



Voter Suppression in the United States

A supplementary lesson to Historic Huguenot Street's online exhibit "*Never Was a Slave:*" *Jacob Wynkoop, Free and Black in 19th Century New Paltz*



Do Now:

Answer the following questions:

- What was the purpose of the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution?
- What group of people did this amendment directly affect?
- When was the 13th Amendment added to the Constitution?



14th, & 15th Amendments to the Constitution

- Following the conclusion of the American Civil War and the 13th amendment to the United States Constitution which abolished the practice of Slavery in the U.S., the 14th and 15th amendments were passed in attempts to extend equal voting rights to Black Americans who were previously disenfranchised due to their race and conditions of enslavement.
- The 14th amendment extended full citizenship and the rights it guaranteed to all people born and naturalized in the United States.
- The 15th amendment permitted all United States citizens the right to vote regardless of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”
- Though these amendments granted Black Americans equal voting rights on paper, many hurdles and obstacles would be put in their way to prevent them from exercising these rights.



Opposition

Both prior to and following the Civil War, many Americans strongly opposed the extension of citizenship and voting rights to Black Americans. Read the following newspaper article from the September 14, 1860 edition of The New Paltz Times in which the author, Charles Ackert, expresses his views on equal voting rights prior to a vote on the matter. The article is transcribed on the following slide.

Image source: Historic Huguenot Street via NYHeritage.org

Negro Suffrage.

We call upon our readers—and we believe it to be the duty of every independent journalist—to examine the Election notice which we publish in our paper. It will be seen that every voter is called upon at the coming election to vote FOR the amendment of the Constitution in order to allow the negro general suffrage, or AGAINST the same.

In the language of a cotemporary we do not believe in forcing down the throats of the Commonalty this black dose. Every one knows that it is repugnant to the ideas and prejudices of the masses. When negroes are admitted to social equality, when their children take their places in the schools and academies, in the churches, at the work-bench beside the white apprentice, then it will be time to make room for them at the ballot-box. These very politicians who attempt to force the people into this political association, would themselves recoil, as from contamination, if asked to walk, or sit, or eat with this proscribed class. Now, the right of suffrage is that of which the poor white laborer is proudest of all his privileges. It is the mark of his citizenship; and when you associate with him in it, a class that you regard as inferior, you evidently seek to degrade him. That is why he resents this attempted change!

There is still another fact. We believe in keeping the races distinct. In other words, the negro black, and the white, white. For in examining the statistics of Massachusetts, it will be seen the result of placing the negro on the same equality with the whites—72 amalgamation marriages have taken place in that state, the past year. We also believe—that white men are capable of making laws without the aid of a black man for themselves.



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September 14, 1860

The New Paltz Times

Opposition

After reading the article, write down your responses to the following questions:

1. Was this article published before or after the 13th Amendment was added to the Constitution?
2. What is the author's stance on equal voting rights for Black Americans?
3. What arguments does the author use to defend his stance?
4. Are the author's arguments based on fact and reason, emotion and personal bias, or a combination of the two? (Logos vs. pathos)
5. How do you think this article made Black citizens of New Paltz feel at the time of its publication?

Negro Suffrage.

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Opposition

Though the article you just examined is discriminatory and does not contain arguments based in fact, countless Americans during this era held the belief that suffrage should not be extended to Black citizens. As such, when the 14th and 15th Amendments were passed, Americans holding these inflammatory beliefs developed forms of legislation which would restrict the voting rights of Black citizens without technically violating the Constitution.

