

**THE RIGHT TO VOTE**

**SPIRALING AROUND THE PROMISE**

*“A government of the people,  
by the people, and for the people.”*

## **TO ENFRANCHISE**

To grant a person citizenship and the right to vote.

## **TO DISENFRANCHISE**

To deprive a person of equal rights  
to citizenship and/or voting in order  
to benefit a minority ruling class.

# 1787

## CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

“How to establish a government  
with equal voting rights?”

Over the issue of representation by population,  
the South bargains to include the enslaved.

The North capitulates.

## THE THREE-FIFTHS COMPROMISE

3 of every 5 enslaved people are counted as  
citizens which gives “Slave States” in the House of  
Representatives a disproportionate advantage.

# 1787

## THE GREAT COMPROMISE

How to skew political power to White voters?

Limit the national popular vote  
to property owners.

Fears of larger states dominating  
presidential elections lead to

**THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE,**  
electors allotted on a state-by-state basis  
to act as intermediaries that cast the actual ballots.

# 1787

## STATE CONVENTIONS

State Constitutions are drafted.

New Jersey enfranchises all adults  
who own property, including  
unmarried and widowed women.

# 1790

654,000 enslaved people in southern states  
represent a third of the population in the South.

# 1792

New Hampshire eliminates the property requirement for White men.

# 1801

*“The will of the people is the only legitimate foundation of any government.”*

—Thomas Jefferson

# 1807

New Jersey bans White women from voting.  
Only tax-paying White male citizens can vote.

# 1818

Connecticut: first state to disenfranchise felons.

# March 1820

## MISSOURI COMPROMISE

President James Monroe preserves the balance of power in the Senate by admitting Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state. Slavery is prohibited in the remaining unorganized territories of the Louisiana Purchase which are situated north of the  $36^{\circ} 30'$  north latitude line.

# 1821

## NYS CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Eliminates property requirement for *all* White men to vote (rich or poor). For Free Black men: no land, no vote.

# July 4, 1827

Last enslaved person in NYS is declared free.

# August 1831

Nat Turner's Rebellion of enslaved and free Black people in Virginia turns deadly. State militias ruthlessly suppress any inkling of uprising.

# 1846

## NEW YORK STATE REFERENDUM

Voters maintain the \$250 property requirement  
for Black men to vote.

## “TIMBUCTOO,” SCHEME OF JUSTICE AND BENEVOLENCE

“Since [New York] State has again determined that although White men may vote, nonetheless Black men, because they are Black, shall be obliged to buy the right to vote—since they must become landowners that they be entitled to vote, they *will* become land owners. Vote they *will*, cost what it *will*.” —Gerrit Smith

Leading Black reformers—Rev. J. W. Loguen, Rev. Henry Highland Garnet,  
and Dr. James McCune Smith—recruit 3,000 grantees  
to own 120,000 acres of Smith’s land in the Adirondacks.

Ownership of land entitles grantees to vote.

# 1849

## WHITE ABOLITIONISTS RISE UP

John & Mary Brown move their family to Lake Placid, NY to befriend and mentor “Timbuctoo” grantees. John travels extensively to build a movement to end slavery.

Their sons summon their father to join the armed fight raging in Kansas over the new territory becoming a free state or a slave state.

# 1856

*All* states allow *all* White men to vote.

3.9 million are still enslaved in the U.S.A.

## March 6, 1857

U.S. SUPREME COURT RULING

### DRED SCOTT v. SANFORD (7–2)

Establishes that an enslaved man has no right to sue. No one with African blood can be an American citizen. Slavery is permitted in every federal territory, which invalidates the Missouri Compromise of 1820.

# October 16, 1859

## JOHN BROWN'S RAID AGAINST SLAVERY IN A "SLAVE" STATE

### HARPERS FERRY, VIRGINIA

Out of the 22 Black & White raiders,  
10 are killed, including 2 of John Brown's sons;  
5 escape, including Owen Brown; 7 are captured.

### CHARLESTOWN, VIRGINIA

The 7 captives, including Brown, are imprisoned,  
tried for murder and treason. John Brown is the  
first to be hanged on December 2.

# 1860

## DECLARATIONS OF SECEDING STATES

“The prohibition of slavery in the Territories... For forty years...considered and debated... The majority...of the North in 1860 decided it in their own favor. We refuse to submit to that judgment...” —GEORGIA

“...Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery... a blow at slavery is a blow at commerce and civilization... we do not overstate the dangers to our institution...” —MISSISSIPPI

“...[The President] has declared that ‘Government cannot endure permanently half slave, half free,’...that slavery is in the course of ultimate extinction...aided in some of the States by elevating to citizenship, persons who, by the supreme law of the land, are incapable of becoming citizens; and their votes have been used to inaugurate a new policy, hostile to the South, and destructive of its beliefs and safety...all hope of remedy is rendered vain...” —SOUTH CAROLINA

# NOVEMBER 6, 1860

*Divided, far from united, over the issue of slavery.*

## 16TH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Four major political parties nominate candidates. Abraham Lincoln wins on the newly-formed anti-slavery Republican Party line. He opposes the expansion of slavery into western territories.

