

PETER: This is *BackStory*. I'm Peter Onuf.

[CHEERING]

HILLARY CLINTON: Tonight we've reached a milestone in our nation's march toward a more perfect union, the first time that a major party has dominated a woman for president.

[CHEERING]

PETER: In Philadelphia, Hillary Rodham Clinton moved one step closer to becoming the first female president of the United States. Clinton stands on the shoulders of generations of women who fought for the right to vote. But even before they won that right in 1920, women found ways to influence politics.

In the spring of 1863, a Confederate woman led a hungry mob of several hundred, demanding bread or blood.

STEPHANIE MCCURRY: She told these women to come tomorrow. We're going to have a riot. You'll need a babysitter.

And come armed.

PETER: From Dolley Madison's parlor politics to other women who sought the White House, a history of women in politics today on *BackStory*.

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[MUSIC PLAYING]

From the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, this is *BackStory* With the American history guys.

BRIAN: Welcome to the show. I'm Brian Balogh. And I'm here with Ed Ayres.

ED: Hey, Brian.

BRIAN: And Peter Onuf's with us.

PETER: Hey there, Brian.

BRIAN: We're going to start today in 1920 in the scenic town of Jackson, Wyoming, known today as Jackson Hole.

SHERRY SMITH: A very small town of about 350 people nestled in a mountain valley, and so it's absolutely gorgeous.

BRIAN: This is Sherry Smith. She's a historian at Southern Methodist University, and a resident of Moose, Wyoming. That's near Jackson. Smith says that in 1920, Jackson wasn't so gorgeous.

SHERRY SMITH: The streets were full of mud. And the town square was full of garbage. And the place was frankly a mess.

BRIAN: It had no sewage system, no streetlights, no official cemetery, and barely any money in the town coffers. This disrepair prompted the residents to call a meeting with the town's elected officials.

SHERRY SMITH: But the problem was, the men who had been in office didn't want to be in office anymore. So they were not interested in running and responding to these demands for some change in the town.

BRIAN: Government in such a small town was a part-time job. And the men in charge made it clear that Jackson's problems were a distraction from their real jobs, things like running ranches, restaurants, and hotels. That didn't go over well with a group of women at the gathering.

SHERRY SMITH: Apparently, somebody in the crowd hearing the women, who were quite outspoken about their concerns, said well why don't we have the women run it and have the women do this? And, you know, partly it was probably a joke. But some of the women there said, yeah, you know, not a bad idea.

BRIAN: This was a time when few women held elected office anywhere in the country. But a group of Jackson women ran for all the council seats and even mayor. The women ran on a simple platform, to literally clean up the streets.

It was an effective message. Voters swept this group of women into office. By the end of 1920, all of Jackson's elected officials were women. Then they set about appointing women to nearly every public job in town, including town marshal.

SHERRY SMITH: She was like five foot two, a tiny little thing. She did carry a revolver with a pearl handle.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

PETER: The news of a woman-run town quickly spread across the country. It was an irresistible blend of the old Wild West and a new type of America that was just emerging. Smith singles out an article that ran in the *L.A. Times*.

SHERRY SMITH: Jackson's Hole broke into print many times in early days through its running fights, revolver duels, and thrilling escapes. This time, the trouble was merely a battle of ballots between men and women. And the thrilling escape consisted of the men's deliverance from the horrors of trying to run a small-town government.

PETER: But there was another reason this story made national news in 1920. Americans were consumed by the question of whether the 19th Amendment would be ratified, finally granting all women the right to vote. The newspapers tended to treat Jackson's election as amusing or, at the very least, a novelty. To Smith, these news stories show how uncomfortable many Americans were with the idea of women in charge. Jackson was, if only jokingly, a cautionary tale.

BRIAN: But in Jackson, the election didn't represent a political watershed or a grand endorsement of the suffrage movement. It wasn't even particularly newsworthy for very long. Take this diary entry from one of the elected officials, Genevieve Van Vleck.

SHERRY SMITH: On Monday, May 10, she wrote, Roy, her husband, painted the kitchen. On Tuesday, May 11, village election, men furious. Wednesday, May 12, Roy painted the bathroom and the pantry.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

BRIAN: In the end, the women of Jackson turned out to be remarkably effective administrators. They collected back taxes, graded the roads, cleaned up the town square, and organized trash collection. But Smith says that same pragmatism is what prompted the women to walk away from politics once they got the job done.

SHERRY SMITH: The women themselves finally did not see themselves as people who set out to break down barriers. Their purpose was to make town improvement the centerpiece of government here. They achieved that in a couple of years. And then they were happy to step back and let men take over again, which is exactly what happened. In fact, the next time a woman was elected

mayor of Jackson was in 2001.

BRIAN: What to make of that 80 year gap between Jackson's first and second female mayors. Smith says it shows that in American political history, the role of women evolves but often unpredictably.

SHERRY SMITH: So when you look at any social movement, there are periods when there seems to be progress. But then there are moments when, after victories, people kind of pull back. So it's not this arc of constant progression, but kind of forward and backward, forward and backward.

ED: So today on the show, we're going to look at the twists and turns of women in politics. We'll visit a raucous parade for suffrage down Washington D.C.'s main avenue in 1913. We'll also explore why millions of women still couldn't vote after the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920. And we'll look at how the first African-American woman to run for president paved the way for the next generation.

PETER: But first, let's travel back to America's founding, long before women could run for office or vote. Even so, the wives of elite politicians played a crucial role in politics. Here's why. The fellows who founded the United States strongly believed they had to embody what they called republican virtue. That basically meant putting the interests of the Republic above self-interest. So no favors for friends or political supporters, no behind the scenes lobbying.

