# Nineteenth Amendment Part 1

**Hannah McCarthy:** Hey, everyone, Hannah here. How are you doing out there? Nick and I are thinking about you constantly. We're a part of your community. If from afar. So please don't ever, ever hesitate to reach out to ask us about anything. Anything, not just civics at Nick knows a lot about old movies and board games. And I know a lot about decommissioned psychiatric hospitals. And Nancy Drew. Anything. E-mail us at Hannah@civics101podcast.org or Nick@civics101podcast.org. And we will answer you. And we love you. OK.

**Nick Capodice:** Yes. Please e-mail us. This is Nick here, by the way. Thank you for keeping Civics 101 in your lineup in this time. That is so strange for many of us. We're all watching right now to see how the government -- if the government works -- now more than ever, it is crucial for us to understand [00:01:00] our history, how we've navigated strife in the past, our missteps, our triumphs, and what systems have come out of that navigation. We'll be here every step of the way to give you the context that you need.

**Hannah McCarthy:** We also need to know what you need. So please let us know. We've posted a survey to our Web site, that's civics101podcast.org. It's right there on the landing page.

**Hannah McCarthy:** And we're asking how we can best serve you in this era of Corona virus. It's super short, super short. And we will take what we learned from you and make you and yours the very best episodes and resources to get us all through.

**Nick Capodice:** Alright. On to the episode.

**Hannah McCarthy:** There's this pretty powerful story that tends to go along with telling people how the 19th [00:02:00] Amendment came to be. It happens in a place called Seneca Falls, New York.

So here's the ad that was published in the Seneca County Courier, "A Convention to discuss the social, civil and religious condition and rights of women will be held blah blah blah blah, uh, ladies only on day one. The public can come on the second day when... Okay, here we go.

When Lucretia Mott of Philadelphia and other ladies and gentlemen will address the convention.

**Elizabeth Cady Stanton Reenactor:**  e hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal.

**Laura Free:** If you go back to the Declaration of Sentiments, the document that was the foundation of the Women's Rights Convention in 1848 in Seneca Falls, it sort of serves as a manifesto for the women's rights movement in the early 19th century, and there were lots of things they were asking for.

**Hannah McCarthy:** This is Laura Free. She's [00:03:00] an historian of voting rights.

**Laura Free:** I teach college students at Hobart and William Smith colleges in Geneva, New York. My most recent book was called Suffrage Reconstructed Gender, Race and Voting Rights in the Civil War Era.

**Hannah McCarthy:** She's also working on a podcast called Amended, which is tackling, coincidentally, the 19th Amendment, which is just a glint in the eye of all of these women at this convention at Seneca Falls. The Declaration of sentiments that Laura is talking about, that's this document written primarily by this woman named Elizabeth Cady Stanton. It's modeled after the Declaration of Independence. And it basically says that women should be on equal footing with men.

**Elizabeth Cady Stanton Reenactor:** Let that be submitted to a candid world. He has never permitted her to exercise her an alienable right to the elective franchise. He has compelled her to submit to laws in the formation of which she had no voice.

**Nick Capodice:** And the 19th Amendment, just to clarify, this is the one that gave [00:04:00] voting rights to women.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Actually.

Can we just read it out? It's really short. Would you do the honors?

**Nick Capodice:** Sure. Sure. Here we go.

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

**Hannah McCarthy:** Right. You can't deny someone access to the polls based on sex. And Congress can make laws to enforce that right. This amendment was the result of decades of work on the part of the women's rights movement.

**Laura Free:** So people like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B, Anthony, Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone. These women had all been very much into expanding rights for women, things like property rights, the right to divorce, the right to have access to higher education, a very broad range of activities.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Suffrage, otherwise known as the right to vote, is one of these activities. And that's what women are ostensibly granted with the passage of the 19th [00:05:00] Amendment. It's ratified on August 18th, 1920, and written into the Constitution on August 26, 1920.

**Nick Capodice:** Wait, what do you mean by a sensibly grant?

**Hannah McCarthy:** As soon as I started to report on this episode, it became clear that the story we think we know isn't really the story of the 19th Amendment.

**Martha Jones:** I want to say I think it's very important from my vantage point that we not drop this story on August twenty sixth when we celebrate one hundred years of the 19th Amendment.

**Hannah McCarthy:** This is Martha Jones.

**Martha Jones:** And I am the Society of Black Alumni, presidential professor and a professor of history at Johns Hopkins University. I'm a historian of the role that black Americans have played in American democracy.

