

Lesson 11, Day 1: Vocabulary

Look up the following words pertaining to this week's lesson and write their definitions.

suffrage-

nominated-

privilege-

ballot-

electorate-

Lesson 11, Day 2: To Read Suffrage and Elections

The right of suffrage, that is, the right to take part in the choice of public officials, is sometimes said to be a natural and inherent right of the citizen, but it has not always been that way in the United States of America. In the early days of our history restrictions on the voting privilege were much more numerous and stringent than now. Most of the early constitutions limited the privilege to white male property owners, and some prescribed religious tests in addition. It is estimated that at the beginning of the nineteenth century not more than one person in twenty had the right to vote, whereas now the vast majority of the adult citizenry can do so.

In the United States the power to prescribe the qualifications for voting in both national and state elections belongs to the individual states, subject to several provisions: in fixing the suffrage they cannot abridge the privilege on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude, or on account of sex, or on account of age, as long as the person is at least 18 years of age. The first provision is found in the Fifteenth Amendment to the Federal Constitution, adopted in 1870, and its purpose was to prevent the states from denying the privilege of suffrage to African Americans who by the Fourteenth Amendment, adopted in 1868, had been made citizens of the United States. The second provision is in the Nineteenth Amendment, adopted in 1920, which gave women the right to vote. Finally, the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, adopted in 1971, lowered the voting age from 21 to 18.

The adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, which indirectly conferred the right to vote onto African Americans - largely former slaves who had not been permitted the privilege of an education - led some of the Southern states to adopt educational and other restrictions to diminish what they saw as the evils of an ignorant suffrage. Mississippi in 1890 took the initiative, and required ability either to read the constitution of the state or to understand it when read by an election officer. South Carolina followed her example in 1895, but with the modification that an illiterate person who was the owner of at least \$300 worth of property should not be disfranchised. Louisiana, Alabama, North Carolina, Virginia, Oklahoma, and Georgia followed with restrictions based on similar principles. These racist restrictions were overturned during the Civil Rights era.

There are still some restrictions on voting; for instance, many convicted felons are forbidden from voting. Generally, states require voters to have been a resident in their district or state for a certain length of time. Other limitations apply in various states.

For a long time women everywhere were denied the right to vote. The principal arguments advanced by the opponents of woman suffrage were: that active participation of women in political affairs would tend to destroy their feminine qualities by forcing them into political campaigns, and thus causing them to neglect their children; that it would tend to introduce discord into family life by setting husband against wife on political issues; that since women were at the time seen as incapable of discharging all the obligations of citizenship, such as serving in the army, militia, or police, they ought not to have all the privileges of citizenship; that

a majority of the women did not desire the privilege of voting; and that men could be trusted to care for the interests of the whole family.

In favor of giving the ballot to women, it was argued that differences of sex do not constitute a logical or rational ground for granting or withholding the suffrage if the citizen is otherwise qualified; that women should be given the ballot for their own self-protection against unjust class legislation; that since millions of them had become wage earners and were competing with men in nearly every trade and occupation and in many of the learned professions, the argument that the wage earner should have the ballot as a means of defense applied equally to women as to men; that since the old civil disabilities to which they were formerly subject, such as the inability to own real estate, enter into contracts, and engage in learned professions had been removed, it followed logically that their political disabilities should be removed also; and that since many of them had become property owners and taxpayers it was unjust to permit the shiftless non-taxpaying male citizen to take part in choosing public officials and at the same time deny the right to women taxpayers. Moreover, it was argued that the admission of women to a share in the management of public affairs would elevate the tone of politics and conduce to better government. Women are vitally interested in such matters as taxation, education, sanitation, labor legislation, pure food laws, and better housing conditions in the cities, and it was maintained that in those states where they had been given the right to vote they had been instrumental in securing wise legislation on many of these subjects. Finally, it was argued, the fact that some women do not care for the privilege is no reason why it should be denied to those who do desire it.