## NY REFERENDUM ON BLACK SUFFRAGE

For a second time, New York voters (64%) reject cutting the \$250 property requirement to enfranchise Black men.



# February 4, 1861

## “RUMORS OF WAR”

7 States secede and form the  
Confederate States Of America

SOUTH CAROLINA • MISSISSIPPI • FLORIDA  
ALABAMA • GEORGIA • LOUISIANA • TEXAS

# April 12–14, 1861

The fall of Fort Sumter. 4 more states secede.

VIRGINIA • ARKANSAS • NORTH CAROLINA • TENNESSEE

# 1861–1865

## THE CIVIL WAR

The Federal Government/The North/The Union  
opposes the expansion of slavery.

To end slavery and unite the 36 states,  
620,000 people die.

Of the 186,000 Black soldiers, nurses,  
and laborers allied with the Union Army,  
at least 38,000 die.

# January 1, 1863

## EMANCIPATION IS PROCLAIMED

Enslaved Americans *“shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons.”*

—President Abraham Lincoln

**Southerners are angered and demoralized by a Nation that defies their authority.**

# December 9, 1864

## EBENEZER CREEK MASSACRE

Confederate soldiers pursue hundreds of Black families, newly-liberated by the Union Army.

On the 37th day, of a 287-mile march to Savannah Georgia, Sherman's Army crosses the swollen creek on a pontoon bridge and hastily removes it in a desperate escape, leaving the Black families no choice but to flee from their former enslavers into the raging water.

They drown.

# January 12, 1865

## **PUBLIC OUTCRY**

Union General William Tecumseh Sherman  
and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton  
ask prominent Black Southern Ministers:

*Q: “What do you want for your people?”*

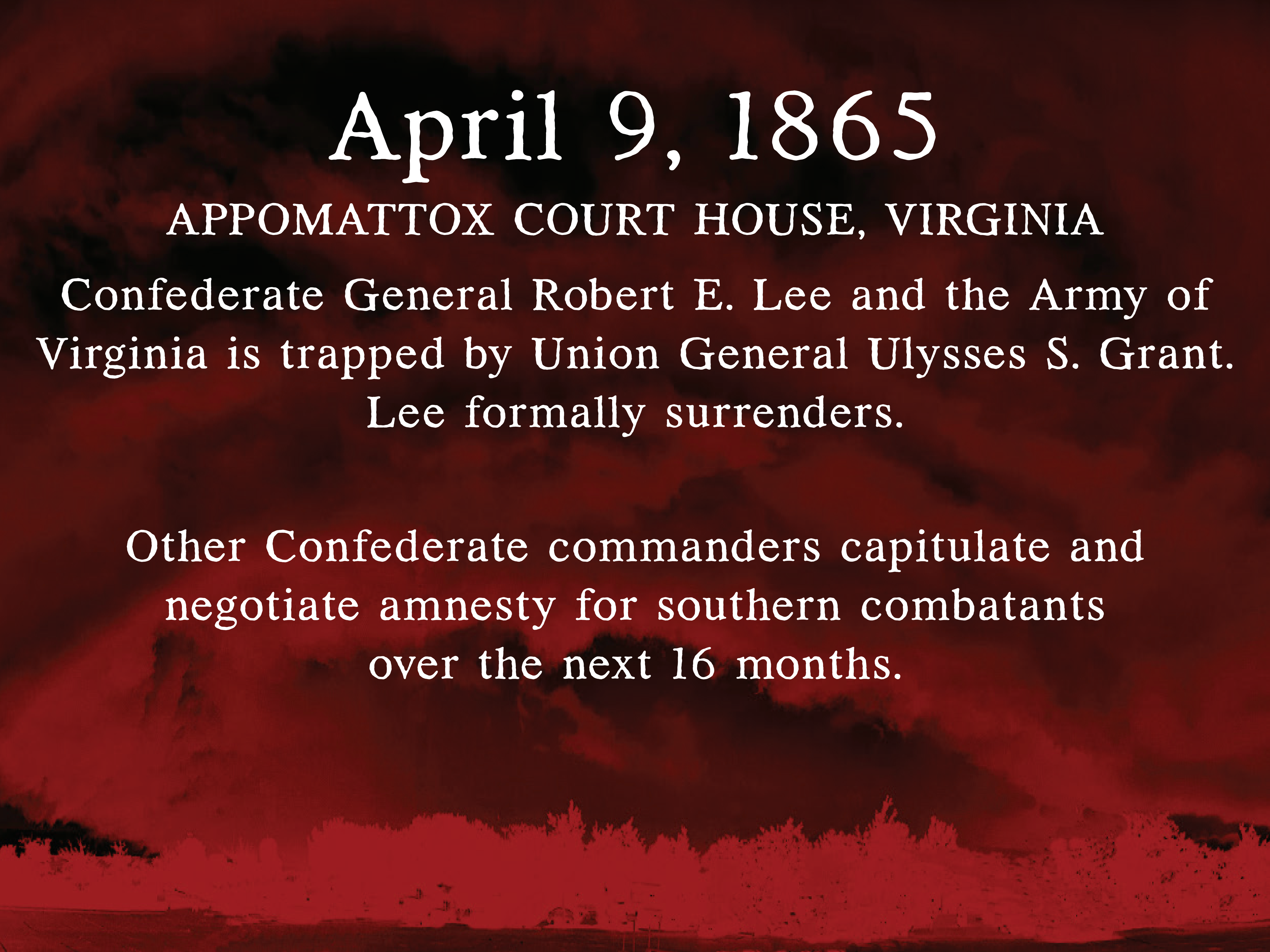
*A: “Land! Tillable land... and maintain it  
ourselves... and live away from prejudice...”*

