061 Why Your Vote Matters

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Rachel Rodgers

Hello Seven with Rachel Rodgers
061 Why Your Vote Matters

Hey, so today’s episode is a little different than our usual dealio, but if you only listen to one episode of the *Hello Seven Podcast* this year, make it this one because today we’re going to be discussing something that directly impacts your body, your health, your family, your safety, and most definitely your income. Today we are talking about voting.

I have a lot to say on this topic, so buckle up. I’m going to cover three main things. Number one, a brief history of voter suppression in our country and how it still continues to this day. Number two, how you can use your position as a small business owner to inspire dozens or even thousands of people to get out the vote. Number three, why voting really matters.

Look, I know you might be feeling cynical about voting. Honestly, my own husband feels that way. You might feel like voting is futile and pointless and you know what? That is exactly what Trump and his administration want you to believe. When you believe you are powerless to enact change that’s when the bullies have won and I have been fighting bullies since I was six years old. I have not backed down to a bully yet, so don’t expect me to do that now.

So, we cannot let that happen. This is a special episode about voting, but really, it’s an episode about claiming the power that is rightfully yours and using your power to shape the world. Because we done with letting old, white men rob us of our power, aren’t we? Are you with me? Here we go.

Welcome to the *Hello Seven Podcast*. I'm your host, Rachel Rodgers, wife, mother of four children, a lover of Beyoncé, coffee drinker, and afro-wearer, and I just happen to be the CEO of a seven-figure business. I am on a mission to help every woman I meet become a millionaire. If you want to make more money, you are in the right place. Let's get it going.

Are you ready for a history lesson? Let me break it down for you. This is by no means a complete history of voter suppression in America.

[Hello Seven](https://www.buzzfeed.com) with Rachel Rodgers
061 Why Your Vote Matters

Unfortunately, that would take a very long time, right? We could easily discuss that topic for the next 5,000 hours but this is a quick glance at the key moments you should know about. Let’s start our story in 1789.

Back then only property owning or tax paying white males were allowed to vote. At that time that’s about 6% of the population. I mean, think about that, 94% of the US population was forbidden to vote. Only 6% were allowed to vote. That seems batshit crazy, but that’s how our glorious nation started out.

Gradually, more white men were allowed to vote. Black people and women, definitely not, not until 1870. That’s when we get the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution which prevents states from denying the right to vote on grounds of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Translation: Black men are now allowed to vote, except not really because the patriarchy made sure to put a whole bunch of obstacles in the way to make it really, really difficult to actually exercise your right to vote.

Just a few of those obstacles included poll taxes and literacy tests. So, poll taxes required eligible voters to pay a fee before casting a ballot and guess which people often struggled to pay that fee, Black folks. This is the best part, some poor white folks were grandfathered in if they had an ancestor who voted before the civil war. So, some white people didn’t even have to pay that tax, right?

Obviously, majorly unfair because that was the goal. That’s why that poll tax was put in place. Then, literacy tests were given in some places as another way of excluding Black people from voting because during this time many Black people did not have access to a high-quality education. Kind of like today. Therefore, they struggled to pass the test.

Did you know, actually, that right after slavery ended a lot of white southerners burned down schools in parishes where there were large,
061 Why Your Vote Matters

Black communities because they were so afraid of Black people becoming educated. There’s even more fuckery on top of that. Literacy tests varied in difficulty and Black people were often given more rigorous tests. Honestly, can you even imagine Trump trying to pass a literacy test? I mean, that would be alarming and hilarious. The man can’t even spell the word hamburger and that’s supposedly one of his favorite things. He also misspelled his own wife’s name.

There are a million of examples of Trump displaying his lack of intelligence, so we don’t even need to get into that. Of course, in addition to poll taxes and literacy tests and other obstacles like those there were additional obstacles including outright terrorism. Terrorizing Black people, burning down their homes and businesses, murdering them in massacres, lynchings, all things that happened frequently during this time in history all to prevent Black people from voting.

Part of the reason why is during reconstruction after slavery ended Black people started voting right away and they were able to get Black men as politicians to govern their own parishes because when these plantations closed and when slavery ended there was a white family there was many, many Black, formerly enslaved people in the community, and so these communities would be majority Black and those majority Black communities now had a majority and so they could vote for Black, local politicians.

So, there was this moment right after slavery ended that actually Black people started to create a world for them that was really positive and that they took their power back and then we had Jim Crow laws and white people have been coming up with ways to disempower Black people and try to get us as close to slavery as possible since then.

