What if the Government Said You Couldn’t Vote?

Today in American society nearly everyone that wants to vote can. But, throughout American history, this hasn’t always been true. Here are a few groups that have struggled to gain the right to vote over the past two hundred years.

1. **Women.** For many years only men had the right to vote. In 1890 Wyoming was the first state to issue voting rights to women. In Ohio, in 1917, women were granted few voting privileges, mainly for school board elections. After 75 years of protest, on August 18, 1920 through the 19th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, women received the right to vote.

2. **Poor People.** When this country was first founded, only people who owned land were allowed to vote. Law-makers believed that only property owners had enough at stake in the country to vote responsibly. Property requirements were then replaced by a poll tax, which forced citizens to pay a fee to vote. The 24th Amendment made poll taxes illegal in 1964.

3. **Young People.** During the Vietnam War era the average age of a soldier was 19, but the voting age in America was 21. Many believed that if you were old enough to fight and die for your country, you should have the right to vote. It took just two months in 1971 for the 26th Amendment to be ratified. This was the quickest ratification in history and granted 18 year olds the right to vote.

4. **People Who Could Not Read and Write.** Early in U.S. history many states only permitted those who could read and write the right to vote. It was believed by many that those who could read and write were the only people with access to information that was needed to make smart choices. In today’s society there are a variety of ways to get information that do not depend on reading or writing, for example television and radio programs. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 banned the use of literacy tests for voting privileges.

5. **African-Americans.** Voting was not restricted only to White people, but it was stated that only freemen, or those who were not slaves, could vote. Even though the 15th Amendment was ratified in February of 1870, allowing Black men the right to vote, many states still implemented laws restricting and preventing Black men from exercising their new right. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 removed the restrictions and returned the right to vote to those that had gained it decades earlier. Within the Voting Right Act of 1965 literacy requirements, poll taxes, and other limitations were eliminated. This act also set up a system to ensure that the new law would be followed.

Are There Still People in the United States Who Can’t Vote?

Yes. Those who are incarcerated for a felony conviction may not be able to vote, but often only while the convicted criminal remains in prison are they denied their voting privileges. In addition, there are also people who live, work, and pay taxes here in the U.S. and are not citizens. These people also do not have the right to vote.