# January 16, 1865

## GENERAL SHERMAN'S SPECIAL FIELD ORDER 15

“40 acres and a mule...”

The Federal Government confiscates 400,000 acres of coastal land—originally stolen from Native Americans—abandoned during the war by Confederate plantation owners. and redistributes it to 40,000 Black families who, for generations, worked the same land without pay.



# April 9, 1865

APPOMATTOX COURT HOUSE, VIRGINIA

Confederate General Robert E. Lee and the Army of Virginia is trapped by Union General Ulysses S. Grant.

Lee formally surrenders.

Other Confederate commanders capitulate and negotiate amnesty for southern combatants over the next 16 months.

# April 11, 1865

President Lincoln declares,

*“...Very intelligent African American citizens  
and veterans deserve the Right to Vote...”*

**3 DAYS LATER, ASSASSINATED.**

Vice President Andrew Johnson, former slaveowner, assumes the Presidency. He revokes “40 acres and a mule,” displacing tens of thousands of free Black landowners whose property is deeded back to former Confederate plantation owners.

# June 19, 1865

## “JUNETEENTH”

### GALVESTON, TEXAS

Two years after Emancipation is proclaimed  
Union General Gordon Granger and his troops inform  
the last enslaved people that they are free.

#### GENERAL ORDER NUMBER 3:

*“The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with  
a proclamation from the Executive of the United States,  
all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of  
personal rights and rights of property between former masters  
and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between  
them becomes that between employer and hired labor.”*

# December 6, 1865

## 1ST ACT OF RECONSTRUCTION

### ABOLISH SLAVERY

13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution  
ends the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787  
and recognizes millions of ex-slaves as free people.

*“Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate  
legislation, the provisions of this article.”*

**The federal government is strengthened, but the struggle  
to establish homes, jobs, resources, and educational  
opportunities is amplified by the desolation of war.**

# 1866

## 2ND ACT OF RECONSTRUCTION

### 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

*“No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”*

Overrides the Dred Scott ruling of 1857.

**Bitterness festers among White southerners.**

# 1866

CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION

WHITE ALLIES (REPUBLICAN)

WIN THE HOUSE

Establishes the Freedmen's Bureau.

Federal troops occupy former Confederate States to protect the civil rights of the newly free.

## THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1866

declares all persons born in the U.S. are citizens and guarantees equal protection under the law.

# 1866

## 1ST ACT OF "REDEMPTION"

### FORMATION OF THE KU KLUX KLAN

A campaign of terror, intimidation, and violence seeks to re-establish social control over 4 million Freedmen. Klan members plot to restore cheap labor by replacing laws with "Slave Codes" and "Black Codes" in state legislatures. For example: if no job, arrest the man for vagrancy, fine him, or bind him to labor for Whites.

# September 28, 1868

## EMERSON BENTLEY

An advocate of voter registration and education for all, a newspaper editor, and a teacher.

Attacked by 3 White supremacists resentful of voting rights for freedmen.

## OPELOUSAS MASSACRE, LOUISIANA

White mobs—violent and armed—are unleashed and kill over 150 citizens to neuter a politically-powerful Black electorate.

# November 3, 1868

## LANDMARK PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

*The first time newly freed slaves vote. Some states with unreconstructed status are not allowed to vote.*

*Will the nation remain divided or reunify and move forward after the Civil War?*

Union war hero Ulysses S. Grant

is elected the 18th President.

He protects the goals of Reconstruction.



1869-1873

Entered according to act of Congress in the year 1872 by Currier & Ives, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.

ROBERT C. DE LARGE, M.C. of S. Carolina.

JEFFERSON H. LONG, M.C. of Georgia.

U.S. Senator H. R. REVELS, of Mississippi.

BENJ. S. TURNER, M.C. of Alabama.

JOSIAH T. WALLS, M.C. of Florida.

JOSEPH H. RAINY, M.C. of S. Carolina.

R. BROWN ELLIOT, M.C. of S. Carolina.

# THE FIRST COLORED SENATOR AND REPRESENTATIVES.

In the 41<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the United States.

NEW YORK, PUBLISHED BY CURRIER & IVES, 225 NASSAU STREET.

