

Lesson 20:
*How Has the
Right to Vote
Been Expanded
since the
Adoption of the
Constitution?*



Purpose

- ▶ During the early years of the nation, most white men met property requirements. However, many groups were historically denied the right to vote.
- ▶ This lesson examines how the right to vote has been expanded since 1787 to now include almost all citizens 18 yrs. of age or older.

Objectives

- ▶ *Describe the extension of the franchise as a result of changes in voting laws, amendments to the Constitution, and Supreme Court decisions.*
- ▶ *Evaluate, take and defend positions on how extending the right to vote is related to fundamental ideas and principles of American constitutional gov't.*

Terms to Know

- ▶ **enfranchisement**

- Giving the right to vote to a person or category of persons.

- ▶ **franchise**

- A right or privilege. In the context of American politics, it means the right to vote.

Importance of American Enfranchisement

- ▶ Representative gov't based upon principle that people have a say in determining who makes, executes, and judges the law.
- ▶ Voting most basic means of participation.
- ▶ Although colonial America had property requirements, franchise generous compared with Britain.
- ▶ However, whole classes remained excluded.
 - Women, natives, religious minorities, slaves...

Early American Suffrage

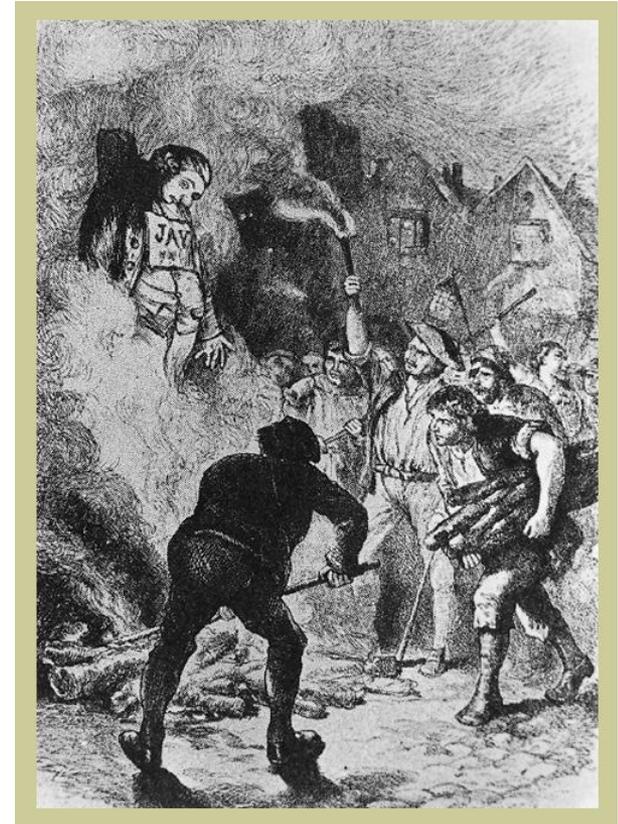
- ▶ Framers could not agree, so left power with the States.
- ▶ NJ (1776)
 - All inhabitants who met property / residency (including women & African Americans)
 - However, those groups were later disenfranchised in 1800s.



