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THE TWENTY-SIXTH AMENDMENT

A Dissertation

presented in partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the Department of History

The University of Mississippi

by

Russell James Henderson

May 2016

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a history of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Passed by Congress in 1971, it set the national suffrage age at eighteen for all state and federal elections. It remains the last federal amendment to broaden voting rights and the most quickly ratified amendment to the Constitution. Those few scholars who have written about the 18-vote law uniformly explain that it emerged as recompense for patriotic duty; i.e. if teenagers were old enough to fight for America in Vietnam, they were also old enough to vote in U.S. elections. This dissertation agrees that young Americans certainly deserved enfranchisement. It argues, however, that youth earned suffrage not as a reward for their public service but in recognition of their personal aptitude and political gumption. Beginning during World War II, federal lawmakers offered legislation to set eighteen as the national age of enfranchisement. In the 1960s, public support for the 18-vote swelled as young people challenged authoritarian institutions and orthodox values. Creative legislative maneuvering by a small group of dedicated congressmen managed to extend suffrage to 18-year-olds through an amendment to the Voting Rights Act of 1970. They steered the rider through a skeptical Congress by persuading their colleagues that adolescents were capable of mature deliberation and beneficial civic involvement. In an era when generational revolution appeared

a real possibility, many legislators believed formally melding youths into the electoral fold would be a tenable way to sustain sociopolitical order. However, other lawmakers thought establishing youth suffrage via statute violated the Constitution. In 1970, the Supreme Court ruled in *Oregon v. Mitchell* that Congress could only regulate voting ages in federal elections and not for state or local polls. Congress reversed the Court's decision by passing the Twenty-Sixth Amendment. After nearly thirty years of gestation, the 18-vote measure sailed through the Article V ratification process in record time – a mere 100 days – to become law in July 1971. Passage of the amendment induced state governments to lower the basic age of legal majority to eighteen for most ventures.

## DEDICATION

To my parents, Dennis and LaDonna, for their love, my life,  
and a red stick

To my children, Madeleine and Jack, for their love and patience  
while Daddy was in the basement

To my wife, Susan, for her love, encouragement, inspiration,  
and red pen

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No man is an island, and I could not have completed this dissertation without the aid and succor of many people. Thanking them for their generous aid and support is one of the happy pleasures of completing this dissertation. The History Department of the University of Mississippi charitably provided a travel grant in fall 1997 that launched the research. My employer, East Central College in Union, Missouri, kindly granted a semester sabbatical so I could advance my work. Thanks to the staffs of the J.D. Williams Library at the University of Mississippi, the Mercantile Library at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, the Ellis Library at the University of Missouri-Columbia, the John M. Olin and Law Libraries at Washington University, the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Collection and Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies at the University of Georgia, the University Archives and Records Center at the University of Louisville, the Birch Bayh Senatorial Collection at the Indiana University, the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library at the University of Michigan, and the Harry S Truman Presidential Library in Independence, Missouri for their assistance. I extend special thanks to Dr. Robert Florian of Salem International University in Salem, West Virginia. He was a most gracious host to the Jennings Randolph Papers. I

am immensely grateful for the generous access he allowed.

I extend sincere thanks to Dr. Charles Eagles. He initiated my research interest in the Twenty-Sixth Amendment by suggesting that an amateurish research essay held the potential to become a dissertation topic. His patient prodding and firm, but kind, words over the years motivated me to liberate myself from the desert of A.B.D. status. Most especially, I thank him for encouraging me to become and teaching me how to be a historian. The lessons he imparted inside of class and in personal conversations have shaped my approach to this profession. I try, as they say, to “pay forward” those lessons each day to my own students. If I have one-tenth the impact on them that Dr. Eagles had me, I will consider my career a success.



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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

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 power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Twenty-Sixth Amendment<sup>1</sup>

On 1 July 1971, the headline of the *New York Times*, America's paper of record, blared in bold, thick print the thrilling end to a remarkable legal fracas: the Supreme Court declared the *Times* could resume publishing the top-secret Pentagon Papers. The Court's ruling halted the first ever attempt by the federal government to restrain the publication of a newspaper in American history. The *Times* justifiably trumpeted the decision and the paper's role in defending a free press. The other front-page news fit to print that day received more modest coverage. Below the fold, tucked between stories about political bribery in New Orleans and military pay raises, the *Times* conveyed the approval of a twenty-sixth amendment to the United States Constitution.<sup>2</sup> The *Times* had not, of course, overlooked the

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<sup>1</sup> The words of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment can be readily found in any source that contains the text of the United States Constitution. The amendment appears officially in 85 Stat. 825.

<sup>2</sup> R.W. Apple, Jr., "The States Ratify Full Vote at 18," *New York Times*, 1 July 1971, p. 1.

amendment, but it appeared overshadowed by the sensational splash of the Pentagon Papers ruling. The *Times's* plain reporting of what would typically be historic news – the most quickly ratified of all the federal amendments – made passage of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment appear underwhelming. The ordinary coverage of its ratification accurately encapsulated the public's relative indifference to its enactment yet ignored the remarkable circumstances that led to its establishment of eighteen as America's uniform voting age.<sup>3</sup>

The debate over reducing the national voting age from 21 to 18 began quietly during the Civil War. It ebbed thereafter until it captured the public's attention during World War II. Between 1942 and 1970, congressmen filed hundreds of bills calling for a lowered voting age; in 1969 alone, over 60 resolutions were introduced. Only one, in 1954, resulted in any action, and it failed to pass the Senate. Despite public support from presidents Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon, efforts to establish a federal suffrage age remained stalled. A handful of states, however, moved to lower their official voting ages,

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The article contains an error made in the process of trying to complete the story by deadline. Apple reported that Ohio became the last state necessary to ratify the Twenty-Sixth Amendment when its legislature approved the proposal on 30 June 1971. Ratification of the amendment was actually completed when North Carolina's legislature voted its approval early on 1 July, just before Oklahoma endorsed it. The Administrator of the General Services Administration (the person duly charged with officially validating alterations to the United States Constitution and U.S. legal code) confirmed the authoritative ratification timeline on 5 July 1971 upon President Richard Nixon's certification of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment. See 36 Fed. Reg. 12725 and *The Constitution of the United States of America: Analysis and Interpretation*, Rev. ed, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Ratification of Amendments to the U.S. Constitution*, by David C. Huckabee, CRS Report 97-922 GOV, (30 September 1997), p. 4. Huckabee determines that, excluding the 27<sup>th</sup>, the average number of days for ratifying constitutional amendments is 617.

including Georgia, Kentucky, Alaska, and Hawaii.<sup>4</sup>

Not until the late 1960s did Congress address youth suffrage seriously. In 1970, Congress approved an extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that included a provision providing 18-year-olds franchise privileges in federal, state, and local elections.<sup>5</sup> The Supreme Court ruled at the end of 1970 that Congress did not have the power to extend suffrage via statute or to stipulate minimum voting ages in state or local elections.<sup>6</sup> The decision meant that 18-to-20-year-olds would be allowed to vote for president and vice president in the upcoming 1972 election but not for state or local officials. The Court's verdict posed a dreadful quandary for the states: how to create and finance a dual ballot system for federal and all other elections.<sup>7</sup>

Faced with potential election-day confusion and the extra expenses of complicated voting mechanics, the states appealed to Congress for legislative relief. Congress responded in March 1971 by approving a constitutional amendment prohibiting the denial of voting rights to all American citizens age eighteen and older.<sup>8</sup> State legislatures rushed to sanction the proposal; by July, the necessary

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<sup>4</sup> Georgia and Kentucky set the voting age at 18; Alaska, 19; and Hawaii, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Title 3, 84 Stat. 318, 42 U.S.C. § 1973bb.

<sup>6</sup> *Oregon v. Mitchell*, 400 U.S. 112 (1970).

<sup>7</sup> See U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, *Lowering the Voting Age to 18: A Fifty-State Survey of the Costs and Other Problems of Dual-Age Voting*, 92<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971).

<sup>8</sup> S.J. Res. 7, 92<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (1971). On 10 March 1971, the Senate passed an 18-vote joint resolution, which the House of Representative approved on 23 March – the day the Twenty-Sixth Amendment was sent to the states for ratification.

three-fourths of states (or 38) needed to ratify an amendment proposed by Congress had done so. On 5 July 1971, President Nixon signed the Twenty-Sixth Amendment into law after Ronald L. Kunzig, head of the General Services Administration, declared it ratified.<sup>9</sup>

The Twenty-Sixth Amendment remains the last federal amendment to broaden voting rights, but it has attracted slight academic interest. Only one full monograph has chronicled its history.<sup>10</sup> Most descriptions of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment occur as token asides in larger volumes of history or political science.<sup>11</sup> Several commonly-used monographs covering the history of the 1960s either ignore it altogether or mention it in passing;<sup>12</sup> one mistakenly labeled it the “Thirty-Sixth

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<sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, 6 July 1971, p. 1. No story accompanied the photo. On 7 July 1971, the Administrator of General Services published the certifying statement that the amendment had become valid. See F.R. Doc. 71-9691 and 36 F.R. 12725.

<sup>10</sup> Wendell W. Cultice, *Youth's Battle for the Ballot: A History of Voting Age in America* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992). The book's title is somewhat misleading because it is more of a descriptive, blow-by-blow narrative detailing federal and state 18-vote proposals than an analysis of voting age in America.

<sup>11</sup> For example, see Bruce Ackerman, *We the People: Foundations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1991), 91; George Anastaplo, *The Amendments to the Constitution: A Commentary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 221-223; Richard B. Bernstein with Jerome Agel, *Amending America: If We Love the Constitution So Much, We Do We Keep Trying to Change It?* (New York: Times Books, 1993), 138-139; Alan P. Grimes, *Democracy and the Amendments to the Constitution* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1978), 141-147; Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States*, (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 277-281; David E. Kyvig, *Explicit and Authentic Acts: Amending the U.S. Constitution, 1776-1995* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 363-368; Judith Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 17-19; and Clement E. Vose, *Constitutional Change: Amendment Politics and Supreme Court Litigation since 1900* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1972), 357-359.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, see Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); William Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1993); and James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University

Amendment.”<sup>13</sup> There are some clear reasons why the amendment has been a neglected research subject. It is not considered a major moment in American history (like the ratification of the Constitution), a legislative turning point (like the Social Security Act of 1935), an essential amendment (like the Fourteenth) or a critical civic law (like the Voting Rights Act of 1965). Establishing a national voting age never became a *cause célèbre* like women’s suffrage, nor did youth suffrage ever reach the level of “movement” akin to other civil rights ventures. Until the late 1960s, the 18-vote issue garnered little sustained interest, and, mirroring the public’s apparent indifference, politicians viewed the matter as of marginal legislative importance. Lowering the voting age also became overshadowed by other contemporary concerns involving young people, such as the Cold War, Vietnam, the civil rights movement, juvenile delinquency, and the counterculture. Understandably, scholars have given more consideration to subjects deemed more consequential or dramatic.

The lack of a rich historiography has engendered a uniform explanation of why the Twenty-Sixth Amendment was ratified. The consensus asserts, as Alexander Keyssar summarizes, that “were it not for the war in Vietnam, the voting age still might be twenty-one.”<sup>14</sup> Youth suffrage advocates reckoned that if young men were old enough to be drafted to fight and die in Vietnam, then they should be

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Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 281.

<sup>14</sup> Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, 318.

old enough to choose the public officials responsible for making war policy.

Proponents of the 18-vote often cited the selfless sacrifice of young citizen-soldiers to justify a claim for enfranchisement. Other supporters emphasized the obvious unfairness of demanding compulsory military service from disfranchised youths. Historians rarely concur when analyzing events, but the “old enough to fight, old enough to vote” thesis remains the ubiquitous interpretation of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment.<sup>15</sup>

The portrayal of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment as the reflexive legislative spawn of uncomplicated circumstances oversimplifies why Congress established and the public accepted youth suffrage. Moreover, its slender historiography neglects the thirty-year gap between its initial offering during World War II and eventual ratification in 1971. The focus of this dissertation is to explain that delay. It argues that establishing eighteen as the national voting age was deferred until adults acknowledged adolescents as autonomous, rational decision-makers capable of giving electoral consent. Youth earned voting rights not as a reward for their public

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<sup>15</sup> For example, see Cultice, *Youth's Battle for the Ballot*; Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*, pp. 277-281; Solomon Montoya, “The Formulation and Ratification of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment” (Ph.D. Dissertation, New York University, 1973); Samia J. Amamoo, “The Legal Struggles to Gain Americans the Right to Vote,” *Social Education*, vol. 64, no. 3 (April 2000), 172-179; and Wynn Schamel, “The 26th Amendment and Youth Voting Rights,” *Social Education*, vol. 60, no. 6 (October 1996), 374-377. Non-academic sources also support the consensus; for instance, see Elaine Scarry, “Separate But Equal for Gays, Too: Emancipation, Women’s Suffrage, 18-Year-Old Vote Were All Linked to the Right to Serve in the Military,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 1993, 5B, and “The 26th Amendment,” *The History Channel*, accessed 10 July 2011, <http://www.history.com/topics/the-26th-amendment>. Official government sources concur with the “old enough” thesis; see as examples “The 26th Amendment,” *History, Art, & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives*, accessed 10 July 2011, <http://history.house.gov/HistoricalHighlight/Detail/37022>; and “Presidential Proclamation: 40th Anniversary of the 26th Amendment,” *White House*, accessed 10 July 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-pressoffice/2011/07/01/presidential-proclamation-40th-anniversary-26th-amendment>.

service but in recognition of their personal aptitude and political gumption. Lowering the age of suffrage required two prerequisites before it could become federal law: 1) a change in the social perception of adolescence, and 2) the restoration of political reformism. Both factors coalesced in the late 1960s to encourage young people to demand enfranchisement and to justify constitutionally expanding the domain of suffrage to include adolescents.

In the long, tough slog to secure youth suffrage, adolescents overcame significant sociopolitical barriers that had tangential connection to the war in Vietnam. Youth once inhabited a nebulous niche in American society that circumscribed their political relevance. Like other societies, the United States partially stratified its population by age. Age stratification steered people into roles and ranks that carried different degrees of prestige, prerogative, and power. For American adolescents, chronological age became the benchmark of their social age, or the time within the human life cycle a society deems a person capable of performing expected tasks.<sup>16</sup> For example, 18-year-olds can vote and 17-year-olds cannot simply because their birth date (and not any demonstrated proof of interest, aptitude, or knowledge) legally allows them to register. Different ages of legal majority, however, let 16-year-olds sign binding contracts and determine courses of medical treatment without the consent of parents or guardians. Teen-aged persons lacked electoral privileges because age-conscious norms shaped adult views of what

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<sup>16</sup> Gunhild O. Hagestad and Bernice Neugarten, "Age and the Life Course," in Robert H. Binstock and Ethel Shanas, eds., *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1985), 46-61.



citizenship roles were “appropriate” for youth. Until the late 1960s, adult doubt about the intellectual and emotional capacity of young people to act responsibly squelched actions to lower voting ages.

The social conception of adolescence framed adult perceptions about teenage abilities. Scholars of adolescent history find that western cultures have traditionally maintained a view of adolescence as an innately turbulent time of the human lifespan. American educator G. Stanley Hall theorized in 1904 that “storm and stress” defines adolescence, meaning it is characterized by mood swings (the storm) and conflict (the stress).<sup>17</sup> His thesis lent scientific credence to social generalizations that cast adolescents as insolent, irresponsible, and immature creatures. Hall’s work gave new authority to old prejudices that restricted youth actions until grown-ups deemed adolescents capable of self-determination, the common hallmark of adulthood. Young people did things to expose the speciousness of the stereotypes characterizing adolescence, such as conducting political advocacy, making tough battlefield decisions, and analyzing their own behaviors in light of societal norms. Nevertheless, the insidious convictions of “storm-stress” thwarted efforts to extend voting rights to American youth.

Adolescents also confronted a sociopolitical tradition of unequal electoral inclusion. The establishment of legal ages of electoral majority served as the fundamental, but usually unmentioned, baseline for all suffrage qualifications.

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<sup>17</sup> G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, 2 vols., (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904).

Western democratic states, starting with ancient Athens, adopted restrictive laws that reduced the voting citizenry to persons perceived as *naturally* most capable: those people who, first, had reached majority age **and** who, additionally, also possessed real estate, an XY chromosome, white skin, wealth, and/or citizenship. Rooting the franchise in age evidenced a social belief that voting was a political license extended only to mature individuals who theoretically possessed the cognitive and emotional qualities supposedly requisite for casting ballots responsibly. Thus, suffrage was conceived more as a privilege of adulthood than a right of humanity or citizenry. While majority ages for voting sometimes fluctuated, age 21 served as the traditional western standard, and it became the most universal of all suffrage requirements. Historian Marchette Chute contends that, in America, the conditions “free, white, and twenty-one” became so pervasive that they “passed into the language as a litany.”<sup>18</sup> No matter how qualified otherwise, potential voters had to be, as the laws required, of “full age” before becoming a bona fide elector.

To gain the prize of suffrage, young people had to focus on the process of earning it. Establishing a minimum national voting age at eighteen could not become an actionable legislative possibility until 1) young people became conscious of themselves as a political constituency, and 2) adults became convinced that young people possessed the ability to deliver a rational and meaningful vote. The former required a galvanizing of shared opinions, feelings, and beliefs, which the dramatic

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<sup>18</sup> Marchette Chute, *The First Liberty: A History of the Right to Vote in America, 1619-1850* (New York: Dutton, 1969), 313.

events of the 1960s made possible. The latter demanded young people prove themselves to be adults, which the transformative experiences of the 1960s made poignant. Lowering the voting age could not be achieved until adolescents demonstrated a capacity to proffer consent sensibly.

The active campaign to establish 18 as the national voting age began during World War II. Youth agitation for a lowered franchise age prodded state and federal politicians to consider the prospect. Though only Georgia acted on youth suffrage during the war, teens got adults to ponder whether adolescents should vote. During the 1950s, adults became increasingly convinced that young people could vote. Postwar teenagers gradually showed themselves to be independent young adults capable of expressing maturity and responsibility. Businessmen, for instance, took notice of the personally sophisticated and publicly influential economic choices made by teenage consumers. Mass media circulated seminal academic theories casting adolescents as more talented, skillful, and clever than previously perceived. Insightful adults looked past the stereotypes of “storm-stress” to glimpse the sometimes brilliant social and cultural critiques made by young people in graffiti, poetry, and song. Many adults realized that the erudite views of youth suggested a talent for critical thought. However, fears of teen recklessness, fueled by Cold War-enhanced hysteria about “juvenile delinquency” and “beatniks,” continued to impede the enfranchisement of adolescents.

During the 1960s, a small but persistent cadre of advocates prodded lawmakers to accept a lowered voting age. Rather than march in the streets like

young militants, they lobbied in the halls of legislatures on behalf of their cause. They devised a considered, well-crafted argument that youth suffrage would make America's political milieu less unhinged by offering young people a direct stake in the system. Critics of the 18-vote argued that the meretriciousness of adolescents, personified by bomb-throwing radicals and dope-smoking hippies, showed youth lacked the maturity to participate responsibly in politics or society; hence, lowering the voting age would damage America's democracy. In an era when traditional authority looked ready to crumble and generational revolution appeared a real possibility, formally melding youths into the electoral fold proved to be a tenable way to smooth generational tension and sustain sociopolitical order.

Creative political maneuvering played an important role in establishing the 18-vote. A small group of dedicated federal legislators, particularly Senators Birch Bayh, Edward Kennedy, and Mike Mansfield, steered youth suffrage through a skeptical Congress. They persuaded a majority of their colleagues that young people were capable of mature deliberation and beneficial civic involvement. They also pointed to polls indicating a public groundswell supporting youth suffrage. Their task was abetted by a congressional era defined by institutional and legislative reformism. During the 1960s, liberal Democrats pushed procedural changes that harnessed obstructionism. Modifying how Congress worked led to the approval of historic legislation that provided social welfare, protected civil rights, and broadened suffrage, including constitutional amendments that allowed citizens in Washington, D.C. to vote in presidential elections, abolished poll taxes, and

granted youth suffrage.

A liberal Supreme Court determined to expand civil liberties helped, too, by affirming the principle of “one man, one vote.” In four decisive cases, the Court expanded federal oversight of suffrage by mandating that all citizens, regardless of where they reside in a state, receive equal representation.<sup>19</sup> In *Oregon v. Mitchell* (1970), however, it authored a curiously narrow decision allowing states to determine the time and manner of conducting elections. That ruling confused who possessed the authority to regulate voting ages in state and federal elections. Congress reversed the Court’s holding by passing the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, which the states adopted in short order. After nearly thirty years of gestation, the 18-vote measure sailed through Congress and the Article V ratification process in record time – a mere 100 days – to become law in July 1971.

Though not as monumental as other federal amendments, the Twenty-Sixth should not be trivialized or dismissed. It marked the political coming-of-age for American youth by granting 18-to-21-year-olds the right to vote and by guaranteeing them the privilege of self-determination. Ratification of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment was not simply a reaction to the turmoil engendered by Vietnam; it acknowledged a new understanding of youth status within a society becoming less deferential and more inclusive. Dropping the voting age did the very thing centuries of tradition had delayed: it gave *instant* civic responsibility to inexperienced adolescents. The Twenty-Sixth Amendment should be understood as

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<sup>19</sup> *Baker v. Carr*, 369 U.S. 186 (1962), *Gray v. Sanders*, 372 U.S. 368 (1963), *Wesberry v. Sanders*, 376 U.S. 1 (1964), and *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964).

the byproduct of social change and political labor rather than as recompense for patriotic service. Like the other suffrage amendments, changing the electoral status quo through setting a uniform voting age required hard work and tough advocacy by committed activists and their congressional champions. Their resiliency resulted in a fundamental alteration of constitutional law: forever banning age-based electoral discrimination against persons aged eighteen to twenty. The Twenty-Sixth Amendment was the reward youth had earned for proving the capacity to proffer consent as maturely as adults. How young people eventually overcame political resistance and social prejudices to change the Constitution is a fascinating tale that stretches back to the establishment of voting as a mechanism for group decision-making.

CHAPTER II

THE TYRANNY OF THE (LEGAL) MAJORITY:  
ADOLESCENCE, ADULTOCRACY, AND VOTING AGES

For although there may be exceptions to the order of nature, the male is by nature fitter for command than the female, just as the elder and full-grown is superior to the younger and more immature.

Aristotle<sup>20</sup>

In 1930, Bernard R. Riley, an 18-year-old from Miami, filed suit in Florida court to obtain suffrage, seeking to take advantage of an apparent loophole in state law. Section 3962 of Florida’s Revised General Statutes of 1920 declared that married male minors “are hereby authorized to assume the management of their estate, to contract and be contracted with, to sue and be sued, and to do and perform any and all acts, matters, and things that he could do if he were twenty-one years of age.”<sup>21</sup> The recently-wedded Riley argued the statute implicitly conferred suffrage rights by granting him “any and all” civil prerogatives afforded majority-aged men. The Florida Supreme Court unanimously disagreed, ruling statutes could not alter the age qualification of voters fixed in the state constitution. The Court deftly sidestepped the “any and all” clause by determining Florida’s legislature

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<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, 1.1259b.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in *Riley v. Holmer*, 100 Fla. 938, 939 (1930).

intended the statute to remove the disability to contract and be contracted with and not to permit married minors to vote in state elections. Justice C.J. Terrell concluded, “Under our law, both males and females are minors till they reach the age of twenty-one years. This was the common-law rule.”<sup>22</sup> That Riley remained disfranchised, though allowed other privileges of legal adulthood, also followed an ostensibly common-sense tradition: adolescents should not vote in any case whatsoever.

Becoming a certified elector, as Riley’s suit implied, had served as the capstone to full-fledged adulthood. Determinations of majority age became the foundation for *adultocracy*, or the sociopolitical system that vested decision-making authority in adults. It forged age-related constructs of power that transcended race, class, and sex and cut across every type of social, economic, and political structure. Adultocracy bolstered western systems of age hegemony by adding legal, governmental, and electoral layers to communal frameworks that stratified persons old to young. A universal and unchallenged understanding of adolescence as a period of “storm and stress” abetted adultocracy by framing adolescents as a separate and subordinate social species ill-equipped for grown-up tasks.

Since adults believed youth a group naturally inferior, as Aristotle had proposed, governments denied suffrage to teen-aged persons, like Bernard Riley, until judged by adult authorities as 1) sufficiently experienced to vote responsibly and 2) developmentally capable of voting rationally. Age qualifications to vote and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 939-940.



hold office spawned a tyranny of the majority consciously designed by the architects of democracy: minors governed without consent by those persons of legal majority age. As a result, adolescents, like other social minorities, existed as political subjects to the will of the majority with few civil privileges and scant influence upon official decision-making processes.

Every society has developed some mechanism of voting for resolving individual differences concerning collective action. The custom of voting, however, did not mean that every individual played an equal role in decision making. Every polity permitted only those individuals considered physically, mentally, and emotionally fit the license to make binding decisions for whole societies; usually, those persons were men; invariably, those persons were adults. Control over group decision-making processes rooted adultocracy. The term *adultocracy* describes a sociopolitical system ruled by people who have reached legal adulthood but who are not considered elderly.<sup>23</sup> Its definition follows the logic of 18<sup>th</sup>-century British

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<sup>23</sup> As a political arrangement, adultocracy should not be confused with gerontocracy. Gerontocracy is a form of rule defined by two central qualities: 1) a small cadre of elders control political power and 2) those elderly leaders are significantly older than the majority of the adult population. Humans rarely employed gerontocracy as a governing system because, as Phyllis Dolhinow attests, few people lived past age fifty in most societies throughout history. Phyllis Dolhinow, "The Primates: Age, Behavior, and Evolution," in *Age and Anthropological Theory*, David I. Kertzer and Jennie Keith, eds., (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 65-81. Ancient Sparta hosted one of the few successful gerontocracies in world history. It was ruled by a council of elders (the *gerousia*) comprised of two kings and twenty-eight men over 60 years old. They were nominated from the most prestigious families, elected by acclamation in the Spartan assembly, and served life terms. The *gerousia* held veto power over decisions made by the assembly. The consensus appears to be that the *gerousia*, and not the Spartan assembly, was the sovereign body of state; thus, Sparta could be understood as a political gerontocracy. See Aristotle, *The Politics* 1272a4-12; Paul Cartledge, *Agesilaos and the Crisis of Sparta* (London: Duckworth, 1987), 124-129; and G.E.M. De Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 124-138.

statesman Edmund Burke who declared that only persons “of adult age, not declining in life, of tolerable leisure for discussions, and of some means of information” should be granted civic authority.<sup>24</sup>

In every sociopolitical system, adultocracy granted adults special dominion over young people. To the progenitors of bands, tribes, and states, adultocracy appeared the most organic means for effecting communal order: from the distinctive abilities of fully mature creatures to provide for and protect their young and the innate authority of parents to rule their children emerged the social right of adults, especially men, to govern.<sup>25</sup> No matter the political family (one, few, many), the governmental genus (monarchy, oligarchy, democracy), or the lawmaking species (despotism, plutocracy, republicanism) the universal aspect to each system was that adults, particularly men, ruled.

Three cross-cultural generalities can be observed in the history of adultocracy. First, those persons considered adults ruled no matter the size of the population, the particular political form employed, or the complexity of the governing system. Second, adolescents had more influence in smaller, informal, and decentralized political arrangements (like bands and tribes) than larger, formal, and centralized political structures (such as states). Third, voting ages

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<sup>24</sup> Frank O’Gorman, *Edmund Burke: His Political Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 133.

<sup>25</sup> According to political sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset, the legitimacy of any political system can only be achieved when its denizens can “engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate for the society.” Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Basis of Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 64.

evolved from culturally amorphous references to fixed legal requirements as age stratification gradually formalized and political schemes became evermore systemized. Societies that lacked an ability to fix precise birth dates, featured short life expectancies, and practiced egalitarianism created sociopolitical climates in which the classification “youth” was not completely prohibitive in relation to status as compared to cultures that developed systems to document age, fostered longish life spans, and adhered to constitutionalism. Adultocracy did not, of course, completely exclude youth from civic life. Parents and authorities expected juveniles, at minimum, to marry, soldier, work, pay taxes, participate in worship, and obey the law. But underage youth generally lacked their own sovereign voice, representation, or agency, while the interests of adults were given direct expression.

<sup>26</sup> And adolescents, though citizens, could not share equally in the prerogatives of the commonweal because of the preponderance of power afforded adults.

Adultocracy slotted adolescents into a peculiar niche that circumscribed their political relevance: they were neither truly children totally adult nor fully citizen.

Adultocracy determined *who* could participate in decision-making enterprises. *When* to declare a person an adult became a riddle partially solved by the social construction of age. Like other social categories, such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity, age provides primary shape to the contours of group organization and the conditions of individual life. Age also conditions social

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<sup>26</sup> See Ruth R. Faden, Tom L. Beauchamp, and Nancy M.P. King, *A History and Theory of Informed Consent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Robert Mnookin, *Child, Family, and State* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978).

assumptions about individual capacities and frames cultural standards for evaluating appropriate behavior and conduct.<sup>27</sup> Sociologist Cheryl Laz points out, for example, that various societies routinely employ the commands “grow up” and “act your age” to correct non-conformity to normative expectations associated with a particular chronological age.<sup>28</sup> The admonitions “not old enough” and “too old” exemplify the use of age norms to impede persons from pursuing non-age-appropriate courses of action. Historically, all societies have deemed children innately inferior to adults in strength and sense, and most of them have judged adolescents as more mistake-prone, restless, and unruly relative to adults. Such culturally-accepted age prejudices justified cordoning off young persons into age-segregated institutions (like schools and juvenile halls) and temporally parceling civil, communal, and individual liberties along chronologically-restrictive timelines.

The universal predisposition to esteem chronology rather than ability when assigning citizen roles rooted age stratification within the world’s governance

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<sup>27</sup> See Ralph Linton, “Age and Sex Categories,” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 7, no. 5 (October 1942): 589-603; Talcott Parsons, “Age and Sex in the Social Structure of the United States,” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 7, no. 5 (October 1942): 604-616; and Matilda W. Riley, “On the Significance of Age in Sociology,” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 52, no. 1 (February 1987): 1-14. Curiously, the study of age as a social construct has lagged. For many years, age was a “neglected aspect” of academic study. See Ralph Linton, “A Neglected Aspect of Social Organization,” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 45, no. 6 (May 1940): 870-886. Some forty years later, Matilda White Riley, a leading practitioner of age studies, admitted “age and aging constitute an empirical domain about which little is known.” See Matilda White Riley, “Foreword,” in *Age and Anthropological Theory*, David I. Kertzer and Jennie Keith, eds., (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 10. The scholastic literature examining age remains scant compared to the volumes devoted to race, class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. The most significant work on age has been conducted by anthropologists and sociologists. Historians, even of a social bent, seem disinterested in chronicling age as a factor of decisions and actions in the past. The few pieces that do examine age, particularly the history of adolescence, were written in the 1960s and 1970s as a means of ascertaining and explaining contemporary youth issues. More investigation into the history of age would be academically beneficial, since age hierarchies remain as pervasive as other social constructs.

<sup>28</sup> Cheryl Laz, “Act Your Age,” *Sociological Forum*, vol. 13, no. 1 (March 1998): 85-113.

systems. Age stratification steered people into sociopolitical ranks that carried different degrees of prestige, prerogative, and power. For adolescents, age signified qualification to assume certain personal, civil, and legal prerogatives. Age of majority laws allotted duties and privileges to citizens based on arbitrarily-chosen years of chronological time. As much as any other social category, age defined the boundaries of citizenship. Majority-age laws framed civic inclusion by temporally apportioning a person's ability to marry, drive, get a job, sign a contract, fight in the military, own property, vote, and seek political office. Lawmakers and jurists in Athens and Rome crafted the western template for allocating majority ages: first bestow transactional prerogatives; next impart civil protections; then confer political rights.<sup>29</sup> The tenets that govern majority ages in England and America derived chiefly from tort law (which controlled civil liability), common law (which offered statutory rules regarding individual emancipation), and legislation (which provided a chronological sequence for doling out civic prerogatives).

Majority-age schemes exemplified a key aspect of age stratification in western societies: adults do not usurp decisions from minors; rather, they attempt to manage consent for minors. The logic of majority age laws emphasized that

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<sup>29</sup> Both Athens and Rome recognized the two key transactional rights (to enter contracts and to draft wills), three civil rights (to declare emancipation from fathers, elder brothers, or guardians, to secure inheritances, and to own property), one public right (to participate in communal worship), two legal protection (to initiate legal proceedings and to represent themselves in courts), and one political privilege (to attend meetings of the popular governing assemblies). See W. Warde Fowler, *The City-State of the Greeks and Romans: A Survey Introductory to the Study of Ancient History*, 5th ed., (London: Macmillan and Company, 1907), 209-210; Léon Homo, *Roman Political Institutions from City to State* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 74-75; Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Life* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 180-183; Lesley Adkins and Roy A. Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 46-51; and Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 73-74, 136, and 142.

undeveloped persons had special vulnerabilities that rendered them in need of sustained adult protection until they had matured, even to the point of excluding them against their will from certain public or private activities.<sup>30</sup> Common sense dictated and common law insisted that children needed special legal protection because of their physical, emotional, and mental immaturity. William Blackstone, the foremost legal expert of 18<sup>th</sup>-century England, forcefully asserted that extending minority status allowed parents and civil authorities to best protect children “from the snares of artful and designing persons; and, next, of settling them properly in life.”<sup>31</sup> The sociopolitical biases favoring “mature” persons posited that aging provided the experience and wisdom required to perform vital civic tasks proficiently.<sup>32</sup> Western peoples defined “maturity” as the capacity to think intelligently, cope steadfastly, and relate rationally. Legal definitions of maturity emphasized the achievement of *sui generis* (i.e. personal control over decisions and actions free of compulsion) as the crucial factor separating children and adults. Western law allowed for some juveniles, in extraordinary circumstances, to make

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<sup>30</sup> Western states, starting with Athens, constructed a system of statutory and procedural safeguards designed to assure the “best interests” of children. The “best interests” doctrine asserted that governments had an inherent power (*parens patriae*) to protect minors because the law deemed them unable to act of their own accord. See Joseph Goldstein, Anna Freud, and Albert J. Solnit, *Beyond the Best Interests of the Child* (New York: Free Press, 1973), and Julia Halloran McLaughlin, “The Fundamental Truth about Best Interests,” *St. Louis University Law Journal*, vol. 54, no. 1 (October 2009): 113-165.

<sup>31</sup> William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England, Vol. 1, Of the Study, Nature, and Extent of the Laws of England* (New York: Oceana Publications, 1967; reprint of the 1<sup>st</sup> American edition, 1771), 441.

<sup>32</sup> Gunhild O. Hagestad and Bernice Neugarten, “Age and the Life Course,” in Robert H. Binstock and Ethel Shanas, eds., *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1985), 46-61.

autonomous decisions sans parents or guardians over some legal matters (usually financial and medical).<sup>33</sup> To avoid case-by-case competency judgments, however, western codes considered all youth as persons with limited but increasing capacities for consent. Pinpointing legal ages when *sui generis* occurred was problematic. The choosing of the precise chronological years for marriage, employment, conscription, contract, and suffrage ultimately relied on adult discernments of youth competencies rooted in age chauvinism. As Bernard Riley discovered in 1930, adult-developed majority ages curbed full self-determination for adolescents regardless of life achievement or personal ability.

The social conception of adolescence framed adult perceptions of teenage immaturity. Historians of childhood debate whether the conception of adolescence was the result of “invention” or “discovery.”<sup>34</sup> But they agree that the main constant in cultural metaphors describing adolescence was its depiction as an inherently turbulent time of the human lifespan. For example, Romans blamed an innate “mental wickedness” for causing adolescents, especially males, to behave mischievously and act impulsively.<sup>35</sup> Early modern Englishmen characterized

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<sup>33</sup> During the 1970s, for example, American jurists established the “mature minor” doctrine that permits children deemed capable by a court to give consent *sui generis* to medical treatment. See *H.L. v. Matheson*, 450 U.S. 398 (1981).

