

VOTING RIGHTS

FREEDOM FOR ALL?

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT QUESTION

How has the right to vote been expanded to various people since the Founding?

OVERVIEW

The history of the amendments to the Constitution is, in one sense, a history of the expansion of certain political freedoms, including voting. Almost a third of the amendments added to the Constitution after the Bill of Rights was ratified concern the ability to vote. In this lesson, students will focus on the suffrage amendments: the Fifteenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-third, Twenty-fourth and Twenty-sixth Amendments, and determine how each increased political freedom for a great number of individuals.

The doctrine of representation is a large subject, and it is certain that it ought to be extended as far as wisdom and policy can allow; nor do I see that either of these forbid widows having property from voting, notwithstanding it has never been the practice either here or in England.

—RICHARD HENRY LEE

A vote is the best way of getting the kind of country and the kind of world you want.

—HARRY S. TRUMAN



MUSEUM CONNECTION

Help your students understand how political rights have been extended since the Founding. Take your class to the **Freedom for All** exhibit and view the “End to Slavery” and “Votes for Women” kiosks at the McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum (www.FreedomMuseum.us).

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- explain the Fifteenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-third, Twenty-fourth and Twenty-sixth Amendments.
- distinguish between natural rights and political rights.
- understand the expansion of the right to vote through American history.
- appreciate the contributions of Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth, and Fannie Lou Hamer to their country.

STANDARDS

NCHS: Era 4, Standard 3; Era 5, Standard 3; Era 7, Standard 1; Era 9, Standard 1
 CCE: IIC1, IIID1, VB2, VD1, VE1
 NCSS: Strands 2, 5, 6, and 10

STUDENT MATERIALS

Handout A: Voting Rights Background Essay

Handout B: The Suffrage Amendments

Handout C: Freedom for All
Freedom's Touchstones: Alice Paul (*optional*)

TEACHER MATERIALS

Answer Key

GRADE LEVEL/TIME

Two 45-minute high school classes or one 90-minute block

BACKGROUND/HOMEWORK

[10 minutes the day before]

Have students read **Handout A: Voting Rights Background Essay**.

WARM-UP

[10-15 minutes]

- A. Write the following quotation on the board and have students write a one-paragraph response.

Suffrage is the pivotal right. –Susan B. Anthony

- B. Have students share their responses and discuss as a large group. What does Anthony mean by “pivotal”? Do students agree or disagree with the statement?

ACTIVITY I

[30-40 minutes]

- A. Ask students to list the groups of people who have struggled for voting rights through American history, and make a list of responses on the board.
- B. Distribute **Handout B: The Suffrage Amendments** and have students work in pairs to complete the chart using **Handout A**, their textbooks, and/or computers with Internet access.
- C. Using an overhead of **Handout B**, go over responses to the chart as a class.

ACTIVITY II

[30-40 minutes]

- A. Ask students to brainstorm the characteristics of each group, and to compare and contrast them. For example, what did abolitionists have in common for those working for women's rights? How has Native Americans' struggle for voting rights differed from the struggles of other groups?
- B. Distribute **Handout C: Freedom for All**. Have students complete the diagram with information from class discussion and **Handouts A and B**.
- C. Reconvene the class and conduct a large group discussion on the expansion of voting rights through history. Questions for discussion:
- How do political rights, such as voting, differ from natural rights?
 - Why have so many groups had to fight for the right to vote?
 - For each group, what was the most important success in the fight for voting rights? What actions led to those successes?

HOMEWORK

- A. Have students read **Freedom’s Touchstones: Alice Paul** and answer the critical thinking questions.
- B. Have students complete an activity on the First Amendment and the Seneca Falls Convention. The activity can be found in the Free Resources section of www.BillofRightsInstitute.org.

EXTENSIONS

- A. Have students read the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions and write two to three paragraphs comparing it to the Declaration of Independence. Why did Stanton and the other delegates decide to write in this style? Then have students write their own Declaration as young people in America. What grievances might they list against their parents, schools, or government? The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions can be found at: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/Senecafalls.html>
- B. Have students research the Voting Rights Act, some portions of which come up for renewal in 2007. Student should create a PowerPoint or other presentation explaining the Act’s key provisions and its history of renewal by later presidents. Students should also locate, read, and report on news stories about individuals or groups advocating or discouraging the 2007 renewal.



REAL LIFE PORTAL

Have students investigate House Joint Resolution 28, which proposes to amend the Constitution to create a federal right to vote. Have them find out if their representative is co-sponsoring the resolution and write a one-page letter to their representative expressing their viewpoint.

