

Welcome to Civil Discourse. This podcast will use government documents to illuminate the workings of the American Government and offer contexts around the effects of government agencies in your everyday life. Now your hosts, Nia Rodgers, Public Affairs Librarian and Dr. John Aughenbaugh, Political Science Professor.

**Nia Rodgers:** Hey, Aughe.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Good morning, Nia. How are you?

**Nia Rodgers:** I'm good. How are you?

**John Aughenbaugh:** I'm fine. Thank you.

**Nia Rodgers:** I'm a little sad because our topic is a little sad today.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes. Listeners, Nia and I late last year, so when we are recording this, it's early in the new calendar year.

**Nia Rodgers:** Of 2022. Sorry, if you're listening to this way in the future.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes.

**Nia Rodgers:** This is 2022. We've survived so far.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes. For our faithful listeners, Nia and I wish you a happy New Year. But we are recording this a couple of months after the death of a political figure that Nia and I believe had a huge impact on American politics. Even if we cannot convince you that he had a huge impact on American politics, he certainly had, I would contend. He reflected, if you will, the scope of American politics for most of the 20th century. Who we're talking about is former Senator Robert Dole, Bob Dole. For our listeners, particularly our younger listeners, you may have come to age, certainly politically after Bob Dole's career had ended. Bob Dole was born in Russell, Kansas in 1923. Nia, if you will, I'm just going to go ahead and give the thumbnail biographical details, and then we can delve into Bob Dole's political career in more detail. But he was born in Kansas, as I just mentioned. He grew up in a very small town, and this was at the height of the Depression.

**Nia Rodgers:** 1923, right.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah, 1923.

**Nia Rodgers:** He would have been like six or seven when the crash.

**John Aughenbaugh:** When the stock market crashed in the country's economy, and for that matter of the world economy crashed.

**Nia Rodgers:** But also in Kansas in the '20s would've been partly the Dust Bowl.

**John Aughenbaugh:** The Dust Bowl. Yes.

**Nia Rodgers:** Born in hard times.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah, born in the hard times. He attended the University of Kansas on scholarship. But before he concluded his college career, he joined the army and he was seriously wounded in World War II, near the end of World War II.

**Nia Rodgers:** Can we make a small digression, of course, because that's how this works?

**John Aughenbaugh:** That's how we do.

**Nia Rodgers:** I know we really live for digressions. The University of Kansas is known for its sports team. If you are in the NCAA, then you know that Kansas has a monster basketball team. They've always had great programs. He was quite the athlete, was he not? Then he played all the sports with all the people for all the teams at Kansas.

**John Aughenbaugh:** He played basketball, football, and he ran track.

**Nia Rodgers:** Those are really teams, and have always been pretty elite teams.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah.

**Nia Rodgers:** He was no slouch when it came to physical things. That's going to be important in a minute because of what happened to him during the war.

**John Aughenbaugh:** He was seriously injured during the war, and we're going to talk in much more detail about that. But then he comes home. He goes through just excruciating rehabilitation. Finishes college on the GI Bill. After a short period of time, he then runs for elected office, first in the Kansas State Legislature, but then for the United States Congress in the House. He was in the House for a short period of time. Then he ran for the Senate and became a longstanding member of the United States Senate. He ran for the office of president, I believe, four times. The first time he didn't win the GOP, in fact, the first three times he did not win the Republican Party nomination for president. The last time was in 1996, where he lost handily to the incumbent Bill Clinton. When he ran that time, he resigned his seat from the Senate, and that's how his political career ended. For listeners, Bob Dole, because of our age, Nia, I mean Bob Dole was-

**Nia Rodgers:** A central figure in politics.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Central figure.

**Nia Rodgers:** When I became aware of politics, that's the thing. Your first 12 or 14 years of life, you're like, politics, what's that? You don't care. Who's president? None of that matters to you, unless something big happens like Watergate, and you vaguely are aware of it. But in my lifetime, Watergate was when I was very young. So I don't remember it. I remember seeing news reports of it later, but I don't remember it in real-time. That election was the first election where I really paid attention to politics because I was of an age where I started paying attention to politics. I had opinions and thoughts that I could vote and all those other things. In my mind, he looms perhaps larger than he does for people now who have come into their political power now because he was old school, but he was very serious. The point of being in politics is to serve. If you don't want to serve, if you don't care about the public, if you don't care about your constituents, then get out, you don't belong here. He is very much like that. He would not have been into social media. He would not have been a person who would've run to the cameras and been like, pick me, Lindsey Graham, I'm looking at you. Although if Lindsey Graham passes, which I'm not wishing for by any means, but if he does, we will also do a retrospective of his career because he has been very influential but Bob Dole, he's just a backbone figure in politics when I became aware of what politics were.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah. One of the more fascinating things when he passed, Nia, you and I both commented that though we were acutely aware of Bob Dole's role in American politics in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, both of us were unaware of his struggle and courage after he was injured in World War II.

