



AMERICAN DEMOCRACY: A GREAT LEAP OF FAITH

By the National Museum of American History

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NOTE TO THE TEACHER

American Democracy: A Great Leap of Faith traces the unfolding of America's experiment with government "of, by, and for the people" and illustrates the fact that democracy involves civic engagement and participation.

This book and exhibition examine the nature of American democracy through a historical lens. High school history teachers will appreciate the rich primary source materials and clear, concise narratives, with special focus on the American Revolution and women's suffrage. Government teachers can review and reinforce essential aspects of citizenship with students through historical examples and personal narratives. Instructors in both content areas will find this a useful resource to enrich classroom instruction.

Included in this teachers' guide are comprehension and broader discussion questions as well as activities based on the content and themes of each chapter. The book includes rich imagery that can serve as illustrations in readings and class discussions on related topics in American history. For recommendations on using objects and images with students, see the National Museum of American History's "Engaging Students with Primary Sources" teaching guide, <https://historyexplorer.si.edu/sites/default/files/PrimarySources.pdf>.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The National Museum of American History collects and preserves more than 3 million artifacts that explore the infinite richness and complexity of American history. It is one of the Smithsonian's most popular and frequently visited museums. Contributors to *American Democracy* are William L. Bird Jr., Lisa Kathleen Graddy, Harry R. Rubenstein, and Barbara Clark Smith, curators at the National Museum of American History, and Grace Cohen Grossman, a former Goldman Sachs Fellow at the museum.

ABOUT THE BOOK

American Democracy: A Great Leap of Faith examines the bold and radical American experiment that created a new form of government, one run by and for the people. This richly illustrated showcase of historical treasures, a companion volume to the Smithsonian National Museum of American History exhibition of the same name, provides a fresh way to look at and understand the forces that have shaped American democracy.

Democracy is a form of government that requires civic engagement and participation. It is formed by citizens' responses to ongoing questions: Who gets to vote? What are the basic rights of the citizenry? What is the role of government in American life? *American Democracy* explores the answers to these questions and how they have changed over time, examining the integral role that democracy has played in the life of the citizen. Spanning the history of the nation from the American Revolution to the present, *American Democracy* showcases such treasures as the portable writing box on which Thomas Jefferson composed the Declaration of Independence, the inkstand that Abraham Lincoln used while drafting the Emancipation Proclamation, Susan B. Anthony's iconic red shawl, and an array of campaign material, protest signs, and other items from everyday life that reflect and express the promise and challenges of American democracy throughout the nation's history.

CLASSROOM COMPREHENSION AND CLOSE READING QUESTIONS

Chapter 1. The Great Leap

- Q: By 1750, what percentage of adult men were eligible to vote in England? What percentage of free adult men were eligible to vote in the colonies?
A: 17% of adult men in England owned enough property to qualify to vote (p. 15). 50 to 70% of free adult men in the colonies owned enough property to qualify to vote (p. 17).
- Q: How did American colonists organize?
A: Through local committees and groups such as the Sons of Liberty; by publishing in the press; by distributing pamphlets (p. 23); and by using economic tactics such as nonimportation and nonconsumption agreements (p. 23).
- Q: How did enslaved people assert their liberty during and immediately after the Revolution?

A: By enlisting in the British or Continental armies, running away, petitioning for freedom, rebelling, and establishing free churches and aid societies (p. 33).

- Q: According to this text, how did the founding generation view political parties?

A: As dangerous factions that followed the interest of a minority over the whole of the people (p. 38).

- Q: How are “republican” and “democratic” principles defined in this chapter?

A: Republican principles are defined as those that “put the community at large before the private ambitions of individuals” (p. 39). Democratic principles are defined as those that “include a broad section of the public” (p. 39).

