LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

REPORTING ON POLICING AT THE POLLS & BIPOC VOTER SUPPRESSION IN 2024

LAURA FLANDERS - We are weeks away from a super important election in a country that is still grappling with its democracy. Just this month, Republican mega donor and South African immigrant Elon Musk amplified a post that seemed to suggest that the whole system would work better if voting was restricted just to high status men. With attitudes like that still out there, will all who want to vote, be able to, especially those who've historically been the most excluded and whose votes could once again ultimately decide the outcome.

KADIA TUBMAN - Right, Laura, we're already seeing new restrictive voter ID laws in places like North Carolina and on many reservations, lingering cases of voter intimidation in places like Pennsylvania, and of course the most growing part of this entire thing, which is the vigilante type "election integrity" watchdogs that are forming all across the country. Now, what does this all mean for millions of eligible voters of color, for whom the stakes of this election are high? But when we talk about the hurdles to even participate in this election, are those even higher?

LAURA FLANDERS - Yeah, well, for this month's Meet the BIPOC Press round table, I am joined, as you can see by this time as co-host Kadia Tubman of the Scripps News Broadcast Network. Hi Kadia, I'm so glad to have you here.

KADIA TUBMAN - Hi, Laura. I'm happy to be here.

LAURA FLANDERS - And we at our non-existent table are joined by Chenjerai Kumanyika, who's an NYU Journalism professor, as well as the host of the excellent new podcast, "Empire City," which looks at the origins of the New York Police. Also with us, Christopher Lomahquahu, an investigative journalist with the Howard Center for Investigative Journalism, which is inside the Cronkite School at Arizona State University. Welcome all.

KADIA TUBMAN - Chenjerai, I want to come to you at this point, I'm thinking about "Empire City," about your podcast, the brilliant podcast that takes us through the actual true history of the NYPD. But there's a particular part of the series that I particularly am stuck with. It's about the publisher, the founder, writer, of the "New York Herald." And how at a point, this is before the abolition of slavery, when New York was participating in returning enslaved people back to the South, the publisher wrote about Black resistance, about how ultimately he was seeing the pushback from Black New Yorkers against enslaved people being sent back as linking to them having political power or wanting the right to vote. I want to also connect that to 2008, the general election where in Michigan, there was a secret plan to challenge the votes of people who

had homes that were foreclosed. And the idea was that if you went after these people particularly going after minorities and poor people. So this has been around, how have you seen the intertwining of power, politics and police come forth in this time?

CHENJERAI KUMANYIKA - You know, that moment where James Gordon Bennett is writing about the George Kirk case, and this is a case everyone should try to understand, because it's basically the first major deployment of police in New York. It happens a year after the modern NYPD is founded and they send 900 officers to kidnap one fugitive. And was amazing to see that his commentary, James Gordon Bennett, the founder of "The Herald," his commentary on that was about voting rights. He was saying, this Black resistance, these efforts that Black folks are making to keep their communities safe, we should look at that in terms of their political power and voting rights. So I think there's a couple of things that you see there, and I think that really, one thing I'm seeing when we look around really the country, what we see now, the fight for democracy is happening in places all over the country on issues related to voting on issues related to climate change, certainly on issues related to immigration, which really is a lens through which we can almost see every other issue in this election. And police are on the wrong side of all those battles. So I think that, if you look back then, one very concrete element of this is that police are involved in charging people and they involved them in the carceral system. And then once you're in the carceral system, this compromises your voting rights. I think we need to talk about, so far so much of this discussions of policing have been around incidents of police brutality or assault. And part of what "Empire City's" is trying to do is to shift the terrain into these politics of policing. How policing is really involved in fighting democracy in a way.

KADIA TUBMAN - Well, at least what I'm hearing when I talk to folks about disinformation and misinformation, the tactic isn't necessarily about confusing people, it's about making it so chaotic that people say, "Well, this is hopeless," or "This is so big and so problematic that I can't possibly change that." I have a sense, Christopher, that in even reading your work and going through what Indigenous communities are battling against when they're coming up against barriers to voting, it sounds like that is also happening in the case of, well look at the 100 years that we have to go to just to fight to vote. Or even when we were granted the ability to vote, we were still stopped in so many ways. How is that translating in Indigenous communities that are probably going to move a lot of different states right now?

