

TEACHER GUIDE

1868 DOC. #1: *Harper's Weekly* Cover, "The First Vote"

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Voting rights for African Americans has been an issue in U.S. politics ever since the time of the Civil War. In 1964 the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenged the Democratic Party regulars saying that their right to equal representation was being prevented by terror tactics. In the disputed 2000 election many African American voters in West Palm Beach and Jacksonville, Florida charged that their votes were not counted, resulting in the election of George W. Bush. This history of enfranchisement and disenfranchisement for African American voters had its beginning in the presidential elections of 1868.

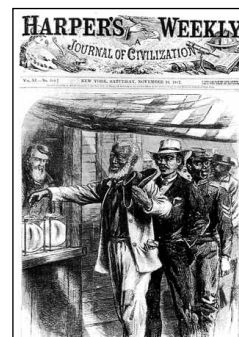
Following the Union victory in the Civil War, African American men in the South were allowed to vote for the first time in the elections of 1867. Many white Southerners opposed this idea, mainly out of fear that the African American majority in the South would limit white political power. Even so the Radical Republicans in Congress passed legislation ensuring that African American men be accorded all of the rights of citizenship. Two years later the Fifteenth Amendment to the U. S. Constitution was ratified providing that all male citizens were entitled to vote regardless of "race, color or previous condition of servitude." However, in many states Native Americans were still prevented from voting because they were not considered "citizens," which was not rectified until passage of the Indian Voting Rights Act of 1924.

> **Project** the document.

"The First Vote" is the title of this drawing by the famous artist Alfred R Waud. It appeared on the cover of the popular magazine *Harper's Weekly* on November 16, 1867. The vessels on the counter in the drawing are the ballot boxes into which votes were cast at the polling booth. A year later, African American votes helped Grant win the presidency just as African American soldiers had helped him win military victory as a General in the Civil War.

QUESTION	What message is communicated by this drawing? Is this a positive message or a negative message? Explain why you think so.
SUGGESTED ANSWER	A positive message is communicated, suggesting pride in the new voting rights for African Americans.
EVIDENCE	pride and nobility in the faces and posture of the voters; quiet approval of registrar; American flag draped overhead

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QUESTION **What different socio-economic groups are shown in the drawing? Explain.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER A poor farmer, a well-to-do businessman, and a Union army soldier are shown.

EVIDENCE farmer—patched field clothes, businessman—jacket, collar, book in vest pocket, soldier—uniform, medal

QUESTION **Who is the target audience for this drawing? Give evidence as to why.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER The target audience would be Republicans or others who supported voting rights for African Americans.

EVIDENCE positive view of African American voters

SEE NOTE →

QUESTION **Which candidate would be supported by such an image, Grant or Seymour, and why?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER This would support Grant.

EVIDENCE Grant supported voting rights and was elected with the help of African American voters

QUESTION **Does this drawing promote or discourage political participation? Why?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER It supports participation.

EVIDENCE portrays voting as an honorable and worthwhile practice

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Why has the issue of African American voting rights been such a heated issue for such a long time?

What changes in voting practices or the electoral system could help to ensure equal voting rights for all potential voters?

Does this cover tell you anything about the editorial position of Harper’s Weekly?

ADDITIONAL INFO

Voting was risky for African Americans, especially in the South. Some Democrats evicted African Americans from their land or refused them credit to keep them from voting. The new Ku Klux Klan ran an effective terror campaign against African American Republicans and freedmen. Still, African Americans went to the polls. Their 500,000 votes helped Grant significantly in his 300,000 vote victory over Seymour.

On April 11, 1865, in his last public speech, Lincoln spoke out for voting rights for some African American men. John Wilkes Booth, a famous actor and white supremacist in the audience, was outraged by this and vowed to kill Lincoln. Three days later Booth assassinated Lincoln at Ford’s Theater.

NOTE

Not all Republicans supported voting rights for African Americans and some supported voting rights because they were politically expedient.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

**Media Bias
Race
Reaching Voters**