This was a radical idea in the 1770s. The way the founders saw it, if they didn't act the part of proper republicans, their new form of government would fail. Historian Catherine Allgor says there was just one problem. The founding fathers had no role models.

CATHERINE ALLGOR: They had only been new Americans for about 15 minutes. They had been British colonist before that. And the only ways they could really understand the world were British. And the only vocabulary of power they have is aristocracy.

PETER: Yet they couldn't be seen as doing anything even remotely aristocratic, which Allgor says often meant that they couldn't do their jobs.

CATHERINE ALLGOR: And what ended up happening in Washington is that, as the official men of the government struggled to retain their pure republican virtue, the women of their families took over all of those dirty tasks of politicking that were borrowed from the monarchy.

PETER: But women are virtuous, I've been taught. Weren't they virtuous in your period as well? Is

there a difference between female virtue and this republican virtue you're talking about?

**CATHERINE
ALLGOR:**

Yes, republican virtue is definitely about public ruling. And women, for their part, their virtue was in supporting men's work. And I think that's something important, too, to say about this period. That when we're talking about women, quote, "being political" or "being politically active," they're not working for suffrage. They're not working for equal rights. They are working for their husband's politics, their family's politics.

So here's an example. The most hated monarchical practice is patronage. So remember, there is no job application process in the royal court. It was really who you knew and who could help you. And you can see why the founding fathers, at least in theory, thought this was just the worst, most representative practice of the old world and one that needed to be taken out root and branch. Unfortunately, as it turns out, patronage is something that budding democracies and baby republics need.

And a great example of that is John Adams, who in his quest to be the perfect republican, kept all of his predecessor's cabinet. And they all turned against him like dogs.

PETER:

Yeah, stupid.

**CATHERINE
ALLGOR:**

So we need patronage in the early republic. We need to make those connections to develop a ruling class, to connect the capital city to the hinterlands, to create political careers. And yes, the dirty work of patronage fell to women.

PETER:

Now can we think of a nicer way to put that, Catherine? That is, women would be associated with a nurturing role, with affection, with warmth. Could they play the family card? Then that would seem like the natural thing for a good woman to do.

**CATHERINE
ALLGOR:**

Yes, so let's characterize patronage not as dirty, but necessary for nation building, as it turned out to be. And the women of the early republic, they develop a language, a vernacular, of femininity in which to basically influence peddle. And if you're not a careful reader of the sources, you might find a correspondence between two women, and they seem to be talking about health, love, family, illness, all of those personal things. But with a good read, you realize that somebody is asking for a job. And somebody is getting a job using this language of femininity.

PETER:

So you broke the code, Catherine?

CATHERINE I am the Alan Turing of women's history, yes.

ALLGOR:

PETER: [LAUGHS]

CATHERINE And nobody embodies that more than my favorite first lady, and I hope yours, Peter, Dolley

ALLGOR: Madison.

PETER: I wouldn't argue about that. Give us an example of how this actually works, how Dolley played this game.

CATHERINE Dolley is always a great example of the patronage machine, how it worked. She had a close
ALLGOR: friend from her Philadelphia days named Anthony Morris. And she was not only close to him, but close to his daughter Phoebe. And at some point, Anthony Morris, who is stuck out in Bolton, Pennsylvania, wants a government position. So he writes President Madison, who he knows through Dolley, a rather formal letter talking about wanting to take a position.

But then he writes Dolley. And he talks to Dolley about needing a change of scene. Why? Because his children need to get out of Bolton. And he talks about concerns for their health and also that they're not meeting the right kind of people that they might marry. And she's a mother and an old friend. And surely she understands that.

And this is a great letter, Peter, because it shows that, like many other men, Anthony Morris has learned the language. And Dolley replies. And she too talks about darling Phoebe and her desire to get Phoebe out into the world. And then a few months later, we find out that Anthony Morris has been appointed a special embassy to Spain. And so he's suddenly with Phoebe on a boat going to Spain.

PETER: So it's bringing those two worlds together, the domestic and the political, that's really critical to the functioning of this politics.

CATHERINE It's politics of the heart. It's important to note though, Dolley was without question a powerful
ALLGOR: political force in Washington. But she would have been horrified to be accused of being what they called petticoat politicians.

It's a funny thing about the work of political women of this time. It only exists under cover. If you asked Dolley why Anthony Morris got this job, she would say, well he was very qualified. But didn't he write to you? Oh, yes, but we're just friends. I'm just concerned about his health.

So the politicking of women operated in a kind of culture of denial. And the women themselves denied it, even as they were quite obvious about what they were doing. But you have to understand that the power of women's world lies in its unconsidered nature.

PETER: So, Catherine, you've brilliantly reconstructed this world of women's political activity and influence. When and why did it go away?

CATHERINE Women's history is full of paradox. And it shows us that American history is not progressive.

ALLGOR: So the sort of heyday of this kind of parlor politicking, especially in Washington D.C., comes to an end in the late 1820s.

So around the time of Andrew Jackson's presidency, that era, we call it the Rise of the Common Man, and it's celebrated as a watershed of democracy. This is when more and more white men are given the chance to vote. And that's seen in our minds as Americans as a very good thing.

But what that meant was that women would become increasingly excluded from the political process. So think about it. When the majority of people, men and women, couldn't vote, there are lots of ways to be politically influential.

You could boycott. You could mob. You could petition. But as men then suddenly were getting the vote, all of these other ways are not nearly as effective. So if I'm a politically powerful woman in the 1790s, my correlate in the 1840s isn't. And so pretty soon, women figured out that they would also need the vote in order to be politically active Americans.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

PETER: Catherine Allgor is the Director of Education at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. She's the author of *Parlor Politics, In Which the Ladies of Washington Helped Build a City and a Government*. Earlier we heard from Sherry Smith, a historian at Southern Methodist University.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

So guys, Catherine Allgor's parlor politicians were elite women, who had access to elite men. That wasn't an opportunity open to most women. And particularly when the doors close of those parlors, where do they go and what do women do? How do they affect politics?