**Nia Rodgers:** Can we talk about that for just a minute?

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah.

**Nia Rodgers:** I seem to remember, and I could be wrong, but I seem to remember that he was left for dead. They thought he was dead or at the very cusp of death. The medics moved on and were working on other people and then someone else came across him and he was like, this guy is not dead. That's how badly injured he was injured, was that they didn't have hope for him surviving removal from the battlefield at first. That's pretty awful.

**John Aughenbaugh:** They didn't have hope that he would survive when they removed him from the battlefield. They did not have hope for him when they send him to an army hospital. They didn't think he would survive the trip across the Atlantic back to a stateside hospital. He basically because of how he was injured, it destroyed his shoulder and the use of one of his arms. The shell also affected his back, so for a period of time, he couldn't walk, he was paralyzed. He learned how to walk again. There are verified stories of the rehab he went through that if you read them, listeners, you're just like, who does this?

**Nia Rodgers:** Three years he was in the hospital.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes. Then after he gets out of the hospital, he had to go through a rehab, and by the way, this is rehab before rehab became, if you will, a medical site.

**Nia Rodgers:** Exactly. This is rehab in the '40s when it was basically one step below which doctor.

**John Aughenbaugh:** This is like self-inflicted torture.

**Nia Rodgers:** Yeah.

**John Aughenbaugh:** He does that and he still wants to serve. I mean, he's definitely a part of the "Greatest generation of Americans." Because not only did he go ahead and give up part of his young life, I mean, as Nia pointed out. If you went to the University of Kansas and you made the basketball, football, and track teams, you had some physical talent and skill.

**Nia Rodgers:** He may have been a professional athlete.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Okay but he comes back from the war and he's physically devastated and still wants to serve. This is a logic that would completely big photo many current Americans.

**Nia Rodgers:** Let's keep in mind that as behind as we are in rights for folks with different abilities, right now and we're. We're still pretty far behind. This is way before ADA. This is way before cars are made for people to get around. This is way before any of that stuff. Like everything that he did, think about campaigning for your first election. When your arm doesn't work, when you are. I mean, I'm sure that at first, he had trouble walking, he had trouble standing. He had to do all these things that you have to do in a campaign. I mean just think about pushing through all that.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Campaigning is physically arduous.

**Nia Rodgers:** Right.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Nia, you and I have discussed this in a previous podcast episode that one of the things they are campaigning is designed to highlight for voters is, does this person who's running for elected office have the physical stamina to do the job? Think about how Bob Dole, how that was even more difficult. Because even after his rehabilitation, this is a guy who for the rest of his life did not have use of one of his limbs.

**Nia Rodgers:** His left arm, I think was, his left arm? I'm picturing him at conventions.

**John Aughenbaugh:** He would insert a pen into the hand of the non-functioning arm. It looked like he was doing something with it.

**Nia Rodgers:** Right.

**John Aughenbaugh:** But the other hand was the functioning hand. There was that physical courage, Nia. It's also, he represents a politician that we don't see very much today. On one hand, when he first started out Nia, by all accounts, he was a very reliable partisan Republican member of Congress. I still remember when he ran on as Vice President on the Gerald Ford presidential campaign in 1976. He was the bad cop to Gerald Ford's good cop. At one point after the Star Wars movies came out, the media

referred to him as the GOP's Darth Vader. He was that hyperpartisan. But he evolved and changed the longer he served in the Senate. When Reagan wins the presidency in 1980, on his coattails, the Republicans regained control of the Senate, Bob Dole, because of tenure, became the chair of the Senate Finance Committee. Bob Dole went from GOP first and only to somebody who was willing to cut deals. If the Reagan administration wanted increased funding for defense, but the Democrats in the House wanted to maintain LBJ's Great Society spending on domestic programs, Bob Dole and the Senate made it happen. He cut deals. At one point later on in his career when Newt Gingrich, in his band of hyperpartisan Republicans took control of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich referred to Bob Dole, I believe the expression was, what was it? The paymaster for the welfare state? What was the expression?

