

# DEMOCRACY IS...VOTING!

***In a democracy, voting is both a right and a responsibility.***

In the United States, citizens over the age of 18 have the right to vote. But it was not always this way. At first, white men with property were the only Americans routinely permitted to vote. Over many years, other groups of people, including African-Americans and women, worked hard to win the right to vote. To help them gain that right, they exercised other constitutional rights, like freedom of speech, the freedom to assemble (meet in public), and the freedom to petition the government for change.

Take a look at the time line to see how the history of voting rights has unfolded in our nation—and think about why voting has been such an important right to people throughout history.

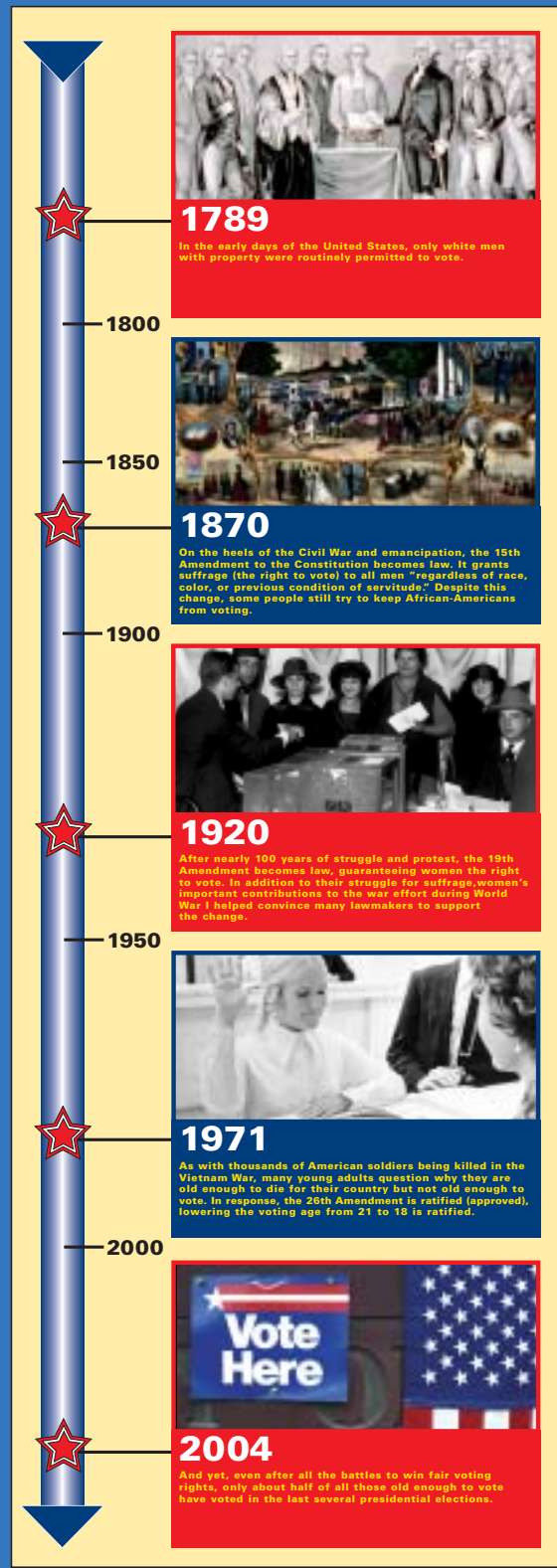
**THINK ABOUT IT**


Why is voting a responsibility, as well as a right? What can happen if people don't exercise their right to vote?

**YOUR TURN**


You may not be old enough to vote on November 2, but you can still make your voice heard. Vote now in the Scholastic Kids' Poll!

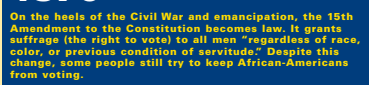
## Voting Rights Time Line




**1789**  
  
 In the early days of the United States, only white men with property were routinely permitted to vote.

1800


**1850**  


**1870**  
  
 On the heels of the Civil War and emancipation, the 15th Amendment to the Constitution becomes law. It grants suffrage (the right to vote) to all men "regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Despite this change, some people still try to keep African-Americans from voting.


1900

**1920**  
  
 After nearly 100 years of struggle and protest, the 19th Amendment becomes law, guaranteeing women the right to vote. In addition to their struggle for suffrage, women's important contributions to the war effort during World War I helped convince many lawmakers to support the change.

1950

**1971**  
  
 As with thousands of American soldiers being killed in the Vietnam War, many young adults question why they are old enough to die for their country but not old enough to vote. In response, the 26th Amendment is ratified (approved), lowering the voting age from 21 to 18 is ratified.

2000

**2004**  
  
 And yet, even after all the battles to win fair voting rights, only about half of all those old enough to vote have voted in the last several presidential elections.