ED: Yeah, Peter, but not everybody had a parlor.

PETER: (LAUGHING) Yeah, right.

ED: And those women who didn't, as well as some of those who did, decided to participate in politics in ways that didn't go through their husbands at all. They started organizing, reform organizations, joining abolitionist societies, and so forth. So what's amazing to me is how quickly we pivoted from this deferential kind of hierarchical model that Catherine talks about to that more participatory model.

PETER: Right, and that's--

ED: How would you explain that?

PETER: --a pretty narrow sense of what politics entails. These are women who associate together to take the high ground and make changes in the world at large, from slavery, to temperance, to world peace.

ED: Yeah, they're building, a lot of times, on the missionary impulses in their churches, which kind of validates women's efforts to make that world better.

BRIAN: And that pattern continues throughout the late 19th century and the 20th century. In the early 20th century, it's women providing social services because the state isn't supposed to do that.

And by the 1960s, it's women being the foot soldiers in large social movements like the civil rights movement, where, especially in the South, we have Jim Crow segregation. The state isn't going to intervene, but these women do. And they do it in the tens of thousands.

PETER: So, Brian, would you say that organizing women are anticipating future legislation. This is deep politics, you might say, to set a new agenda, a more capacious agenda.

BRIAN: Absolutely. I think they're saying politics, the formal political system, that doesn't begin to deal with all of the issues that are really about power.

PETER: So women are excluded from politics early on, before women's suffrage is finally recognized. But they're also drawing attention to the things that are excluded from politics.

BRIAN: They're also anticipating equal protection of the law as actually being carried out across the nation.

ED: And precisely because women are advancing the vision of what the state could be and what we might do for each other in this way, they run into opposition at every step of the way of the story.

PETER: And that opposition suggests that you need direct political power. You need to be in politics. So these things come together, the vision and the practice, making a new politics.

[MUSIC - OF MONTREAL, "IT'S DIFFERENT FOR GIRLS"]

OF MONTREAL: [SINGING] It's different for girls. They don't spit on the street. They don't have to size up every person they meet, or create an elite, or poison the game so no one else can compete.

ED: So, Brian and Peter, in talking about women in politics, one thing that everybody would know is that women during the Civil War era, during wartime, simply didn't have political power, and especially in the South, where there weren't even the stirrings of a woman's suffrage movement. But in the spring of 1963, white women across the Confederacy did something truly unexpected. They rioted.

Now we should make it clear that these women weren't protesting war or slavery. They simply did not have enough to eat. Here's what happened. By the second winter of the Civil War, white women throughout the Confederacy could not feed their families because most able-bodied white males were in the Confederate Army.

STEPHANIE There's not even teenage sons left on these farms.

MCCURRY:

ED: This is historian Stephanie McCurry. She says that at first these soldiers' wives wrote letters to state and local officials begging for help. McCurry discovered hundreds of these letters. And here's one written by a North Carolina woman in 1863.

STEPHANIE (READING) "We have seen the time when we could call our little children and our husbands to our tables and have aplenty. And now we have become beggars and starvers, and no way to help ourselves."
MCCURRY:

And then she said that she and the other soldiers' wives could not do enough field work to get subsistence from the land. Sometimes in this same letter it would start out like as a begging letter, and then it would turn angry in the middle. "We will have bread or blood."

[MUSIC PLAYING]

- ED:** And they meant it. In March and April of 1863, mobs of white women broke into stores and government warehouses across the Confederacy to steal food in what were known as bread riots. There were more than a dozen of these uprisings, from Mobile, Alabama and Salisbury, North Carolina, up to Petersburg, Virginia. The biggest riot took place in the capital of the Confederacy, in Richmond, Virginia, on April 2, 1863.
- STEPHANIE MCCURRY:** Around 9:00 in the morning, a clerk in the government office, John Jones, who left this amazing diary, describes being pulled to his window by the sound of these women, about 300 women, with another crowd of men and boys behind them. And he said, totaling about 1,000 people, they converge on particular merchants.
- And they demand-- they sort of interview the merchants. They say, how much is bacon a pound? And the guy says, you know, well it's \$1.20 a pound. And they say, how can women in our position pay \$1.20 a pound for bacon? You need to give it to us at government prices. And he says, no. And then they break down the door.
- And they begin this, basically, four-hour riot in the warehouse district, or the wharf district, of Richmond. And they threw men off of wagons in the street to commandeer the wagons to haul off the loot. They seized a huge amount of stuff. They siezed--
- ED:** Well, and if people may know that Richmond is the capital of the Confederacy, you would have thought they would have had some soldiers there or something. Why did they let this rage for four hours? Why didn't they try to nip this in the bud?
- STEPHANIE MCCURRY:** They did eventually put this thing down by force. They called out troops to put down this riot. And then a lot of them were arrested.
- ED:** Confederate officials were puzzled by how well organized these riots seemed. The leading Richmond newspaper offered the standard explanation, men did it. Or even Yankee conspirators had put these women up to it. But in Richmond, the trial records provided some clues to the contrary.
- STEPHANIE MCCURRY:** When they get into court, they find out that this is not the work of men or Yankee operatives. It's the work of one woman, Mary Jackson, a huckster and meet at the city market. And the night before the riot, she called a meeting of 300 town and country women, some of them from

as far as 11 miles away. People she had recruited.

And they had a meeting in the Belvedere Baptist Church. She got up into the pulpit. So you know how acceptable that was. And she kind of rallied her troops.

And she told these women that they were going to organize themselves. They were going to behave peaceably. They were going to explain their reasons. But that they were to come tomorrow, and they were to leave their children at home.

