

21.03.13 Who Votes Hour.wav

SM: Sarah McConnell

LF: Lauren Francis

GP: Gilda Pedraza

BF: Bernard Fraga

KH: Kathleen Hale

MB: Mitchell Brown

ED: Evette Dionne

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SM Remember that year and a half of nonstop voting ads? It was inescapable, but something must have worked because Americans voted in record numbers. And yet 35 percent chose not to vote. Some people regard that not-voting as almost a moral failure. It's a moral and civic obligation to vote, right? But what if we saw disillusioned potential voters as a political failure, not a personal failure on their part? From Virginia Humanities, this is With Good Reason, I'm Sarah McConnell. Today who shows up to vote? Who doesn't? Why? Local organizers were pushed to their limits this past year. Not only were they mobilizing people to vote, but they were also contending with the global pandemic that changed how they connected with the voters. The Latino Community Fund of Georgia stayed the course, reaching every Latinx voter in Georgia, twice in both the presidential and the Senate runoff. Associate producer Lauren Francis spoke with Gilda Pedraza, the fund's executive director.

LF Gilda Pedraza, spoke to me on Saturday morning from a pop-up vaccination event run by her organization, the Latino Community Fund of Georgia. This is what her life looks like these days: weekdays, keeping eyes on the legislature and weekends, getting vaccines into arms.

GP I think it is two faces of the same coin.

LF For Pedraza, vaccines and politics are both tools to help her community thrive.

GP Elections are a tactic to ensure that we create the realities that we want to see, that we go from surviving to thriving. And the vaccine, it's the tool that we have to mitigate and combat the virus.

LF And her organization has gotten very good at using whatever tools are available to reach Latinos in Georgia. Pedraza says, it's not just a matter of speaking the same language.

GP It's culture, it is immigrant competences, not only the outcome by the process, right. How we do things. And so, for us, it's important that while everybody understands that this is work that everybody needs to do for everyone, we are uniquely qualified to define and decide what works for our own communities.

LF The Latino Community Fund began their work three years ago as a part of a larger network of organizations. They don't exclusively focus on elections, but early on they recognized that there was really no voter education in their community, not from politicians, not from anyone.

GP It was very clear to us that the - they had been no investment in educating the community on what a senator does, a U.S. senator. And there was absolutely no recognition of the candidates for our community. So, there was a lot of investment that had to happen, a lot of information, a lot of education on why the race was important and why specifically Georgia was really at the center of the political universe, right.

LF Midway through their 2020 election efforts, covid-19 completely change what it meant to mobilize voters. Suddenly mobilizing voters was a biohazard.

GP It was really hard to do canvassing and field work. There was a point where half of all of our team of volunteers was sick or had someone that had died in their families because covid really ravaged our communities in Georgia.

LF She told me that a lot of people didn't have health care and it didn't help that Georgia had not expanded Medicaid or Medicare.

GP There's a significant number of immigrants in the state that are unable to purchase or don't qualify for any insurance.

LF In between weekly covid tests and grief, the Latino community funds organizers hosted food drives, got people registered to vote and hosted town halls around civics. Meanwhile, Pedraza saw little effort outside of grassroots organizations to engage Latin voters.

GP You know, between the presidential and the runoff, in the few weeks that we had, the fact that we still had to almost tell people, yes, messaging in Spanish is important.

LF They made it their business to make clear how important participation was in shaping their day to day lives.

GP Civic participation - it's something that we all do. And even undocumented - undocumented folks can do - not by voting, but they can also call their representatives, they can volunteer, they can write checks, they can, you know, keep folks accountable, they can go to the Capitol, they can, you know, translate.

LF At one precinct, two people found themselves closer to the ballot box than they had ever been.

GP You know, this lady, an American citizen, you know, 76 years old, first time voter, and she voted because her daughters push her to do it because it was that important.

LF When the woman arrived at the polls, a translator was there to help her through the process.

GP And we had this undocumented person, there was a volunteer that was able to translate for her. You know, at the end of it, they - they gave each other a hug because it was the closest they had both been to the voting booth. And it was - it was just a wonderful moment.

LF These memories energize and sustain the Latino Community Fund of Georgia, and they need the energy because there are no off years in the Georgia legislature, which means the organization is already back at work. Now, the legislature is considering proposals that Pedraza says will prevent Latinx people from voting.

GP People voted like never before, because they believed that they could change things. So to me, how do we keep that going? How do we keep that hope going? It's the work, right? It's the work.