**Nia Rodgers:** Tax collector for the welfare state.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah, the tax collector for the welfare state. Bob Dole ends up becoming a consensus builder, a deal-maker in the Senate.

**Nia Rodgers:** You know what he was? He was an old-school moderate maybe would be a better way to put it in the sense of I got to give a little to get a little.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes.

**Nia Rodgers:** This is how it works in the hyperpartisan world in which we currently live. The idea of anybody giving anything to get anything is just like people are bananas about that thing and they get all fancy with each other. The best politics that we have are the politics between the moderates, the ones who are willing to say, let's come to the table and see what we can agree on because we've got to agree on something. It's impossible that we would be diametrically opposed on every single issue like that's not even a thing. The other thing about that diametrically opposed is assuming that your opponent is your enemy. I don't know that he assumed that his opponents were his enemies. I think he assumed that they were misguided and could be led to the proper path. Because like many politicians, he did have a bit of hubris, but I think he thought that people who were in the opposite party probably still wanted to serve their country and serve their constituents. He didn't break it down to and the reason you feel that way is because you're evil, like we do now, and I miss that steadiness.

**John Aughenbaugh:** You always knew that Bob Dole was a Republican?

**Nia Rodgers:** A Conservative?

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes. On the other hand, he was one of the members of Congress who pushed for the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

**Nia Rodgers:** Exactly. That feel-good liberal thing. Except he could tell you what it meant to be a person who was living with a different ability and had to make compensation for that. Like I know he believed in small government, but he also believed in the GI Bill. He took the GI Bill.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes. Again, by today's standards, I'm not entirely sure conservatives in the State of Kansas would vote for him or whether or not the state GOP would run him for office because he was full of contradictions. As you just pointed out. On one hand, he was a small government conservative. On the other hand, his life benefited because of the government.

**Nia Rodgers:** He knew that that could work for other people too. He wasn't the only for me not for me, he was like, this is a good thing. What we need is moderation in government spending. That's where Dole came down. But I think you're right. I think at this point he might be seen as a common liberal in Kansas. You know what I mean?

**John Aughenbaugh:** Or at least a sell-out.

**Nia Rodgers:** Right. Why would he work with those people?

**John Aughenbaugh:** Think about, for instance, what happened to former Speaker of the House, John Boehner from Ohio.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Boehner was speaker of the House before Nancy Pelosi. He's a figure of this millennium. By the end of his career, you had Tea Party Republicans in Congress who were like, "We can't trust him because he's willing to cut deals with Democrats. He's willing to go ahead and play golf with Barack Obama. Can we trust him?"

**Nia Rodgers:** Exactly. Wow, that's terrifying.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Again, nobody who looked at John Boehner's record.

**Nia Rodgers:** Who think he was in any way liberal. I mean, come on.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah. There is an acronym today. You probably have heard of it Nia, a RINO, a Republican In Name Only. Boehner at the end of his career was derisively referred to as a "RINO". I was just like, "Who are these people referring to?" Because Boehner believed that there were things that Congress had to get done. Whether it was a budget or whether or not it was taking a look at what the public wanted and it was his job to find a way to get it done. To put brakes on it, to go ahead and say, what would be acceptable if we're no longer in the majority? What would be acceptable to conservatives? How do we cut a deal? Bob Dole became a deal cutter. The other thing that really fascinates me Nia, and I don't know if it fascinated you about Bob Dole's career, is he ran for president and lost four times.

**Nia Rodgers:** Is it four times or is it three times?

**John Aughenbaugh:** Oh, yeah. Three times.

**Nia Rodgers:** He ran in '80 and '88 and '96.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah, 1988.

**Nia Rodgers:** He kept coming back for a beating.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes.

**Nia Rodgers:** A person who does that believes they have something to offer.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes.

**Nia Rodgers:** You would not go through the meat grinder, sorry, vegetarians. The blender that is a presidential primary if you did not firmly believe that you had a place in leadership. You just wouldn't. It's so hard. It's so invasive and it's continual. Once you declare, everything you do is analyzed. Everything.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes.

**Nia Rodgers:** Oh, I see that candidate Aughenbaugh is walking across the street. I wonder what that means. Why is he crossing this particular street at this particular time of day? Is he speaking to someone in that building? He's like, "No, he's going in there to go to the bathroom, leave him alone."