Image source: Library of Congress via loc.gov





Suppression Tactics

In order to prevent Black Americans from exercising their right to vote, white legislators in countless U.S. states, including New York and other northern states, enforced several kinds of discriminatory legislation. The following practices were commonly used to disenfranchise Black voters:

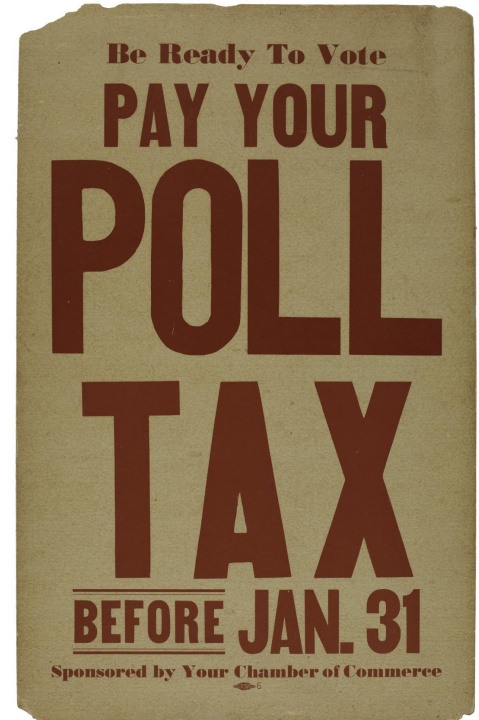
- Poll taxes
- Property requirements
- Literacy tests
- Grandfather clauses



Poll Taxes

Poll taxes were a fixed fee which adults of eligible voting age were required to pay in order to vote. This form of voter suppression directly targeted Black Americans by taking advantage of the systemic wealth inequality created by the institution of slavery and continuing discriminatory practices in post-Civil War America. Black Americans who were previously enslaved were never paid for their labor, and in their free lives, it was highly unlikely that they would receive the same rate of pay as white counterparts for the same work. As a result, it was often difficult for Black Americans to afford poll taxes.

Image source: National Museum of American History via americanhistory.si.edu





Property Requirements

Many states also stipulated that a person must own a certain amount of property in order to exercise their right to vote. Similar to poll taxes, property requirements maintained that a person must have a certain amount of wealth or generational assets (such as inherited family land) as a prerequisite to enfranchisement. Jacob Wynkoop, whose life you explored in the online exhibit, was a rare example of a Black American during this period who owned land and was able to vote as a result of it. Most Black Americans at the time were not afforded the opportunities which would allow them to amass the wealth needed to purchase property.

On the next slide, you will see an excerpt from New York State's 1821 Constitution which sets forth several different requirements, including property requirements, which one must meet in order to exercise their right to vote. Read the transcription then answer the questions provided on the next slide.

one thousand eight hundred and twenty three, and no longer.

Article II.

Section 1. Every male citizen of the age of twenty one years, who shall have been an inhabitant of this state one year preceding any election, and for the last six months a resident of the town or county where he may offer his vote, and shall have within the year next preceding the election paid a tax to the state or county, at which upon his real or personal property, or shall by law be exempted from taxation; or being armed and equipped according to law, shall have performed within that year military duty in the militia of this state, or who shall be exempted from performing militia duty, in consequence of being a fireman in any city, town, or village, in this state, and also every male citizen of the age of twenty one years, who shall have been for three years next preceding such election, an inhabitant of this state, and for the last year a resident in the town or county where he may offer his vote, and shall have been within the last year obliged to labor upon the public highways, and shall have performed the labor, or paid an equivalent therefor, according to law, shall be entitled to vote in the town or ward where he actually resides, and not elsewhere, for all officers that now are, or hereafter may be, elective by the people, but no man of colour, unless he shall have been for three years a citizen of this state, and for one year next preceding any election, shall be seized and possessed

Ex 11

of a freehold estate, of the value of two hundred and fifty dollars, over and above all debts and incumbrances charged thereon, and shall have been actually rated and paid a tax thereon, shall be entitled to vote at any such election. And no person of colour shall be subject to clerical taxation, unless he shall be seized and possessed of such real estate as aforesaid.

Section 2. Laws may be passed, excluding from the right of suffrage persons who have been, or may be, convicted of infamous crimes.

Section 3. Laws shall be made for ascertaining by proper proofs, the citizens who shall be entitled to the right of suffrage, lawfully established.

Section 4. All elections by the citizens shall be by ballot, except for such town officers as may, by law, be directed to be otherwise chosen.