LF For With Good Reason, I'm Lauren Francis.

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SM Many people argue that voting is a personal responsibility and that not showing up is an almost moral failure. But Bernard Fraga has a different point of view. He's a political scientist at Emory University and he says low voter turnout is actually a political failure on the part of politicians and our political system. And not a personal fault of nonvoters. Bernard, you argue in your book that low voter turnout should be seen as a failure of politicians, and not the personal failure of people who didn't make it to vote. Why is that?

BF Well, when I think about voter turnout and the reasons why people do or do not vote, one thing that we can look at is the data. We can look at survey data, the reasons people give for not voting. And that includes things like not liking the candidates, but also includes feeling disinterested in politics, feeling like politics doesn't really matter to your everyday life. And when I think about the political process and the goals of our democracy, it's about ensuring citizens feel engaged and feel represented. So in my opinion, when we think about voter turnout and the failure to vote, it's not so much an individual failure as a failure of the people that are trying to win our votes to try and actually win our support.

SM That's such a turnaround from traditional thinking, right? Haven't we traditionally thought that it's on you - if you can vote, but you don't vote, that's on you. Our job is to make it possible for you to exercise that right.

BF Well, I think that there's a there's a very interesting point there, given where we are in history. Right now we see a partisan divide in terms of access to voting. You have one side that says voting is, you know, not quite a privilege, but pretty close. It's something that you have to work towards. If you're not willing to make a lot of effort to vote, it means you must not want to vote very much. The other side, you have a camp that says voting is a right. It's something that we all have as citizens, as adult citizens of this country. But I think there's this third perspective, which is the idea that it's an obligation. And political scientists talk a lot about this, something that we are obligated to do as citizens. What I like to do is turn that obligation part around and say there's an obligation on politicians or the ones who are seeking to represent us to explain why they would do a good job, why they should earn our vote, why it matters for us to vote, what will change in our everyday lives. And I think if we switch that thinking, it also switches what the politicians are supposed to do in the campaign season and not just attack opponents, but really convince us that they have a vision that will improve our everyday lives.

SM It's kind of hard for me to imagine that - being so turned off that I just choose not to vote. Can you paint a picture of an example where someone may feel that way?

BF This is - that's a really great point. So as someone who votes quite a bit myself, I often am forced to kind of walk in the shoes of a nonvoter. And when I talk to nonvoters, look at survey data, but also hear the voices of nonvoters, especially young people, the thing that comes up over and over again is, it doesn't really matter if I vote, it's not going to change anything. Now, they don't mean the election result. They mean that no matter who wins or

loses, their everyday lives are not going to change. Now, again, as someone who votes often and pays a lot of attention to politics, that seems strange. Right, we know that policy is shaped very much by who's in office. Whether a bill passes or not can have a lot of impact on everyday lives. But for individuals who are struggling in this country, who for decades have seen little progress on key issues like inequality, even today, racial justice. Those individuals who again are statistically less likely to vote might very rightly feel like it doesn't really matter who's in office, the policies that they care about, the things that directly impact their lives don't seem to change.

SM I'm curious, have you found in talking with people that there are certain groups more consistently disillusioned with voting and therefore unlikely to vote?

BF When we look at the data, we see two key patterns. One is age. Younger people are far less likely to vote than older people. And as individuals age, they become more likely to vote. So there's some of that is not just a generational kind of shift, it's not that millennials and GenZ are not going to vote when they get older. It's that young people have so many other things going on in their lives and feel disconnected from the political process and from candidates that they don't vote. And I think that there is a common thread between racial and ethnic minority groups and young people in feeling like it doesn't really matter if we vote because policy is not going to change in a way that directly impacts our lives. The second major factor is race and ethnicity. For the fastest growing racial and ethnic groups, that is Latinos and Asian Americans, voter turnout rates are 10, 20, even 30 percentage points lower than what we see for non-Hispanic whites and for African Americans. So that means that as this country continues to become more diverse, we see growth in Latino and Asian population, if we don't do something to make sure that those groups are more engaged in the political process, we're going to see even lower rates of overall voter turnout in future elections.

SM I'm fascinated that you have said this feeling of disillusionment, that nothing is going to change, deters more people from the polls than say voter suppression efforts. Really?

