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## THE AMENDMENTS

1. Voting is one of the most important rights we have. In order to vote, you have to be a citizen, at least 18 years old, and registered to vote in the state where you live. But when the U.S. Constitution was adopted, generally only white male landowners could vote.
2. Now, I don't know about you, but this means that I couldn't have voted. So, how did that change? How did the country go from a small group of people being allowed to vote to a large percentage of the population? Amendments! Let's take a look at how these changes to the Constitution expanded voting rights.
3. After watching this video, you'll be able to:
  - ◆ Recognize the rights in the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 26<sup>th</sup> Amendments, and
  - ◆ Recognize how these amendments expanded civil rights to African Americans, women, and young people.
4. Don't forget though, make sure you watch the other video in the module on how these amendments impacted the political process to make sure that you really understand the importance of our voting rights.
5. So let's begin considering the expansion of the right to vote by beginning with the amendments that expanded that right beyond the old, white, male landowner that existed under the Constitution.
6. We'll start with the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, ratified in 1865, prohibited slavery. While this amendment did not give freed slaves the right to vote, it did give them their freedom and this was the first step on the road toward voting rights for former slaves.
7. In 1868, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified. This amendment established that anyone who has been born or naturalized in the United States was a citizen of the United States and that state governments could not pass laws that limited the rights of U.S. citizens. It also defined voters as males, at least 21 years old, and citizens of the United States. No longer did they have to own land or be white.
8. The U.S. Constitution now protected the rights of all U.S. citizens under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment's Equal Protection Clause. State laws, theoretically, could not deny U.S. citizens equal protection, but sometimes there were problems with this, so we'd need more amendments.
9. Despite the equal protections of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, some states were still trying to deny African-American males the right to vote. So in 1870, the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified. This prohibited the states and the federal government from denying citizens the right to vote

based on their race or having previously been a slave. The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, then, tried to protect the right to vote for any male citizen who was at least 21 years old. Again though, we'd have some problems, and we'd need more work, more amendments, more laws.

10. Let's check in- try to answer the following in your own words using what you've learned.

11. If an election was held after the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified, which groups of people could NOT vote in that election?

→ ANSWER TO QUESTION

12. Let's recap what we've learned so far about these amendments. Originally only white, male, citizen, property owners 21 or older could vote. The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment outlawed slavery, while the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment said that anyone born or naturalized in the United States was a citizen. The Equal Protection Clause of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment means that states cannot limit the rights of citizens. The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment said you cannot deny someone the right to vote because of their race, and after the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, all male citizens at least 21 years of age could vote.

13. So men have the right to vote, but we have to "remember the ladies!" So let's talk about the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. In 1920, this amendment was ratified, and it prohibited states and the federal government from denying women the right to vote based on sex. So this amendment gave women, 21 years and older, the right to vote. But we still have some problems, so we're gonna need another amendment. In 1964, the 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified. This prohibited states and the federal government from charging what are called poll taxes. A poll tax is just what it sounds like. It's money you had to pay to actually exercise your right to vote. This often kept people, particularly poor people, from voting. And so the 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment allowed more people to vote.

14. Our final amendment here is the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment, ratified in 1971. This amendment lowered the national voting age from 21 to 18. The argument for this amendment is that if you were 18, old enough to live on your own, to pay taxes, to serve in the military, you should have the right to vote.

15. So now, all men, all women, as long as they are citizens and at least 18 and registered could vote.

16. Let's check in- try to answer the following question in your own words.

17. If an election was held after the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified, which groups of people could vote in that election?

→ ANSWER TO QUESTION

18. Let's recap some of what we've learned recently:

- ◆ The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment gave women the right to vote.
- ◆ The 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment outlawed poll taxes (having to pay to vote).
- ◆ The 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment lowered the national voting age to 18.

19. And remember too that after the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment, all citizens of the United States, regardless of race or gender, could vote if they were at least 18 years old and registered.

20. Voting is one of the most important rights, but not just a right, a responsibility, that a citizen has. The right to vote expanded through amendments, and it's important that we know these amendments to know our right to vote. There's still more to learn though, so be sure to watch the video in this module on the impact the amendments had on the political process to really understand the expansion of our right to vote.