



Live the Legacy Podcast

Live the Legacy podcast captures bold conversations between civil rights icons and today's student activists. These conversations bridge the past and the present in order to move forward together. Listen today on our website or your favorite podcast app.

Season 1, Episode 7: Bard College Polling Location Win

In this extra special episode, we sit down with 3 key players in the historic win at [Bard College](#) to bring a polling location to campus after decades of organizing against clear efforts to suppress the student vote. Learn strategies and tactics for bringing lasting change to your campus/community from Yael Bromberg (Chief Counsel & Strategic Advisor for The Andrew Goodman Foundation), Erin Cannan ([Bard College Center for Civic Engagement](#)), and Sadia Saba (former AGF Ambassador at Bard College).

Transcript

Mo: Welcome back to Live the Legacy Podcast, a project brought to you by the Andrew Goodman Foundation. This week's episode is a little bit different because we're joined by three incredible guests instead of our usual two. I'd like to first introduce Yael Bromberg. Yael is a constitutional rights lawyer with over 20 years of experience in grassroots organizing, advocacy, and campaigns. She serves as the Chief Council and Strategic Advisor for the Andrew Goodman Foundation and is Principal of Bromberg Law, LLC. Her legal scholarship on the 26th Amendment has been heralded as a groundbreaking study and blueprint for organizers, advocates, and litigators. She teaches election law and the political process at Rutgers Law and serves as a faculty advisor for the Rutgers University Law Reviews 2022 Symposium entitled Voting Rights Reform The 26th Amendment Youth Power Lawmaking and the Potential for a Third Reconstruction. We are so, so excited to have her join us today.

Our next guest is Erin Cannon. As an inaugural staff member of Bard Center for Civic Engagement, Erin's work links the liberal arts with civic engagement through community partnerships, public events, teaching, research and curricular development, and student

leadership development. Erin leads the Civic Engagement Initiative for the Open Society University Network, leading student curricular and research initiatives for over 40 colleges and universities worldwide. She is a fierce advocate for student voter rights, and Erin has worked closely with election at Bard Student Leaders to advocate for an on campus polling site for over ten years, and she was even named as a plaintiff in the most recent case.

Joining Yael and Erin, we have none other than [Sadia Saba](#). Sadia is a recent alumni from Bard College's Class of 2021, where she studied Global and International Studies. Pursuing her passion for civic engagement and advocacy, she joined [Election@Bard](#) as a freshman and continued to lead the student run organization for four years, eventually becoming an Andrew Goodman Foundation Vote Everywhere Ambassador. Sadia worked closely with Bard students, staff, and administration to register, engage, and educate voters in the community. After experiencing the many barriers to the ballot alongside her peers, she served as a plaintiff in the 2020 lawsuit against the Dutchess County Board of Elections that allowed Bard students to vote on campus for the first time. Now, she works at a local nonprofit that focuses on youth engagement in underserved communities in New York City.

In this episode, we're going to be talking a lot about a specific case that happened at Bard College recently, where students, faculty, and outside legal help were able to win a case to get a polling location on campus. So I'm going to help set the stage and give a little bit of context for what we're talking about in this episode so that you can fully understand the whole conversation. So decades worth of long story short, Bard College students had clear and documented difficulties voting at their allocated polling location, which was at a church miles from the campus up a winding country road that didn't have sidewalks or public transportation. Most students didn't have access to cars, and so student groups on campus, like Election@Bard, and The Andrew Goodman Foundation, and the Bard Center for Civic Engagement would provide rides for students to the polls.

But even with this transportation, the church was really small, it had limited parking, there were long lines, it was a long and dangerous road. There was no wheelchair ramp, which was, by the way, not in compliance with the [Americans with Disability Act](#). The church was not accessible, it wasn't safe. So students do what students do. They started to make noise about it. They started advocating, they started organizing, they started getting in contact and forming these coalitions to make a change. And when I say decades worth of fighting and organizing went into this, I mean decades worth. Almost 20 years of work and organizing has gone into Bard College, having a campus, an on-campus polling location for the first time. So that's just setting the stage for a larger conversation that we're having today with our guests about voting, accessibility, the power of the youth vote, what happened at Bard College, and what you can do if there's a change that you want to make on your campus, what are some effective organizing tools and strategies to make a change? So, yeah. Without further ado, let's jump into this week's extra special episode.