That is to say, we're going to have a riot. You'll need a babysitter. And come armed.

ED: More than 70 Richmond rioters were put on trial. Many were fined or sent to prison. Although Mary Jackson, the ring leader, was not.

Despite the clampdown in Richmond, the riots had a positive outcome for women. They forced officials throughout the Confederacy to pay attention to the needs of civilians, not just soldiers.

STEPHANIE MCCURRY: First of all, they started to return food from the army to the worst hit counties. So they gave back food that they had seized by the tax-in-kind. They created food relief programs. The welfare policy in the Confederacy expanded enormously. And they allowed county relief officials to buy corn at government prices, which is what the women had wanted in the first place.

ED: So I think that if people were imagining places the United States where women were likely to be depoliticized it might have been in the Confederacy. You know, southern ladyhood and all that sort of stuff. And yet, we have here one of the most visible, and in some ways effective, rebellions of women in 19th century America coming out of the South.

Do you think it's mainly a condition that they were put in such conditions that they had no choice? Did this have a Southern accent in any way?

STEPHANIE MCCURRY: Absolutely. This is desperation. But people can just lie down and die in moments of desperation. And these women got up and fought back. And they fought back and sort of forced officials to answer to them like, you took our men. You promised to protect us. Now you better act.

So the fact that these women, who have no legs to stand on, no ground on which they can think of themselves as citizens of the nation with rights that are being violated, none of that is

within their grasp. And yet still, when the government forces them into this really intimate relationship with them, it starts to take their husbands, and their sons, and their food, people respond.

ED: Yeah, what that suggests is that this grassroots rebellion had very direct results in what people do think of as politics and the public policy of the state. I mean, it's hard to imagine they could have gotten those results in any other way, rather than threatening to burn things down. So--

STEPHANIE MCCURRY: It's just so fascinating, I think, and so moving in a human sense to recognize that, when we go into the archives and dig around, we find these unexpected things.

ED: Exactly.

STEPHANIE MCCURRY: And one of them is that no matter how many times we're told-- and the history we read is really, men do this and men do that. I mean really, it's quite outrageous. You get to the 21st century, and you can still basically write a history of the world without any women in it.

It infuriates me. There is lots of evidence of how women made history. And I think this is a great example of that. It's like a rip in history.

And that's, I think, why historians write so much about wars, because wars create conditions of rapid change. They also leave records.

[MUSIC - BIKINI KILL, "REBEL GIRL"]

ED: Stephanie McCurry is a historian at Columbia University and author of *Confederate Reckoning, Power and Politics in the Civil War South*.

BIKINI KILL: [SINGING] Rebel girl, rebel girl, rebel girl, you are the queen of my world. Rebel girl, rebel girl--

BRIAN: We're going to turn now to a more conventional political struggle, the right to vote.

PETER: In 1848, the historic women's rights convention in Seneca Falls included suffrage in its declaration of rights. But progress on that front was slow. By the early 20th century, only a handful of states had actually granted women suffrage. A Federal constitutional amendment granting all women the vote seemed out of reach.

BRIAN: In 1912, a splinter group of the National American Women's Suffrage Association, or NAWSA,

decided to push for suffrage on a national level instead of state by state. The leader of that group was Alice Paul, a suffragist trained in so-called militant tactics such as hunger strikes.

In 1913, Paul organized a parade. That might not seem like an extreme measure now, but it was at the time. Respectable white middle-class American women simply did not march in the street. But Alice Paul wanted to shake things up. And she wanted to be seen.

JILL ZAHNISER: She convinced NAWSA leaders to allow her to organize a parade on the day before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration.

BRIAN: This is Alice Paul biographer Jill Zahniser.

JILL ZAHNISER: There would be many, many people in Washington already for the inaugural festivities. So the nation's eyes would be on Washington D.C. at this time.

BRIAN: Paul fought to secure a permit to march down America's corridor of power, Pennsylvania Avenue, which connected the capitol and the White House. On March 3, 1913, after months of strenuous effort in the face of opposition, 5,000 women gathered for the peaceful march. But it didn't stay peaceful for long. Zahniser provides this snapshot of the day's drama, with testimony from suffragists in attendance.

JILL ZAHNISER: They were very conscious of providing a spectacle. So this parade started off with women on horseback and the woman Inez Milholland, known as the most beautiful suffragist.

MALE SPEAKER: *Washington Post*, March 3, 1913, "the arrival of Miss Milholland, the beautiful society girl of New York, gave complete support to the claim of the suffragists that some of the most beautiful women in the country are active in equal rights cause."

JILL ZAHNISER: She led off the parade with the other horsewomen, draped in a blue cloak, wearing a kind of a helmet that was gold, on a white charger. Shades of Joan of Arc here, who was very much a hero for many suffragists.

So it started off with horses and Inez Milholland. There were seven sections of the parade. And each section was designed to have different costumes. And then the floats came to provide color and spectacle during the parade.

MALE SPEAKER: "A kaleidoscopic picture of ever-shifting color, beautiful women posing in classic robes passed in a bewildering array, presenting an irresistible appeal to the artistic and completely

captivating the 100,000 spectators, who struggled for a view along the entire route," *Washington Post*, March 4.

JILL ZAHNISER: The parade started on the grounds of the US capitol. And even as they were getting organized, it became apparent that the police protection was already breaking down.

MALE SPEAKER: "Although short wire ropes had been stretched up and down the length of Pennsylvania Avenue, the enormous crowds that gathered early to obtain points of vantage overstepped them or crawled beneath, with the result that when the parade started, it faced at almost every 100 yards, a solid wall of humanity," *Washington Post*, March 4.

