

TRACING

THEMES

Voting Rights

When the American colonists declared their independence from Great Britain in 1776, their struggle to create a representative government was just beginning. The state constitutions that were drafted at that time established voting rights, but only for certain citizens. Voting rights established by the Articles of Confederation were similarly restricted.

Even the new Constitution that replaced the Articles in 1788 did not extend voting rights to many groups of people living in the new United States. As the Constitution has been amended over the years however, things changed. The right to vote was gradually extended to more and more citizens, enabling them to participate in local and national government.

1789

MALE PROPERTY OWNERS ►

In the early years of the United States, property qualifications were relaxed in some states (Pennsylvania, Delaware, North Carolina, Georgia, and Vermont) to include all male taxpayers. With few exceptions, women were not allowed to vote. Most state constitutions also required that a voting male be at least 21 years of age.

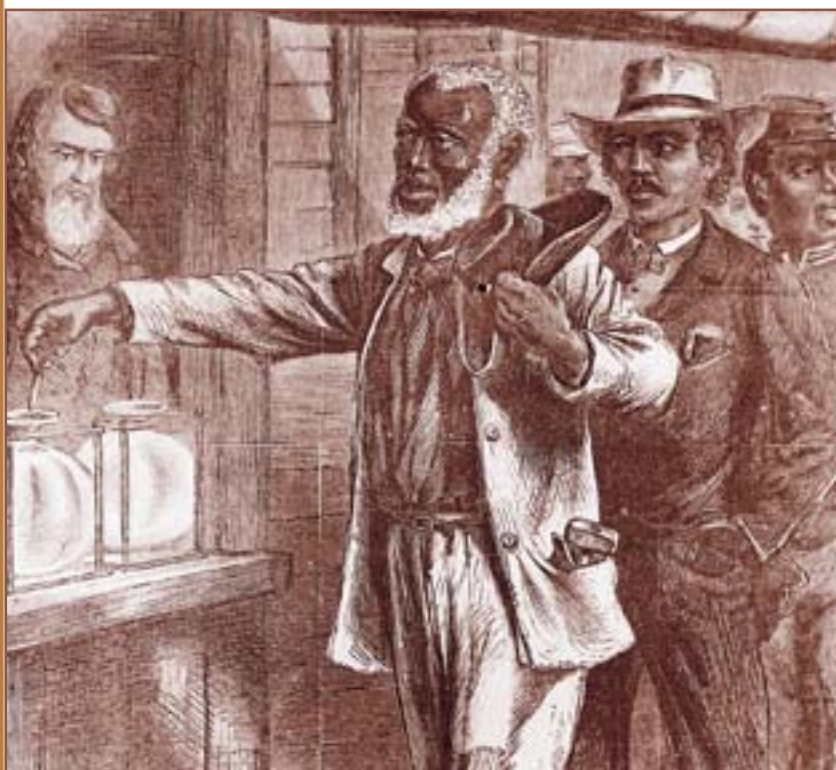
Those who qualified to vote were generally white, although some states allowed free African Americans to vote.



1870

◀ AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES

The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution attempted to guarantee African-American males the right to vote by stating that the right of U.S. citizens "to vote shall not be denied or abridged [limited] by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The picture to the left shows African-American males voting in a state election in 1867. African-American males, however, were often kept from voting through the use of poll taxes, which were finally abolished by the Twenty-fourth Amendment in 1964, and literacy tests, which were suspended by the Voting Rights Act of 1965.





1920

◀ WOMAN SUFFRAGE

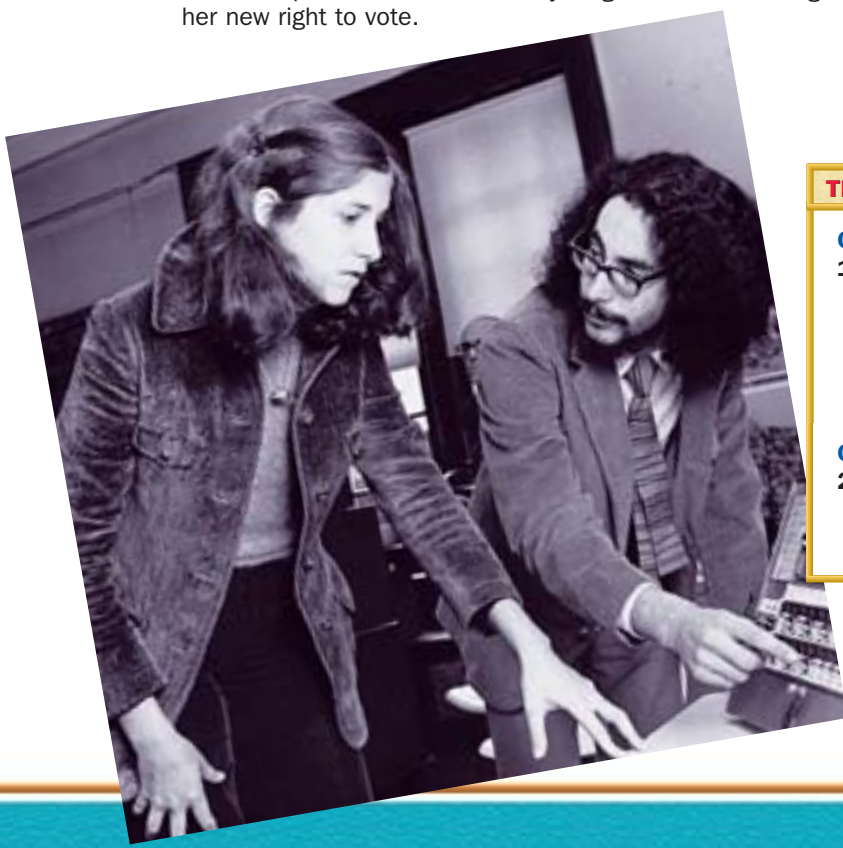
In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment, granting voting rights to women, was finally ratified. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and many other women, such as those shown at left marching in a woman suffrage parade in 1919, worked tirelessly for women's voting rights.

Four years after ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, in 1924, citizenship—including the right to vote—was extended to Native Americans.

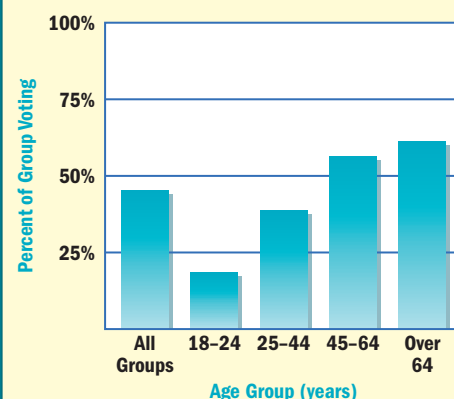
1971

▼ EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD VOTE

The Twenty-sixth Amendment, ratified in 1971, granted the right to vote to citizens "eighteen years of age or older." Voting rights for young people had become an issue in the 1960s during the Vietnam War. Many people questioned drafting 18-year-olds to fight but refusing them the right to vote. The picture below shows a young woman exercising her new right to vote.



**Voter Turnout
1998 Federal Elections**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

THINKING CRITICALLY

CONNECT TO HISTORY

- Forming Generalizations** What does the information on these pages demonstrate about how voting rights in the United States have changed? How did the Constitution help bring about the changes?



SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R21.

CONNECT TO TODAY

- Interpreting Data** Research voter turnout statistics from a recent election. What age group scored highest? Which scored lowest?



RESEARCH LINKS

CLASSZONE.COM