

A Chronology of American Suffrage 1776-2002



1776: At the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the right to vote is based on the ownership of property.

1787: The United States Constitution gives states the power to regulate their own suffrage laws and they favor white, male property owners.



1791: Vermont advances the voting process by declaring ALL adult white males, regardless of property ownership, can vote.

1848: The plight of women is denounced by Elizabeth Cady Stanton at a gathering of 100 women's rights advocates in Seneca Falls, NY. She reads a proclamation that "all men and women are created equal." The Women's Suffrage Movement has begun.



1865: A Civil Rights Act defines citizenship and prohibits discrimination based on race. President Andrew Jackson vetoes the bill, however the Republican Congress overrides the veto.

1868: After the Civil War the 14th Amendment to the Constitution granted citizenship to African-Americans and permitted them to vote. However, slave states allowed no African-American persons to vote.



1870: The 15th Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, providing African-Americans the right to vote and prohibiting state and local governments from denying that right.

1872: Susan B. Anthony votes and is arrested for violating a federal law that forbids the votes of confederates or traitors.



1876: Poll taxes, grandfather clauses, and literacy tests are introduced in many southern states. The measures are designed to restrict the ability of African-Americans to register to vote.

1890: Wyoming becomes a state and is the first to provide suffrage for women in its constitution.



1920: The 19th Amendment to the Constitution guarantees suffrage for women.



1923: Frances Hunt and Erle Chambers first women elected to Arkansas House of Representatives.

1931: Arkansan Hattie Caraway assumed her husband's U.S. Senate seat, after his death, becoming the first female U.S. Senator. She was elected in her own right in 1932.



1940: Native Americans are made citizens by an act of Congress. However, in New Mexico and Arizona, Native Americans cannot vote because they do not pay property taxes.

1943: Georgia lowers its voting age from 21 to 18 in state and local elections.



1947: Miguel Trijillo, a Native American and former Marine, wins a suit against New Mexico for not allowing him to vote. Since Native Americans pay most forms of taxes, they are subject to taxation without representation. New Mexico and Arizona are required to give the vote to all their Native American citizens.

1955: Orval E. Faubus was the first Arkansas governor to serve six terms (1955-76). Faubus also tried to segregate Little Rock's Central High in 1957, causing the National Guard to intervene.



1964: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 guarantees the right to register to vote without fear of reprisal. The 24th Amendment guarantees that NO person can be denied the right to vote due to inability to pay a tax prior to voting. The "poll tax" is now considered unconstitutional.

1965: Martin Luther King leads 25, 000 people on a march from Selma to Montgomery, AL., to protest the lack of voting rights. The Voting Rights Act is amended to ban the use of literacy test, poll taxes, and other barriers to voting.



1971: The 26th Amendment to the Constitution lowers the voting age to 18.

1972: Jerry Jewel, Henry Wilkins, Richard Mays and William Townsend become the first African-Americans elected to the Arkansas Legislature since reconstruction.



1993: President Bill Clinton signed the National Voter Registration Act enabling citizens to register to vote more easily.

2002: The Help America Vote Act is signed in as a law by President George W. Bush totally overhauling the election system.