JILL ZAHNISER: And they went a few blocks. And then it became clear that it was going to be very difficult to go on further, because the police were not successfully holding back thousands and thousands of spectators, many of whom were there for the inaugural festivities for the week.

FEMALE SPEAKER: "I said to a policeman, a tremendous big man who could have moved almost any kind of crowd, officer, there are nearly 2,000 women in back of us walking five abreast. And you can push these lines back. He deliberately folded his arms and said, I cannot do nothing with this crowd. And I ain't going to try. And he began to pick his teeth.

The crowd laughed when he made this reply to me. And I looked straight ahead. I thought the only thing to do was to march on."

JILL ZAHNISER: And women began to hear insults. Some of the male spectators began to touch them, to push against them, to shout at them, tell them to go back home. What were they doing there?

FEMALE SPEAKER: "This woman put her hand out and brushed back this drunken German man. And as she did, he had some tobacco juice in his mouth. And he spat it right on her forehead. And it ran down her face. I asked the policeman would he not please protect this woman. And he said, there would be nothing like this happen if you would stay at home."

JILL ZAHNISER: So some women were just frightened out of their minds. Other women marching were energized really, feeling that they had a right to march down Pennsylvania Avenue, protesting for their rights, demanding their rights. There's a great quote from one woman who told the other women to get out there hat pins and to use those as weapons against anyone who approached them too closely.

FEMALE "Another man broke into the parade and almost tore a girl's coat from her back. I heard him

SPEAKER: make a very ugly remark to a woman in front of me. He prepared to say something to me. But as he opened his mouth, my baton accidentally struck him in the mouth. I think his teeth went down because he gulped a great deal. I haven't yet heard what he was going to say."

JILL ZAHNISER: And that was the moment when the women leading the parade realized that everything really was falling apart in front of them. And then the cavalry was called.

MALE SPEAKER: "In two lines, the troops charged the crowds. Evidently realizing they would be ridden down, the mobs fought their way back. When they hesitated, the cavalry men drove their horses into the throngs and whirled and wheeled until hooting men and women were forced to retreat," *Los Angeles Times*.

"In the short stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue between 11th and 15th Streets, more than 30 women and girls were taken out of the press to the emergency hospital in a fainting condition in less than an hour," *Chicago Daily Tribune*.

JILL ZAHNISER: Some of the people who participated in the parade, who happened to be congressman, began to call for a Congressional investigation. A hearing was held in which spectators and some of the women marching in the parade could tell their stories.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Ironically, this became an enormous opportunity to put suffrage, women's suffrage, on the front page for days, and days, and days, nearly for a month, because of the hearing. So what might have been a disaster turned into a great opportunity.

It put women's suffrage back on the map. There had been really not a whole lot happening before 1910. But the national splash of the 1913 parade, that really reinvigorated the suffrage movement. From almost nothing happening for a Federal amendment, a Federal amendment to the Constitution was achieved in 1920.

So 1913, and the introduction of Alice Paul into the movement with the 1913 parade, is really the beginning of the end.

PETER: Jill Zahniser is the author of *Alice Paul, Claiming Power*.

[MUSIC - DAVID BOWIE, "SUFFRAGETTE CITY"]

DAVID BOWIE: [SINGING] Hey, man, aw leave me alone. You know-- hey, man-- well she's a total blam-blam. She said she had to squeeze it but she-- and then she-- aw don't lean on me, man, cause you can't afford the ticket back from Suffragette City. Oh, don't lean on me, man, cause you--

ED: We're going to turn now to a question from one of our listeners. It was prompted by meme he saw online. Neil, welcome to the show.

NEAL: Hi, thanks for having me on.

ED: OK, tell us a little bit about this meme.

NEAL: So I received a meme across my Facebook page. And it begins with a CNN Tweet that states that 96 years after women won the right to vote, a woman could win the White House.

The Tweet is embedded in another Tweet that states, Native American women couldn't vote until 1924. Asian women couldn't vote until 1952. And black women couldn't vote until 1964. And I was wondering, what is the truth of that?

ED: So we have a CNN Tweet that refers to the 19th Amendment, the amendment that granted women the right to vote in 1920. Then another Tweet rebuts the CNN Tweet, listing later years that different minority women got the vote, Native American women in 1924, Asian-American women in 1952, and African-American women in 1964.

Well, Neal, I have someone on the line here who can help us untangle all of this. Let me introduce you to Robyn Muncy, a historian from the University of Maryland. Robyn, welcome to the show.

ROBYN MUNCY: Thank you so much. Delighted to be here.

ED: So, let's start with the first part of this meme, the CNN Tweet. Quote, "96 years after women won the right to vote, a woman could win the White House." Now, if we were going to tweet back an answer to this, what would be the short version? I know we're going to unpack each clause of it, this being *BackStory* and fully understanding things. But what would be the quick answer to that meme?

ROBYN MUNCY: I love this meme, not because it gets everything right, but because it does point to a profound truth about the history of women's suffrage, which is that, even after the passage of the 19th Amendment, millions of American women still were barred from the polls.

ED: So, Neal, you were right to be confused by this. And it's an even larger scale than we would have thought. So now we're going to ask Robyn to unpack each one of these clauses and help us understand really what's going on.

Part two of the meme, Native American women couldn't vote until 1924. Is that true, Robyn?

ROBYN MUNCY: In part. In 1924, Congress passed the Snyder Act. And that act made all Native Americans citizens. But being a citizen did not guarantee you voting rights. Still, the states had it in their power to exclude people from the polls on a lot of different bases.

So what was very common in places like, oh gosh, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Maine, Minnesota, in many states, Native Americans were still barred from the polls, both men and women, by arguments that said, for instance, that because they lived on reservations, they weren't really residents of the state. And those laws remained on the books in some states into the '40s and even into the 1950s. So it was still decades after 1924 that many Native Americans were still fighting for the right to vote in their states.

