

# **YO Vote! Presentation**

## ***The Fight to Vote & the History of Voting in the U.S.***

### **1. YO Vote Opening Slide – Welcome**

### **2. YO Vote Mission & Values**

### **3. TOPIC: The Fight to Vote & the History of Voting**

#### **4. What is Democracy?**

- a. The word democracy itself means rule by the people. A democracy is a system where people can change their rulers in a peaceful manner and the government is given the right to rule because the people say it may.

#### **5. What is Voting & Who Gets to Vote?**

- a. Voting in a democracy is the most fundamental pillar in its functioning. Efforts should be put forth to ensure a clean, well equipped, and efficient path to cast one's vote.
- b. It's the responsibility of citizens to vote. The law does not require citizens to vote, but voting is a very important part of any democracy. By voting, citizens are participating in the democratic process. Citizens vote for leaders to represent them and their ideas, and support citizens' interests.
- c. Today, people in the U.S. can vote if they are:
  - i. A U.S. citizen
  - ii. Are 18 years old on or before Election Day
  - iii. Meet the state's residency requirements, which varies from state to state
  - iv. Are registered to vote in state of residency by the deadline set by your state
- d. Though in the past, there were many restrictions on who could vote, as well as barriers to prevent certain people or groups from voting.

#### **6. Why Does Diversity Matter in Elections?**

- a. A government more representative of its people is better run and can help achieve equity. It creates and implements more inclusive policies and elevates a diverse set of role models. Leaders from diverse backgrounds often develop more creative insights, proffer alternative and comprehensive solutions and thus make decisions that better serve the American people.

## 7. Is there a History of Racism in Voting Rights?

- a. Racism is defined as prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized.
- b. The United States founding principles embrace the ideals of freedom and equality, but it is a nation built on the systematic exclusion and suppression of communities of color. From the start, so many of this country's laws and public policies, which should serve as the supporting progress, were instead designed explicitly to prevent people of color from fully participating.

## 8. Who Historically Didn't Have the Right to Vote?

- a. In the beginning of the country, only white males 21 or older, who owned property, were allowed to vote.
- b. Women, people of color, indigenous persons, Catholics, Jews, Quakers, and people who didn't own property, were all barred from voting.

## 9. Historical Voting Statistics

- a. This chart shows the presidential election popular vote totals as a percentage of the total U.S. population.
- b. The black line is the total turnout, while colored lines reflect votes for major parties.
- c. Note the surge in 1828 due to the extension of suffrage to non-property-owning white men), the drop in 1890–1910 when Southern states disenfranchised most African Americans and many poor whites, and another surge in 1920 due to the extension of suffrage to women.

## 10. What is Voter Suppression?

- a. In U.S. history and politics, any legal or extralegal measure or strategy whose purpose or practical effect is to reduce voting, or registering to vote, by members of a targeted racial group, political party, or religious community.
- b. Voter suppression has been a tool historically used to deter Black Americans and other minorities from voting.
- c. Suppressing voting rights obstructs true democracy

## 11. Timeline of Voting in the USA ~ 1776-1882

- a. **1776** - Only white men age 21 and older who own land can vote, which was fewer than **5% of the population** or less than 125,000. Total population was about 2.5 million.
- b. **1787** - Constitution gave State the power to set voting mandates, most were still favorable to white males who owned property.

- a. **1868** - The **14th Amendment** to the U.S. Constitution grants full citizenship rights, including voting rights, to all men born or naturalized in the United States, giving African Americans “equal protection” under the law.
- b. **1870:**
  - a. The **15th Amendment** to the U.S. Constitution eliminates racial barriers to voting. Native Americans are still denied the right to vote.
  - b. The **Department of Justice** was also enacted to enforce the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to protect persons of color against groups like the KKK and other oppression.
- c. **1882** - Chinese Exclusion Act restricted Chinese immigration into the United States.