703804

# February 3, 1870

3RD ACT OF RECONSTRUCTION

15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

ONE MAN, ONE VOTE

*“The right of MEN to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the U.S. or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”*

1871

THE KU KLUX KLAN ACT

Protects Americans from political intimidation.

1874

U.S. SUPREME COURT RULING

SLAUGHTERHOUSE CASES (5-4)

New Orleans butchers contest state-granted meat-packing monopolies. The court's first interpretation of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, it returns citizens' rights to the control of individual states.

# 1874

*Voter suppression campaigns persist in Southern states.*

**Militias of ex-Confederate War veterans use harassment, intimidation, violence, bombings and assassinations to prevent the Black majority electorate from voting.**

**THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1875**  
bars discrimination in public places.

# 1876

## PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN DISPUTE

*Months of partisan gridlock  
effectively sabotage Reconstruction.*

The Electoral Commission resolves  
which votes count in

SOUTH CAROLINA, FLORIDA, AND LOUISIANA.

The presidency is awarded to Rutherford B. Hayes  
in exchange for withdrawal of Federal troops  
put in place to protect the rights of Black citizens.

Violent anti-Black racism disenfranchises voters.

1877–1879

“BLACK CODES”

DOMINATE THE SOUTH

JIM CROW LAWS

SEGREGATE SOCIETY

Rewritten state constitutions and laws  
in Southern cities and states  
diminish Black political power  
and civil rights, and  
restrict social contact  
along racial lines.

# October 15, 1883

U.S. SUPREME COURT RULING

## CIVIL RIGHTS CASES

The Federal Government rolls back Reconstruction-era protections and policies that guarantee equal access to public accommodations, theaters, and transportation.

The Civil Rights Act of 1875 is overturned.

The Constitutional Amendments meant to protect formerly enslaved people are undermined.

# 1890s

## REWRITTEN MISSISSIPPI CONSTITUTION BECOMES BLUEPRINT FOR DISENFRANCHISEMENT

*Voter Suppression based on economic opportunities.*

Southern states institute a poll tax as prerequisite to voting.

MISSISSIPPI (1890) • SOUTH CAROLINA (1895) • LOUISIANA (1898)

ALABAMA (1901) • VIRGINIA (1902) • TEXAS (1902)

White landowners bar sharecroppers from voting.

Arrest-without-cause leads to convict leasing.

White supremacists erect monuments to revise history.

# 1890s LITERACY TESTS FOR BLACK VOTERS ONLY

*Voter Suppression based on reading, writing,  
and answering arbitrary questions:*

*“How many grains of sand in a seashell?”*

*“How many bubbles in a bar of soap?”*

*“How many jelly beans in a jar?”*

Answers assessed by White election registrars.

# 1896

U.S. SUPREME COURT RULING

PLESSY v. FERGUSON (7-1)

“Separate but Equal”

*Voter Suppression based on educational opportunity.*

By refusing to leave his train seat, Homer Plessy, 1/8th Black by Louisiana law, triggers a case about the legality of segregation. The ruling separates children in public schools on the basis of race.

*“Separate never intended to be equal.”* —Nell Irvin Painter

# POPULIST MOVEMENT

attempts to unite Blacks and poor Whites  
against disenfranchisement.

## February 12, 1909

### NAACP

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

An integrated advocacy group for civil rights  
founded by Ida B. Wells, W.E.B DuBois,  
Mary White Ovington, Moorfield Storey,  
Lillian Wald, and Henry Moskowitz.

# 1917–1930s

To increase literacy, the Julius Rosenwald Fund builds 5,000 Black schools in the South.

## May 31–June 1, 1917

*Voter Suppression targets communities of color.*

**TULSA MASSACRE  
GREENWOOD, OKLAHOMA**

To disenfranchise voters, the deadliest domestic terrorist attack on a thriving, affluent African American community in our nation's history.

# November 2, 1920

## ELECTION DAY MASSACRE

### OCOEE, FLORIDA

# FIRE!

White mob terrorizes two Black communities  
to prevent voting and to “purge” a local  
agricultural town of diversity.

March 3, 1913

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE PARADE

The largest peaceful protest at the U.S. Capitol.

August 18, 1920

ONE WOMAN, ONE VOTE

The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution enfranchises all women, fifty years after all men.

1923

EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT (ERA)

To end legal distinctions between men and women.

Still in legal limbo in 2026 due to missed deadlines for ratification.

# 1924

## INDIAN CITIZENSHIP ACT

All Native Americans  
are finally granted the citizenship rights  
of the 15th Amendment (1870).

Western states bar their large Native American populations from voting until 1948 by declaring this Act makes them wards of the government due to the fact that they live on reservations and do not pay state taxes.

# 1937

U.S. SUPREME COURT RULING

**BREEDLOVE v. SUTTLES (9-0)**

Poll tax upheld in Georgia (until 1945).

## WORLD WAR II

Black servicemen fight and die to free Europe from Hitler's oppression. Back home, racism intensifies.

## TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

## MONTFORT POINT MARINES

## ALL-BLACK 92ND INFANTRY DIVISION

Many emerge as leaders for civil and voting rights.