BF Yeah, this is a big question that I tackle in my book. Now, we all know that voter suppression is a real phenomenon. It's difficult to measure the exact effect, but some people are trying to make it more difficult to vote. And they're targeting groups that already have lower turnout rates than the older white population. But when we think about the broader kind of reasons of why people don't vote, it's not so much because they don't have voter I.D., most people have a photo identification. It's not because they can't find, you know, the polling place because of a closure. It's not because of a lack of early voting. All those are important things to make it easier to vote, we should try and make it easier to vote for sure. But it's because of, again, this lack of engagement by candidates, it's lack of mobilization. So if we want to really flip the script, if we want to really change the rates of voter turnout and have a kind of political sea change, it's going to take attacking those kind of deeper lack of engagement issues rather than the kind of surface level measures that make it a little bit easier to vote.

SM So let's say you have a white politician running for Congress, male or female, who really would like to reach 30 percent of the electorate, who is Asian, Latino or African American. But how do you teach them how to bridge that divide?

BF So it's interesting. One of the patterns that I see in my book is that whatever the race is of the candidate or the politician and frankly, whichever party is doing the work- when they need to, they figure out very quickly which strategies are going to be effective for

mobilizing in particular, minority voters. That is, white candidates who run in heavily Black districts or heavily Latino districts, they know what to do. It's things like hiring outreach coordinators and hiring staff that are going to talk to members of those underrepresented communities. It's things like supporting policies that target inequalities and policing, target income inequalities, educational disparities, issues that are of concern to those communities. So this is not a kind of magic formula. It's really about the incentive that politicians have. When they need to, when they feel like they really need to earn African American, Latino, Asian votes. And maybe when they feel like they really need to earn youth votes, they shift their policy response, they hire people, they go out in the community, they talk to people. They know what they need to do and they're willing to do it. It's just that nine times out of ten, literally 90 percent of the time, politicians running for office in the U.S. feel like they can win with older voters, with white voters, and they don't really need to win the support of low turnout groups.

SM How has your theory of low voter turnout changed after seeing what happened this past election cycle in the Senate runoff race and in the presidential race in Georgia?

BF We saw, you know, a tremendous increase in the rate of voter turnout overall in November, and that was sustained to some degree in the runoff election here in Georgia. You saw, you know, rates of voter turnout that were 10, maybe even 15 percentage points higher than we saw in the in the 2014 or even 2016 elections. So that should be celebrated. Increases in voter turnout, I think, can happen in spite of voter suppression and Georgia has relatively strict laws about who can vote already as well. So that, I think, concurs with my theory. But what I saw that doesn't really comport with my theory to the same degree is how quickly groups can ramp up that mobilization and engagement if they're given the resources to do so. We saw, again, 10 to 15 percentage point increases in Latino, Asian American and some degree African American turnout because organizations that were doing the work in those communities already were simply given the resources they needed to. So, what I think was surprising and really a path forward is trust those communities and leaders from those communities to do the work. Just give them the resources to do their jobs and they will be able to engage with and mobilize voters that are otherwise forgotten, that are otherwise seen as not worth investing in.

SM Do you think what happened in Georgia is sort of a one-off, in the sense that this was such a popular race, this was there was so much attention and care involved in the candidates and the issues in the moment in time - that after this we'll all go back to another election, who cares why vote?

BF I think that if someone would have told me at the beginning of 2020 when we saw voter enthusiasm being exceptionally high or we knew turnout would be high, that we would have obviously a global pandemic, right. That it would change the way that people vote radically so that the groups that were least likely to use things like mail in ballots, which are African Americans and young people, would instead become the people most likely to use them in the wake of a pandemic. Right, that despite voter suppression efforts and calls from the very top of our federal government for invalidating elections, calls about voter fraud, that turnout would be as high as it is, I'd say this is an exceptional circumstance, no matter what the outcome is. So, in that sense, I don't think we're going to see a repeat of the Georgia runoff any time soon just because there's so much that's unique about the circumstance. But in some ways, it also charts a new path forward. It says if you invest in communities, they will turn out to vote.

SM So now that we've seen a new model for engaging voters, what do you advise politicians do to motivate voters?

BF My advice would be to go into the communities that these voters live in and actually talk to those voters about what they want out of politics. What do they want from politicians? What would make them a voter, what would make them engaged in democracy? And I think a good way of doing that for a candidate that's in some sense starting from scratch, is to go to those organizations that already exist and say, what do you know? What have you learned? What do these potential voters want and what makes them not engaged? Use those lessons to design the mobilization strategy instead of starting from a template that says, all we need to do is turn out the same people who voted last time around.

