion that the Democratic Party is the party of big government spending on domestic programs and social welfare programs. But the civil rights movement that initially was more allied by geography than [00:13:00] by party. Almost 100% of northern Democrats in Congress supported the Civil Rights Act of 1964. But, so too did 85 percent of northern Republicans. Just 9% percent of Southern Dems and 0 Southern Republicans supported it in Congress. So here's Paddy Riley. He's a professor of history and humanities at Reed College.

**Paddy Riley:** [00:13:19] But I mean I think the key thing is that the Democratic Party...is just no longer become possible for Southern white supremacist to remain in the party because the because the national party has moved so hard on civil rights. I mean that's Johnson's- Lyndon Johnson's famous line, "We lost the South for a generation". And it turns out to be true, a generation and more at this point. So I think effectively the South kind of becomes up for grabs. Because they're not going to remain in the Democratic Party. So is someone going to capitalize on them? And Republicans do. I mean, that's just what happens.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:13:54] I don't want to sound cynical here.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:13:56] Go ahead. Go ahead.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:13:56] But it just kind of sounds like a big part of the reason [00:14:00] that the Democrats completely reversed their positions on just about everything was not purely because of ideals, but to court voters?

**Keneshia Grant:** [00:14:13] Well, I mean, I'm a political scientist so I think everything is about political strategy, political expediency. But yes, I think that one of the kind of biggest broadest ways of understanding party history is that parties are trying to- one- maintain themselves. And then parties as groups who are willing to court coalitions in order to keep or maintain power. "Black people are here. They want to have some kind of intervention on civil rights. We're not opposed to that. That seems like it could be okay for us. We think that they would help us win these local and state elections. We think that because they live in these states with large electoral college votes they could help us win the presidential election. Let's test out a coalition between [00:15:00] black people and the Democratic Party." So it's the same kind of thing, parties kind of moving and shapeshifting as they encounter groups so that they can maintain dominance.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:15:16] So thinking about like the party today versus the party then, there's a lot of arguing going on on social media about the problematic history of both parties. Right? And I'm just wondering, like, given how different the parties are today- from how they were at their genesis- is that even fair to do?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:15:36] Yeah. People taking the Democratic Party to task for being the party of the KKK. I asked Paddy about that specifically.

**Paddy Riley:** [00:15:42] That accusation, in some sense, it seems like it has power partly because maybe we are just not open and public enough about just how deep and powerful the history of white supremacy is in the United States. You know, it shouldn't be possible for us to continue to, like, romanticize the past. So, [00:16:00] you know, those accusations seem to have power just because we need to be more open.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:16:08] So finally, with all that history under our belt, I ask Keneshia about the party going forward. If she thinks there might be another realignment?

**Keneshia Grant:** [00:16:16] The Democratic Party is a big tent party. Keep these coalitions in mind. The Democratic Party has to please immigrants, black people, gay people, progressive white people. Like- business interest for some people... like people- just so many groups of people they have to be worried about. When you think about the Democratic Party or any party, particularly in a national election, they have to get in a room and fight it out. A party platforms only so long and, you know, not everybody's gonna read it. But it matters a lot to the party and it matters a lot to the messaging of the party. And so how do I say, "I really care about [00:17:00] urban development and I really don't like displacement of people as a result of gentrification"? In some instances that stuff is going to be in conflict. And so the Democratic Party has this difficult road to travel, because they have to please all these different groups of people and these different groups of people have different interests.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:17:22] So the Democratic Party has come a long way. Changing names, switching positions on the way to the blue party we think of today. And that's the thing. These parties are always changing. So it's really hard to say what a Democrat is because there's not one answer and it depends on a ton of other things. And you can still see that push and pull of this big tent, that Keneshia mentioned, in the huge pool of Democratic candidates in the 2020 race.

**Andrew Yang:** [00:17:50] So, we need to pay teachers more because the data clearly shows that a good teachers-

[00:17:53] -public colleges, and universities, and HBCU's debt free-.

**Elizabeth Warren:** [00:17:57] I think I'm the only [00:18:00] person on the stage who has been a public school teachers-

[00:18:01] {montage of candidates}

**Nick Capodice:** [00:18:19] Well that will just about tie it all up in a big blue bow or a red bow maybe if it's pre the 1992 election. Today's episode is produced by me, Nick Capodice, with you Hannah McCarthy. Thank you!

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:18:30] You're welcome. Our staff includes Jacqui Fulton. Erika Janik is our executive producer and her cut of the week, lots of stuff about a national bank. Thanks, Erika.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:18:40] When it comes to salting her food, Maureen McMurray is liberal with the small L, as scholars say.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:18:44] Music in this episode by Chad Crouch, Blue-Dog Sessions, Diala, The Grand Affair, Reed Mathis.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:18:50] And it wouldn't be a Nick Capodice episode without Worth the whiskey, Chris Zabriskie.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:18:56] Civics 101 is made possible in part by the Corporation [00:19:00] for Public Broadcasting and is a production of NHPR, New Hampshire Public Radio.