## 12. **Timeline of Voting in the USA ~ 1920-1965**

- a. **1920** - The **19<sup>th</sup> Amendment** to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, giving women the right to vote nationwide, but did not guarantee Black women the right to vote who were still subject to voting literacy tests and other voter suppression.
- b. **1924** - The **Indian Citizenship Act** granted Native Americans citizenship and voting rights.
- c. **1943** - The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 is repealed, giving Chinese immigrants the right to citizenship and the right to vote.
- a. **1964** - The federal **Civil Rights Act** is passed to ensure that all men and women age 21 and older, regardless of race, religion, or education, have the right to vote. The **24th Amendment** to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, eliminating poll taxes nationwide
- b. **1965** - The federal **Voting Rights Act** suspends literacy tests. Registration and voting rights are now federally enforced.

## 13. **Timeline of Voting in the USA ~ 1971-2013**

- a. **1971** - The **26th Amendment** gives 18-year olds the right to vote.
- b. **1982** - The **Voting Rights Act Amendments** that extend the right to vote guarantees given in the 1965 legislation. Further provisions for Americans with disabilities, voters not able to read and write, and those not fluent in English were added to insure their freedoms.
- c. **1990** - Congress passes **Americans with Disabilities Act** that requires election workers and polling sites provide services to ensure people with disabilities can vote.
- d. **1993** - **National Voter Registration Act** (Motor Voter) makes registration more uniform and accessible.

- e. **2006 - Voting Rights Act Reauthorization** - The Reauthorization bill extends for 25 years several important enforcement provisions of the Voting Rights Act that would have otherwise expired in 2007.
- f. **2013 – Shelby County vs. Holder** case – Gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965 - In 2013 the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, ruled that Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act was unconstitutional.
  - i. This meant that areas that had a history of voter suppression no longer had to get federal approval before changing their voting requirements or rules
  - ii. Allowed states across the country to implement "massive dents" to the voting infrastructure. Since then 25 states have put into place new requirements such as voter ID laws, closing polling places and cutbacks to early voting.

**14. Many people worked hard for the right to vote.**

- a. Here's just a few who fought for voting rights:
  - i. **Thomas Wilson Dorr (1805-1854)** - Organized a "People's Party," that followed a new constitution and abolished voting restrictions.
  - ii. **Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)** – **AN** abolitionist and social reformer who was an advocate for equal rights of all people, which included the right to vote.
  - iii. **Lucy Stone (1818-1893)** - Campaigned tirelessly for universal voting rights.
  - iv. **Ida B. Wells (1862-1931)** – Suffragist and one of the founders of the National Advancement for Colored People (NAACP).
  - v. **Alice Paul (1885-1977)** – Suffragist and proposed an Equal Rights Amendment. "Men and women," it read, "shall have equal rights throughout the United States."
  - vi. **Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968)** - Brought national attention to the issue with a voter registration drive in Selma, Alabama, which led to the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. Months later in August of 1965, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race.

**15. Quote: Rosa Parks**

*I'd like to be remembered as a person who wanted to be free and wanted other people to be also free.*

**16. Types of Voter Suppression**

- a. Now let's discuss some ways the vote has been suppressed in U.S. history.

## 17. **Jim Crow Laws**

- a. These were a collection of state and local statutes that legalized racial segregation. Named after a Black minstrel show character, the laws existed for about 100 years, from the post-Civil War era until 1968 and were meant to marginalize African Americans by denying them the right to vote, hold jobs, get an education or other opportunities. Those who attempted to defy Jim Crow laws often faced arrest, fines, jail sentences, violence and death. These laws included:
  - i. **Poll Taxes**, which requires eligible voters to pay a fee to vote - Poll taxes were abolished in 1964 with the 24th Amendment. Equivalent to about \$10-25 today.
  - ii. **Voter Literacy Tests**, administered to prospective voters, purportedly to test their literacy in order to vote. In practice, these tests were intended to disenfranchise racial minorities.
    1. Whites were generally exempted from the literacy test if they could meet alternate requirements that in practice excluded blacks, such as a grandfather clause (their forefathers could vote), or a finding of "good moral character", which was often offered only to white people.
    2. Though the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1920 gave women the right to vote, Black women were still subject to the voting literacy tests and poll taxes.
    3. Literacy tests were outlawed under the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

