



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**

Episode 17: Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution

****Please note: This is a rough transcription of this audio podcast. This transcript is not edited for spelling, grammar, or punctuation.****

Participants:

Trevor Parry-Giles

Dianne Bystrom

Kristan Poirot

Belinda Stillion Southard

Ella Stillion Southard

[Audio Length: 0:51:01]

RECORDING BEGINS

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Welcome to *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*. I'm Trevor Parry-Giles, the Executive Director of the National Communication Association. The National Communication Association is the preeminent scholarly association devoted to the study and teaching of communication. Founded in 1914, NCA is a thriving group of thousands from across the nation and around the world who are committed to a collective mission to advance communication as an academic discipline. In keeping with NCA's mission to advance the discipline of communication, NCA has developed this podcast series to expand the reach of our member scholars' work and perspectives.

Introduction:

This is *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

Songs of the Suffragettes by Elizabeth Knight - Courtesy of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings:

There is a band of women and to our manor born. Emerging from the darkness past and looking toward the morn. Their mothers labored, waited through a night without a star. The morning shows a suffrage flag that bears a woman's star. Hurrah! Hurrah. For equal rights, hurrah! Hurrah for the suffrage flag that bears the woman's star.

Clip from PBS film *Not for Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*:

I knew about the woman's suffragettes but remember in those days, women were in the kitchen. In those days, women were in the home. Men did the voting. They let them do the voting. They weren't interested. I remember the women's suffragettes. They seemed rather bold and



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unladylike to venture out into the world. There was a woman in Cold Spring Harbor. She rode a white horse all the way to Albany, trying to educate people along the way on why women should have the vote and that's what impressed me very much. They were a little bit unladylike but when we got the vote, we were thankful to them. But we had to wake up too.

On November 2nd, 1920 for the first time in history, more than eight million American women went to the polls and exercised their right to vote in precincts all over America. Thomas Jefferson had proclaimed equality the bedrock of American government but it had taken 144 years for women finally to achieve full citizenship in the United States.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That was a clip from the PBS film *Not For Ourselves Alone: The story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*. The film was directed by Ken Burns. These clips and others related to women's suffrage are part of the UNUM Project by Ken Burns that feature educational films on a variety of themes. Today on *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*, we'll be discussing the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution which granted white women the right to vote. In this episode, Professors Dianne Bystrom, Kristan Poirot, Belinda Stillion Southard and special guest Ella Stillion Southard offer different perspectives on this amendment and on women's issues today. First, let me tell you a little bit more about our guests. Dianne Bystrom is the director emerita of the Carrie Chapman Catt Center for Women in Politics at Iowa State University. Dr. Bystrom researches in the areas of women in politics, political campaigns and women in leadership and has contributed to numerous books including *An Unprecedented Election: Media, Communication and the Electorate in the 2016 Campaign*. Hi, Dianne. Thanks for joining us on *Communication Matters*.

Dianne Bystrom:

Glad to be with you.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Kristan Poirot is an associate professor and the associate head for graduate studies in the department of communication at Texas A&M University. Dr. Poirot researches social movements and public memories about resistance with particular attention to the roles that identification and place play in the U.S. context from the 19th century onward. Dr. Poirot is the author of *A Question of Sex: Feminism, Rhetoric and Differences That Matter*. Hi, Kristan. Thanks for joining us.

Kristan Poirot:

Hi, it's good to be here.



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Trevor Parry-Giles:

Belinda Stillion Southard is a faculty member at the University of Georgia and the graduate coordinator for UGA's department of communication studies. Dr. Stillion Southard researches in the areas of rhetorical criticism, public address and women's rights rhetoric. Dr. Stillion Southard recently published *How to Belong: Women's Agency in a Transnational World* which received the 2019 Marie Hochmuth Nichols Award from NCA's public address division. Hi, Belinda.

Belinda Stillion Southard:

Hello, Trevor. Thank you so much for having me.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

And Ella Stillion Southard is one of the young women who created Women in Politics, an online magazine blog and YouTube channel developed to provide a platform for young women to learn about women in politics, showcase their ideas and connect with others of similar interests. Ella also serves as the writing leader for the *Women in Politics* magazine and the first issue of the magazine is available online now. Hi, Ella. Thanks for joining us.

Ella Stillion Southard:

I'm excited to be here. Thank you.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

So, I want to start the conversation 72 years before the ratification of the 19th Amendment and Dianne, maybe you want to take a stab at this. In 1848, the Seneca Falls Convention was held in New York and what were some of the priorities of the organizers at that Seneca Falls Convention?