SM Bernard Fraga, thank you for sharing your insights on With Good Reason.

BF Thank you very much for having me.

SM Bernard Fraga is a professor of political science at Emory University in Georgia. His book is "The Turnout Gap Race: Ethnicity and Political Inequality in a Diversifying America".

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SM The 2020 election season was polarizing. There was widespread distrust in the system as a whole. Kathleen Hale and Mitchell Brown say that distrust is misplaced. They say the system is working, it just needs more funding. Kathleen Hale and Mitchell Brown co-direct Auburn University's Community Governance Research Project. Mitchell, a lot of people worry our election system actually broke under stressors from this past year. Do you share that worry?

MB I do not think that is true at all. In fact, I think if you look back over elections over the past several decades, what we just came off of was perhaps one of the most successful, if not the most successful election from an administration standpoint. Election officials around the country were able to both anticipate and respond to, you know, huge pressures that they've never experienced before and pulled off a very clean election in the end.

SM What people worry about is less about the integrity and the competence of the election officials, the volunteers and the paid, but rather the system itself.

MB That's a political conversation. And I think that's a conversation about the politics of the parties and the politics of how we talk to each other about elections and about politics itself. And there, I think, is where we came up on some - some really big stressors and there are some real concerns about what's happening in the country. One of them is about what's truth, you know, what is real, who gets to arbitrate truth. Right. If two people who are seen as important public figures say things that are completely opposed to each other, who's actually right? And that's where we saw some problems in this last election.

KH I think there's a I think there's a political piece, sure. I also think that during this election, we saw news footage on Twitter, on YouTube, on TV about details of a process that are essentially unknown. And so we got to see these details and we got to know that we didn't know what was going on. We watched something that didn't look like what we did in grade school when we wrote a name down on a piece of paper and we folded it in half

and we stuck it in a shoebox with a hole cut in the top. Like, how hard could this be, really? We learned so much. I think the American public learned the voting public, which was, you know, by larger numbers than ever - learned firsthand that there's a lot that goes into this.

SM Any ideas of what may help, having spoken to hundreds of people across the country about how challenging this is for a democratic system - do you have a few simple ideas that people have proposed that you like?

MB For people who are truly concerned and are sure that there's a vast conspiracy going on and that the system is really broken. The single best thing they could do is get in touch with the election officials in their local offices and actually, once the pandemic is over of course, you know, go and watch. There are some amazing offices around the country who have put together public facing information within their offices, where anyone can go in and essentially tour and watch all of the steps and see all of the steps and read background information so they can understand exactly what's going on and why. And that kind of information is the kind of information that people need if they're sure that there's something really, truly nefarious going on. Because what they would see is all of these safeguards in place to make sure the system is okay. The other thing that needs to happen more in all of this, as just this new huge amount of legislation is coming out - both around the 2020 election and now in response to the 2020 election - is for for legislators, for state lawmakers to actually talk to and listen to the election officials as they do this. Because sometimes what gets put into a potential bill would make things worse and not better. You know, there's a job to do by state legislators and in all of this. And that's about reassuring their constituents.

SM When you all talk about a raft of new laws, new bills related to election rules that are in the works now, are you mostly talking on a state-by-state level?

KH What voters saw was an expansion of different methods and opportunities to vote what we call voter convenience. Right. You could vote by mail, you could vote in person, maybe you could vote absentee with some different rules, maybe you had days of early voting. There was an expansion of opportunity, and the turnout suggests that people liked that. What's happening in state houses, in some state houses, conservative state houses, you know - if we had two weeks of early voting, let's roll that back and let's just have one week. Let's eliminate Sunday voting. Let's only have one Dropbox in a county instead of 15. I mean, so and we're seeing it go in the other direction, too. In states where a progressive leaning legislature has control, they're looking to institutionalize the temporary changes that were made during - during COVID to expand the opportunity for voters to vote. It's hot activity in both directions.

MB I would guess - adding to that - that the one thing that isn't on the table, the way it ought to be in the states where they're expanding voter convenience options, is money to support those activities. This is one of the things that Kathleen and I study is looking at how funded, and how well-funded or poorly funded election offices are. And they are primarily local functions, and they primarily exist off a local money. In a study we did a couple of years ago, looking at a sample of states, comparing election office budgets to the county budgets on average with a lot of variance, right. But on average, the county spent half a percent on elections. And elections don't just happen every four years or every two years. They happen all the time. And the functions related to elections like list maintenance, like carrying ballots afterwards, like putting ballots together in advance. These are year-round functions.