Thank you all so much for being here with us. I'm so excited to have all of you join this episode of Live The Legacy. If you could just begin by giving us a quick introduction about who you are, what your work entails, and maybe like, something that you're currently working on. And Erin, can we start with you?

Erin: Sure. Hi, I'm Erin Cannon. I'm the vice president for Civic Engagement at Bard College, and I've been working with an organization that got started a few years back called Election@Bard. And we have been advocating for student voting rights since about 1998, when we started doing voter registration, when students arrived on campus as first-years. Ever since that time, we've been involved in a variety of lawsuits to support our student voter rights, making sure that they are able to vote locally and involved in a number of things around registration and other things. And then from that emerged Election@Bard, which is a student led organization that focuses on voter rights and voter engagement. So we've been involved. I'm also a poll worker and have actually been also part of the lawsuits as one of the folks named so I can talk more about all that.

Mo: Yes, I love that. I didn't know that you're a poll worker. I'm currently writing, like, a short article. I might have to reach out to you about your experience. Sadia, over to you.

Sadia: Awesome. Hi, everyone. My name is Sadia Saba. I recently graduated from Bard College in the Class of 2021, where I studied Global and International Studies. For four years, I co-led Election@Bard, which is again a student led organization that deals with voter registration, engagement and education. And I was also a Vote Everywhere Ambassador for AGF and Election@Bard, and I was a plaintiff in the first lawsuit against the Dutchess of County Board of Elections. I had a big role in terms of on the ground, working with students, faculty, staff, and the administration.

Mo: Awesome. Thank you so much for being here. And Yael, over to you.

Yael: Hi everyone, I'm Chief Council with AGF and Strategic Advisor, and I've been involved with the Bard fight since 2018/2019 through the various litigation efforts. And it's been really a privilege to be able to connect and work with the folks on the ground there, the students, the incredible administrators who really care deeply about the role of institutions of higher education as civic actors, and all the way up to the University President who also served as a plaintiff in the lawsuit, which you don't often see. And my focus is voting rights, election law, democracy law, and civil rights. And I also do some labor and pay equity work as well, and I wear a few hats. I also teach election law and the political process at Rutgers Law and have my own solo practice, law firm practice as well.

Mo: Wow, you are busy changing the world in so many incredible ways. Thank you so much for being here. So we've mentioned a couple of times right out the gate, Bard College. So for everybody who's listening, this episode is going to be specifically about this one case, but it's also a broader conversation about accessible polling location and the importance of it. So I like

to couch every single conversation that we have during this podcast and the power of the youth vote, why that's so important and why that's something that's often talked about, especially in our circles, with democracy and voting rights and getting out the vote. Sadia, why was it important to spend so much of your time in college, even like, advocating for an accessible polling location for you and your peers? What was so important for you? And also maybe talk about what was the problem, what was the issue that was there in the first place?

Sadia: Totally. Yeah. I think it comes back to my personal background. Just to give a little bit of context, I'm the daughter of two Bangladeshi immigrants, and so I didn't really grow up with a lot of political background or access to the political process. I would see my dad in the living room watching CNN and political commentary all the time, and he knew so much, but never really saw anyone from campaigns or anything like that that made the voting process easy for him or accessible to him. And that's something that I just grew up around. And so when it came to Bard, we have the Martin Luther King Day of Engagement. And as part of that, I volunteered and registered people to vote at our local farmers market. And I think that was only like a couple hour thing, and I maybe got like three voter registrations, but it completely changed my perspective on the entire process because I was like, wow. And helping someone fill out this one piece of paper, it sets them up for a lifetime of democratic practice. And that was really important to me and impactful.

And so when it came to Bard, I knew myself as a low income daughter of immigrants who was a first-time voter, it was really important for me for the voting process to be as accessible as possible. And I knew that I wasn't the only one that came from this background where this process was confusing. And especially working with Election@Bard, I got a first glance at how confusing all these paperworks are. There's so many deadlines to take care of, and it really doesn't set up a lot of young people for success, especially with the rampant voter suppression that happens all across the country.

So in terms of the polling place location issue, I worked during the 2018 Election, and I remember it was a really rainy day, there were lines outside of the church, and it was a struggle for a lot of students to get out there. It's like 3 miles back and forth to the polling place. My team and I were the ones coordinating the transportation back and forth. And you can see that it really discourages a lot of students, especially disabled voters, first-time voters again, and also people who don't have cars, which plays into socioeconomic class and race, which is definitely part of this conversation as well. And I saw these issues first hand and it was really important to me to make sure that the polling place was accessible to everybody, especially people who came from these backgrounds.