**John Aughenbaugh:** Is that the blue coffee mug instead of the red coffee mug?

**Nia Rodgers:** What does that mean today? Today, he must be feeling particularly liberal in his feeling. Like, "Stop." Then it also embryos sometimes your spouse, sometimes it embryos your children. Making those decisions when you have a family is really also complicated and he had two wives.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes. His second wife.

**Nia Rodgers:** He married very young. Well, not very young. He married just out of rehab the first time, and they were married for a long time, 30-some years.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes.

**Nia Rodgers:** I think she passed away, I think. I'm struggling to remember. Then he married Libby Dole. Well, who I know to be Libby Dole because she's from North Carolina.

**John Aughenbaugh:** You want to talk about a Washington DC power couple.

**Nia Rodgers:** Right. She is something.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Again for listeners. She was the Secretary of Transportation in the Reagan administration. Afterward, her and Bob Dole get married and she ran for the Republican Party

nomination in 2000, the year the Republicans picked Bush. Then she ran for and won a Senate seat from the state of North Carolina. Yes. I think she served one term. Correct Nia?

**Nia Rodgers:** Yes.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes. She served one term.

**Nia Rodgers:** Just an interesting individual all around. Oh, no, he divorced his first wife. She died later after Libby Dole married to her 20 years or so when his first wife died. Again, an odd thing for a conservative to do, but Bob Dole just didn't fit any particular mold.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Again, there's so many things that I find fascinating about Dole. His evolution as a politician, the contradictions. He was comfortable with those contradictions. Again, in today's politics, contradictions are a hard talk. I don't know about you Nia, but most human beings have contradictions.

**Nia Rodgers:** Bob Dole was all for the MLK holiday.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes.

**Nia Rodgers:** That is weird for a Republican politician.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah. Particularly from the Midwest. How many votes was that going to win him? I'm sorry.

**Nia Rodgers:** Exactly.

**John Aughenbaugh:** I hate to be so crass politically, but how many votes was that going to win him?

**Nia Rodgers:** Exactly. How much aggravation was it going to cost him and yet he thought it was the right thing to do. If anybody has been to the World War II Memorial in DC, it's beautiful and it's stark and we have it in part thanks to Bob Dole.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Bob Dole was on TV, he was on radio. He went around the country raising money. Again, most of our DC memorials had not been paid for by funds from the United States treasury. Whether it'd be Vietnam, World War II, the Holocaust Museum, these are raised by private funds. Bob Dole was forever on TV. You know what else he did?

**Nia Rodgers:** I have to admit that I didn't think it would happen.

**John Aughenbaugh:** I didn't think it would happen either.

**Nia Rodgers:** When they broke ground I was delighted for that, but I just thought, "Oh, this is going to take forever." Again, with that dog head Midwestern, we don't give up, we don't surrender attitude.



**John Aughenbaugh:** The way he spoke was from a different generation. He was dry, he was drawl. You had to watch his face to figure out whether or not he was being serious.

**Nia Rodgers:** Sarcastic.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Or sarcastic.

**Nia Rodgers:** Yeah. He had a great sense of humor about certain things.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Particularly about himself.

**Nia Rodgers:** Right. You've had in here a quote and after I've read it, I remembered it, where they asked him how he felt about losing the election.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah, in 1996.

**Nia Rodgers:** He said, "Last night I slept like a baby." Then he paused, and he said, "I woke up every two hours crying." I was like, I remember him saying that and I remember thinking good for you that you're that self-assured that you're not just crumbling somewhere.

**John Aughenbaugh:** This was a guy who was on the precipice of culminating his political career by winning the presidency and he got destroyed. It wasn't even close.

**Nia Rodgers:** Yeah, I think he took Kansas but I'm not sure he took anything else.

**John Aughenbaugh:** I think it was 320 something to like 160. It wasn't even really close. Nevertheless, he still had the self-awareness to go and answer that question by making fun of himself, but also pointing out to the acute listener that this did matter. This was effectively the end of his career because he resigned from the Senate to run in '96.

**Nia Rodgers:** You retired from politics after that?

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah. He sent a very clear message to the voters. I'm all in on this. I don't have a fallback position because many people say they are running for president, but if they don't get the nomination or they lose, they retain their seat in the Senate or they're still governor of a state. Bob Dole didn't have that fallback.