CHRISTOPHER LOMAHQUAHU - Yeah, I think it speaks to the resiliency of Native people, like you mentioned, it wasn't until 100 years ago that Native Americans were granted citizenships of this country, and throughout that time, as part of that, that was the right to vote, but as was mentioned, there have always been barriers. There's been things that were put in the way to say that Native people, they could not understand or read English or really know what they were voting for, but for a fact, like you're looking at it, they understood what was the landscape of the environment they were living in both politically, physically, and of course

everything else that they were impacted by. And with these groups that you're seeing out here with the Western Native Voice, Arizona Native Vote, other organizations that you're finding across these different states is that they understand that history, but it hasn't deterred them from looking ahead as far as they can do to activate those other voters, especially the youth who are going to be that next generation. Because in Indigenous cultures, we're always looking at those next generation of Native people, what are they going to do? How are they going to face this new environment that we're in? And I think that they find really innovative ways and not give up, because when you look at some of these laws that border on voter suppression, you see they don't just impact Indigenous communities. They impact a lot of people from low income communities, people where there's not a lot of infrastructure and just basically, as far as individuals that may not have a seat at the table. So I think that really shows that we're trying to keep that seat and then open that avenue for other people to be there as well.

LAURA FLANDERS - We should point out that Native people vote more than anybody else, Indigenous voters vote in tribal elections as well as US elections. Are Democrats in particular who relied so much on Native voters in Nevada and Arizona to elect both the presidency and senators last time around giving those Native vote organizations, you mentioned Christopher, the support they need right now, do you think?

CHRISTOPHER LOMAHQUAHU - Well, they work independently of state and other entities out there, so I believe that a lot of 'em are just self supported. They're supported by volunteers, people who give their time to go out and canvas communities and talk to people and do voter registration drives, things like that. I haven't really seen too much interaction between people that are running for office or anything here in Arizona and directly in participation with a group in particular. But they do acknowledge, as far as the Secretary of State, Adrian Fontes and other individuals, they acknowledge that Indigenous voters do make up a good voting bloc of either their district or even across the state. So they understand, they acknowledge that, but I think there is room for more engagement to talk about how their platforms or whatever they are running for, are able to address and meet the needs of these Indigenous communities. And of course we have a large Hispanic population, which is by far very large here in the Phoenix metropolitan area. And so there's a lot of groups that are trying to gain that as far as that collaboration so that their needs are not falling through the cracks.

LAURA FLANDERS - Well, let me pick up on that, insofar as this feature of the show focuses on journalism and media. What's your advice for journalists as they try to cover elections? Because as you just said, often our police brutality beat is on a different page from our election beat, which is on a certainly different page from our Indigenous issues beat, if there even is one. Starting with you, Chenjerai.

CHENJERAI KUMANYIKA - Well the one thing I'd really want to say about this is this, we have a tendency in the media, and I'm going to say we, but it's probably not the people in this call, to talk about policy as though it's coming out of the intention or goodwill of the candidates. So we talk about what Kamala Harris and Walz are going to do, what they want to do, and there's a way in which we individualize it. When in fact, these decisions are not actually simply the product of their own individual intention of their ethics, these are massive political systems. When you talk about it as people, as opposed to the way that Chris just put it, Chris said, he wants to think for younger generations, what is the new environment? What is the new political terrain that might be the case under one candidate or another?

LAURA FLANDERS - Christopher, you want to add to anything to that?

CHRISTOPHER LOMAHQUAHU - Yeah, I think you made a really good point. Talking in reality, for Indigenous communities, and I'm pretty sure there's others out there that when you're talking about the issues, they're not talking about issues that are far off like 100 miles away or some point across the country, like in places like DC or anything. They're talking about things that are right there in their own community and their reservations and things that happen within their state, because that's really where the big impact is. And that's why with these groups and others advocacy voter groups out there, they're trying to educate, especially targeting the young as far as the generation, it's like, "Okay, how could you look at voting in your community? What are the things that impact you? Is it education? Is it safety?" We're looking at things, "Well, what matters to you?" May not be as far as what happens across the country, but "Okay, what is it that needs to be done that really is affecting you every day as you go about your lives in these reservations?" So it's really about trying to just focus on local part. Of course, the bigger impact is going to obviously impact how communities are treated, whoever the next president will be. They are concerned with that too as well. So that's not just far from the picture, but it is something that obviously will eventually have a place in terms of their peripheral of what Immediately impacts their lives.

KADIA TUBMAN - I'm thinking, Christopher, about a 2020 report from the Native American Right Fund that found that more than 1.5 million eligible Native American voters were not registered. And one of the looming questions that a lot of folks have around the Native American vote in 2024 is not who they will vote for at the end of the day, but if they will show up to vote at all. How are you facing that question? Especially like you said, when it comes to younger Native American voters who may not even show up to the polls.