Dianne Bystrom:

Well, actually I think one of the interesting things about Seneca Falls in 1848 is it actually came off of Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton kind of being rebuffed at an 1840 meeting of abolitionists in London. As we're going to talk about later, there actually was a lot of work between in the abolition movement for suffrage and so, prior to 1848. And so, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott went to this convention, anti-slavery convention in London and they weren't allowed to be seated on the floor because they were women. So, that got them thinking about that they also needed a women's rights convention. So, it was in New York, 1848, about 240 people came. The first day was just for women. So, there were about 200 women and that's when they introduced the Declaration of Sentiments which was written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and it was patterned after the Declaration of Independence and basically, made the assertion that all men and women were created equal. And then they went on to ask for 11



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different resolutions for more equality in society, the workplace and the only really controversial resolution was the one on women's voting rights and that was the only one that did not pass unanimously. It passed partially because Frederick Douglass who was one of the 40 men who joined on the second day spoke passionately for it. But many of the delegates there thought they would actually be ridiculed if they actually were so ostentatious to ask for the right to vote. And so, that's what typically historians say is the start of the women's suffrage movement although others now will say that it actually started many years prior to this in the abolition movement and there's also some evidence of some Indian tribes like Iroquois, for example, in New York state also having suffrage interests.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

The relationship between women's suffrage and abolitionism and Elizabeth Cady Stanton's role in all of that has been the subject of some of your work, Kristan. And I'm curious about what you see as the extent to which Stanton wrestled with the sex and racial differences in the post-Civil War period. In other words, how would you describe the tension between Stanton's commitment to equality and the elitism and real racism that is present in a lot of Stanton's speeches and writings?

Kristan Poirot:

So, the way that I think about it is actually Stanton's commitment to liberal, capital L liberal natural rights, philosophies and political theories with the conflict that comes in with her with race and her elitism, a lot of historians have talked about how post-Civil War, she turns to kind of what's called educated suffrage, that she becomes, a lot of people say it's like a product of her time that she was willing to make arguments from expediency to get help from white supremacists and to use race arguments to base, to move the suffrage cause forward. I think that that's all true. I also think that we have to remember that Katie Stanton was a political theorist just as much as she was a social movement actor. And so, that it really does come down to for Stanton, sex and race as biological distinctions didn't matter and all of those are born in a natural rights kind of idea. However, the sociological differences between white women specifically and African-Americans specifically mattered greatly for Stanton.

And so, it wasn't that black men or women as black were politically inferior for Elizabeth Cady Stanton but because they were formerly enslaved or because many of them were not as educated as her, as some of the other white women. And so, really I see this as very much like her elitism and I wish like in the piece that I wrote previously I would have been stronger in calling her white supremacy out as white supremacy, as much like kind of the colorblind racism we have right now with liberals and conservatives, that it's a superficial assertion that race doesn't matter. I don't see color, I just see economics. Right? I just see poverty, I just see lack of



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education. And so, racism gets coded in terms of class, in terms of lack of education which my little side comment would be that liberal political theory doesn't really deal well with class anyway. So, it's not too much of a surprise that still reverberates. And so, I actually think that some of the stuff that Elizabeth Cady Stanton while using pretty offensive language that we would say today, actually, the same types of arguments are still being made in terms of what we may think of as a colorblind racism indebted to liberal political thought.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Well, and a lot of the women of color who were fighting for suffrage founded separate organizations. What were some of their organizations and their organizational priorities? Were they the same? How did they differ from those that were led by white women? And I'm thinking here of popular culture and the ways we sort of historically remember women's suffrage and it's largely driven by white women. And the women of color who are depicted are always sort of just crashing the gates and I'm wondering if that's consistent with sort of historical reality and what can any of you tell us about the women of color and their role in this movement?

Kristan Poirot:

That kind of received history, the kind of like storming of the gates and I don't remember the exact convention, the infamous story where black women show up to a national convention and say we were segregated on trains and they're like well, that's a black issue, that's not a woman's rights issue. Right? But I think that it's also from the perspective when we think of those narratives, if we start from the place that black women's organizations were separate from white women's organizations, we start with the idea that it is a break off of women's rights movement as opposed to that a lot of these black women's organizations, their seeds come from abolition and were always already a part of the black freedom struggle. And so, even the suffrage organizations are never separate from the larger black freedom struggle. So, the founders, if you can even look at this, the founders of the National Association of Colored Women's clubs, you have Ida B. Wells who's known for her work with anti-lynching; you have Francis Harper who's a poet, an abolitionist, also known for literary societies; Mary Church Terrell really credited and works if we think of a lot of the racial uplift in the club movement as well; and Harriet Tubman also. And so, like to even think of the black suffrage organizations as separate from the larger black freedom struggle I think is how we need to reposition that narrative. White women did seem to be able to break their abolition ties and just focus more solely, I won't say exclusively but I don't think that a lot of those women suffrage organizations were as much a part of the black freedom struggle as some of the black women's organizations.