**Nia Rodgers:** I also think it was a lovely sly way of saying, "Why would you ask a person about this? How do you think I feel?" It's such a rude question and it's such an obnoxious thing to me, and reporters do it a lot where they're like, "How do you feel about your house burning down?" Well, how do you think I feel, idiot? I'm not out here dancing in the streets. Yeah. It was on multiple levels that that worked as a rejoinder. But I also, just before we wrap up, I want to mention that when he was in the hospital after his injuries, he was there with two other people who became senators, Daniel Inouye.

**John Aughenbaugh:** From Hawaii?

**Nia Rodgers:** Phil Hart from Michigan.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah. Michigan.

**Nia Rodgers:** I want to point out that when we talk about the greatest generation, one of the things that we're talking about is the fact that none of these three people made hay of having been injured and of having ongoing physical problems. It's the same thing you found with McCain. They were not people who talked about, "Well, I'm so injured. I need special anything blah, blah, blah." None of that. None of that.

**John Aughenbaugh:** None of that.

**Nia Rodgers:** They were like, "You treat me like you treat everybody else because I can do exactly what everybody else can do," and that dignity, and it's one of the reasons I think that him being behind the ADA is so touching for me emotionally because he wasn't asking to be treated specially, he was asking for equity. I need you to give me what I need to get the job done, not I need you to make special whatever allowances for me. I don't need special allowances, I just need what I need to get the job done, which is what ADA was getting at. People who wanted to get on a bus but couldn't get on a bus because they were in a wheelchair, they're like, "I don't want you to give me a special van. I want you to make the bus accessible for me, so I can get to work and do my job."

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah.

**Nia Rodgers:** It's a powerful thing in it, and it makes me think a lot about those people in the way that they have served the nation not by asking to be treated differently, but by asking to be treated equitably.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah. Nia, before we close this particular episode, can I share an anecdote when I did an internship in the United States Senate or for United States senator in the 1980s?

**Nia Rodgers:** Absolutely.

**John Aughenbaugh:** It's about Bob Dole.

**Nia Rodgers:** Well, of course.

**John Aughenbaugh:** I'm doing an internship with a Democratic senator in the United States Senate. This particular senator gave a speech to an organization that was not a big fan of Bob Dole. The event went on much longer than we thought it was going to be. The Senate was supposed to cast a vote on a spending bill that afternoon, and Bob Dole was the Senate majority leader at the time. We get into the limo to drive from the Lincoln Memorial back to the capital. This was in the middle of the summer, and my senator was gulping down water and gives me the phone, and tells me to call up Senator Dole's

office. I call up Senator Dole's office, the majority leader's office, and I'm fully expecting to get one of his staffers to ask that the vote be delayed 20 minutes. Instead, I get Senator Dole.

**Nia Rodgers:** He picked up his own phone. That's so awesome.

**John Aughenbaugh:** He picked up his own phone, and I said, "I'm so and so, I'm on Senator so and so staff. My senator would request that the vote be delayed." Senator Dole, "Well, of course, it goes though I am slightly disappointed, I was not invited to speak at that event." He held off on the boat. I mean, we got stuck in traffic. We were easily another 15 minutes late, but Dole refused to start the vote until my senator could make it into the chambers, and even then waited for me to come down and speak to the parliamentarian to make sure that my senator was ready to vote. That's the kind of person, Bob Dole was, and that's for me one of the things that may be missing in today's politics. Bob Dole knew that my senator was going to vote differently, was going to vote no.

**Nia Rodgers:** Okay. He was not getting a vote for his side.

**John Aughenbaugh:** No. He knew this.

**Nia Rodgers:** That makes that even more civil.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah.

**Nia Rodgers:** That's a civility we are lacking.

**John Aughenbaugh:** He knew this, but he was just like.

**Nia Rodgers:** Because you asked me nicely.

**John Aughenbaugh:** You asked. Yes, you were at an event that I was not invited. But nevertheless, Senate Majority leader Bob Dole was just like, "No." The entire work of the Senate is going to be delayed until all of our members are present and are ready to vote, because that's what we do here.

**Nia Rodgers:** That's a good note to end on, Aughen.

**John Aughenbaugh:** That's what we do. Yes.

**Nia Rodgers:** That really shows his civility as a gentleman in politics.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yeah.

**Nia Rodgers:** Cool. Thank you.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Thank you, Nia.

**Nia Rodgers:** We'll talk soon.

**John Aughenbaugh:** Yes.

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