

Voting in the Jim Crow Era

From the American Revolution to the Civil Rights movement to the recent establishment of democracy in South Africa and Eastern Europe, citizens across the globe have long struggled for the right to vote. Upon earning such rights, voters have turned out en masse.

Such was the case during the Reconstruction era in the American South, when African-American males (it would be years before women of any background could vote) proudly and enthusiastically exercised the right to vote. Yet as Reconstruction gave way to Jim Crow, the right to vote all but vanished.

What was the voting experience like for African Americans in the Jim Crow era? Is voting valued today as it once was?

This activity explores the right to vote and assert one's political preferences, which was and still is one of the most basic forms of expression.

To begin, go to http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/tools_voting.html and click on "Try to Vote." Follow the prompts each step of the way, always selecting to move on and to continue trying to vote.

Part I: The Grandfather Clause

1. According to grandfather clauses, who was exempted from the new, stricter voting regulations in the South?
2. In the South, what race was allowed to vote before 1867? Therefore, the grandfather clause was used to prevent which race from voting?

Click Continue

Part II: Literacy Tests

1. What were literacy tests? Who were they intended to keep from voting?
2. Describe the manner in which literacy tests were administered (given)?
3. Open the link "Click to See Literacy Test." Read over the literacy test and list three issues you have with the test.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

4. Read the section “Do You Think You Passed the Test?” If you select “No,” for what reasons may you have “failed” the test? Was the test fair? Why or why not?

Click Yes to Continue

Part III: Poll Taxes

1. What is a poll tax? Why was the poll tax an obstacle that prevented blacks from voting in the South?

Click Continue

Part IV: Transportation

1. What transportation issues did blacks face when it came to voting? What role did the police play in creating these issues?

Click Continue

Part V: The Sheriff

1. How did the sheriff use fear and intimidation tactics to prevent blacks from voting?

Homework: Read Chapter 9, Section 3 and answer questions 1-5. Additionally, write a short response to the following question: What was the decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*? What impact did it have on blacks in the South?