Mo: Yeah, absolutely. Voting accessibility is something that I don't think it's in the spotlight enough in the conversations around voting rights, especially, as you said, as it relates to socioeconomic class status, racial components, as well as college voters or even young voters, voters who have disabilities, these are things that all play a factor. And whenever you're going to try to vote, what are the barriers that exist? What are the things that we can be working to take

away, like you so pointedly said, so that voting is as accessible as possible and that it's as easy as possible to do. So I love that your heart is behind that. Thank you for your story and your background. I really appreciate that. Erin, I'm going to hop over to you and ask, how did you get involved in this as a staff member, as somebody who were you coordinating with Sadia? What was the cooperation that was happening here to try to get something at Bard College that was a safe, easy, accessible place to go and cast your vote.

Erin: Well, it's been a process. So I mentioned that a while back, we started doing voter registration at check in for first-year students and then developed a whole process that students were having to identify where they wanted to vote and registering to vote every time a new semester or a new year came around. So students moving off campus, so making sure that people understood that the whole process wasn't a kind of one-and-done thing, which I think a lot of students don't. I think a lot of people entering into the system assume a few things. Assume that it will be digitized, assume that it's easy enough to move your voter registration around, that you can do same day voter registration.

There are lots of things that I think, accessibility on our phones, people don't realize that the process is actually quite archaic. So we ran into problems around issues related to anyone who was putting a Bard address on voter registration forms back in the day. So I was the Dean of Students, we were getting lots of rejections for anybody who put Bard as an address. So we had to start. We joined [Vassar College](#) and [Marist College](#) are in our same county, and it's the same board of elections. And so we've joined them a couple of times over the last 20 years on certain lawsuits, because the way college students were being treated, living in residential facilities, like similar to what's happening in a nursing home, per se, the nursing homes weren't getting the same treatment as college students.

So there was a very particular way that students needed to fill out their forms to not get rejected that were not the same, and was not applied to people in similar situations. So there was clearly when I first started, anyone who wanted to register locally would receive a form that they had to fill out that indicated how many months were they in Dutchess County. It was a total indicator that students were not welcome to vote regardless of what the law said. So it was clear at that point that the institution needed to participate in the process of protecting voter rights, which is, I think will be part of this conversation, is that from an institutional perspective, Bard considers itself a private college in the public interest, that we talk about diversity, equity and inclusion, which I think requires institutions to act as social justice oriented citizens, right? So that the institutions themselves have to play an active role in protecting rights as a form of education for students to understand what that takes and to understand that universities aren't just places where you learn how to do this as an individual, but that institutions should be playing more active roles in democratic processes.

So it's not just that colleges and universities or an education is important to democracy, but that taking action on the behalf of students, especially, as I've been talking recently a lot about students develop identities. They're really unpacking identity in college. And one of the things

we don't talk about is their civic identity. What does it mean to be a citizen? And I use that term very globally, not as in a sort of legal framework. And it's important for us to help students think through what that means. That Sadia was talking about what does it mean for her and her particular background and experience? What did it mean for her to understand her role in community? And it's up to institutions to do that. So we've been involved.

And then when we were being challenged at the polling site, we had poll watchers coming and illegally challenging students, threatening students essentially for voting. And that was another lawsuit. It was clear at that point that someone from the college needed to work the polls to actually be able to control what poll watchers were able to do. And I lived on campus, that was my polling site for many years. So I signed up, and I've been doing it now, I think, twelve or so years. I have to recognize that it's also my community, too. So how do I want access in my own community to look like? So it was sort of a multi-tiered, not just from an institutional perspective, not just from a staff perspective, but also from a personal perspective. As a member of the Dutchess County community, I needed to also act, so many, many reasons to get involved.

Mo: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's so important to folks listening to think about what's your personal role in these things and these challenges, or whatever it may be, whether it's voting rights, whether it's LGBTQ rights, whether it's advocacy of any kind, what's your personal role, what's your personal stake in it, but then also more of a global perspective. What is the community involvement in this? And then keep going further out, how do your actions and your choices and the ways that you're showing up impact all these other things? So I love that perspective that you brought into that conversation. Thank you so much. Yael, when did you get brought into this? What was your role in helping Bard College in this process?