Common Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Science

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.10

By the end of grade 10/12, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 9–10 or 11–12 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Chapter 2. A Vote, a Voice

- Q: Summarize the following amendments and include the years of their passage:
 - Fifteenth Amendment (1870): “Stipulates that the rights of citizens, including the right to vote, cannot be denied because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude” (p. 53).
 - Nineteenth Amendment (1920): “Stipulates that the rights of citizens to vote cannot be denied based on sex” (p. 53).
 - Voting Rights Act (1965): “Requires preclearance before changing election procedures in designated areas where racial discrimination had prevented African Americans from voting and sends federal examiners to the South to register voters” (p. 57).
 - Twenty-sixth Amendment (1971): “Lowers the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen” (p. 64).
 - *Richardson v. Ramirez* (1974): “The Supreme Court rules . . . that states may deny the vote to convicted felons” (p. 47).
- Q: When did residents of the District of Columbia receive the right to vote in presidential elections? How was that right ensured?

A: 1961. It was ensured through passage of the Twenty-third Amendment to the Constitution (p. 46).
- Q: Which arguments did young people make for lowering the voting age from 21 to 18? When was the amendment to change the voting age passed?

A: They argued that if they could be drafted—in this case, for the Vietnam War—they had the right to participate in politics. The Twenty-sixth Amendment, lowering the voting age to 18, passed in 1971 (p. 64).

- Q: Which state was the first to grant women the vote, and in what year?
A: Wyoming, in 1890 (p. 48).
- Q: When did Asian immigrants and Native Americans gain access to citizenship and the vote?
A: Asian immigrants in the 1940s; Native Americans in 1924 (p. 53).
- Q: How were voting rights for African Americans and other minority groups restricted in the South and West from the late 1800s through the first half of the 20th century? How did civil rights activists work to address the issue?
A: By “literacy tests, poll taxes, ‘English only’ voter registration forms, complicated voter registration rules, ‘white only’ primary elections . . . and through intimidation and violence” (p. 53). Civil rights activists responded with demonstrations, voter education, registration drives, and marches, including the Selma-to-Montgomery march (pp. 57).

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Chapter 3. The Machinery of Democracy

- Q: Name and describe the meaning of three or more common symbols and images in American politics, as outlined in this chapter.
A: Rivers and springs to symbolize the enduring nature of politics; animals to represent the temperament of competing parties (p. 73); hatchets, axes, and log cabins to suggest that a candidate was one of the people (p. 82); brooms and housecleaning as metaphors for altering government (pp. 92).
- Q: Who was Thomas Nast? What was his significance?
A: A political cartoonist of the 19th century who popularized the donkey and elephant symbols for the Democratic and Republican parties (pp. 74-75).
- Q: What is gerrymandering?
A: “The apportionment of voting districts into distended and jagged jurisdictions to consolidate voting strength” (p. 74).

- Teachers: Use the graph showing the evolution of political parties (pp. 74-75) to illustrate the central concerns of a given political party, or ask students to research the laws and events listed during a given era to begin a unit of study.

Common Core Anchor Standards for Reading

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7

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College, Career, and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards

D4.2.9-12. Construct explanations using sound reasoning, correct sequence (linear or non-linear), examples, and details with significant and pertinent information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanation given its purpose (e.g., cause and effect, chronological, procedural, technical).

Chapter 4. Beyond the Ballot: The Right of Petition

- Q: Name and describe three ways that individuals influence their government beyond voting.
A: (1) Petitioning: creating a signed official request that asserts one's rights (p. 99). (2) Demonstration or assembly: picketing, marching, or otherwise gathering for a political motive or to share a political message (p. 104). (3) Lobbying: engaging directly with elected officials (p. 112).
- Q: Define and include dates for the following:
 - Gag Rule (May 26, 1836): A provision "adopted by the House of Representatives stating that all petitions regarding slavery would be tabled without being read, referred, or printed." John Quincy Adams repeatedly called for an end to the rule, which was abolished on December 3, 1844. "The vote was a major defeat to the supporters of slavery, who recognized that their power to maintain federal backing for their cause was increasingly tenuous" (p. 102).
 - Coxey's Army (1894): A demonstration in Washington, D.C., by unemployed people calling for a government jobs program and currency reform to address the impact of the economic depression the country was experiencing. "Coxey's Army would usher in a long history of demonstrations in the shadow of the United States Capitol" (p. 104).
 - March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (August 28, 1963): A demonstration on the National Mall, coinciding with the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation and organized "to unite established civil rights organizations with local community and student movements to build a coalition that crossed ideological lines." It was "the largest

demonstration in American history” until that point, with about 250,000 participants. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech at this march (p. 105).