Expansion of Suffrage

▶ White Men

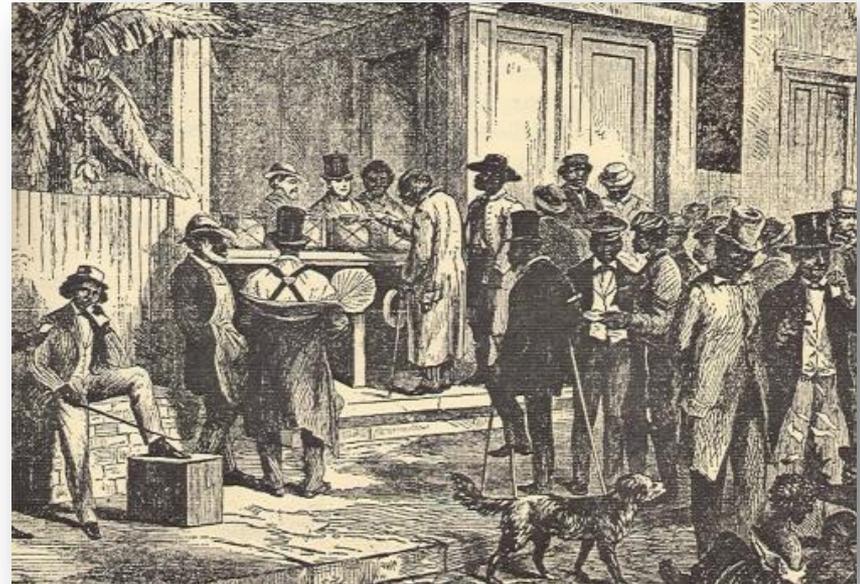
- Many leaders (J. Adams) feared mob rule would erupt w/o property rights.
- Western states lead reform to abolish prop requirements in early 1800s (to attract settlers)
- Following Mexican–American War and Texas Annexation, suffrage granted to free Mexicans. However, violence and fraud deny many their rights.



Expansion of Suffrage

▶ African American Men

- 15th Amendment (1870) grants voting rights to African Americans, but literacy tests, poll taxes, and grandfather clause bar many from voting.
- Almost a century passes until the civil rights movement galvanized national support to end voting discrimination.



Expansion of Suffrage

▶ Women

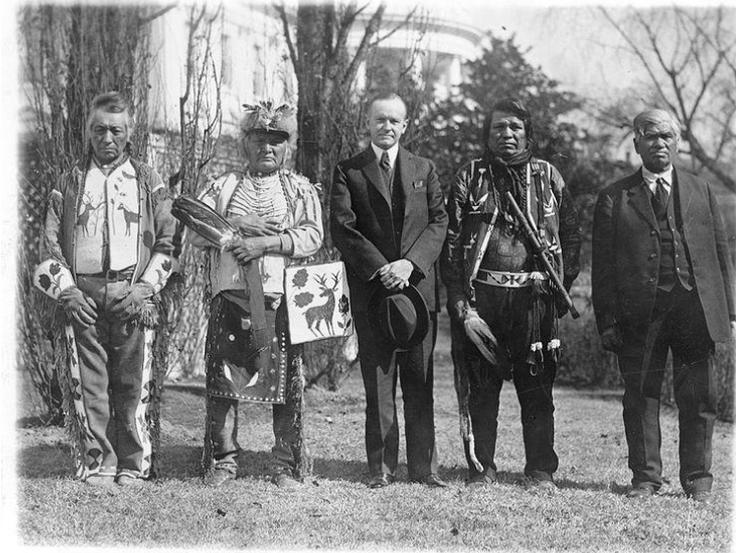
- Mid 18th c. abolitionist and women suffrage movement closely links.
- Stanton's Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments echoes Jefferson's Declaration ('48)
- Susan B. Anthony & others point to section 1 of 14th claiming that as citizens they should have suffrage
- *Minor v. Happersett* ('75) Ruled that citizenship does not automatically grant suffrage.
- WY leads western states expansion of women's suffrage
- Following WWI and mass demonstrations, 19th Amendment guarantees franchise for women



Expansion of Suffrage

▶ Native Americans

- Originally, Native Americans not considered citizens
- Considered “foreigners” and often treated as enemies
- Dawes Act ('87) extends citizenship if give up tribal affiliations (attempt to undermine tribal culture)
- Indian Citizenship Act ('24) extends franchise to all natives with expectation that tribal gov'ts would wither and natives would assimilate into “mainstream”
- Enforcement lacking until passage of 24th (bans poll taxes) and Voting Rights Act ('64)



Expansion of Suffrage

▶ 18 Year Olds

- By '70, only 3 states granted suffrage to those under age 21
- Facing protests over Vietnam, Congress amends Voting Rights Act to ensure suffrage for 18 yr olds
- Oregon v. Mitchell ('70) – rules that Congress could regulate voting age in national elections but not state elections.
- In response, 26th Amendment passed prohibited all governments from denying voting rights of citizens age 18 or older.