Transcription of Article II, Section 1 of the New York Constitution, 1821

"Every male citizen of the age of twenty-one years, who shall have been an inhabitant of this state one year preceding any election, and for the last six months a resident of the town or county where he may offer his vote; and shall have, within the next year preceding the election, paid a tax to the state or county, assessed upon his real or personal property; or shall by law be exempted from taxation; or, being armed and equipped according to law, shall have performed, within that year, military duty in the militia of this state; or who shall be exempted from performing militia duty in consequence of being a fireman in any city, town, or village in this state; and also, every male citizen of the age of twenty-one years, who shall have been, for three years next preceding such election, an inhabitant of this state; and, for the last year, a resident in the town or county where he may offer his vote; and shall have been, within the last year, assessed to labor upon the public highways, and shall have performed the labor, or paid an equivalent therefor, according to law, shall be entitled to vote in the town or ward where he actually resides, and not elsewhere, for all officers that now are, or hereafter may be, elective by the people; but no man of colour, unless he shall have been for three years a citizen of this state, and for one year next preceding any election, shall be seized and possessed of a freehold estate of the value of two hundred and fifty dollars, over and above all debts and incumbrances charged thereon; and shall have been actually rated, and paid a tax thereon, shall be entitled to vote at any such election. And no person of colour shall be subject to direct taxation unless he shall be seized and possessed of such real estate as aforesaid."



Breaking Down Article II, Section 1

1. What requirements did a person have to meet in order to vote in New York State? List at least three requirements stated in the text.
2. How did the requirements differ for white citizens and citizens of color?



Literacy Tests

Literacy tests put forth a slate of questions which must be answered correctly in order for a person to attain their right to vote. Varying on a state to state basis, the content of literacy tests included questions about American history and government, prompts to divulge personal information, and carefully crafted word and number puzzles meant to trick and confuse prospective voters.

The administration of such exams excluded Black voters due to systemic inequalities present in the education system of the time. Many people who were previously enslaved were unable to read or write as they were not provided the resources to educate themselves during the time in which they were enslaved. As for the children of people who were previously enslaved, segregated schools designated for Black students were not allocated the same resources as schools for white students. As such, they typically received a lower quality of education and were strategically not guaranteed to do as well on literacy tests as people who received a higher quality of education. Purposeful systemic failures set Black voters up to fail these exams and relegate them from the voting booth.

Over the next few slides, you will see actual literacy tests administered in order to determine whether or not a person may vote. Complete each test and compare to the answer key, where applicable.



1965 ALABAMA LITERACY TEST

Name _____

1. Which of the following is a right guaranteed by the Bill of Rights?

____Public Education ____Employment
____Voting ____Trial by Jury

2. The federal census of population is taken each five years. ____True ____False

3. If a person is indicted for a crime, name two rights which he has.

4. A U.S. senator elected at the general election in November takes office the following year on what date?

5. A President elected at the general election in November takes office the following year on what date?

6. Which definition applies to the word "amendment?"

____Proposed change, as in a Constitution
____Making of peace between nations at war
____A part of the government

7. A person appointed to the U.S. Supreme court is appointed for a term of _____.

8. When the Constitution was approved by the original colonies, how many states had to ratify it in order for it to be in effect? _____

9. Does enumeration affect the income tax levied on citizens in various states? _____

10. Persons opposed to swearing in an oath may say, instead: (solemnly _____)

11. To serve as President of the United States, a person must have attained:

____25 ____35 ____40 ____45 years

12. What words are required by law to be on all coins and paper currency of the U.S.?

13. The Supreme Court is the chief lawmaking body of the state. ____True ____False

14. If a law passed by a state is contrary to provisions of the U.S. Constitution, which law prevails?

15. If a vacancy occurs in the U.S. Senate, the state must hold an election, but meanwhile the place may be filled by a temporary appointment made by _____.