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Dianne Bystrom:

I would add also that there were African-American women that were in the quote-unquote white women's suffrage movement dating back to Sojourner Truth and Mary Church Terrell, for example, was a member of the National American Women's Suffrage Association and actually spoke at their conventions. And Ida B. Wells was also a member of the National American Women's Suffrage Association. In addition to what Kristan said is that I think for African-American women, they were focused on more than just getting the vote because they had a greater need than just getting the vote because of their place in society and economics. And so, a lot of these clubs like the National Association of Colored Women basically were founded because women like Mary Church Terrell and Ida B. Wells saw that African-American women needed more than just the vote. And so, they advocated for reforms that were beyond the vote, for example, like child care, fair wage, economic opportunities, educational opportunities because their needs were so much greater. And, you know, the suffrage movement and the National American Women's Suffrage movement were really, really focused on the vote as sort of an opportunity I think, as a gateway to get all these other things that they wanted in the progressive movement. But I think African-Americans because of their place in society advocated for a bigger array of reforms.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's very interesting. Now not all women we know supported women's suffrage. Maybe Belinda, you can tell us why. How is it that some women back in the late 19th/early 20th century opposed the 19th Amendment?

Belinda Stillion Southard:

Well, one of the ways that I talk about this is that you think of how scary that would be for women who only knew what they saw their mothers do, their grandmothers do. To violate what was perceived as a violation of your place and the ramifications of those violations would be anywhere from domestic violence to just being ostracized from your community. So, that was a very scary thing I think for a lot of women whose lives were fairly stable. So, these are women who are financially supported by their husbands, who might have middle/upper class lives. So, for them, challenging those very limiting social strictures was really scary. Now the biological determinism of the 19th century certainly had a strong carryover. The idea of a woman leaving the house really threatened what we could call male fragility today. And so, a lot of the media of anti-suffragists proliferated, infantilized men, basically portrayed this world in which women would come in and take over, take their jobs. It threatened their economic stability. It threatened the future of our nation's citizenry, right? And so, we would no longer be this strong nation ready to go to war when we eventually did and we wouldn't have the soldiers and we wouldn't have people in their right place.



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So, just think of the family unit as the national family. That was the rhetoric that kind of circulated at the time. So, it wasn't hard to stoke those fears. It wasn't hard to say the nation's going to come crumbling down if your family at home is a sort of a unit representative of the national family. Also, money is always an issue so let's talk about liquor interests. What women were going to do with the Prohibition Party and prohibition interests, they were going to vote for prohibition which they did when they got the vote. So, men like those pubs. They need to go hang out, go vote at the voting polls, then drink some.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Well, there's that. And I'm wondering, it strikes me is there any kind of regionalism at the basis of this opposition sometimes to the suffrage amendment? Because I grew up in the Mountain West and out there, we always learned sort of the history that in some of the Western states in particular, women always had the right to vote. From the very formation of those states and prior to the 19th Amendment, they were given the right to vote. And what was it regionally that allowed for that to happen and how did that Western commitment to suffrage for women inform things like admission to statehood and the ways in which those other territories were viewed? It's always struck me as very interesting.

Belinda Stillion Southard:

Well, it was seen at first as like a strategy to recruit citizens to the territories to become states. And so, our earliest territories, Wyoming, Utah, Washington, Colorado, Idaho, these are places that just from the get-go said yes, come here, women can vote. So, it was a strategy to sort of build up their own state citizenry. But also at a time when you're sort of building, kind of inventing your own localized democracy, you have more opportunity for third parties to get involved in local politics, the Populist Party, Progressive Party, the Prohibition Party. Women's clubs were able to take advantage of those openings, those small local openings like the Women's Christian Temperance Union, The General Federation of Women's Clubs and they also kind of, historians will attribute it to like a more agrarian lifestyle that all hands on deck on the farm. So, why should we have separate laws for men and women? That is a thing but I also do think that sex roles still very much existed. So, with that, there is a perception that there was a greater openness and there were some greater sort of democratic opportunities for women, for third parties, for politics to be less so much entrenched in a two-party system. So, I mean the regionalism, I think our scholars do fantastic work about the different local suffrage organizations in the state of Washington, for example. Tiffany Lewis has a great piece on how these women went hiking. They out-hiked some soldiers that were trained to do this, that trained them to do it. They out-hiked them. They got to the top. They planted their suffrage flag. That's pretty awesome. But it really was a way for them to sort of tack on to that nationalism that was



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like well, manifest destiny sort of ended, our westward expansion. Let's go up. Let's conquer the mountains. Let's show the world that we're the best.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah, yeah.