**Hannah McCarthy:** I figured that making an episode about women's suffrage and the 19th Amendment [00:06:00] was going to be more complicated than the story of ladies in white dresses marching on Washington. Right. But it took Martha saying this for it all to click for me.

**Martha Jones:**  Because what begins on August twenty seventh, right.

Is that next chapter for black women? Right. That will drive all the way to 1965 in the Voting Rights Act. And if we'd stop at August 2016, 2020, we missed the opportunity to really place this next chapter. This chapter that black women really lead.

**Hannah McCarthy:** This is Civics 101. I'm Hannah McCarthy.

**Nick Capodice:** I'm Nick Capodice.

**Hannah McCarthy:** And today we are talking about the 19th Amendment, the long fight that preceded it and the long fight that followed. So long, in fact, that we need two episodes to tell this story. Women's [00:07:00] enfranchisement continued to be a struggle long after the American suffrage movement ended. The 19th Amendment isn't some singular event. It's a continuing principle that just like every other amendment, takes proactive enforcement. So this is a story about voting, but it's also a story about civil rights.

It's about race. It's about slavery. It's about the reasons why when we think 19th Amendment, we think Susan B, Anthony, we think Seneca Falls.

All right. The prevailing story about the 19th Amendment goes like this.

**Lisa Tetrault:** Oh, so we have a very clear set of outlines that start and finish the story.

This is Lisa Tetrault, author of The Myth of Seneca Falls. So what is the myth?

**Lisa Tetrault:** The 1848 women make the first claim for the vote, which is false. But that's the way the story is told.

**Hannah McCarthy:** In actual fact, women had been calling for enfranchisement and [00:08:00] empowerment and equal rights for a long time before this.

And that declaration of sentiments, that manifesto for the women's rights movement?

**Elizabeth Cady Stanton Reenactor:** He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her sphere of action, one that belongs to her conscience and to God.

**Lisa Tetrault:** We elevate the declaration of sentiments simply because we have given so much credit to Seneca Falls. But that wasn't the first women's rights manifesto. Sarah and Angelina Grimke wrote women's rights manifestos. Mariah Stewart was write -- and a black woman, freed black women in the 1830s, was writing women's rights manifestos.

**Hannah McCarthy:** By the way, Nick, Martha told me that Stewart wasn't just politically active. She was the very first American woman to speak at a podium to a mixed audience about politics.

The very first.

**Martha Jones:**  And when we read the records of her speeches, when we read [00:09:00] the pamphlets that she published, what we discover is that she is already rethinking politics in what today we would call intersectional terms, which is to say she's already cognizant that she is an African-American woman labors under two burdens, racism and sexism.

All right. So I feel like Lisa and Martha are describing some radical women. So if these bold moves were being made by people like Mariah Stewart, like 15 years before Seneca Falls, why does everyone talk so much about Seneca Falls?

**Hannah McCarthy:** That's a great question. And I'm going to call that myth number two.

**Lisa Tetrault:** So it became to be curious to me as to how Seneca Falls won out as the vision for when at least this kind of strand of white women's organizing began and all the black women were there. But this wasn't always their preferred method of organizing.

And so I started wondering, like, where on earth did this story come from?

**Hannah McCarthy:** Lisa [00:10:00] told me that as she dug into this story, she discovered that it's not like people immediately happily fell in line behind women like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. They didn't become the names that we remember by default. They made that happen.

**Lisa Tetrault:** There were contests against their leadership and different organizations formed that were rivaling them.

And sort of arguing they weren't legitimate leaders anymore because of the racism and the anti black sentiments they were engaging in.

And so one of the things they do is start to tell this Seneca Falls story as a way to center their own leadership. So by centering the movement at the beginning, it's Seneca Falls. She really cuts out without resorting to outright exclusion, cuts out all of these other women and says, I am the movement. Right. I began the movement. Therefore, I am the movement.

Therefore, my my leadership is the most legitimate. And [00:11:00] through a variety of really complicated things, Susan B. Anthony, who wasn't there, even though a lot of people put her there, which is really the logic of the story they create.

Susan B. Anthony very quickly becomes associated with that event and will always carry the mantle of it, even though she was never there.

**Nick Capodice:** So not only is Seneca Falls not actually the start of the women's rights movement or the origin of the first women's rights manifesto. The lady who championed the story of Seneca Falls wasn't even there.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Yeah.