# August 14, 1946

## Elmore v. Rice

*To end segregated primaries in the U.S.*

African American businessman George Elmore, a registered voter, is denied the right to pick a representative in South Carolina's White-only primary.

Elmore's class-action suit opens the primary to all South Carolinians. Voter rolls increase dramatically, but African American communities wait hours to exercise their right to vote in the 1948 Democratic primary.

# 1948

## TRUJILLO v. GARLEY

### ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

Miguel Trujillo, Tribal citizen, schoolteacher, and WWII Marine, sues the state for denying him the right to register to vote.

A 3-judge panel rules in Trujillo's favor, removing legal and constitutional barriers to voting for Native Americans who live on Tribal lands in New Mexico.

Intermountain Histories

# May 17, 1954

U.S. SUPREME COURT RULING

## BROWN v. BOARD OF EDUCATION (9-0)

The “separate but equal” doctrine  
is ruled *unconstitutional*.

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), the case  
that gave rise to gross inequities  
in public school access and funding  
on the basis of race, is overruled.

# 1954-1968

## MODERN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

To challenge legalized segregation  
and promote civil rights,

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.,  
THE BLACK FAITH COMMUNITY,  
BLACK WOMEN ACTIVISTS,  
AND BLACK ATTORNEYS

unite against a White-collar backlash  
to the *Brown* doctrine by coordinating a unique  
nonviolent campaign of civil disobedience.

# December 5, 1955

## THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT

### MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

Local activists Claudette Colvin (age 15) and Rosa Parks refuse to give up their seats on city buses to White people. Their arrests trigger a 381-day boycott of the buses by over 30,000 African Americans, financially straining the system until the U.S. Supreme Court upholds a lower court decision.

# December 21, 1956

Segregation is deemed *unconstitutional* on public transit. Black residents return to riding city buses, sitting in any open seat.

1957

CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

Prohibits voting interference.

Feb 1–July 25, 1960

WOOLWORTH'S

GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

Black students sit at a segregated lunch counter.

They refuse to leave when denied service.

The movement spreads to college towns in 78 cities  
throughout the south. 50,000 Black students  
& White sympathizers participate.

# 1962

## FANNIE LOU HAMER

### MISSISSIPPI DELTA

A 44-year-old sharecropper learns that she is allowed to vote. She joins the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and leads 17 volunteers to register voters at the courthouse.

Brutally beaten, Ms. Hamer is fired from her job, and evicted from her home in Ruleville, Mississippi, about a 10-minute drive from the barn where Emmett Till was tortured to death in 1955.

Ms. Hamer goes on to be an iconic civil rights leader until her death in 1977 at age 59.

1962

24TH AMENDMENT

Poll taxes are prohibited in Federal elections.

1966

U.S. SUPREME COURT RULING

HARPER v. VIRGINIA STATE

BOARD OF ELECTIONS (6-3)

The Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment is upheld, prohibiting taxation to obtain access to the polls in State elections.

# JUNE 11, 1963

A few hours after President Kennedy announces  
a tough civil rights bill on National TV,

## MEDGAR EVERS

NAACP's impassioned visionary veteran activist  
is in his driveway carrying a box of t-shirts  
that say, "Jim Crow Must Go."

## **ASSASSINATED.**

# April 9, 1963

## HARTMAN TURNBOW

Mississippi farmer, orator, and activist attempts to register to vote.

Shot at, he defends himself.

His home firebombed, he is framed for arson.

# Summer 1963

## “FREEDOM VOTE”

### ORGANIZED BY SNCC IN MISSISSIPPI

About 80,000 African Americans defy White intimidation and cast *unofficial* “freedom ballots” demonstrating that Blacks will vote if afforded the right.

Freedom workers and 1,500 potential voters deal with food blockades, economic reprisals, and police with dogs and clubs.

MAY 18, 1963

PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY

REMARKS AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY CONVOCATION

“...The educated citizen knows how much more there is to know...

that “knowledge is power,” ...that only an educated and informed people

will be a free people, that the ignorance of one voter in a democracy

impairs the security of all, and that if we can, as Jefferson put it,

“enlighten the people generally... tyranny and the oppressions of

mind and body will vanish, like evil spirits at the dawn of day.”

And, therefore, the educated citizen has a special obligation to encourage

the pursuit of learning, to promote exploration of the unknown, to preserve

the freedom of inquiry, to support the advancement of research, and to

assist at every level of government the improvement of education for all

Americans, from grade school to graduate school.

1963

AUGUST 28

250,000 MARCH ON WASHINGTON, D.C.

*“I Have a Dream...”* —Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

SEPTEMBER 15

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

16TH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

White terrorist bomb obliterates four choir girls.

NOVEMBER 22

DALLAS, TEXAS

PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY

**ASSASSINATED.**

# 1964

## “FREEDOM SUMMER”

Interracial group of northern civil rights workers travel by bus to register southern voters.

Buses and workers are ambushed and at least 20 southern Black churches are bombed or burned.