<sup>34</sup> Some scholars support the thesis of Philippe Ariés, who argues that western peoples conjured adolescence as a component of social life during the Renaissance; before then, it “was confused with childhood.” Other academics agree with the development model of Erik Erikson. He maintains scientific research uncovered adolescence as a universal “life stage” in human maturation that transcended social boundaries and historical eras. See Philippe Ariés, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. by Robert Baldick, (New York: Knopf, 1962), 25, and Erik Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968).

<sup>35</sup> Beryl Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 75. See also Emiel Eyben, *Restless Youth in Ancient Rome* (New York: Routledge,

adolescence as a “wild and wanton” “stage of lawlessness” plagued by “vice, lust, and vain pleasures of the flesh.”<sup>36</sup> Contemporary Europeans and Americans have continued constructing negative images of “incorrigible,” “juvenile,” and “delinquent” youth around the age norms associated with mature, well-adjusted adults.<sup>37</sup>

In 1904, an American educator, G. Stanley Hall, seminally defined adolescence as a life stage characterized by a “storm” of emotional mood swings and the “stress” of physiological and psychological conflicts.<sup>38</sup> His thesis lent scientific credence to social generalizations that cast adolescents as unstable, irresponsible, and disobedient creatures. To save young people from degeneracy during the maturation process, Hall advocated lengthening and institutionalizing adolescent preparation for adulthood.<sup>39</sup> He asserted that a temporally-extended, state-crafted

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1993).

<sup>36</sup> Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 18; Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval England: The Experience of Childhood in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 197; C. John Sommerville, *The Discovery of Childhood in Puritan England* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 34; and Steven R. Smith, “Religion and the Conception of Youth in Seventeenth-Century England,” *History of Childhood Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (Spring 1975): 513. Paul Griffiths contends that youth had a creative influence on pre-civil war English society despite demonization by adults. Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> See Pamela Cox and Heather Shore, eds., *Becoming Delinquent: British and European Youth, 1650-1950* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate-Dartmouth, 2002) and Anne Meis Knupfer, *Reform and Resistance: Gender, Delinquency, and America’s First Juvenile Court* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, 2 vols., (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904).

<sup>39</sup> Hall’s biographer, Dorothy Ross, contends that his recommendation to extend the preparation for adulthood, and not the coining of “storm-stress,” proved his most innovative contribution to the social conception of adolescence. Dorothy Ross, *G. Stanley Hall: The Psychologist*



adolescence would allow adult authorities to better control youth development and to better shepherd adolescent assimilation into modern adult culture.

Hall's counsel to extend adolescence under firm adult oversight mirrored traditional remedies for handling adolescent tempestuousness. Beginning with Athens and Rome, western people reckoned that anxiety-ridden and rebellious juveniles needed extended time to acclimate to the different expectations and increased responsibilities of age and citizenry. In drafting majority-age schemes, western jurists reckoned all humans had a facility to assent (or provide silent acquiescence) but only certain persons possessed the capacity to consent (i.e. furnish active agreement or dissent). Legislative decisions regarding who would be granted suffrage boiled down to which social groups could be trusted to proffer consent independently and sensibly.<sup>40</sup> Admittance policies based on birth and residence initially pared who could vote. Subsequent debilitations based on wealth, gender, race, religion, literacy, and age whittled enfranchisement further, and competence-based restrictions narrowed it to a small cadre: adults, particularly men. No matter how qualified otherwise, potential voters had to be, as the laws required, of "full age" before becoming a bona fide elector. Thus, western states conceived suffrage more as a privilege of adulthood than a right of humanity or citizenry.

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*as Prophet* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972).

<sup>40</sup> Legally, people who seek the power of consent have to demonstrate: 1) the facility to comprehend understandably and disclose accurately the information necessary to make a decision that could be judged as reasonable by informed persons; 2) the freedom to make decisions absent pressure, duress, fraud, deceit, intimidation, coercion, constraint, enticement, and/or undue interference; and 3) the fitness to do or decide upon something suitably. See Paul S. Appelbaum, Charles W. Lidz, and Alan Meisel, *Informed Consent: Legal Theory and Clinical Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

The civic reason for age-delaying political participation was plain: to protect the best interests of the state from the disorders of rowdy and bumptious young males. They were not allowed full enfranchisement – to participate in assembly and hold political office – until adulthood because supposedly wild and wanton nature of adolescents compelled adults to marginalize them, albeit briefly, to maintain civic order. The disability of age made young males in western states subjects of adult rule since adult lawmakers had absolute control over official decision-making bodies. As adult men saw their civic responsibilities swell with the centralization and expansion of their states, the governmental participation allowed young males decreased. Adults thought adolescents too impulsive and irresponsible to conduct the august work of the state assiduously or sensibly. A Roman jurist, Ulpian, claimed the exclusion of adolescents necessary because “everyone agrees that judgment, at this age above all, is delicate and weak, exposed to numerous deceptions and vulnerable to the treachery of many.”<sup>41</sup> States held youth back from full immersion into political life until their skills had sharpened and their egocentrism had dulled, irrespective of ability or aspiration.

When to apportion the power of electoral consent to adolescents became a socio-legal conundrum. Lawmakers recognized the task of codifying precise suffrage ages as fundamentally arbitrary but wholly necessary since consent required developed faculties to understand, reason, and judge. Western states grafted franchise ages onto the scaffolding of majority-age laws. Athenian and Roman law

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<sup>41</sup> Bruce W. Frier and Thomas A.J. McGinn, *A Casebook on Roman Family Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 438.

codes used the word “adult” to describe the ages when males could begin the process of attaining full citizenship: 18 in Athens and 17 in Rome.<sup>42</sup> But neither Athens nor Rome promulgated an official suffrage age. Becoming a citizen did not confer a civil right to vote since Athenians and Romans did not elect candidates to civic offices or decide upon public proposals in plebiscites. Instead, citizenship bestowed a political privilege – to attend meetings of the popular governing assemblies – and voting remained bound to deciding legislative or judicial questions and confirming magistrates.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the age of citizenship did not grant a claim to seek political office. Athens and Rome set minimum ages to hold bureaucratic and administrative positions between the late 20s and early 40s; the more important the responsibility, the higher the prerequisite age.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> One of the frustrations involved with antiquities research is the imprecision regarding age. Few studies examine ancient voting, and they say little about age requirements. Most works claim a potential voter had to be an “adult” without clarifying a minimum voting age. Aristotle’s work, as detailed as it is, does not specify exactly at what age males earned full voting status within the Athenian assembly. E.S. Staveley, the author of the only single-volume study of Greek and Roman voting, even admits “. . . it is not ever certain who constituted the electoral body” in Athenian or Roman congresses. E.S. Staveley, *Greek and Roman Voting and Elections* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), 101. Hence, my conclusions regarding age conception within the Greco-Roman franchise are conditional considering the limited nature of the available evidence and a lack of first-hand knowledge of the Latin or Greek languages.

<sup>43</sup> Fowler, *The City-State of the Greeks and Romans*.

<sup>44</sup> In Athens, Cleisthenes’s reforms of 508/7 B.C.E. set age thirty as the threshold for membership in the *Boule* (council of 500) and *dikasteria* (the law courts). In Rome, no legally-prescribed age threshold barred young males from seeking magistracies for most of the Republican era. The governmental sprawl of empire required Rome to institute official minimum ages for holding offices. The *Lex Villia Annalis* (“age law”) of 180 B.C.E. set age 28 for the Quaestorship, 40 for the Praetorship, and 43 for the Consulship.<sup>44</sup> Sulla (82-81 B.C.E.) increased the age to become an *quaestor* to 30, while Augustus (27 B.C.E.-14 A.D.) lowered it to 25 so that the age of majority for holding office matched the age of discretion set in private law by the *Lex Plaetoria* of 200 B.C.E. See Staveley, *Greek and Roman Voting and Elections*, 121-179; Homo, *Roman Political Institutions from City to State*, 49-84, 124-125, 207, and 345; Rawson, *Children and Childhood in Roman Italy*, note 10, 138; Barry Nicholas, *An Introduction to Roman Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 5-6; Alexander Yakobson, *Elections and Electioneering in Rome: A Study in the Political System of the Late Republic* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1999), 8-9; Florence Dupont, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*,

Similar to Athenians and Romans, Englishmen considered the power to consent an essential element of political citizenship. After King John signed the Magna Carta in 1215, enfranchisement evolved from scant to significant importance.<sup>45</sup> Internecine brawls over governmental authority prompted British citizens to view voting as a civic task to be performed only by those persons who had a noticeably personal stake in the outcomes of public decision-making. British lawmakers granted shares of political involvement to males based on perceptions of ability and achievement measured by amounts of land owned and years of age lived. England's representative bodies, the Witan (the great king's councils first organized in the 10<sup>th</sup> century) and Parliament (which first met legally in 1236), retained the same basic criteria for participation: only "wise men," or experienced men who held important socioeconomic positions, would be summoned to attend.<sup>46</sup> In 1430, members of Parliament (M.P.s) established the vital qualification for enfranchisement. To be an elector or M.P., a man had to be a freeholder (i.e. a landowner holding permanent and absolute tenure of property with the freedom to dispose of it at will) possessing real estate assessed at least 40 shillings of value for

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trans. Christopher Woodall, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 7; and W. Jeffrey Tatum, "Roman Democracy?" in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought*, Ryan K. Balot, ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 217.

<sup>45</sup> James C. Holt, ed., *Magna Carta and the Idea of Liberty* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1972).

<sup>46</sup> See John Maddicott, "Parliament of England to 1307: Origins and Beginnings to 1215," in *A Short History of Parliament*, Clyve Jones, ed., (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2009), 3-9 and Levi Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871-978* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 27-44.

the annual land tax.<sup>47</sup> Thereafter, English political theory claimed property ownership reflected the permanent stake in society that ensured the independent judgment required of a virtuous voter. The 40-shilling freehold remained the basic franchise standard until abolished by the Reform Act of 1832.

The repeated use of the word “men” in English political documents presumed the attainment of adulthood as a condition of enfranchisement. For example, the Magna Carta guaranteed critical civil rights to all free men of “full age” without stating what chronological year marked civic majority. Confusion over the political definition of “adult” grew in the early modern era as the practice of electing M.P.s gradually replaced the tradition of selecting “wise men” to serve. Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century, competitive partisan politics gradually replaced the casual, patron-driven poll of yore.<sup>48</sup> Questions regarding franchise credentials increasingly arose when people were asked to vote for, rather than assent to, parliamentary candidates. When youths got involved, especially 40-shilling freeholders, the issue

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<sup>47</sup> *8 Henry VI. c. 7* (1430). Read the citation as “the 8th year of King Henry VI’s reign, statute issue no. 7.” See also William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 1:172-173. Two years later, another statute mandated that a freeholder must live within his declared county of election. *10 Henry VI. c. 2* (1432). At the time of the 40-shilling proclamation, Henry was only eight years old. See Ralph Griffiths, *The Reign of Henry VI: The Exercise of Royal Authority, 1422-1461* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981). The 40-shilling requirement limited suffrage to less than 20% of England’s adult male population. But historian Derek Hirst finds that many local officials creatively quantified 40 shillings to help men gain franchise; e.g. they might include annuities, rent charges, mortgage payments, ecclesiastical benefits, and appointments in government service as part of the accounting of value. Moreover, Hirst notes that the inflation of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries stimulated by the turn from feudalism to capitalism made the 40-shilling requirement “virtually meaningless” because increased land values multiplied the number of potential voters. See Derek Hirst, *The Representation of the People?: Voters and Voting in England under the Early Stuarts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>48</sup> See Mark A. Kishlansky, *Parliamentary Selection: Social and Political Choice in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); and John A. Phillips, *Electoral Behavior in Unreformed England: Plumpers, Splitters, and Straights* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).

of qualifications became more problematic. Sculpting the temporal bounds of youth suffrage could determine the outcome of elections, particularly since scholars believe that 17<sup>th</sup>-century England hosted a young population.<sup>49</sup>

In the years after the Restoration and through the Glorious Revolution, local uncertainty over franchise parameters, including age restrictions, incited arguments regarding voter eligibility. British laws provided cities, boroughs, counties, and shires the prerogative to determine the standards for voter eligibility. Those units developed a mish-mash of idiosyncratic franchise criteria that yielded an inconsistent and confusing muddle of voting conditions that allowed adolescents political inroads.<sup>50</sup> Some community traditions, for example, permitted enfranchisement to those males who knew how to identify a counterfeit penny, count money, measure cloth, or conduct business properly.<sup>51</sup> During the 1680s and 1690s, public concern over age eligibility escalated as the number of young males

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<sup>49</sup> Jeffrey L. Singman believes that the demographic expansion of England “meant that a large part of the population at any time were young people; it has been estimated that roughly a third were under the age of 15, and half under age 25.” Jeffrey L. Singman, *Daily Life in Elizabethan England* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 9.

<sup>50</sup> See John Hostettler and Brian P. Block, *Voting in Britain: A History of the Parliamentary Franchise* (Chichester, England: Barry Rose, 2001).

<sup>51</sup> Henry of Bracton, *Henry of Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England*, trans. by Samuel E. Thorne, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), 2:250. Bracton claimed that bodily appearance “as where he is bearded, great in stature or the like” presumed “sufficient proof of age.” If visual appearance left a question of age, the petitioner’s age could be “proved” by either an examination of “twelve lawful men,” testimony of fact by kinsmen, or by an affirmative oath swearing “that he has reached at least his twenty-first year or more.” Bracton concludes, “When the justices have judged him of full age, he will be taken of full age, as against all; there must be no further argument against their judgment.” *Ibid*, 4:320. The writings of a 12-century jurist, Ranulf de Glanville, influenced Bracton. Glanville clarified, “If there is any doubt whether heirs are of full age or minors, then it is clear that the lords [of the manor] shall have both heir and inheritance in wardship until full age is reasonably proved by the oath of lawful men of the neighbourhood.” Ranulf de Glanville, *The Treatise on the Law and Customs of the Realm of England*, trans. and ed. G.D.G. Hall, (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965), 83.

participating in politics and standing for election swelled. In more than a few cases, teen-aged males won seats in Parliament.<sup>52</sup> Many adults complained that minors should not be allowed to legislate on matters to which they were not themselves liable. Other Englishmen feared corrupt operators and scheming fathers would cajole the young political neophytes into making imprudent, maybe even dangerous, decisions that served partisan interests more than the public good.<sup>53</sup> William Blackstone chastised the immature politicians for their "imbecility of judgment."<sup>54</sup>

Concerns about irrationality and rambunctiousness within the electorate spurred Parliament to eradicate the potential for youth disruptions to political order. In 1696, it passed an omnibus bill to reform elections. Part VII of the act barred all males below twenty-one years of age from voting for members of Parliament or serving in Parliament.<sup>55</sup> Blackstone admitted the choice of twenty-one to be the suffrage age was "merely arbitrary."<sup>56</sup> But he declared Parliament's

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<sup>52</sup> Holly Brewer reports, "Between 1660 and 1690 alone, forty-three boys under age twenty-one gained seats in the [House of] Commons." Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law, and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority*, (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 26; see also, 40-41.

<sup>53</sup> Kishlansky, 151, 155, and 188. Brewer adds, "In English society from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, children of high status often held positions of political and legal power." Brewer, *By Birth or Consent*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 1:462.

<sup>55</sup> "William III, 1695-6: An Act for the further regulating Elections of Members to serve in Parliament and for the preventing irregular Proceedings of Sheriffs and other Officers in the electing and returning such Members," in *Statutes of the Realm, Volume 7: 1695-1701*, ed. John Raithby, [Chapter XXV, Rot. Parl. 7 & 8, Gul. III, p. 5. n. 11.], <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=46832> (accessed 1 July 2014). This law has also been cited as *7 & 8 William III. c. 25 (1696)*. William III's edicts are dated separately by the years he ruled after Queen Mary's death. The years he governed with Mary are labeled *Wm. & Mary*.

<sup>56</sup> Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 1:464.

action entirely necessary “to prevent the mischiefs that might arise, by placing extensive [governmental] authority in hands that are either incapable, or else improper, to manage it.”<sup>57</sup> To shield the state from the potentiality of damage inflicted by unruly adolescents, M.P.s closed the local loopholes that had allowed adolescents electoral participation by declaring a national voting age.

The popular explanation why 21 became the year of electoral majority says it emerged from a tradition of concluding the training for knighthood at that age. However, knighthood was an age-fuzzy apprenticeship. The general age range for reaching full knighthood stretched between the mid-teens and mid-twenties, depending upon when his riding and martial skills were perfected and tried in battle.<sup>58</sup> Parliament’s promulgation of 21 as the national electoral age squared more with the scheme of majority-age laws than the vocational education of knighthood. The establishment of a fixed suffrage age corresponded with other state efforts, begun in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, to assimilate young males into adulthood and incorporate them into the citizen body within an age-graded legal structure. M.P.s did not conjure an age at random to proclaim the attainment of suffrage; they consciously borrowed a pre-existing age from two property rights gained only upon reaching twenty-one: to inherit (important in a culture that practiced primogeniture) and to dispossess (which implied a right to action: to obtain, keep,

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 162

<sup>58</sup> See Richard Barber, *The Knight and Chivalry* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1970), Peter Coss, *The Knight in Medieval England, 1000-1400* (Gloucestershire, England: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1993); and Martin Windrow, *The Soldier Through the Ages: The Medieval Knight* (London: Franklin Watts, 1985).



use, or discard property based on individual discretion).<sup>59</sup> By welding enfranchisement to the age of inheritance and the dispossession of property, Parliament upheld the tradition of land-based, stakeholder political rights. Therefore, the setting of twenty-one as the nationwide age to vote and hold office was not as subjective as commonly believed.

Parliament's establishment of an official voting age triggered a significant change in the nature of suffrage. Because of the reform bill, age replaced property as the primary basis for election. After 1696, arguments about the enfranchisement credentials for teen-aged, 40-shilling freeholders ceased: no matter how much property an adolescent held, he could not vote or hold office until reaching age 21. For adolescent lads, however, the 1696 decree closed paths for electoral opportunity and political agency that custom had once abided. The precision of 21 took from local officials the authority to interpret the electoral meaning of "adult," but, concurrently, the law provided them the means to thwart claims to suffrage by underage constituents. Hence, the 21-vote law accomplished what Parliament intended: to harden the traditional practices and beliefs supporting adultocracy.

In America, the colonies replicated the English pattern of gradual youth marginalization through suffrage codification. According to historian Cortland F. Bishop, the initial colonial franchise laws were "neither numerous nor well

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<sup>59</sup> Holly Brewer states that primogeniture was a key source of political power. Through primogeniture, "Power could thus be granted to the very young. . . .Patriarchalism thus did not justify the power of older people, but justified inherited authority. A son who was young could, and often did, inherit a kingdom with the power to rule over many older subjects." Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent*, 24.

defined.”<sup>60</sup> Most colonies simply enfranchised “freemen” or “freeholders” with little definitiveness in regard to precise qualifications.<sup>61</sup> For young males, the imprecision of electoral codes and the fluidity of colonization opened avenues to political involvement. Well-known, well-connected, or well-born adolescents sometimes cast ballots, competed for local offices, and won elections.<sup>62</sup> In the very earliest years of settlement, when elections were occasional and irregular, colonial governments allowed males as young as 16 and 17 to vote. America’s first representative assembly, Virginia’s House of Burgesses, initially allowed 17-year-olds who paid poll taxes to become legislators. Virginia and Plymouth each taxed 16-year-olds in the early 1620s to pay for the salaries of public officials and fund the maintenance of government. Historian Marchette Chute posits that “since this tax was imposed on all males over sixteen it seems probable that all of them were voters.”<sup>63</sup>

Colonial adolescents did not inhabit a world as socioeconomically caste as

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<sup>60</sup> Cortland F. Bishop, *History of Elections in the American Colonies* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968; reprint of 1893 edition), 46.

<sup>61</sup> For example, some colonies, like Massachusetts and Rhode Island, adopted the 40-shilling standard; others, such as Virginia and North Carolina, restricted voting and office-holding to those men who owned a certain amount of acreage. Christopher Collier concludes, “Property restrictions cut down the potential electorate somewhat, but for the most part, the property requirement had become nominal and was often ignored, so that it did not constitute a bar to significant numbers of would-be voters.” Christopher Collier, “The American People as Christian White Men of Property: Suffrage and Elections in Colonial and Early National America,” in *Voting and the Spirit of American Democracy: Essays on the History of Voting and Voting Rights in America*, Donald W. Rogers, ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 24-25.

<sup>62</sup> See Robert J. Dinkin, *Voting in Provincial America: A Study of Elections in the Thirteen Colonies, 1689-1776* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 30-31.

<sup>63</sup> Marchette Chute, *The First Liberty: A History of the Right to Vote in America, 1619-1850* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1969), 17. See also, pp. 42, 44, and 139.

that in Europe, and westward expansion provided them wide opportunities to strike out on their own and claim independence. Scholars Oscar and Mary F. Handlin maintain that many young males parlayed their abilities into official or informal roles of communal influence.<sup>64</sup> A colonial atmosphere favoring aptitude allowed ambitious and talented youths to leverage their endowments individually to voice opinions and to express consent periodically in group situations, such as militia elections.<sup>65</sup> In addition, informal politicking customs (including a reliance on personal testimony and communal knowledge to determine franchise ages) allowed ambitious adolescents assorted entry points into the multi-layered colonial political structure. The young population of America provided some pull for youth; for instance, Robert E. Brown's study of colonial Massachusetts found that "more than 60 per cent of the people were minors" and "25 per cent of the polls (males over sixteen) were under twenty-one."<sup>66</sup>

Demographic heft, however, did not garner for youth power equal to that of adults. Political participation by young colonists appears inconsistent and did not, like in England, ever seriously threaten to disorder colonial governance. Assertive adolescents may have nudged and pushed, but, clearly, adults held the command to

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<sup>64</sup> Oscar Handlin and Mary F. Handlin, *Facing Life: Youth and the Family in American History* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 26-66.

<sup>65</sup> Due to the threats posed by Native Americans and other European powers to England's land claims, American colonies mandated all males between ages sixteen/seventeen and sixty to enlist for militia duty. Rules for officer elections varied by colony and individual unit, but, in general, most militias permitted all members a share in the choice of leaders. See Albert Edward McKinley, *The Suffrage Franchise in the Thirteen English Colonies in America* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1969; reprint of 1905 edition), 33, 201, 204, 218, 365-366, 400, 425-426, and 438.

<sup>66</sup> Robert E. Brown, *Middle-Class Democracy and the Revolution in Massachusetts, 1691-1780* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968; reprint of 1955 edition), 52 and 44.

decide political courses of action. Historian Holly Brewer finds that a moderate number of Virginia adolescents served in the House of Burgesses. Though each of them “fit the picture of teenage males elected to Parliament during the seventeenth century: significant wealth, high status, powerful patron, previous membership of father, often early inheritance,” Brewer finds few of the young assemblymen had any real legislative clout.<sup>67</sup>

When lawmakers sensed that youths might threaten the autocratic status quo, colonial assemblies responded by codifying enfranchisement ages. The 1629 charter for Massachusetts Bay, for instance, empowered “the Freemen of the Company” to elect governing officials “from tyme to tyme” without specifying a suffrage age.<sup>68</sup> In 1631, the General Court legislated that “no man shall be admitted to the freedom of this body politic” who was not a full church member, but, again, it did not set an age floor for “man.”<sup>69</sup> The 1641 Massachusetts Body of Liberties provided that 21-year-old freemen could give “votes, verdicts, and sentence in civil courts” but did not specifically provide for their inclusion at the colonial assembly.<sup>70</sup> In 1646, a group of prosperous merchants who attended worship but were not members of a church petitioned for suffrage rights. The merchants argued

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<sup>67</sup> See Brewer, *By Birth or Consent*, 28.

<sup>68</sup> Francis Newton Thorpe, ed., *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the States, Territories, and Colonies Now or Heretofore Forming the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1909), vol. 3, p. 1852.

<sup>69</sup> Donald Lutz, ed., *Documents of Political Foundation Written by Colonial Americans: From Covenant to Constitution* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1986), 81.

<sup>70</sup> Albert Edward McKinley, *The Suffrage Franchise in the Thirteen English Colonies in America* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1969; reprint of 1905 edition), 310.

they deserved a vote because they had served in Indian wars, paid taxes, and led godly lives. The General Court denied their petition, but Marchette Chute notes it “had a particular attraction to the young” who sympathized with the claim to an earned electoral stake.<sup>71</sup> The grumblings of un-franchised adolescents caused the General Court in 1647 to proclaim twenty-four as the voting age.<sup>72</sup> Twenty-four remained the age standard in Massachusetts until 1692, when William and Mary issued the colony a new charter that lowered it to 21.<sup>73</sup>

Like Massachusetts, the other colonies eventually moved from de facto to de jure electoral ages of majority.<sup>74</sup> In the process, each colony entrenched the power of adults by codifying specific chronological years for voting and office-holding. Parliament’s 1696 act declaring twenty-one as the national age of enfranchisement seems to have instigated colonial actions. Prior to 1696, just three colonies had self-declared twenty-one as the official voting age: Connecticut (1656), Pennsylvania (1682), and New Hampshire (1682), and only Pennsylvania had proclaimed it as part of a founding charter or frame of government. After 1696, each colony codified 21 as the franchise age. Four colonies had twenty-one imposed upon them as part of William & Mary’s re-chartering process: Massachusetts (1692), Carolina (1696),

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<sup>71</sup> Chute, 71.

<sup>72</sup> McKinley, 374-375. In 1680, New Hampshire also set 21 as the voting age. McKinley notes that the 24-vote clause in New Hampshire “had a widely different application” than in Massachusetts: “In Massachusetts it simply applied to the small number of non-church-members who might be admitted to the franchise; in New Hampshire it was universally applicable.” Ibid, 379.

<sup>73</sup> Historian Robert Dinkin states, “If each of the colonies did not always establish a minimum age in its election laws, it is probably that such a restriction was still customary.” Dinkin, *Voting in Provincial America*, 354.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 30.

Virginia (1699), and New York (1699). The other colonies adopted twenty-one on their own: North and South Carolina (1715), Rhode Island (1723), Delaware (1734), and Georgia (1754). Maryland and New Jersey never promulgated an age of electoral majority prior to America's break from England, but historian Albert Edward McKinley asserts that "there is no doubt" that twenty-one "was enforced in those colonies."<sup>75</sup>

Like in England, adolescent males in America increasingly found themselves politically marginalized as adult lawmakers formalized electoral qualifications. That process continued when the colonies transitioned to states upon America's independence. The military, social, and intellectual upheavals of the Revolution inspired young people, especially those males aiding the Patriot cause, to stake practical and ideological claims to suffrage. States received a smattering of proposals to extend franchise privileges to minors serving in the armed forces. Only Pennsylvania allowed adolescent soldiers to vote in general elections, but just once (in spring 1776) before reverting back to the 21-vote tradition upon the writing of a new state constitution in fall 1776.<sup>76</sup> And every state required delegates to constitutional conventions to be at least twenty-one.

The Revolution caused Americans rethink traditional limits on political participation, but it did not prompt a radical redefinition of suffrage. Some scholars

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 474.

<sup>76</sup> See Thorpe, *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the States, Territories, and Colonies Now or Heretofore Forming the United States of America*. 5:3084, 3096, and 3108.

regard the Revolution as fomenting a republican ideology that energized disfranchised social groups to pursue the benefits of citizenship. They argue that the egalitarian, contractual, and consent-based philosophy that animated America's patriots became a dominant force behind the clamor for including more people into the political nation.<sup>77</sup> During the 1770s and 1780s, the transition of the American population from subjects to citizens required that persons contributing to the well-being of the country should have some say in government. In some states, that sentiment provided the moral justification to enfranchise women and free blacks.<sup>78</sup> Driven by the relationship between taxation and representation, other states reduced property qualifications or separated voting requirements from owning property to paying taxes, which allowed poor men in those places a voice in political decision-making.<sup>79</sup>

For minors, the transformative power of the Revolution and republicanism was far weaker: adults remained unshakably in control as Americans seized rule from the British and formed the federal republic. Suffrage rights for youth were not on the Patriot political agenda, and no prominent American of the founding era

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<sup>77</sup> Over an overview of the "republican synthesis" in American historiography, see Daniel T. Rogers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *Journal of American History* 79, no. 1 (June 1992): 11-38.

<sup>78</sup> During the Confederation era, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and Massachusetts did not explicitly ban free blacks from voting. North Carolina, Maryland, Kentucky, and Tennessee allowed propertied free blacks to vote and hold certain legal protections, such as a right to a jury trial. New Jersey's constitution permitted both blacks and women to vote until 1807, when the state legislature specified suffrage rights for white males who could be taxed. See Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage: From Property to Democracy, 1760-1860* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960).

<sup>79</sup> See Marc W. Kruman, *Between Authority and Liberty: State Constitution Making in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

publicly challenged the legal or traditional supremacy of adultocracy. America's founders fully supported republican forms of government, but they could not justify allowing minors to vote or hold office. To validate the turn from monarchical authority, Americans employed an age-based paradigm: since adults possessed the capacity to reason, born from the wisdom gained from experience, a government based on the consent of the governed was justified. To maintain the viability of the claim, America's Founding Fathers perpetuated the British tradition of defining electoral consent as an entitlement of age rather than ability. They accomplished that by writing constitutions that specified *when* enfranchisement would be granted to constituents and ignoring *how* consent could be assessed among the citizenry. American lawmakers justified the denial of youth enfranchisement and the repeal of suffrage extended to women and free blacks by raising the specter of an unwise and unrestrained democratic multitude threatening civil order. As educator Thomas Cooper exclaimed, "Republicanism is good, but the 'rights of boys and girls' are the offspring of Democracy gone mad."<sup>80</sup>

The traditional skepticism about the mental and emotional fitness of young people served as the main rationale for barring youth suffrage. The customary view of adolescence as a time of tumult compelled adults to not enfranchise adolescents, despite youth contributions to securing nationhood and the egalitarian spirit of republican ideology. In a 1776 letter to a fellow member of the Massachusetts assembly, John Adams asked rhetorically, "Why set the standard at age twenty-

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<sup>80</sup> Oscar Handlin and Mary F. Handlin, *Facing Life*, 130.



one? What reason should there be for excluding a man of twenty years eleven months and twenty-seven days old, from a vote when you admit one who is twenty-one?" Adams answered himself, "The reason is, you must fix upon some period in life, when the understanding and will of men in general, is fit to be trusted by the public."<sup>81</sup> To Adams and his adult contemporaries, turning twenty-one served, in lieu of a common rite of passage, as an arbitrary but necessary marker of civic maturity signifying social recognition of full adulthood, enfranchisement, and citizenship. Despite the turn in home rule established by Adams and other founders, American voting age laws replicated the autocratic boundaries of authority defined by British custom. Every state constitution from 1776 through 1943 declared twenty-one as the electoral age of majority.

The basic thesis for age-delaying enfranchisement emphasized that adults would not grant adolescents suffrage until they gained the cognitive capacities necessary for balancing the grown-up demands of public and private life. The laws of Athens, Rome, England, and America each incorporated Aristotle's view that the development of self-determination constituted the hallmark of maturity by constructing an age-graduated process for apportioning decision-making sanction. By the time the Florida Supreme Court heard Bernard Riley's case in 1930, he had attained the traditional social attributes normally associated with adulthood: a married, self-sufficient, taxpaying householder. In a vital political aspect – his age

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<sup>81</sup> John Adams to James Sullivan, 26 May 1776, in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, Charles Francis Adams, ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1856), 9:377.

– he remained a child. Riley’s case evidenced that the typical evaluation of adolescent requests for prerogatives, whether arbitrated by judges, legislators, or parents, focused narrowly on the chronological age of the petitioner rather than the content of character or the context of condition. For adolescents, the command to act one’s age became a doubled-edged sword requiring them to balance comporting to adult-defined behavioral standards while harnessing their natural impulses for individual autonomy. Riley’s plea did not ask to overturn statutory orthodoxy; it simply asked for a share of electoral self-governance equitable to his own personal sovereignty. The aged judges of the Florida Supreme Court refused to consider Riley’s life circumstances and instead focused on the legal precedent of denying all minors, self-sufficient or not, the adult privilege of suffrage.

As Riley learned, adolescents suffered the disabilities of age-based chauvinism because of a social consensus stereotyping them as reckless, insolent, and unruly no matter how independent or self-reliant. The term “adolescence” became code for a pernicious form of prejudice that anchored denials of opportunity to a chronological bigotry that cut across racial, sexual, and economic disfranchisements. Juveniles could engage in civic life, but they were not entrusted with civil authority. Conceptions of adolescents as congenitally inferior creatures informed the contrivance of adultocracy to harness their dynamism. Adults feared that the innate defiance of adolescents would morph into fanaticism and, possibly, anarchy if not checked. Adultocracy granted grown-ups absolute power and special privileges because they appeared, as Aristotle averred, *naturally* possessed with the

equanimity to govern sensibly and the experience to rule wisely.

The adult consensus that only persons of majority age possessed the cache of wisdom and experience to vote and hold office smacked of autocracy. Many adolescents had similar, if not better, cognitive abilities than adults but were unfranchised because of age-based chauvinism. Adults considered young people incompetent for having the developmental imperfections that, as Aristotle observed, were “natural” to adolescence. Teen-aged persons, especially those emancipated like Bernard Riley, became politically anomalous: they possessed the requisite personal skills to live independently but were denied the electoral license to shape the political life of the nation they inhabited. The great risk of democracy is that the state trusts individual judgement to make the electoral and governmental decisions necessary for its preservation. Because adults simply did not trust supposedly stressed-out and rebellious adolescents to carry out democratic tasks maturely, they consciously constructed a tyranny of the legal majority that favored age over ability. American adolescents vowed that if given a genuine opportunity by adult authorities to prove their mettle, they would secure their right to vote. That chance came during World War II.

CHAPTER III  
WAR, YOUTH, AND SUFFRAGE, 1940-1945

This is no easy war. It means the continuation of democracy or the end of it, so it is a pretty serious war for us. We have sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers abroad, and while they are fighting for democracy abroad it is just as important for us to preserve democracy at home. And the most important part of that is the right to vote.

John J. Bennett, New York State Attorney General<sup>82</sup>

D-Day, 6 June 1944, began badly for Allied invasion forces. German defenders along the ridgelines of the coasts of Normandy, France, poured mortar shells and machine-gun fire into enemy platoons stuck on the beach. Allied strategists planned to spread the assault over five beaches, each given special code names. The Germans put up the toughest resistance on Omaha beach, where Allied invaders suffered an 80% casualty rate, the highest of the five attack points.<sup>83</sup> The recollections of the surviving paratroopers, foot soldiers, and marines starkly describe the harrowing experiences of the day's combat. Bernard Friedenber, a

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<sup>82</sup> *New York Times*, 8 October 1942, 20.

<sup>83</sup> The total number of D-Day casualties remains controversial, but the fatal devastation at Omaha Beach is undeniable. As Steven Zaloga writes, "casualties on Omaha Beach were comparable to total Allied casualties on the other four beaches *combined*." Steven Zaloga, *The Devil's Garden: Rommel's Desperate Defense of Omaha Beach on D-Day* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2013), 12.

medic assigned to the 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment's Medical Detachment, remembered vividly a young soldier at Omama with a gaping chest wound. Friedenberg quickly diagnosed that only constant pressure on the wound could stave off the GI's death. As his hands worked to control the bleeding, he heard the desperate cries of "Medic!" from other troops who needed his immediate attention. Friedenberg now faced an awful quandary. Should he stay with the patient, who was most likely to die regardless, or leave him to save other lives? At that moment, Friedenberg understood the grave consequences of his battlefield assessments. "Who should live and who should die," he wrote, "is not a decision a twenty one year old boy should have to make. It is a decision only God should make but where was God?"<sup>84</sup> Friedenberg shot the GI full of morphine to ease his pain and moved on to treat another injured soldier.