And we already know the icing on the mythological cake.

**Lisa Tetrault:** 1920 women win the vote, which is also false. And in between, a lot of white ladies who's mostly who we remember sort of march up and down and champion and fight valiantly and keep the cause alive and win voting rights for all women.

**Nick Capodice:** The question is then, Hannah, what is the real story about women's suffrage?

**Martha Jones:** I would begin the story of African-American women's suffrage in the earliest decades of the 19th centuries. That would be the 1820s [00:12:00] and the 1830s.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Here's Martha Jones again. She's about to publish a book, by the way, about this movement called Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote and Insisted on Equality for All. And that story, she says, began way before Seneca Falls.

**Martha Jones:** This is a period in which we have growing really burgeoning communities of formerly enslaved people, principally in the north cities like Boston and New York, New Haven, Philadelphia, Baltimore have become really hubs for formerly enslaved people who are building communities within the building of institutions within the creation of those communities in debates inevitably arise about many things. But in particular, by the 1820s we see on the landscape recurring debates [00:13:00] about what roles women should play in that project, which is breathing meaning into freedom building institutions and the struggle for civil rights along with the anti-slavery struggles.

**Hannah McCarthy:** The fight for the abolition of slavery is very much bound up with the women's suffrage movement and women like Stanton and Anthony. They were abolitionists. But it was an entirely different thing for African American women to speak up for civil rights, especially during this time.

**Martha Jones:** It is a dangerous business for an African-American woman to step to the podium. Not only reputationally, but literally her own safety is at risk.

The term I've come to use is a movement for voting rights, and that is useful, I think, for appreciating the scope and [00:14:00] the scale of the political work that black women are doing from the 1820s forward.

We might say until today I say voting rights because they understand their quest for political power to be absolutely linked to the possibilities and the problems that African-American men confront as they strive for political power. For me, the term suffrage denotes a specific episode in the long story of the American story of voting rights. Suffrage is a movement largely led by and championed by white middle class women.

**Nick Capodice:** And were those white middle class women involved in that same fight? You said that [00:15:00] Susan B, Anthony was an abolitionist. Did she fight alongside the African-American community, like in the name of the African-American community?

**Lisa Tetrault:** These women had all been very much into expanding rights for women. But they also were interested in ending slavery in the United States. So during the Civil War, they agreed to help the Republican Party to pass the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. And the 13th Amendment said that there can be no slavery or involuntary servitude in the United States.

**Nick Capodice:** But ending slavery is a different thing from campaigning for civil rights. Did the 14th and the 15th get the same support from people like Stanton and Anthony?

**Hannah McCarthy:** This is actually where things really start to fall apart. See, Laura told me that suffragists expected a kind of quid pro quo on the part of the Republican Party. Like we helped you to get this massive legislation passed. We helped you to abolish the institution [00:16:00] of slavery. And now it is time to give us what we want, which is women's rights, women's voting. But when Congress starts to debate the 14th and 15th amendments, they also start to consider ways to exclude women from these changes to the Constitution.

**Laura Free:** So Stanton and Anthony see that this is going on. They see that that gender is a problem. They see some of the early proposals. There are 70 different proposals for the text of the 14th Amendment. They see that in some of the early proposals, some people have included the word male. So they kind of freak out and they say to all their friends, we've got to stop this now.

**Hannah McCarthy:** At first, it seems like this could be a moment that will strengthen the activist community. We all pushed for abolition. Now we can all work together to make sure that Congress grants rights to African-American men and women.

**Laura Free:** But in May of 1866, Stanton and Anthony and [00:17:00] all of the people in their community who were activists and engaged in women's rights activism, they say, you know what? I think we need to create and what we would describe now as an intersectional movement. We need to be working for the equality of all people at this. At this moment. So they form what's called the American Equal Rights Association. And its goal was to, as Stanton put it, bury the black man and the woman in the citizen so that all women and men would be viewed as citizens rather than as a combination of gender and race identities. Right. So they attempt this alliance. They attempted an alliance operative word there at this meeting in '66. This is where Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, who's probably one of the most well-known black writers at this time period. She's a poet. She's a novelist. She's also an incredible speaker. She [00:18:00] gets up and gives up some really interesting speech. And she says basically it's known as the all bound up together speech. And she says we're we're all bound up together. Here's her language. She says, You white women speak here of rights. I speak of wrongs. So her experience, she's saying as a woman of color in the United States is an experience of being wronged and that rights are important, but that she wants to rectify the wrongs, that the harms that are being done to women of color. She's like, I do not believe that white women are dewdrops just exhaled from the skies. Right. Like you delicate white women. And she says, too, that the white women of the country need the ballot in order to become better educated. She says if there is any class of people who need to be lifted out of their airy nothings and selfishness, it is the white women of America. And almost right away, [00:19:00] there starts to be tensions in this organization.