SM Kind of amazing, isn't it?

MB Yeah. And so, in that way, if the system's broke, maybe it's broke because we've underfunded elections so much.

SM And you're saying you think we have historically underfunded the elections offices and given cybersecurity, voting machine expansion of efforts, you know, new ways to computerize looking at voting systems. We really should devote a lot more attention in the budget to elections systems.

KH Well and it should be a whole government piece of attention, right. It's not just the election officials' issue, even in jurisdictions, states like Florida and Colorado, where the election officials are themselves elected. It's not just the election office's responsibility. If what you need is a super modern current I.T. structure, you can't do that on your own. Your state office probably can't do it on their own. That's one of the conversations that's starting to happen.

SM You've said that Georgia is a pretty good case study of what is working well, election-wise. What are the big challenges Georgia faced in the last election and, you know, how would you evaluate it?

MB Georgia was one of the first states to delay their primary in 2020 and they were doing this at a time that they were also implementing new equipment. And so they got a lot of attention then. And then the problems that - that folks talked about having in Georgia, they were really able to respond by the general election in November. And the - the processes clearly worked and worked well, and you could see that because of the various recounts and the audits. The differences in the original tallies and the tallies and the recounts and the audits were just minuscule, you know. So, most systems around the country were under pressure because of the pandemic. Georgia's was under particular pressure because they've got new voting equipment and the pandemic and, you know, some contested Electoral College votes and a lot of public attention and a lot of public pressure and scrutiny. And - and they came out on top on this and they were able to do so despite, you know, this essentially a triple threat of potential problems.

SM Well, Mitchell Brown and Kathleen Hale, thank you for sharing your insights on With Good Reason.

MB Oh thank you so much. It's been a pleasure.

SM Kathleen Hale and Mitchell Brown, co-direct Auburn University's Community Governance Research Project in Alabama. They're coauthors of "How We Vote: Innovation in American Elections". This program was funded in part by the Why It Matters Civic and Electoral Participation Initiative. It's administered by the Federation of State Humanities Councils and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. This is With Good Reason. We'll be right back.

[00:28:00]

SM Welcome back, this is With Good Reason from Virginia Humanities. Every election, the same cycle repeats, young people feel ignored by politicians, so they don't turn out to vote. Then comes the next election. Politicians say young people didn't turn out the last election

and choose not to center their issues in the campaign. So young people don't turn out to vote.

ED I think so often, particularly legacy publications are talking at young people instead of talking to them and bringing them into the fold and figuring out how to have these intergenerational conversations about how to help them become more politically engaged.

SM Evette Dionne knows better than to disengage young voters. Dionne is editor-in-chief of a popular online magazine that engages young voters who politicians often ignore. Some listeners may find the magazine's name offensive, so I'll say it once now and then again at the end. Evette Dionne is editor in chief of Bitch Media. For years, she's explored issues of race, the wage gap and body positivity through pop culture. One of her blog posts turned into her new young adult book called "Lifting as We Climb: Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box". If there's a vicious cycle where a lot of young people don't vote because they don't feel represented or considered by politicians, but then politicians think, hey, it's a lot of money and effort to try to engage these people who don't show up to vote. Do you think newer, younger media is bridging that traditional gap?

ED I believe that newer, younger media is attempting to do so because the role of a new media operation is not taking the stance of objectivity that previous media organizations or legacy media organizations have. And so, they're not just concerned with the stories that they tell, they're concerned about how they can use those stories to mobilize their readership into action. And of course, they are really fine ethical lines around that, particularly on the journalism end of whether or not you identify as say progressive or conservative and who you mobilize and for what purpose. But I think newer media outlets understand the role of journalism in a much more holistic way than legacy media does, that they are not just objective observers of a movement, but that they have the power to mobilize and organize people for greater social good.

SM Give me an example of ways in which media that older adults don't even know exist, might be engaging and politically attracting young people.