Yael: So, I got brought in early on when I started working with the Andrew Goodman Foundation, because this was one of the stories we're on 25 states plus DC, on over 80 campuses, et cetera. And I was basically doing an assessment and just listening to what was coming up from the field and where there were repeat issues and repeat stories. And this issue of accessibility to polling places was a repeated theme throughout our network. So we started to work on that. And the ongoing story at Bard was a clear flag, right? Like, as Erin just described, like 20 years of student voter suppression of one form or another. And the really interesting thing about the ways in which the problems have presented themselves at Bard is that it's not just a polling place issue, right? There were issues about proving student's residencies and right to vote from campus, and right to vote free of intimidation and all these other questions that appeared.

And so it wasn't simply, yes, there is a discreet election mechanism that we can work on, but that this issue of student voter suppression is actually a much larger theme. This is one expression of it. And me personally, like Sadia, I'm a first generation/naturalized citizen, and I myself was a student organizer when I was a college student. So at some point through my work and after I went to law school, I was teaching constitutional law and voting rights, and I had been doing all these other areas of constitutional litigation. And it occurred to me that when we

were teaching the US. Constitution and the evolution of the right to vote in America, that there was literally nothing in the textbooks, even the constitutional law textbooks, about the 26th Amendment. There was basically no jurisprudence on it.

And so I wrote a piece of legal scholarship on it that has since kind of gone viral, to the extent that legal scholarship can go viral. But it's created a blueprint in the field for a lens to understand these issues. And actually, when I go back to my article, which I have to do on occasion, I actually cited the Bard case as an example. So it's interesting how this stuff kind of ripples up and how it has a ripple out effect. So I know that, for example, in the midst of the Bard litigation, we had two efforts, one in 2020, and one in 2021, and I served as counsel on both of them, that actually the rest of the student voting rights space had heard about it. So folks on the other side of the country were aware of the win, and they were celebrating the win at Bard College, 45 minutes or so north of New York City in a blue state that people in red states sympathize, and they could understand. And they looked at it as an example and a model. And I really think that the Bard example is just such a good illustration of how to unpack the various ways in which student voter suppression appears through different types of election mechanisms.

And it also flips the narrative from thinking of this as simply a red or blue issue, because this is an issue that's appearing in a blue northern state. And the other thing that it really did in litigating this case and in listening to the folks that were directly impacted and doing the press conferences, et cetera, is the way in which this case directly spoke to the disability rights community, which was something that I didn't anticipate when I was first learning about the case, or the issue, really, and first exploring the issue. And that was something that was raised very naturally in a grassroots manner that the disability rights community. Actually, they organized a press conference. I believe Erin joined me there, and we were being invited to the press conference, and they were taking this issue, and they said, no, we really need to kind of raise the anthem on this and show that this is something that really directly impacts us. So there's a lot of learning lessons that come out of the Bard situation from an organizing perspective, from an advocacy perspective, and from a litigation perspective.

Erin: I can speak a little bit from the college's perspective if that would be helpful. So we had spent 20 years in and out of court, not every year, but there would be years that would go by where the process would go by pretty smoothly. Once we established especially what the template for the address, that was critical, there was an agreement finally on what the address needed to look like, because before it was required that you put your dorm room even though that's not where you'd get your mail. And so it was like these little tiny bureaucratic processes that are always used, like, always leveraged to limit rather than to expand voting rights. And when you're in a constant state of battle, what it does is it makes it difficult to be working on multiple levels. So I would say for colleges, if you're putting this on a Center For Civic Engagement or if you're putting this on students, exactly what Yael was saying is that it disincentivizes because it's very difficult to both get people registered, and get people to the polls, and be constantly fighting with very particular legal knowledge. And so that's why a partnership like AGF, I think, is really critical.

And when [Jonian Rafti](#), who was on our team for the four years that he was at Bard before joining AGF in a variety of different roles and really, from the student perspective, pushing for the polling side to move, at that point, we didn't find any legal outlets. There is no authority over the local board of elections that we could identify who was interested in helping us pursue the case. So we reached out to a variety of different state organizations and to the state board of elections and everything, and there was no authority, no place for us to go. And so what shifted for us was AGF's partnership, Yael's understanding of the 26th Amendment, and a legal perspective about what was going on. Without that partnership between the institution and a community partner like this. This is what I was saying in why institutions need to consider their role in how they move towards protecting rights. That, I think, was really the critical shift.