These arguments in favor of suffrage for women gradually made a strong appeal to the men and one state after another conferred a limited suffrage on women citizens. At first they were allowed to vote in school elections, or in municipal elections, or on proposed bond issues (if they were taxpayers). From this it was a short step to equal suffrage with men in all elections and by 1920 there were some sixteen states in which this right had been conferred upon women. In the meantime various foreign countries, including England and even Germany, had granted the full right of suffrage to women. After long agitation on the part of American women, Congress in 1919 submitted to the state legislatures an amendment to the Federal Constitution providing for full women's voting rights in all the states, and this nineteenth amendment was ratified in 1920.

The exercise of the suffrage is not only a high privilege conferred by the state on its citizens, but is a duty as well. Among the great dangers of popular government are indifference and apathy of the voters. If popular government is to be a success, we must have not only an intelligent and honest electorate but also one which is wide-awake and vigilant. Under a system of government like ours, the character of the government is largely what the voters make of it. If we are to have capable and honest officials to enact laws and enforce them, the voters must see to it that such people are nominated and elected and compelled by the pressure of a vigorous and alert public opinion to the faithful performance of their duties. Every voter should inform himself as to the qualifications of candidates for office and as to the merits of policies upon which he is called to express an opinion, and having done this, he ought to go to the polls and contribute his share to the election of good people and the adoption of wise public measures.

The question has sometimes been discussed as to whether one who possesses the privilege of voting ought not to be legally required to exercise it just as the citizen is compelled to serve on

the jury. But however reprehensible the conduct of the citizen who neglects his civic obligations and duties as a member of society, it is hardly the province of the state to punish the nonperformance of such a duty. Moreover, if required by law the duty might be exercised as a mere form and without regard to the public good. Better results are likely to be obtained by treating it as a moral duty and a privilege rather than a legal obligation. But public opinion ought to condemn the citizen who without good cause neglects his obligations to society, one of which is the duty to take part in the election of those who are responsible for the government of the country.

All of the states except for North Dakota now require as a preliminary condition to the exercise of the suffrage that the voter shall be "registered," that is, that he shall have his name entered on a list containing the names of all qualified voters in the election district who are entitled to take part in the election. The purpose of this requirement is to prevent double voting and other abuses of the electoral privilege.

It used to be rather difficult to register to vote; but it is much easier now. There is now almost no excuse for any qualified adult American to not be registered to vote.

National elections for the choice of President and Vice President are held on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November every four years. Elections for representatives in Congress are held on the same date, in most states, every second year. Elections for state officers are generally held on the same day as national elections, though where state officers are chosen annually, state elections of course come oftener.

Elections for local and city candidates, as well as special elections, are held at various times throughout the year.

Before an election can be held, due notice must be given of the time and place at which it is to be held and the offices to be filled or the questions of public policy to be submitted to the voters. For the convenience of the voters the county or city is divided into districts or precincts each containing a comparatively small number of voters, and for each district there is provided a polling place with the necessary number of booths, ballot boxes, voting machines, and other election paraphernalia. The responsibility for preparing the ballots, giving notice of the election, and providing the necessary supplies is entrusted to certain designated officials. Sometimes the county clerk, sometimes the city clerk, and sometimes, as in the large cities, a board of election commissioners, performs these duties.

At each polling place, on election day, there is a corps of election judges or inspectors. Each party is allowed to have one or more watchers, and sometimes there is a law enforcement presence to maintain order at the polls. While the polls are open, electioneering within a certain number of feet of the election place is forbidden. Every polling place is equipped with one or more voting booths which must be so constructed as to insure secrecy on the part of the voter while he is marking his ballot.

In the early days of our history, voting was by *viva voce*, that is, by living voice. Each voter as he appeared at the polling place was asked to state the names of the candidates for whom he desired to vote, and this he did in a distinct voice that could be heard by the bystanders as well as the

election officials. The obvious objection to such a method was that it did not secure secrecy, and moreover it stimulated bribery because it was easy for a person who purchased a vote to see that the vote was delivered as paid for. The states soon began to experiment with the method of voting by ballot, and the advantages were so evident that in time this method was adopted in all of them, the last state to abandon the old method being Kentucky in 1891.