ED: So, Neil, what I hear here is that this clause of the meme has even greater weight than we thought.

NEAL: Oh absolutely. This is stuff my history teacher never taught me.

ED: But I believe that there's still other parts of this meme we still have to explain. Right, Neal?

NEAL: Yes, the second part of the meme was that Asian women couldn't vote until 1952.

ED: So what do you think, Robyn? Is this true?

ROBYN MUNCY: It's partly true. Asian descended women who were born in the US could vote. But Asian immigrant women were largely excluded from the polls because they were excluded from citizenship until 1952, when the McCarran-Walter Act dropped the bar so that Asian immigrants could naturalize. They could become citizens, and thereby gain access to the polls.

ED: So this is true, but it also applies to men of the same immigrant background as well.

ROBYN MUNCY: Absolutely.

ED: So we'll give that a largely true ranking. But, Neal, there's even more after this, right? What's the next, and the last, part of the meme?

NEAL: So the last part of the meme states that black women couldn't vote until 1964.

ED: Is it true?

ROBYN MUNCY: No, not quite. African-American women in the North and the West were able to vote in their states at the same time that the majority of women in those states were admitted to the franchise. So in 1911, when women in California are given the vote, black women voted in California.

It's African-American women in the South who were excluded in the early 20th century and through much of the 20th century by the same means that African-American men were excluded by. Those include things like the poll tax, unfairly administered literacy tests, brute violence, and economic reprisals from employers. And that kept African-American women in the South from the polls, in large part, until 1964 or 1965-- in 1964, the ratification of an amendment to the Constitution that banned the poll tax, and then in 1965, of course, the passage of the Voting Rights Act, which made literacy tests illegal and also extended all kinds of protections to language minority groups, which helped Asian immigrant women and men as well.

ED: So that's very helpful. If you were giving this meme a grade, what would you assign it Robyn?

ROBYN MUNCY: For spirit, an A-plus.

ED: [LAUGHS] OK.

ROBYN MUNCY: For facts, I'm afraid it would have to be a C-plus or B-minus.

ED: You like the spirit of this, an A-plus. What's the spirit behind this that you like so much about this?

ROBYN MUNCY: I think it is really important to recognize that women are discriminated against on many bases other than sex. And if we really care about the well being, and empowerment, and freedom of women, then we have to be worried about all the bases on which women are excluded from something like the vote.

ED: You know, I think that sounds like a meme in and of itself.

ROBYN MUNCY: [LAUGHS]

ED: Thanks so much to both of you, Neal, for initiating this conversation and, Robyn, for actually answering these very hard questions.

NEAL: Thank you very much.

ROBYN MUNCY: Thank you so much.

ED: Robyn Muncy is a historian at the University of Maryland, College Park, and the author of *Relentless Reformer, Josephine Roche and Progressivism in 20th Century America*.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

PETER: If you've got a question for us, don't be a stranger. Leave comments at backstoryradio.org or tweet us @backstoryradio.

There's been a lot of talk about the 1964 election these days. That's when conservative senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona shocked the nation by winning the GOP nomination for president. Many have compared Goldwater's quick ascent to Donald Trump's.

ED: 1964, as it turns out, was also the year a Republican woman ran for president. Margaret Chase Smith, a senator from Maine, made it all the way to the party's convention.

The podcast, *Radio Diaries*, recently ran this piece about her campaign, the farthest any woman had gotten in major party politics up to that point.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

[APPLAUSE]

-There are those who make the contention that no woman should ever dare to aspire to the White House, that this is a man's world and that it should be kept that way.

-My name is Janann Sherman. And I wrote the book *No Place for a Woman, a Life of Senator Margaret Chase Smith*.

-My name is Merton Henry. And in 1964 I worked on the Margaret Chase Smith presidential campaign.

-Margaret Chase Smith was born in a little town in central Maine called Skowhegan. Her mother struggled, working in the shoe factory, working as a waitress, and so forth. So it was

not an easy life. And I think that was the basis for a lot of Margaret's ambition, that she didn't want to end up like her mother had. She had better ideas for herself.

-She was the first woman ever elected to the Senate in her own right. She was very much a middle-of-the-road Republican, who really followed her own instincts on things.

-She definitely was seen by 1964 as a hawk.

-It does not pay to play footsie with the Communists.

-She was probably the only woman in 1964 that had the stature to be a serious candidate for president.

[APPLAUSE]

-It is contended that I should not run for president because the odds are too heavily against me for even the most remote chance of victory.

-In January 1964, Margaret Chase Smith was scheduled to make a regular speech to the Women's Press Club.

-Third, it is contended that, as a woman, I would not have the physical stamina and strength to run. So because of these very impelling reasons against my running, I have decided that I shall.

[LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE]

-So that was the opening shot.

-(CHANTING) Margaret, M-A-R-G-A-R-E-T, Margaret--

-Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine, the first woman to announce a serious bid for the White House, will enter the New Hampshire presidential primary on March 10th.

-[SINGING] Go all out for Margaret, the senator from the wonderful state of Maine.

-She campaigned in Illinois. She campaigned some in Oregon. She campaigned in small towns before Rotary clubs. She drove most places by car.

-She would not accept campaign contributions, so she had no money, no poll workers, no buttons, no bumper stickers. Goldwater and Rockefeller, her opponents, were both

millionaires. So I think she decided to take the moral high ground by saying, you don't have to be a millionaire to be President of the United States.

-From Washington DC, Senator Margaret Chase Smith, Republican of Maine, will face the nation.

-She tried to get people to pay attention to her record, what she had done of substance, not the fact that she was a woman. But of course, she was constantly asked that. I mean, it's the very first thing that people see.