Wartime America asked young men like Sergeant Friedenberg to make such tough, life-changing choices. American youths threw themselves into the work of war. On front lines and factory floors, they labored with conviction and devotion. Yet the government that willingly sent 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds into battle willfully refused to enfranchise them. Advocates of youth suffrage exposed the hypocrisy of employing adolescents to defend democracy while denying them electoral rights. They pushed the issue into the national political arena by framing

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<sup>84</sup> John C. McManus, *The Dead and Those About to Die: D-Day: The Big Red One at Omaha Beach* (New York: Penguin Group, 2014): 260. Friedenberg's choice to abandon his wounded patient left him eternally remorseful: "For more than fifty years I have wondered if I made the right decision and I know I shall never stop feeling guilty." Ibid. The United States Army awarded Friedenberg a Silver Star for his valorous service on D-Day; in addition, he earned two Purple Hearts, two Bronze Stars, and another Silver Star.

it as one of reward. Youths deserved enfranchisement because of their meritorious service. State and federal lawmakers put forward bills to reduce legal suffrage ages from twenty-one to nineteen or eighteen. Except for Georgia, wartime governments rejected those proposals.

Two interconnected factors influenced wartime debates regarding voting ages: legal structures parceling opportunities to proffer consent by age and social conceptions defining adolescents as immature and recalcitrant. The recent (ca. 1900) social subscription to a liminal (i.e. prolonged) adolescence fused onto the pre-existing structure of gradated majority ages. Together, beliefs in liminality and the piecemealing of full legal standing had bolstered the abiding consensus that teenage persons needed some time to develop the temperament and judgment necessary to execute the grown-up tasks of civic life. An advocate for establishing eighteen as the national voting age identified the conundrum of youth: “These young people, who certainly could be trusted to exercise the citizen’s prerogative to vote, are still chained to our elders’ concept of ‘legal age.’”<sup>85</sup> Supporters of the 18-vote argued that the circumstances of war had upset those convictions by plunging adolescents into adult situations. In an April 1943 poll, George Gallup’s American Institute of Public Opinion revealed that many Americans sympathized with the plight of the unfranchised underage soldier. A Gallup interviewer summarized, “The majority feel that since the Army can use the judgment of this age group to good advantage,

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<sup>85</sup> “Injustice to Youth Seen,” letter to editor, *New York Times*, 16 January 1943, 12.

there seems no good reason why the same judgment would not work in politics.”<sup>86</sup> Opponents conceded that the stellar war service of youth appeared to make them deserving of suffrage. But to enfranchise all 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds because of the patriotic actions of a few gallant youth obfuscated the longstanding recognition of teenage persons as “immature and unstable as they stand in the swirl of adolescence.”<sup>87</sup>

Several obstacles blocked revising voting ages during World War II. Some lawmakers thought adolescents should be enfranchised as recompense for duties performed, but many, including President Franklin Roosevelt, did not reckon youth suffrage a political priority in the midst of war. Most members of Congress, particularly conservatives, believed federal legislation to set a national voting age in American elections violated the states’ constitutional right to determine the qualifications of electors. Many policymakers heartily acknowledged the vital contributions of young people to the war effort, but, like their adult constituents, they did not readily accept adolescents as capable voters. Though government officials relied on young combatants to make mature decisions on the battlefield, they distrusted adolescent citizens to choose sensibly at the ballot box. Nor did young people appear all that interested in obtaining suffrage. When asked, most individual teenagers agreed with the reasoning that a person old enough to fight for democracy was old enough to be afforded the full franchise of democratic

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<sup>86</sup> *Washington Post*, 9 April 1943, 11.

<sup>87</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, 9 May 1943, 7A.

citizenship. Yet, adolescents did not collectively mobilize or campaign on behalf of their own enfranchisement. As a result, neither superb war service nor stirring democratic appeals yielded voting rights for American youth.

Fighting World War II fostered a high degree of social unity among Americans. The clarity of the battle between democratic good v. totalitarian evil inspired them to toil tirelessly and enthusiastically for victory. Like other social groups, America's youth rallied to help win the war. Enthused by the spirit of collective purpose, teen-aged Americans joined the "Arsenal of Democracy" that churned out enough tanks, planes, ships, and armaments to overwhelm the Axis. Thousands of other adolescents, particularly males, enlisted in the armed forces. The labors and sacrifices of young people, similar to other social groups, helped to vanquish fascism and established democratic societies in Europe and Asia.

Young Americans accepted the national consensus that World War II was being fought to defend the right of all persons to have self-determination and to live in security. Even left-wing youth groups that had criticized the war as a needless conflict to enrich western capitalists ardently supported the fight against fascism after Pearl Harbor. One leader of the Youth Communist League declared, "Our objective was and is: every YCL member a *Production Commando*."<sup>88</sup> The self-evident need for youth to serve and the clarity of the cause that America fought for

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<sup>88</sup> Frank Cestare, "A National YCL Conference," *Weekly Review*, 12 January 1943, 7. The Young Communist League dissolved in October 1943 and was replaced by American Youth for Democracy. *New York Times*, 18 October 1943, 17.



inspired adolescents to accept the grown-up obligations of warfare. As one lad declared,

I, as an individual, will do my utmost to help in national defense, and will do all in my power to protect my country from any country who tries to destroy democracy. I will be ready at any time to be called upon for national defense, if it is for the army or in my community or in a factory. I will do all I can to express to other people my thoughts on what a free country means to me. In other words, I love to be an American, and I want to stay that way.<sup>89</sup>

Factors such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, and religion differentiated the war experiences of youth. But, in the context of war service, all adolescents yearned to be, or be seen as, adults; i.e. persons capable of determining their own fates or courses of action without compulsion. Adolescents saw World War II as an opportunity to overcome age-based prejudice through their achievements. Historian James Marten posits that warfare has usually allowed young people to escape “prewar restraints on their behavior and limits on their imaginations.”<sup>90</sup> Youth in wartime America hoped to accelerate their advancement into adulthood by showcasing their skills and aptitudes. They believed adults would accept them as first-class citizens by exhibiting their willingness to sacrifice, soldier, and sweat for the Allied cause. Many young people, like Bernard Friedenber, disproved the stereotypes of youth irresponsibility through their splendid service. Many

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<sup>89</sup> “The Attitude of Youth Toward National Defense,” *School and Society*, 16 August 1941, 100.

<sup>90</sup> James Marten, *The Children’s Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998), 103.

adolescents even chose to withdraw from school, knowing full well the long-term ramifications of an incomplete education, to secure the esteem of “mister,” “Mrs.,” or “sergeant” rather than remain classified as a “kid” or a “teenager.”<sup>91</sup>

Adult authorities publicly and repeatedly deemed young citizens a necessary part of the fight. A pre-war report authored by the National Youth Administration predicted: “That the nation needs the loyalty and cooperation of its youth, now and in the days to come, is not to be questioned.”<sup>92</sup> President Roosevelt, in a speech before the International Students Association, declared that the Allied cause was “the cause of youth itself . . . youth must fight the battles and bear the responsibilities of the peace to follow.”<sup>93</sup> Adults encouraged Washington officials to mobilize youth manpower. A March 1942 poll conducted by George Gallup’s American Institute of Public Opinions revealed that 82% of respondents agreed that “all men and women over 18 who are not already in military service” should be “required to register with the government for some kind of civilian defense or war work.”<sup>94</sup> And adults lavishly praised youth for superlative service. In a 1944 editorial, the *Chicago Tribune* lauded those “tens of thousands of boys whose ordinary prospect in peace times would have been limited by the theory of juvenile

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<sup>91</sup> Grace Palladino finds that over the course of World War II the term “teenager” became part of the common vernacular describing adolescents, usually in a pejorative manner. See Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History*, (New York: Basic Books, 1996).

<sup>92</sup> “The Attitude of Youth Toward National Defense,” 100.

<sup>93</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 September 1942, 1.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 4 September 1942, 11. For 16- and 17-year-olds still in school and working part-time, the War Production Board and armed forces agreed to a standard set by the War Manpower Commission, U.S. Office of Education, and Children’s Bureau of the Labor Department to limit them to a 48-hour maximum work-and-school week. *Ibid*, 2 April 1944, 15A.

delinquency, the teen-age tradition, who are now out with the army, navy, and coast guard, in combat or in training for combat, doing a man's job and probably with more than the ordinary adult's vigor, resiliency, and instinctive courage."<sup>95</sup>

Such declarations clarify adult appreciation of youth, but scholars disagree over the intentions of adults to draw young people into the war effort. Robert William Kirk contends that adults encouraged them to participate for material (to collect needed war supplies) and personal (to develop character) reasons.<sup>96</sup> William M. Tuttle, Jr. holds that the involvement of youth had mainly a political motive (to embrace democratic values).<sup>97</sup> Whatever their aim, many adults believed that united war service might rekindle a sense of intergenerational comity that had been lost during the Great Depression. An Army recruitment poster targeted toward youth emphasized, "This fight is for your country. You must make sure it's *your victory too!*"<sup>98</sup>

Adults, however, kept youth from full immersion into the war because of the age prejudice inherent to the storm-stress model of adolescence. The cultural understanding of adolescence as a naturally turbulent period framed teenagers as a discrete social group mentally and emotionally ill-equipped to handle the mature tasks of grown-up life. Historian Anthony M. Platt shows how G. Stanley Hall's

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<sup>95</sup> "New Youth on the Horizon," editorial, *Chicago Tribune*, 8 January 1944, 12.

<sup>96</sup> Robert William Kirk, *Earning Their Stripes: The Mobilization of American Children in the Second World War* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

<sup>97</sup> William M. Tuttle, Jr. *"Daddy's Gone to War": The Second World War in the Lives of America's Children* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>98</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 October 1942, 2. Italics in original source.

identification of adolescence as a “problem” spurred state intrusion into the private sphere to “save” youths from their inherent deviancy.<sup>99</sup> Over the first four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, adults utilized Hall’s prescription for a prolonged adolescence to intensify public control over young people. Authorities designed juvenile courts, compulsory education laws, and prohibitions on child labor to protect the best interests of minors and assist their transition to adult status but, in the process, they institutionalized chronological segregation. Sociologist David Bakan contends that such enactments imparted a modern calibration of ages that divided adolescence and adulthood at the high-school years, particularly eighteen – the customary year of graduation.<sup>100</sup>

To avoid carping about the science of adolescent development, government administrators utilized the age gradations of secondary school as the rubric for the dividing and sub-dividing of civic assignments. For instance, the War Labor Board allowed children as young as fourteen to obtain work permits, but only if they had completed the eighth grade, passed a physical examination, and received permission from their parents.<sup>101</sup> Influenced by the custom of a prolonged adolescence but tempted by the weighty burdens of war to mobilize all youth, civilian and military authorities disagreed over when they would allow young

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<sup>99</sup> Anthony M. Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

<sup>100</sup> David Bakan, “Adolescence in America: From Idea to Social Fact,” in *Adolescence: Contemporary Studies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Alvin E. Winder, (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1974), 5-20.

<sup>101</sup> *Washington Post*, 21 November 1943, L1.

people to serve autonomously (i.e. without the need for parental consent) as workers and soldiers. After some debate, federal officials chose sixteen as the minimum age of employment and eighteen as the age floor for conscription.

Those decisions sparked a generational quarrel over the service role of youth. Underage adolescents saw themselves as associate partners in the campaign, players who possessed talents and abilities exceptionally suited for modern warfare. Teenagers understood clearly how their efforts, irrespective of their youthful age and inexperience, directly connected to the defense of freedom at home and around the globe. And they insisted upon having their fair share of the work load. A Census Bureau survey in April 1944 showed that 20% of males aged fourteen and fifteen and more than 25% aged sixteen and seventeen were gainfully employed. Fewer teenage girls worked, in aggregate, than boys, but the report revealed that 33% of females aged sixteen to eighteen had jobs. Moreover, 35% of all adolescents (primarily boys) between ages sixteen and eighteen had left school altogether and gone to work.<sup>102</sup> A wartime study of young males found, however, that well over half of them desired “adult” service activities and deemed their current position (usually part-time manual labor) was not “big enough” to assist the war effort meaningfully.<sup>103</sup>

Federal war planners viewed juveniles as adjunct assistants to adult labor,

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<sup>102</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Teen-Age Youth in the Wartime Labor Force,” *Monthly Labor Review* 60, no. 1 (January 1945): 6-17.

<sup>103</sup> Ronald Lippett and Alvin Zander, “A Study of Boy Attitudes Toward Participation in the War Effort,” *Journal of Social Psychology* 17, no. 2, (May 1943): 309-325.

helpers who would act as subordinates and make secondary contributions to war activities. Public authorities sought to look out for the best interests of young people, and the war effort itself, by striving to protect unsure and unqualified youths from harmful or overwhelming situations. The system for acclimating teen-aged people to war service apportioned tasks along a stepped structure of chronology-based eligibility standards, resembling closely the graduated allocation of responsibilities forged by age of majority laws. War administrators limited adolescents to roles that adults *thought* young people could handle relative to the magnitude of the task. Adult perceptions of youth capability rather than demonstrations of aptitude or interest initiated the drawing of age lines. As historian Joseph Kett asserts, “Adolescence was essentially a conception of behavior imposed on youth, rather than an empirical assessment of the way in which young people actually behaved.”<sup>104</sup>

Following the cues of Paul V. McNutt, chairman of the War Manpower Commission, civilian authorities outlined a program for youth service founded on educational age gradations.<sup>105</sup> Adults enlisted junior-high school children as “salvagers.” They mainly recycled consumer goods and collected donations of, among other things, scrap metal, fats, and money, activities usually chosen and organized by school administrators.<sup>106</sup> Besides meeting national material needs,

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<sup>104</sup> Joseph Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 243.

<sup>105</sup> *New York Times*, 29 August 1942, 13.

<sup>106</sup> “Children and Total War,” *Newsweek*, 9 March 1942, 57-58; and Catherine Mackenzie, “War Tasks for Boys and Girls,” *New York Times Magazine*, 16 January 1944, 29.

adults also encouraged participation in scrap collection, historian Robert William Kirk claims, for psychological reasons, such as “improving character through practicing diligence, enhancing patriotism, developing a sense of purpose in children in order to reach a common goal, preventing their delinquency, and lessening children’s fears and insecurity.”<sup>107</sup> The war work of junior-high youth functioned more as volunteerism, purposefully expending time and energy directed at benefitting society. They grew frustrated that their young age excluded them from assisting the war effort in an independent manner; a psychologist reported that they deeply resented “being treated like babies when there is so much vital work to be done.”<sup>108</sup> Young adolescents believed themselves to be contributing to the war effort but became impatient to experience the sense of personal triumph and feeling of patriotic amity associated with autonomous, rather than adjunctive, war service.

Authorities regarded high-school teens as homefront “reservists” available for, but not yet fully capable of, war duty. Their war work more resembled employment, or the deliberate use of labor to perform the jobs of war.<sup>109</sup> As youths grew older, the age shelters that had protected them from full immersion into the war gradually fell. And adults insisted high-schoolers put aside the high jinks of

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<sup>107</sup> Robert William Kirk, *Earning Their Stripes: The Mobilization of American Children in the Second World War* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

<sup>108</sup> Caroline B. Zachry, “The Adolescent and His Problems Today,” Sidonie Gruenberg, ed., *The Family in a World at War* (New York: Harper, 1942), 219.

<sup>109</sup> Vivian A. Zelizer avers that prewar debates about the nature of youth labor “centered over conflicting and often ambiguous cultural definitions of what constituted acceptable work for children.” Vivian A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 56.

teendom to take on the serious duties of citizenship. In a story about female war service, reporter Yolande Gwin noted that “Betty Co-ed of 1943 is not the dating, dancing, and frivolous young student as were her predecessors. . . . Her daily schedule is taken in the tempo of war rather than peace and her spare time is taken in doing her part for her country rather than for herself.”<sup>110</sup> The main task of high-school age youth was to gain the education and training fundamental to their imminent war duties. While in the process of getting ready to work or fight, they participated in homefront preparedness. Adults usually coordinated the important rear-guard activities, such as taking part in civil defense, war bond sales, Red Cross first aid, and messenger service. In less vital ventures, like forming “anti-rumor” squads, planting backyard gardens, and assisting rationing boards, teenagers were given slight supervisory agency. When working together, the roles of males and females often, but not always, differed. Boys generally carried out managerial errands or manual labor, while girls performed clerical work or served as support staff.<sup>111</sup>

The expectation of adults that secondary-school students would make significant, but supervised, contributions to the war effort did more to reinforce civil paternalism than develop youth autonomy. The notion that adolescents would benefit from adult-imposed structure, order, and discipline formed the ideological

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<sup>110</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 July 1943, 4D.

<sup>111</sup> C.M. Arthur, “What Can They Do?: High School Girls in the National Defense Program,” *School Life*, January 1942, 123; “Young America Does Its Share,” *Woman’s Home Companion*, April 1942, 14-15; “War Service Role of Students in Our High Schools,” *Education for Victory*, 15 August 1942, 5; *New York Times*, 8 October 1942, 29 and 10 October 1942, 17; and “Helping Pupils Contribute Directly to the War Effort,” *School Review*, December 1943, 573-575.



core of age relations during the war. Gladys Huntington Bevans, a nationally-syndicated home-affairs columnist, counseled her parent-readers to tamp the precocious, though patriotic, desires of their high-school aged children to rush into war service. Rather than prematurely endure the pressures of handling orders by officers or bosses, teenagers, she advised,

should have during this part of their adolescence the guidance and championship of their parents and the developing influence of home. Under the most favorable circumstances this fast maturing period that is often accompanied by bewilderment as to conduct and ideals. Teen age boys and girls often find it difficult to adjust to the world. They are not ready at 13 or 15 for the experiences and shocks of war. Rather do they need those years at home to build up their bodies and their characters to better fit them to fight for their country.<sup>112</sup>

Like Bevans, most every adult believed that anxiety-ridden juveniles needed and desired guidance in finding self-definition.<sup>113</sup> Authorities could, therefore, simultaneously exploit adolescents for their adult-like capabilities and treat them like dependent children. Historian Joseph Kett contends that one of the continuities in youth history is adolescent wavering between states of dependence and semi-independence, especially during times of national strife. He writes, “Young people at times experienced a halfway blend of freedom and restraint, with elements of freedom becoming more pronounced over time. But at other points they

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<sup>112</sup> Gladys Huntington Bevans, “New Draft Age Accents Value of Home Life,” column, *Chicago Tribune*, 17 April 1943, 19.

<sup>113</sup> See “Back to School: Educators Must Guide Youth to Right Decisions,” *Education for Victory*, 1 September 1943, 2.

were exposed to temporally alternating opportunities for independence and adult responsibility on one side and demands for submission on the other.”<sup>114</sup> Traditional dogma about the storms and stresses of adolescence mandated that adults check teen impulses for the good of society and the war effort. Restricting youth to a narrow range of adult-approved activities, however, mitigated the hopes of adolescents to leverage their war ventures to break the customary confines of chronology.

Many young people, of course, found the adult-imposed, age-based structure of mobilization conspicuously neglectful of ambition and ability. They viewed the system as poignantly un-democratic as they strove for the chance to work and fight against fascism on par with other citizens. Youths also perceived a fundamental hypocrisy in the conflicting messages authorities conveyed. Adults insisted that teenagers act maturely while helping the cause, but they treated adolescents as if they were incapable of mature behavior or deeds. Scholar Richard M. Ugland finds that juveniles grew more dismayed than delinquent over their inability to assist the war effort fully. He quotes from a 1942 report issued by the Progressive Education Association that concluded, “Youth have suffered more from the frustration of not being invited to share in solving real problems than from being overtaxed in working at them.”<sup>115</sup> Over the course of the war, Ugland concludes, adolescents

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<sup>114</sup> Joseph Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 42.

<sup>115</sup> Richard M. Ugland, “Viewpoints and Morale of Urban High School Students during World War II – Indianapolis as a Case Study,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 77, no. 2, (June 1981), 165:n.35. The PEA was a national body dedicated to propagating John Dewey’s theories on “progressive education.”

became more and more perplexed by their marginalization. As a girl from Indianapolis wrote, “We know we’ve got to do something; we know we’ve got to go out there and help. . .or we’ll go crazy but what can we do?”<sup>116</sup>

Adolescent Americans who worked and fought for democracy considered themselves worthy of political privileges. Traditional adult concerns about teen credulity, though, motivated a stunting of political involvement among adolescents. The chaos of the Great Depression pushed millions of young Americans, particularly college students, to join political advocacy groups. The American Youth Congress emerged as the unofficial spokesman for the young. It was an umbrella organization of diverse student and youth groups, including the Boy Scouts and Young Communist League, that supported liberal positions, such as the creation of federal scholarships for education, abolition of child labor, and elimination of warfare.<sup>117</sup> In 1937, the AYC became the first student group to advocate publicly for reducing voting ages to eighteen.<sup>118</sup> Though the AYC and other youth organizations condemned communism and fascism, adults thought malleable young minds might succumb to charismatic Pied Pipers of radicalism, foreign-born and homegrown.<sup>119</sup> In October 1940, Mrs. William Hastings, first vice president of the

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>117</sup> See Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America’s First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>118</sup> *Washington Post*, 20 July 1937, 15.

<sup>119</sup> Paul Mishler describes how American communists established children’s organizations, education programs, and summer camps with the aim of developing “revolutionary consciousness” in the minds of the younger generation. Paul Mishler, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

National Congress of Parents and Teachers, asserted, “Corruption of our youth by subversive propaganda is a violation of our American liberties regardless of high-sounding names of hypocritical ‘front’ organizations. Certainly we have a right to inquire about the character of our children’s education; to see that they are taught the true principles of Americanism and nothing else.”<sup>120</sup> The Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association issued a report in November 1940 summarizing the results of a nationwide investigation into high-school programs for civic preparation. The Commission concluded that, on the whole, secondary school graduates were “loyal to the ideals of democracy” and “well-informed on many political and economic questions.” It labeled the time gap between graduation and the attainment of suffrage a “distinct problem” and recommended lowering voting ages to eighteen to maintain the civic consciousness of young adults.<sup>121</sup>

Members of the NCPT and NEA and other public officials did not fear young people publically goose-stepping or subverting the republic. They did have a concern for the political thoughts and talents of youth on the eve of World War II as part of their general worry about the global state of democracy. In the context of a war proclaimed as a democratic crusade, adult concern for political socialization made ideological and practical sense. Public officials strove to cultivate among young people a sense of personal ownership in America’s democratic system. Gene

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<sup>120</sup> *New York Times*, 17 October 1940, 27.

<sup>121</sup> *Washington Post*, 10 November 1940, A8.

Tunney, former heavyweight boxing champion of the 1920s, organized the Young Voters' Exchange to coordinate local and state efforts that worked to get young people active in civic life. Tunney avowed, "They are the reservoir, the new blood of democracy. If we can get them excited about the privileges and duties of citizenship, our democracy lives. If not, it sickens and dies."<sup>122</sup> Tunney and other public leaders urged adolescents to self-engage by studying the governmental system, investigating contemporary issues, and forming political beliefs. *Seventeen* magazine, a periodical aimed at teen-age girls, editorialized: "The only people who are too young to . . . have political opinions are the truly infantile who *can't* read, and the perpetually young who *don't* read."<sup>123</sup> In a war to defend democracy, elders placed great pressure on young Americans to uphold the tenets of the republic by performing their civic duties – even if voteless.

The first congressional conversations regarding youth suffrage emerged as a result of disagreement about the age of conscription. The push for draft legislation came from the Military Training Camps Association, a small but vocal group that had been a part of the pre-war "preparedness" movement. In May 1940, it started a lobbying campaign for compulsory military service. The issue of conscription became extremely controversial. Opponents included the education establishment, major religious groups, organized labor, the pacifist movement, and Republican isolationists. Some of them argued an antebellum draft was unconstitutional

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<sup>122</sup> *New York Times*, 11 September 1940, 17.

<sup>123</sup> Untitled editorial, *Seventeen* 3, September 1944, 33.

because in 1918 the Supreme Court upheld the legality of involuntary induction but only in times of war.<sup>124</sup> Other draft foes charged financiers and arms manufacturers were pressing for conscription to maximize profits under the guise of defending democratic principles, rekindling fears that the so-called “merchants of death” would again trick America into entering a European war. Most congressmen backed the use of volunteers, particularly unmarried and childless young men, before resorting to conscription.<sup>125</sup>

The Nazi sweep across Europe, and, in particular, France’s surrender to Germany in June 1940 tilted congressional opinion toward acceptance of a peacetime draft. On 21 June 1940, one day before France fell, Senator Edward Burke (D-NE) and Representative James Wadsworth, Jr. (R-NY) each filed legislation proposing to make able-bodied males ages 18 to 65 available for enlistment.<sup>126</sup> Lawmakers agreed that men in the lower age brackets (18 to 30-35) should be drafted first. They wrangled mostly over the age floor of conscription. Some congressmen agreed with 18, the accepted age for full combat participation during World War I. Other legislators wanted it raised to 21 to match the traditional age of majority and the original conscription age set in the Selective

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<sup>124</sup> *Arver v. United States*, 245 U.S. 366 (1918).

<sup>125</sup> For information regarding the pre-war conscription debate, see George Q. Flynn, *The Draft, 1940-1973* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 53-87.

<sup>126</sup> S. 4164, 76<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3d sess., *Congressional Record* 86 (21 June 1940): 8680 and H.R. 10132, 76<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3d sess., *Congressional Record* 86 (21 June 1940): 8908. See also *New York Times*, 22 June 1940, 1.

Service Act of 1917.<sup>127</sup>

The American public generally supported the return of conscription. A *Life* magazine poll taken in July 1940 revealed that 71% favored “the immediate adoption of compulsory military training for all young men.”<sup>128</sup> A month later, George Gallup found that 67% of males between sixteen and twenty-one and 61% of young men 21-to-24 supported the principle of a peacetime draft.<sup>129</sup> Isolationists in Congress acknowledged that the poll results mirrored a shift in public opinion from favoring complete neutrality to supporting limited aid to the Allies. They strenuously objected to the Burke-Wadsworth bill, however, arguing peacetime enlistment would precipitate actual American intervention in the war.<sup>130</sup> Isolationist groups picketed Capitol Hill and crowded the galleries in the House and Senate seeking to derail Burke-Wadsworth.<sup>131</sup> The draft issue also sparked protests by left-wing student organizations, such as the American Youth Congress, American Youth Committee, Youth Committee Against War, Young People’s Socialist League, and American Student Union, that had advocated pacifism or isolationism since the 1930s.<sup>132</sup> As Congress debated conscription ages during the

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<sup>127</sup> *New York Times*, 25 July 1940, 10; 27 July 1940, 5; 30 August 1940, 1 & 11 and *Washington Post*, 1 August 1940, 1 & 4; and 21 August 1940, 1 & 16.

<sup>128</sup> *Life*, 29 July 1940, 20.

<sup>129</sup> *New York Times*, 30 August 1940, 10 and *Washington Post*, 30 August 1940, 2.

<sup>130</sup> William L. O’Neill, *A Democracy at War: America’s Fight at Home and Abroad in World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 86-87.

<sup>131</sup> *Washington Post*, 7 September 1940, 4.

<sup>132</sup> *New York Times*, 6 July 1940, 17; 5 August 1940, 2; 14 October 1940, 14; 15 October 1940, 17; and 30 December 1940, 9.

first week of September 1940, Washington, D.C. police dispersed over 1,500 young people demonstrating against coerced induction. Some opposed conscription altogether; others supported the Burke-Wadsworth bill but assailed plans to limit the call-up to males in their 20s.<sup>133</sup> No adversaries to the draft law mentioned the incongruity between the conscription and disfranchisement of young men since America was not yet at war.

In early September, a joint House-Senate committee set ages 21 to 65 as the range for registration and 21 to 35 as the ages eligible for induction to military duty. The committee did not conjure original age spans; rather, it borrowed from age classifications used by American armies during the Civil War and World War I.<sup>134</sup> On 14 September, the House and Senate approved the committee bill, known officially as the Selective Training and Service Act. President Roosevelt signed it into law two days later.<sup>135</sup> The act required every male from 21 to 35, regardless of race or nationality, to enroll in the Selective Service system. Registered men could volunteer before being called, and volunteers could choose their branch of military service. In October 1940, the first peacetime draft in America's history commenced. The government selected men through a lottery system administered by local draft

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 6 September 1940, 12. See also, Ibid, 5 August 1940, 2. The draft registrations subsequent to the first in October 1940 proved the validity of the protestors' claims: July 1941 (for youths who had turned 21), February 1942 (which registered 20-year-olds and the 35-45 age bracket), April 1942 (men 45-65 received draft cards), and June 1942 (for 18 and 19-year-olds and those males who had turned 20 since the April registration). Ibid, 25 October 1942, 6E.

<sup>134</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 12 September 1940, 1 and *New York Times*, 12 September 1940, 1.

<sup>135</sup> Selective Service and Training Act of 1940, Public Law 76-783, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. 54, ch. 720 (16 September 1940): 885.



boards. Conscientious objectors were offered a choice between noncombatant military duty or alternative service. Draftees were required to serve one 12-month enlistment, and were limited to duty only in the Western Hemisphere or U.S. territories.<sup>136</sup> These restrictions on service reflected the nation's lingering isolationism, suspicions of militarism, and reluctance to fight except for defensive reasons.

As the international pressures to enter the war increased in 1941, federal officials pondered reducing the minimum age for draft eligibility. In April 1941, as Axis armies conquered southern and eastern Europe, the War Department announced a tentative proposal to lower the conscription age to 18 and begin a compulsory military training program for youths as young as 17 and up to age 21. "At present," the *Chicago Tribune* reported, "the army has enough older men and the need is for younger men who are more physically fit for army life."<sup>137</sup> President Roosevelt and the head of Selective Service, Lewis B. Hershey, declared the plan "necessary" to prepare a backlog of young men for future combat.<sup>138</sup> A May 14 poll indicated a slight majority (51%) agreed with lowering the draft floor to eighteen, but, as Gallup reminded, 71% had approved it in August 1940.<sup>139</sup> Representative Charles I. Faddis (D-PA), spokesperson for the House Military Affairs Committee, asserted that no member backed the Army's plans. Faddis indicated that the

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<sup>136</sup> "Fine Points for Eligibles," *Time*, 14 October 1940, 35.

<sup>137</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 16 April 1941, 1.

<sup>138</sup> *New York Times*, 16 April 1941, 1.

<sup>139</sup> *Washington Post*, 11 May 1941, B6.

committee agreed with his belief “that the average 18-year-old boy ‘has not reached the proper physical development to be able to make as desirable a soldier as he could.’”<sup>140</sup> A woman from San Francisco writing to the *Washington Post* identified youth disfranchisement as “the strongest argument” against reducing the conscription age, lamenting that the “boys of 18” had no say in the issue since they lacked “a voice in Government.” “If ‘taxation without representation’ was deemed unbearable to our forefathers, what can one say of ‘taxing’ one’s physical being without representation?” she asked, “Is a man free who is compelled to risk his neck, yet is denied the right to vote?”<sup>141</sup> In August, Congress dropped the top draft age from 35 to 28 and increased the term of service for conscripts from twelve to thirty months. But it did not stray from the 21-draft though the Army insisted it needed younger, more physically fit troops.<sup>142</sup>

The national defense emergency caused by Japan’s bombing of Pearl Harbor changed the public calculus regarding adolescent military service. Of the 1.6 million men enlisted as of December 1941, about half had been drafted under the Selective Training and Service Act, and most came from the 21 to 28 age class.<sup>143</sup> Immediately after the attack, FDR, Hershey, and Henry Stimson, the Secretary of War, pressed Congress to reset the minimum registration age to either 18 or 19 to

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<sup>140</sup> *New York Times*, 17 April 1941, 14.

<sup>141</sup> “Of 18-Year-Old Soldiers,” letter to editor, *Washington Post*, 24 April 1941, 10.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, 19 August 1941, 1.

<sup>143</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 8 June 1941, 8 and *Washington Post*, 10 December 1941, 1 & 4. Before America’s official entry into the war, Selective Service called only 13% of eligible draftees as compared to 28% during 1917-1918. *Ibid*, 6 February 1941, 9.

create a large pool of potential combatants.<sup>144</sup> “We may need a lot of men,” Hershey affirmed, “And we have to find out where we can get them.”<sup>145</sup> Some lawmakers publicly worried the nation could not adequately equip or train a military inflated by teenage conscripts, while others privately cringed at the notion of compulsory service for under-age “children.”<sup>146</sup> Columnist Walter Lippmann reported that part of the objection among congressmen to the induction of 18-or-19-year-olds sprung from a “feeling that those who are too young to vote and enjoy the full privileges of a citizen should not be called upon to pay the full price of citizenship.”<sup>147</sup>

On 19 December 1941, Congress amended the Selective Training and Service Act to require all males between 18 and 64 to register for the draft and to make men from 20 to 44 eligible for active duty. The revision also removed the prohibition on duty outside the Western Hemisphere and increased the term of service to the duration of the war plus six months.<sup>148</sup> From 41 million liable registrants, the War Department projected it could raise a fighting force of 7 million if combat circumstances required. Though 18- and 19-year-olds were not subject to compulsory military service, they could be mobilized along with older men for work in war industries.<sup>149</sup> The editors of the *Chicago Tribune*, a conservative, anti-New

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<sup>144</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 10 December 1941, 22, and *Washington Post*, 10 December 1941, 1 & 4.

<sup>145</sup> *New York Times*, 13 December 1941, 14.

<sup>146</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 15 December 1941, 1, and *Washington Post*, 12 December 1941, 2.

<sup>147</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, 21 December 1941, 14A.

<sup>148</sup> *Congressional Digest* 87, (19 December 1941): 6763.

<sup>149</sup> *New York Times*, 20 December 1941, 1 & 6.

Deal daily, cheered Congress's action. "There is no better material for the army than the youth of 18 or 19," they stressed,

He has a man's strength and much more than a man's recuperative powers. He can enjoy hardships which would reduce a more mature brother to sullen anger. He is at an age when obedience comes easily and the capacity to learn and to adapt to changed circumstances is greater than it will be a few years hence. What the young man of 19 may lack in caution can be corrected with training and, in any event, will be more than balanced by his greater audacity in times of danger.<sup>150</sup>

As manpower needs escalated, the pressure to lower the age for active duty intensified. Military leaders initially projected that an armed force of three million men would suffice; by February 1942, they expected to need seven million.<sup>151</sup> After the first official registration drive following Pearl Harbor, Selective Service officials predicted that 18- and 19-year olds (which the War Department estimated to number nearly 3 million)<sup>152</sup> would become eligible for active duty in future drafts.<sup>153</sup> In April 1942, the Army tried to induce pre-draft-age youths to volunteer by offering them their choice of service branch, which was a departure from regular enlistment procedure. Parental consent, however, was still required before the

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<sup>150</sup> "The Draft Age," editorial, *Chicago Tribune*, 19 December 1941, 18.

<sup>151</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 December 1941, 2 and 11 February 1942, 4. The tough slog that was World War II proved those predictions woefully sanguine; some 16.3 million Americans would serve during the course of the war. See U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Series Y 856-903, "Selected Characteristics of the Armed Forces, by War," *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Part 2 – Chapters N-Z* (White Plains, NY: Kraus International Publications, 1989), 1140.

<sup>152</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 18 April 1942, 16.

