

## **Script for Who Can Vote? 1920 to Present Day (Part 2)**



### **Slide 1: Notes for Teachers**

#### **Slide 2: Who Can Vote? A Short History of Voting Rights, Part 2**

Who gets to participate in government? Who has a voice? Does “We the People” really mean ALL citizens? And who is considered a citizen?

This PowerPoint illustrates the expansion of voting rights in the United States and the importance of ensuring that all citizens have the right to vote.

#### **Slide 3: Who could not vote in 1920?**

With passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, more citizens were able to vote in 1920, but more change was needed as many could not vote. Although Black men and women had the right to vote, this right was suppressed in many states. Native Americans, Asian Americans, and people under age 21 still could not vote. This PowerPoint will share information about the rest of the story,

#### **Slide 4: What do you think?**

Take a minute to read these sentences and decide if each one is true or false.

The first two sentences are true. Did you know that the last three sentences are false? Listen to the information in this PowerPoint to find out more.

#### **Slide 5: The Indian Citizenship Act**

Native Americans were denied American citizenship until 1924 when President Coolidge signed the Indian Citizenship Act. Even with the rights of citizenship, they were prevented from voting in many states because the Constitution allowed states to decide who could vote.

Like other minorities, they faced barriers to voting such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and intimidation. In some states, Native Americans were not allowed to vote because they lived on tribal lands or reservations and did not pay property taxes. These discriminatory practices continued until 1965, but other voting barriers remain in place today, including having to travel long distances in order to vote and ballots and election materials that are not translated into native languages which many of the elders speak.

### **Slide 6: Civil Rights Movement**

During World War II, the African American double V campaign stood for victory in the war effort and victory over racial discrimination. Black men and women served in the war, but they still endured segregation and Jim Crow laws. The double V campaign focused on fighting for voting rights, equality in education, and equal opportunities for jobs at home. The double V campaign is viewed by many as the beginning of the Civil Rights movement.

The struggle continued through the 1950s and 1960s. People bravely demonstrated, wrote letters to government officials, were beaten, attacked by police, jailed, marched, and held sit-ins at segregated lunch counters until government leaders realized that new laws were needed.

Additional information and resources about teaching the Civil Rights Movement can be found at <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/the-march-continues/the-five-essential-practices-for-teaching-the-civil-3>

### **Slide 7: Many Faces of the Civil Rights Movement**

Many people were part of the Civil Rights Movement; Some have famous names and actions that we remember, such as Rosa Parks, John Lewis, Martin Luther King, Jr, and Jesse Jackson. Some were students who integrated schools, like the young girl Ruby Bridges and the Little Rock Nine, but many, many more, whose names we do not know, were active in this fight. They were beaten, jailed, and sometimes killed for their willingness to advocate for African American rights as equal citizens.

### **Slide 8: The 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment**

The 1960s and early 1970s were years of turmoil and change in the United States. President Kennedy was assassinated, the Vietnam War was raging, and protesters were demonstrating. The struggle for equal rights culminated in federal action during the 1960s.

The 24<sup>th</sup> amendment finally stopped all states from imposing taxes on voting in **federal** elections. However, five states, Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Texas, and **Virginia**, continued to assess poll taxes until 1966 when state poll taxes were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Today, people cannot be taxed or required to pay money in any form in order to vote.

### **Slide 9: The Civil Rights Act of 1964**

The Civil Rights act was proposed by President Kennedy, but it was not passed before his assassination. President Johnson lobbied for its passage and signed the law in 1964 as part of his Great Society program. This law guaranteed equal access to public

facilities, such as restaurants, buses, and hotels. It also ended segregation in education and provided federal protection of voting rights.

### **Slide 10: The Voting Rights Act of 1965**

The Civil Rights march from Selma to Montgomery Alabama was a significant event that led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act. The first march led by John Lewis was stopped by state troopers who beat the unresisting marchers and is known as “Bloody Sunday.” This jolted the conscience of the nation, and President Johnson called for a voting rights bill. Two weeks later, with federal troops protecting the route, a crowd of thousands led by Martin Luther King successfully marched to Montgomery.

The Voting Rights Act prohibited racial discrimination in voting including ending literacy tests in state and local elections. If a jurisdiction had a significant language minority population, this law also required election material in languages other than English. The Voting Right Act has been renewed several times, most recently in 2006 for 25 years.

Look at the chart. You can see the difference the 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Right Act of 1965 made by noticing how voter registration increased for African American citizens from 1960 to 1966.