-Senator Smith, not all countries have the same attitudes towards women as the United States. How do you think a woman President of the United States would make out in international conferences and those so-called nose-to-nose meetings?

-Well, I would remind you that once there was Catherine the Great. I would remind you that there was Queen Victoria. I would also call your attention to Mr. Khrushchev's references to me through the years, when he called me an Amazon warmonger hiding behind a rose.

-Well how do you think you would make out in a kitchen confrontation with Mr. Khrushchev?

-Well I wouldn't care to estimate that. If it was making blueberry muffins, I probably would win.

-We are well aware of that, Senator, from having sampled them.

-She was always having to walk that tightrope between being strong enough and tough enough to be Commander in Chief to run a country, but still feminine enough and ladylike enough, because being feminine was absolutely essential. And so she tried to balance it the best way she knew how.

-[SINGING] Leave it to the girls, where there's a frill.

-She was always meticulously dressed. She was very careful about her appearance and everything.

-She would tell *Time* magazine that nothing clears her mind like vacuuming, or pose with a mixing bowl, or primping in a mirror. That was a favorite. Senator Smith had a campaign song called *Leave It To the Girls*.

-[SINGING] --will wear perfume and pearls, be diplomatic in pin curls.

-Well the response from the press was not pretty. One of the pundits said that a woman could be president, just as long as she didn't act like one.

-[SINGING] Leave it to the girls.

-The press never treated her as if she had a realistic shot at it.

-Good afternoon. This is the Republican National Convention at the Cow Palace in San Francisco. Before this day is out, the nominee of the Republican Party will have been determined.

-I am now proud and honored to nominate the senior senator from the great republican state of Maine, Senator Margaret Chase Smith.

[APPLAUSE]

-You know, she knew at that point that she was not going to get the nomination, to say the least. Goldwater had the nomination pretty much sewed up.

-And there it is. Senator Barry Goldwater is the Republican Party's nominee for the presidency of the United States.

-The standard is, if you're the loser and you don't have enough delegates to swing it, well then, you very graciously release your delegates to vote for other candidates. But Senator Smith never released them. And the total of the 27 votes that she got on the floor she hung on to, denying Barry Goldwater the unanimous vote for the nomination. So she came in second.

-The tumult and the shouting has died. Senator Margaret Chase Smith, the lady from Maine, has emerged from her precedent-breaking bid for the presidency with even greater stature and reputation. Let's get around to this. You made some history, lovely lady, in being the first woman ever nominated.

-Yes, it's quite a satisfaction today to think about--

-Why do it at all? People run because they want to prove a point. They run because they want to make a statement. They run because they've got an oversized ego or something. There are all sorts of reasons that people run for president, even though they may know they have little chance of winning.

Her reason was to prove that a woman could be a serious presidential candidate. And she did. She proved it.

-[SINGING] Go all out for Margaret.

-Will we see a woman elected President of the United States during our lifetime? Perhaps not so wild a dream. The world is changing rapidly. Politics change with it.

Many of the once impossible things have happened. Time alone will tell if a woman will someday break the tradition that only men can hold that office.

-[SINGING] Go all out for Margaret. And we'll win, win, win.

[END PLAYBACK]

ED: That piece was produced by Joe Richman and Samara Freemark. It came to us from the podcast *Radio Diaries* as part of the "Contender" series, "Profiles of the Most Original Presidential Candidates Who Never Won the White House." To hear more of these profiles, head to radiodiaries.org.

BRIAN: Margaret Chase Smith wouldn't be the last woman to seek a major party nomination for president. And no, we're not talking about Hillary Clinton.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

-I stand before you today as a candidate for the Democratic nomination for the presidency of the United States of America.

[APPLAUSE]

[END PLAYBACK]

BRIAN: This is Shirley Chisholm announcing her campaign in January of 1972. She was the first black woman to run for a major party nomination. Her campaign slogan was "Unbought and Unbossed."

Chisholm was already a seasoned politician. In 1968, she became the first black woman elected to the US Congress. Before that, she served in the New York State Assembly.

She understood that her campaign for president was a long shot. Here she is speaking to

students at UCLA in May of 1972.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

-And in the very beginning, I, to be frank with you, I laughed because I was cognizant of the fact that being simultaneously a black person and a woman placed me in the position of being a part of two segments in America who have never had any real roles to play in terms of the decision-making processes and policies that govern our lives.

[END PLAYBACK]

BRIAN: Chisholm's campaign encountered a number of roadblocks. Treated as a fringe candidate, she had to sue to be included in the televised national debates. She also survived multiple assassination attempts on the campaign trail.

Although she didn't win the Democratic Party nomination, Chisholm's campaign is often cited as transformative, paving the way for both Barack Obama and this year's democratic nominee, Hillary Rodham Clinton.

ED: We spoke with one politician who credits her career to Shirley Chisholm. US Congresswoman Barbara Lee has represented a district near San Francisco since 1998. She first met Chisholm while attending Mills College in Oakland.

At the time, Lee was so disillusioned with politics she never even registered to vote. And she was about to flunk out of a political science class that required students to volunteer for the 1972 presidential election. Nevertheless, as head of the African-American Student Union, she invited Mrs. Chisholm to speak on campus.

BARBARA LEE: So I went up to her afterwards. And I told her about my class and that I was about to flunk it. But after hearing her and meeting her, maybe I would reconsider. And she shook her finger at me. And she really was very adamant and took me to task.

You know, I had my big Afro, my jeans and t-shirt. She said, little girl. And I mean, I was, you know, a grown woman then. I had two little kids. I was on public assistance. And I was working with the Black Panther Party on the community programs.

And I conscientiously said, no, I don't want to register to vote. No, I don't want to be part of this political system because I didn't think it worked for me. And so she took me to task, told me I

better register to vote. And if I really believed in what I was working for and talked about, then I needed to get involved politically.