CHRISTOPHER LOMAHQUAHU - Yeah, that always is like the big question to trying to find that solid answer or answer that is tracking in that right direction because there is a thing how are we going to look at who shows up? When you talk to the different individuals within these communities, the older generation, they get it. They understand why voting is important. They

served in armed forces when they didn't have the right to vote. They were citizens at that time, but they could not cast their vote. And there's some that just grew up throughout the different periods of social and issue and obviously the civil rights movements that were going on across the country throughout the mid part of the 20th century. For this generation, as far as having them show up goes back to, "What impacts you? What is important to you?" And I think what really the groups that are out there, they're really trying to hit at bringing their voice because you feel, as a youth coming from a tribal community, you feel like you are not heard. But I think when these groups go out there, they really try to activate them, get their voice, get 'em involved in the idea of what democracy is, what is their idea of what democracy means to them? And I think that's really how they're trying to get the younger voters to the polls and not just people that are at voting age, but also people that are even 10, 20 years older too as well. So I think that's going to be a big thing that every community tries to tackle is how are we going to get as many people voting? And then it comes down to some of the simplest things. Having an event, having something around food and culture and entertainment, things like that. Something that resonates with them.

CHENJERAI KUMANYIKA - I think what Chris is saying is so important. And building on that, I would say how you talk to people who are skeptical of what it means to vote is really important. People in a position who want to do this have to do two things. One thing is you have to acknowledge that people's skepticism about American democracy is justified and the things that politicians may be saying, and a lot of the narrative they're going to hear, are if they get the sense that maybe this is BS, there's a lot of evidence for that, that it is. And then to say, but nevertheless, your voice and your vote matters. And especially on the local level, because what happens, who gets put into power is going to change the landscape. And I think the ability to have those conversations and to have the bottom up process, there's also a political economic aspect to that. And what I mean by that is some of the nonprofit money that flows throughout these political parties to get out the vote. Sometimes they go in certain communities and it's happening very early in the election cycle. There's a certain kind of money that's talk to people, hear from them what's important and let that influence the agenda. But then other communities, more marginalized communities, that money, it's more like last minute money, where it's just like, go to the door and then try to shame people into voting or whatever, have a brief conversation.

LAURA FLANDERS - Well this is why diversity is so important, especially in our media. Now, it's not a destination, but it is important because speaking as a white person here, it's like white Americans have mostly been given this image of our democracy as a additive project. If we can just secure rights for the mainstream, so-called, then rights will trickle down, we'll add things on. And what I'm hearing every election season that I've been here ever, actually are those fissures in our democracy, excluding critical people that scuttle the whole process, that weaken the whole machine. So I guess my question to both of you and Kadia is are things changing, for example,

the work that you are doing Chenjerai to show this story of history? Is it shifting people's trickle down approach to justice, rights, democracy, you name it.

CHENJERAI KUMANYIKA - I think it is, I mean, I'm hopeful that it is, we're getting a really exciting feedback on "Empire City." When you're doing a dense, what could be considered a weedsy history, you're concerned that maybe it's going to be boring and you don't want to put people to sleep. But I'm getting a lot of good feedback. And I think part of that was, we tried to tell a story that was also a story of resistance. And it was interesting, if you talk about some of the major media outlets, some of whom are outlets that I've worked with, this project was produced by Crooked Media and we had Wondery. These are big companies, but even if you look at a company like the New York Times, or as some people call it the New York War Crimes, what I think is important to say here is that these are contested spaces. So I think we should absolutely be critical of these institutions, but we also have to remember that there's people in them who want to tell a different story. So I do think we're moving forward and I'm inspired by the leadership. I'm inspired by the kind of work that Chris is talking about, the kind of work that we see all the time from the journalists on this show. And I think we have to call attention to that without exaggerating the victory that it is. We do have to lift those up because morale is absolutely essential.

LAURA FLANDERS - Kadia?

KADIA TUBMAN - I agree, I am hopeful, especially as someone who's mostly covering this information, I don't think I could be hopeful, but I am now that we're seeing more and more voices in the community come up, and it doesn't have to necessarily be through traditional media. It doesn't have to be through New York Times or The Guardian or et cetera. It can be as simple as someone, a former reporter that I follow on TikTok who's like, "I don't work for a news organization, but I'm going to tell people in my community, mostly Black people, what's happening in the news." And so I feel like there's a lot of hope, but there's is a lot of change. But right now what's most important in terms of what the media can do is constantly put up, and again, not traditional media, but constantly put up good information to combat or at least out shout all the bad stuff that we're hearing and that's constantly out there.

LAURA FLANDERS - Christopher, you want to come in on this same question?

