EXPANDING VOTING RIGHTS

The Twenty-sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Read the amendment and the annotations. Then answer the questions that follow in order to understand the amendment in its historical context.

SECTION 1. The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.

SECTION 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

The Congressional Record Service (CRS) has added these annotations explaining the background of the amendment:

In extending the Voting Rights Act of 1965 in 1970, Congress included a provision lowering the age qualification to vote in all elections, federal, state, and local, to 18. In a divided decision, the Supreme Court held that Congress was empowered to lower the age qualification in federal elections, but voided the application of the provision in all other elections as beyond congressional power. Confronted thus with the possibility that they might have to maintain two sets of registration books and go to the expense of running separate election systems for federal elections and for all other elections, the States were receptive to the proposing of an Amendment by Congress to establish a minimum age qualification at 18 for all elections, and ratified it promptly.

1. What was going on in 1971 that led young people to pressure the government to grant voting rights to 18-year-olds? If you don’t know, do some research to find out.

2. The process of granting voting rights to 18-year-olds involved a complex series of events. Explain what role the legislative and judicial branches played, and the states. Also, explain why a constitutional amendment was proposed and ratified.

Legislative Branch:
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Judicial Branch:
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States:
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Amendment:
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3. How do you think young people having the right to vote has affected elections since 1971? In the next activities, you will have a chance to see if your hypothesis is correct.