Dianne Bystrom:

The only thing I would add to what Belinda said, I agree with everything, more of an openness. I'm living in Nebraska now and Nebraska actually became the first territory to vote for suffrage and they didn't accomplish it three times. But one of the things you find here and in other of these states, the Progressive Party, for example, was very big in Nebraska at the time. And so, the other thing I would say is that in addition to all these different political parties in the Western part of the United States that was being settled, there really wasn't any opposition from the two major parties. And so, you have states like Wyoming where Republicans and Democrats supported suffrage. You have Utah, another state that came on early where the Mormon Church supported women's suffrage. And I think the other thing especially since this is a communication program, the other thing that you find is you find these pro-suffrage newspapers throughout the Western part of the United States and at times started by a male publisher and his wife like there was one in Nebraska. The Women's Journal started in Nebraska. So, these suffrage newspapers that popped up in the West where they were not only reporting suffrage and supporting suffrage arguments but also people writing for those regional suffrage newspapers were writing for the national suffrage newspapers, telling people how things were in the West so communicating like this is how we have it in the West. And so, I think communication also played a really big role in how suffrage was passed in the Western part of the United States.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Interesting. This might be a good time to turn specifically to Carrie Chapman Catt because you were the director emerita or are the director emerita and were the director of the Catt Center for Women in Politics and we know of her as a leader of the suffrage movement and the 19th Amendment and all of that. But I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more specifically about some of her contributions to the movement or the 19th Amendment.

Dianne Bystrom:

Yeah. I think when you look at Carrie Chapman Catt, what you see later on is that she was really, in the recent PBS documentary, the two-part documentary, she was known as the politician. Alice Paul was a militant. She was a politician. And from my research, Trevor, which of course is on contemporary women politicians, people see her as being strategic. And so, Hillary Clinton was strategic. And so, is that a good or bad thing? So, Carrie Chapman Catt was



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definitely a political strategist. And so, she was a strategist. She was able to work with both political parties as part of strategy. Whoever was in power, she was willing to work with. Basically, her goal was the 19th Amendment, the suffrage amendment. And so, I think when you look at that and then she also had really great organizational skills and she was a really good public speaker. She was a good public speaker, gave hundreds and thousands of speeches. And so, she was very persuasive.

I think the other thing that's remarkable about her is that she spent 33 years of her life and it ended up being a very long life, way past the lifespan for women that age, but she started out in the suffrage movement when she was just 28 years old and the 19th Amendment was passed when she was 61. And so, she spent, when you think of really just starting out in the movement as a young woman in the suffrage movement, I think most people know that she served as president of the National American Women's Suffrage Association twice. Once was in 1900 to 1904. She was a hand-picked successor of Susan B. Anthony. Then her second husband died. She went into international women's suffrage work and then at the end in that crucial time period of 1915 to 1920, she was called back into service and it was sort of a failing movement at the time. Again from a communication perspective, she delivered a speech at the 1916 Convention of the National American Women's Suffrage Association. It's called the Crisis and what she basically says we have a crisis.

And so, she advocated for a federal amendment but acknowledged that we needed to work in the state and that way again, strategy wise laid this whole groundwork for ratification to take place because at the time I think there were 15 states that had full suffrage and another 12 that had presidential suffrage. And so, those 27 states, and by the way, it included Tennessee with presidential suffrage, sort of laid back groundwork for 36 states to ratify. And so, I think those are major accomplishments. Of course, I must say that she also, I'm the co-president now of The League of Women Voters of Nebraska, have been a league member since 1995 and she founded the League of Women Voters on February 14, 1920 before the amendment was ratified. And at the time, the suffragette organization actually had grown to over 2 million women. And so, I think that's her major accomplishments for the suffrage movement.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Maybe it's popular culture's fault but the sort of vision that we have of this movement is a tension between the political and established and elite National Women's Suffrage Association and Carrie Chapman Catt and then this militant Alice Paul and The National Woman's Party and all of that and the protests and the chaining to the gates at the White House. And Belinda, I know you've written a lot about the silent sentinels and the National Woman's Party and their protesting, particularly outside the White House during Wilson's presidency. Can you tell us a



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little bit more about those strategies and how they were or were not successful and maybe how they did or did not reflect this tension that I think is sort of the historical legacy of the suffrage movement?

Belinda Stillion Southard:

Well, I want to start out by addressing the public memory, collective memory of the movement and how that all went down. The National Woman's Party is the militant wing of the movement. At their height, they had 50,000 members and at the height of The National American Women's Suffrage Association—correct me if I'm wrong, Dianne—they had over half a million members.

Dianne Bystrom:

I think they had two million at one point I read. I mean they were a very large organization.

