**Nineteenth Amendment: Part 2**

**Adia Samba-Quee:** Civics 101 is supported in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

**Hannah McCarthy:** This is Civics 101, the podcast about the basics of how our democracy works. Hannah McCarthy here.

**Nick Capodice:** Nick Capodice here too. We are about to dig into part two of a two-part episode on the 19th Amendment. If you haven't listened to Part 1, I recommend you hit pause on this. Go back and give it a listen. There's a whole lot of context in there that will make what you're about to hear actually makes sense. OK, that's all. Thanks for listening.

Our first episode on the 19th Amendment left us in this murky place. The 15th Amendment, the amendment that granted African-American [00:01:00] men the ostensible ability to vote had just been passed. Victory for American democracy, right? Except, well, not so as far as Susan B Anthony and friends were concerned.

**Nick Capodice:** Yeah, this really shocked me. It's part of the narrative that I had not been familiar with. This felt like the glass shattering moment because this whole swath of the women's suffrage movement breaks off to form a new organization that is in part opposed to the 15th Amendment.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Yeah, this is a political choice that Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton make. The argument is white women should get the vote before African-American men. So Anthony and Stanton break off and they form the National Women's Suffrage Association, dedicated to the defeat of the 15th Amendment, which feels so horrible.

Right. Especially when we're talking about a movement that did ultimately result in the 19th Amendment, which, [00:02:00] to be fair, is a good thing. I kept pushing this question during my interviews like Stanton and Anthony and a lot of their cohort were the awful racists. Right? So here's Laura Free, history professor at William and Hobart Smith College as an author of Suffrage Reconstructed.

**Laura Free:** I think we have to say, yes, these suffragists were racist in these moments and they were also important advocates for equality in America at certain times in their lives. So I view this as us, as a kind of. Yes. And approach to thinking about racism in the movement.

**Nick Capodice:** I know about. Yes, And. This is maybe our first improv reference in civics 101. You made a choice in a scene. I'm not going to say no. I'm going to affirm it and add to it.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Right, exactly.

So, yes, these women, they were racist and they helped a lot of women.

The other person that's really helping me think about it is Dr. Ibram Kendi, [00:03:00] who's a historian of American racism. And in his most recent book, How to Be an Anti-racist, Kendi argues that racist and anti-racist aren't identity positions, but their policy choices and their policy choices that people make over and over and over and again and again. And he even says you can flip back and forth between a racist position and an anti-racist position from moment to moment. And I think this is a really useful model for helping us to think about the suffragists, because Stanton throughout her life hops into and out of racist positions, supporting racist policies and ideas, and she hops into and supports anti-racist positions throughout her career.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Make no mistake, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B, Anthony, these women were political movers and shakers in gloves and white dresses and they made what they felt were politically expedient choices.

And sometimes these were really gross [00:04:00] choices.

**Lisa Tetrault:** I think one of the other things that makes it hard to grapple with these women is that we still have a double standard that we apply to female politicians.

**Hannah McCarthy:** This is Lisa Tetrault, history professor at Carnegie Mellon and author of The Myth of Seneca Falls.

**Lisa Tetrault:** Which is that they're supposed to be good and noble and pure, you know, and kind of worked for the broader good, whereas we know that men are, you know, selfish and conniving and, you know, domineering, you know, in these suffragists were those things, too. But partly because they're women and they were social activists, we think somehow they must be noble and pure. You know, how could they possibly have engaged in this kind of activism? And, you know, the thing is, people are complex and, you know, female political actors are just as complex as male political actors.

**Hannah McCarthy:** And let's just remember the fact that while many of these white activists broke off to form this anti 15th Amendment organization, African-American women activists are reveling and they are leveraging this moment in history for their own political empowerment.

**Martha Jones:** For African-American women, the 15th Amendment in many ways [00:05:00] is a watershed.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Our third guest here.

Martha Jones, history professor at Johns Hopkins and author of Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote and Insisted on Equality for All.

**Martha Jones:** We know that black women, their families and their communities have already by 1870, when the amendment is ratified in their communities, black women have already been an important force during political deliberations. When black men get the vote in 1870 and they begin to go to the polls, we can recover stories of the black women who accompany them, whether they are in the air, the ears of men telling them how they should vote, or they are quite literally part of a community that is standing guard and ensuring the safety of men who are going [00:06:00] to vote for the first time.

**Hannah McCarthy:** And it wasn't just whispering in the ear of men who were going to vote as we think about the ways in which women like Stanton and Anthony were scrambling for political influence. Martha points out that it's important to remember that African-American women were doing the same thing in their church communities.

**Martha Jones:** And so we can see black women after 1870 in their church communities, in their church conferences, in their congregations, beginning to speak about rights, beginning to speak about the vote, beginning to call for their office holding.

And really transforming the equation, if you will, between gender and power in their churches on terms that very much mirror the political debates that we associate with the 15th Amendment.