<sup>153</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, 14 February 1942, 1.

armed forces would accept an underage recruit.<sup>154</sup> In late May, President Roosevelt ordered 18- and 19-year-old males to complete the Selective Service inventory of the nation's available manpower, which several observers claimed was a precursor for asking Congress to revisit the draft-age floor.<sup>155</sup> With American families sending loved ones off to battle, public opinion regarding lowered draft limit changed; a June 1942 Gallup survey revealed that 52% of persons opposed an 18-19 draft.<sup>156</sup> The parents and grandparents of underage teens candidly voiced their disapproval. A grandmother, for instance, impugned "the fathers of our democracy" as craven for contemplating any proposal to "send the children out to fight for them."<sup>157</sup> "If it is true that men always have to call on children to help fight their wars," a person from Washington, D.C. maintained, "then it is high time the voting age be lowered and children have all the privileges of men."<sup>158</sup>

Despite the naval victory at the Battle of Midway and ground advances in North Africa during the summer of 1942, Secretary of War Stimson stated drafting 18- and 19-year-old youths "would be necessary eventually."<sup>159</sup> House Military Affairs Committee Chairman Andrew May (D-KY) disagreed. He relayed to parents

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<sup>154</sup> *New York Times*, 24 April 1942, 8.

<sup>155</sup> *Washington Post*, 23 May 1942, 1 & 16 and 25 May 1942, 1; and *New York Times*, 27 May 1942, 8.

<sup>156</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 June 1942, 14.

<sup>157</sup> "Draft Age," letter to editor, *Washington Post*, 7 June 1942, B6. See also "War Is for Men," letter to editor, *Ibid*, 18 June 1942, 14.

<sup>158</sup> "Boys on Call," letter to editor, *Ibid*, 8 June 1942, 8.

<sup>159</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, 16 July 1942, 1.

that “private advices”<sup>160</sup> assured him that the Allies should bring the war to an end “probably in 1942 and unquestionably in 1943”; thus, there would be no need to induct their young sons.<sup>161</sup> The exhaustion of unmarried men from the draft rolls, not battlefield triumph, stirred the War Department to request another review of the minimum conscription age. In August 1942, Selective Service chief Lewis Hershey warned married men faced mobilization by Christmas because the numbers of unwedded draft-age males were rapidly dwindling.<sup>162</sup> An unnamed congressman predicted that the exhaustion of single men from the enlistment rolls meant the armed forces would renew their request for drafting 18- and 19-year-olds. “And if our generals and admirals tell us this is essential to insure victory,” he forecast, “I believe Congress will amend the Selective Service Act.”<sup>163</sup>

When the Democrat-controlled 77<sup>th</sup> Congress returned from summer break in September 1942, governmental sentiment leaned toward calling up adolescents before married men with children.<sup>164</sup> A high-ranking Selective Service official told the *Wall Street Journal* that conscripting the under-aged would impel Congress to take on the herculean task of redesigning the system of draft classifications: from statuses determined primarily by deferments based on marital status, child

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<sup>160</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 17 July 1942, 5.

<sup>161</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, 9 July 1942, 4.

<sup>162</sup> *Washington Post*, 22 August 1942, 1.

<sup>163</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 23 August 1942, 12.

<sup>164</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 28 August 1942, 3 and “Stampede to Arms,” *Time*, 7 September 1942, 28.

dependency, and employment necessity to those based solely on physical fitness tests.<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless, Republicans and Democrats re-litigated the draft age floor. On 2 September, Senator Chan Gurney (R-SD) introduced an amendment to the Selective Training and Service Act that would lower the minimum conscription age from twenty to eighteen, which was followed on 7 September by a nearly-identical 18-draft bill filed in the House of Representatives by James Wadsworth (R-NY).<sup>166</sup> Government officials estimated that including 18- and 19-year-olds would add somewhere between 2.5 and 3.25 million males to the Selective Service rolls, with about 1.5 million physically capable of military service.<sup>167</sup> House Military Affairs Committee Chairman May reiterated his personal opposition to conscripting youths under twenty “unless I am convinced that the nation actually needs them.” He added that forthcoming hearings on the Wadsworth proposal would “give the Army an opportunity to show the need.”<sup>168</sup>

Democrats offered two main objections to the Republican proposals. They said inducting inexperienced youth would put military units at risk and mobilizing

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<sup>165</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 1 September 1942, 1.

<sup>166</sup> Gurney’s bill: S. 2748, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (2 September 1942): 7019. Wadsworth’s measure: H.R. 7528, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (7 September 1942): 7061. Wadsworth’s measure differed from Gurney’s by providing an educational deferment to high school students called for service during the last half of their senior year. See also *Chicago Tribune*, 4 September 1942, 1 and 8 September 1942, 4; *New York Times*, 4 September 1942 1, and 8 September 1942, 19; *Washington Post*, 4 September 1942, 1 and 8 September 1942, 6; and *Wall Street Journal*, 8 September 1942, 1.

<sup>167</sup> *Washington Post*, 8 September 1942, 6, and *Chicago Tribune*, 14 October 1942, 1.

<sup>168</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 8 September 1942, 4.

college-aged teens would endanger America's productive capacity.<sup>169</sup> Republicans countered that permitting them to be drafted had an advantage over volunteerism: the provision of adequate preparation by professional military personnel. They reasoned that, in theory, a more mature 18-year-old conscript would be better equipped physically to train for combat than an underdeveloped 17-year-old volunteer.<sup>170</sup> As Wadsworth claimed when he submitted his 18-draft amendment, "History teaches us that these young men will make most effective soldiers when given thoro[ugh] training and the army will be the better for their being in it."<sup>171</sup> The GOP also warned that unless Congress changed the Selective Service Act to allow the induction of 18- and 19-year-olds, enormous economic and domestic dislocations would incur because of need to draft married fathers.<sup>172</sup> *Newsweek* reported that the chatter about drafting family men "was pumped along partly to build a fire under Congress to legislate for conscription of 18- and 19-year-olds."<sup>173</sup> Senator Albert J. Engel, Sr. (R-MI) privately expressed to his son that the use of this tactic by his party was "undoubtedly to crystallize public sentiment which has

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<sup>169</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, 3 September 1942, 5.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 23 September 1942, 11. Young men could enlist at age 17 with parental approval. There were, of course, a relative handful of under-17 youths who tried to, or did, join the military by lying about their birthdays. Estimating accurately how many underage youth fought in the armed forces during World War II remains difficult accounting because of the mistruths.

<sup>171</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 8 September 1942, 4.

<sup>172</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 September 1942, 7A and 8 September 1942, 10; *New York Times*, 8 September 1942, 19; and *Washington Post*, 8 September 1942, 6.

<sup>173</sup> "Draft vs. Votes," *Newsweek*, 14 September 1942, 35.



been against the drafting of boys under 20 years of age.”<sup>174</sup>

House and Senate leaders appeared reluctant to address the 18-draft bills as thousands of parents loudly protested.<sup>175</sup> As the editors of the *Washington Post* observed, “The implication right along has been, of course, that since the proposed measure is bound to be politically unpopular and since elections are in the offing, it might be better to withhold consideration for the time being.”<sup>176</sup> As Congress dickered, other federal officials pressed the 18-draft issue. The War Department began by announcing two plans to expand its youth manpower. In mid-September, it called to duty all draft-age college members of its enlisted reserve, whom had been allowed educational deferment.<sup>177</sup> Less than a month later, it escalated the recruitment of under-20 volunteers by offering them their choice of service in all Army branches and the opportunity of qualifying for commissions.<sup>178</sup> Then, during the first two weeks of October, President Roosevelt took to the airwaves to urge national support for the 18-draft “so that an Army with the spirit and hardihood of youth may shorten the war with annihilating new offensives”<sup>179</sup> Before the radio

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<sup>174</sup> Albert J. Engle, Sr. to Albert J. Engle, Jr., 21 September 1942, p. 2, Box 1, Albert J. Engle Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

<sup>175</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 12 September 1942, 8.

<sup>176</sup> *Washington Post*, 9 September 1942, 8.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 11 September 1942, 1 & 6 and 18 September 1942, B9; and “Draft Forecasts,” *Newsweek*, 21 September 1942, 46.

<sup>178</sup> *Washington Post*, 4 October 1942, 11; 9 October 1942, 7; and 21 October 1942, 1. The new regulations still mandated that volunteers under age 20 receive written consent from their parents, but no longer did they need a release from their local draft boards.

<sup>179</sup> *New York Times*, 13 October 1942, 1. See also *Chicago Tribune*, 14 October 1942, 1, and “From the President: 18-19-Year-Olds Must Fight,” *Newsweek*, 19 October 1942, 31-33.

chats, FDR had thought it unnecessary to lower the age of conscription before the end of 1942.<sup>180</sup> Convinced by federal manpower executives that enlisting 18- and 19-year-olds would not disrupt agricultural or industrial production and persuaded by military brass that more troops were necessary to fight, what one general called, “this young man’s war,” Roosevelt reversed his stance – which GOP leaders charged was nothing more than a political ploy to placate upset constituents before the upcoming November mid-term elections.<sup>181</sup> In response to the president’s call, committees in the House and Senate took up the Gurney and Wadsworth measures after weeks of delay.

Cued by the Commander in Chief, Secretary of War Stimson and Army Chief of Staff George Marshall argued the case for the military necessity of resetting the age floor of conscription. Stimson claimed only the 18-draft would allow the armed forces to reach its manpower goal of nine million (7.5 million Army + 1.5 million Navy). He also provided data that indicated the Army was “too old”: the average age of a division had climbed exactly two years (26 to 28) from March to August 1942.<sup>182</sup> Marshall testified the swift, highly mobile, and mechanized warfare being fought in Europe, Asia, and Africa “requires youth” because of their comparative

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<sup>180</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 12 September 1942, 8, and *Washington Post*, 12 September 1942, 1 & 18.

<sup>181</sup> *Washington Post*, 9 October 1942, 7, and *New York Times*, 14 October 1942, 1 & 11.

<sup>182</sup> *New York Times*, 15 October 1942, 1 & 15; *Washington Post*, 15 October 1942, 1 & 2; and “Draft Bestirs Teen-Age Rush and Older Men Look for Break,” *Newsweek*, 26 October 1942, 33 & 36. See *New York Times*, 25 October 1942, 2E for a breakdown of military manpower projections for 1943.

advantages in physical fitness to older men.<sup>183</sup> He also claimed, anecdotally, that platoons performed poorly because they were staffed with “too many overage men” who lacked the “vigor and enthusiasm” of young troops.<sup>184</sup> Indeed, both Stimson and Marshall emphasized that adolescent males possessed superior fighting ability relative to adult men. As Stimson declared,

Members of the 18 and 19 age groups are peculiarly well adapted to military training. This is a military axiom. Their response to leadership, their recovery from fatigue, their enthusiasm, or ‘flair for soldiering,’ are exceptional as compared with older and younger age groups. The simple fact is, they are better soldiers and never before in its history has the American nation more urgently needed exceptional soldiers.<sup>185</sup>

Other War Department staff echoed Stimson’s beliefs. His adjutant, Major General James A. Ulio, averred, “In many instances, [18- and 19-year-old males] have proved to possess not only physical stamina superior to that of older comrades but more dash and fighting spirit – which when equally trained and equipped soldiers meet – is the deciding factor in battle.”<sup>186</sup> Influential Americans outside of government concurred. “[B]oys of eighteen are ideal material for pilots, bombardiers, radiomen, navigators, jeep and tank drivers,” syndicated columnist Robert Quillen stressed, “They learn fast; they are daring; they are resilient, and,

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<sup>183</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, 14 October 1942, 1.

<sup>184</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 15 October 1942, 12.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 14 October 1942, 20.

<sup>186</sup> *Washington Post*, 5 October 1942, 1.

above all, they have a split-second reaction that is lost in a few years.”<sup>187</sup> Eighteen-year-olds also appeared to have other advantages. As William D. Hassett, Harry Truman’s personal secretary, explained to an Oklahoma congressman that they “generally have fewer reasons for deferment than older men since they are rarely fathers, normally have not developed skills making them essential to war industry, and usually are in better physical condition.”<sup>188</sup>

The draft-age debate exposed familial splits and professional disagreements splits regarding youth capabilities. Protective parents and grandparents emphasized that the inborn juvenility 18- and 19-year-old boys should warrant further seasoning at home before shipping them abroad. They seemed to agree with an adult who wrote *Survey Graphic* magazine that teenagers should have “a chance to gain experience and independence before going, fresh from school, into war. Everyone should have *at least* the right to grow up!”<sup>189</sup> While generals and admirals advocated drafting teenagers, educators and doctors argued that most youths of 18 or 19 were not psychologically or physically developed enough to stand the shocks of modern battle. Dr. Thomas V. Moore of Catholic University recommended to the House Military Affairs Committee that “some effort should be made to test their emotional maturity, and all those who are emotionally immature

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<sup>187</sup> Robert Quillen, “Any Boy Who Can Carry Water Is Old Enough to Help When the House is Afire,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 9 July 1942, 6. See also Walter Lippmann, “Youth and Age in War,” *Atlanta Journal*, 21 December 1941, 14A.

<sup>188</sup> William D. Hassett to Honorable George B. Schwabe, 15 June 1945, White House Central Files: Official File 245 Miscellaneous (1945-1949), Box 845, Harry S Truman Papers, Harry S Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>189</sup> “The Right to Grow Up,” letter to the editor, *Survey Graphic* 31, (October 1942): 403.

should be rejected” if Congress decided to lower the draft age.<sup>190</sup> Other physicians recommended underage lads receive a combination of physical and combat training up to age 20 or 21 before deployment overseas.<sup>191</sup> Many adolescent boys, however, declared themselves immediately fit for duty. A telephone poll of 17, 18, and 19-year-old males conducted by George Gallup showed an overwhelming majority (81%) in favor of a reduced conscription age. Many of the youths surveyed said they backed the proposal to bypass parental objections to joining the military; as one respondent admitted, “I approve lowering the draft age but my parents don’t.”<sup>192</sup> Thousands of young men below age twenty flocked to recruiting offices in anticipation of a new draft floor. Reports from towns and cities across America showed a stunning spike of teen volunteers, many of whom abandoned their schooling to enlist.<sup>193</sup>

Pressed by Roosevelt, Stimson, and Marshall and pushed by the wave of underage enlistments, Congress worked quickly to lower the conscription age. On Thursday, 15 October 1942, after only two days of hearings and less than eighty hours after the president’s request, the House Military Affairs Committee unanimously approved James Wadsworth’s proposal to reset the draft age at

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<sup>190</sup> *Washington Post*, 16 October 1942, 8.

<sup>191</sup> *New York Times*, 16 October 1942, 11.

<sup>192</sup> *Washington Post*, 21 October 1942, 7.

<sup>193</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 October 1942, 1 and 8; *New York Times*, 15 October 1942, 15, 18 October 1942, 39, and 21 October 1942, 42; *Washington Post*, 15 October 1942, 22; and “Draft Bestirs Teen-Age Rush and Older Men Look for Break,” *Newsweek*, 26 October 1942, 33 & 36. John Modell claims that over the course of the war eight out of ten high schools boys entered the military. John Modell, *Into One’s Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States 1920-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 166.

eighteen.<sup>194</sup> The next day, the House Rules Committee (the institutional panel that determines the guidelines that define the length of debate and the nature and extent of amendment for every major bill shall debated on the House floor) hurriedly cleared the measure for consideration by the full House under a partial “gag” rule. It limited deliberation to four hours and restricted changes to the measure only to amendments seeking to revise the conscription age limits. Also on Friday the 16<sup>th</sup>, the Senate Military Affairs Committee unanimously endorsed Chan Gurney’s 18-draft measure, which was to be delivered to the Senate the following Monday.<sup>195</sup> The committee’s report, clearly impressed by the testimony of Stimson and Marshall, affirmed,

Not only the success of our armed forces depends upon the employment of our 18 and 19 year old men as soldiers but that our very national existence is dependent upon their use. Members of these age groups are particularly fitted for military training and combat. Their response to leadership, their quick recovery from fatigue, their aggressiveness, their enthusiasm, and their ‘flair for soldering’ far exceed such qualities in other age groups. The simple fact is that they make better soldiers than persons of other age groups and that America cannot win unless full use is made of their military capabilities. Our armed forces must have the qualities that belong to youth.<sup>196</sup>

Congressional action on the 18-draft decelerated once the bills reached the

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<sup>194</sup> H.R. 7528, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (15 October 1942): 8243. *Chicago Tribune*, 16 October 1942, 1 & 13; *New York Times*, 16 October 1942, 1 & 11, and *Washington Post*, 16 October 1942, 1 & 8.

<sup>195</sup> S. 2748, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (16 October 1942): 8315. See also *Chicago Tribune*, 17 October 1942, 8; *New York Times*, 17 October 1942, 5; and *Washington Post*, 17 October 1942, 1 & 4.

<sup>196</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 20 October 1942, 3.

House and Senate floors for deliberation. On 17 October, in an unusual Saturday session, the House overwhelmingly approved, 345-16, Wadsworth's measure.<sup>197</sup> Before final acclamation, the House was roiled by intense debate over an amendment filed by Ed Gossett (D-TX) to set the age of conscription at nineteen. Before Gossett's motion, Hamilton Fish (R-NY) assailed the "gag" rule limiting floor action, declaring it forestalled consideration of his plan to require that all teenage troops receive a year's worth of training before entering combat. Piggybacking on Fish's complaint, Jerry Voorhis (D-CA) supported Gossett's pitch as a safeguard to prevent drafting immature 18-year-olds. Harold Cooley (D-NC) angrily attacked the Wadsworth bill, shouting: "It doesn't take a lot of courage, but it take[s] a lot of gall to take 18-year-old boys and make cannon fodder out of them because you know that's what will be done. . . .Has Congress decided to let Boy Scouts fight this war?"<sup>198</sup> Military Affairs Committee chair Andrew May calmed the chamber by offering his personal regrets that teenage boys had to fight at all, with or without preparatory training, but he beseeched his colleagues "to be brave. Let's get this job over with and let's get the job of licking Hitler and Tojo over with."<sup>199</sup> Anticipating ratification of Wadsworth's bill by the Senate, King George VI of Great Britain signed a proclamation making English males 18 years of age liable for

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<sup>197</sup> H.R. 7528, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (17 October 1942): 8274-8308.

<sup>198</sup> *Washington Post*, 18 October 1942, 2.

<sup>199</sup> "Let's Get the Job Over With," *Time*, 26 October 1942, 22. See also *Chicago Tribune*, 18 October 1942, 1 & 17, and *New York Times*, 18 October 1942, 1 & 38.

military service.<sup>200</sup>

The chief threat to speedy passage of the 18-draft in the Senate was an anti-vice amendment filed by Joshua Lee (D-OK). In advance of the debate regarding the House-approved conscription bill, civic organizations and parents (particularly mothers) bombarded senators with letters and telegrams demanding they provide teenage enlistees “special safeguards” for their education, military training, and recreation.<sup>201</sup> Anxious adults had seemingly shifted their concerns about conscripting 18- and 19-year-olds from worries about their physical and emotional capacities to soldier to distress about maintaining their moral turpitude within the rowdy, macho culture of the camp environment. Lee responded to the communiqué barrage by proposing to ban prostitution and liquor sales in and around military posts. On 19 October 1942, the Senate Military Affairs Committee rebuffed Lee’s tender, 7-1.<sup>202</sup> After Lee vowed to bring his amendment to the Senate floor, military officials moved to undermine it. Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox said Lee’s plan would wreck troop morale.<sup>203</sup> Secretary of War Henry Stimson claimed he had no objection to the anti-prostitution article but dreaded the prohibition section would encourage bootlegging.<sup>204</sup> Many senators concurred; as Millard Tydings (D-MD)

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<sup>200</sup> *New York Times*, 23 October 1942, 7. England’s induction age had been 20 in 1939, and had been lowered to 18.5 years of age in December 1941.

<sup>201</sup> *Washington Post*, 21 October 1942, 1.

<sup>202</sup> *New York Times*, 20 October 1942, 1.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, 23 October 1942, 1.

<sup>204</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 22 October 1942, 1.



emphasized, “I think liquor is one of the greatest curses that ever afflicted the human race. . .but heaven knows I do not want to go back to the Capone era all over again.”<sup>205</sup> Other senators blasted Lee for attempting to inject a moral “diversion” into a debate on military affairs. Some lawmakers insisted that adolescent conscripts were “old enough” to make independent choices about their private lives. Senator Robert LaFollette, Jr. (R-WI) asked, “Why should we assume that these men who are fighting to preserve our country don’t know enough to be careful in their personal habits? Why should be discriminate against them?”<sup>206</sup> On 22 October, the Senate killed Lee’s prohibition rider 45-29.<sup>207</sup>

Two days later, the Senate voted to accept the House-approved 18-draft bill but added an amendment, offered by Lee O’Daniel (D-TX), requiring a 12-month training period for all soldiers under age twenty before deployment into combat.<sup>208</sup> Senators heatedly clashed over the necessity of mandatory training, and, collaterally, the military’s stated need for adolescent conscripts. Prewar isolationists, particularly Robert Taft (R-OH), George Norris (I-NE), and Hiram Johnson (D-CA), strongly supported the bipartisan drive for the 1-year training program. Johnson insisted it was necessary because “these are our children. These children have a right to their little span of life, their little fling at happiness, just as

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 23 October 1942, 1.

<sup>206</sup> *Washington Post*, 21 October 1942, 1.

<sup>207</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 23 October 1942, 1; *New York Times*, 23 October 1942, 1; *Washington Post*, 23 October 1942, 1; and “Ghosts of Prohibition Stalks in Wake of Youth-Draft Bill,” *Newsweek*, 2 November 1942, 32-34.

<sup>208</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 25 October 1942, 1, and “Time Out,” *Time*, 2 November 1942, 27.

we have had ours. . . .Give youth some other opportunity than to die.”<sup>209</sup> President Roosevelt tried to intervene by sending a letter to the Senate, read aloud by Chan Gurney, imploring it to accept the view of Stimson and other military leaders that the 12-month preparation course would needlessly shackle war planning and troop deployment.<sup>210</sup> The Senate tacked the training provision to the 18-draft bill anyway. Its decision meant a joint congressional conference had to settle the differences between the Senate and House versions of the legislation. The conference would not meet for another two weeks, however, because of a work break to allow congressmen an opportunity to campaign before the 3 November 1942 mid-term elections.

Being the first national election held after Pearl Harbor, the 1942 mid-terms allowed voters their first chance to express their opinion of federal war management. The plebiscite revealed much displeasure with the paucity of military success and the surfeit of bureaucratic regulations. The people appeared restless that battlefield progress against the Axis had proved elusive after the U.S. victory at the Battle of Midway the previous June. And at the time of the election, the Marines were stalemated at Guadalcanal. Americans seemed particularly perturbed with the government agencies that ran the war economy and especially annoyed by the rationing of consumer goods, wage and price controls, tax increases, limits on commerce and trade, and rising inflation. Republicans benefitted from the

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<sup>209</sup> *Washington Post*, 24 October 1942, 2.

<sup>210</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 25 October 1942, 1 & 19.

public disenchantment with Washington, winning 44 seats in the House and 9 in the Senate. Though the Democrats still maintained a 222-209 House majority (with four independents) and a 57-38 majority in the Senate (also with four independents), the election results indicated that voters wanted the GOP to temper the statist tendencies of Congress and the White House.<sup>211</sup>

Some Democrats said congressional actions to lower the conscription age from twenty to eighteen cost them important votes, principally among the parents and grandparents of draft-eligible boys. About a month after his party's pummeling, Kent Keller, a staunch New Dealer from Illinois, wrote to Vice President Henry Wallace that familial concern over the issue created "a swelling chorus" among mothers that their "very babes (for all children remain babies to all mothers) were being sent out by Roosevelt to be killed in HIS war. And they voted that conviction."<sup>212</sup> The stunning results of the mid-term may have caused Keller and other incredulous Democrats to overstate the electoral impact of the mother-voters. Yet, two of the foremost liberal incumbents to lose their seats – Joshua Lee and George Norris – were prominently embroiled in the draft-age kerfuffle just before election-time.

Following the mid-terms, lawmakers rushed to solve the 18-draft dilemma

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<sup>211</sup> John Morton Blum, *V Was for Victory: Politics and Culture during World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 229-234; Richard Polenberg, *War and American Society: The United States, 1941-1945* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972), 187-192; and Nancy Beck Young, *Why We Fight: Congress and the Politics of World War II* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2013), 73-80.

<sup>212</sup> Quoted in Polenberg, 189. For information about Keller's congressional career, see Stuart L. Weiss, "Kent Keller, the Liberal Bloc, and the New Deal," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 68, no. 1 (April 1975): 143-158.

before the 77<sup>th</sup> Congress concluded, as scheduled, in mid-December. In the morning of Wednesday, 10 November 1942, the joint legislative committee stripped the 1-year, mandatory training amendment from the conscription-age proposal; that afternoon, the House adopted the committee measure with a “mighty roar” viva voce.<sup>213</sup> The Senate ratified the bill the following day also via voice vote.<sup>214</sup> On 13 November 1942, President Roosevelt signed the 18-draft into law.<sup>215</sup> The Teenage Draft Act was the last major legislation passed by the 77<sup>th</sup> Congress.

In adopting a clean (i.e. no pre-combat training provision) draft bill, Congress acquiesced to military necessity. Lawmakers listened to the pleas of President Roosevelt, Secretary Stimson, and General Marshall for young troops to be made immediately available and believed their assurances that teenage conscripts would be adequately prepped for battle. With the Army entering the fight against the Germans at North Africa, the Navy struggling to sweep the Axis out of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, and the Marines stymied at Guadalcanal, congressmen understood that allowing the armed forces instant access to the approximately 100,000 youths who turned eighteen each month was essential to victory.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 11 November 1942, 1. See also H.R. 7528, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (10 November 1942): 8755.

<sup>214</sup> H.R. 7528, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (11 November 1942): 8797. See also, “Teen Draft,” *Newsweek*, 16 November 1942, 58.

<sup>215</sup> H.R. 7528, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (13 November 1942): 8864. See also, Teenage Draft Act of 1942, Public Law 77-772, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. 54, ch. 636, (13 November 1942): 1018. See also, “Teen Agers Are on Their Way,” *Newsweek*, 23 November 1942, 30-31.

<sup>216</sup> *Washington Post*, 12 November 1942, 1, and “The Whos, Whens, and Whys of the Draft: Up-to-Date Office of War Information Report on What’s Coming,” *Newsweek*, 21 December 1942, 27-28.

Representative Dewey Short (R-MO) summarized the thoughts of many of his congressional colleagues in explaining the main objections to the compulsory training amendment. “It is a terrible thing to draft youths 18 and 19 years of age and send them forth into battle to die,” he exclaimed, “But we are engaged in a devastating war and we’re not going to defeat the Nazis and Japs with 45 year old potbellies. . . .Let us do nothing to hamstring our military efforts. Who, in the name of God, is going to tell us what is “adequate training” unless we leave it to the military leaders themselves?”<sup>217</sup> The urgent need for combatants, as so well-articulated by the armed forces chiefs, also swung public opinion. A Gallup poll released after the mid-term elections showed 67% (men 73%, women 60%) supported the drafting of 18- and 19-year-old young men, a clear change from the slight majority who opposed it back in June. In addition, a “special survey” of under-20 youths showed 81% approved lowering the conscription age to eighteen.<sup>218</sup> As the joint congressional conference met, college-aged youths sent letters and declarations petitioning lawmakers to drop the training requirement from the 18-draft bill. Typical of the messages was a note from Dartmouth College’s undergraduate governing council: “We think that the Senate amendment would only hamstring our generals at a time when speedy action is necessary for our successes and for the success and relief of our Allies.”<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 11 November 1942, 14.

<sup>218</sup> *Washington Post*, 7 November 1942, 3.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, 8 November 1942, 6.

After the change of the draft age, American combat units in the final two years of the war were mainly staffed by men in their early 20s who had been conscripted as older teens in 1943 or 1944. Establishment of the 18-draft affected the age demography of the U.S. armed forces. The average age of an American soldier was 26, sailor 23, and Marine 22.<sup>220</sup> In September 1943, Congress briefly discussed and quickly rejected drafting 17-year-olds (for lacking “maturity”) as part of a bill to exempt fathers from conscription.<sup>221</sup> Beginning in December 1943, fathers were called to duty, with those in the 18 to 21 age group inducted first.<sup>222</sup> Sending teenage sons into combat distressed parents like no other issue of the war. A small contingent of mothers wrote the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* to complain that “boys of 18 and 19 are too young to go to war, too youthful to be sent in to settle a gory mess.” “If they’re not old enough to vote,” the mothers concluded, “they’re not old enough to take the place of the oldsters in the fighting ranks.”<sup>223</sup>

Public consternation about fixing a national conscription age initiated the first significant congressional discussion about setting a national age of enfranchisement. Going into World War II, every state limited voting rights to persons age 21 and over. Youth suffrage proponents hoped to declare eighteen as

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<sup>220</sup> Lee B. Kennett, *G.I.: The American Soldier in World War II* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 22. For a view of how conscription worked in the three main Allied nations, see George Q. Flynn, *Conscription and Democracy: The Draft in France, Great Britain, and the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002).

<sup>221</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 September 1943, 1 and 13.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, 12 December 1943, 13A.

<sup>223</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 23 November 1942, 2B.

the minimum federal voting age. The U.S. Constitution did not declare a majority age of enfranchisement or specifically prohibit persons under age 21 from voting. The only statement in the Constitution referencing age in relation to suffrage occurred in the Fourteenth Amendment. It forbade states from abridging or denying “to any of the male inhabitants . . . being twenty-one years of age” the right to vote in federal elections “except for participation in rebellion, or other crime.”<sup>224</sup> The intent of the wartime legislation was to establish a uniform national voting age since none existed and not to reduce an existing age by two or three years.

On 17 October 1942, the same day the House voted to reduce the draft age to eighteen, Representative Victor Wickersham (D-OK) offered the first youth suffrage amendment. He proposed to set eighteen as the voting age for federal elections.<sup>225</sup> The 36-year-old Wickersham had spent most of his political career as the court clerk of Greer County, Oklahoma, before being elected to Congress in spring 1941 to fill a vacancy caused by the death of Sam C. Massingale.<sup>226</sup> Wickersham was known for his dedication to constituent service and his affability (e.g. he always answered his

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<sup>224</sup> U.S. Constitution, amendment 14, section 2.

<sup>225</sup> H.J. Res. 352, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (17 October 1942): 8312. Nota Bene: The *Congressional Record* is a problematic primary source. Judith Schiek Robinson stresses that it offers a curious “blend of truth and fiction” because of the ability of congressmen to correct, omit, and alter transcribed remarks. Judith Schiek Robinson, *Tapping the Government Grapevine: The User-Friendly Guide to U.S. Government Information Sources* (Phoenix, AZ: The Oryx Press, 1993), 91. Though the *Record* does not exactly provide a verbatim account of floor debates nor fully indicate what an individual politician truly thought about an issue, it still remains a valuable source for chronicling the course of legislation and tracing the deliberations of lawmakers.

<sup>226</sup> Wickersham served several non-consecutive terms in Congress: April 1941 to January 1947, January 1949 to January 1957, and January 1961 to January 1965. *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=W000439> (accessed 10 July 2014).

telephone by saying “Hello, this is Victor Wickersham, your best friend”).<sup>227</sup> He also had a reputation for helping young people, as a 17-year-old from Frederick, OK, remarked upon requesting information from Wickersham about a career in journalism: “I have heard a great deal of your interest in the young people of our district.”<sup>228</sup> Wickersham routinely courted potential young voters by writing congratulatory letters to junior- high, senior-high, and college graduates.<sup>229</sup> He did not make any public statement in Congress or to the press about his 18-vote proposal. Whether Wickersham was motivated by his “continued interest in the youth of our nation” or moved by the House vote to reduce the draft age to eighteen remains unclear.<sup>230</sup>

Two days after Wickersham filed his resolution, the Senate began debate on the House-approved legislation to subject 18- and 19-year-old males to conscription. In the midst of the deliberations, Senator Arthur Vandenberg (R-MI), 58-year-old dean of the GOP’s isolationist wing, offered an amendment that would set the national voting age at eighteen for both federal and state elections. Prompted by his opposition to the pending conscription bill, Vandenberg stated upon filing his

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<sup>227</sup> Bob Burke, “Victor Wickersham,” *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, Oklahoma Historical Society, <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/Encyclopedia/entries/w/wi006.html>, (accessed 10 July 2014).

<sup>228</sup> Rex Curtis to Victor Wickersham, 26 December 1941, Folder 2, Box 220, MS 74-41, Victor Wickersham Papers, University Library, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas.

<sup>229</sup> See Victor Wickersham to Miss Mary Jones, February 1951, Folder “Correspondence General, 1950-1951,” Box 46, MS 74-41, Victor Wickersham Papers, University Library, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas.

<sup>230</sup> Victor Wickersham to John Jones, 10 January 1951, Folder “Correspondence General, 1950-1951,” Box 46, MS 74-41, Victor Wickersham Papers, University Library, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas.



motion: “If young men are to be drafted at 18 years of age to fight for their Government, they ought to be entitled to vote at 18 years of age for the kind of government for which they are best satisfied to fight.”<sup>231</sup> Whereas Wickersham made his amendment applicable only to national elections, Vandenberg’s resolution extended voting rights to citizens over eighteen in all elections, federal and state:

Section 1. The right of the citizens of the United States, who are 18 years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied to abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Section 2. This article shall be inoperative unless it shall be ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the legislature of three-fourths of the several states within seven years from the date of its submission to the States by the Congress.<sup>232</sup>

Raymond Willis (R-IN) hailed Vandenburg’s motion and urged “the states individually to reduce the voting age to fighting age.”<sup>233</sup>

Vandenberg’s 18-vote resolution appeared to counter to his reputation as a crotchety curmudgeon. In April 1940, Dorothy Thompson wrote in her syndicated column “On the Record” that “Senator Vandenberg simply does not speak the language of anybody under the age of 40 in this country. . . . Even when he says something very nice, he says it in words that are used up, which have unfortunate

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<sup>231</sup> “Voting Privileges for Draftees,” *Congressional Record* 88 (19 October 1942), 8316. His bill was filed as S.J. Res. 166. Ibid. See also *Chicago Tribune*, 20 October 1942, 3 and *New York Times*, 20 October 1942, 1.

<sup>232</sup> “Should the Legal Voting Age Be Reduced to 18 Years?” *Congressional Digest* 23, (August-September 1944), 193-222. Vandenberg may have placed the seven-year statute of limitations on his bill because of the apprehension congressmen felt concerning the length of time states had to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment.

<sup>233</sup> *New York Times*, 20 October 1942, 1.

associations which harken back to a time that no one wants to see restored.”<sup>234</sup> Despite his seeming antiquarianism, Vandenberg’s domestic politics reflected a layer of sympathy for young people buried underneath his crusty conservatism. The economic panic of 1893 wrecked his father’s leather-goods business, which, according to biographer Lawrence S. Kaplan, forced “the nine-year-old Arthur to spend much of his youth living by his wits.”<sup>235</sup> The tough socioeconomic circumstances of his upbringing led him as a journalist and editor of the *Grand Rapids (MI) Herald* to demand safe working conditions for children and to champion legislation that barred the use of child labor. As a U.S. Senator, Vandenberg continued his advocacy to protect young workers. In 1937, 1939, and 1941, he filed constitutional amendments that empowered Congress “to limit and prohibit the labor for hire of persons under 16 years of age.”<sup>236</sup> Vandenberg’s private papers do not provide any hint as to why he submitted his 18-vote resolution, but, in the context of his opposition to lowering the draft age, it appropriately fit his penchant to shield youth from exploitation while simultaneously seeking to expand their opportunities as individuals.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Quoted in C. David Tompkins, *Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg: The Evolution of a Modern Republican, 1884-1945*, (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1970), 182.

<sup>235</sup> Lawrence S. Kaplan, *The Conversion of Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg: From Isolation to International Engagement* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 1.

<sup>236</sup> S.J. Res 144, 75<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 83 (6 May 1937): 4224; S.J. Res. 30, 76<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Ibid*, 85 (12 January 1939): 89; and S.J. Res. 11, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Ibid*, 87 (8 January 1941): 53.

<sup>237</sup> Arthur H. Vandenberg Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan. In particular, see Arthur Vandenberg Scrapbooks, Volume XIV, December 1941-December 1942, *Ibid*.