VOTING RIGHTS

When the United States was founded, only adult males who owned property could vote. The history of the amendments to the Constitution is, in one sense, a history of the expansion of certain political rights, including voting.

The Founders saw governments as existing to protect natural (or “inalienable”) rights. Natural rights are rights people are born with, and which can be exercised without anyone else taking any action. Examples are freedom of speech and freedom of religious belief. Political rights, such as voting, require positive action on the part of others – if you have a right to vote, then someone else must have the obligation to set up a polling place, count the votes, and do other things to secure that ability.

Many believe they have a constitutional right to vote in our democratic republic, but there is actually no such right listed in the Constitution. Rather, several amendments to the Constitution list conditions that the states cannot use to stop people from voting.

The Constitution may one day be amended to guarantee the right to vote, but the current document only says what the government cannot do to “deny or abridge” your rights.

Former Male Slaves/African American Men: The Fifteenth Amendment

Many of the individuals who fought against the institution of slavery were among those who supported voting rights for former slaves. Frederick Douglass, an influential writer and lecturer who was also a former slave, believed

that full equality could not come without the right to vote. He asked President Lincoln to fight for abolition, and he worked to recruit blacks to fight for the Union during the Civil War.

The Fourteenth Amendment was ratified after the war, and provided that no state could deny equal protection of the law to its citizens. But many former slaves were still turned away when they tried to vote. The Fifteenth Amendment was written to clearly ban the denial of voting rights to former slaves. Ratified in 1870, it barred states from stopping people from voting on the basis of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

Though former slaves could not constitutionally be barred from voting, many blacks who attempted to register to vote often faced harassment and violence. Fannie Lou Hamer, an African American woman from Mississippi, worked on voter registration drives in the mid-twentieth century. Guards at Montgomery County Jail

beat her and fellow civil rights workers when she tried to register to vote in 1963. She spoke out at the Democratic presidential convention about people being illegally prevented from voting. A year later in 1965, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law, which many see as a fulfillment of the Fifteenth Amendment’s promise.

Women and the Seneca Falls Convention: The Nineteenth Amendment

The first American women’s rights convention was held in 1848 in Seneca Fall, New York. It was organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and others. Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth were among the 300 people in attendance.

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VOTING RIGHTS (CONT.)

The delegates signed the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, which used the same wording as the Declaration of Independence, to list the ways women had been deprived of equal rights, including “the inalienable right to the elective franchise.” The Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions was signed by 100 people, including thirty-two men.

Women suffragists continued to campaign for the vote and other rights for the next eighty years. During that time, many states approved votes for women at the state level. After the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920, states could not stop people from voting because they were female.

Native Americans

No constitutional amendment secures the right to vote for Native Americans. Through American history, many states imposed severe restrictions on the ability of Native Americans to vote. Many states passed laws that excluded those Native Americans living in traditional American Indian culture, requiring that voters prove that they were “civilized.”

In other cases, laws that appeared fair on their face—requiring voters to be citizens, for example—had the intended result of stopping Native Americans from voting, as they were not granted citizenship rights until 1924 when

Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act. After this law was passed, many states imposed other restrictions meant to keep Native Americans from voting. The last state to grant voting rights to Native Americans did so in 1947.

The 1965 Voting Rights Act was amended in 1975 and 1982 to include federal protections for Native Americans.

Washington, DC, Poll Taxes, and Eighteen to Twenty-One Year Olds

When the District of Columbia was established, it was planned to serve merely as a seat of government. By the twentieth century, however, its population was greater than those of several states. The Twenty-third Amendment gave the right to vote in national elections to residents of Washington, D.C. It did not, however, make the District of Columbia into a state.

The Twenty-fourth Amendment prohibited states from stopping people who could not pay a poll tax from voting. Poll taxes had historically been used to keep poor African Americans from voting.

Finally, the Twenty-sixth Amendment lowered the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen years of age. This amendment came during the Vietnam War in response to the objection that eighteen-year-old men were being drafted into the military, yet had no right to vote.

THE SUFFRAGE AMENDMENTS

Directions: Read the following amendments to the Constitution and paraphrase each.

Amendment XV (1870)

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

President, to be electors appointed by a state; and they shall meet in the District and perform such duties as provided by the twelfth article of amendment.

Amendment XIX (1920)

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.

Amendment XXIV (1964)

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax.

Amendment XXIII (1961)

Section 1. The District constituting the seat of government of the United States shall appoint in such manner as the Congress may direct:

A number of electors of President and Vice President equal to the whole number of Senators and Representatives in Congress to which the District would be entitled if it were a state, but in no event more than the least populous state; they shall be in addition to those appointed by the states, but they shall be considered, for the purposes of the election of President and Vice

Amendment XXVI (1971)

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States, who are 18 years of age or older, to vote, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of age.

