

The County Election: A History of Voting Rights in America **Overview and Frameworks**

George Washington, the first United States president, was elected in 1789- the only president to be unanimously elected by the electors chosen by each state. The new country desperately needed a leader to unite the previously disconnected colonies and forge a single nation. Washington was a hero, the man who had won independence for the formerly beleaguered colonies. He was an obvious choice to lead the country. According to the U.S. Constitution, which did not specifically define who was eligible to vote, each state was (and is) allowed two votes, one for each senator, and one for each representative in Congress. This number varies based on population. States could basically set their own rules about who was allowed to vote, so the overall picture of who could vote in a Presidential election was murky. It wasn't long before suffrage was mostly restricted to property-owning white males with specific limitations set by each state concerning property size. Women and non-white men were rarely allowed to vote. By 1856, white men were allowed to vote in all states even if they did not own property. The 14th Amendment to the Constitution, passed in 1866, allowed all men aged 21 and over who were residents of the United States the right to vote. In 1870 the 15th Amendment prohibited the federal government and each state from denying a citizen the right to vote based on "race, color or previous condition of servitude." Women officially were granted the right to vote in 1920 when the 19th Amendment was ratified. The 26th Amendment in 1971 lowered the required voting age to 18. Since that first presidential election, power-grabbing factions have been manipulating voting rights and systems all over the country. We may never achieve the unity that our country's earliest citizens deeply desired after winning independence.

Unit Overview

There are three lessons in this unit:

- In Lesson #1 students examine quotes and images for information about changes to voting rights from 1776-1984.
- George Caleb Bingham's 1852 painting, *The County Election*, will be examined in Lesson #2 for what information it reveals about voting in Missouri.
- In Lesson #3 students will research, analyze, and evaluate voting laws as they pertained to specific individuals to create and present personas that illustrate what the 'voting picture' looked like at various times in the U.S. Suffrage (the right to vote in political elections) is also included.

Through the 3 lessons, students will scaffold learning about the history of voting rights. They will be able to:

- Identify key historical events and understand their meaning
- Discern the challenges of voting throughout American history, including the fluidity of who and when someone could vote
- Understand that the decision about who could vote was handled by individual states until well into the 20th century
- Synthesize information learned about voting and voting rights and be able to present an argument

History and Social Studies and English Language Arts Frameworks Connections for the Entire Unit

Massachusetts US History Learning Standards

US History I Topic 7 Progressivism

3. Analyze the campaign for, and the opposition to, women's suffrage in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; describe the role of leaders and organizations in achieving the passage of the 19th Amendment (e.g., Carrie Chapman Catt, Alice Paul, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the National Woman Suffrage Association, National Women's Party, League of Women Voters).

4. Analyze the strategies of African Americans to achieve basic civil rights in the early 20th century, and determine the extent to which they met their goals by researching leaders and organizations (e.g., Ida B. Wells-Barnett, W. E. B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Booker T., Washington, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People).

US History II Topic 4 Defending Democracy

Evaluate accomplishments of the Civil Rights movement (e.g., the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act) and how they served as a model for later feminist, disability, and gender rights movements of the 20th and 21st centuries; collect and analyze demographic data to investigate trends from the 1964 to 2010 in areas such as voter registration and participation, median family income, or educational attainment among African American, Hispanic American, Asian American, and white populations.

Massachusetts English Language Arts Learning Standards

Grade 9 standards

RI 3 = Analyze how an author (creator) unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the presence or absence of connections between them.

RI 7 = Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized or deemphasized in each account.

RI 9 = Analyze seminal documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., George Washington's Farewell Address, Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural and Gettysburg Addresses, Franklin D. Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech, Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"), including how they address related themes and concepts.

SL 4 = Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, vocabulary, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

Grade 11-12 Standard

SL 4 = Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, vocabulary, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

Massachusetts Arts Curriculum Framework

Foundations Visual Arts Course Standards

Connecting

11. Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. Identify the connections between historical and cultural contexts and define stylistic elements of artistic movements (e.g., how the impact of World War II influenced the Western art world and shifted focus from Europe to New York City).