### **Slide 11: One Person, One Vote**

During this same time, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled on several cases to establish the concept of “one person, one vote.” In other words, every vote must have the same value, and voting districts for both the U.S. House of Representatives and state legislators must be roughly equal in population.

In 1983, the Supreme Court ruled that creating voting districts with almost equal populations was not sufficient, and states must also create voting districts using consistent, nondiscriminatory policies (*Karcher v. Daggett*). This ruling was reinforced by subsequent cases that established the principal that racial groups should not be over- or under-represented in voting districts.

Another type of unfair voting districts, or gerrymandering, occurs when state legislators create voting districts that favor one political party over another. The Supreme Court has not yet addressed this issue.

### **Slide 12: The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment**

The first push to lower the voting age came during World War II when the military draft was lowered to include 18-year-olds. People horrified by the idea that men could be sent to die for their country before being old enough to vote coined the slogan: "Old Enough to Fight, Old Enough to Vote." However, the effort to lower the voting age to 18 was not successful at that time.

The idea to lower the voting age to 18 rose again during the Vietnam War era. Senator Edward Kennedy raised the issue using the same slogan, "...—old enough to fight, old enough to vote." Then Senator Kennedy added, "About 30 percent of our forces in Vietnam are under 21. Over 19,000, or almost half, of those who have died in action there were under 21. Can we really maintain that these young men did not deserve the right to vote?"

In 1971, the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment granted 18-year-old citizens the right to vote. The Vietnam War ended in 1975 when the US withdrew its troops from Vietnam

### **Slide 13: The 23<sup>rd</sup> Amendment**

The District of Columbia is not a state. As a result, District residents do not have the same voting rights as many other citizens even though there are more residents in Washington, DC than in the state of Wyoming. They did not gain the right to vote for President until 1961. They still cannot elect a voting member of Congress, although they can elect a **non-voting** member of the House of Representatives who can speak on issues and urge others to pass laws on their behalf.

You may have seen their license plates reviving the slogan, "Taxation Without Representation," that was first used during the War of Independence with Great Britain. They are lobbying to become the 51<sup>st</sup> state so they will have the full rights of citizens living elsewhere in the United States.

### **Slide 14: Changes to Voting Continue**

Improving access to voting continues.

- The *Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act* required accessible polling places in federal elections for elderly individuals and people with disabilities who might not be able to walk into a polling place.
- The *Uniformed and Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act* granted military and citizens living abroad the right to vote in federal elections.
- The *National Voter Registration Act* required states to permit voter registration by mail and make voter registration available at the DMV.

- The *Help America Vote Act* created required minimal standards for voting procedures, including upgrading voting machines, registration processes, and poll worker training.

Think about how some of these groups were kept from voting in the past. Through no fault of their own, they often did not have the opportunity to vote.

**Slide 15: States influence who votes by making it easier or harder to cast a ballot.**

Remember, states can make decisions about voter registration and voting procedures. Statistics show that when states offer more options for voting, such as voting by mail or voting early, in addition to in-person voting on election day, more people will vote.

When states provide more access to voter registration, such as allowing both registering online and registering with a paper application, more people can become voters. The requirements for voter registration are also important. Many Native Americans who live on rural reservations or tribal lands do not have street addresses which are required for voter registration in some states. The requirement of a street address limits their ability to register.

The location and number of polling places are important issues. When there are few or inconvenient polling places, people need to travel long distances to vote or may need to wait in long lines. Not everyone can do this because of their circumstances, such as their work schedule or not being able to access transportation. This discourages people and results in fewer voters.

**Slide 16: No Federal Voting Rights for People in U.S. Territories**

Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, and U.S. Virgin Islands are part of the United States, but they are territories, not states. People who live in these territories are citizens with one exception. The people who live in American Samoa are U.S. nationals, not citizens.

The people who live in these territories can vote only in their own local elections. They cannot vote for President or for a voting member of the House of Representatives. Like the District of Columbia, each territory can elect only a non-voting member of the House of Representatives, who can advocate for them. (Residents of these territories pay U.S. taxes such as social security and Medicare, but they do not pay federal income taxes. The territory may impose a territory income tax much like the states have a state income tax.)

Do you think it is fair that these territories cannot vote in U.S. federal elections? This is a topic that you might want to research further.

### **Slide 17: Who Can Vote?**

President George W. Bush said, “A great nation does not hide its history; it faces its flaws and corrects them.” That’s why the answer to the question, “Who can vote?” has changed many times since the U.S. Constitution was first written.

Our democracy can only be sustained and improved by using our voting rights and protecting voting rights for **all** citizens. All of us must work to ensure that every citizen can vote without barriers, without difficulty and without fear so their voices can be heard.