ED Yeah, absolutely. I think the most obvious example of that right now is Teen Vogue and the Sweet around Teen Vogue. So not just Teen Vogue, but also Allure magazine has really taken on this role of being an arbitrator of thinking about how to lean their audience more progressive in this case, to really tell the truth about what's happening with politics very unapologetically. And I think that has not only reached a new audience for them, but also reengaged an audience that had been disengaged for a while because of the direction that that particular publication was going in. And so every year they have a summit in which they convene not only the leaders at the publication, but also progressive political thought leaders to have conversations about voting, to have conversations about voter suppression, to have conversations about the role of feminism in the marketplace. Those sorts of kind of offline virtual events really allow people to not only have a readership experience with this magazine, but also incorporate it into their everyday life and use it as a gateway in which to better understand their own politics.

SM That's so interesting. You know, are you surprised that I assumed magazines like Teen Vogue and Allure and some of these others - even though they went digital, weren't really thriving anymore in this culture?

ED Yes, that's absolutely true. The magazine business is not a profit-making business. But I think in the way in which those publications think about new media is that it's not just

about something tangible that goes on newsstands, but it's also about having virtual events. It's about using social media more effectively. It's having video series and having interview series with thought leaders in a way that engages audiences in a - in an almost, I would say, a better, more progressive, more innovative way than legacy publications have historically done.

SM A great example of this was your own article that you wrote for Teen Vogue that led to your book "Lifting as We Climb: Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box". It's so interesting that the article would have led to years of your research.

ED Absolutely. I never could have or would have expected that article to become that book, but I'm grateful that I wrote it. And originally that started as a social media project, like a very haphazard, quickly put together social media project on the day of the 2016 election, in which I noticed that a lot of people were flocking to Susan B. Anthony's grave in Rochester, New York. And I thought, this is very interesting - not that the Susan B. Anthony doesn't deserve to have "I VOTED" stickers on her grave. But what about all of these Black suffragists who were in the trenches with her, who are often overlooked in this movement? And so from that, it became a video for The Root and then it became an article for Teen Vogue and then it became a book. And I think that's often the power of new media in terms of recognizing or in my case, a book editor recognizing that this very small thing that I did haphazardly in the middle of my workday could become a very extensive research project.

SM When did you personally first realize that there had been Black suffragists who'd been a key part of the movement but were overlooked in our history books?

ED It took me until adulthood, to be honest - into so my early 20s. Because so often when we talk about suffrage, we separate it from all the movements that came before it and after it, when in actuality all of these movements are interconnected. So, you know, the abolition movement is connected to the suffrage movement and the civil rights movement is connected to the suffrage movement. And the movement to end lynching in the United States is connected to the suffrage movement. But we don't think of those movements as one long, continuous lineage of activism. We often break it up into different waves or different decades or different generations. And so it took me a long time to realize that some of the women that I admire, like Ida B. Wells Barnett or Sojourner Truth or Harriet Tubman are all a part of this lineage of activism that they literally passed on the baton from one generation of Black women to the next generation of Black women to the next generation of Black women and continuing until today, that was not something I realized until I started writing this book.

SM And, you know, most of us have heard of Susan B. Anthony, but don't know much about her. What did you learn about her?

ED I learned that she was willing to fight for suffrage at all cost, even if it came at the expense of who should have been natural allies for her, which were Black women. And so she thought that she was being strategic and engaging suffragists in the South who endorsed lynching and thought that lynching, was just a natural output of trying to protect white women from what they perceived as aggressive and vicious Black men. And so she strategically aligned with them because she knew that she needed Southern senators in order to pass the suffrage amendment, but she didn't account for how that would harm or affects the Black women who up until that point had been in coalition with her and working toward the same goals as her. I mean, she had a very, very close relationship with

Frederick Douglass, for instance, and he was integral in getting her involved in the abolition of slavery. And so, her unwillingness to see the way in which you can coalition build, that it may take a little longer to reach the goal will be more equitable for everyone I believe is a real blight on her legacy.

SM You've told people that when you were writing this book, you cried the entire time you were writing the epilog. Why?

ED Many reasons. After researching for nine months, I realize that generations of Black women who have done this work cannot rest because the work still continues, that all of the work from the 1830s to the Voting Rights Act was undone in a single Supreme Court ruling that has now ushered in scores of voter suppression tactics not only in southern states, but across the United States, specifically designed to curtail Black people and people from other marginalized communities - to curtail them from voting. To realize that all of the work that these women did could be undone in literally the stroke of a pen was devastating to me, because it shows me that any freedom that you have is tenuous and that every step that you make has to be fought for and reinforced over and over and over again. And there is no way in which to get around that. And that is what honestly broke me down as I wrote that last chapter.