All that work prior to 2020 was really important, and students were then able to, they were focused on the fight, obviously, but then they were also able to register voters and focus on voter engagement. Which is, what are the best practices? So the other thing is you have to be sort of expert in best practices to get students not only to register, but to get out to vote in different types of elections and explaining to them and helping them understand why voting in the different types of elections, not just the presidential election, is important and critical to the issues they care about. So it goes back to that civic identity. So it's hard to educate students, new voters on the issues and what elections actually look like and who you're actually voting for and what does that actually look like, and also protecting the right to vote. So I think it's actually very clever. It's a clever approach on behalf of structural barriers because what it does is it just means that your team is disjointed.

And that's a really good way to why it's taken us 20 years to even get to this point because there's another however many years where students just didn't even bother. It wasn't even something they considered they could do. So basically we could say from the passing of the time of the 26th Amendment, there's very little voter engagement except in the last, maybe really the last 20 years. And that means that of the 50 years that it's been passed, 30 of those meant that no students were really voting locally. So we're really talking about 50 years. So it's a long time getting to this point. And I think it's important that we understand each constituency on campus has to play a role in this. And without that structural strategic planning, which I think AGF, the [ALL IN Challenge](#), all these organizations that are now popping up to try to support youth voting, there's a reason. Because without coalition building, like other kinds of rights protecting movements, right, without coalition building from multiple sectors, you're not going to succeed because the default is too strongly in the direction of developing barriers and learning, when there's a win, you learn from the win so that you just create a different barrier. So I think that's what's difficult.

Yael: Well, as Erin pointed out, there were various efforts of student voting campaigns and organizing to remove certain structural boundaries such as the voter registration obstacles and the residency obstacles, etc. But the thing is that this issue of the polling place accessibility kept coming up for them and they were advocating for it and they were organizing for it. But at a

certain point there's a disincentive that's reached, right, because they're spinning their wheels, doing all their other work around voter engagement, voter education, transportation to the polls, et cetera. And I think that at some point it became a disincentive for them to continue to engage. And so once we had the opportunity to meet with the student organizers and the activists and hear the stories from the field, it just presented a really compelling narrative. And I think that once we were able to offer legal support, it was very motivating and mobilizing for the students because now they were able to, I think, provide a systemic lens to something that they intuitively understood.

So it was just articulating and affirming the systemic part, but also just giving them really tangible and practical tools like, okay, let's start moving forward. This is how we do this. This is how we do this. Let me hear from you, troubleshooting, et cetera, because obviously, when we engage, it's not with the hope that we litigate. Oftentimes we do the work to avoid litigation, right? You just litigate when necessary. So when you see litigation happen, it's often because it's a point of last resort. And I think for the students, that was particularly true here, that they had done the work. Jonian Rafti had been a student who's currently on the AGF board, I believe, had been a student ambassador. He had been going to the Board of Elections advocating, doing presentations, very thoughtful presentations, et cetera, with the support of Election@Bard and all of the kind of resources there, and to no avail. And eventually it was the need to marry and offer strategic legal support to the organizing and advocacy campaign, which eventually led to the realization that the only way to push us to the finish line and gain victory was going to be through going to the courts.

Mo: Yeah. Thank you. I think everyone summarized that so beautifully. And that's why I wanted to kind of assemble the group that we have today, because we have somebody who was a student at the time organizing and trying to push for a difference. We have somebody who has been on staff there for a long time, and then we have this outside legal counsel, and it takes this coalition like you all are talking about to sometimes organize enough to create the change that's necessary. And so I wanted that to be reflected in this conversation. So thank you both for kind of summarizing how we got to this place, which leads up to this iconic photo, Sadia, where you're standing with the President.



You are walking on campus. You're headed to go vote. When I first saw it, I was beaming, kind of like tears in my eyes almost, because it was just such this beautiful thing of putting in decades worth of effort to have it finally be something where you could go on campus to cast your vote. Can you just let the listeners know what that moment was like, what it was like for you as a student at the time, to go and cast your vote on campus at Bard College?