16. A U.S. senator is elected for a term of _____ years.

17. Appropriation of money for the armed services can be only for a period limited to _____ years.

18. The chief executive and the administrative offices make up the _____ branch of government.

19. Who passes laws dealing with piracy?

20. The number of representatives which a state is entitled to have in the House of Representatives is based on _____.

21. The Constitution protects an individual against punishments which are _____ and _____.



1965 ALABAMA LITERACY TEST PAGE 2

22. When a jury has heard and rendered a verdict in a case, and the judgment on the verdict has become final, the defendant cannot again be brought to trial for the same cause. ____True ____False

23. Name two levels of government which can levy taxes: _____

24. Communism was the type of government in: ____U.S. ____Russia ____England

25. Cases tried before a court of law are two types, civil and _____.

26. By a majority vote of the members of Congress, the Congress can change provisions of the Constitution of the U.S. ____True ____False

27. For security, each state has a right to form a _____.

28. The electoral vote for President is counted in the presence of two bodies. Name them:

29. If no candidate for President receives a majority of the electoral vote, who decides who will become President? _____

30. Of the original 13 states, the one with the largest representation in the first Congress was _____.

31. Of which branch of government is the Speaker of the House a part?

____Executive ____Legislative ____Judicial

32. Capital punishment is the giving of a death sentence. ____True ____False

33. In case the President is unable to perform the duties of his office, who assumes them?

34. "Involuntary servitude" is permitted in the U.S. upon conviction of a crime. ____True ____False

35. If a state is a party to a case, the Constitution provides that original jurisdiction shall be in _____.

36. Congress passes laws regulating cases which are included in those over which the U.S. Supreme Court has _____ jurisdiction.

37. Which of the following is a right guaranteed by the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution?

____Public Housing ____Education
____Voting ____Trial by Jury

38. The Legislatures of the states decide how presidential elections may be chosen. ____True ____False

39. If it were proposed to join Alabama and Mississippi to form one state, what groups would have to vote approval in order for this to be done?

40. The Vice President presides over _____.

41. The Constitution limits the size of the District of Columbia to _____.

42. The only laws which can be passed to apply to an area in a federal arsenal are those passed by _____ provided consent for the purchase of the land is given by the _____.

43. In which document or writing is the "Bill of Rights" found? _____

44. Of which branch of government is a Supreme Court justice a part?
____Executive ____Legislative ____Judicial

45. If no person receives a majority of the electoral votes, the Vice President is chosen by the Senate. ____True ____False



1965 ALABAMA LITERACY TEST PAGE 3

46. Name two things which the states are forbidden to do by the U.S. Constitution.

47. If election of the President becomes the duty of the U.S. House of Representatives and it fails to act, who becomes President and when?

48. How many votes must a person receive in order to become President if the election is decided by the U.S. House of Representatives?

49. How many states were required to approve the original Constitution in order for it to be in effect?

50. Check the offenses which, if you are convicted of them, disqualify you for voting:

Murder Issuing worthless checks
 Petty larceny Manufacturing whiskey

51. The Congress decides in what manner states elect presidential electors. True False

52. Name two of the purposes of the U.S. Constitution.

53. Congress is composed of

54. All legislative powers granted in the U.S. Constitution may legally be used only by

55. The population census is required to be made every _____ years.

56. Impeachments of U.S. officials are tried by

57. If an effort to impeach the President of the U.S. is made, who presides at the trial?

58. On the impeachment of the chief justice of the Supreme court of the U.S., who tries the case?

59. Money is coined by order of:
 U.S. Congress The President's Cabinet
 State Legislatures

60. Persons elected to cast a state's vote for U.S. President and Vice President are called presidential

61. Name one power which is exclusively legislative and is mentioned in one of the parts of the U.S. Constitution above.

62. If a person flees from justice into another state, who has authority to ask for his return?

63. Whose duty is it to keep Congress informed of the state of the union?

64. If the two houses of Congress cannot agree on adjournment, who sets the time?

65. When presidential electors meet to cast ballots for President, must all electors in a state vote for the same person for President or can they vote for different persons if they so choose?

66. After the presidential electors have voted, to whom do they send the count of their votes?

67. The power to declare war is vested in

68. Any power and rights not given to the U.S. or prohibited to the states by the U.S. Constitution are specified as belonging to whom?