**Nick Capodice:** Harper is not mincing her words here. And I'm starting to suspect that these white women activists didn't really see their enfranchisement as a way to help women of color.

**Hannah McCarthy:** And unfortunately, things are just compounded by the debates going on in Congress about the language of the 14th and 15th amendments. Like in New York. They were having a constitutional convention, you know, where a state will decide whether or not to ratify a proposed amendment. Right. Here's the debate that was going on there.

**Laura Free:** So like one of the men in the debate says, black men need the right to vote because they're men. Women do not need the right to vote because they're not men. And that's a direct quote. It's just basically laying it bare.

**Hannah McCarthy:** And when Congress passes the 14th Amendment, it does, in fact, include [00:20:00] the word male when talking about apportionment and denying someone the ability to vote.

And when they pass the 15th, it does prohibit disenfranchisement based on race.

**Lisa Tetrault:** And only enfranchise as black men.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Here's Lisa again.

**Lisa Tetrault:** And Stanton and Anthony stand up and say we refuse. We refuse to support this amendment and the things that Stanton says are really cutting. She calls black men sambos, ignorant, she says that and she goes on to then rail against not just black men, but the immigrants.

And, you know, the kind of ignorant foreign vote and Chinese man. And she goes on and on and on and says, we cannot have these people, you know, these degraded people voting over educated white womanhood, refined, educated white womanhood. And, you know, it's just appalling.

I just want you to keep in mind Frederick Douglass, the famed African-American abolitionist and activist and formerly enslaved person. He was a friend of Susan B. Anthony [00:21:00] and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. He was present at Seneca Falls. He also argued for women's enfranchisement.

**Lisa Tetrault:** Frederick Douglass stands up and says, you know, I can't believe that you're saying that you get to go first when we have campaigns of violence unleashed against our bodies in the south and in the north, and we are being hung from light posts and having our brains dashed out on the pavement. You know, this is a matter of life and death for us. And Stanton and Anthony say no and they bolt and they go form their own women's rights organization, their own woman suffrage association, the National Women's Suffrage Association, dedicated to the defeat of the 15th Amendment.

**Nick Capodice:** There were suffragists who actively opposed the 15th Amendment?

**Hannah McCarthy:** The best known suffragists actively opposed the 15th Amendment.

**Lisa Tetrault:** And then this is where the first talk of a federal amendment for women's suffrage comes from. And they say, well, the only thing that was good about the 15th Amendment is that it federalized suffrage.

**Nick Capodice:** So this major push towards the 19th Amendment starts in this [00:22:00] racist, ugly response to the 15th Amendment.

And basically, these women deny this real victory in enfranchising African-American men and grasp at anything about the 15th Amendment that will get them what they want.

**Hannah McCarthy:** You know, the facets of the women of the suffrage movement are many, and not all of them are gleaming. We do ultimately arrive at the 19th Amendment. The 19th Amendment, which is, by the way, a wonderful thing. But the way we finally got there says a lot about the women who led the movement. And it set the stage for a whole new era in the battle for enfranchisement. The winding story of the 19th Amendment continues in part 2 here on Civics 101.

Civics 101 was produced today by me, Hannah McCarthy, with Nick Capodice. Our staff [00:23:00] includes Jackie Fulton. Erica Janik is our Executive Producer. She also fights for things in dresses, but they're multi-colored and she makes them herself. Maureen McMurray's daughters daughters will adore her. Well done, Sister Suffragette. Music in this episode by Blue Dot Sessions, Doug Maxwell, Chris Zabriskie and Chad Crouch. There's so, so much more to see at civics101podcast.org. We are churning out educational materials and sniffing out resources like mad these days. And again, don't hesitate to tell us what you need, you parents and teachers alike. I'm hannah@civics101podcast.org, Nick's nick@civics101podcast.org. Email us, we'll answer you and we will find a way to get you what you need. Civics 101 is supported in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and is a production of NHPR, New Hampshire Public Radio.