

Gaining the “Right” to Vote

Discussion Questions

Can you have a just and equal society without universal access to the ballot?

Are there groups that should be barred from voting? If yes, who and why?

What is an acceptable means for attaining the right to vote?

What is an acceptable punishment for individuals and institutions that illegally create barriers to voting?

Common Voting Restrictions

Citizenship

Residency

Property Ownership

Wealth and Income Qualifications (Poll Taxes)

Military Service

Legal Social Status (Slave or Free)

Religion (Catholics and Jews)

Literacy

Race

Gender

Age

Case Studies

The Struggle for Universal White Male Suffrage

Thomas Dorr (1841)-Rhode island

Women and the Right to Vote

Seneca Falls Convention 1848

Declaration of Sentiments

“The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.”

Susan B. Anthony-1872, Rochester New York
Minor Vs. Happersett-Constitution does not guarantee
women the right to vote explicitly
Federal vs. Statewide Strategy

The Case of Alice Paul

“The militant policy is bringing success. . . . the agitation has brought England out of her lethargy, and women of England are now talking of the time when they will vote, instead of the time when their children would vote, as was the custom a year or two back.”—Alice Paul, 1910

African Americans and the Right to Vote

Civil War and Reconstruction

Myths vs. Reality (1860 Suffrage Allowed in Maine, Mass, NH, RI, Vermont)

14th and 15th Amendments

Reconstruction Act of 1867 (New State Constitutions permitting Black Male suffrage leads to huge political gains)

Hayes/Tilden Act and Mississippi Plan (Redemption)

Civil Rights Movement

Judicial Progress Prior to Civil Rights Movement/Voting Rights Act of 1965

Guinn v. United States, 238 U.S. 347 (1915)- Grandfather Clauses Violate 15th Amendment

Smith v. Allwright, 321 U.S. 649 (1944)- Texas' "white primary" violated the 15th Amendment.

*Freedom Summer and the Mississippi Freedom
Democratic Party: The Case of Fannie Lou Hamer*

“I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired.”

“One night I went to the church. They had a mass meeting. And I went to the church, and they talked about how it was our right, that we could register and vote. They were talking about we could vote out people that we didn't want in office, we thought that wasn't right, that we could vote them out. That sounded interesting enough to me that I wanted to try it. I had never heard, until 1962, that black people could register and vote.”

“When they asked for those to raise their hands who'd go down to the courthouse the next day, I raised mine. Had it high up as I could get it. I guess if I'd had any sense I'd've been a little scared, but what was the point of being scared? The only thing they could do to me was kill me and it seemed like they'd been trying to do that a little bit at a time ever since I could remember.”