Sadia: Yeah, I mean, in one word, it was awesome. It really did symbolize all those years of work, and it was really special. I think that when people think about youth voter turnout, historically the ages of 18 to 29, I think, have historically the lowest turnout rates across America. And, with that statistic, people assume that it's because young people don't care. They don't care about these issues or they're lazy and things like that, but it couldn't be farther from the truth. So when I was walking to the point, it wasn't just about me, it was about the entire community of young voters. And that's what that moment really symbolized. And just beyond that, at 6AM, there were like 20 people waiting outside for the polling place to open, which is really special.

And my team and I are outside for upwards of like 12 hours working the entire day, and we have dozens of volunteers that work and it's not an easy thing to do. It's really cold outside. You're outside. You're really trying to get the word out, help as many people as possible with the

process and everything like that. And we all do it with smiling faces. I think in all of that, never once did I ever hear about someone complaining. And it's because young people truly do care. And being civically active and being a part of the political process and elections is something that people are excited about. And with that excitement, the barriers are just access and opportunity and things like that. So once those barriers were removed, it was just so rewarding seeing groups of students going in and out and the flow throughout the day was really great and overall super rewarding.

Mo: I love that so much. That's such a beautiful story and an insight into something that can feel almost like it's always out of reach, that moment, that win, that we're putting in efforts for all of these years. So to be able to see you and your peers experience that hopefully kind of like rejuvenates some of that passion and motivation for the young people listening to continue the fight, it's not over yet. There's still hope that you can have that moment as well. And yes, young people are passionate. They care. That's what we've been trying to shout from the mountaintops after years of misinformation and disinformation around how young people are too lazy, that they don't care, that they're not interested, that they only think about themselves. We know that that's not true. Young people do care. They want to vote. It's that there are these so many laws and barriers and technicalities in place that often make it very difficult.

So kind of like to put a bow on the Bard College conversation. Thank you all so much for speaking directly to that. And now I want to shift the conversation to advice that you all have for young people who are trying to advocate for things, whether that's voting rights, whether that's environmental climate justice work, whether that's racial justice work. What advice do you all have to young people who are trying to make a difference, who may be listening to this podcast? What advice would you have for them to keep going and to make a difference? Erin, let's start with you this time.

Erin: I was going to say start with Sadia!

Mo: Whoever wants to go first, Sadia?

Sadia: Sure. I think this really echoes what we've been talking about. And it's really to consider the partnerships. I think as a student organizer, really understanding the resources that are available as students was key to us. Luckily, Election@Bard was embedded into the Center for Civic Engagement, which has access to the institution and all these amazing staff and other resources. That was pivotal, which we've talked about and just hearing all concerns on all sides. So Election@Bard, of course, wants to bring students' concerns to the forefront of the conversations that we're having, but also understanding community members'. And we did a lot in terms of things with the Red Hook Community Board and things like that, and different members of the community. There's a lot of voices that are at the table, and I guess the most efficiently that those voices can be heard, it makes the work a lot more impactful. So that's the advice I'd give.

Mo: Excellent. Thank you so much. Erin?

Erin: I would say I would speak not just to young people because I think they understand that they do have so much to offer, like you were saying Mo, but to institutions and to the people who run institutions to do a better job of supporting and lifting their voice, amplifying the work that they're doing. Because I think a lot of this work is going on in the ground. And without institutions joining in partnership to amplify the work, I think everything is done better when it's been amplified and different voices come to the table together, like what we've been talking about, what Sadia has said. And from an institutional perspective, it seems like we need to do more of that to amplify the impacts that these kinds of things have.

Especially when we're talking about inclusion work, we often talk about that on our own campuses. Like, what do we need to do to make our own campuses more inclusive? And I think we need to think about, how do we make all of our communities more inclusive? And the practice of doing this through something like voting or understanding the civil society or the government sector. Understanding how the different systems work and amplifying whatever the issue is. Whether it's climate, whether it's race, whether it's gender equity., whatever students are interested in practicing, getting their voices heard. I think that is critical. That institutions figure out ways to help amplify that and kind of in partnership. Rather than, and I know I'm speaking very maybe idealistically, because there are, institutions do have their own concerns and are embedded in certain communities. And that can make things difficult. But I think what's been really empowering for me as a staff person is really being at the table together with students.

