Post Service-Learning Experience Resource Module
Topic: Voting Rights

DISCUSSION

1. How did your service experience inform or alter your views about the voting rights and access?
2. Who and who is not eligible to vote in the U.S.? (Note that this varies by state.) Should current rights be extended or more restrictive?
3. Do you believe voting ensures a true and effective democracy?

PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENTS AND PERIODICAL ARTICLES

15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Voting Rights for Non-White Men
Passed by Congress February 26, 1869. Ratified February 3, 1870.
Text of the amendment:
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_amendments_11-27.html#15
Fifteenth Amendment text, as well as illustrations and cartoons about the amendment, appeared in Harper Weekly Magazine. The link also includes a history of suffrage of black people in the U.S. prior to the passage of the amendment.
http://15thamendment.harpweek.com/

19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Women's Right to Vote
Passed by Congress June 4, 1919. Ratified August 18, 1920
Text of the amendment:
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_amendments_11-27.html#19
Other primary source documents pertaining to women’s suffrage:
http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/woman-suffrage/

1965 Voting Rights Act
Text of the legislation here:
Explanation of the history and subsequent debates and amendments concerning the 1965 Voting Rights Act:
http://www.avoiceonline.org/voting/legislation.html

26th Amendment: Lowering Voting Age to 18
Text of the amendment:
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_amendments_11-27.html#26
History, ratification, and effects of lowering the voting age:
http://www.history.com/topics/the-26th-amendment
Article – “What Would Real Voting Reform Look Like?”
This editorial argues that comprehensive bi-partisan voting reform on a federal level is needed to combat the wave of restrictive voting laws passed in states across the U.S. since 2011. (By Elisabeth Genn posted in Yes! Magazine April 20, 2012)
http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/what-would-real-voting-reform-look-like

President Johnson’s Voting Rights Speech (Text and Video)
On March 15, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson addressed a joint session of Congress to urge the passage of the voting rights legislation. The President surprised the nation near the close of his speech when he invoked the famous civil rights anthem and declared “we shall overcome.” Follow this link for written text, audio and video of the speech. http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/speech-3386

Video – TED Talk – Jacob Soboroff - “Why Do Americans Vote on Tuesday?”
Jacob Soboroff explains the history of why Election Day in the U.S. falls on Tuesdays and makes an argument to change this to increase voter participation.

Collection of Current Articles and Legislation on Voting Rights
Up-to-date news on voting rights is maintained by Project Vote. Project Vote is a national nonpartisan, nonprofit that works to empower, educate, and mobilize low-income, minority, youth, and other marginalized and under-represented voters. Project Vote has achieved a nationwide presence through long-term relationships with service and advocacy partners, and takes a leadership role in nationwide election administration issues, working through research, legal services, and advocacy to ensure that our constituencies are not prevented from registering and voting.
http://projectvote.org/

Article – “Voting Rights Act Stalled in Congress”
Bill Moyers reposting of an article that originally appeared at the Brennan Center for Justice blog
Nearly one year after the US Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act’s core provision and six months before a crucial midterm election, a bill to restore many of the VRA’s key protections remains stalled in Congress. This article examines why the bill is stalled. After the article Moyers gives state by state updates on Voter’s Rights.

ACTIVITIES

1. Distribute original texts of major legislation extending voting rights in U.S. history. Ask students to create annotated timeline summarizing the legislation in plain English. Then ask students to research and identify the movements that led to the passage of each and notable leaders of those movements. (Possible responses might include Abolitionist movement, Suffrage Movement, Civil Rights Movement, and Anti-War movement.)

2. Discuss modern cases of voting rights and accessibility. Break students into groups groups (the number of groups to be determined by size of class) and have each group read one of the following articles:
“Arkansas Put on Notice for Failing to Follow Voter Registration Law”  
http://www.projectvote.org/blog/2012/06/arkansas-put-on-notice-for-failing-tofollow-voter-registration-law/

“Purged Voters Sue Florida”  

“Michigan House Approves Voter Suppression Bills”  
http://www.projectvote.org/blog/2012/06/michigan-house-approves-votersuppression-bills/

“Voting Rights Act Ruling a Setback for our Great Democracy”  
http://www.projectvote.org/blog/2013/06/voting-rights-act-ruling-a-setback-for-our-great-democracy/

“Judge oks Restrictive Voter Registration Process, Undermines Federal Law”  

“Arizona Public Agencies Once Again Failing to Comply with Voter Registration Law”  
http://www.commondreams.org/newswire/2014/03/24/california-comply-voter-registration-law-according-settlement

Ask groups to present to the class a summary and the essential issue of each case. Groups should also answer the following for the class: What is being challenged? Who is at risk? Who has the power to make change?