FREEDOM FOR ALL

Directions: *Using your textbooks or Internet resources, research each group's efforts to secure voting rights and summarize your findings on the chart.*

Group**Additional information from research**

1. Former male slaves/
African American men

2. Women

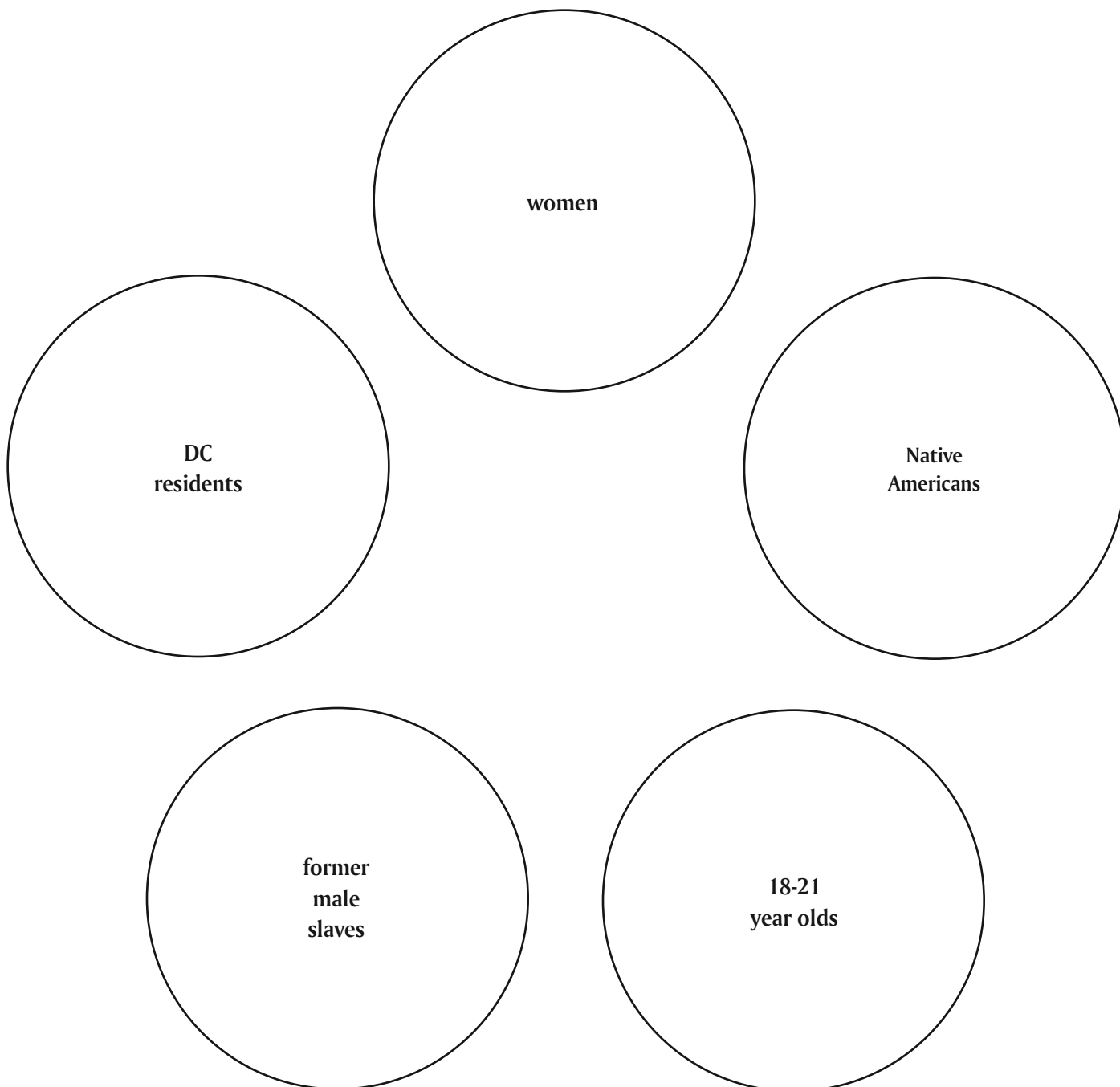
3. District of Columbia

4. Native Americans

5. 18-21 year olds

FREEDOM FOR ALL (CONT.)

Directions: *Fill in each circle with information about each group. Then draw lines linking groups with common characteristics and methods. Briefly explain each connection on the line you draw.*



ALICE PAUL

"I resorted to the hunger strike method twice. ...When the forcible feeding was ordered, I was taken from my bed, carried to another room and forced into a chair, bound with sheets and sat upon bodily by a fat murderer, whose duty it was to keep me still. Then the prison doctor...placed a rubber tube up my nostrils and pumped liquid food through it into the stomach. Twice a day for a month... this was done."