At first written ballots were generally used; then it became the practice for each candidate to print his own ballots; and later each party would put on the same ballot the names of all the party candidates and have them printed at the expense of the party. Each of these methods had its disadvantages. When the last method prevailed, for example, the ballots of the different parties were printed on different colored paper, so that it was easy to ascertain a voter's intentions by the color of the ballot in his possession. These ballots were distributed days before the election and were frequently marked by the voter before going to the polls. Such a system not only made secret voting difficult, but it afforded abundant opportunities for using undue influence over certain classes of persons to compel them to vote for particular candidates. To remove these and other evils which increased as time passed, the Australian ballot system, with modifications, was introduced into this country, first by the state of Massachusetts in 1888.

The distinguishing features of the Australian system are the following: The names of all the candidates of every political party are placed on a single ballot; this ballot is printed at public expense and not by the candidates or parties; no ballots are distributed before the election, and none are obtainable anywhere except at the polls on election day, and then only when the voter presents himself to vote; and the ballot can be marked only in voting booths provided for the purpose, and in absolute secrecy.

The Australian system has been more or less modified in all the states where it has been introduced, so that it really does not exist in its pure form anywhere in this country. For instance, early voting is now allowed in many states; other states vote entirely by mail.

Many states have adopted electronic voting machines. These are so arranged that the voter may mark their ballot on a computer screen. Some voting machines have a paper backup; others do not.

When the voter presents himself at the polls he must announce his name and address to the election officials. If his name is found on the registration list, he is marked off as being present by an official. He then enters a booth, where he marks his ballot in secrecy.

At a certain hour prescribed by law the polls are closed, after which the votes are counted; and when this task is complete the returns are announced. Generally the ballots must be preserved for a length of time in order that an opportunity may be offered for a recount in case the election is contested. Usually the ballots cannot be reopened and recounted except by order of a court or of the committee on elections of the legislature.

For a long time in this country there was little legislation designed to regulate the conduct of elections and to protect the exercise of the electoral privilege against fraud. The principal evils of the old system were: lack of secrecy in voting; the use of separate ballots printed by the candidates or their party organizations; the distribution of these ballots before election day; lack

of means for identifying the voters; bribery, intimidation, treating, and the use of other objectionable means for influencing voters; "repeating"; ballot box "stuffing"; and the like. To eliminate or diminish these and other evils, practically all the states have passed laws of one kind or another. There is still a certain risk of election fraud today; and of course, there will always be contested elections in which the loser refuses to accept their loss, and instead blames their defeat on fraudulent voting.

Everywhere there are laws against bribery, intimidation, fraudulent voting, and most of the other election offenses. Public sentiment demands that elections shall be free from the taint of corruption, to the end that the results shall represent the real choice of the people and thus popular government made to be what its founders intended that it should be.

Lesson 11, Day 3: Finding Out More

Answer the following questions.

1. What are the qualifications for voting in your state?
2. When were women first allowed to vote in your state?
3. How many registered voters are there in your state?
4. What is the usual location of the polling place in your ward or precinct?
5. Describe what you believe to be the pros and cons of paper ballots versus electronic voting machines.

Lesson 11, Day 4: Digging Out the Facts

Interview an adult who has voted. Ask them the following questions and record their answers. If you have voted, you may answer the questions yourself.

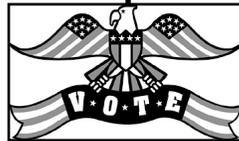
1. When did you last vote?
2. What, in your opinion, was the most important thing on the ballot?
3. Did you have to show an ID to vote?
4. Where did you go to vote?
5. Did you have any trouble voting?
6. Have you ever worked at a polling location?
7. Do you think that a national voter ID law should be implemented? Why or why not?

Lesson 11, Day 5: Timeline of Events

Add the following events to your timeline. Because there are 51 years between these events, they will be placed on two separate pages, one after the other.



19th Amendment
Ratified
August 18th, 1920



Voting Age Lowered
from 21 to 18,
26th Amendment
March, 1971

Here are the pictures to add to your timeline.