Belinda Stillion Southard:

Yes. So, the significance, the impact of the National Woman's Party's strategies I would say is very important, created a national conversation, no doubt created some images that circulated that I think really tipped the scale if you will toward creating that sort of national awareness of what's going on. But the really important work that the National American Women's Suffrage Association, the WCTU, other organizations that really hit the ground, not that the National Woman's Party didn't, it was just much more diffuse and had stakes in every single state as well shouldn't be undermined or overlooked. I was in DC last summer and I went to no fewer than three exhibits on the National Mall celebrating the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment being passed. Every single one of them was cast in the colors of the National Woman's Party. And I've just written a small piece about this and I think that I attribute the memory, the dominance of the memory because 1) visually, they knew how to make a moment that could transcend time, this image of women at the gates of power is one that can easily be adopted today by any sort of third, fourth wave feminist. It's something that travels really well over social media. It's an identity that I think women now can hold on to yeah, I'm a militant because they don't have to do the very dangerous things that these women did as quote-unquote militants.

So, that's one of the reasons why. Another argument that I make is that because they were very much protected by their race. They were very much protected knowing that what they were doing was dangerous, knowing that the repercussions could be death. The things that they did were extremely painful. They suffered at the hands of institutional abuse. But the likelihood that they would survive was much greater than say if women of color did the same thing they did. So, to be clear, just to remind y'all, the very popularly remembered things that they did was gather the beginning of 1917 in front of President Wilson's White House. They created this image of them directly confronting the President. That was part of their theory to hold the party



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in power responsible. It was a direct violation of where women belonged. They were in a very highly politicized space. They stood silently which to an extent protected them a little bit because it played into their femininity but also, the silence amplified what their sign says which were direct attacks on President Wilson who was touting democracy around the world, talking about World War I which he promised to keep us out of.

So, they performed the kind of same militaristic commitment that the United States had so sort of like in their own words liberating nations that weren't democratic. Those images circulated far and wide. Eventually, they were dragged and beaten and things were thrown at them. They were arrested daily, taken to the jailhouse, either then sent to a workhouse or to psychopathic ward. Some of them quite famously went on hunger strike and while that didn't create, I mean we now have images from the hunger strikes but for them, that created solidarity for them inside of the prison cells. But really when these women were released especially the elderly women, these white socialite elderly women looking enfeebled, that really was an image that generated a lot of sympathy and did a lot of work to expose the brutality that the nation state was willing to impose upon women who were simply, who really were just able to say look, you say we're democracy, we're not. So, here's the hypocrisy. They were really able to do that visually. And the effect was mixed. People loathed them. Women suffragists thought that they were detracting from the movement. President Wilson's wife at the time famously called them disgusting creatures. But what they did do like I said was normalize the discussion of suffrage, create sympathizers who then were like well, okay, so maybe I'll get involved with my local NAWSA chapter or my state suffrage chapter and it did pressure Woodrow Wilson to make his democratic principles consistent. He wanted the League of Nations. So, with our allies, countries like Russia who had enfranchised women, it wasn't a good look for him.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Now once the 19th Amendment gets passed, you can always look at these amendments in the Constitution and sort of tension. And I'm curious about the tension and the relationship between the 19th Amendment and the South's failure to adequately enforce or even to restrict the 15th Amendment, right? The right to vote for freed slaves, freed male slaves. How did the South and Kristan, maybe you want to weigh in on this, how did the South's refusal to enforce the 15th Amendment vigorously affect the passage of the 19th Amendment? Was there any influence? And were—I don't know, I hate to think in these terms—but were the white women involved with suffrage somehow complicit in these racist structures that denied black women the right to vote that they were seeking in the first place?



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Kristan Poirot:

I think they were absolutely complicit and not just complicit but explicit. Explicitly complicit, right? I mean you get towards in the early 20th century, I believe the late, I'm going to get the dates wrong, but late 19th/early 20th century, what emerges in terms of the Southern strategy is that this belief that first off, we need to cater to the South and you had Southern suffragists who were saying we need white women's votes to ensure white supremacy. We'll take care of black women's votes the way we've taken care of black men's votes, right? Which is we have functionally taken away the franchise through literacy tests, etc., right? And so, what happens then is that not only do you have white women who are at least like okay, well, I may not agree with that but I'm not exactly going to, I mean if that gets us some support, then let's just go with it even though we didn't need the South to ratify the 19th Amendment it turns out but kind of willing to go with that. But then in others, you had suffrage organizations that saw that, explicitly saw the 19th Amendment as a way to ensure white supremacy. And so, that's how I understand the relationship between the 15th and the 19th Amendment at least in terms of some people involved.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

And it seems to me even now when we think about the passing of John Lewis and the commemoration of his commitment, lifelong commitment to voting rights that as I think about it, a lot of the real hero—well, not that John Lewis wasn't a hero—but a lot of the heroes in securing voting rights even today are black women. So, you can go back and think about Fannie Lou Hamer and you can look at that legacy but then I'm thinking here of Senator Harris who is leading the charge in the Senate for the voting rights efforts against Mitch McConnell's odds and Stacey Abrams and her voting efforts in Georgia and across the country. Black women really have been at the core of a lot of these efforts to secure voting rights.