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College, Career, and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards

D2.Civ.2.9-12. Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans’ participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.

Chapter 5. Creating Citizens

- Q: Define the following:
 - Multiculturalism: The “preservation of diverse heritage” and celebration of multiple cultural identities (p. 125).
 - “Melting pot”: The “creation of a common citizenry,” a singular American identity, and the concept of assimilation (p. 125).
 - Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848): “Extended citizenship to all inhabitants living in the territory annexed to the United States following the Mexican War” (pp. 122).
 - Chinese Exclusion Act (1882): The first U.S. law to ban immigration based on race or nationality; repealed in 1943 (pp. 123).
 - Hart-Celler Act (1965): Abolished the national origins quota system, replacing it with a preference system focused on immigrants’ skills and family relationships with citizens or U.S. residents (pp. 123).
 - Know-Nothing Party: A nativist political party of the 1850s that “saw immigrants and Catholics as the greatest threat to self-government and to the nation” (p. 128).
- Q: Which legal responsibilities of citizens, as mandated by the government, are outlined in this chapter?

A: “Complying with the census, responding to the military draft, paying taxes, [and] answering summons for jury duty” (p. 139).
- Q: What is the purpose of the U.S. Census?

A: “The primary purpose of the census is to allocate seats in the House of Representatives to the states according to their population” (p. 139).

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CLASSROOM DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Chapter 1. The Great Leap

- Consider the “No Slavery to Tea” creamer (p. 24) and the militia pitcher (p. 29). Why do you think these objects were chosen to distribute these messages? Can you think of an object that we use to share political views today? Create a propaganda piece calling for an end to the Stamp Act of 1765. Consider which object would be an effective vehicle for the message, and create an image and related text or slogan.
- Use the copy of Paul Revere’s print of the Boston Massacre (p. 20) to conduct a historical investigation into the nature of the incident, comparing the print with participants’ accounts of the event itself: http://hsionline.org/cases/boston/boston_student.html. (Another source: www.smithsoniansource.org/display/lessonplan/viewdetails.aspx?TopicId=1004&LessonPlanId=1016.)
- This section on colonial America is called “The Great Leap,” and the exhibition as a whole is called *American Democracy: A Great Leap of Faith*. Why do you think these names were chosen? Why do the curators of this exhibition consider the Revolution and establishment of American democracy a “great leap of faith”? (Extra credit: If you were to create an exhibition on American democracy, what would you call it? Explain your reasoning.)

Common Core Anchor Standards for Reading

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7

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Common Core Anchor Standards for Writing

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Common Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Science

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually and quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

College, Career, and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies State Standards

D2.Civ.2.9-12. Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system, with attention to various theories of democracy, changes in Americans' participation over time, and alternative models from other countries, past and present.

D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

D4.2.9-12. Construct explanations using sound reasoning, correct sequence (linear or non-linear), examples, and details with significant and pertinent information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanation given its purpose (e.g., cause and effect, chronological, procedural, technical).

Chapter 2. A Vote, a Voice

- Compare and contrast the Mississippi voter registration application (p. 60) with one from your state today. What is similar or different? What is the goal of each form?
- Do you think it's important to vote? Why or why not? Cite examples from the book to support your response. (Alternative: Using the sample voting posters from this chapter and your new knowledge of voting rights, design an image or graphic that encourages young voters to take advantage of their right. If possible, draw on historical examples.)
- Graddy writes that "voting rights have expanded, contracted, and expanded again as Americans dealt with shifting issues of politics, race, class, and wealth" (p. 45). Cite examples from the text of times when existing voting rights were restricted, and note the method. Then consider the present, finding one contemporary example of restriction of existing voting rights or access. What can be done to ensure that those affected can keep their vote? (Alternative: Consider the examples of contemporary questions in "Keeping the Vote." Are voter ID laws necessary? Should felons be eligible to vote? Why or why not? Consider the examples in the text and then research the issue in your state or region.)
- Consider the suffrage wagon (p. 50) and other artifacts related to woman suffrage. How did suffragists spread their message? Make a list of their methods based on the chapter. How do you spread the word about issues that matter to and affect you? How do your methods compare with those of the suffragists? Think of an object or document that you would include in the national collection to represent political advocacy today.