SM What was the aha-moment for you and your research that really opened your eyes to Black women's ongoing voting rights work?

ED I realized that these women were committed to fighting for something bigger than themselves, and it is something that we see repeated over and over and over again, I think specifically about Stacey Abrams, who ends my book and the coalition work that she did in Georgia around voter registration, around literally flipping that state for Joe Biden and then for the Senate. That was 10 years' worth of work. That is one inspiring but also heartbreaking, that requires that much to give people any central right to vote, to determine in our republic who their elected officials are, and to eliminate the barriers that prevent them from doing so. And so, I recognize that all of these women were very self-aware that they may not live to see, say, 1965. They may not live to see Barack Obama being elected president. They may not live to see Kamala Harris becoming the first Black woman and South Asian woman to become the vice president of the United States. But it's still worth fighting for. That is both inspiring to me, but also heartbreaking that you can work your whole life towards something and not see it come to fruition.

SM You write this as a young adult book. How do you think young people are getting important information? Is younger, newer media engaging young voters where the politicians fail?

ED Yes and no. I would say that particularly young people have an advantage that I did not have when I was a really young person, which is the Internet.

SM You are so young!

ED I am so young! But when I was like 12, 13, 14 years old. The Internet is really, in some respects, the great equalizer because you don't have to go to a single source for information. Tik-Tok for young people is a great source of information, if it's not disinformation, of course. They have Snapchat, they have group chats with their friends, they're on Among Us and Fortnite, in all these places where they built community. And that is a great way to reach them directly where they are. I think so often, particularly legacy

publications are talking at young people instead of talking to them and bringing them into the fold and figuring out how to have these intergenerational conversations about how to help them become more politically engaged. What are the issues that they are concerned about? For instance, they - they have been raised in what I call the post-Columbine High School era, in which all they know are school shootings and school shooting drills. What does it look like to put forward a plan to make it safe for them to be in school? That has to be a priority for them. They're inheriting an earth that is quickly eroding. What does it look like to put climate change at the front of a political agenda in a way that engages them? But you can't even get to that point if you're not in communication with them and figuring out the issues that matter to them and - and making it your business to ensure that those issues are at the front of your own mind.

SM Do you think we're adequately addressing these issues in school through civics and government and history and other lessons?

ED Absolutely not. Absolutely not. I'm thinking about the push in many states to prevent the 1619 Project at New York magazine from becoming a part of primary school curriculum, because it's almost as if educators and school boards fear what children could become, especially children from marginalized communities, if they knew accurate history from the start. I think.

SM What could they become?

ED I mean, they could dismantle the world and rebuild it. They - they could become the progressive politicians who make it to where we envision and actually imagine and follow through on building a new world. Like not just paying lip service to the idea but imagining it from the age of eight years old, until you're of age and then you run for office, and now you're in power, and now you can actually make legislative change toward the world that you want to see. That is powerful when we're thinking about the fact that the United States is approaching a shift in in the literal racial demographics of children and who is going to be the majority in this country. I imagine that that's terrifying for those who are in dominant power right now. And so rather than giving them the tools to empower them to be the leaders of tomorrow, you filter the information that they receive to the point that then they have to go on a process of unlearning, which is something that I had to do. And so one of the reasons I wrote the book is because I want young Black children specifically, to know accurate history from the start. So, they don't have to go through that process and they can step in through their power really early.

SM How powerful do you think mainstream culture is in moving forward things culturally? Do you think seeing things like sexism or classism in a TV show or Tik-Tok, for example, can maybe ease us into a topic, whereas just outright talking about it can be daunting? I've read that you love the TV series "Insecure" and have seen some and written about some really powerful episodes that beautifully lay out political issues now.

ED Absolutely. Television and pop culture, specifically - just pop culture in general across the board is a phenomenal tool to convey information because so often we're having these conversations about, say, racism or sexism or classism. There are these huge intangible, abstract concepts that people sit in classrooms for years and years to learn and deconstruct and figure out and challenge. Pop culture can be a gateway for people who don't have access to higher education in the way that, say, I did. It becomes in some respects the way in which you engage people and pull them in and then guide them toward the other resources that help them shape their worldview. And so more "Insecure"

in particular, I think it is a part of this - I would say it's a part of a lineage of Black pop culture. I'm thinking of "Girlfriends", I'm thinking of the "Fresh Prince of Bel Air" that have taken on these social issues in a way that resonates where people may not understand classism on its face. But if you watch enough episodes of "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air", you will understand how it functions. That is really powerful.