Kristan Poirot:

It kind of goes back to what I was saying earlier. If we think about the relationship between abolition and stuff or women's suffrage especially for black freedom movements, all of that is completely intertwined and never gets unentwined, right? For some white women, it does. But for black women and black women's organizations, it never does. And so, for Fannie Lou Hamer and others, the franchise was a necessary focus whether it be through photo registration drives, whether it be through the Mississippi freedom vote which showed not only will black people vote but you know what, they're going to vote differently than some of these white citizens and how then a population isn't being represented comes to bear. But then you also have the other side in black freedom movements, where black women were using the desire for the franchise in order to radicalize for the larger black freedom movement. So, you have people like Esau Jenkins and Septima Clark who start citizenship schools that then provide education and



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schools to help people pass literacy tests and to fill out voter registration forms which seems to be like a singular focus. But it's these schools where many people become radicalized to join the larger black freedom movement. And so, it's not just that these black freedom movements were one of the franchise but they used the desire for the franchise to get more people involved in the movement and a lot of this is through the often invisible labor of black women.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Add the fact that the founders of Black Lives Matter were three women.

Dianne Bystrom:

So, I want to add a little bit here as well because I think there's a narrative today and again, I want to kind of counter it I guess that says that the 19th Amendment only achieved the vote for white women and so there's no white in the amendment. And while it's true that not all African-American women could vote obviously in the South in 1920, one of the historians I turn to today is Martha S. Jones and she's an African-American historian and legal scholar at John Hopkins University and she's been actually featured in several of these documentaries not only the vote but also the documentary that Iowa PBS did on Carrie Chapman Catt. And I've also watched her on a couple of things that she's done for the *New York Times* and also for PBS. And so, when asked about the race question, she says it would be not true to say that all women could vote in 1920 but it would also not be true to say that no African-American women could vote. And then she goes on to say, and I think Kristan was kind of talking about this, is that from her point of view by saying that no African-American women could vote, she even says denies these stories of these women who did vote, who did register women to vote. In addition to the women that Kristan mentioned, Mary McLeod Bethune registered all these women to vote in the 1920 election in Orlando, Florida. And so, my political science colleagues that I work with and there's a number of them that have written books on suffrage, according to the 1920 Census, about half a million black women lived in the 34 states of the 48 states with no restrictions on black men voting. Of course, that's a small part of the population. So, we even have pictures if you can see it in the vote of African-American women voting in 1920.

And so, I think we need to acknowledge that some did vote but then other states started passing things like poll taxes and things like that that we didn't get rid of until a constitutional amendment much later in life. And so, I think we need to acknowledge that they had to fight and I guess what I'd like to acknowledge too and especially when I talk to young people, I want to hear from Ella, is that sometimes we kind of stop with okay, then everything was made whole by the 1965 Voting Rights Act but it's not whole. I can tell you as someone who's working for voting rights through the League of Women Voters, the Supreme Court case of *Shelby County vs. Holder* struck down most of the key provisions of the Voting Rights Act. And so, we still need to fight



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today and especially for young people, older people and people of color to have the right to vote.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

And that's a great way to move into the next generation and talk about Women in Politics. Ella, if you could tell us what is Women in Politics? What's it all about? How did it get started? What's it like to write for this particular sort of initiative I guess?

Ella Stillion Southard:

So, Women in Politics is a non-profit organization that is run by women across the world. We do have three or four people that are international, I believe two in Lebanon, maybe one in India. So, that's really exciting. But it's a non-profit that's encouraging women to use their voices and to work towards a career in politics and empower other women across the country and the world and not only that but also just talking to each other and educating each other and creating a community of empowerment. Because as we all know, women sometimes struggle with just empowering each other because there is some sort of environment of toxicity with women sometimes bringing each other down. So, Women in Politics is really focused on just lifting other women up and we do ride on other issues, not just women's issues. We're really focused on creating women's perspectives of other issues in the country. So, it's not just like feminism 24/7. But that is a main foundation. In regard to writing for Women in Politics, it's an amazing experience. I hope I speak for all writers on that one. You're really learning how to work with other people. I think that's something I've learned being a part of Women in Politics is communication and I'm not just saying that because we're on a podcast called *Communication Matters* but it's true. I mean part of the first issue was just navigating like who do I need to speak to for this, who do I need to contact if I have this issue and how do I communicate effectively to my writers as I lead a team of writers, like how do I make sure that they feel comfortable to talk to me or if they have problems, they can talk to me. So, we're all just trying to figure it out. But it's a very empowering, exciting experience. I hope I speak from 65 members I think when I say that it's kind of a dream for us because I think we all kind of for a while wanted to be a part of something that's bigger than ourselves, that it's working towards a goal that we have in our minds. So, coming together is a really powerful and exciting experience.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I can imagine more than a few of our listeners would be interested in this notion of writing as empowerment. If you could comment a little bit about how the act of writing and the process of writing is a dimension to that whole notion of empowerment.