This is how Alice Paul, a women's suffragist, described her experience in a British prison.

Alice Paul was born in 1885 on a New Jersey farm. Her parents encouraged her love of learning, and her mother often brought her along to women's suffrage meetings. Paul attended prestigious universities and earned a master's degree in sociology. In 1907, Paul moved to England where she continued her studies in economics and political science.

While in England, Paul joined a group working to win voting rights for women in Britain. She was arrested three times while attending demonstrations. In prison, Paul and her fellow activists began hunger strikes to bring attention to their imprisonment. British authorities force-fed the women by putting tubes down their through their nostrils. They would often vomit through the violent process.

When Paul came back to the U.S. in 1910, she turned her attention to the fight for women's suffrage in America. She wrote her Ph.D. dissertation on the legal position of women in Pennsylvania. She joined the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and chaired the committee working for a federal amendment, but by that time the NAWSA had all but given up on a federal amendment and was instead focusing efforts on the state level.

Paul saw Woodrow Wilson's upcoming presidential inauguration as an opportunity to bring national attention to the cause of voting rights for women. She organized a parade to coincide with the inaugural parade. The parade was a historic spectacle with more than twenty floats and over 5,000 marchers.

The parade was not without its challenges. Paul recalled years later: "We did hear a lot of shouted insults... the usual things about why aren't you home in the kitchen where you belong." Other men shoved and tripped the marchers, while police did little to assist. One hundred marchers were taken to the hospital.

Paul went to the White House two weeks after the parade to talk to Wilson. The President promised to give the idea of voting rights for women his "most careful consideration," but this promise did little to satisfy Paul and the suffragists.

Paul soon grew frustrated by NAWSA, finding the group's efforts to be disorganized and inadequate, and in 1913 founded her own suffrage organization. It would be called the National Woman's Party. Noting that she did not look at all like a political agitator, the *Chicago Tribune* described her as a "delicate slip of a girl." But "Miss Paul," as she preferred to be called, was in fact an agitator of the most effective kind.

Paul began to organize demonstrations and parades in support of women's suffrage. She wrote and distributed leaflets, and she organized daily pickets in front of the White House. The picket signs addressed Wilson directly and used his own



words to make their case, “Mr. President, you say liberty is the fundamental demand of the human spirit,” and “Mr. President, how long must women wait for liberty?” Demonstrators burned Wilson’s copies of his speeches, calling them “meaningless words” on democracy. They even burned an effigy of Wilson at the White House gates.

Unlike NAWSA, Paul’s party did not suspend their efforts during World War I. They believed World War I made women’s suffrage even more vital. The war was being fought “so that democracies may be safe,” as Wilson said, but the suffragists claimed the United States was itself not a democracy, as twenty million women were without the means for self-government.

Growing frustrated, police announced that picketers would be given six months in prison. The next day, October 17, 1917, Paul defiantly led a march to the White House. The marchers, including Paul, were sentenced to six months in jail.

During her sentence in Virginia, Paul was placed in solitary confinement. Her diet of bread and water weakened her so much that she was taken to the prison hospital. But instead of eating more,

Paul decided to use the strategy she’d learned in England eight years before: a hunger strike. Just as the British had done, prison officials force-fed Paul to prevent her from dying and becoming a martyr for the cause. Paul wrote to a friend of her experience during the force feeding, describing the constant “cries and shrieks and moans.” She would later explain that the form of non-violent protest was “the strongest weapon left with which to continue... our battle.”

Paul’s actions alienated some who believed the women’s suffragists were becoming too militant. On the other hand, Paul and the 500 others who were arrested for speaking, publishing, peaceably assembling, and petitioning became known as political prisoners, which mobilized their cause. Wilson eventually acknowledged public opinion and ordered the suffragists released from prison.

Paul’s efforts, coupled with NAWSA’s newly focused and effective strategy of lobbying on the local, state, and federal levels, had led the suffragists to victory. Wilson lent his support to the Women’s Suffrage Amendment in January of 1918. Congress approved it within a year and it was ratified by the states in 1920.



CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. Why was Alice Paul arrested in London?
2. Why do you think she decided to go on a hunger strike?
3. How did Paul’s National Woman’s Party work for women’s suffrage?
4. Paul’s militant actions alienated some people. Why do you think Paul chose to continue them?
5. If you were writing a eulogy for Alice Paul, what would you say? How should Paul’s efforts on behalf of women’s suffrage be remembered?