SM And you wrote a piece, an article on the powerful lesson you thought was laid out in one of the "Insecure" episodes on Black women's equal pay.

ED Absolutely. There was an entire storyline, I believe that was season two with Molly. She then began trying to engage her bosses. So she figured out that they were having almost like poker nights, and all sorts of things that her coworker was invited to do that she wasn't invited to. So she began inviting herself and like ingratiating herself with her bosses. And then eventually, toward the end of the season, she ended up getting the raise. But then she got an offer from a Black law firm and decided to leave to go somewhere where she felt like she would be appreciated. But the lesson in that was that she had all of the options on the table. Now, in real life, people encounter those sorts of discriminations all the time. Like that can be something you can watch if you're in that sort of negotiation that you don't have a mentor to guide you. You can watch that season unfold and say, okay, I can adopt this family, I won't use this, but this could help me and negotiate for your worth in the workplace. That is - is a power that you can't imagine - if you if you haven't gone through a training on how to negotiate, and you can watch HBO at 9:00 pm on a Sunday and get this information, it just makes it more accessible. It eases a lot of the barriers that prevent people from getting that kind of information and it allows you to apply it in your real life in a way that makes an actual tangible difference.

SM You know, we just finished a presidency where we had the first president ever who was almost completely engaged on social media. How - how did that affect your life and your work as editor of a popular magazine - online magazine?

ED The former president completely dominated the news cycle and, in many respects, broke it. And he also found a way to dominate media coverage where he became inescapable. And I don't think that anyone in the news business, myself included, could have foreseen that. Having to cover tweets that are not vetted by Twitter or any other platform originally - eventually, they were - trying to decipher what part of that is actual, factual or what part of it is disinformation, and then deciding how and when to cover it was an exercise that I don't think media was prepared for. But it was also a good lesson in knowing that power can be corrupting and that just because a person is in a position of power doesn't mean they're necessarily going to tell you the truth. And it is your job to vet all of the information that you receive to ensure that you are giving the correct information to the people who are looking to your publications to deliver it.

SM Evette, you work so closely with young people in shaping the sort of new media that they're organizing requires, are you hopeful about the future?

ED Yeah. I am inspired by the generation that is coming behind me, and I began being inspired by them honestly after the shooting in Parkland, Florida. I believe that was in 2018, when they said we are not doing this anymore, there has to be a better way, and we are going to take to the streets, if necessary, to bring awareness. That level of courage and bravery just runs through their generation in a way that it didn't for mine until we were much older. And that gives me a lot of hope about what is possible for the world that they are trying to build if they can inherit a world at all, depending on what happens with climate

change. But they are a model for how to do the work and be engaging about it. They - they've learn how to master Tik-Tok and all of these social media platforms and they're incredibly engaging, but also to be serious about the work of activism, about understanding what it takes to organize, understanding what it takes to mobilize, understanding what it takes to move policy, understanding that everyone has a different role in a movement and no movement needs a singular face. That is inspiring to me because that is the very best of what activism can be. And not that there isn't infighting and not that there is a perfect movement or a perfect leader - that does not exist. But these young people have tapped into something special, and I think it is up to those in positions of power now, myself included, like those dictating the media that is consumed to provide the infrastructure and the support that they need to literally take over the world.

SM Evette Dionne, thank you for sharing your insights on With Good Reason.

ED Thank you so much for having me. I appreciate it.

SM Evette Deon's new book is "Lifting as We Climb: Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box". She's editor in chief of a magazine whose name some listeners may find offensive. So I'm going to say it now, Bitch Media. This program was funded in part by the Why It Matters: Civic and Electoral Participation Initiative. It's administered by the Federation of State Humanities Councils and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Support for With Good Reason is provided by the University of Virginia Health System, using advanced cardiac imaging to better diagnose conditions before they become serious health issues. UVAHealth.com. With Good Reason is produced by Virginia Humanities, which acknowledges the Monacan nation, the original people of the land and waters of her home in Charlottesville, Virginia. Our production team is Allison Quantz, Matt Darroch, Lauren Francis and Jamal Millner. Maya Nir, Cassie Deering and Dontae Woodfolk are our interns. For the podcast, go to withgoodreasonradio.org. I'm Sarah McConnell, thanks for listening.