JUNE 21

### PHILADELPHIA, MISSISSIPPI

Three young civil rights workers, James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner are brutalized and buried under a dam.

**The first interracial lynching.**

# 1965

FEBRUARY 18

MARION, ALABAMA

## PEACEFUL VOTING RIGHTS MARCH

JIMMIE LEE JACKSON

Unarmed, shot in the stomach while protecting his mother from Alabama State Troopers. His death sparks a 50-mile “Walk for Freedom” from Selma to Montgomery.

MARCH 7

SELMA, ALABAMA

## “BLOODY SUNDAY”

At the second Freedom March, State troopers with helmets, gas masks, billy clubs, bullwhips, and tear gas attack 600 peaceful marchers crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

# March 15, 1965

## PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON INTRODUCES THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT TO CONGRESS

“At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man’s unending search for freedom....So it was last week in Selma, Alabama. There is no Negro problem. There is no southern problem. There is no northern problem. There is only an American problem. Many of the issues of civil rights are very complex and most difficult. But about this there can and should be no argument. Every American citizen must have the right to vote...The command of the Constitution is plain. There is no moral issue. It is wrong—deadly wrong—to deny any of your fellow Americans the right to vote in this country. There is no issue of States’ rights or National rights. There is only the struggle for human rights.”

# March 21–25, 1965

Dr. King summons northerners for a second March. 25,000 join the original “foot soldiers.”

## JAMES REEB

White Unitarian Universalist minister, father of 4,  
catches a last-minute flight from Boston.

**Fatal beating on a Selma Street corner.**

## VIOLA LIUZZO

White mother of 5 drives from Detroit to Selma  
to shuttle marchers.

**Shot in the head from a passing car of Klansmen.**

# AUGUST 6, 1965

## VOTING RIGHTS ACT (VRA)

Passage of the VRA reinforces the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

Section 5 authorizes federal supervision to prevent racial discrimination in voting. Federal registrars oversee dramatic increase in voter rolls despite White segregationist's intimidating incidents of violence.

*“The most important piece of legislation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”*

—Ari Berman, “Give us the Ballot”

# 1966

JANUARY 10

HATTIESBURG, MISSISSIPPI

VERNON DAHMER

Successful farmer, businessman, and NAACP leader registers voters at his store and offers on the radio to pay the poll tax for anyone who cannot afford it.

**His home is firebombed. He perishes.**

ENSHRINED ON HIS TOMBSTONE:

*“If you don’t vote, you don’t count.”*

Ellie, Mr. Dahmer’s wife, survives the incident and becomes election commissioner in Hattiesburg in 1992.

# 1966

## MARCH 7

### U.S. SUPREME COURT RULING

## SOUTH CAROLINA v. KATZENBACH (8-1)

The challenge to the VRA of 1965 is rejected.

“Preclearance” is ruled *Constitutional*.

In order for states to change election law, federal approval is required. Voter registration officials are sent to the South for a massive

Voter Registration Drive.

1968

APRIL 4

LORRAINE MOTEL, MEMPHIS

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

**ASSASSINATED.**

JUNE 5

AMBASSADOR HOTEL, LOS ANGELES

ROBERT F. KENNEDY

**ASSASSINATED.**

# JULY 29, 1969

Get Out The Vote Rallies. Green County, Alabama is the first county in nation to elect all Black officials:

## VOTING RIGHTS ACT (VRA) EXTENDED & AMENDED 1970

VRA extended for 7 years. Federal preclearance to change election law remains in effect. Voting age lowered from 21 to draft age, 18.

## 1975

VRA is amended to ensure rights of non-English-speaking voters.

## 1982

Time limits for preclearance amended. VRA extended for 25 years.

# 1992

## THE VOTING RIGHTS LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE ACT

Expands coverage to voters with limited English.

# 1993

## THE NATIONAL VOTER REGISTRATION ACT

Congress passes “Motor Voter” bill to make voter registration more accessible. Allows mail-in ballots.

Allows registration at DMVs, welfare offices, and unemployment agencies.

# 1994

## VOTING RIGHTS OF FORMER OFFENDERS ACT

Secures voting rights for former felons.

# 1996

## CONGRESS PASSES SECTION 230.

The law provides legal immunity to online platforms and users for content posted by 3rd parties, protecting them from civil lawsuits. Still, the subject of intense legislative scrutiny concerning generative AI, child safety, and fake news, is a huge threat to democracy.

# 2000

U.S. SUPREME COURT RULING

BUSH v. GORE (5-4)

Weeks-long battle over contested Florida punch-card ballots with “hanging chads” decides presidency.

# 2002

*Major Federal Election Reform Law*

HELP AMERICA VOTE ACT (HAVA)

Sweeping reforms create Election Assistance Commission, better accessibility to polling places, and funding to replace outdated voting systems.

# November 4, 2008

*Massive Grassroots Campaign*

15 MILLION NEW VOTERS

Barack Obama, 44th President of the United States,  
the First African American to hold the office.