As just one example, the Greenwood Massacre in the early 1900s. Greenwood was known as Black Wall Street and it was a neighborhood
where Black people were thriving and prospering, running successful businesses, living their best life, and they had actually fled some of these southern cities where endless violence was going on and Black people were being terrorized. They left, organized themselves, and moved into this town where they were dominant.

So, it was all Black people, all Black businesses, they were running and living in their own sort of pod, if you will, that was incredibly successful and where they felt safe. Then, of course, white people stormed into the community and destroyed everything, 35 city blocks in flames, 300 people died and 800 were injured. Through massacres like this one – and there were others, this wasn’t the only one, white people sent a clear to Black people and that message was, you are not wanted here and you are not safe here.

You are not safe at your place of work, you are not safe at home in your bed, you are definitely not safe at the polls and if you try to rise and prosper and gain power, we will murder you. To every white person who is listening to this. Take a moment of stillness and silence right now. Pause. Really consider what it must’ve been like, what it is still like to this day to be a Black person in America.

This is true, right? It’s still what we’re experiencing today where we do not feel safe at home, we do not feel safe at work. Consider how difficult it must be to summon the motivation to get up and go vote in a country that repeatedly has told you you are not safe here and you will be punished if you try to exercise your power and you are worthless, and no matter what you try to build it will be burned down.

These are the messages that we have been receiving for hundreds of years. Consider how much courage it takes to get up and go vote anyway. The courage to remain hopeful and to keep trying in spite of every horrible
061 Why Your Vote Matters

thing that has happened in this horrible country and our horrible history. Okay, so white ladies, you’re next in our story.

1920, that is when women are given the right to vote, finally. But as usual, there’s a catch because racist voter suppression continues which means it is still very difficult for non-white women to vote. In fact, there were still laws in place that prevented Native American women and different Asian populations from voting during this time.

So, even though women were given the right to vote, it was really for white women. There were lots of other kinds of voting laws on the books that prevented other people, other types of women, women of color from voting. That is why Black women like Fannie Lou Hamer and Ella Baker and many others fought hard for fairness at the polls which eventually led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This is a piece of federal legislation that prohibits racial discrimination in voting. It was a big win for people of color, but does it mean that racism is over and voter suppression has ended? No, it does not. This continue to this very day.

Here we are in 2020. One way that voter suppression is alive and, unfortunately, pretty well in 2020 is because of unfair voter ID laws. 36 states have identification requirements at the polls, but over 21 million US citizens do not have government issued photo identification. That’s because ID cards aren’t always accessible for everyone for a wide variety of reasons. Probably the most common reason is that you simply can’t afford to get a card.

For instance, let’s say you work two minimum wage jobs and you can still barely cover the bills and you’re a single mom, and you literally can’t afford to go downtown to the DMV to wait in line for six hours to get your ID because if you do that you’ll have to miss a shift at work and then won’t have money for groceries to feed your babies. Thus, you don’t have an ID card.

Hello Seven with Rachel Rodgers
061 Why Your Vote Matters

The ACLU reports that to get an ID card the combined cost of document fees, travel expenses, and waiting time are estimated to range from $75 to $175. For millions of low-income households in America $175 is just not doable. I remember a time in my family where spending $75 to $175 to get an ID card and also missing work where that would not have been possible. I remember that in my own family.

The ACLU also reports that nationally up to 25% of Black citizens of voting age lack government-issued photo ID compared to only 8% of whites. So, a quarter of Black people do not have government-issued photo ID, so a quarter of them cannot vote in most states.

Another way that voter suppression happens today is voter purges. When a state does a voter purge this means thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands of people are made ineligible to vote, usually for flimsy BS reasons like, “Because you skipped voting in several consecutive elections,” or, “Because you have not responded to a letter asking you to confirm where you live.”

Often people have no idea they’ve been purged and only learn this when they show up at the polls on election day and purges disproportionately impact, you guessed it, Black folks, always, right? In the state of Georgia 70% of voters purged in 2018 were Black.

Okay, I’m shaking my fist at this very moment, but I’m going to keep going. Another way that voter suppression continues is felony disenfranchisement. This means if you have ever been convicted of a felony you might not be allowed to vote. Your right to vote might be taken away temporarily, or depending on where you live, your voting right could be taken away forever.