## 18. **Gerrymandering**

- a. **Census & Redistricting** – Every 10 years we hold a census where all the people in the country are counted where they live. This information is used to help redraw districts for funding and political representation.
- b. **Gerrymandering** is a practice used when redrawing districts that is intended to establish an unfair political advantage for a particular party or group by manipulating district boundaries. Two principal tactics are used in gerrymandering: "cracking" and "packing."
  - i. Gerrymandering is considered a form of voter suppression as it divides or arranges election districts in a way that gives one political party or group an unfair advantage.
  - ii. Two common types of gerrymandering include partisan gerrymandering, which is drawing boundaries based on party lines to favor one party over the other; or racial gerrymandering, which draws boundaries based on where communities of color live to dilute their impact on an election.
  - iii. For example, it often uses mathematical solutions to look at where people of color live, especially Black people in a particular area

distributed throughout the state and either divides them, defined as **cracking**, or groups them together, defined as **packing**, which is used to dilute the voting impact of certain communities, especially communities of color.

## **19. Felony Disenfranchisement Laws**

- a. Voting rights were also denied for those convicted of crimes through felony disenfranchisement laws.
  - i. By 1870, 28 states had adopted a version of these laws prohibiting persons convicted of a felony the right to vote.
  - ii. Only two states, Maine and Vermont gives everyone the uninhibited right to vote. Three states currently disenfranchise those convicted of a felony from voting permanently: Iowa, Kentucky and Virginia.
  - iii. All other states have restrictions about when formerly incarcerated people can vote.

## **20. Other Forms of Voter Suppression Used Today**

- i. Strict voter photo ID laws
- ii. Failure to accept Native American tribal or government-issued state student IDs
- iii. Closing or relocating polling locations, especially impacting communities of color
- iv. No polling locations on tribal lands or on college campuses
- v. Limiting hours of polling locations
- vi. Restrictions on voter registration
- vii. No access to early voting
- viii. Not supplying enough ballots
- ix. Purging voting rolls, removing voters from lists
- x. No disability access
- xi. Long wait times to vote
- xii. Complicated absentee voting requirements
- xiii. Misinformation on when and where to vote
- xiv. Voter intimidation at the polls

## **21. Improving Voting Access and Removing Barriers**

- a. Pass new laws and expand existing laws to reduce barriers to create a more easier access to voting to create equitable democracy for all, such as:
  1. John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act
  2. For the People Act
  3. Voting Rights Restoration
  4. Automatic & Same Day Voter Registration

5. Add More Polling Locations
6. Access to Early Voting
7. Eliminating Voter ID Laws
8. Expanding Voting By Mail
9. Increase Civic Education

**22. Stronger Voting Rights & Access Can Help Combat Racism**

- a. Without a political voice, voters of color cannot advocate for policies to achieve equality.
- b. We must recognize the barriers to voting that many people still face and work to eliminate those barriers, so that our representatives and laws reflect our increasingly diverse country and help ensure full access and engagement for marginalized communities.

**23. Quote: John Lewis**

*Voting and participating in the democratic process is key. The vote is the most powerful nonviolent change agent you have in a democratic society. You must use it because it is not guaranteed. You can lose it.*

**24. What can you do?**

- i. Talk to your family, friends and neighbors about the importance of voting and civic engagement.
- ii. Educate yourself on issues that affect your community and communities that you don't interact with often.
- iii. Get involved and stay engaged!
- iv. VOTE!

**25. Work with YO Vote!**

- i. Visit [Yo-Vote.org](http://Yo-Vote.org) to sign up as a volunteer or request a presentation for your class
- ii. Program contact information