Vandenberg's act inspired other congressmen to pursue the establishment of a national voting age. In the two weeks after his 18-vote motion, representatives Jennings Randolph (D-WV) and Jed Johnson (D-OK) submitted House legislation that copied Vandenberg's measure verbatim.<sup>238</sup> Several people congratulated Vandenberg for illuminating the injustice of youth votelessness in light of the teenage conscription bill and encouraged him to square other suffrage inequities, such as the disfranchisement of Washington, D.C. denizens.<sup>239</sup> The *Wall Street Journal*, a conservative newspaper that had routinely supported Vandenberg's isolationist and anti-New Deal tack, chided him for filing a mawkish "gesture." "There is no connection in reason between military duty and the political franchise," the *Journal's* editors opined, "It does not follow that the youth of 18 has attained the maturity of judgment which intelligent voting requires. To say that if a man is good enough to fight he is good enough to vote is only sentimentalism."<sup>240</sup> The 77<sup>th</sup> Congress ended on 16 December 1942 without taking action on any of the 18-vote proposals. Establishing a national voting age did not garner much attention since it was broached late in the legislative session and because, as reporter W.H. Lawrence of the *New York Times* noted, it was a "collateral issue" to the draft age imbroglio.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>238</sup> H.J. Res. 354, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (21 October 1942): 8507; and H.J. Res. 356, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (27 October 1942): 8669.

<sup>239</sup> See "Voting Age," letter to editor, *Washington Post*, 25 October 1942, B6 and "Another Rider," letter to editor, *Ibid*, 26 October 1942, 8.

<sup>240</sup> "Fighting and Voting Ages," editorial, *Wall Street Journal*, 21 October 1942, 6.

<sup>241</sup> W.H. Lawrence, "Draft Bill Rider for Ban on Liquor Pressed in Senate," *New York Times*,

The 18-vote also became collaterally attached to congressional debate regarding anti-poll tax legislation. During the 1890s, southern state governments adopted the poll tax (an assessment fee levied as a prerequisite to vote) as part of a cache of disfranchising measures to exclude African-Americans and poor whites from electoral politics.<sup>242</sup> In 1937, the Supreme Court upheld the legality of poll taxes and ruled the authority for levying them rested wholly with the states. It also noted that the Constitution allowed for the eradication of poll taxes as applied to federal elections.<sup>243</sup> After the ruling, congressional efforts to eliminate poll taxes intensified. Southern Democrats, with assistance from a handful of Republicans, successfully rebuffed legislation in 1939, 1940, and 1941.<sup>244</sup> On 13 October 1942, four days before Wickersham proposed his 18-vote measure, a House motion filed posthumously for anti-poll tax champion Lee Geyer (D-CA) easily passed a 252-84 roll-call vote. Southern Democrats bitterly objected that it would stir up racial strife by enfranchising blacks and deprive states control over their elections as

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20 October 1942, 1.

<sup>242</sup> V.O. Key, Jr. and his protégé Frederic Ogden were among the first political scientists to study the effects of the poll tax on electoral participation. They concluded that poll taxes more negatively affected poor whites than African-Americans. V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, (New York: Knopf, 1949) and Frederic Ogden, *The Poll Tax in the South*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1958). Other historians fault Key and Ogden for not considering poll taxes as part of the cumulative practices to disfranchise southern blacks. See C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951) and J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restrictions and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

<sup>243</sup> *Breedlove v. Suttles*, 302 U.S. 277 (1937).

<sup>244</sup> "Proposed Legislation to Abolish State Poll Taxes," *Congressional Digest* 20, (December 1941), 305-320.

guaranteed in the Constitution.<sup>245</sup> The bill, as Geyer had formulated it in 1940, cleverly framed abolishing poll taxes as the prevention of “pernicious political activities” that might disable overseas soldiers from casting ballots in forthcoming federal elections. Geyer had borrowed the phrase “pernicious political activities” from the Hatch Act of 1939. Named for Senator Carl Hatch (D-NM) the law restricted employees of the executive branch (except the president, vice president, and certain high-level officials) from engaging in partisan political activities, such as using public funds for electoral purposes.<sup>246</sup> Geyer originally filed his bill as an amendment to the Hatch Act, reasoning that southern politicians manipulated elections by paying the poll taxes of some citizens. His 1940 measure banned the levying of poll taxes as a prerequisite for voting for the President, Vice President, Senator, or Representative in Congress; it did not seek to outlaw poll taxes for other elections.<sup>247</sup> After his death in October 1941, collegial sentiment for Geyer within Congress and the emotion of fighting a “good” war on behalf of democracy carried other anti-poll tax proposals.<sup>248</sup> As Representative Thaddeus Wasielowski (D-WI) underscored, “Thousands of people disfranchised by the poll tax are serving in the armed forces of the United States. Is it fair to deny them the right to express their

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<sup>245</sup> H.R. 1024, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 88, (13 October 1942): 8174. See also *Chicago Tribune*, 14 October 1942, 11; *New York Times*, 14 October 1942, 1; and *Washington Post*, 14 October 1942, 5.

<sup>246</sup> Hatch Political Activity Act, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. 53, ch. 410, (2 August 1939): 1147.

<sup>247</sup> *New York Times*, 17 March 1940, 77, and 13 October 1942, 11.

<sup>248</sup> In October 1941, the 53-year-old Geyer, a former high school teacher and football coach, died of bronchial pneumonia in Washington, D.C.’s Walter Reed Hospital. See *Washington Post*, 12 October 1941, 1 & 11.

will as to the people who will represent them? We cannot fight for freedom and then deny its existence, to any degree whatsoever, to any group, any place, in America.”<sup>249</sup>

Since soldiers were technically employees of the executive branch (as members of the War Department), Geyer had believed the Hatch Act might provide an indirect path to poll tax elimination via the policing of federal soldier-vote laws.<sup>250</sup> Congress faced a tangled mess of state voter qualifications that challenged enfranchising military personnel. Kentucky, Louisiana, and New Mexico, for example, had no provisions for absentee voting whatsoever. New Hampshire allowed absentee voting only in presidential elections. Massachusetts and North Dakota mailed absentee ballots to all persons outside the state serving in the armed forces. Seven states (Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois, Kansas, Maine, Nevada, and South Dakota) mailed ballots to state citizens in the armed forces and called for their collection at training camps or points of station. Fourteen states (Connecticut, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, North Carolina, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina) allowed state citizens who were in military to absentee vote by mail but did not send them a ballot until requested. And twenty-one states (Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Michigan, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 14 October 1942, 1. For additional contemporary views regarding the issue, see “Has the Federal Congress Power to Enact Legislation Affecting the Poll-Tax Law of a State?” *Congressional Digest* 21 (November 1942), 259-288.

<sup>250</sup> *Washington Post*, 3 September 1940, 3.

Island, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming) extended absentee voting privileges to soldiers and civilians but had no specifications for delivering or collecting ballots.<sup>251</sup>

In July 1942, Representative Robert Ramsay (D-WV) and Senator Theodore Green (D-RI) introduced companion absentee soldier vote bills. Green, chairman of the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections, maintained that the acts did not alter state voting requirements regarding residence, poll-tax payments, or age. The measures sought to permit any member of the armed forces stationed within the continental United States to vote by postcard in the November 1942 mid-term elections if eligible to meet their home state's qualifications for voting.<sup>252</sup> On 23 July 1942, the House passed Ramsay's resolution after nearly seven tumultuous hours of delaying tactics coordinated by John Rankin (D-MS), who, Gordon Canfield (D-NJ) angrily snapped, had orchestrated a "sorry day in the history of the republic. We filibuster all day, and over what? Over giving the service men their vote, and we are dancing minutes with the question of giving the right of franchise to those who are preparing to give their lives for what they call a free America."<sup>253</sup> Over the next two months, the Senate and House approved amendments to

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<sup>251</sup> Irving Dillard, "Who'll Elect the Next Congress?" *Survey Graphic* 31, (June 1942): 292-294.

<sup>252</sup> H.R. 7416, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (20 July 1942): 6423, and S. 2675, *Ibid*, 6480. Biographer Erwin L. Levine contends that the soldier vote proposals "germinated in the mind of Senator Green, who firmly believed that servicemen should have the privilege of voting for federal officials." See Erwin L. Levine, *Theodore Francis Green: The Washington Years, 1937-1960* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1971), 65.

<sup>253</sup> *New York Times*, 24 July 1942, 9. See also *Congressional Record* 88, (23 July 1942): 6569, and *Washington Post*, 24 July 1942, 14.

Ramsay's measure that allowed absentee voting in primary and general elections for federal offices, permitted mail ballots for military personnel at home and abroad, and waived poll tax obligations if servicemen met residency, minimum voting age, and/or property requirements.<sup>254</sup>

The addition of the poll-tax rider to Ramsey's amendment became, according to *New York Times* Capitol Hill reporter C.P. Trussell, "the most volatile measure dropped into the hoppers since Pearl Harbor."<sup>255</sup> It would apply only to soldiers hailing from the eight remaining poll-tax states: Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The congressional battle over the poll-tax waiver pitched Southern Democrats and a small group of hardcore anti-statist Republicans against northern and western congressmen, Democrat and Republican, "from districts having an important colored vote."<sup>256</sup> Senator Walter George (D-GA), who led Senate resistance, clarified that the poll tax allies were not "opposed to soldier voting" since many congressmen, including himself, had sons and other males relatives in service. However, the poll-tax rider to the soldier vote bill set an ominous precedent: "[I]f Congress can now say who shall vote for membership in the House and Senate in wartime, it will not be long

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<sup>254</sup> *Congressional Record* 88, (25 August 1942): 6972; (31 August 1942): 7008; (9 September 1942): 7079; and (10 September 1942): 7097. See also *New York Times*, 26 August 1942, 22; 10 September 1942, 23; and 11 September 1942, 9; *Chicago Tribune*, 10 September 1942, 1, and 11 September 1942, 8; *Washington Post*, 10 September 1942, C10, and 11 September 1942, B8; and "Votes for Servicemen," *Newsweek* 20, 21 September 1942, 54.

<sup>255</sup> C.P. Trussell, "Soldier Vote in Jeopardy," *New York Times*, 6 September 1942, E7.

<sup>256</sup> *Washington Post*, 1 September 1942, 7.



before the Congress is exercising the same power in peacetime.”<sup>257</sup> Some Republicans, including party leaders Arthur Vandenberg and Senator Robert Taft (R-OH), agreed with George and criticized federal countermanding of state laws; other GOP members believed Ramsey’s proposal would create an army of new Democrat voters.<sup>258</sup> Southern Democrats denounced the poll tax exemption as a liberal-northern threat to the right of states to determine election qualifications, which, of course, was the fount of one-party, one-race rule in the South. Representative John Rankin thundered that the poll-tax rider was “part of a long-range Communistic program to change our form of Government and our way of life, and to take control of our elections out of the hands of the white Americans in the various States and turn them over to certain irresponsible elements that are constantly trying to destroy private enterprise and to stir up race trouble – especially in the Southern States.”<sup>259</sup> Supporters of the legislation retorted that eliminating poll taxes for all the soldiers, white or black, who willingly sacrificed to defend the freedoms of their fellow citizens simply served the cause of democratic justice. As Representative William Pheiffer (R-NY) declared, “if a man is good enough to fight for his country he is good enough to exercise his right of franchise

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 21 August 1942, 6.

<sup>258</sup> *New York Times*, 18 August 1942, 10, and Mark Sullivan, “Service Ballot Bill: The Poll Tax Amendment,” column, *Washington Post*, 28 August 1942, 13. In 1940, Vandenberg forwarded the results of an Army study detailing the complicated absentee voter registration regulations within the states to the Senate for examination as part of the deliberations on the Selective Training and Service Act. See *Washington Post*, 3 September 1940, 2.

<sup>259</sup> *Washington Post*, 2 September 1942, 4. See also *Chicago Tribune*, 2 September 1942, 8, and *New York Times*, 2 September 1942, 11.

without paying tribute.”<sup>260</sup> On 16 September 1942, less than two months before the November elections, President Roosevelt signed the Soldier Vote Bill despite some hesitation regarding the mechanics of processing the mail-in ballots.<sup>261</sup>

After executive approval of the soldier vote measure, the legislative push for a discrete anti-poll tax resolution embroiled Congress. Poll tax foes realized the Soldier Vote Bill had induced Congress to declare for the first time that it had the power to quash all forms of poll taxes, not just those that touched military personnel. To many people, a war that required special individual sacrifices to preserve democracy made poll taxes an anachronistic affront. “American citizens should not be required to pay for the privilege of extending democratic rights,” the *Washington Post* editorialized, “The poll tax should go the way of the former property qualification for voting.”<sup>262</sup> One week after President Roosevelt authorized the Soldier Vote Bill, anti-poll tax advocates in the House managed to pull off a discharge petition, a rare parliamentary procedure.<sup>263</sup> They gathered the necessary

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<sup>260</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 September 1942, 3.

<sup>261</sup> Soldier Vote Bill, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. 56, ch. 561, (16 September 1942): 753. See also *Chicago Tribune*, 17 September 1942, 2, and “Votes for Servicemen,” *Newsweek*, 21 September 1942, 54. The lateness of the bill’s passage can account for why fewer than 28,000 of the 5.5 million people in the armed forces would vote in the 1942 federal elections. See *New York Times*, 25 October 1942, 31, and Levine, *Theodore Francis Green*, 66. In 1944, Congress created the War Ballot Commission to increase the number of soldier returns. The 1944 ballot allowed servicemen to vouch orally for their age: “Proof of Age for Voting Federal Ballot. The statement of an individual soldier as to his age will control his eligibility, insofar as age is concerned, to receive a Federal ballot.” See Manual for Soldier Voting Outside the United States in the November 1944 General Election, War Department Pamphlet No. 21-11, 5 June 1944, p. 12, Record Group 2, Series Group I, Series 2, Box 12, “Sec. of State Correspondence – ‘B’ (General), John B. Wilson” Folder, Georgia State Department of Archives and History, Atlanta.

<sup>262</sup> “Votes for Soldiers,” editorial, *Washington Post*, 28 August 1942, 12.

<sup>263</sup> For more about discharge petitions, see John W. Petty, “The House Discharge Procedure and Majoritarian Politics,” *Journal of Politics* 69, no. 3 (August 2007): 678-688.

218 signatures to discharge (i.e. relieve) the House Judiciary Committee of its jurisdiction over Lee Geyer's bill (which had been stuck in committee over twenty months since it was originally filed in January 1941), thereby turning the measure to the House Rules Committee.<sup>264</sup> Under the parliamentary rule governing the discharge petition, the earliest date for House consideration of Geyer's motion would be 12 October. On that day, the House passed a resolution that took it out of the southern-dominated Rules Committee directly to the legislative floor.<sup>265</sup> The next afternoon, 13 October, the House overwhelmingly approved the Geyer Bill, thus sending it to the Senate for consideration.<sup>266</sup>

Prospects for passage of the anti-poll tax legislation initially looked slim. Ten days prior to receiving the Geyer motion, a Senate Judiciary subcommittee had roundly rejected a statute offered by Senator Claude Pepper (D-FL) to void poll tax prerequisites for voting in federal elections as a "clear violation" of the Constitution.<sup>267</sup> Within the full Judiciary Committee, Chairman Frederick Van Nuys (D-IN) engineered an alliance of northern and western Democrats and moderate Republicans to approve the Geyer Bill handily (13-5) but with an amendment that banned poll taxes in both the primaries and elections for national

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<sup>264</sup> *New York Times*, 23 September 1942, 16; *Washington Post*, 23 September 1942, B2; and "Poll-Tax Prospect," *Newsweek*, 26 October 1942, 36 & 38.

<sup>265</sup> H. Res. 110, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (22 September 1942): 8070-8079. See also, *Chicago Tribune*, 13 October 1942, 10; *New York Times*, 13 October 1942, 11; and *Washington Post*, 13 October 1942, 8.

<sup>266</sup> H.R. 1024, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (13 October 1942): 8174.

<sup>267</sup> *New York Times*, 3 October 1942, 6, and *Washington Post*, 3 October 1942, 3.

offices.<sup>268</sup> Southern Democrats again fumed that the proposal was an unconstitutional infringements of states' rights. "This bill means federal control of elections," Senator Tom Connally (D-TX) bristled, and, in language recalling the supposed era of "Negro Rule" during Reconstruction, he charged, "However obnoxious may be poll tax requirements, they are not as bad as federal bayonets at the voting booths."<sup>269</sup>

Helped by a two-week recess to campaign for the November mid-terms, southern Democrats schemed to stall the Senate's legislative clock until the end of the 77<sup>th</sup> Congress (slated to adjourn on 16 December 1942). As congressional rules stated, all unaddressed or unresolved bills had to be re-introduced at the start of the next Congress once a legislative session ended.<sup>270</sup> On 13 November, Theodore Bilbo (D-MS) launched the first full-blown Senate filibuster since one in 1938 orchestrated by southern Democrats to kill an anti-lynching bill.<sup>271</sup> He was a master of the race-baiting politics of the Jim Crow era and a staunch defender of states' rights, particularly in regard to determining voter qualifications.<sup>272</sup> Bilbo claimed he was prepared to talk until Christmas, but the strategy plotted by his

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<sup>268</sup> H.R. 1024, 77<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (26 October 1942): 8656. See also, *Washington Post*, 27 October 1942, B14.

<sup>269</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 27 October 1942, 6.

<sup>270</sup> *Washington Post*, 11 November 1942, 3, and *Chicago Tribune*, 14 November 1942, 13.

<sup>271</sup> *New York Times*, 14 November 1942, 1, and *Washington Post*, 14 November 1942, 1.

<sup>272</sup> Biographer Chester M. Morgan contends Bilbo's "redneck liberalism" (i.e. aggressive statism to alleviate the plight of poor white Mississippians) allowed him to escape sexual, financial, and political scandals. Chester M. Morgan, *Redneck Liberal: Theodore G. Bilbo and the New Deal* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985). See also A. Wigfall Green, *The Man Bilbo* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963).

legislative confederates planned to bury Geyer's revised bill in an avalanche of parliamentary maneuvers, quorum calls, points of order, and amendments.

One of the amendments, filed by Bilbo on the seventh day of his filibuster (21 November), proposed to establish eighteen as the national minimum voting age. His 18-vote rider to the Geyer Bill surely sounded democratic when it said, "No person otherwise qualified to vote in any primary or other election for any such [federal] officer shall be denied the right to vote in such election because of his age, if such person is 18 years of age or older."<sup>273</sup> Bilbo's motives, however, were clearly polemic. He utilized the 18-vote measure as a hedge against the possibility that further efforts to pass the anti-poll tax bill might be made.<sup>274</sup> In case the Senate revived the bill, Bilbo hoped to slay it by pressing consideration of his resolution to lower the minimum voting age via continuation of the filibuster. Bilbo, like other southern congressmen, believed a national anti-poll tax bill was the first step toward federal control of state elections. According to historian Ronald L. Heinemann, southern objections to such legislation "were heightened by wartime pressures that threatened to upset not only political equilibrium but traditional race relations as well."<sup>275</sup> Bilbo's resolve to maintain white supremacy by quashing a simple expansion of electoral privilege drove his legislative charlatanism. On 23

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<sup>273</sup> *Congressional Record* 88 (21 November 1942): 9059. See also, *Washington Post*, 22 November 1942, 11.

<sup>274</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 22 November 1942, 10A; and "Poll-Tax Pillory," *Newsweek*, 23 November 1942, 35.

<sup>275</sup> Ronald L. Heinemann, *Harry Byrd of Virginia* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 231.

November 1942, two days after filing his 18-vote measure, a Senate vote for cloture on Bilbo's filibuster failed, thereby killing the Geyer anti-poll tax bill and closing any further discussion in the 77<sup>th</sup> Congress of a uniform suffrage age.<sup>276</sup>

The first session of the 78<sup>th</sup> Congress (6 January to 21 December 1943) opened with a rush of youth suffrage bills. Senators Arthur Vandenberg and Harley Kilgore (D-WV) and Representatives Hamilton Fish (R-NY), Jennings Randolph, Thomas J. Lane (D-MA), and Grant Furlong (D-PA) each filed joint resolutions proposing constitutional amendments to extend voting rights in all elections to citizens at least 18 years of age.<sup>277</sup> Each of these proposals copied the wording of Vandenberg's October 1942 measure. Congressman Wickersham re-filed his previous amendment allowing persons over age 18 to vote only in federal elections.<sup>278</sup> Representative J. Buell Snyder (D-PA), chairman of the House Military Appropriations Subcommittee, submitted an amendment establishing nineteen as the national voting age for all elections.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 24 November 1942, 8; *New York Times*, 24 November 1942, 1 & 17; *Wall Street Journal*, 24 November 1942, 8; *Washington Post*, 24 November 1942, 1 & 14; "Senate Sideshow," *Newsweek*, 30 November 1942, 37-38; and "An Epitaph Is Written," *Time*, 30 November 1942, 24.

<sup>277</sup> The following joint resolutions are listed in correspondence to the order of Senators and Representatives as written in the noted sentence. S.J. Res. 7, 78<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (7 January 1943): 36; S.J. Res. 89., Ibid, (25 October 1943): 8650; H.J. Res. 8, Ibid, (6 January 1943): 25; H.J. Res. 39, Ibid, (7 January 1943): 51; H.J. Res. 71, Ibid, (26 January 1943): 395; and H.J. Res. 167, Ibid, (28 September 1943): 7895 – which was the only bill or joint resolution filed by Furlong during the first session of the 78<sup>th</sup> Congress. See also *Washington Post*, 7 January 1943, 3.

<sup>278</sup> H.J. Res. 34, 78<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 88, (6 January 1943): 26.

<sup>279</sup> H.J. Res. 33, 78<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* 88 (6 January 1943): 26. Snyder filed his bill without explaining why he chose age 19 as the year of enfranchisement. He may have been influenced by the fall 1942 debates regarding the proper draft age or possibly by his former career as a high school principal. Absent any evidence, Snyder's reasons for choosing a 19-vote

Congressional motions to lower the voting age gained influential support. The American Civil Liberties Union, and the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers Union of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and the National Education Association each publicly supported the 18-vote.<sup>280</sup> Joy Elmer Morgan, an NEA executive, declared, “The enfranchisement of 18-year-olds would be a logical climax to the amazing growth of the American high school . . . is in keeping with the work to extend and enrich education for citizenship and to encourage increased emphasis on the study of current affairs.”<sup>281</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt was the first federal official connected to the executive branch to back resetting voting ages. In late January 1943, Eleanor Roosevelt asserted in “My Day,” her nationally-syndicated column, “If young men of 18 and 19 are old enough to be trained to fight their country’s battles and to proceed from training to battlefields, I think we must face the fact that they are also old enough to know why we fight this war. If that is so, then they are old enough to take part in the political life of their country and to be full citizens with voting powers.”<sup>282</sup> On a trip to Columbia, Missouri, a few weeks

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resolution remain unclear. See *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-Present*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000668> (accessed 10 July 2014).

<sup>280</sup> See “Should the Legal Voting Age Be Reduced to 18 Years?,” *Congressional Digest*, 193-222, and *New York Times*, 15 September 1943, 31.

<sup>281</sup> Joy Elmer Morgan, “Old Enough to Fight: Old Enough to Vote,” *Journal of the National Education Association* 32, no. 2 (February 1943): 35.

<sup>282</sup> *New York Times*, 22 January 1943, 22. Mrs. Roosevelt consistently supported the 18-vote. In July 1944 at a press conference in Asheville, North Carolina, Roosevelt again said she favored lowering the voting age to 18: “When you draft people and send them out to die, and know that they’re facing that, you might better give them the chance to participate in their government.” *Ibid*, 26 July 1944, 8. She also backed lowering the draft age to eighteen – even before Pearl Harbor. See *Washington Post*, 1 July 1941, 11.

after the column appeared, she reiterated: “I have no objection to lowering the voting age to 18 years if students are properly trained in citizenship. We expect so much of 18-year-olds in war it is only fair that we should expect the same of them in peace.”<sup>283</sup> The public comments of the First Lady were significant because, as the *New York Times* emphasized, her “daily newspaper column often gives hints of policies under discussion in Administration circles.”<sup>284</sup>

The seeming interest of the White House and the flurry of federal bill filings triggered state action to reduce voting ages. The U.S. Constitution gave to the states primary authority for establishing eligibility requirements for suffrage. Despite a wide variety of voter prerequisites, only two qualifications were prescribed by all the states: residence and minimum voting age. Since the Civil War, only New York had seriously considered reducing the age of enfranchisement.<sup>285</sup> In 1943, thirty-one state legislatures, stirred by the “old enough to fight, old enough to vote” argument, weighed measures to recalibrate legal voting ages. State lawmakers sympathetically but unenthusiastically considered the youth suffrage proposals. Twenty-seven statehouses either chose not to act on or did not report bills out of committee. In Arkansas, New York, and Wisconsin, one house of the legislature approved a youth suffrage proposal while

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<sup>283</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 February 1943, 7.

<sup>284</sup> *New York Times*, 22 January 1943, 22.

<sup>285</sup> At their constitutional convention in the summer of 1867, New York state delegates twice rejected resolutions to set 18 as age of electoral majority. See “Should the Legal Voting Age Be Reduced to 18 Years?,” *Congressional Digest*, 199-200, and Wendell W. Cultice, *Youth’s Battle for the Ballot: A History of Voting Age in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 13-14.



the other house declined. Only Georgia successfully lowered its voting age, from 21 to 18, during the war.<sup>286</sup>

State rejection of extending voting rights to young people mirrored public opinion. Gallup polls conducted in January and April 1943 showed that a majority of those persons asked opposed changing laws to permit 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds suffrage. The January and April polls, however, revealed that the idea of lowering voting ages was gradually gaining favor:<sup>287</sup>

<u>Date of Poll</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
June 1939	17%	79%	4%
January 1943	39%	52%	9%
April 1943	42%	52%	6%

In June 1939, Gallup's group first asked Americans about the prospect of youth suffrage in response to its promotion by Judge Ben B. Lindsey. Americans knew Lindsey as the originator of America's juvenile court system, an international authority on juvenile delinquency, and outspoken advocate for children's rights.<sup>288</sup>

In spring 1939, Lindsey had given several public speeches and, according to nationally-syndicated columnists Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen, had been

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<sup>286</sup> *New York Times*, 7 January 1943, 17; 12 February 1943, 14; 24 February 1943, 13; 3 March 1943, 15; 25 March 1943, 23; 5 August 1943, 36; and 13 October 1943, 44; *Time*, 16 August 1943, 22; and *Washington Post*, 12 February 1943, B4; 25 February 1943, B8; 5 August 1943, 3; and 22 September 1943, 17.

<sup>287</sup> *New York Times*, 9 April 1943, 17.

<sup>288</sup> See Charles Larsen, *The Good Fight: The Life and Times of Ben B. Lindsey* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972).

granted a private audience with President Franklin Roosevelt in support of the 18-vote. Pearson and Allen reported that Lindsey emphasized two points in his talk with FDR: 1) modern youth were capable of voting because they matured more quickly, in terms of educational and experiential development, than prior generations, and 2) young men who faced the possibility of conscription because of world political events deserved an electoral say in deciding whether the United States should go to war. Lindsey told Pearson, “With longevity increasing, we are becoming a nation in which old people have a controlling voice in the affairs of the nation.” Because America “always has been a young nation,” Lindsey concluded, “we must keep it that way” by enfranchising America’s three million 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds.<sup>289</sup>

The overwhelming majority of poll respondents in 1939 disagreed with Lindsey. Gallup’s results showed some demographic variation: Democrats and the working class favored the 18-vote more than Republicans and the wealthy. The reason for the party and class split, Gallup speculated, related to a general belief that young people and the poor strongly supported the President Roosevelt and the New Deal.<sup>290</sup> Nevertheless, nearly everyone queried opposed Lindsey’s idea for generally the same reason. People disputed his claim that better contemporary

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<sup>289</sup> Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen, “Washington Merry-Go-Round,” typescript copy of column, 7 May 1939, Washington-Merry-Go-Round Digital Collection, American University, Washington, D.C., accessed 13 September 2015, [http://auislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/pearson%3A53613?solr\\_nav\[offset\]=18#page1/mode/1up](http://auislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/pearson%3A53613?solr_nav[offset]=18#page1/mode/1up).

<sup>290</sup> Young people appeared to back consistently FDR and his legislative program. In August 1943, *Newsweek* alleged that the national establishment of the 18-vote “would be a break for Mr. Roosevelt, since it is estimated that young people have a 60-40 pro-New Deal leaning.” See “Vote at 18,” *Newsweek* 22, 16 August 1943, 59.

schooling had prepared youth to vote as knowledgeably as adults. Gallup conveyed, “By far the most frequent comment is that most young people under 21 are too unfamiliar with political matters to make competent voters. Many of them remark that ‘even at 21 you don’t know very much about what’s going on.’” That sentiment held across age lines:<sup>291</sup>

<u>Persons Aged</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
21 to 29	17%	83%
30 to 49	17%	83%
50 and over	18%	82%

Neither Nazi aggression in Europe nor other international episodes portending war affected the poll results. Gallup made no mention of the looming war or potential conscription as factors influencing what people thought about reducing voting ages.

By April 1943, however, America’s participation in World War II and the use of youth in combat convinced 25% more respondents that adolescents should vote than the June 1939 survey. Though a slight majority still supported the 21-vote tradition, the induction of 18-year-olds into the armed forces caused many citizens to reconsider whether it should persist. The January 1943 Gallup poll revealed a consistent rise in favorable opinion for youth suffrage over different age spans:<sup>292</sup>

<u>Persons Aged</u>	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
21 to 29	41%	53%	6%
30 to 49	38%	52%	10%
50 and over	37%	52%	11%

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<sup>291</sup> *New York Times*, 11 June 1939, 17.

<sup>292</sup> *Washington Post*, 15 January 1943, 11.

Two population groups acutely affected by the impact of war – teenagers and the parents of young troops – nudged the 18-vote issue into the national spotlight by highlighting the intelligence of contemporary youth and the injustice of service without suffrage. A high-school student from Hancock, Maryland, asked, “if a young man at [eighteen] is old enough to fight for a thing, and know what he is fighting for, isn’t he old enough to help protect and play an active role on behalf of that for which he is giving his life?”<sup>293</sup> Another adolescent challenged the supposed “fact that the men below 21 were ill-advised in political matters.” “This might have been true in 1789,” the youth asserted, “but the educational systems of this country have advanced to the point where a young man has a knowledge of political affairs at the age of 18. I have recently turned 19 myself and have participated in many debates with elders who have respected and valued my opinions on a parity with one who has passed the present legal age.”<sup>294</sup> The father of a soldier from New York City questioned why adolescents “who certainly could be trusted to exercise the citizen’s prerogative to vote, are still chained to our elders’ concept of ‘legal age.’ I have a son who will be 21 in a few days, but as he is serving in our Army overseas, this won’t mean a thing to him from this angle of consideration. It seems to me that if these young people of 18 and over are old enough to fight they should be considered old enough to vote; otherwise we oldsters do them a great disservice.”<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> “Voting Age,” letter to the editor, *Washington Post*, 10 January 1943, B6.

<sup>294</sup> “Fighting and Voting,” letter to editor, *Ibid*, 1 February 1943, 8.

<sup>295</sup> “Injustice to Youth Seen,” letter to the editor, *New York Times*, 16 January 1943, 12.

The slim public majority who backed the 21- vote remained skeptical about enfranchising adolescents. They acknowledged that young men had benefitted from improvements in American education, shouldered much of the fighting burden, and made tough decisions in harrowing circumstances. And they often congratulated underage troops for their impressive military service. Nevertheless, most adults believed that, as a group, adolescents lacked the knowledge of current events, interest in political matters, and maturity of cognitive judgment to vote wisely. As a Baltimore clerk summarized to a Gallup pollster, “They just haven’t got enough sound political judgment at that age.”<sup>296</sup> Other adults doubted the claim that the battlefield prowess of young combatants proved teenagers possessed the sagacity to cast ballots. “How anybody can relate the capacity to tote a gun to experience in affairs of government is more than I can see,” a man wrote the *New York Times*, “I had, naturally, expected to see a lot of harebrained things emerge from the welter of war, but I never expected to see [the youth suffrage] proposal taken seriously; yet we see it actually taken up by a few otherwise sensible men.”<sup>297</sup>

The “otherwise sensible men” gibe referred to those state and federal lawmakers who endorsed Georgia’s approval of the 18-vote. During the first week of August 1943, Georgia voters had overwhelmingly accepted, by over a 2 to 1 margin, a constitutional amendment lowering the legal suffrage age from 21 to 18,

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<sup>296</sup> *Washington Post*, 15 January 1943, 11.

<sup>297</sup> “Lowering Voting Age Opposed,” letter to the editor, *New York Times*, 26 August 1943, 16.

thereby becoming the first state to grant voting privileges to teenagers.<sup>298</sup> Youth suffrage had been a chief plank of Ellis Arnall's gubernatorial campaign. Arnall, a 35-year-old former state attorney general, had won the governorship in 1942 from demagogue Eugene Talmadge by pledging to cleanse the Peach State of cronyism and corruption. In particular, Arnall promised to eradicate political tampering with Georgia's higher education system. In the spring and summer of 1941, Talmadge engineered the firings of Marvin Pittman (president of Georgia State Teachers College), Walter Cocking (dean of the University of Georgia's School of Education), and ten professors from other Georgia universities for allegedly promoting communism, religious non-conformity, and/or race-mixing in their professional capacities. Several members of the Georgia Board of Regents (the state's educational oversight committee) balked at Talmadge's demand for lack of reasonable evidence and refused to sack the accused. Talmadge then moved to "pack" the Board of Regents by forcing the resignations of the disagreeable members and replacing them with stooges who coveted being his hatchet men. In July 1941, the Talmadge-tilted Board discharged the accused educators. In December, the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools suspended the University of Georgia and nine other public colleges from its list of accredited institutions for violations of academic freedom and political interference into the

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<sup>298</sup> See *New York Times*, 12 February 1943, 14; "Suffrage, Jr.," *Time*, 16 August 1943, 22; Franklin L. Burdette, "Lowering the Voting Age in Georgia," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (July 1945): 300-307; *Atlanta Journal*, 4 August 1943, 1; and *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 August 1943, 1.

operations of the state's colleges.<sup>299</sup> Over the next several months, the American Medical Association, Association of American Law Schools, Association of American Universities, American Association of Teachers Colleges, and American Association of College Schools of Business all sanctioned or suspended Georgia colleges in some fashion for Talmadge's meddling.<sup>300</sup>

Talmadge staked his re-election campaign on stirring the economic and psychological anxieties of the "wool-hat boys," i.e. rural white Georgians.<sup>301</sup> Historian Thomas G. Dyer asserts Talmadge built his political career on a message tailored to country folk that combined "a strong populist appeal with anti-urbanism, anti-intellectualism, and racism."<sup>302</sup> The dislocations and uncertainties engendered by the Great Depression and World War II heightened provincial paranoia about the South's scant leftists, labor organizers, and race liberals. The penchant to place blame on every variety of social, political, or economic radical for causing the Depression or war or threatening white supremacy spurred Talmadge and other southern demagogues to search college campuses for ideological deviants.

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<sup>299</sup> See "July 14 in Georgia," *New Republic*, 21 July 1941, 69-70; "Talmadge on the Warpath," *Newsweek*, 28 July 1941, 50; "Lynching in Georgia," *Time*, 28 July 1941, 37; "A Blow to Education in Georgia," *School and Society*, 2 August 1941, 71-72; and Jonathan Daniels, "Witch-Hunt in Georgia," *The Nation*, 2 August 1941, 93-94.

<sup>300</sup> "Talmadge's Fouls," *Time*, 14 September 1942, 90.

<sup>301</sup> Rufus Jarman, "Wool-Hat Dictator," *Saturday Evening Post*, 27 June 1942, 20-21 & 109-112.