Unless you get a governor’s pardon or you’ve got money to pay huge fines which, of course, many people aren’t able to do. Felony

Hello Seven with Rachel Rodgers
Why Your Vote Matters

disenfranchisement disproportionately impacts Black people because Black people are five times more likely than white people to be arrested, why? Because the cops are racist, hello. Not all cops are racist, right, but enough of them are that we have the news that we have today that we have seen many, many times where Black people are arrested, injured, murdered by cops for no reason other than being Black.

Black people are five times more likely to be incarcerated for these same reasons. One-third of Black men in America have a felony conviction on their record. Also, Black people are 50% more likely to be wrongfully convicted of murder than white people and are more likely to serve a lengthy prison sentence before being exonerated.

You guys, I used to work for the Vera Institute of Justice and I worked for the Sentencing and Corrections Department and our whole goal as a department was to create a fair process and really systematize and basically correct sentencing and corrections guidelines that were uniform across states. What was the purpose of this? The entire purpose was to prevent racism, systemic racism from causing people who commit the same crimes, but one is white and one is Black from getting wildly different sentences which happens all the time every day.

The vast majority of wrongful convictions are never discovered, that’s according to Michigan State University Law Researcher, Barbara O’Brien. In summary, we lock Black people up often entirely by mistake for a crime they did not commit. We rob them of their life and then when or if they are released from prison, we rob them of the right to vote.

Across the country 1 in 13 Black Americans cannot vote due to disenfranchisement laws. 1 in 13, that’s over 6 million voters. That is enough people to determine the outcome of an election. If only they could vote. Hearing all of this, if you feel stunned, if you feel angry, sickened,
061 Why Your Vote Matters

outraged, good. That is the appropriate reaction. And if you feel really sad or even numb that is a normal reaction, too. So, now what is the question.

Knowing all this, what do you do with all this painful information? Here’s my answer, you go vote. You honor your ancestors who fought for your right to vote and you go vote. And you make sure that vulnerable people in your community have the resources they need to be able to vote, too. You don’t put your personal feelings about the candidates ahead of the fact that you know you need to vote.

I had someone in my community – I had posted about voting on Instagram and someone in my community said, “Well, both of these current presidential candidates have been accused of sexual assault. So, how can I vote for either one of them? Isn’t that outside of my integrity to vote for either one of them?”

Here was my answer to her. Your integrity and your personal view of your integrity is not more important that the most vulnerable members of society being harmed. What I just shared about the criminal justice system and how it affects the Black community, that needs to be more important than your integrity on this one. The fact that climate change isn’t taken seriously, that has to be more important than the fact that you don’t like Biden.

Children in cages and women getting forced hysterectomies that has to be more important than the fact that Biden has a sordid past. At the end of the day he’s a means to an end at this point, right? So, we are voting for the vulnerable. That’s what we’re doing when we vote and we who are people of privilege and who are capable of voting we have to because of the many, many people who are disenfranchised, right? We have to represent their interests. We have to go to the polls knowing that that is how we fight, literally. Okay?
061 Why Your Vote Matters

If it wasn’t that powerful, if voting wasn’t that powerful this country and white men wouldn’t be working so very hard to take away your right to vote. So, get your ass out there. I don’t want to hear no excuses.

Okay, now we’re going to shift gears and talk about how you can use your position as a small business owner to help people get out and vote. Here’s the thing, if you are a small business, have a blog, host a podcast, write a newsletter, or have a social media following of any size, even just 12 people, that means you have a platform. You have people listening to you. People who know, like, and trust you.

It’s your responsibility to use your voice, use your power, urge your community to vote. Whether you have a community of 10 clients or 100,000 fans, whatever the size, you are more influential than you think. I’ma say that one more time, you are influential than you think.

As a small business owner here are three very simple steps you can take right now. Number one, make sure you are registered to vote. Go to vote.org and get your shit together, okay? Make sure that you are registered to vote if you have moved recently, if you didn’t vote in the last election and you’re just not sure, even if you are sure, double check, because as we mentioned people are purged from the voting rolls constantly.

Number two, if you are voting by mail, mail your ballot as early as possible. Don’t leave it until the last minute because due to lengthy mail delays it might not arrive in time and then your vote won’t be counted. Even better, if you can vote in person, do that. In a lot of different states early voting is happening already, so go to the polls and vote in person now.

