

Virginia During Progressive Era Issues for Discussion

Activity: Assessing Prior Knowledge through Discussion:

Prior to studying various aspects of the Progressive Era in Virginia, use the discussion topics that follow to assess students' prior knowledge. When preparing to teach a specific topic of this era—women's suffrage, prohibition, etc.--introduce it to students by reading aloud or distributing the paragraph(s) relating to it. Then, utilize the discussion questions following the paragraph. Record students' ideas on chart paper.

Use the activities in this guide to teach students about the era. The activities have been carefully developed to assist students in gaining new understandings and to help them look at the many facets of an issue. After completion of the study, repeat the process, add students' new understandings to the charts.

Discussion I: Child Labor

In the early part of the 20th century, many textile mills in the north were relocated to Virginia where there were no laws restricting child labor. Children worked in the factories often performing the same duties as adults, yet were paid far less. In addition, it was not uncommon for children to be maimed by dangerous machinery.

- < What is a society's responsibility to children?
- < Why don't children in America work in factories today?
- < Are Americans in any way responsible for the abuses of child labor in other countries? If so, how?
- < Where are American factories relocating today in search of cheap labor?
- < What happens to American factory workers when the factories close and move to other countries?

Discussion II: Prohibition

As a response to perceived problems with saloons and drunkenness, in 1916 the Old Dominion voted to become dry. This meant that no alcoholic

beverages could be sold anywhere in the state, though limited quantities could be brought in for personal consumption. With poor roads and fairly primitive transportation, most Virginians did not have access to alcohol. Later, the Volstead Act prohibited alcohol sales and consumption on a national level. In place for many years, the Volstead Act was repealed by an amendment to the United States Constitution. This allowed Virginians to, once again, buy and sell liquor. Virginia chose to establish the Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) Board to operate stores selling alcoholic beverages--other than beer and wine--in the state. The Alcoholic Beverage Control Board is still in operation today. In the last twenty years, many localities have chosen to allow liquor by the drink, which means that restaurants can apply to the ABC Board for the right to sell mixed drinks.

- < For what reasons might Virginia have instituted prohibition?
- < Are there other methods of controlling people's behavior besides enacting legislation prohibiting it?
- < What are reasons that may have led to the failure of prohibition?
- < What kinds of substances are prohibited today?
- < Should substances that are prohibited today be made legal?

Discussion III: The Virginia Constitution of 1902 and Voting Rights

In 1902, Virginia chose to adopt a new state constitution. This document put in place methods of controlling who could vote. The document was written and approved by a small group of white males. The voters of Virginia were not given the right to vote for approval or disapproval. After the new constitution took effect, only males could vote. They had to meet the following qualifications:

- C attainment of the age of 21;
- C citizenship in the United States;
- C residency in Virginia;
- C payment of a poll tax of \$1.50 per year for three years with the tax due six months prior to an election;
- C the completion of a registration form--unaided--in the presence of a registrar official;
- C the answering of any questions the official might have (This became a type of literacy test.);
- C the ability to read and explain portions of the state constitution;

C the ability to interpret parts of the state constitution if read by the registrar in cases where the person could not read.

Because of these restrictions, very few Virginians retained the right to vote. In 1880, over 200,000 Virginians had voted in the gubernatorial election. By 1905, a mere 41% of that number voted. In 1920 an amendment giving voting rights (suffrage) to women was passed by the United State Congress. Virginia had no choice but to comply.

- < For what reasons would Virginia want to restrict voting?
- < For what reasons did people argue against blacks voting?
- < For what reasons did people argue against women voting?
- < How were the arguments against women and blacks voting flawed?
- < Many Virginians do not exercise their rights to vote. Why might this be?
- < Why is it important that all people eligible to vote do so?

Discussion IV: Women's Suffrage

Many women in Virginia worked hard for women's suffrage. There were, however, women who were opposed to the issue. When women finally were given the right to vote, the anti-suffragists registered to vote just as quickly as the suffragists. Virginia was a state that did not vote for ratification of the 19th amendment, but enough states did vote for it that it became law in 1920. Years later, in the 1950s Virginia, at long last, voted for ratification.

- < What might explain the anti-suffragists quickly registering to vote after the amendment was passed?
- < What are possible reasons Virginia chose to ratify the 19th amendment in the 1950s since this vote didn't really count for anything?
- < In 1923, the first women were elected to the Virginia General Assembly. Who might have voted for them? Why?
- < The two women elected in 1923 served for eleven years. Then, from 1934 to 1953, no women were elected to the General Assembly. What are possible reasons for this?

Discussion V: Virginia in World War I

In 1914, World War I broke out in Europe after many years of tension among and between various European countries. Our president at that time, Woodrow Wilson, hoped to keep America out of the war. By 1917, however,

America entered the war and fought on the side of the countries calling themselves the Allies. These countries included England and France as well as many others. The allies fought against Austria-Hungary, Germany, and the Ottoman Empire. The Allies were victorious. After the war, the map of Europe was redrawn to punish the losers.

- < How might Virginians have been affected by a war so far away?
- < Many black men served as soldiers in World War I. When the war was over and they returned to Virginia, many of these former soldiers became more vocal about civil and voting rights and education for black Virginians. What might their arguments have been?
- < How might the loss a great number of young men killed in the war have on a community?