



LESSON 1: WE THE PEOPLE

The most important players in the election of a U.S. president are not the candidates or their staffs, not the political parties or the other organizations, and not the media pundits. A presidential election revolves around the beliefs and the actions of American voters. Come Election Day, no one else's opinions matter, and no one else has control over the outcome.

Voting is the greatest equalizer in American society. No matter how much money you have or who your friends are or whether or not you contributed to a particular candidate, you have one vote – the same as everybody else. And with that one vote, you have the power to influence decisions that will affect your life. Your job, your taxes, your health care, your Social Security, whether the nation goes to war, you name it – they are all at stake.

Voting in the Nation's Early Years

Today, every American citizen age eighteen and older has the right to vote. Sometimes it's a right we take for granted. We forget how much blood, sweat, and tears have gone into making sure that all segments of the American population – minorities, women, and youth – are able to have their say.

Despite their opposition to arbitrary rule and their faith in popular sovereignty, the founders of the United States did not believe that all adults should be able to vote. During the early years of the country's history, legislatures in the United States generally restricted voting to white males who were twenty-one or older. Many states also limited voting rights to those who "had a stake in society." Translation: To vote, you had to own property. State governments began to eliminate the property requirement during the 1820s and 1830s.

How do you register to vote?

Visit the voter registration tool at:
www.VOTE411.org

★ ★ ★ ★ ACTIVITY ★ ★ ★ ★

ASSESSING THE CANDIDATES:

Find articles in the newspaper about the candidates. Analyze and evaluate their positions on issues that are important to you.

Which candidate stands out? Why?

Newspapers for this educational program provided by:

