

“Women's Suffrage: The Long Journey to the Vote” Part 2

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote, “Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the Governed.”

But how would Americans consent to be governed? Who should vote? Eventually, framers of the Constitution left details of voting to the states. In Article I, Section 4, the Constitution says:

“The times, places and manner of holding elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each state by the legislature thereof: but the Congress may at any time by law make or alter such regulations.”

Leaving elections in control of individual states led to unfair voting practices in America. At first only those who had a stake in the actions of the government (those paying taxes, those affected by regulations, etc.) were allowed to vote. White men with property were the only Americans routinely permitted to vote. President Andrew Jackson, champion of frontiersmen, helped advance political rights for those who did not own property. By 1860, most white men without property were able to vote. But African Americans, women, Native Americans, non-English speakers, and citizens between the ages of 18 and 21 had to fight for the right to vote.

A terrible and bloody Civil War freed enslaved Americans. The 14th Amendment to the Constitution in 1868 granted African Americans the right of citizenship but this did not necessarily mean they had the right to vote. Black voters were systematically turned away at polling places. To remedy the issue, Congress passed the 15th Amendment in 1870, it says:

“ 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 the account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

Even with the passage of the 14th and 15th Amendments, African Americans were prevented from voting by such means as poll taxes, literacy tests, fraud and intimidation.

Women's Right to Vote is still 50 years away.....

Suffrage Trivia

Which African American abolitionist, who became an activist leader after escaping slavery, spoke in favor of women's suffrage at the Seneca Falls Convention in July 1848?

- a. Sojourner Truth
- b. Maria W. Stewart
- c. Frederick Douglas
- d. Harriet Tubman

Answer to last trivia question – 1878- a Constitutional Amendment for Women's Suffrage was introduced in the U.S. Congress but was soundly defeated in the first full Senate vote 16-34 in 1887.