ANSWERS TO ALABAMA LITERACY TEST

1. Trial by Jury only
2. False (every 10 years)
3. Habeas Corpus (immediate presentation of charges); lawyer; speedy trial
4. January 3
5. January 20
6. Proposed change, as in a Constitution
7. Life (with good behavior)
8. Nine
9. Yes
10. Affirm
11. 35
12. In God We Trust
13. False
14. U.S. Constitution
15. The governor
16. Six
17. Two
18. Executive
19. Congress
20. Population (as determined by census) less *untaxed Indians*
21. Cruel and unusual
22. True
23. State and local
24. Russia
25. Criminal
26. False
27. Militia
28. House of Representatives, Senate
29. House of Representatives
30. Virginia
31. Legislative
32. True
33. The Vice President
34. True
35. The Supreme Court
36. Co-appellate
37. Trial by jury
38. True
39. Congress and the legislatures of both states
40. the Senate
41. 10 miles square
42. Congress; state legislatures
43. Constitution
44. Judicial
45. True
46. Coin money; make treaties
47. The Vice President, until the House acts
48. 26
49. 9
50. Murder
51. False
52. (Preamble statements) "to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity."
53. House of Representatives and Senate
54. Congress
55. 10
56. The Senate
57. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
58. The Senate
59. The U. S. Congress
60. Electors
61. Pass laws, coin money, declare war
62. The Governor
63. The President
64. The President
65. They can vote for different people.
66. Vice President (President of the Senate)
67. Congress
68. The states; the people

Image source:

Literacy Test (This test is to be given to anyone who cannot prove a fifth grade education.)

Do what you are told to do in each statement, nothing more, nothing less. Be careful as one wrong answer denotes failure of the test. You have 10 minutes to complete the test.

1. Draw a line around the number or letter of this sentence.
2. Draw a line under the last word in this line.
3. Cross out the longest word in this line.
4. Draw a line around the shortest word in this line.
5. Circle the first, first letter of the alphabet in this line.
6. In the space below draw three circles, one inside (engulfed by) the other.

7. Above the letter X make a small cross.

8. Draw a line through the letter below that comes earliest in the alphabet.

Z V S B D M K I T P H C

9. Draw a line through the two letters below that come last in the alphabet.

Z V B D M K T P H S Y C

10. In the first circle below write the last letter of the first word beginning with "L".



11. Cross out the number necessary, when making the number below one million.

1000000000

12. Draw a line from circle 2 to circle 5 that will pass below circle 2 and above circle 4.



13. In the line below cross out each number that is more than 20 but less than 30.

31 16 48 29 53 47 22 37 98 26 20 25

14. Draw a line under the first letter after "h" and draw a line through the second letter after "j".

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q

15. In the space below, write the word "noise" backwards and place a dot over what would be its second letter should it have been written forward.

16. Draw a triangle with a blackened circle that overlaps only its left corner.

17. Look at the line of numbers below, and place on the blank, the number that should come next.

2 4 8 16 ____

18. Look at the line of numbers below, and place on the blank, the number that should come next.

3 6 9 ____ 15

19. Draw in the space below, a square with a triangle in it, and within that same triangle draw a circle with a black dot in it.

20. Spell backwards, forwards.

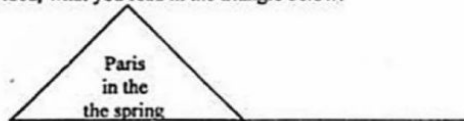
21. Print the word vote upside down, but in the correct order.

22. Place a cross over the tenth letter in this line, a line under the first space in this sentence, and circle around the last the in the second line of this sentence.

23. Draw a figure that is square in shape. Divide it in half by drawing a straight line from its northeast corner to its southwest corner, and then divide it once more by drawing a broken line from the middle of its western side to the middle of its eastern side.

24. Print a word that looks the same whether it is printed frontwards or backwards.

25. Write down on the line provided, what you read in the triangle below:



26. In the third square below, write the second letter of the fourth word.



27. Write right from the left to the right as you see it spelled here.

28. Divide a vertical line in two equal parts by bisecting it with a curved horizontal line that is only straight at its spot bisection of the vertical.

29. Write every other word in this first line and print every third word in same line, (original type smaller and first line ended at comma) but capitalize the fifth word that you write.