**Nick Capodice:** This makes me wonder about African-American women, their relationship to the men and their community, [00:07:00] because there's this dual thinking about civil rights and women's political rights, like these women supported the 15th Amendment because it meant that half of their community was finally enfranchised and it gave them the opportunity to speak about their own vote.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Yeah, this is a really good point. Martha says that, you know, of course, African-American women had their share of foes within their own community. There's often still a divide between men, women. Right. But thinking of race and gender bias in the same breath allowed for this radical approach to equality.

**Martha Jones:** When these questions get debated, sometimes how it's put is --

So what distinguishes the black church and powerful men, along with powerful women, will argue that part of what distinguishes the black church is its longstanding rejection of man made, so-called man made [00:08:00] differences between human beings. Right. The black church should reject racism. That's not controversial, but perhaps also the black church should especially reject sexism because the argument goes both are not God given differences, but manmade differences in the black church can distinguish itself.

**Hannah McCarthy:** So we've got these parallel communities, some working alongside and in support of African-American men's enfranchisement. Some working opposed to it, both with the same goal, though, women's enfranchisement. It's a complicated web of activity.

And keep in mind, we're in the 1870s, right? We are still 50 years away from the passage of the 19th Amendment. Susan B, Anthony is in her 50s. Elizabeth Cady Stanton is getting into her 60s. Neither of these women who are at the forefront of the movement will live to see national women's suffrage. And we're going [00:09:00] to pass into a new generation of suffragists soon.

So does that mean we are also going to see some better ideas about race among suffragists? Does the younger generation ally with women of color?

Not exactly. Stanton and Anthony say that a really strong precedent. Here's Laura free again.

**Laura Free:** We see this in the way that those younger generation of suffragists treat women of color in the movement. The suffragists organize a big parade in Washington, D.C., which is their way of doing a march on Washington right?

**Isola Dodic remembers the 1913 March on Washington:**  The theory that you would say.

that Gable marched around the wall of Jericho seven times before seven times before it fell?

**Isola Dodic interviewer:** And you were going to knock that White House down if they didn't pass the suffrage act?

**Isola Dodic remembers the 1913 March on Washington:** Not the White House, it was the gate. It was to rouse the consciousness of President Wilson.

**Laura Free:** And the Alpha Suffrage Club of Chicago [00:10:00] is a group of very eminent African-American women activists, including Ida B Wells, the prominent anti-lynching advocate. And they ask for space in the parade to join this movement and the white suffrage. Just tell them yes, but you have to march at the back.

**Hannah McCarthy:** You can be a member of a super progressive movement that's about rights for people. Right. But that doesn't mean that power structures and racism and sexism can't bleed into that. And in fact, it often does. So this is the atmosphere in which women for the next four decades are tirelessly marching, lobbying Congress and working at the local level. Lisa mentioned at the beginning of our interview that 1920 this year that, quote, all women get the right to vote. That is kind of a falsehood. It's not just a falsehood because of the many ways that people of color were disenfranchised. It's also [00:11:00] a falsehood because women had the vote before that.

**Lisa Tetrault:** So to get women's suffrage, you have to go state by state by state. And there's this massive campaign that takes place at the state level that we almost forget about every time we follow the 19th Amendment.

And they have tons of victories. Like I said over the you know, by the 1910s, all of the Western states have have taken mail out of their constitutions and allowed women to start voting on same terms as men.

**Nick Capodice:** Women were voting in the US before the passage of the 19th Amendment?

**Hannah McCarthy:** Oh, women had the vote in New Jersey at the dawn of the American Revolution. I mean, they lost it before the passage of the 19th. But yeah, Wyoming gave women access to the polls in 1869 when it was still a territory and maintained the decision when it became a state. In fact, lots of states in the West gave women the right to vote before the passage of the 19th. African-American women were voting in New York, Illinois, [00:12:00] California all before its passage, which is a part of the story that's often left out. And I think kind of disempowers the women who won suffrage or partial suffrage over the course of this movement. Still, the passage of a federal amendment remained important even to the next generation of suffragists.

**Lisa Tetrault:** And then, you know the ratification story, don't you?

**Hannah McCarthy:** Do you?

**Nick Capodice:** No I don't. Hannah, do you, though?

**Hannah McCarthy:** Actually, I really didn't.

**Lisa Tetrault:** So they finally get it passed through Congress and then it has to go to the states for ratification. And two thirds of the state legislatures have to vote for it, which is, you know, a lot. And it also requires that some of the southern states, which did not allow women voting in any capacity, have to vote for it. And that was unheard of. It goes out to the states. It gets all the states it needs except one. It's short one. And no other state will take it up. And they just sit there for months with no like no progress. And it looks like it might fail. And then Tennessee takes it up.