And understanding that when they graduate, there's a kind of, a way that they understand how to move into the next community. And I'm not going to say like, global leaders, because that's too trite, but there is a sense that they know how it works and the benefit of having students, it is, I feel like part of my contribution to American democracy is helping this development of civic identity. And that has to be done in a supportive, lifting way, not just in a I'm teaching you skills, I have the expertise, take these classes, and then you go do your leadership work that's kind of separate from what we believe as an institution should be done. Like, you go off and you do your thing. I don't think that's how we're going to make any impact, and I don't think that's how we're going to actually address these issues that not just young people care about.

And I think that's how to do this in combination as partners and long term partners like Jonian Rafti joining AGF, I think there's a kind of scaffolding that can start to happen where the support structures around students can be built because you have an alumni base, you have these partnerships. And again, that sort of learning how to do that coalition building is really key. The active listening, understanding the intersections of identity, the impacts of those identities, and limiting access to different areas of our democracy or making impact on the issues you care about. I think that's really the job of institutions is to figure out how to help do that.

Mo: Yeah, absolutely. What a full answer. Thank you. Yael, what about you? What's some advice that you may have?

Yael: I think trying to frame this in a systemic lense is very helpful because what I found is that individuals, they think, oh, my voter registration form was rejected, or oh, I'm having this issue with my vote by mail ballot right? And even their parents, who may or may not be lawyers or constitutional scholars, may not see this as a part of a systemic perspective and systemic issue. And then when we don't think about it from a systemic framework, then it's really easy to blame the individual applicant or simply individualize that particular issue or case, so to speak, and fail to recognize that this is actually something that's happening to a protected class of voters.

And so providing that systemic lens again, and I put it within the 26th Amendment lens because we just ratified this right. It's the most recent voting rights amendment to be ratified in our Constitution, and it is the quickest amendment to be ratified in the U.S. Constitution less than 100 days through huge cross partisan and almost uniform appeal and support. So basically, the nation came together across partisan lines to recognize the power and the need and the imperative that young people provide to democracy, right? It's not just that they have the right to do such and such. It's that they provide a critical perspective to the practice of democracy. And that's why we expanded the franchise to them.

Putting it in that systemic lens really, I think, changes the discussion, and it also helps to normalize it, right? Like, it's not just some fringe group that's advocating for polling places or student voter identification to be included among the permissible list of voter IDs or accessible vote by mail, free of age discrimination, et cetera, et cetera. Providing the systemic view, normalizing the issue, which is why it's so important for these institutional actors, like Erin was talking about earlier, to join the fold, because it takes away this potential tinge that this is kind of a fringe thing when it really isn't. This is really basic democracy.

And then the other kind of tip that I would provide is just to be persistent and keep organizing. Often, especially today, we want immediate gratification. We want the win, and we want Instagram, right? We want the win and we want the Sadia photo with the Bard University President. But what we fail to recognize is that there's so much labor and capital that goes into building and scaffolding up to that win, and it's not just a semester's worth of work, and it's not just something that happens within one college student's entry and then graduation, right? It's years of effort, of movement building that continues.

And that's also another reason why it's so important to have these institutional actors supporting, because the students graduate, but they can pass the baton to each other, they can educate and empower each other as they go. But the main piece is the persistence, because once you start to lose hope, right, then all of the work that came before you falls to the wayside, and you can't continue that for the next generation to come. And that's something that requires persistence directly from the activists and the organizers because they are engaged in the labor

and the efforts, and additionally from the other support actors along the way, including the advocates, the administrators.

It's just people think that it's so easy to get a win, and it's actually not. A lot of work goes into it. And oftentimes people think that it's just the actors that were present at the time of the win that get to be attributed for the win. But when you think about it from a generational perspective, it's the 20 years of actors at Bard College that stand behind them in this particular example. But you can kind of think about that in other examples as well, if you're talking about racial or environmental justice, gun control, et cetera, that we stand as generations and a legacy to bring forward these various efforts. And so I think the systemic view, the normalized view, and the persistence and ongoing support through generations are really key to getting these success stories.

Mo: This concludes this week's episode of Live the Legacy podcast. If you enjoyed this week's episode or even any of the other ones, please subscribe and leave a review it helps people find us a little bit easier. And if you want to learn more about this specific case at Bard College, please visit our website at AndrewGoodman.org, where you can read more about it under our news and blog section. A special shout out to Tabeeek music for all of the music that you heard during today's episode. Until next time, this has been your host, Mo Banks. Thanks for listening.