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Ella Stillion Southard:

Yeah. So, when I write, I'm just going to go ahead and admit that sometimes when I choose topics, I don't know enough about them. And so, the process of researching with articles or just listening to other people talking about it, that in itself is empowering, that in itself, learning about and educating myself so I can write about it and teach other young people or possibly not young people about it is empowering. So, the whole writing process is humbling in a way because it's like oh, I didn't know that or I should keep this in mind, like this perspective in mind so I don't denote this entire group of people. So, that is humbling. But it's also empowering because it's like oh my gosh, like there's so many amazing women across the world and in our country that are writing about this stuff and I have an opportunity to convey what they want to say or I have the opportunity to teach other people that maybe won't put forth the effort to learn about these issues. So, I'd say the writing process is very empowering and even like discussing with other writers, like I had a call with my writers yesterday and it was initially about like scheduling and all this stuff. And then we just started talking about like history and it was just like really cool because you have this community of girls who are just—anyways, I'm going on a tangent. But yes, the entire experience, releasing the magazine, producing it with other women and researching for the writing is all a very empowering experience.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Well, you were going on another tangent that I kind of, I'm going to put you on the spot for because I think all of us on this particular podcast would be curious to know the role of history and what you all draw from that history as you've listened to us talk about it today and in the research that you're doing. What can young activists like you learn from this history and what does it tell you moving forward?

Ella Stillion Southard:

Yeah. So, personally women's history and the suffrage movement means a lot to me. It's how I really got involved in activism and I think a lot of the women and women in politics can agree. It's really the foundation, it's the gateway for me to all the other issues that I care about. I remember I was in middle school and these dumb teenage boys would just talk down to me or disrespect me and really I was like I don't like this and I'm going to do something about it. And that's really how I got involved in politics is current day feminism but also history. So, I think it's actually funny because our next issue, magazine issue that's coming out August 1st is talking about, it's based on the suffrage movement because 100 years of women's suffrage. So, that conversation of history has been a big part of producing this issue because we were like how do we first of all honor women of color, specifically black women and make sure that their voices are heard in this magazine just on their team and also in history. Yeah. So, I'd say it's a big inspiration for me. It's where I draw my activism, it's where a lot of the women on our team draw



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their activism and it's also just kind of the foundation of Women in Politics. I feel like we have a responsibility to keep women's voices heard and a large part of that was suffrage movement. So, yeah, I would say it's just a big inspiration and we all keep it in mind.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

So, now I'm going to put everybody on the hook because I think we get a lot of hope and optimism, I get a lot of hope and optimism from what Ella is saying and the fact that there are 65 young women out there who are working on these issues. I'm hopeful that you all might reflect on the future of the women's movement, of voting rights, of all of that and just go around the circle. What do you think? What does the future hold?

Dianne Bystrom:

Well, speaking again from my long time in the League of Women Voters in three different states and kind of pick up on what Ella just said, I think one thing that I really didn't study a lot about the suffrage movement quite frankly until when I retired and really kind of took a deep dive in it. I obviously knew about Carrie Chapman Catt and I knew about suffrage, I knew about the league. But one of the things I think that organizations like the League of Women Voters are doing this year to celebrate the 19th Amendment not only nationally but in the state is telling the stories of women of color and that is one thing that was missed I think with the official accounts. You have the official accounts coming out and it was even though women of color were involved in the movement, it's basically a white women's story with these early documents. And so, I do think one of the things I've been trying to do both in Iowa and Nebraska is do research on the role of African-American women in those days in suffrage and a very rich role in the state of Iowa, not as many things I can find in Nebraska but still things going on here. So, I think whilst we celebrate the 19th Amendment, I think we need to tell the stories of different women in that movement and getting that.

As far as looking forward, I mentioned earlier that the League of Women Voters is very focused on voting rights. I think that's a really big concern and I think it's a concern moving forward because again, like Seneca Falls in 1848, I think the realization that a lot of our rights depend on the right to vote and the right to vote. And so, of course, in a lot of the states, we're advocating vote by mail and things like that. Another thing I want to talk about is the Equal Rights Amendment. I think everyone knows that it was finally ratified by the 38th state, Virginia in January 2020 and I think if we had different members of Congress right now, it might be ratified as an amendment. And so, I think that amendment is needed because there has been an erosion of women's rights through different decisions. So, I certainly think the Equal Rights Amendment is something that we should think about when we vote in November. And then I



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guess finally, I would say reproductive choice is also now I think a major issue for women moving forward with recent court decisions.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Kristan, what does the future hold for you?

Kristan Poirot:

I'll say like it's funny because I have moments of optimism and moments where I'm not as optimistic or I'm really worried. I'm really worried about voting rights whether it be in our current COVID situation with the lack of the opportunity for mail-in ballots, with the seemingly ease that these ID laws have functionally disenfranchised many, many people and how the argument of voter fraud has so much weight that I'm baffled by it.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

You and everybody else.