CHRISTOPHER LOMAHQUAHU - Yeah, I think, in following along in the same vein is that you see a lot of progress coming up in terms of the diversity in the newsrooms. Editors, especially individuals, like myself and others they want to hear, what's your take on this? What are your experiences in this? And what can you share that can help us understand why this story is newsworthy? Of course, the newsworthiness, as much is not in a big newspaper, it's not in a big publication, but it's actually what happens to community members, people that are dealing

with everyday things that happen to them. And I think that's really the thing that I'm seeing a lot is a lot of that more extra time to really listen, stop and understand, it's not just simply about the story, it's about the different layers to that, the cultural component, the social component, the stigmas. How do we get by those stigmas without having to feel like we're parachuting in and just collecting the information we want and then leaving. So I think that's what tribal communities really like, is when people really get to know them, really get to understand their struggles and what they're going through. And also what their successes are because there is a lot of success in Indigenous communities. And I think those really do need to be highlighted a bit more in terms of what progress has been made, how are they holding the government accountable for things that they should be doing, and as far as what the government, the treaty agreements that each tribe has. And so when you start seeing newsrooms really listen to that and really understand that, that piece that you obviously bring to the environment, it really opens the door to potentially other types of stories you'd be covering. because there's plenty of other things that are out there that are outside from voting, have the missing and murdered Indigenous peoples or women's movement that's happening. And there's obviously other things that we can be focusing on as well. So I think it's really moving in that direction where we can really try to, as far as people cover and canvas a lot of these issues.

LAURA FLANDERS - I don't want to suggest that there's a happy ending to your "Empire City," and I haven't gotten there yet in the podcast, but you did say at the beginning, Christopher just did that ours is a story of incremental progress. Progress and retrenchment, progress and backlash. But are there stories you'd like to lift up from the struggles you've been reporting on, Chenjerai, that you think might be inspiring, encouraging, illuminating on this front?

CHENJERAI KUMANYIKA - What I think we have to do in our movements is find a way to be in the world where we're committed to a sense of constant pushing forward. Constant struggle might sound too much for people, but constant pushing forward. And that's what people in the 19th century had to do. So they have so many examples. Whether it is moments where they were able to make sure that someone did not get sent back into slavery. Whether it was a Black woman who was thrown off of a streetcar and wound up suing the whole city successfully. Whether it's moments of Muslim people in New York who were able to push back against the way that they had been surveilled. There's so many moments where you can see that victories were won and it did matter that people fought and they were able to take the morale from that victory, although it was not permanent, and push to the next level.

KADIA TUBMAN - And then I'm thinking about the safety. When we think about safety and democracy and how, right now it seems like safety and making sure that everyone can vote is just like an inverse relationship. We even had the former president saying, like the police agency basically saying, "Hey, we need more police involved. We need you to watch out because we

would win so much easily if you guys are involved. And quote, I think he says specifically, "You do not know how afraid people are of the badge."

> **DONALD TRUMP**: Watch for the voter fraud because without voter fraud, we win so easily, hopefully we're going to win anyway, but we want to keep it down. You can keep it down just by watching, because believe it or not, they're afraid of that badge. They're afraid of you people, they're afraid of that more than anything else, they're afraid. So I hope you can watch.

KADIA TUBMAN - So when we think about-

LAURA FLANDERS - Internal order of police, seeking their endorsement, which he then got.

KADIA TUBMAN - In North Carolina all of it is absolutely connected.

CHENJERAI KUMANYIKA - Wow, that's really disturbing, I just want to stress, you also see immigration, how this strain of using immigrants as a way to inspire fear, but also offering to those immigrants, like this mechanism, like you can become police, you can become part of the apparatus of even keeping your own people out. That goes also all the way back, even to the beginning of the department. One thing I was amazed to find, and the NYPD is very much identified with Irish people right now to the point where you would assume that that was always the case. But the very first police force in New York, it was like, Irish need not apply, and so those strains go back. So in that way too, the history of the NYPD is actually, while being divisive, because some people support police, it's actually a unifier in the worst way in the sense that there are so many diverse groups of people who are targeted by the NYPD, from Russian Jews to German immigrants, to Black Americans, to Latinos, to Chinese Americans. It's like all these folks, there's this tremendous archive of people who were on the wrong end of the NYPDs guns. And I think that that archive needs to be recognized.

KADIA TUBMAN - And Laura, to your point that you've once made before we started talking was about how in some countries it's simple to vote that it shouldn't be so hard. But in this country, if it is simple to vote, it is considered that our elections are unsafe. So there is an inverse between safety and simple when it should be that everyone should be able to vote. To Christopher's point about young people, hey, when they turn 18, maybe they get a ballot card in the mail. Maybe it should be that easy that you shouldn't have to fight. Or as Chenjerai said, you don't have to push forward because no one wants to constantly be fighting. But yes, there is a constant struggle in a way there's a constant push for progress. And I just wanted to make that connection in terms of when we think of safety in our election and who gets to be safe and who's kept out and why.

LAURA FLANDERS - I can only imagine, Kadia, that you are swamped over there at Scripps reporting on misinformation and targeted misinformation. But I hope you have time to come back with me again. It's really been a joy having you co-host today.

KADIA TUBMAN - Been fantastic. And thank you to both of our awesome panelists.

LAURA FLANDERS - Thank you all. It's been great having you with us. Till the next time, you've been watching "Laura Flanders & Friends," stay kind, stay curious, I'm Laura.

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