<sup>302</sup> Thomas G. Dyer, *The University of Georgia: A Bicentennial History, 1785-1985* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), 225. Michelle Brattain's study of Rome, Georgia, illuminates the long-term influence of Talmadge's brand of white-supremacist politics among the state's white working class. See Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

“Although he had graduated from the [University of Georgia’s] law school,” Dyer writes, “Talmadge had little fondness for higher education and seemed to delight in making educators uncomfortable.”<sup>303</sup>

In the past, Talmadge’s purges of educational “furriners” who seemed to challenge his views or the South’s orthodoxy garnered him much electoral support.<sup>304</sup> The discharge of Pittman and Cocking and the resulting loss of accreditation backfired. Devereaux McClatchey, member of Atlanta’s Board of Education, called the affair “a disgusting triumph of ignorance, prejudice, and savagery over the forces of enlightenment and civilization.”<sup>305</sup> A Georgia “farm boy” averred, “I am a high school graduate and plan to enter college in September. This, if for no other reason, would make me a bitter non-supporter of Talmadge if I were of voting age. I dislike his dictatorial methods of ruling the University System as well as the state as a whole.”<sup>306</sup> The education controversy alienated many white Georgians, rural and urban, and it provided the cohesion to hold together an anti-Talmadge political alliance that coalesced around Ellis Arnall. According to one biographer, Arnall’s “youth and inexperience neatly fit the prototype of a crusader

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<sup>303</sup> Dyer, 225.

<sup>304</sup> “Furriners Must Git!” *Time*, 21 July 1941, 16.

<sup>305</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 July 1942, 12.

<sup>306</sup> “Farm Boy Against Talmadge,” letter to editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 July 1942, 4. Other high school students concurred with the “farm boy.” Virgil Price, 14-year-old editor, publisher, and circulation manager of the *Vidette* (GA) *Weekly News* who wished to attend the University of Georgia’s journalism school, affirmed: “If Talmadge is re-elected Governor, the school will lose its standing, and going there would not do me any good.” *Ibid*, 7 August 1942, 12.



against an entrenched machine.”<sup>307</sup> Labeled the “boy wonder of Georgia politics,” Arnall pledged to sweep away the “high-handed, low-browed” practices of the Talmadge gang.<sup>308</sup> During the gubernatorial race, Talmadge taunted Arnall as a liberal zealot bent on racial coeducation. Arnall swiftly thwarted the charge. “If a nigger ever tried to get into a white school in my part of the state,” he vowed, “the sun would never set on his head.”<sup>309</sup> With his segregationist bona fides affirmed, Arnall tore into Talmadge’s malfeasance. The damage inflicted by Talmadge to Georgia higher education gave Arnall an issue to keep him on the defensive throughout the campaign no matter how many times Talmadge tried race-baiting. In a 1971 interview, Arnall declared: “I ran against Talmadge because he had interfered in the University System of Georgia about saying what the teachers could teach and what they couldn’t. . . . [I]t was academic freedom, dictatorship, accredited schools. He thought, Talmadge thought, the ignorant people, who didn’t have a college education, would be for him. But they were the most strongest for me because they wanted their children to have that advantage.”<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Thomas Elkin Taylor, “A Political Biography of Ellis Arnall,” (M.A. thesis, Emory University, 1959), 70.

<sup>308</sup> “Change in the Weather,” *Time*, 13 July 1942, 19, and “Exit Gene Talmadge,” *Ibid*, 21 September 1942, 19.

<sup>309</sup> Quoted in Stephen G.N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 42.

<sup>310</sup> Ellis Arnall, interview by Jane W. Herndon, 24 July 1971, series M, no. 2, tape 2, side 1, Georgia Government Documentation Project, Special Collections Department, William Russell Pullen Library, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia. Political scientist Joseph L. Bernd confirms Arnall’s assertion of rural support. In a study of the 1942 gubernatorial primary, Bernd finds, “The rural vote for Arnall was substantially equal or superior to that of Talmadge in exactly half of the counties carried by the anti-Talmadge candidate. When results in the representative group of counties are projected on a state-wide level, it is evident that the balance of power lay in the

The education issue also rallied Georgia students to Arnall's side, and they were responsible for much of the fervor that the campaign generated. The loss of accreditation meant graduates from state universities possessed diplomas worthless outside of Georgia; i.e. they were barred from postgraduate work and professional practice in other states. "To these young people," the *Atlanta Constitution* emphasized, "the threat of Talmadge's dictatorship in Georgia is quite as real as the threats of Hitler and Mussolini and Tojo."<sup>311</sup> Outraged by Talmadge's "Hitlerism," a group of Georgia co-eds from across the state formed the Student Political League in April 1942.<sup>312</sup> According to its leaders, the SPL organized "to destroy Talmadge-ism in Georgia" and "to restore the accredited rating to the University System."<sup>313</sup> Willis Johnson, University of Georgia SPL organizer, declared that its members simply could not stomach "the public lynching of Georgia educators by a mere nod of the Governor's head."<sup>314</sup> The SPL claimed no "affiliation to any candidate for public

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strong rural backing for Arnall. The Arnall margin in the towns and cities equaled or exceeded the normal expectations of an anti-Talmadge candidate, but the Arnall votes in the country provided the victory." Joseph L. Bernd, *Grass Roots Politics in Georgia: The County Unit System and the Importance of the Individual Voting Community in Bi-factional Elections, 1942-1954*, (Atlanta: Emory University Research Committee, 1960), 23.

<sup>311</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 September 1942, 3D.

<sup>312</sup> *The [University of Georgia] Red and Black*, 1 May 1942, 1. Thomas G. Dyer notes that college "students likened Talmadge's methods to those of Adolf Hitler, and even suggested that the Georgia governor strongly resembled the German fuehrer." Dyer, *The University of Georgia*, 237-238. For sample comparisons of Talmadge to Hitler, see "Wants Georgia to Be Set Free," letter to editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 August 1942, 6; C.E. Gregory, "Georgia Campus Leaders Lash at Talmadge," *Atlanta Journal*, 10 July 1942, 9, and "From G[eorgia] S[tate] C[ollege] [for] W[omen] Alumna, letter to editor, Ibid, 6 September 1942, 9A. For more information regarding the formation of the Student Political League, see *Atlanta Constitution*, 25 April 1942, 1 & 6; 26 April 1942, 8A; and 31 May 1942, 12B; and *The [Georgia Institute of Technology] Technique*, 24 April 1942, 1 & 2.

<sup>313</sup> *The Technique*, 24 April 1942, 8, and 1 May 1942, 1.

<sup>314</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, 19 July 1942, 7A.

office,” but its members eagerly worked to elect Ellis Arnall governor.<sup>315</sup> “Arnall for Governor” clubs formed on university campuses, and student newspapers endorsed his candidacy without hesitation. A poll of University of Georgia students revealed that 92% supported Arnall over Talmadge.<sup>316</sup> “We know what Ellis Arnall stands for,” one student declared, “integrity in public office. . . .We like his youth, vitality, and his sincere desire to change things long in need of changing.”<sup>317</sup> Many students saw a ripe opportunity to topple Talmadge’s machine via a youth-led political operation. The student editors of Georgia Tech’s weekly, *The Technique*, urged,

**Students of Georgia, to arms. . . .Let us conscript the power of the ballot box to reinstate academic freedom in Georgia, to dethrone injustice, despotism, and ignorance. Let each student who is of age be certain to register and cast his unchallengable vote against tyranny. And let each student wield all the influence he can possibly command for this same purpose.** May this September see the end of demagoguery and despotism in Georgia.<sup>318</sup>

Arnall’s staff worked closely with the SPL to take an active part in the campaign. During the summer vacation of 1942, several thousand SPL members fanned out across the state to urge parents, friends, and fellow Georgians to vote for Arnall. They mailed literature, wrote influential letters, canvassed neighborhoods,

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<sup>315</sup> *The Technique*, 24 April 1942, 8.

<sup>316</sup> *The Red and Black*, 17 July 1942, 1 and *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 July 1942, 8A. The *Atlanta Journal* reported that the few students who favored Talmadge “gave reasons for their choice, ranging from ‘Gene’s the best governor Georgia’s ever had’ to ‘My dad’s on the state payroll.’” *Atlanta Journal*, 18 July 1942, 2.

<sup>317</sup> Joseph L. Bernd, letter to editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, 24 July 1942, 6.

<sup>318</sup> *The Technique*, editorial, 24 April 1942, 2. Bold print in original.

arranged parades, carried placards, burned Talmadge in effigy, spoke at rallies, and implored Georgia troops stationed out of the state to obtain absentee ballots on Arnall's behalf.<sup>319</sup> The SPL also enlisted the aid of high-schoolers. Jean Martin, 17-year-old president of the Ben Hill County SPL, stressed, "We are too young to vote. We don't earn any money to give to a campaign fund. Still we want very much to help. We high school students may be wrong. But we aren't dumb enough to think Talmadge will stop with the university if he gets away with his grab there. We want to help stop him now before he grabs for the high schools with the support of a Talmadgized university system."<sup>320</sup> Some adults became irritated by the exuberance of the student campaigners. A man from Colbert, Georgia complained,

They really believe that they must organize a crusade and save the state. . . .Most of them are sophomores and freshmen and very few of them are 21 years of age, and very few can vote. Why should a minor who cannot vote tell us, the voters, how we should vote? The daddies of these boys should call them home; they are too smart for their breeches; they know too much for their ages. They fail to realize that their minds are as yet immature and they cannot pass sound judgment on anything."<sup>321</sup>

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<sup>319</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 July 1942, 4A; 11 July 1942, 11; 12 July 1942, 7; 19 July 1942, 8A; 21 July 1942, 4; 5 August 1942, 17; 6 August 1942, 5 & 7; 14 August 1942, 5; 30 August 1942, 2B; 4 September 1942, 6; and 5 September 1942, 2 & 17; *Atlanta Journal*, 1 July 1942, 2; 2 July 1942, 24; 5 July 1942, 12A; 10 July 1942, 12; 12 July 1942, 7A; 20 July 1942, 13; 21 July 1942, 22; 2 August 1942, 11A; 5 August 1942, 8; 6 August 1942, 10; 7 August 1942, 4; 11 August 1942, 9; 13 August 1942, 8; 16 August 1942, 6A; 20 August 1942, 19; 21 August 1942, 6; 25 August 1942, 7; 31 August 1942, 6; and 8 September 1942, 10; *The Red and Black*, 26 June 1942, 1; 3 July 1942, 1 & 6; 10 July 1942, 1; 17 July 1942, 1 & 3; and 6 August 1942, 4 & 6; *The Technique*, 1 May 1942, 2 and 8 May 1942, 1.

<sup>320</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 6 September 1942, 3D.

<sup>321</sup> "Wants Students to Keep Quiet," letter to the editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 June 1942, 4.

Although most of the students were, indeed, under twenty-one and could not vote, Arnall believed their activism, rather than their ballots, would get him elected governor.<sup>322</sup> After he won the office in September 1942, Arnall said in a speech broadcast over national radio that young Georgians should receive “full credit” for his victory over Talmadge.<sup>323</sup>

As governor, Arnall worked to reestablish the accreditation of Georgia’s colleges as part of a progressive reform package to restore political integrity and citizen-focused government to the state.<sup>324</sup> One element of the program sought to enfranchise young people. In November 1942, Arnall first announced his proposal to lower Georgia’s voting age to eighteen at a national conference of state attorneys general held in St. Louis. He claimed his primary motive in seeking youth suffrage was patriotic: “if men of 18 are old enough to fight for their country, they should have a right to vote.”<sup>325</sup> Arnall also hinted that he wanted to enfranchise Georgia youth as a reward for helping him fulfill a personal ambition.<sup>326</sup> He acknowledged in his 1946 autobiography the quid pro quo elements behind his 18-vote call,

I knew that I owed much to the audacious and vigorous

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<sup>322</sup> Ellis Arnall, *The Shore Dimly Seen* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1946), 51-52.

<sup>323</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 19 September 1942, 6. *Time* magazine concurred with Arnall’s assessment: “In his tough campaign against hillbillyish Eugene Talmadge last year, no Arnall supporters were more effective than college students infuriated by the Talmadge purge of the State’s universities.” *Time*, 16 August 1943, 22.

<sup>324</sup> Most of Arnall’s 10-point legislative program sought to strip from Georgia’s executive branch the power to meddle in governmental affairs. See *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 December 1942, 16A.

<sup>325</sup> *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 23 November 1942, 3A.

<sup>326</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 24 November 1942, 1B.

campaign of Young Georgia. I knew that they represented an element in public life that deserved, somehow, to be recognized. But it was not until the campaign and the party convention were over that their real place in the political system occurred to me. A young man, a student at Georgia Tech, who had worked hard in the campaign and shown exceptional interest in spite of his nineteen years and his disqualification as a voter, came to my office to tell me goodbye. He was being inducted into the service and expected to be stationed soon in New Mexico. 'Well, I guess I am old enough to help with the Japs, even if I can't vote.' he said as he was leaving. My young friend was old enough to fight, but he was not old enough to vote. It set me to thinking and to examining the precedents.<sup>327</sup>

Ralph McGill, influential columnist of the *Atlanta Constitution*, enthusiastically backed Arnall's proposal. He agreed with Arnall that young people old enough to fight for democracy should be allowed to participate in its construction. McGill also emphasized the political potential of youth: "They would bring a lot of intelligence and enthusiasm to politics. That was demonstrated in our recent primary. They would provide a healthy leavening of the political mixture."<sup>328</sup> McGill's editors exhorted state lawmakers to accept youth suffrage legislation. They opined that America "needs the clear-eyed, fearless, and idealistic thinking of her young people." Furthermore, Georgia would benefit from the "powerful effect" the votes of youth would exert "in lessening the stranglehold of 'machine politics' in many areas where it now controls the ballots for the benefit of a privileged few."<sup>329</sup>

Arnall's vote-at-18 pitch became the "liveliest issue" of Georgia's 1943

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<sup>327</sup> Arnall, *The Shore Dimly Seen*, 52.

<sup>328</sup> Ralph McGill, "One More Word," column, *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 November 1942, 8E.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid*, 20 January 1943, 6.

legislative session.<sup>330</sup> In late January, the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools reaccredited the state's universities after Arnall personally assured the group that his reform package would block future governors from tampering with higher education.<sup>331</sup> Arnall's feat earned him much political capital with state lawmakers. As his reorganization plan for Georgia's government breezed through the General Assembly, Arnall predicted, "Give me the backing of the boys and girls and we will save the state."<sup>332</sup> On 9 February 1943, a joint oversight committee unanimously approved a bill that lowered the voting age from 21 to 18.<sup>333</sup> The next day, in a "ribald" gathering, the Georgia Senate overwhelmingly consented to the 18-vote measure, 39-8.<sup>334</sup> Disapproving senators expressed concerns that changing state electoral law could allow black youth to vote and might politicize high-school and college classrooms. Supporters of the 18-vote bill placed it within the context of Arnall's reformism. Senator Alpha Fowler (D-Douglasville) maintained including young people as electors would "improve our government."<sup>335</sup> Many senators who voted in the affirmative expressed privately they opposed the

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid, 7 February 1943, 5B.

<sup>331</sup> Ken Turner, "Georgia System Restored to Full Credit by Southern Body," *Atlanta Journal*, 31 January 1943, 1 & 10A; "Georgia Recovering Educational Sanity," *School and Society* 57, 6 February 1943, 151; and "Prodigal's Return," *Time* 41, 8 February 1943, 68. For Arnall's meeting with SACS and its reaction to his legislation plans, see *Atlanta Constitution*, 1 December 1942, 10, 2 December 1942, 1 & 10, and 5 December 1942, 2.

<sup>332</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, 11 February 1943, 27.

<sup>333</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 10 February 1943, 1.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid, 12 February 1943, 8.

<sup>335</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, 11 February 1943, 27.

measure but felt state voters should have a chance to ratify or reject it through popular referendum.<sup>336</sup> Arnall praised the Senate for acting “purely in the interest of good government” and pledged to stump in every county of Georgia on behalf of youth suffrage.<sup>337</sup>

The debate in the House was “riotous” and reaching the necessary 2/3 majority for passage of the 18-vote amendment proved difficult.<sup>338</sup> Led by J. Robert Elliott, former floor leader during the Talmadge regime, opponents attacked the proposal as a plot concocted by the Communist Party and the Roosevelt administration to “throw open the ballot box to everybody – 18, 19, or 20 – regardless of their color or whether they had paid their poll tax.” Representative M.G. Hicks thundered that passing the bill would make Georgia a “hotbed for every subversive influence under the heavens.” Mrs. John B. Guerry, one of two female lawmakers, charged the measure “would give the right to vote to those not best fitted to vote, those the armed services are rejecting.”<sup>339</sup> Advocates of the 18-vote countered it was a necessary part of Arnall’s effort to de-Talmadgize state government. Representative Ben W. Fortson contended, “Youth could bring a wholesome effect of open-mindedness and lack of cynicism to the ballot.”<sup>340</sup> Other

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<sup>336</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 February 1943, 8 and Burdette, “Lowering the Voting Age in Georgia,” 301.

<sup>337</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 February 1943, 1.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid*, 3 March 1943, 1.

<sup>339</sup> Ken Turner, “Teen-Age Vote Bill Hit as Communistic,” *Atlanta Journal*, 2 March 1943, 1.

<sup>340</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 3 March 1943, 9.



legislators played the old enough to fight-vote card. Spence Grayson, one of the bill's main proponents, professed, "I would feel ashamed of myself if I stood here in civilian clothes and voted to deny the right of the ballot to beardless youths who are driving tanks and manning machineguns on the battlefields."<sup>341</sup> Some lawmakers, like House Speaker Roy Harris, indicted pro-Talmadge forces for "pure cussedness and selfishness" in their vengeful efforts to stymie youth suffrage. On 2 March 1943, the House accepted the proposition 126-60 (19 not present) – twelve votes shy of the 2/3 majority legally required to pass constitutional amendments. During that night and into the next day, Arnall, Harris, and House floor leader Adie Durden pressed the absentee representatives for their support and cajoled those legislators wavering on the bill. The buttonholing and arm-twisting succeeded. On 3 March, the House voted 149-43 to submit the youth suffrage measure for referendum.

The 18-vote proposal was one of 28 amendments presented to Georgia voters for approval during the August referendum. Governor Arnall, House Speaker Harris, and Senate President Frank Gross organized the Georgia Committee for Good Government to push electoral acceptance. Arnall campaigned around the state, emphasizing how each amendment on the slate would reform, streamline, and/or modernize state and local government. Supporters of the youth suffrage portion highlighted its national significance. Arnall said he was "especially proud" Georgia had influenced other states to ponder their electoral-age laws.<sup>342</sup> And he

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Ellis Arnall, "Without a Dissenting Vote," *Atlanta Journal*, 7 March 1943, 1.

asserted throughout the run-up to the referendum, “Eighteen is not too young to learn at first hand the business of self-government, which is the American tradition of all government; nor is 18 too young to assume some of responsibilities that are a part of the right of citizenship in our State and our Nation.”<sup>343</sup> The *Atlanta Journal* editorialized that voter approval of teenage voting would indicate to the nation a new “open-mindedness” in Georgia: “Willingness to consider new ideas on their merits and to thresh them out in a forum of free discussion is a mark of intellectual courage and political growth. . . . This is democracy, *thinking* democracy in place of static prejudice.”<sup>344</sup> If passed, Georgia Tech’s student newspaper predicted, the 18-vote might “mark the beginning of voting franchise for 18-to-21-year-old youths all over the country. From Georgia the idea would, no doubt, spread rapidly from state to state, especially with public opinion supporting all men in the service, be they 18 or 35. Thus the question should be debated on the basis of nationwide benefit – not thinking of Georgia alone.”<sup>345</sup>

Georgians pondered both the national and statewide consequences of allowing 18-year-olds to vote. Arguments for and against the amendment were framed by the countrywide “old enough to fight, old enough to vote” debate but were also fixed within the context of Georgia politics, particularly the question of whether Arnall’s reformism could erase the taint of Talmadgism. The bulk of the pre-

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<sup>343</sup> Ellis Arnall, “Vote the Amendments,” *Ibid*, 25 July 1943, 2.

<sup>344</sup> “The ‘Teen-Age’ Voting Issue,” editorial, *Ibid*, 7 March 1943, 12A. Italics in original quote.

<sup>345</sup> “Teen Age Vote Bill Studied by Nation,” editorial, *The Technique*, 5 March 1943, 2.

referendum chatter considered whether teenagers collectively possessed sufficient preparation for effective electoral participation. Advocates of the amendment cleverly posed the “old enough” thesis as both a deserved reward for services rendered and an earned privilege for aptitudes demonstrated. As a man from Winder, Georgia, reasoned,

To fight and defend their country is a responsibility which has been thrust upon 18-year-old youths. Suffice it to say that they are living up to expectations; they are ‘making good.’ Then, again, 18-year-old youth, as a class, are making use of their opportunities to inform themselves, and as a consequence, they’ll be well fitted to help take care of the interests of the state and the nation. It goes without saying, that if youths are granted the right of suffrage, they’ll not only be voters of thought, but voters of action as well.<sup>346</sup>

Other supporters praised young Georgians for their “educational maturity,” “mature judgment,” and “clear-minded, progressive, and well-informed” viewpoints – attributes that youth had demonstrated “in helping clean our state of some of the most outstanding rottenness from which we had so severely suffered.”<sup>347</sup> Governor Arnall contended,

At the age of 18, most young men and young women are self-supporting, self-reliant, and able to judge reasonably well for themselves. They are old enough to serve their country on battlefields, in airplanes, and on the seas. They are old enough to work as riveters or cartridge-loaders or typists. They are also old enough to assume the responsibilities of their citizenship and to learn the lessons of public life by participation in

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<sup>346</sup> “Let 18-Year Olds Vote,” letter to editor, *Atlanta Journal*, 9 May 1943, 14A.

<sup>347</sup> See “American Youth Should Vote,” letter to editor, *Atlanta Journal*, 27 April 1943, 14; “Has Faith in Youth,” letter to editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, 2 August 1943, 7; “Ridiculous Assumption,” letter to editor, *Atlanta Journal*, 11 March 1943, 12; and “Let Young People Vote,” letter to editor, *Atlanta Journal*, 13 July 1943, 10.

public affairs.<sup>348</sup>

Many 18-vote sponsors agreed with Arnall that the advance of democracy in Georgia and America required youth enfranchisement. “The best way to teach democracy is to practice it,” WSB-Atlanta radio commentator John Paschall asserted, “When our boys and girls return from their posts of duty in many parts of the world, they will have some understanding of the kind of world in which they wish to live. . . .We trust them in a Flying Fortress, surely we may in wisdom, justice, and moderation, trust them in the ballot booth.”<sup>349</sup>

Opponents of the amendment retorted that the physical abilities that made young men good soldiers did not necessarily imply that young people possessed the cognitive qualities that defined good voters. A woman from Atlanta insisted, “Mere fighting does not empower a boy with judgment as how to handle state affairs, not to mention national.”<sup>350</sup> Another Atlanta inhabitant pointed to the War Department’s supposed preference for “reckless and daring” teenage draftees willing to “rush into a fight without considering the consequences or counting the costs” as evidence that adolescents could not be trusted to cast ballots sensibly.<sup>351</sup> Many 18-vote foes conceded that contemporary youths were better educated than previous generations, but they contested the notion that educational advances automatically

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<sup>348</sup> Ellis Arnall, “Vote the Amendments,” *Atlanta Journal*, 25 July 1943, 2.

<sup>349</sup> John Paschall, “Shall Voting Age Be Lowered?,” *Ibid*, 10 July 1943, 4.

<sup>350</sup> “Voting Qualifications,” letter to editor, *Ibid*, 27 July 1943, 10.

<sup>351</sup> “Suffrage Amendment,” letter to editor, *Atlanta Constitution*, 29 July 1943, 5.

yielded a more prudent teenage elector. “The test of a good voter,” a man from Hapeville, Georgia, declared, “is experience and intelligence, not merely some schooling.”<sup>352</sup> The political naïveté of well-read but callow teens, some argued, exposed them as corruptible prey for devious politicians; a Rome, Georgia, resident reminded his fellow citizens, “Mussolini and Hitler established their dictatorships through youth movements.”<sup>353</sup> Anti-18-vote Georgians dismissed claims of “the youngsters of this day and generation being wiser and maturing earlier” than their forefathers; “This is pure nonsense,” an Atlantan held, “nature is just like it has always been.”<sup>354</sup> Amendment adversaries unwittingly employed a key contention of G. Stanley Hall to buttress their position. The quickened pace of modern life had magnified, rather than diminished, the puerile disposition of teenagers; hence, a prolonged adolescence unencumbered by grown-up obligations would allow immature juveniles the time to develop their private, public, and political personas freely and fully. “Let us not burden, unsolicited, our boys and girls with the cares and responsibilities of voting, during their last three years of adolescence,” a man from Decatur, Georgia, implored, “Spare them, during this interim between bloom-time and maturity, from the cares of state.”<sup>355</sup>

Georgia adults chose to incorporate 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds into the electoral body politic. By a count of 42,284 to 19,682, voters ratified the youth

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<sup>352</sup> “Against Teen-Age Amendment,” letter to editor, *Ibid*, 11 June 1943, 18.

<sup>353</sup> “Eighteen Too Young,” letter to editor, *Atlanta Journal*, 1 March 1943, 10.

<sup>354</sup> “Against Suffrage Amendment,” letter to editor, *Ibid*, 27 July 1943, 10.

<sup>355</sup> “The Voting Age,” letter to editor, *Ibid*, 28 July 1943, 10.

suffrage measure. It carried 128 of Georgia's 159 counties, including Eugene Talmadge's home county of Telfair.<sup>356</sup> Arnall was "jubilant" that all twenty-eight reform amendments had passed referendum but claimed to be, "Especially delighted that Georgia leads the nation in lowering the voting age to 18."<sup>357</sup> "I'm glad Georgia is first in something at last," Arnall rejoiced, "I'm tired of us always being at the tail end."<sup>358</sup> The *Atlanta Constitution* editorialized that "this state started something that is going to bring nation-wide repercussions."<sup>359</sup> Americans widely commended Georgia's accomplishment. A man in New York City praised it as evidence of a new "enlightened progressivism" in the South.<sup>360</sup> The *Christian Science Monitor* congratulated the "Cracker State" for being "First in peaches, first in watermelons, first to give the vote to 18-year-olds."<sup>361</sup> National publications predicted Georgia's action might spur state and federal legislation to standardize eighteen as the national electoral age.<sup>362</sup> Some periodicals hailed Arnall as a rising political star.

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<sup>356</sup> John B. Wilson to Ellis Arnall, no date, p. 2, Record Group 2, Series Group 2, Series 60, Box 3, "1943 General Election Certificate to Governor and Consolidated Returns" Folder, Georgia State Department of Archives and History, Atlanta. See also *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 August 1943, 1 & 5, and 7 August 1943, 11, and *Atlanta Journal*, 4 August 1943, 1 & 6, and 7 August 1943, 10.

<sup>357</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, 4 August 1943, 1.

<sup>358</sup> "Suffrage Jr.," *Time* 42, 16 August 1943, 22.

<sup>359</sup> "Georgia Started Something," editorial, *Atlanta Constitution*, 14 August 1943, 4.

<sup>360</sup> "Georgia Action Approved," letter to editor, *New York Times*, 15 August 1943, Section IV, p. 9.

<sup>361</sup> "School-Age Voters," reprint of *Christian Science Monitor* editorial, *Atlanta Journal*, 21 August 1943, 2.

<sup>362</sup> See, for example, *Ibid*; "Vote at 18," *Newsweek*, 16 August 1943, 59; and "Georgia Approves Voting at 18; Other Amendments," H.M. Olmstead, ed., *National Municipal Review* 32, September 1943, 447.

In smashing “the statutes on which Talmadge had built his dictatorship,” journalist Rufus Jarman extolled, Georgia not only “regained her self-respect” but America reaped a “good politician” dedicated to public service rather than personal graft.<sup>363</sup> Arnall said that he would press for an 18-vote plank in the 1944 Democratic platform and urged young people across the nation to “look to me for leadership” in gaining suffrage rights.<sup>364</sup>

Georgia’s approval of youth suffrage re-launched national discussions of the voting age issue. Soon after the August referendum, other states moved to reconsider previously shelved youth suffrage bills, and ten states requested formal copies of the 18-vote amendment from Georgia officials.<sup>365</sup> Georgia’s ratification also appeared to alter national opinion regarding youth suffrage. A September 1943 Gallup poll showed a majority of Americans (52%) approved teenage voting for the first time.<sup>366</sup> A second September survey indicated that 18-vote measures might pass easily in six of the ten states with the largest number of votes cast in the 1940 presidential election (New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, California, Michigan, and New Jersey) if their statehouses brought the youth suffrage issue to voters as a referendum.<sup>367</sup> Gallup attributed the change in public sentiment to the

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<sup>363</sup> Rufus Jarman, “Georgia’s New Peach,” in “Report to the Editors” column, *Saturday Evening Post* 216, 28 August 1943, 6.

<sup>364</sup> “Suffrage Jr.,” *Time* 42, 16 August 1943, 22.

<sup>365</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 11 August 1943, 3.

<sup>366</sup> *Washington Post*, 5 September 1943, B7.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid*, 22 September 1943, 17.

“considerable” national attention Georgia’s referendum garnered and the “effect of the war” on communal attitudes, particularly the “cry that if a man is old enough to fight at 18 he is old enough to vote.”<sup>368</sup>

Federal congressmen also seemed to be newly energized about establishing a uniform voting age. After a bout of youth suffrage filings early in 1943, federal action in the 78<sup>th</sup> Congress waned due to the exigencies of war, particularly the run-up to the Allied counterattack in North Africa and invasion of Italy. Congress had also spent much time in the spring approving the Current Tax Payment Act, which established the modern “pay-as-you-go” system of withholding taxes from individual paychecks.<sup>369</sup> Days after Georgia’s August referendum, Senator Frederick Van Nuys (D-IN), chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said that Arthur Vandenberg’s resolution would be allowed a public hearing after Congress returned from vacation in September.<sup>370</sup> The Associated Press reported, “The issue of making 18, 19, and 20-year-olds eligible to vote seemed headed for noncontroversial treatment by Congress.” It noted that Vandenberg’s amendment “thus far has drawn no public criticism from members of either party.”<sup>371</sup> By the end of August, the 18-vote measure had attracted so much support that the radio debate program *American Forum of the Air* had to scrub its 14 September broadcast regarding the

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid, 5 September 1943, B7.

<sup>369</sup> Current Tax Payment Act, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. 57, ch. 120 (9 June 1943): 126.

<sup>370</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, 5 August 1943, 2.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid, 9 August 1943, 18.



voting-age issue because of a “lack of congressional opposition.”<sup>372</sup> The Senate, though, held no hearings on Vandenberg’s measure; it focused instead on anti-poll tax and soldier-vote bills that had passed the House before Congress’s summer break.

In October 1943, the House Committee on the Judiciary sent an 18-bill to Emanuel Celler’s subcommittee on constitutional amendments for review. On 20 October, it held a public hearing to discuss Jennings Randolph’s measure, House Joint Resolution 39. Only two people testified: Randolph and Ellis Arnall. Both men cleverly posed the “old enough” thesis to justify youth suffrage as both recompense for patriotic service and recognition of adolescent ability. Randolph argued the “intrepid” war service of young people on the battlefield and homefront not only made youth deserving of voting rights but demonstrated that the traditional stereotypes maligning adolescents as irresponsible, irrational, and immature to be “meritless.”<sup>373</sup> According to Randolph, Georgia’s August referendum and the two September Gallup polls indicated growing public support for reducing enfranchisement ages. Because of the opposition by state legislatures, however, he believed that a federal amendment would be necessary to set a national voting age. Randolph predicted that an 18-vote amendment would eventually be established, like that for the Nineteenth Amendment, after a successful

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<sup>372</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 August 1943, 2.

<sup>373</sup> *Constitutional Amendment to Reduce the Voting Age to Eighteen: Hearings Before Subcommittee No. 1 of the Committee on the Judiciary*, H.J. Res. 39, 78<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 20 October 1943, 4.

“educational campaign” convinced adults that “youngsters” were qualified to vote.<sup>374</sup> Randolph concluded, “I am very firmly convinced, and I would not have sponsored this amendment were I not of the considered opinion. . .that today we have a great youth population within this age bracket which is entirely capable and eager for participation in our Government as voters.”<sup>375</sup>

Governor Arnall concurred with Randolph’s assessment of youth capabilities. He declared, “No one can convince me that a young man or young woman of 18 today does not have a power of understanding that transcends that of a 21-year-old man or woman of a generation ago.”<sup>376</sup> Arnall, too, played the “old enough” card as his main claim for championing the 18-vote. He burnished his case with a “true story” about an injured, underage ex-sailor who won a statewide essay contest on why Georgia should lower its voting age by writing: “I was at Pearl Harbor. I participated in the Battle of the Coral Sea. I was wounded 22 times fighting for my country. I am not yet 21. Do you not think I have won the right to vote?”<sup>377</sup>

Dubious committeemen, particularly Emanuel Celler, questioned the “old enough” hypothesis. After Randolph stated that the lowering of the draft age convinced him that teenage combatants deserved to vote, Celler inquired, “Let us suppose – God forbid – that the exigencies of would turn against us and . . .we would have to reduce the draft age to 16, as is the case in Germany today. Would

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid, 11.

you say the voting age should likewise be reduced to 16?” Randolph responded, “No, Mr. Chairman. I would not advocate the lowering of the voting age to 16. I feel there is a point below which we should not go.”<sup>378</sup> Estes Kefauver (D-TN) got Governor Arnall to admit that Georgia precisely chose eighteen as its suffrage age because of its correlation to high-school graduation rather than its connection to military service. Immediately afterwards, Cellar challenged, “Is it fair to offer that as an argument, that if a boy is old enough to fight he is old enough to vote?” Arnall retorted,

I do not desire, first of all, for the eminent chairman of this subcommittee to allow my argument to be drawn into one line only. You will recall I have submitted a number of reasons, such as participation in government being fine training in citizenship, and the ardor and candor of youth will bring to the ballot box, and other reasons. But another reason is that if a young man risks his life for his government, he is entitled to vote.<sup>379</sup>

The southern members of the panel peppered Randolph and Arnall with queries about the possible constitutional harm of a federal voting-age amendment to the rights of the states to determine elector qualifications. Hatton Sumners, (D-TX), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, alleged that H.J. Res. 39 “proposes an abridgment of the powers of the States. . .to take from their governmental discretion, does it not?” Randolph said the amending process, as specified in the Constitution, respected local prerogatives by mandating ratifying

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid, 11.

action by at least three-fourths of the states.<sup>380</sup> Governor Arnall deftly parried the legal queries posed by Sumners, Kefauver, and Sam Russell (D-TX). He agreed with the congressmen that H.J. Res. 39 impinged states “to some extent” but concurred with Randolph that the Constitution’s Article V procedure provided “adequate safeguards” for state discretion to determine voter requirements.<sup>381</sup> He riposted, “we have talked too much about states’ rights and not enough about state responsibilities.”<sup>382</sup> Arnall did not indicate whether his state had a responsibility to extend its new 18-vote law to black Georgians. He defined a “good citizens” as someone who combined “moral fitness and intellectual ability” with “an interest in his Government” and “the ability to understand that issue upon which he may vote.”<sup>383</sup> Some black Georgians fulfilled Arnall’s definition of a “good citizen” but, obviously, were denied democratic participation for reasons irrespective of capability or age but wholly lashed to the Peach State’s right to set the legal prerequisites for voting.

The pointed questions about federal intrusion upon a traditional state prerogative clearly indicated that most members of the subcommittee, especially the southern Democrats, opposed federal legislation to create a national voting age. Nor did the hearing on H.J. Res. 39 attract much attention. Fifty years afterwards, Randolph recalled that only eleven people attended it, including the subcommittee

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid, 9 & 13.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

members and no major newspaper or periodical covered it.<sup>384</sup> The House Judiciary Committee took no further action on Randolph's amendment. No lawmaker filed an 18- or 19-vote proposal during the second session of the 78<sup>th</sup> Congress (10 January to 19 December 1944). And public calls for lowering suffrage ages quieted in 1944 and 1945 as the battle against the Axis barreled toward crescendo. For all intents and purposes, national consideration of youth suffrage during the war ceased with the closing of the October 1943 subcommittee hearing.