- The chapter ends with the following questions: Should we try to create an ideal electorate through a combination of education, qualifications, and regulations? How hard should it be to vote? How easy should it be to make our voices heard? What, if any, restrictions should be placed on voting rights? Consider sample scenarios, such as qualifications required to vote for a local representative, such as a school board member, as well as for a national one, such as a senator or a president.

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Chapter 3. The Machinery of Democracy

- Consider the symbols introduced in this chapter. Beyond the donkey and elephant, do you see any of these symbols in use in political imagery today? Are their uses similar or different? Explain your answer.
- Consider the handbill on pages 89. What imagery and persuasive elements are central to these cartoons? What does the Republican Party promise the voter through these images? Have you seen or can you find similar or related imagery today?

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Chapter 4. Beyond the Ballot: The Right of Petition

- As a class, select up to three posters from this section that you find especially compelling and analyze them. What makes them appealing? Which literary or persuasive strategies or elements are included (e.g., alliteration, pathos, humor, or irony)?
- Why are the forms of communication with elected officials outlined in this chapter (petitioning, lobbying, demonstrating) important? Cite an example from the text and explain how this method, or these methods, of communication furthered the interests of the group who used it. (For example, women used demonstrations, lobbying, and petitioning to press for their rights and causes of importance to them before they gained the right to vote. They provide an avenue to address grievances beyond the election cycle. These methods of communication with elected officials provide a compromise to direct democracy, to ensure that elected representatives are aware of and addressing the interests of the people).

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Chapter 5. Creating Citizens

- This chapter includes the following questions: Do we need a shared national identity? What are citizens' rights and responsibilities? Select one question to use as an opening prompt for a text-based discussion, such as a Socratic seminar, based on corresponding text from the book.
- Use the text on debates over the teaching of American history as a prompt to conduct a close reading of a selected section of an American history textbook used in your school. Have students consider the perspective it takes, whose perspectives are missing, and the language used. How did this examination affect their interpretation of the textbook? How would they rewrite the selected section, if they could? At the start of a government or civics class, share the section "What Are the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizens?" (p. 139) and the conclusion of the book. Ask students to use these readings and their prior

knowledge to discuss their idea of a “good citizen” and the role of an informed citizenry in promoting a more perfect union.

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OTHER RESOURCES AND WORKS OF INTEREST

- *American Democracy* exhibition website, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/2-west-nation-we-made-together/american-democracy>.
- *The American Presidency* exhibition website, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/presidency/home.html>.
- *The First Ladies* exhibition website, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/first-ladies/introduction>.
- National Museum of American History “Engaging Students with Primary Sources” teaching guide, <https://historyexplorer.si.edu/sites/default/files/PrimarySources.pdf>.
- National Museum of American History interactive voting website, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/vote>.
- Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States*. New York: Basic Books, 2009.
- *National Standards for History*. Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools, 1996.
- Robert H. Wiebe, *Self-Rule: A Cultural History of American Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Ralph Young, *Dissent: The History of an American Idea*. New York: New York University Press, 2015.
- “Declaration of Independence: A Transcription.” National Archives and Records Administration, www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript.
- “The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription.” National Archives and Records Administration, www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript.

- “The Bill of Rights: A Transcription.” National Archives and Records Administration, www.archives.gov/founding-docs/bill-of-rights-transcript.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE’S AUTHOR

Naomi Coquillon is currently Education Program Specialist at the Library of Congress. She was previously Manager of Youth and Teacher Programs at Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History. Through the A. James Clark Excellence in History Teaching Program and the Smithsonian’s History Explorer website team, Naomi designed and delivered workshops for K–12 teachers nationwide, developed online materials for K–12 classrooms, and conducted online outreach to educators. Prior to joining the education department at the National Museum of American History, Naomi was a classroom teacher and served as Director for Educational Resources at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore.

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