So I reluctantly told her, OK. I said, well who do I contact? Because I, you know, will try to pass this class. She said, my dear, I don't have a lot of national money. That's up to you to figure out.

So I talked to a couple of friends. And we figured it out. And we ended up organizing Shirley Chisholm's Northern California campaign from my class at Mills College. I got an A in the class and went on to Miami as a delegate.

ED: Well as a college professor, I'm going to take vicarious pride in the fact that that was all triggered by a farsighted college professor. So once you got into the campaign, what was it like to be a part of that?

BARBARA LEE: Ah, it was wonderful. She mentored me. She educated me. But also, I learned how to organize.

I organized fundraisers for her. I organized the office. I organized voter registration drives.

I actually went to Huey Newton and Bobby Seale and talked to them about the importance of the Black Panther Party getting involved in political work. And so ended up organizing the Shirley Chisholm fundraiser at the apartment of Huey Newton. And they endorsed Shirley Chisholm. And I was part of that whole process.

And so it was a very enlightening campaign. It was, in many ways, difficult because we did have to put together coalitions.

ED: Right, right.

BARBARA LEE: That's how I learned how to put together coalition politics, which then led to the first election of Lionel Wilson, our first African-American mayor in Oakland. None of this would have happened, as I believe Barack Obama never would have been elected president, had it not been for Shirley Chisholm and, of course, the great Reverend Jesse Jackson, who paved the way.

ED: Now, as you were doing all this inspiring work, did it bother you that you had a pretty good idea that Shirley Chisholm would not be the President of United States?

BARBARA LEE: Well, I believed she would.

ED: [LAUGHS]

BARBARA LEE: This was my point, that I really believed she would. And I just felt like, given her leverage and what she was able to accomplish, I felt we had won anyway.

ED: You laid out the whole chain of things that you didn't think would have happened without Shirley Chisholm's campaign. Are you heartened by the general situation of women in politics today? People of color in politics? Or did you see a future back in those days that hasn't really come to pass?

BARBARA LEE: No, I am heartened. I see progress-- not enough. We need more African-Americans elected to public office, more people of color, and more women. But, you know, we have to really recognize this is a marathon. This requires institutional systemic change.

But one thing about Shirley Chisholm, she said, you know, when you get on the inside, you've got to shake things up. Don't go along to get along. You know, you've got to change the rules of the game because they weren't made for you. They weren't written for you.

She was very clear about reform and incrementalism was not going to really bring justice and equality to people. We had to really get in there and deal with the institutions and the biases that are so endemic in all of our public policies.

ED: Well now, she famously said, I met more discrimination as a woman than for being black. Do you think she'd still say that if she were running today?

BARBARA LEE: Well that-- I've heard that quote and read it several times. But it was-- I won't say taken out of context, but she talked about being an African-American and being a woman and what that meant--

ED: Right.

BARBARA LEE: --you know, in different instances.

ED: Right.

BARBARA LEE: And I mean, I watched her. Because I came on to Washington, and I saw how she had to address members of Congress. Yeah, she really had a tough time, but she just stood tall and

kept going. She had a lot of courage.

ED: So you think that quote kind of pulls things apart that are really a part of the same thing? Trying to weigh discrimination for being female and discrimination for blacks is kind of a dead-end way of thinking about this?

BARBARA LEE: Yeah, absolutely, yeah, yeah, yeah. No, as black women, you know, we have both loads to carry. And these are weights that we have to lift from our shoulders. And we can only do that by fighting the system and changing things.

ED: So what would you say is her great legacy then?

BARBARA LEE: She was a catalyst for change. And she was unbought and unbossed, you know. And she was a progressive African-American woman. And I think most African-American women are progressive and can look to Shirley Chisholm as an icon and as a role model.

ED: Well I know you have further shaking up to do this morning. So I will let you go do that.

BARBARA LEE: OK, well I really appreciate the chance to talk with you. I love Shirley Chisholm. And if anyone comes to the Capitol, we were able to get a beautiful portrait of her placed in a very prominent place in the United States Capitol.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

ED: Barbara Lee is a Congresswoman from California and a former volunteer on Shirley Chisholm's 1972 campaign for president.

[MUSIC - EURYTHMICS, "SISTERS ARE DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES"]

EURYTHMICS: [SINGING] --say to you. We say, sisters are doing it for themselves.

BRIAN: That's going to do it for today. But you can keep the conversation going online. Let us know what you thought of this week's show.

While you're there, ask us questions about our upcoming shows. We've got one on the history of the American work ethic and another that examines faith in the presidency. You'll find it all at backstoryradio.org. Or send an email to backstory@virginia.edu.

We're also on Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter @backstoryradio. Whatever you do, don't be a stranger.

PETER: *BackStory* is produced by Andrew Parsons, Brigid McCarthy, Nina Earnest, Kelly Jones, Emily Gadek, and Ramona Martinez. Jamal Millner is our technical director. Diana Williams is our digital editor. And Melissa Gismondi is our researcher.

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[MUSIC - EURYTHMICS, "SISTERS ARE DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES"]

EURYTHMICS: [SINGING] We got doctors, lawyers, politicians too, ooh hoo hoo hoo.

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FEMALE SPEAKER: Brian Balogh is professor of history at the University of Virginia and the Dorothy Compton professor at the Miller Center of Public Affairs. Peter Onuf is professor of history emeritus at UVA and senior research fellow at Monticello. Ed Ayers is professor of the humanities and president emeritus at the University of Richmond. *BackStory* was created by Andrew Wyndham for the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities.

EURYTHMICS: [SINGING] --for themselves. People pay, hear what they say.

MALE SPEAKER: *BackStory* is distributed by PRX, the Public Radio Exchange.