House inaction on youth suffrage fit Congress's propensity to short shrift social issues. Between 1939 and 1945, two core concerns dominated congressional deliberations: American participation in World War II and the continuation of New Deal socioeconomic programs. Like in the 1930s, Democrats maintained control of Congress throughout the war years. Influential leaders inside Congress, particularly Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn (D-TX), Senate majority leader Alben Barkley (D-KY), and House minority leader Joseph Martin (R-MA), gradually relinquished governmental control over foreign and military policies to the Roosevelt administration. Though Congress delegated sweeping powers to executive and administrative agencies to meet the emergency, it did not become an anachronism or rubber stamp according to political scientist Roland Young. He

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<sup>384</sup> Ellis Arnall to Jennings Randolph, 14 August 1984, Vote Subject Folder, Jennings Randolph Collection, Salem International University, Salem, West Virginia. Arnall wrote a congratulatory letter to Randolph upon his retirement. In the note, Arnall reminisced, "Well do I remember our national interest in 18-year-old voting. I was proud of the fact that Georgia blazed the trail in extending the franchise rights to those who were old enough to fight for their country. They surely had the right to vote if they had the duty and privilege to bear arms in defense of our Nation." In hand-written script on a margin of the letter, Randolph wrote that only eleven people attended the 1943 hearing on his resolution.

argues Congress remained influential as it exerted vigorous oversight of bureaucratic operations and strict management over domestic legislation. Young highlights the vital role Congress played in mobilizing the resources needed to fight. Through the meticulous conscription of men and the generous appropriation of money, Congress raised the armies, materials, and funds that the White House requested to conduct the war.<sup>385</sup>

Mobilization measures frequently provoked controversy because they became entangled in the ongoing political struggle over the New Deal. Historian Richard N. Chapman suggests that the persistence of party politics was Congress's most notable contribution to the war, for the suspension of politics would have meant the adjournment of democracy.<sup>386</sup> Debates within and between Congress and the Roosevelt administration over domestic policy, inflamed the ideological and regional factionalism endemic to prewar arguments about the New Deal. Political historians and scientists agree that Roosevelt's recovery and relief programs initially received ubiquitous legislative support and important congressional cooperation.<sup>387</sup> During

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<sup>385</sup> Roland Young, *Congressional Politics in the Second World War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956). Young wrote from first-hand knowledge of the legislative process in Congress. During the war years, Young served as a staffer on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and as a member of the American Political Science Academy Committee on Congress.

<sup>386</sup> Richard N. Chapman, *Contours of Public Policy, 1939-1945* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981).

<sup>387</sup> Most studies of the New Deal consider Congress as an afterthought to the seminal machinations of Franklin Roosevelt. Though Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. claimed FDR as the Machiavellian figure driving the New Deal, he acknowledged that Congress "played a vital and consistently underestimated role in shaping the New Deal." Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Coming of the New Deal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), 554-555. William E. Leuchtenberg concurs with Schlesinger's assessment of Roosevelt's decisive sway and adds that "despite the growth of the Presidency, this was a period in which Congress had great influence." William E. Leuchtenberg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1933-1940* (New York: Harper, 1963), 327 n. 3. Even the

his second term, internecine battles between New Deal Democrats and a bipartisan coalition of rightist congressmen both narrowed the reformist proposals of the administration and allowed Congress to reestablish its independence and authority in relation to the presidency.<sup>388</sup> The informal “conservative coalition” of anti-administration Democrats (predominantly rural and largely southern) and anti-New Deal Republicans (mostly rural and midwestern) materialized around a shared fidelity to anti-statism. Historian James T. Patterson emphasizes that the coalition never formally united as a caucus, but, after 1937, it successfully frustrated FDR’s attempts to broaden the New Deal, pack the Supreme Court with liberal judges, and consolidate federal authority within the executive branch. Patterson finds that the first obligation of many coalition members was to their state or district (especially in garnering pork barrel funds to develop local economies) and not necessarily to advance a conservative agenda.<sup>389</sup> The need for federal aid in the South and rural areas, the discrediting of isolationism, and the necessity of centralized planning in the run-up to war stunted the coalition’s quest to thwart the New Deal.

During the war’s early years, FDR’s conservative opponents endeavored to

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more recent works that seek to assert government as a semi-autonomous agent within the New Deal do not focus full attention on Congress. For example, see Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Margaret Weir, Ann Shola Orloff, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Kenneth Finegold and Theda Skocpol, *State and Party in America’s New Deal* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); and Joanna L. Grisinger, *The Unwieldy American State: Administrative Politics since the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>388</sup> David L. Porter, *Congress and the Waning of the New Deal* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1980).

<sup>389</sup> James T. Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1967).

check his growing power, slash his programs, and bruise him at the polls. The grand strategizing required to win the war necessitated political deference to the White House. Conservatives criticized Roosevelt for adopting a presidency-centered governing tack that disdained intergovernmental consultation, empowered executive agencies, and asserted unprecedented executive powers. To smooth relations, Roosevelt appointed many rightward-leaning businessmen to the planning agencies in charge of wartime production and named a Republican, Henry Stimson, to be Secretary of War. But the GOP did not offer FDR or his majority party a formal pledge to cooperate or an explicit promise of support, unlike within Britain's parliament, and it often attacked the administration's economic regulation and social welfare policies.<sup>390</sup> Southern Democrats generally backed the president on war matters and rural development but contested his social justice initiatives and continuation of the reformist and redistributive elements of the New Deal.<sup>391</sup> Republicans, led by Senator Robert Taft (R-OH), and dissident Democrats, led by Senators Harry F. Byrd (D-VA) and Walter George (D-GA) and Representatives Edward Cox (D-GA) and Howard A. Smith (D-VA), argued certain New Deal agencies, particularly the ones that put people to work, should cease because continuation would cripple national defense by siphoning essential human and financial resources from the war effort. American voters listened attentively to their complaints about an over-intrusive bureaucracy as civilians experienced the hassles

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<sup>390</sup> Lewis L. Gould, *The Republicans: A History of the Grand Old Party*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 201-217.

<sup>391</sup> Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 345-382.



of getting a proper draft classification or a new coupon book for gasoline. The results of the 1942 elections emboldened Republicans (who were confident of a strong conservative upsurge in the nation) to reach out to southern Democrats (who had become leery that Roosevelt and other northern liberals within the party might submit to black demands for desegregation) to forge a powerful voting bloc within Congress.

Although Democrats retained numerical control of both the House and Senate, the conservative coalition managed between 1942 and 1944 to carry out retroactive revenge on the New Deal. Two of the first three programs liquidated, the Civilian Conservation Corps (defunded in June 1942) and the National Youth Administration (eliminated in July 1943), had been particularly helpful to adolescents and fond to FDR. Conservatives contended the employ of youth manpower by the armed forces and defense industries made the CCC and NYA nonessential expenditures. Historians John A. Salmond and Richard A. Reiman find little, if any money was saved by their elimination. They point out congressional conservatives made it perfectly clear that the true targets were the agencies themselves as much as the funds. Salmond and Reiman conclude that the war budget provided conservatives a political rationale, not a financial reason, to gut the CCC, NYA, and any other New Deal programs they loathed.<sup>392</sup>

Politics also provided conservatives a reason to rebuff the patriotic appeal of

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<sup>392</sup> John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1967) and Richard A. Reiman, *The New Deal and American Youth: Ideas and Ideals in a Depression Decade* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1992).

the “old enough to fight, old enough to vote” rationale supporting youth suffrage. Southern Democrats, as exemplified in the 1943 House subcommittee hearing, obstructed all congressional attempts to expand voting opportunities as infringing upon states’ rights. While spouting paeans to the valor of those citizen-warriors defending democracy, they actively opposed legislation to abolish poll taxes, set a national suffrage age, and establish uniform regulations to accommodate soldier voting as unconstitutional federalization of electoral qualifications. Of course, racism factored into their obstinacy; southern Democrats fought against any plan that might enfranchise blacks either as combatants or civilians, especially those engineered by their northern-liberal partymates. Republicans worried that enfranchising 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds would hand the Democrats long-term electoral hegemony. Many GOP devotees agreed with Arthur Vandenberg, their senatorial stalwart, that youngsters at war should gain electoral recompense. Most Republicans, however, knew what opinion polls had revealed since the 1930s and throughout the war years. American youth consistently sided with the Democratic Party and considerably favored liberal approaches to government.<sup>393</sup> The *Washington (D.C.) Times-Herald*, an unfailingly conservative newspaper, summarized GOP views when it lambasted youth suffrage as another New Deal “scheme” masqueraded as a “reform” that would sully the electorate with a “large number of less experienced and less wise voters” but would solidify the Democratic

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<sup>393</sup> See for example, *Washington Post*, 15 March 1936, B1; 5 April 1936; B1; 13 June 1937, B4; 11 June 1939, B5; 7 August 1940, 1; 15 August 1942, 9; 5 September 1943, B7; 1 September 1944, 3; and 21 October 1944.

base “not only into our 1944 election, but also into our political system for all future elections.”<sup>394</sup> Predisposed to a philosophy of limited government and states’ rights and concerned with a coagulating northern-urban-liberal consensus within national politics, the conservative coalition flexed its muscle against any federally-backed extension of voting rights – even to brave adolescent servicemen.

Youth suffrage also suffered from a lack of executive interest. Whereas Eleanor Roosevelt backed it, her husband never stated publicly whether he did. In his speeches and fireside chats, Franklin Roosevelt mobilized support for issues related to young Americans (such as lowering the draft age and permitting soldiers to vote) by overtly articulating the necessity of each measure. He also championed the use of teenage manpower to aid the civilian and military war efforts. But FDR remained mute on the subject of adolescent enfranchisement even though young people expressed overwhelming approval for him and the Democrats. The strains and stresses of the war made it difficult for Roosevelt to maintain his New Deal coalition, but he and his advisors neglected to enfranchise eager youth. Many scholars have marveled at the cunning of FDR and his political gurus on Capitol Hill to compel lawmakers to adopt administration policies. They conducted much of that work confidentially, mainly via private chats and telephone conversations, because Roosevelt, unlike modern presidents, held no regularly scheduled meetings with legislative leaders or employed a permanent congressional liaison office.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>394</sup> Editorial, *Washington Times-Herald*, 13 August 1943, quoted in “Should the Legal Voting Age Be Reduced to 18 Years?” *Congressional Digest* 23, no. 8-9 (August-September 1944): 219.

<sup>395</sup> See, for example, Michael Foley and John E. Owens, *Congress and the Presidency*:

Given their wont for the clandestine, FDR and his operatives may have tried quietly lobbying behind the scenes on behalf of the 18-vote. But the image of Roosevelt as a political maestro, bending docile and hostile lawmakers to his legislative will, does not hold for the cause of youth suffrage.

The disinclination of Roosevelt for youth suffrage could also be attributed to a belief that time spent on securing 18-vote legislation was a distraction to directing the war effort. Preoccupied by the war, the president expended most of his energy on the formation of military strategy, diplomacy, and foreign policy. He gave some attention to domestic affairs, prioritizing economic and financial interests over social welfare/justice matters. Historian John Morton Blum contends that FDR consciously subordinated national issues to the Allied pursuit of victory.

“Disinclined therefore to engage in causes he considered peripheral, divisive, and probably futile,” Blum states, “he ordinarily gave only rhetorical attention to questions of social or economic justice, including those that the progressive minority within his own party were eager to advance.”<sup>396</sup> Scholar Nancy Beck Young finds federal lawmakers were not so quick to deemphasize domestic affairs since they were electorally beholden to their constituents. But like the president, Young concludes, most congressmen did not think conflicts over social matters important

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*Institutional Politics in a Separated System*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 298-301; Michael Janeway, *Fall of the House of Roosevelt: Brokers of Ideas and Power from FDR to LBJ* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 3-43; David McKean, *Tommy the Cork: Washington’s Ultimate Insider from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 2004), 131-189; and Jordan A. Schwarz, *The New Dealers: Power Politics in the Age of Roosevelt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

<sup>396</sup> Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 222.

enough “to waste their political capital on, especially when struggles about the economy were intense and, from their perspective, more relevant to the war effort.”<sup>397</sup>

The indifference the president and most legislators showed toward the issue of suffrage ages indicates they thought it not meaningful enough to consider in the context of fighting a global war. Compared to the soldier vote and anti-poll tax bills, the resolutions to set a federal age of enfranchisement were nonpartisan and noncontroversial. Yet there did not appear, unlike the other suffrage measures, to be a pressing need to modify constitutional law to expand civil liberties for youth. Gallop polls and other public opinion barometers revealed that many Americans sympathized with the view that youth war service merited a revisiting of voting age statutes. They concurred with the sentiment that denying young people suffrage was probably unfair and maybe unjust. “It would be a strange democracy,” Frank C. Walker, Roosevelt’s Postmaster General and Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, asserted, “that singled out for disfranchisement the citizens who are giving the greatest service for democracy.”<sup>398</sup> Yet there was no mobilization of popular will (except in Georgia) to reset voting ages because the vast majority of Americans and lawmakers did not see teenagers as a distinctively aggrieved class of citizens. Most people maintained that the denial of adolescent suffrage, no matter how seemingly undemocratic, simply was not morally or politically urgent enough to

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<sup>397</sup> Young, *Why We Fight*, 4.

<sup>398</sup> *New York Times*, 30 December 1943, 9.

warrant purifying legislative action. As a high-school senior from Cincinnati maintained on the radio program “America’s Town Meeting on the Air”:

Every time in history that there has been a movement to extend the franchise, it has been with the purpose of including some new group heretofore entirely unrepresented. The Negro’s fight to vote meant that a whole new element, a new race, in fact, with its own ideas and its own wishes was at last given the opportunity to express itself. But to assert that the 18-year-olds represent some special group which does not find expression in American Government is to create a false illusion.<sup>399</sup>

The idea that youth *should* vote confronted a suspicion whether youth *could* vote. Many citizens sympathized with view that adolescents deserved to vote because of their commendable war service. Many more people doubted that teenagers possessed the sense to vote judiciously. Youth suffrage advocates labored to establish the central point that adolescents, whether engaged in combat or not, could be entrusted with ballots. “We have a sense of responsibility; we are intelligent; we are mature,” proclaimed a young man from Chicago on a national radio broadcast.<sup>400</sup> Acculturated to view adolescents as anxiety-ridden and irresponsible, most adults and the majority of public authorities were skeptical that youths could perform electoral duties responsibly if enfranchised. Even Eleanor Roosevelt admitted, “I realize that at 18 a great many young people are not mature enough to take part in government.”<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Sidney Silvian, quoted in “Should the Legal Voting Age Be Reduced to 18 Years?” *Congressional Digest* 23, no. 8-9 (August-September 1944): 221.

<sup>400</sup> James F. Concannon, quoted in “Should the Legal Voting Age Be Reduced to 18 Years,” *Congressional Digest* 23, no. 8-9 (August-September 1944): 222.

<sup>401</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 26 July 1944, 8.

Many Americans held great faith in the capabilities of young people, like Sergeant Bernard Friedenber, to make the tough combat decisions necessary for victory. However, most adults distinguished between responding to battlefield conditions and analyzing political choices. Emanuel Celler (D-NY), for instance, maintained,

How could the average youth of 18 evaluate properly intricate questions of economics and government, the politics and strife involved in a national campaign? It might be contended that a lad of 21 or over would labor under similar disadvantages. Probably so, but in a lesser degree. The three years between 18 and 21 – three formative, impressionistic, highly absorptive years – make a great difference.<sup>402</sup>

The adults like Celler who opposed lowering voting ages simply distrusted that adolescents possessed enough age-forged wisdom to give electoral consent wisely. As a man from New Jersey expressed in a letter to the *Washington Post*: “Even if service in the armed forces by a boy of 18 increased his ability to act intelligently as a voter, which is very doubtful, that is no reason for altering our Constitution to permit all boys and girls of 18 to vote for all time to come. They have not had sufficient experience to form sound judgment on national and local affairs.”<sup>403</sup>

Teenagers, too, disputed whether draft-age youths could vote responsibly. A high-school senior from Ocala, Florida, asserted during a national radio debate: “Surely, the 18-to-20-year-olds constitute one of the greatest fighting groups in the world.

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<sup>402</sup> Quoted in “Should the Legal Voting Age Be Reduced to 18 Years,” *Congressional Digest* 23, no. 8-9 (August-September 1944): 216.

<sup>403</sup> “Teen-Age Voters,” letter to the editor, *Washington Post*, 30 August 1943, 10.

But because a man is a good fighter, that doesn't make him a good voter.

Recklessness, impetuosity, and dare-deviltry, the very best qualities which make him a great fighter, none of which depend upon reasoning, would tend to make him a poor voter.”<sup>404</sup>

Youth suffrage sponsors fervently challenged the doubts about the capacity of adolescents to cast ballots maturely. Many 18-vote allies argued that advances in child development and education (particularly in social studies and citizenship training) made contemporary teenagers equally or better qualified to vote than their parents. George D. Stoddard, president of the University of the State of New York and New York State Commission of Education, claimed modern high schools amply prepared 18-year-olds to meet their democratic responsibilities: “Their intelligence, energy, and sense of participation adequately counterbalance the wisdom and life experience of voting citizens in the latter decades.”<sup>405</sup> A high-school senior from Ithaca, New York, added, “the very qualities of youth that make them good soldiers – alertness of mind and body, quick thinking, and, above all, good judgment – are the very qualities that would make them good voters. The other recognized assets of good voters – intelligence, responsibility, and education – are the qualities of youth as well as adults.”<sup>406</sup> Some supporters questioned how responsibly enfranchised adults tendered their votes. For example, William E.

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<sup>404</sup> John E. Walker, quoted in “Should the Legal Voting Age Be Reduced to 18 Years,” *Congressional Digest* 23, no. 8-9 (August-September 1944): 222.

<sup>405</sup> *New York Times*, 10 January 1943, 41.

<sup>406</sup> Mary Lou Barger, quoted in “Should the Legal Voting Age Be Reduced to 18 Years,” *Congressional Digest* 23, no. 8-9 (August-September 1944): 220.



Mosher, Dean of the Graduate School of Public Affairs at Syracuse University, criticized the “widespread ignorance and indifference of our fellow adult citizens” regarding the principles and practices of “effective democratic citizenship.”<sup>407</sup> Other 18-vote exponents wondered if any objective data existed to substantiate adult claims to age-inherent electoral maturity. A man from New York City asked: “Who is prepared to prove, by any set of standardized scientific tests, that the attainment of legal maturity entails the acquisition of political wisdom? If there is no such test, the present age of 21 should quite as rationally be raised as retained immovable. Contrawise, if there is no scientific proof that it should be immovable there is no inherent argument against lowering it.”<sup>408</sup>

Many advocates for lowering voting ages alleged the maturity concern was a canard that clouded the real issue: the unfairness of denying suffrage to a citizen class who proved responsible enough to serve the war effort willingly and admirably. Several backers pointed out that, although adolescents might be legally minors, their war effort made them de facto adults. A Brooklyn resident writing to Congress through the *New York Times* declared, “You have taken the 18-year-olds out of the realm of childhood and made them men. Why must you impose restrictions on these men?”<sup>409</sup> Other supporters asserted that the laudable war service of teenage soldiers and workers entitled them to political enfranchisement;

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<sup>407</sup> *New York Times*, 10 October 1941, 20.

<sup>408</sup> “Younger Voters Approved,” letter to editor, *New York Times*, 30 August 1943, 14.

<sup>409</sup> “Youth, Made Man, Protests,” letter to editor, *Ibid*, 23 October 1942, 20.

as an elementary school principal from Norfolk, Virginia, argued: “Certainly today’s 18-year-olds have every claim to the *right* of the vote. They are fighting that their country might live. In the Nation’s factories and fields they participate in the productive life of their country. Simple justice demands that they be permitted to take part in determining what kind of life it shall be.”<sup>410</sup> The democratic rhetoric that informed adult appeals to youth service, however, yielded to the public reservations about the electoral faculties of adolescents.

Many citizens also had doubts about the depth of youth support for their own enfranchisement. An August 1943 survey conducted by the Institute of Student Opinion of 86,000 high school students from all forty-eight states found 53% against lowering the voting age.<sup>411</sup> Other polls indicated vacillation among young respondents when asked if their age peers had enough knowledge and acumen to vote intelligently.<sup>412</sup> Teenagers debated the issue in spirited forums hosted by high schools and radio stations.<sup>413</sup> Few of the discussions pondered the constitutional or federalist theories regarding the authority of Congress to declare a national franchise age. Most often, adolescent panelists contemplated whether the

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<sup>410</sup> Edith B. Joynes, quoted in “Should the Legal Voting Age Be Reduced to 18 Years,” *Congressional Digest* 23, no. 8-9 (August-September 1944): 214.

<sup>411</sup> William C. Bagley, “Should 18-Year-Olds Be Entrusted with the Ballot?” *School and Society* 58, 21 August 1943, 117-118. The Institute of Student Opinion was founded by M.R. Robinson, publisher of *Scholastic Magazine*.

<sup>412</sup> For instance, see *New York Times*, 29 April 1940, 14; 7 May 1943, 16; 9 March 1944, 19; and 1 November 1944, 40; and *Chicago Tribune*, 31 December 1944, W3.

<sup>413</sup> For examples of debate preparation manuals, see Midwest Debate Bureau, *Reducing the Legal Voting Age to 18 Years. Resolved: That the Legal Voting Age Should Be Lowered to 18 Years* (Jacksonville, IL: Midwest Debate Bureau, 1944); and John W. Walsh, *Complete Handbook on Lowering the Voting Age* (Portland, ME: Platform News Publishing Company, 1944).

mitigating qualities of youth, among them juvenile behavior and the struggle to understand consequences, should disqualify teenagers as electors.<sup>414</sup> “Such honesty is refreshing,” the editors of the *New York Times* remarked, “whether well-founded or not. Some people now old enough to have the franchise would do well to consider whether they, making up their minds rather casually at the polls on issues before them, have regarded the ballot with the same awe and respect as these boys and girls who decided they were not yet worthy of the voting privilege.”<sup>415</sup> Adults listening to the deliberations or reading youth comments questioning the readiness of adolescents to vote wondered if young people wanted enfranchisement or if it was being forced upon them by self-interested politicians. Alonzo F. Myers, professor of education at New York University, charged the 18-vote hullabaloo sprung from the “emotionalism” of war and the crass “political opportunism” of lawmakers groveling for votes.<sup>416</sup>

Some young people did independently advocate for suffrage. Prompted by the draft age discussions in September 1942, Harold R. Moskovit, 36-year-old president of the Affiliated Young Democrats of New York, organized “Votes for Youth,” a non-partisan drive that sought enfranchisement for all persons between 18 and 20.<sup>417</sup> Moskovit envisioned flooding statehouses and Congress with teams of high-school-

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<sup>414</sup> For example, see “Should the Voting Age Be Lowered to Eighteen?” *Town Meeting* 9, no. 11 (15 April 1943); *New York Times*, 7 May 1943, 16; and *Washington Post*, 11 December 1944, 18.

<sup>415</sup> “Topics of the Times,” editorial column, *New York Times*, 10 August 1943, 18.

<sup>416</sup> Quoted in “Should the Legal Voting Age Be Reduced to 18 Years,” *Congressional Digest* 23, no. 8-9 (August-September 1944): 217.

<sup>417</sup> *New York Times*, 13 September 1942, 45.

and college-age activists pressing for passage of “right to fight, right to vote” legislation. Votes for Youth never became the national lobbying operation that Moskovit anticipated. It remained from its inception a petite publicity organ that periodically drew attention to youth suffrage through mass mailings, press releases, and personal visits (usually by Moskovit) to lawmakers, student governments, or newspaper editors.<sup>418</sup> Unlike women suffragists, sponsors of lowered voting ages separately pleaded the case, which atomized the endeavor into small, disjointed petition cells. Because advocates never joined in league, there was no coherent attempt to mobilize young people on behalf of their own enfranchisement en masse. Supporters of the 18-vote appeared to bank on a hope that legislative authorities would recognize the millions of teens performing vital war services with a reward of collective voting rights. The lesson from Georgia was unlearned: with no centralized group to organize public advocacy, the case for youth suffrage fell flat.

Since the final bomb of World War II, scholars have traced the wartime contributions of various American social groups. Historians generally agree with Richard Polenberg’s assessment that the war “radically altered the character of American society and challenged its most durable values.”<sup>419</sup> For youth, the war created new opportunities and posed old challenges. National mobilization offered young people great prospects, but they were also burdened with greater

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<sup>418</sup> For more about Votes for Youth, see *Chicago Tribune*, 29 March 1943, 15, and *New York Times*, 12 March 1944, 12.

<sup>419</sup> Polenberg, *War and Society*, 4.

responsibilities. Adolescents did not experience the war passively. They insisted on getting involved as actors in their own right and not as appendages to adult ventures, even despite the skepticism of public authorities regarding their abilities. Adolescents expressed hope, similar to other social groups, that exceptional war service might improve their sociopolitical status. Teen-aged Americans eagerly strove to prove capable of fulfilling the economic, military, and civic responsibilities of war to overcome the prejudice of age-based chauvinism. The war experience showed that young people possessed a great adaptive quality to face most any situation and an acute capacity to analyze complex issues in sometimes harrowing circumstances. The armed forces trusted millions of young troops, like Sergeant Bernard Friedenbergr, to make the hard battlefield calls necessary to win the war. Some of the decisions they made affected limb; others determined life. Youths who had shouldered the burdens of service at the front, on the farm, and in the factory considered themselves entitled to the privileges and prerogatives of adulthood – including the opportunity to make electoral decisions.

Because adolescents had seemingly earned the right to vote, prospects for youth suffrage initially looked bullish. Many teenagers served commendably, and most adults agreed their contributions greatly aided the war effort. Several members of Congress supported extending the franchise to adolescents. Opinion polls showed the public appeared to concur with the notion that young people deserved voting rights. Many adults agreed with the argument that it was grossly inequitable to ask youth to work and fight for democracy and then deny them a full

electoral share. Adolescents argued enfranchisement was vital to effectuate democratic citizenship, that not to vote would undermine the reason they had been taught in school the Allies had to vanquish fascism: to preserve self-determination. Indeed, the promises of democracy animated the 18-vote cause more than the expected rewards of war service; as one advocate asserted: “Democracy can grant one incomparable reward – the right to be governed by the consent of the governed – represented by the full franchise that goes with citizenship. . . .If our younger youth are big and brave enough to fight for us, they are good enough to say who shall represent them and what direction our government shall take under the Constitution.”<sup>420</sup>

But federal lawmakers did not extend suffrage to youth. Other, more pressing and important war issues impeded the effort to lower the voting age. The nascent conservative coalition of congressional Republicans and Southern Democrats held firm that any changes to suffrage qualifications, including age, must originate in the states. Neither President Roosevelt nor members of Congress appeared willing to devote the time and energy to shepherd a youth suffrage bill through the legislative process while supervising the war effort. In addition, there was a fundamental incongruity between their nationalistic rhetoric and legislative deeds. White House and Capitol Hill officials sincerely praised America’s citizen-soldiers fighting the battles of democracy and paid dutiful homage to the republican principles motivating the drive to exterminate fascism. But their commitment to

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<sup>420</sup>*New York Times*, 14 October 1942, 14.

democratization extended only to already-enfranchised adults. Supporters of the anti-poll tax and soldier vote legislation believed that if adult servicemen were good enough to fight for the nation, they were good enough to be accorded the full exercise of their existent franchise. Washington lawmakers did not afford 18-, 19-, or 20-year-old troops the same accommodation despite being legally old enough to defend American democracy. Without expressing any sense of irony related to the votelessness of adolescent combatants or civilians, the editors of the *Chicago Tribune* charged:

The exercise of the franchise within the hundreds of encampments in this country should serve to emphasize to the men in service the difference between their free republican government and the methods of the enemy countries. It is regrettable, however, that the exclusion from the voting of certain of the men who are willing to give their lives for their country will also emphasize the fact that we are setting out to evangelize the world without first having practiced all that we preach.<sup>421</sup>

Young Americans who worked and fought for democracy considered themselves worthy of electoral privileges. Adults, however, declined to accept adolescents as political stakeholders because they doubted the capacity of teenagers to proffer consent sensibly. The political assimilation of youth, similar to their immersion into war work, was directly proportional to the degree adults allowed them meaningful involvement. Whereas adults entrusted trained, but untested, teenagers to make purposeful choices on the job and in combat, they doubted educated, but inexperienced, 18-to-20-year-olds would make sensible electoral

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<sup>421</sup> "Votes for Soldiers," editorial, *Chicago Tribune*, 24 July 1942, 10.

decisions in the voting booth or at the ballot box. Americans might have believed the denial of youth suffrage unfair considering adolescent war service, but neither lawmakers nor their adult constituents reckoned the 21-vote an unjust violation of rights that required legislative resolution. Public authorities may have valued the service of adolescents, but they did not deem teenagers vote-worthy.

Working without the force of unified leadership or the strength of national organization and within a society unwaveringly focused on the war effort, 18-vote sponsors could not convince enough legislators to overturn the convention of delayed electoral adulthood. Patriotic petitions, righteous appeals, and superlative service simply were not enough; the case for re-conceptualizing the bounds of adolescence had to be made before recalibrating voting ages could occur. Adolescents shouldered the heavy responsibilities of mobilization along with adults, but the confines of traditional age boundaries and the curbs of the “storm-stress” stereotype cramped the liberating possibilities of combat and defense work. By not allowing adolescents to join the war on their own timelines, adults took from youth the sense of collective unity and individual self-worth accorded other social groups who enlisted for duty on their own terms. Establishing a uniform national voting age was not accomplished during World War II. But youth suffrage found a champion, Ellis Arnall, and he would carry the cause into the postwar era.



CHAPTER IV  
CITIZEN OR OUTLIER:  
TEENAGERS AND SUFFRAGE, 1945-1960

Democracy can be cruel to misfits. The reason it's cruel is you're told you can be anything, and there's enough evidence around you of people getting ahead that you believe it's true. So when you don't, it's crushing. The more democratic a society, the more humiliating the failure.

Charles Peters, founder of *The Washington Monthly*<sup>422</sup>

On 14 September 1952, nearly 100,000 New Yorkers flocked to the Mall in Central Park for America's first "Citizenship Day." Its origins lay in 1939 with the delivery of an unsolicited song called "I Am an American" to Arthur Pine, the head of a public relations firm in New York City. Pine arranged for the tune to be played on the national radio networks of ABC, Mutual, and NBC, and its popularity inspired the *New York Journal-American* to organize "I Am an American Day" at the World's Fair held in the city. The promotion proved so successful that, in 1940, Congress designated the third Sunday in May as national "I Am an American Day."<sup>423</sup> The main purpose of the celebration was to salute "all who, by coming of

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<sup>422</sup> Quoted in Jonathan Alter, "American Assassins," *Newsweek*, 24 January 2011, 22.

<sup>423</sup> See Richard M. Fried, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!: Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 14-20. See also

age or naturalization, have attained the status of citizenship.”<sup>424</sup> Some people reckoned it a pseudo rite of passage, in a nation devoid of one, for it gave special recognition to persons who attained full citizen status by becoming eligible electors.<sup>425</sup> In February 1952, Congress renamed it “Citizenship Day” and moved it to the third week of September to also commemorate the signing of the U.S. Constitution.<sup>426</sup>

The people who filled the Central Park Mall for the first “Citizenship Day” gala heard grand patriotic oratory by prominent political dignitaries. The Cold War and the combat in Korea shaped the content of the day’s discourse. Each speaker reminded the audience that only determined vigilance against communist expansion would safeguard world peace and domestic felicity. James A. Farley, former Postmaster General, glowingly venerated the liberties inherent to “Americanism” by contrasting them to the constraints imposed by Marxism. He declared, “We are not told how to vote and we can belong to any political party we choose. We are not forced to join any political party. We have a free hand and a

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*New York Times*, 16 May 1940, 14.

<sup>424</sup> I Am an American Day Act, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. 54, ch. 183, (3 May 1940): 178. The American Legion and 4-H Clubs of America started citizenship ceremonies for youths who reached voting age in 1939 and 1940 respectively. See *Chicago Tribune*, 15 June 1939, 18 and *Washington Post*, 15 June 1940, 4.

<sup>425</sup> For sample views of the fete as an non-official rite of passage, see statements by President Harry Truman, *New York Times*, 2 March 1947, 37; Ugo Carusi, Commissioner of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Washington Post*, 18 May 1947, B1; the Daughters of the American Revolution, *Chicago Tribune*, 24 August 1947, F2; New York City Mayor Vincent Impellitteri, *New York Times*, 14 September 1953, 13; and Tennessee Governor Frank Clement, *Wall Street Journal*, 6 July 1956, 1.

<sup>426</sup> *New York Times*, 1 March 1952, 16.

free mind.”<sup>427</sup> To New York City Mayor Vincent Impellitteri, the perils of containing communism globally and thwarting subversion locally required national mobilization akin to World War II. He implored the crowd to alert “our neighbors and our neighbors’ children, that we need their help to make the great decisions of our times.”<sup>428</sup>

The civic unity aroused by “Citizenship Day” contrasted the civil exclusion experienced by America’s social minorities, including young people. Republicanism postulated that the sustainability of self-rule depended upon states enfranchising only those persons deemed capable of rational judgment. Determining who possessed the requisite level of mental and emotional fitness engendered tense debates. The employ of arbitrary markers of qualification, such as wealth, race, gender, and age, identified which people democratic states considered competent citizens and inept outliers. During the post-World War II era, the liberating promises of democracy inspired disfranchised persons to demand the enforcement of their citizenship rights. African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and other groups held faith in the Constitution’s avowal of popular political rights and embraced the rhetoric honoring the sacredness of suffrage. As citizen-stakeholders, they insisted their consent be conferred as a check and influence upon governmental decision-making. With all deliberate speed, America’s republican system gradually granted them electoral equality.

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid, 15 September 1953, 22.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

Young people also desired enfranchisement, and they, too, encountered deep-rooted social prejudices that blocked their paths to full political citizenship. The popular sentiment formed during World War II that adolescents should be granted suffrage because of patriotic service faded quickly at war's end. Postwar debates over lowering voting ages examined whether young people could proffer consent sensibly and responsibly. The social hysterias of the era amplified the usual adult qualms about youth capacities. After the war, adolescents achieved unprecedented social attention thanks to the "baby boom." During the 1950s, a discrete "youth culture" materialized that set adolescents apart from adult culture. The formation of youth culture crystallized "teenagers" as distinct social personae with their own lifestyles, outlooks, goods, fads, music, and slang. The rising youth demographic tide begat for teenagers an economic and cultural clout heretofore unknown in American history. Though businessmen cashed in handsomely on the consumer demands of adolescents, parents and politicians became ever-more alarmed by the collective want of youth to flout the norms, values, and behaviors of the larger adult culture. Addled by Cold War paranoia, adults detected in the normal squalls and anxieties of adolescence a potential national security hazard. The naïve credulity allegedly inherent to youth supposedly made them acutely susceptible to communist charms. Civic concerns that the immaturity of "teenagers" and the criminality of "juvenile delinquents" might subvert the nation not only heightened traditional worries about adolescent rebelliousness but also muffled contemporary calls to enfranchise youth. To many adults, teenagers lacked the levelheaded faculties

necessary for electoral cogency.