Kristan Poirot:

And so, I have these moments where I'm like oh, I'm so worried about voting rights. But then when I think of some of the work just broadly like that Ella's doing, my stepdaughter is a sophomore in high school and there's a couple of experiences I've had recently whether it be in the classroom when I'm teaching women's and gender studies like the intro course so I have a lot of first and second year students or even talking to my stepdaughter Bethany, where I'm not the most radical person in the room, right? I'm like wow, I'm pretty moderate and conservative even, right? Like these ideas, like I'm being called out by my sophomore daughter, right? And I'm like okay, there's hope that this generation is actually testing people like me who devoted their whole career to studying gender and race, etc. So, I mean I think that that's where I get the hope is that while I may be stressing over voting rights and not figuring out how we're actually going to get out of this, I'm hopeful that there are people coming up who are going to do a much better job. So, that's how I try to weigh it in my mind.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Belinda, do you have the same optimism for the future?

Belinda Stillion Southard:

I have this very similar experience to Kristan. Our dinner table is one where Bjorn and I are called out for not doing enough. So, because TikTok apparently is where you all get radicalized and something I'll come up and I'll say I didn't see that video or I can't watch it because I've



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seen enough or I've read a lot of whatever and I try not to make myself self-important. I'm an academic is what I really want to retreat into or I want to be like—

Trevor Parry-Giles:

I have a PhD.

Belinda Stillion Southard:

Or your father has written a book about whatever. But that's not enough and I got to like put my ego aside because we do have a lot to learn and Ella's been to more protests in Athens than I have and there is hope there. The work forward is if you're academic like Dianne said, intentionally seek to write about the rights, lack thereof or the means, strategies toward enhancing the rights of people of color and also at the end of the day, I know as a rhetorical studies person maybe this is not it's the lesson that we like to promote but it's money. So, give money to Planned Parenthood, give money to the League of Women Voters, give money to women of color running for office and do as much work as you can locally.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

And give money to Women in Politics, right? Well, I'm thrilled that you all were able to join us today and talk about the 19th Amendment, all of the issues surrounding suffrage and its history and its future possibilities. Ella, I'm especially thrilled that we were able to hear about what the next generation has in mind and it did my heart good to learn that history still matters and that you all care a great deal about the importance of what happened before. So, thanks for joining me. And listeners, thanks for tuning in again to *Communication Matters*, the NCA podcast. If you are interested in reading more about the 19th Amendment, there's a special issue of NCA's quarterly *Journal of Speech* that is published this month and it features a series of articles about the 19th Amendment and women's suffrage. NCA members can access that issue online at natcom.org/journals. Thank you once again for listening into *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

Songs of the Suffragettes by Elizabeth Knight - Courtesy of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings:

If the men should see the women going to the polls to put down the liquor traffic, need it vex their souls? If we're angels as they tell us, can we once suppose that all the men should frown on us when going to the polls. We love our boys, our household joys, we love our girls as well. The law of love is from above 'gainst that we ne'er rebel.



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Trevor Parry-Giles:

In NCA news, the NCA 106th Annual Convention themed Communication at the Crossroads will be a fully virtual event. Synchronous sessions will take place on the same dates as originally scheduled, November 19th through the 22nd, 2020 with some virtual meetings held on days surrounding these particular convention dates. Specific details about virtual sessions, virtual events and activities and ways to participate will be forthcoming through regular updates over the coming weeks. Learn more and register for the annual convention at natcom.org/convention.

And listeners, I hope you'll tune in for the next episode of *Communication Matters* on September 3rd. The episode will feature Professor Leah Litman, the author of the essay, "Muted Justice" which examines how much time each of the United States Supreme Court Justices was given to ask questions during May's oral arguments. Tune in for this important discussion about the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced Supreme Court's oral arguments and the effects of disparities in questioning. The songs you've heard in today's episode are courtesy of the Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. The songs are "Going to the Polls" and "The Suffrage Flag" from the *Songs of the Suffragettes* album by Elizabeth Knight released in 1958.

Be sure to engage with us on social media by liking us on Facebook, following NCA on Twitter and Instagram and watching us on YouTube. And before you go, hit subscribe wherever you get your podcasts to listen in as we discuss emerging scholarship, establish theory and new applications, all exploring just how much communication matters in our classrooms, in our communities and in our world. See you next time.

Conclusion:

Communication Matters is hosted by NCA Executive Director Trevor Parry-Giles and is recorded in our national office in downtown Washington DC. The podcast is recorded and produced by Assistant Director for Digital Strategies Chelsea Bowes with writing support from Director of External Affairs and Publications Wendy Fernando and Content Development Specialist Grace Hébert. Thank you for listening.

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