



Vanguard

How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All

Martha S. Jones · 2020

WHAT IT'S ABOUT

Historian Martha S. Jones traces the political lives of Black women in America from the early republic through the 1965 Voting Rights Act and beyond.

Most of us learned that women won the vote in 1920. Jones shows that for many Black women, the 19th Amendment was not the end of the fight. Through figures like Maria Stewart, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Fannie Lou Hamer, she shows women who fought racism and sexism at the same time, and pushed for voting rights for everyone. The book won the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for History.

WHY WE PICKED IT

It fills in a part of the voting rights story that usually gets left out, and it is full of people worth knowing by name.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TABLE

- 01 What did *Vanguard* add to the version of women's suffrage you learned in school?
- 02 Jones writes about women who fought for rights for everyone, not just themselves. Whose story stood out to you?
- 03 Why do you think histories like these are so often left out?

CONNECT IT TO RIGHT NOW

In April 2026, in *Louisiana v. Callais*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 6–3 that a Louisiana congressional map with a second majority-Black district was an unconstitutional racial gerrymander, and narrowed how Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act applies to redistricting.

Jones's story builds toward the 1965 Voting Rights Act. What do you think the women in *Vanguard* would make of where that law stands now?

Congress has debated the SAVE Act, which would require documentary proof of citizenship, such as a passport, to register to vote. Several states have recently passed their own versions.

Supporters say it protects election integrity. Critics say it will keep eligible citizens from registering. How does the history in this book shape the way you weigh those arguments?