Number three, pledge that you will remind your friends, family, and business community to vote. Remind them at least three times between now and November. You can remind them via text, email, a newsletter,
061 Why Your Vote Matters

Facebook, IG, TikTok, a handwritten calligraphy note, whatever you got to do just do it. Do those three things. Those are the bare minimum.

There are tons of other things you can do to inspire people to vote and to begin to fix unfair voter suppression in our country, but those three things are a good place to start. Now, I know some of you listening are like, “Okay, count me in. Let’s go vote. I’m fired up and I will do everything in my power to get everyone I know to vote, too. Boom, let’s make it happen.” That is awesome.

I also know some of you listening might be feeling tired and cynical about all of this. You’re hearing me, but you’re also like, Rachel, a bitch is tired, and I hear you. I get the tiredness and the doubt. If you feel cynical about voting, especially if you are Black person that is completely and 100% understandable.

With our nation’s long and racist history of voter suppression and with faulty ballot counting machines and Russian hacks, and God only knows what else it’s easy to lose faith in the democratic process. It’s entirely understandable that you might think voting is pointless my vote doesn’t matter. You know what? That is exactly what Trump and his cronies want you to think because when you believe that you are powerless then the bullies have won.

To quote Barack Obama in his speech at the recent DNC, “They’re counting on your cynicism.” He adds, “The current administration is hoping to make it as hard as possible for you to vote and to convince you that your vote doesn’t matter. That is how they win.” He is right. We can’t let that happen.

That is why I want to share with you three reasons why you absolutely must vote. Reason number one, because some elections are incredibly close which means every vote matters. Back in 1876 Rutherford B. Hayes got

Hello Seven with Rachel Rodgers
Why Your Vote Matters

elected president and won the electoral college by a single vote. These are facts. Back in 2016 in many swing states Donald Trump’s margin of victory was less than 1%, painfully close. Just a few more votes for Hilary Clinton might have made all the difference.

Do you really want to be sitting on your butt on the day after the election and learn that Trump won again by a razor-thin margin and you could have made a difference if you had voted? You do not want to be that person.

Reason number two, because as we have discussed throughout this episode people faced racial terrorism and marched and fought and risked their lives so you could vote. Black women like Fannie Lou Hamer and Ella Baker fought tirelessly to get the Voting Rights Act of 1965 signed into law. Don’t dishonor your ancestors by not voting. If you skip voting Fannie and Ella’s ghosts will haunt you. Their faces will scowl at you from your foggy bathroom mirror every day when you step out of the shower and you know what? You deserve it.

Reason number three, because your vote is more powerful than you think. Why do you think the patriarchy has worked so damn hard over the centuries to keep Black folks and women away from the polls? Because voting is extremely powerful.

Dr. Rachael Cobb who is a PhD, Chair, and Associate Professor of Government at Suffolk University puts it like this, “Why would people spend so much time trying to take political power away from people? The answer, because political power actually matters,” and guess what, you have it. You have political power, so use it and exercise your right to vote. It matters so much.

Okay, we just covered a lot. That was major. Your head might be spinning. You might be feeling all the feelings. I know I’m feeling all the feelings just expressing this to you, so I want to end on a simple and powerful note. If

Hello Seven with Rachel Rodgers
061 Why Your Vote Matters

there is just one thing you take away from this episode it is this, your vote matters so much. The people in power want to make it very difficult, expensive, inconvenient, unsafe, or even forbidden for millions of people to vote, mostly Black people. They have done this for centuries and they are doing it right now.

So, you have got to do whatever it takes to leap over those hurdles and get to the polls and get your vote counted. You have got to vote. You cannot sit this one out and especially, if you are a business owner with a platform it is your responsibility to use your platform to help others vote. Talk to your peeps. Make sure your peeps have a ride to the polls or they’ve got their mail-in ballot because in every election and especially when it comes down to a razor-thin margin every single vote makes a difference.

If every single person listening to this episode right now convinces 10 people to vote and makes sure they do it, they would mean 500,000 votes. That is enough to change an election. That is how powerful we are. So, let’s go do this.

To quote Barack one more time, “Do not let them take your power away.” And to quote Beyonce, “They’ll never take my power.” Go vote for your life.

If you loved the Hello Seven Podcast follow us on Instagram @Hello7Co, @Hello7Co. We share inspiring gems every day to help you build a million-dollar mindset and bank account, too. You know we will be dropping tons of info to help you prep for election day. Follow @Hello7Co and we’ll see you on IG. I will see you there.