# 2009

SUPREME COURT LANDMARK DECISION

Northwest Austin Municipal  
Utility District v. Mukasey (8-1)

Restores voting rights for the formerly incarcerated. Largely  
preserves Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

# 2010

## U.S. SUPREME COURT RULING

### CITIZENS UNITED v. FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION (5-4)

Unleashes unlimited spending (dark money) in elections without disclosing the funding source.

Devastates the impartiality of elections.

Without transparency, voters cannot know who is influencing them. The laws intent is to sabotage informed decision-making.

# 2013

U.S. SUPREME COURT RULING

SHELBY COUNTY v. HOLDER (5-4)

Declares a key part of the VRA *unconstitutional*,

States no longer need to seek preclearance

for changes to voting laws. Within weeks,

23 states enact discriminatory measures and

pass laws that restrict voter registration.

Polling places are closed, reducing access to voting.

“A dagger to the heart.”—Senator John R. Lewis

# November 14, 2014

## PRESIDENTIAL MEDALS OF FREEDOM

President Obama awards Freedom Summer co-workers

JAMES CHANEY

ANDREW GOODMAN

MICHAEL SCHWERNER

our Nation's highest civilian honor posthumously  
for their efforts to register disenfranchised voters  
in southern states.

# 2016

## ELECTORAL COLLEGE DETERMINES PRESIDENCY

The Electoral College turns a single national race  
into fifty state-by-state races.

The winner in each state takes all the votes.

## ELECTORAL COLLEGE VOTES

Donald J. Trump 304. Hillary Clinton 227.

## POPULAR VOTE:

Clinton: 65,853,625 (48.0%)

Trump: 62,985,106 (45.9%)

*4 other presidents in U.S. History won by winner takes all:*

John Quincy Adams (1824), Rutherford B. Hayes (1876),

Benjamin Harrison (1888), George W. Bush (2000)

# 2020

## Covid-19 Enables Census Irregularities

Racial gerrymandering (redistricting) threatens fair representation.

## Refusal to Accept Defeat in Presidential Election

Inauguration of a fairly-elected Democrat (Joe Biden) to the presidency incites hostilities toward the federal government.

# January 6, 2021

*Unconstitutional* attempt to overturn an election  
by preventing the Peaceful Transfer of Power.

*“To advocate for secession is reckless. It legitimizes the false notion that the election of a moderate Democrat to the presidency is such a threat to the nation’s historic values that insurrection is a valid response.”*

—Rex Smith, “Speculation on Secession is Immoral” Dec. 12, 2020, *Times Union*

# December 22, 2023

*To prevent a repeat of January 6, 2021*

## THE ELECTORAL COUNT REFORM AND PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITION IMPROVEMENT ACT (ECRA)

A bipartisan bill signed into law by  
President Biden reforms the  
1887 Electoral Count Act (ECA).

ECRA removes the ambiguity  
that lawyers exploited in 2020  
to create the fake electors scheme.

# 2023

U.S. SUPREME COURT RULING

MOORE v. HARPER (6–3)

Overrules Independent State Legislature (ISL) Theory,  
a repeatedly-rejected interpretation of the  
Constitution's elections clause—  
as recently as 2015 and 2019.

ISL aims to end Democracy by nullifying hundreds of election  
rules, by challenging key elements of democratic elections,  
by giving states the right to overturn the popular vote  
if they don't like the outcome of an election, and by  
eliminating checks and balances against voter suppression.

# 2024

*Campaigns to Suppress Votes Rise Sharply*

**U.S. SUPREME COURT RULINGS**

*unconstitutionally* remove established Federal and State rights.

**RESTRICTIVE VOTING BILLS**

**VOTING ACCESS ROLLBACKS**

Replace election officials with partisan actors.

Undermine the safety and security of election administrators.

Intimidate and threaten poll workers, election officials, and eligible voters. Purge Voter rolls. Close polling places and cut hours at the polls. Harp on nonexistent voter fraud.

Frenetic and meritless election-related lawsuits challenge voters and ballots.

# August 2025

## PENDING SCOTUS RULING

Mississippi's Republican Secretary of State asks SCOTUS to reinstate the 5-day post-election grace period on a National basis to safeguard military, rural, and overseas voters who rely on the mail to vote. The routine law allows election administrators to count mail-in ballots that arrive within 5 business days of an election, as long as the postmark predates Election Day.

The routine law was reversed in October 2024 by The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals (Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi) in a GOP initiative, *RNC v. WETZEL*.

# 2024

## SLENDER VICTORY IN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

denied despite sophisticated social media disinformation campaigns by partisan actors and foreign trolls, and at least 227 bomb threats at polling stations where voters trend Democratic.

### ELECTORAL COLLEGE:

Trump 312. Harris 226.

### POPULAR VOTE:

77,302,580 or 49.8% of voters

75,017,613 or 48.3% of voters

Tens of millions of registered voters don't vote!

# PROJECT 2025

A federal policy agenda of The Heritage Foundation becomes a blueprint of the Trump administration to reorganize the government agency by agency in fealty to a conservative agenda that opposes abortion and reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights, immigrants' rights, and racial equity.