30. Draw five circles that one common inter-locking part.

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6. In the space below draw three circles, one inside (engulfed by) the other.



7. Above the letter X make a small cross.

8. Draw a line through the letter below that comes earliest in the alphabet.

Z V S ~~B~~ D M K I T P H C

9. Draw a line through the two letters below that come last in the alphabet.

~~Z~~ V B D M K T P H S ~~C~~

10. In the first circle below write the last letter of the first word beginning with "L".



11. Cross out the number necessary, when making the number below one million.

+0000000000

12. Draw a line from circle 2 to circle 5 that will pass below circle 2 and above circle 4.



13. In the line below cross out each number that is more than 20 but less than 30.

31 16 48 ~~29~~ 53 47 ~~22~~ 37 98 ~~26~~ 20 ~~25~~

14. Draw a line under the first letter after "h" and draw a line through the second letter after "j".

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q

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2 4 8 16 32

18. Look at the line of numbers below, and place on the blank, the number that should come next.

3 6 9 12 15

19. Draw in the space below, a square with a triangle in it, and within that same triangle draw a circle with a black dot in it.



20. Spell backwards, forwards.

backwards

21. Print the word vote upside down, but in the correct order.

notv

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23. Draw a figure that is square in shape. Divide it in half by drawing a straight line from its northeast corner to its southwest corner, and then divide it once more by drawing a broken line from the middle of its western side to the middle of its eastern side.

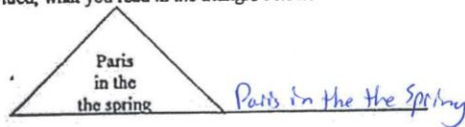


24. Print a word that looks the same whether it is printed frontwards or backwards.

wow, mom, I

(not ~~or~~ ~~had~~
~~rose!~~ ~~dot~~)

25. Write down on the line provided, what you read in the triangle below:



26. In the third square below, write the second letter of the fourth word.



27. Write right from the left to the right as you see it spelled here.

right

28. Divide a vertical line in two equal parts by bisecting it with a curved horizontal line that is only straight at its spot bisection of the vertical.



29. Write every other word in this first line and print every third word in same line, (original type smaller and first line ended at comma) but capitalize the fifth word that you write.

Write either in first and every word the,
other this and third The

30. Draw five circles that one common inter-locking part.





Literacy Tests

Now that you have taken the sample literacy tests and scored your answers, answer the following questions:

1. Did you find either of the tests to be difficult or confusing?
2. What tactics were used in these literacy tests to ensure that they were difficult to pass?
3. Do you think the average, contemporary American voter could pass either of these exams?



Grandfather Clauses

Though poll taxes, property, requirements, and literacy tests were designed to target Black voters, they also adversely affected poor and uneducated white voters. In order to reduce the impact on white voters, Grandfather Clauses were put into effect in many states. This legislation allowed prospective voters to bypass paying their poll tax, owning a specific amount of property, or passing a literacy test if their grandfather had the right to vote prior to the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. (Exact dates varied depending on the state issuing the legislation.) This legislation guaranteed white people the right to vote regardless of wealth or education while still maintaining discriminatory suppression tactics for Black voters.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965

The voter suppression tactics utilized across the United States beginning in the 1860s were blatantly designed to prevent Black voters from exercising the rights granted to them by the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. In the 20th century, though, Black citizens and allies to the cause of racial justice mobilized and protested in order to bring awareness to the unfair treatment of Black people in America, including racially based voter suppression. After years of dedicated and hard work to the Civil Rights Movement, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed. This act outlawed discriminatory voter suppression tactics and paved the way for Black Americans and other non-white Americans to gain more equal voting rights.



Image source: Social Welfare History
Project via socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu



Review & Reflection Questions

1. What practices were used to restrict Black citizens from voting?
2. How did legislators ensure that these practices did not negatively affect white citizens?
3. How do you think the practice of slavery influenced the way white Americans viewed Black people and their civil rights?
4. Can you think of any ways voter suppression, targeted towards any demographic, persists in America?