Show students the 4-minute TED Talk by Jacob Soboroff “Why Do Americans Vote on Tuesday?” referenced above. Conduct “Quick Quiz” and use “Think” questions for discussion found on TEDEd here: http://ed.ted.com/lessons/why-do-americans-vote-on-tuesdays#watch. If there is more time, ask students to research the issue using resources listed in “Dig Deeper.”

Conduct Mock Election using resources provided by the Youth Leadership Initiative at University of Virginia’s Center for Politics: http://208.81.226.245/learning-programs/mock-election/?_yli_session=057dccc3de8f632b2f58f23d07ec8e3f2 *Note – as of August 18, 2014 this site had not been updated for the 2014 election. Here is an alternate site sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Illinois Education Fund http://illinoisstudentvote.org/node/184

Have students watch the following episodes of “Eyes on the Prize.”

Episode 5: Mississippi: Is This America? (1962-1964)
Focuses on the extraordinary personal risks that citizens faced as they assumed responsibility for social change, particularly during the 1962-64 voting rights campaign in Mississippi. The state became a testing ground of constitutional principles as civil rights activists concentrated their energies on the right to vote. White resistance to the sharing of political power clashed with the strong determination of movement leaders to bring Mississippi blacks to the ballot box. In Freedom Summer 1964, tension between white resistance and civil rights activists reached its height in the tragic murder of three young civil rights workers.

Episode 6: Bridge to Freedom (1965)
Opens with the 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery and explores the drive to make voting rights a national issue, examining ideological differences within the movement, and the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

Then read and discuss President Johnson’s voting rights speech that led to the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act (see primary sources above). Ask students to think about how the Civil Rights Movement impacted the actions of public officials and changed the course of history in regards to voting rights.

Download the educator guide for the “Eyes on the Prize” developed by Facing History and Ourselves and conduct the lessons that correspond to these episodes. (Requires log in.)
http://www.facinghistory.org/resources/publications/eyes-prize

Debate: Should the United States Adopt Voter I.D. Cards? Use this site for arguments on both sides:

Debate: Should the Electoral College be abolished? Explain that many believe that the Electoral College system undermines the power of the vote. To prepare students for the debate, use the short videos on this C-span lesson. There is also a pdf handout for guided note taking during the videos
http://www.c-spanclassroom.org/Lesson/591/Lesson+Idea+Electoral+College+ProsCons+and+Alternatives.aspx

Also use this site to review another perspective on pros and cons as well as some ideas for change:
http://uselectionatlas.org/INFORMATION/INFORMATION/electcollege_procon.php

CHICAGO CONNECTIONS

The following is a selection of advocacy organizations in Chicago whose work directly addresses issues related to voting education and voting rights.

League of Women Voters Chicago
The League of Women Voters (LWV) is a nonpartisan political organization encouraging informed and active participation in government. It influences public policy through education and advocacy. The LWV has roots in the Women’s Suffrage Movement. On February 14,
1920, six months before the 19th amendment to the Constitution was ratified, the League was formally organized in Chicago as the National League of Women Voters. LWV has two separate and distinct roles:

1) Voting service and citizen education where they aim to present unbiased nonpartisan information about elections, the voting process, and issues.
2) After studying the issues, LWV uses their positions to advocate for or against particular policies in the public interest.

http://lwvchicago.org/

**Mikva Challenge**
The Elections in Action program at Mikva Challenge engages youth in campaign work, voter registration and school-wide mock elections. Each election season begins with a campaign kick-off event and a candidate forum where students have the opportunity to meet the candidates and ask questions about the issues facing youth in Chicago and the greater Chicago area. The Elections in Action program transforms students' attitudes toward the political process and supports their understanding of campaign work and electoral politics.

http://www.mikvachallenge.org/elections/

**CURRICULUM RESOURCES**

**Voting Rights and Citizenship Curriculum**
The City University of New York (CUNY) in partnership with The New York Times Knowledge Network offers this internet versions of both the Voting Rights and Citizenship 7/8th and 11th grade history curricula. In these curricula, developed by the La Guardia and Wagner Archives at La Guardia Community College/CUNY, students will learn about the history of voting rights through the analysis of original documents, such as letters, newspapers, photographs, cartoons and maps that help them see how people perceived events at that time.

Each lesson contains questions developed by The New York Times Knowledge Network to connect lesson themes with events and trends in modern life. This curriculum is specifically designed to help students analyze primary source documents and to identify main ideas as well as providing supporting evidence and comparing points of view.

http://www1.cuny.edu/portal_ur/content/voting_curriculum/

**UVA Center for Politics’ Youth Leadership Initiative Civics Education Lesson Plans**
This site features teacher-developed lesson plans and course units for K-12 that cover all aspects of civic education from voting to service learning to the legislative process. Many lesson plans include PowerPoint presentations. Elementary resources include a resources guide, morning meeting lesson plans, mini-modules and a dramatic reading of the Constitutional Convention. Teachers must register and log in to download.

http://www.youthleadership.net/learning-programs/lesson-plans/