Everyone [00:13:00] thought Tennessee would show its opposition in some ways. The governor called a special session of the legislature just to declare the up their opposition to the amendment. You know, it's people stream into the state. All the opponents stream men trying to sabotage the amendment. All the suffragists, three men trying to advocate for the amendment. You know, they're getting legislators drunk the night before. You know, I'm in the capital than the state houses. You know, just in a bedlam the night before the vote, the night before the vote, it looks like the no's have it. The vote is then taken the next day. And it seems pretty clear it's going to fail. And it goes around and everyone votes. It's a tie. And then a young man named Harry Burn, who was 23, the youngest member of the legislature, had gotten a letter from his mother in which she told him to vote for the ratification, quote -- and quote, Be a good boy. She tells him and he then changes his vote and votes for it. And without the tie is broken and it it clears to ratification with that one single vote.

**Nick Capodice:** Be [00:14:00] a good boy.

The 19th Amendment passed because a legislator was scolded by his mother?

**Hannah McCarthy:** Which I think is just the most perfect end to this long, sometimes bitter, sometimes ugly fight.

Be a good boy now. Give the women what they want. And finally, they do 1920.

The amendment is ratified. Written into the Constitution on August 26.

**Nick Capodice:** So circling back to where we started, August twenty sixth isn't necessarily the date we need to care about. Right. Like Lisa said at the beginning, it didn't start with Seneca Falls and it sure didn't end with the passage of the 19th Amendment.

**Lisa Tetrault:** How do we get out of the 1848 to 1920 story? Right. When we look at black women's, because this is the point I was trying to make earlier, which is that there's two ways of thinking about race in the movement. One is trying to locate black women in the white [00:15:00] movement, and the other is just to look black women on their own terms. Right. And that's what Martha's doing. And that really blows open the 1848 to 1920 story. You know, it just it doesn't fit at all. You know, whereas locating black women in the white movement allows us to kind of have white women still define what the narrative is.

**Hannah McCarthy:** It doesn't fit at all. I told you that the point Martha Jones made at the end of my interview with her changed the way that I perceived approaching the 19th Amendment. The story of women and the vote is a much longer one. 1920 was just the beginning.

**Martha Jones:** If we treat that as the end, point us as storytellers and if we treat that is the end point we miss. What comes next and what comes next is as important as any chapter in the history of our democracy. When it comes to voting rights.

**Nick Capodice:** So the point is we can [00:16:00] tell the story of the passage of the 19th Amendment, which we kind of just did. But that is not the story of women's suffrage.

**Hannah McCarthy:**  Right.

The story of women's suffrage is a hundred plus year fight. There are decades of violent disenfranchisement of African-American men and women.

And it isn't until the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 that voting is really protected for most people in the country. And as I was wrapping up my interview with Laura Free, my last question for her was, OK. I was thinking back to Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, this well-known African-American speaker, and she had this all bound up together speech that we talked about in part one where Harper says, yes, white women do need the right to vote so that they can educate themselves and better understand what African-American women are facing and better support them. And so I asked Laura free. Okay. So when in this long story did that happen? When did white [00:17:00] women educate themselves and support the African-American community?

**Laura Free:** Have we done so yet? Right. White women, it turns out, vote pretty much exactly like white men do. They vote on their economic and ethnic and religious interests. And there's not until I believe that the there certainly were white women involved in the civil rights movement. Don't get me wrong. And in the race, racial justice movements today, I think it's absolutely essential that white women own the racist past of our activist foremothers and work to use our privilege to advocate for the rights of others. That said, I don't think I don't think you could say that all white women now have gotten over that racist past and now support people of color.

**Nick Capodice:** So in other words, Hannah, [00:18:00] this isn't just one hundred years story. It's an ongoing story.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Yeah. Talking about the 19th Amendment in particular really highlighted for me the fact that an amendment to the Constitution doesn't suddenly fix everything. Right. It's on us to make sure it's implemented in so many different ways. So I guess my final thought is go out there, get educated and bring the 19th Amendment to life.

**Hannah McCarthy:** This episode was produced by me, Hannah McCarthy with you, Nick Capodice, and help from Jackie Fulton.

**Nick Capodice:** Erika Janik is our executive [00:19:00] producer and she has been telling the story of women's suffrage ever since we met.

**Hannah McCarthy:** Maureen McMurry holds a women's march every day just by getting out of bed in the morning.

**Nick Capodice:** Music in this episode by Chad Crouch, Ramzoid, Chris Zabriskie and Blue Dot Sessions.

**Hannah McCarthy:** There are resources, graphic organizers, transcripts and so, so much more at our Web site, civics101podcast.org. While you're there, don't forget to check out our brand new Learn from home page for all of you students and educators fighting the good fight from kitchen tables.

And our new Civic Shorts, fast and fun episodes for the younger set.

**Nick Capodice:** Civics 101 is supported in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and is a production of NHPR, New Hampshire Public Radio.