# 2026

*Broad GOP battle to skew voting to White wealthy men.*

CAMPAIGN TO RIG, SUBVERT, “TAKE OVER,”

OR “CANCEL” ELECTIONS

Laws bar federal agents from the polls, but illegally deploying ICE to Minneapolis serves as a reminder that peaceful protest and public mobilization give the administration reason to change course. Laws prohibit interference by federal agents in elections, but the seizure of ballots and election records to collect personal voter data will lead to false claims of multitudes of noncitizens on the voter rolls. The SAVE Act intends to require “papers” to vote. Dismantling the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, and pardoning those responsible for the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol sends a clear message to would-be election subverters.

Sean Moreales-Doyle for Brennan Center for Justice, May 2026

# 2026

**STALLED IN THE SENATE SINCE 2021**

## FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT

Expands Americans' access to the ballot box, reduces the influence of big money in politics, and curbs partisan and racial gerrymandering.

## THE JOHN R. LEWIS VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT

Modernizes and revitalizes the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the most successful civil rights legislation in our country's history until the Supreme Court gutted the law in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013).

Brennan Center for Justice

*“...We live in a country still staggering imperfectly  
down the path to full equality...”*

—Frank Bruni, New York Times opinion writer, August 1, 2024

*“...If you believe the Constitution and the rule of law  
mean something, mean a better way of life for us and  
our children... then you can't just give up and walk away.”*

—Joyce Vance, American lawyer who served as the U.S. attorney for the  
Northern District of Alabama from 2009 to 2017. Civil Discourse, Nov 26, 2024

*“Democracy is not a state. It is an act.”*

—John Lewis, pivotal American civil rights leader and longtime U.S. Congressman, 2020

Voters, election officials, advocates, and  
state law enforcement fight back on Election Day.

**VOTE!**

# THE RIGHT TO VOTE: SPIRALING AROUND THE PROMISE

Dedicated to the lineage of citizens since 1787 who struggle against bigoted violence, and courageously fight for the voting rights that the Framers of our Constitution envisioned.

Updated June 2026. 1st edition 2023. Compiled and designed by Ren Davidson Seward with thanks to editors Anna Fors, Martha Swan, Dr. Alice P. Green, Louis A. DeCaro, Jr. Made possible with support and funds from Creatives Rebuild New York; John Brown Lives!; the Statewide Community Re grants Program, a regrant program of the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature and administered by the Adirondack Lakes Center for the Arts; and New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

## SOURCES

Ari Berman, "Minority Rule: The Right-Wing Attack on the Will of the People and the Fight to Resist It" (2024, Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

Ari Berman, Tom Zingarelli, et al. "Give us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America" (2015, Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

Gloria J. Browne-Marshall, "The African-American Woman: 400 Years of Perseverance" (2019, Law and Policy Group Press)

Heather Cox Richardson, "How the South Won the Civil War: Oligarchy, Democracy, and the Continuing Fight for the Soul of America" (2020, Oxford University Press)

Favreau, Lovett, Vietor, Holloway, the hosts of Pod Save America, "Democracy or Else: How to Save America in 10 Easy Steps" (2024, Zando-Crooked Media)

Amy Godine, "The Black Woods: Pursuing Racial Justice on the Adirondack Frontier" (2023, Three Hills Press)

Nell Painter, "Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction" (1992, Norton)

Rex Smith, "Speculation on Secession is Immoral" Dec. 12, 2020, *Albany Times Union*

Wright Thompson, "The Barn: The Secret History of a Murder in Mississippi"

Horace Randall Williams, "A Fast Walk Through a Long History" (2018)

Brennan Center for Justice, [www.brennancenter.org/election-2024](http://www.brennancenter.org/election-2024)

Civil Discourse (Substack), [joycevance.substack.com](http://joycevance.substack.com)

Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Inc., [avoice.cbcfinc.org/exhibits/voting-rights-act/](http://avoice.cbcfinc.org/exhibits/voting-rights-act/)

Democracy Docket, [www.democracymarket.com](http://www.democracymarket.com)

Intermountain Histories [www.intermountainhistories.org/items/show/251](http://www.intermountainhistories.org/items/show/251)

National Voting Rights Museum and Institute, Selma, Alabama

The Sentencing Project [www.sentencingproject.org/reports/expanding-the-vote-two-decades-of-felony-disenfranchisement-reforms/](http://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/expanding-the-vote-two-decades-of-felony-disenfranchisement-reforms/)

Zinn Education Project, [www.zinnedproject.org/materials/?theme=voting-rights](http://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/?theme=voting-rights)

# VOTERS

Voter registration must be received by: Oct 24, 2026

## NEW YORKERS

Pre-register to vote at 16, then vote upon turning 18.

**VOTING DAY:** Tuesday, November 3

**EARLY VOTING:** Contact your county elections office

Visit [VOTE.GOV](https://www.vote.gov) to register to vote, to request an absentee ballot, to double check your registration, and to ensure your current address is on record.

Turn your ballot over to vote for amendments.