Young people also confronted political obstacles impeding electoral selfhood. Postwar Americans broadly accepted that governments would protect individual rights, provide basic welfare, and commit to international involvement. Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower and members of Congress steered America on a modest political course by striving to uphold those precepts while not expanding the prerogatives of government too much. While Truman remained non-committal to lowering franchise ages, Eisenhower publically endorsed establishing eighteen as the national suffrage age. In May 1954, the Senate took the first congressional floor vote on a youth suffrage bill. Southern Democrats rallied fellow partymates to reject it as an infringement upon the states' right to set voter qualifications. In the context of federalist traditions and contemporary politics, the 18-vote resolution appeared to many lawmakers as just too constitutionally ambitious – even to those legislators who, every Citizenship Day, extolled enfranchisement as the essential democratic right. The Senate's decision to uphold the 21-vote meant teenagers remained sociopolitical misfits: creative enough to wield cultural influence but not capable enough to be granted electoral power.

The victory over the Axis powers fostered a dismantling of colonial empires after World War II that allowed for the emergence of many modern democratic states. Political scientist Samuel P. Huntington contends the historical pattern of global democratization can be broken into a series of three waves and reverse

waves. The first wave began in the 1820s and lasted until the mid-1920s; however, some backsliding occurred as fascist, communist, or military dictatorships overthrew some of the fledgling democracies. The second wave of democratization started during World War II and was finished by the mid-1960s; many of the democracies during this brief span succumbed to autocracy. In the mid-1970s, the third wave of democratization commenced and continued through the 1990s with the end of the Cold War. With the fall of communism, democracy became the most common form of world government. The missionary zeal with which American Cold Warriors preached the transformative virtues of democracy had much to do with its global adoption. Huntington maintains the second-wave democracies emerged mainly as a result of purposeful American efforts, supported by local partners, to squash fascism and thwart communism through the implementation of federalism (separation of powers), constitutionalism (rule of law), republicanism (popular sovereignty) and capitalism (free markets). Though American action sometimes relied more on coercion than persuasion, thirty-six formerly autocratic nations, by his calculations, became functioning democracies by the mid-1960s.<sup>429</sup> As a result, Huntington concludes, democracy developed from a largely northern European to a worldwide phenomenon over the course of the twentieth century.

The second-wave democracies established suffrage as a global right of citizenship. In the past, disfranchised peoples insisted upon electoral equalization to channel legitimate claims against the tyranny of imperialists or despots. In the

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<sup>429</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

postwar era, as sociologist Reinhard Bendix emphasizes, the claims for political empowerment became part of larger strategies for national unification, the control of dissidence, and the securitization of human rights.<sup>430</sup> In December 1948, the United States voted with forty-eight other countries to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>431</sup> The United Nations drafted the Declaration to articulate the inalienable personal and political liberties implied by the terms “human rights” and “fundamental freedoms” that appeared in the U.N. charter. The Declaration pronounced moral standards and legal entitlements designed to protect the freedom, dignity, and quality of life for peoples and nations around the world. Article 21, Clause 3 of the Declaration proposed: “The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.”<sup>432</sup> The concept of “universal and equal suffrage” nourished the global trend toward democratization by insisting that the right to vote be granted to all qualified citizens. Member nations, of course, retained the legal power to determine voter requirements. Signatories of the Declaration understood that arbitrary disbarments due to gender, race, class, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation should be eliminated. Serious

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<sup>430</sup> Reinhard Bendix, *Nation-Building and Citizenship: Studies of Our Changing Social Order* (New York: Wiley, 1964).

<sup>431</sup> United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1948-1949* (Lake Success, NY: United Nations, Department of Public Information, 1950), 535. The U.N. General Assembly approved the Declaration with 48 countries voting in favor, zero against, and eight abstentions.

<sup>432</sup> United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 1948. An online copy can be found within the U.N. website: [www.un.org/en/documents/udhr](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr).

struggles over suffrage and electoral procedures engulfed many countries, but, little by little, the principle of “one man, one vote” developed into the world standard of enfranchisement.

Though the Declaration never clarified if age represented an illegitimate deprivation of full citizenship, lowering voting ages became part of the global democratization process. Before its first national election in 1949, for example, Israel dropped its voting-age threshold from 21 to 18.<sup>433</sup> Brazil and Costa Rica set eighteen as the national franchise age to standardize the administration of suffrage laws.<sup>434</sup> In Asia, establishing electoral ages grew out of American actions to reconstruct governmental systems shattered by World War II. Japan’s postwar constitution amended previous election laws by authorizing women’s suffrage and lowering the franchise age from 25 to 20.<sup>435</sup> The U.S. military government in South Korea approved an election law that established the minimum voting age at twenty-three.<sup>436</sup>

In Europe, a desire to avoid a future war enlivened actions to lower franchise ages. Political activists asserted that broadening the voting base would serve as a brake to prevent governments from plunging into the diplomatic calamities that led

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<sup>433</sup> Daniel Judah Elazar and Chaim Kalchheim, *Local Government in Israel* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 131. See also *Chicago Tribune*, 30 July 1951, 12.

<sup>434</sup> *New York Times*, 29 May 1945, 10, and 11 August 1948, 7.

<sup>435</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 14 October 1945, 9, 24 October 1945, 5, and 2 November 1945, 22; *New York Times*, 14 October 1945, 1; *Washington Post*, 14 October 1945, M1; and “One or Many?” *Time*, 31 May 1948, 27.

<sup>436</sup> *New York Times*, 5 September 1947, 5.



to warfare in 1939. Their logic stressed that the more democratic the nation, the more accountable its leaders would be to the citizenry, which would, in theory, lessen the future prospects of war. Other people argued that since the Allies armies had fought to preserve democracy, national electorates should expand to include previously un-franchised age groups who helped win the war. Within five years of its end, Finland, France, the Netherlands, and Denmark each reduced their constitutional voting ages, but none reached below age twenty.<sup>437</sup>

Europe's communist countries were among the first on the continent to promulgate eighteen as the official franchise age – long before the United States did so. The 1936 constitution of the Soviet Union established eighteen as its minimum voting age. After World War II, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia each followed Russia's example by reducing the age of enfranchisement to eighteen.<sup>438</sup> Of course, suffrage inside the communist bloc meant nil politically without observance of popular sovereignty. Soviet leaders, however, intended the age drop of enfranchisement to enlarge membership in the Communist Party rather than to increase electoral participation. The practical gain in solidifying regional control in Eastern Europe via expanded

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<sup>437</sup> Finland reduced its voting age from twenty-four to twenty-one; *Washington Post*, 18 March 1945; France from twenty-one to twenty; *New York Times*, 14 October 1945, 1; and the Netherlands from twenty-five to twenty-three; *Ibid*, 10 February 1946, 19. In 1949, Denmark also cut its franchise age from twenty-five to twenty-three; *Ibid*, 17 March 1949, 13. In 1953, Danes rejected a proposal to reduce it to twenty-one; *Ibid*, 29 May 1953, 6, and *Chicago Tribune*, 29 May 1953, 3.

<sup>438</sup> "The Question of Lowering the Voting Age to 18," *Congressional Digest* 33 (March 1954): 73. See also *Chicago Tribune*, 20 October 1945, 7 and 2 October 1945, 6; and *New York Times*, 10 August 1945, 2; 6 December 1951, 22; and 20 March 1953, 11.

party constituencies also yielded a political profit beyond the Iron Curtain. For those young Western Europeans who had become disillusioned by the democratic-capitalist model, Soviet policies that purposefully included youth in party politics stoked interest in communism. Within some of Europe's democracies, particularly Greece, Italy, and France, communists made political inroads by rallying support among adolescents through promises to enfranchise them.<sup>439</sup> A Frenchman complaining to the *New York Times* about the growing electoral strength of Western European communists lamented that they "have actually stolen and muffled the thunder which should be our own truth."<sup>440</sup>

Leftist political groups in the United States were early postwar champions of lower voting ages. In January 1946, the American Labor Party set a 17-point legislative program that included a provision for reducing suffrage ages to eighteen.<sup>441</sup> Left-wing youth organizations became vocal in support of revising the age of enfranchisement. In February 1946, the New York state branch of American Youth for Democracy organized a protest at the capitol in Albany on behalf of youth suffrage. Nearly 500 young people, "many of them in uniform and still more with GI buttons in their lapels," demanded, among other things, voting rights for all persons over age eighteen.<sup>442</sup> The youth bureau of the diminutive Liberal Party

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<sup>439</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 15 May 1946, 9; *Washington Post*, 15 May 1945, 9; and *Chicago Tribune*, 30 January 1946, 13.

<sup>440</sup> *New York Times*, 8 December 1951, 9.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid*, 3 January 1946, 29.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid*, 26 February 1946, 27.

called on lawmakers to revise voting ages, reckoning that “the contribution of the 18-to-21-year-olds to our country during the last war needs no emphasis.”<sup>443</sup> In 1948, the National Youth Organization formed as an auxiliary to Henry Wallace’s Progressive Party. The NYO sought “full assurance of civil liberties for Negro youth, the right to vote at 18 . . . and freedom from war for all youth.”<sup>444</sup> Arthur Gilbert, chairman of the National Jewish Youth Organization, asserted politically open-minded adolescents had gravitated toward Wallace and the Progressives because the Republicans and Democrats “destroy the full creative development of youth.” The Progressive Party’s 1948 platform indeed included a plank setting eighteen as the national age of enfranchisement.<sup>445</sup> In the context of the Cold War, left-wing support of lowered suffrage ages colored the proposition with a radical tinge that made many lawmakers around the nation wary of communist encroachment. But, during the immediate years after World War II, when most Americans were focused on economic issues, leftist advocacy carried on the 18-vote cause when few citizens cared.

Former Georgia governor Ellis Arnall busily worked to keep the issue of franchise ages on the nation’s political radar. Into the 1960s, Arnall encouraged federal and state legislators to follow Georgia’s lead in expanding franchise opportunities for youth. Arnall penned essays for periodicals, spoke in public

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid, 2 March 1947, 49.

<sup>444</sup> Ibid, 24 July 1948, 6.

<sup>445</sup> *Washington Post*, 24 July 1948, 4. The 18-vote policy had been part of the Progressive Party’s plans since its inception in January 1948. See *Chicago Tribune*, 19 January 1948, 2.

forums, appeared on radio and TV programs, and testified at governmental hearings to promote the revision of voting-age qualifications. He ardently disagreed with the oft-expressed view that 18-year-olds were too immature, too gullible, and/or too inexperienced to be entrusted with ballots. Arnall consistently maintained his “faith in the young men and women of America” to be sensible and dutiful voters if ever enfranchised.<sup>446</sup> His advocacy of the 18-vote garnered attention to youth suffrage; however, it did little to affect lawmaking during the postwar years. He had acquired sizeable public capital as governor, but after being termed-out of office in 1946, he saw his influence decline as he transitioned into the private sector. Regionally, Arnall fell out of favor by supporting voting rights for African-Americans. Nationally, he lost popularity by campaigning for Henry Wallace.<sup>447</sup> Nevertheless, he remained a valuable spokesman for youth enfranchisement. Though Arnall did not directly inspire legislators or governments to adopt lower voting ages, his persistent promotion of the 18-vote kept the issue afloat.

Arnall avidly promoted youth suffrage as a curative to voter apathy. He consistently asserted that “the idealism and candor of youth” could reenergize American politics similar to how adolescents had shaken up European elections.<sup>448</sup> Fervent political competition and democratization, including the lowering of

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<sup>446</sup> See Ellis Arnall, “The Importance of the 1946 Elections,” *NEA Journal: The Journal of the National Education Association* 35, no. 7 (October 1946): 377.

<sup>447</sup> See Harold Paulk Henderson, *The Politics of Change in Georgia: A Political Biography of Ellis Arnall* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991).

<sup>448</sup> *New York Times*, 25 October 1953, 51.

franchise ages, fostered massively high voter turnout rates across Europe. A December 1948 mayoral race in West Berlin, for example, saw 85% of eligible electors cast ballots; whereas, only 51% of enfranchised Americans voted the previous month in the presidential plebiscite.<sup>449</sup> The 51% score marked a 5% decline from the 1944 election and a 7% drop compared to the 1940 contest – and represented the lowest turnout rate by percentage since 1920.<sup>450</sup> In several states that had voting-age populations equal to or less than West Berlin’s 1.5 million persons, constituent turnout could only be described as anemic: South Carolina (13.6%), Alabama (13.7%), Mississippi (15.5%), and Arkansas (22%).<sup>451</sup> “We are the freest people on earth, the most prosperous and the happiest,” U.S. Senator Wayland Brooks (R-IL) avowed, “yet we show an amazing indifference to politics.”<sup>452</sup>

Political observers struggled to make sense of the “franchise delinquency.”<sup>453</sup> The *Washington Post* lamented that no analysis of the voting data could avoid the “painful conviction that a vast number of Americans do not take our democratic

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<sup>449</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 7 December 1948, 12; *New York Times*, 11 December 1948, 10; and *Washington Post*, 7 December 1948, 2 and 12 December 1948, M30.

<sup>450</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Participation in Elections for President and U.S. Representatives, 1932-2010,” Table 397, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2010* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), 244. See also, L.W. Jeffery, *Comparison of Potential Voters and Actual Votes Cast by Counties in Each State in 1948-1950* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952). See also *Washington Post*, 10 November 1948, 10.

<sup>451</sup> Royce Crocker, *Voter Registration and Turnout, 1948-1986*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, No. 88-207 GOV, (29 March 1988): 61-62.

<sup>452</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 22 October 1948, 3.

<sup>453</sup> “Excerpts from an Address by Jennings Randolph,” submitted by Representative Joseph R. Bryson of South Carolina, *Congressional Record* 95 (21 March 1949): A1604. At the time, Randolph served as an assistant to the president of Capitol Airlines.

system very seriously.”<sup>454</sup> A college student from Providence, Rhode Island, who had longed to “fulfill my obligation as an American citizen” by casting his first presidential ballot, blamed public apathy on a disillusioning campaign that “seemed to degenerate into a ‘lesser-of-the-four-evils’ affair” that left voters with no “positive choice to make” among Harry Truman, Thomas Dewey, Strom Thurmond, and Henry Wallace.<sup>455</sup> The *Chicago Tribune*, which notoriously headlined the wrong winner of the election – “DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN” – dismissed the shabby polling numbers as “a plain indication that the campaign was a dud to everyone.”<sup>456</sup> The 1950 mid-term elections appeared equally uninspiring; only 41% of eligible voters took part in the balloting.<sup>457</sup>

In contrast, European voter turnout soared. Italy averaged 90% participation in its 1948 and 1951 national elections.<sup>458</sup> Sweden’s 1950 elections garnered a 78% showing by registered voters.<sup>459</sup> And the 1951 plebiscite that propelled Winston Churchill to a second term as British Prime Minister generated an 83% turnout rate.<sup>460</sup> European election returns so impressed President Truman that he scolded his fellow citizens for their “laziness and indifference.” “Americans are mighty

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<sup>454</sup> “Votes for Freedom,” editorial, *Washington Post*, 7 December 1948, 12.

<sup>455</sup> “Disillusioned Voters,” letter to editor, *Ibid*, 27 October 1948, 10.

<sup>456</sup> “They Stayed Home,” editorial, *Ibid*, 8 November 1948, 24.

<sup>457</sup> Census Bureau, “Participation in Elections for President and U.S. Representatives, 1932-2010,” p. 244.

<sup>458</sup> *New York Times*, 29 May 1951, 1.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid*, 18 September 1950, 11.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid*, 27 October 1951, 3.

proud of their democratic system of government, but when it comes to voting,” Truman admonished, “many other countries put us to shame.”<sup>461</sup> Chastisement of “vote slackers” by Truman and other authorities, however, did little to spur participation.<sup>462</sup>

Civic leaders fretted over the public’s cool detachment from the electoral process. They pondered one of the great paradoxes of contemporary American politics: the United States was the first nation to endow its citizens with the powers of self-government, but modern Americans, as reflected by voter turnout rates, did not seem to cherish the privilege of self-determination. Considering the serious international struggle America was waging against communism, many authorities believed the problem of democratic ennui posed as serious a threat to domestic tranquility as internal subversion. As Minnesota governor Luther W. Youngdahl exhorted, “In these crucial days when democracy is endangered by an ideology that holds the right of free elections in contempt, it is tragic to find the great percentages of qualified American voters who fail to exercise their franchise at the polls. This apathy, indifference, and neglect can undermine our heritage of ‘government by the people’ unless we take steps to overcome it.”<sup>463</sup> Political scientists labored to deduce why qualified, enfranchised Americans chose not to exercise their suffrage rights. Their studies sketched three types of non-voters: the lazy who did not get around to

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<sup>461</sup> Ibid, 8 August 1952, 1.

<sup>462</sup> “Vote Slackers,” editorial, *Washington Post*, 6 November 1950, 8.

<sup>463</sup> Quoted in *Congressional Record* 98 (25 June 1952): 7958-7959.

voting; the skeptical who viewed voting as futile; and the discouraged who were prevented from voting by legal or practical difficulties. The scholars also found that postwar economic prosperity had engendered a uniquely American version of electoral apathy rooted more in contentment than hopelessness.<sup>464</sup>

University professors, newspaper editors, business executives, labor chieftains, and government officials conferred frequently to share ideas about how to inspire citizens to care and incite constituents to vote. Some pundits backed coercive schemes, such as compulsory voting laws, that would punish qualified electors who evaded their democratic duty.<sup>465</sup> Other observers blamed widespread ignorance of political affairs for the failures to exercise suffrage privileges. The *Detroit News* questioned whether the bulk of American voters possessed the “elementary political knowledge as would indicate a minimum interest much less an intelligent absorption in political processes.”<sup>466</sup> The *New York Times* encouraged “a greater effort, in the schools and elsewhere, to make the individual realize the importance of voting.”<sup>467</sup> A public school teacher who claimed vast experience in political recruitment acknowledged, however, that “no amount of education or

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<sup>464</sup> For example, see Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, *Voting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954); Heinz Eulau and Peter Schneider, “Dimensions of Political Involvement,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1956): 128-142; and Angus Campbell, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960).

<sup>465</sup> For example, see Robert Cobb Myers, “A Proposal to Tax Those Who Don’t Vote,” *New York Times Magazine*, 6 November 1949: 12, 75-76, & 78-80.

<sup>466</sup> “As the Teens Themselves Might Be a Good Idea,” editorial, *Detroit News*, 27 November 1952, n.p., Constitution of the United States, Amendments, S.J. Res. 71, no box number, Jennings Randolph Papers, Salem International University, Salem, West Virginia.

<sup>467</sup> “Our Fractional Electorate,” editorial, *New York Times*, 11 October 1948, 22.



pressure-appeals will bring all of the [electors] to the polls.”<sup>468</sup>

A consensus developed that poor voter turnout emerged not only from popular indifference but also from faults in the electoral system. Advocates for political reform identified America’s byzantine electoral laws as the chief obstacle holding back voter participation. John C. Cornelius, president of the American Heritage Foundation (a conservative think tank based in Washington, D.C.), argued revising voting regulations, particularly at the state level, was necessary because many “were established in the last century and no longer meet current needs.”<sup>469</sup> The authors of the U.S. Constitution allowed the states great discretion, in the absence of a specific federal law or amendment, to establish the qualifications for suffrage, the requirements for office-holding, and the schemes for casting ballots within their jurisdictions. Allowing states to determine the terms of enfranchisement, however, created an eclectic variance in eligibility standards qualifying how, when, where, and which electors could vote.

Eager to expand the bounds of democracy, postwar reformers challenged the three systemic obstacles they believed most impeded voter turnout. First, they disputed the legality of those codes that purposely disfranchised certain peoples, like Native Americans.<sup>470</sup> They also contested the validity of those obligations,

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<sup>468</sup> “Percentage of Voters,” letter to editor, *Ibid*, 21 October 1948, 26.

<sup>469</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 9 December 1956, 30.

<sup>470</sup> Arizona law had declared Native Americans ineligible to vote because they lived under federal guardianship. That meant Arizona Indians could not vote despite a 1924 federal declaration that Native Americans were citizens of the United States. In 1948, lawyers representing Frank Harrison, a Yavapai Indian and World War II veteran, convinced the Arizona Supreme Court to declare a state law denying suffrage to Native Americans as unconstitutional. *Harrison v. Laveen*,

such as paying poll taxes and passing literacy tests, designed to whittle “undesirable” groups from the electorate. In addition, they questioned the rationality of rigorous registration and residential prerequisites that, in light of the mobility of the modern American populace, disqualified and discouraged loads of potential voters.<sup>471</sup> U.S. Senator Francis Case (R-SD) lauded the reformism for easing the hardships of those persons living “behind the iron curtain of legal technicalities that keep them from governing themselves.”<sup>472</sup>

Supporters of youth suffrage sought to wrap lowering voting ages into the electoral reform cause. Father Edward Dowling, a fervent anti-communist Jesuit priest from St. Louis, implored Americans to practice what their nation preached to the world by getting behind democratization projects that would enhance popular sovereignty, particularly the elimination of “outdated procedures” such as the Electoral College and the 21-vote.<sup>473</sup> India Edwards, director of the Women’s Division of the Democratic National Committee, advocated a “Voting Bill of Rights” that proposed, in part, that “no American shall be denied an effective vote because of race, color, or national origin, unreasonable literacy tests or excessive educational requirement, dishonest registration procedures or elections, taxpaying or property

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67 Ariz. 337 (1948). Harrison’s success triggered other western states to squash their Indian disfranchisement laws. See *New York Times*, 4 August 1948, 1.

<sup>471</sup> For a list of state residence and registration requirements, see *Congressional Record* 98 (28 March 1952): 3098-3100.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid*, 100 (26 January 1954): A571.

<sup>473</sup> *Washington Post*, 10 August 1948, 2. Since the late 1930s, Dowling had been a consistent champion of youth suffrage. See *Ibid*, 15 August 1939, 7 and *New York Times*, 28 August 1942, 38.

holding requirements, unrealistic age requirements, or residence in the District of Columbia.”<sup>474</sup> To Dowling, Edwards, and other allies of adolescent enfranchisement, the traditional 21-vote standard struck them as “unrealistic” because it appeared incompatible with the contemporary endeavors to widen the electorate and incongruous with the advanced education that modern youth received. “For American life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to deny the franchise till age 21,” University of Illinois president George D. Stoddard declared, “is to hold back persons who are capable of assuming social and political responsibilities.”<sup>475</sup>

Youth suffrage received strong support from professional educators. They asserted ever-increasing high school graduation rates signified that 18-year-olds were well-equipped to handle the obligations of enfranchisement.<sup>476</sup> Historian Andrew Hartman contends that the impetus of the Cold War spurred government officials to mobilize teachers and students in the geopolitical contest for global hegemony. He notes that educational programs evolved over the course of the postwar period. From the end of World War II to the early 1950s, most schools still employed John Dewey’s progressive education theories as the main pedagogical model. Most every district abandoned progressive education after critics scored its

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<sup>474</sup> *Washington Post*, 4 July 1952, 17.

<sup>475</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 4 October 1951, 8.

<sup>476</sup> Until the 1930s, the typical childhood pattern of education involved completing elementary school (usually up to sixth grade) and then finding employment. As a result, many Americans never attended high school. Since 1940, the numbers of people who finish their formal education before secondary school have decreased while rates of graduating high school have increased. See Trudy A. Suchan, Marc J. Perry, James D. Fitzsimmons, Anika E. Juhn, Alexander M. Tait, and Cynthia A. Brewer, *Census Atlas of the United States: Census 2000 Special Reports*, Series CENSR-29, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), 157-174.

student-centered approach as the cause of poor academic results. Between the early and late-50s, educators emphasized “life adjustment” classes that offered pupils lessons in the practical know-how for becoming happy and productive citizens. After the launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik, federal officials insisted school administrators craft a more technological curriculum to produce mathematically and scientifically smart Cold Warriors. As a result, Hartman concludes, the traditional belief that the primary purpose of American schools was to educate young people for responsible conduct as adults got subsumed into the political cause of developing the intellectual manpower needed to combat communism.<sup>477</sup>

To cultivate the qualities of mind and heart required to sustain Americanism, educators created “civics” courses that intended to train students in “democratic citizenship.” Similar to the “life adjustment” pedagogy, civics classes strove to provide young people enough political knowledge so, as adults, they could adequately perform their citizen duties. In 1955, sociologist Herbert Hyman observed that the American process of introducing youth to their nation’s politics relied more on indoctrination than education. He coined the term “political socialization” to describe how communities fostered ideological conformity through the perpetuation of an ethos that stressed the importance of institutions and

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<sup>477</sup> Andrew Hartman, *Education and the Cold War: The Battle for the American School* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). For similar interpretations of U.S. education as a vital part of the national security canon, see Ronald Lora, “Education: Schools as Crucible in Cold War America,” in *Reshaping America: Society and Institutions, 1945-1960*, eds. Robert H. Bremmer and Gary W. Reichard (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982), 223-260 and Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, “Showdown at the Little Red Schoolhouse,” in *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 248-268.

political authority while disparaging imagination and personal license.<sup>478</sup> Civics curricula lay emphasis on imparting the norms, values, and behaviors of American-style democracy through a mixture of hagiography (studying the epic deeds of the great men of America's political history), catechism (teaching the basic democratic principles as a set of incontrovertible verities, especially as compared to communism), and patriotism (coaching a dogmatic defense of America's way of life against communist denigration or incursion).<sup>479</sup> Public officials found ways to funnel young student-citizens into civics classes. Some states, like Maryland, advised school districts to include Civics as a part of the core curriculum.<sup>480</sup> Other states, such as Missouri, steered pupils towards Civics, History, and Government courses by mandating the completion of competency examinations over the U.S. and state constitutions within such classes as a requirement for graduation from public high schools.<sup>481</sup>

Schools enhanced the citizenship training by sponsoring extracurricular activities that reinforced the importance of civic engagement within a constitutional democracy. For instance, teachers reminded children of the communal duty to aid misfortunate persons by coordinating campaigns on behalf of the March of Dimes or

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<sup>478</sup> Herbert Hyman, *Political Socialization* (Chicago: Free Press, 1959).

<sup>479</sup> For a description of how postwar civics classes melded into high school curricula, see William G. Wraga, *Democracy's High School: The Comprehensive High School and Educational Reform in the United States* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 87-128. For a contemporary snapshot, see "Education Special Report: The Education Puzzles," *Newsweek*, 5 December 1955, 55-62.

<sup>480</sup> *Washington Post*, 12 October 1951, B12.

<sup>481</sup> Missouri Revised Statutes, Chapter 170, Section 170.011.1 (1959).

UNICEF. Administrators arranged teams of students to take part in the mundane, but important, workings of democracy, such as assisting voter registration drives, phoning people to remind them of an upcoming election, offering babysitting services for mothers, and helping voters at polling places.<sup>482</sup> Mock elections, usually held in conjunction with presidential or gubernatorial campaigns, informed teens about the candidates and issues and allowed teachers to tutor them in voting.<sup>483</sup> Some school districts, particularly those in the Northeast, partnered with Citizenship Education Project sponsored by the Teachers College of Columbia University. The CEP worked with public schools to embolden citizenship by teaching adolescents about democratic ideals through hands-on civic activities, such as public service work and political volunteerism. A group of teenagers in Pearl River, New York, who had gone through the CEP program, for example, organized a successful campaign that convinced voters to pass a bond issue for building new schools. Another set of CEP-trained students in South Orange, New Jersey, so impressed local officials with their proposal to construct a youth recreational center that they were allowed to help plan the project.<sup>484</sup>

While principals and faculty exposed youths to the democratic process, they stifled expressions of student opinions within the schoolhouse. In the heightened tensions engendered by the Cold War, the excited, often poorly framed, political

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<sup>482</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 16 May 1948, D3; Dorothy Barclay, "The Very Young Guard in Politics," *New York Times Magazine*, 14 October 1956, 25; and *Washington Post*, 27 October 1952, 7.

<sup>483</sup> See *Washington Post*, 5 November 1956, B7.

<sup>484</sup> "Students with Bullwhips," *Newsweek*, 10 July 1950, 82, and "The Making of Citizens," *Ibid.*, 31 October 1955, 82.

utterances of adolescents that had been formerly considered different or weird were sometimes construed as radical or subversive. Some students organized their own events outside of school to articulate their views. Young people hosted community forums to discuss local problems or national concerns.<sup>485</sup> Youth groups staged model legislatures to practice the intricate mechanics of speech-making, politicking, and lawmaking.<sup>486</sup> President Truman encouraged a group of YMCA “boy governors” visiting the White House to continue rehearsing “the responsibilities that are necessary to carry on a government . . . In a few years the responsibility is going to be in your hands.”<sup>487</sup> Not every attempt to stimulate enduring interest in electoral affairs worked, of course; some adolescents remained indifferent to politics and civic duties into adulthood and old age. For the majority of teenagers, however, partaking in the classes, forums, and elections, even if pretend, inculcated a spirit of civic guardianship necessary for the perpetuation of republicanism. “Participation of youth in the democratic life,” a 1953 National Education Association resolution trumpeted, “prepares students for responsible citizenship.”<sup>488</sup>

Many people maintained that well-schooled adolescents should be allowed to demonstrate their citizenship training in the voting booth. Truman’s first attorney

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<sup>485</sup> See *Chicago Tribune*, 22 September 1946, NW9.

<sup>486</sup> See, for example, *Chicago Tribune*, 26 April 1950, A3 and 24 February 1957, 34; *New York Times*, 25 May 1947, 64 and 19 April 1952, 7; and *Washington Post*, 24 April 1949, M22; 11 April 1953, 14; and 8 April 1957, A3.

<sup>487</sup> *New York Times*, 18 June 1949, 7.

<sup>488</sup> *Washington Post*, 3 July 1953, 7. At its 1953 and 1958 national conventions, the NEA membership formally endorsed reducing voting ages to eighteen. See *Ibid.*, and *New York Times*, 5 July 1958, 19. State and local Parent-Teacher Associations also supported youth suffrage. See *Washington Post*, 5 June 1953, 30.

general, Tom C. Clark, submitted, “I have a boy 18 and I think the right to vote would add to his consciousness of civic responsibility, as it would to all boys and girls in that age group.”<sup>489</sup> Youth suffrage advocates argued the interest of high school graduates in politics dampened waiting three or four years for enfranchisement, which, in their view, fostered perpetual electoral disengagement. At a historical moment “when grownups are staying away from the polls in such an alarming manner,” *Washington Post* columnist Malvina Lindsay observed, capturing the “youthful enthusiasm” of teenagers could stoke “a widespread, steady buildup” of long-term electoral involvement.<sup>490</sup> An Arlington, Virginia, attorney asserted that if 18-year-olds were enfranchised “the younger blood would help stir more interest in national politics.”<sup>491</sup> Adolescents, when solicited by adults, confirmed an ardor for civic involvement. A University of Illinois student believed a lower suffrage age would bring into the electorate “a great many more voters who are interested in civic problems.”<sup>492</sup> A Manhattan teen affirmed that citizenship training had fostered an “enthusiasm” among teenagers for community affairs that “more than makes up for their lack of maturity.” A Brooklyn youth insisted that “age is not the only criterion for maturity . . . many adults in the[ir] thirties are

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<sup>489</sup> “New Interest Is Shown for Proposal to Extend Voting Privileges to 18-Year-Olds,” *Congressional Record* 92 (18 April 1946): A2276.

<sup>490</sup> Malvina Lindsay, “Horse Before the Cart,” column, *Washington Post*, 2 April 1952, 12.

<sup>491</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 February 1955, 45.

<sup>492</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 20 February 1952, 16.



irresponsible when they vote.”<sup>493</sup> “If the 18-year-olds could vote,” a Newark, New Jersey, high-schooler predicted, “younger people would urge more of the adults to get out and vote. We would also show them exactly how important it is to vote.”<sup>494</sup>

Ellis Arnall pointed to the positive electoral contributions of Georgia youth as proof that the benefits of reducing suffrage ages would ripple through any political system. He declared that adding adolescents to Georgia’s voting pool had a “tremendous” impact on state elections and government because “young people take a more active interest in politics . . . and want to become active at once.”<sup>495</sup> As an example of the youth effect, Arnall credited the establishment of the 18-vote in 1943 as the catalyst for eliminating Georgia’s poll tax in 1945.<sup>496</sup> Because the Peach State decreased its franchise age, Arnall concluded in his book, *The Shore Dimly Seen*, “Georgia today has the broadest electoral base, not only of any Southern State but of any State in the Union. . . . This experiment in broadening the base of democratic participation in government will be helpful to every State of our

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<sup>493</sup> *New York Times*, 6 November 1949, 74.

<sup>494</sup> “Senior Class at Newark Central School Favors 18-Year-Old Vote,” *Congressional Record* 102 (14 June 1956): A4838.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 January 1954, 53. A quirk in Georgia voter registration law encouraged young people to get into electoral politics while in high school. Georgia citizens could, as a result of the 1943 referendum approving the 18-vote, register to vote at age sixteen as long as they would be eighteen by the time a general election was next held. “Memo on Lowering the Voting Age to 18,” W.O. Brooks, aide to Governor Herman Talmadge to Lawrence Spivak, 12 January 1954, Series I, Box 42, Folder 8, Herman E. Talmadge Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 May 1946, 11. For corroboration of Arnall’s claim that the 18-vote spawned the action to rid Georgia of poll taxes, see T. Grady Head to John B. Wilson, 7 August 1943, p. 5, Record Group 2, Series Group 1, Series 2, Box 12, “Sec. of State Correspondence – H-J (General), John B. Wilson” Folder, Georgia State Department of Archives and History, Atlanta, and Albert B. Saye, ed., *Records of the Commission of 1943-44 to Revise the Constitution of Georgia*, Volume 1, (Atlanta: State Commission to Revise the Constitution of Georgia, 1946), 100.

Union.”<sup>497</sup>

In the decade after World War II, no state answered Arnall’s call to enfranchise adolescents. Delegates to New Jersey’s 1947 constitutional convention, for example, defeated a resolution to establish eighteen as the state’s voting age.<sup>498</sup> Between 1946 and 1954, bills to reduce suffrage ages were offered in 21 of the 48 states.<sup>499</sup> Only the 1952 proposals in Oklahoma and South Dakota made it through their respective statehouses to citizen referendum, and adult voters rebuffed each.<sup>500</sup> Rejection of the propositions could be partly blamed on the voting-age issue getting caught in the wake of more pressing state concerns. For instance, Oklahoma voters also denied authorizing a 125 million-dollar bonus to World War II and Korean War veterans and a special sales tax to fund welfare programs as well as nixing the 18-vote measure.<sup>501</sup>

The ineffectual state action reflected federal indifference to youth suffrage. Only seven times from 1946 to 1952 did congressmen put forward resolutions to establish a national voting age: two in the Senate (both on the same day in 1947) and five in the House (four filed by New York Democrat Arthur G. Klein). None of

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<sup>497</sup> Ellis Arnall, *The Shore Dimly Seen* (Philadelphia, J.B. Lippencott, 1946), 58 and 60.

<sup>498</sup> *New York Times*, 21 August 1947, 25.

<sup>499</sup> Frederick H. Pauls and Louise Comfort, *State Action to Lower the Voting Age: A Report in Two Parts*, Legislative Reference Service, Report No. 69-241 GGR, (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1969), 2-10.

<sup>500</sup> Oklahoma: *New York Times*, 17 November 1952, 20. South Dakota: *Ibid*, 9 November 1952, 56.

<sup>501</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 6 November 1952, A11.

the bills were reported out of committee.<sup>502</sup> Most Washington officials considered enfranchising adolescents of slight importance compared to managing the domestic economy, maintaining internal political stability, sustaining military preparedness, and containing communism. Congressional action also got hindered by concerns that declaring a federal age of enfranchisement might create sticky legal messes; e.g. many states tied jury service to voter eligibility. Several lawmakers fretted that a promulgating a national voting age, either by statute or amendment, might necessitate a change to the Fourteenth Amendment since it fixed representation in Congress on the basis of male citizens at least twenty-one years old.<sup>503</sup>

Harry Truman remained unenthusiastic about the prospect of lowering the voting age. Like previous presidents, Truman promoted opportunities to expand the franchise. He urged Americans to vote in greater numbers, supported federal protection of suffrage rights, convinced the Defense Department to streamline absentee voting for soldiers, and called for the residents of Washington, D.C. to be enfranchised.<sup>504</sup> Yet he never made a formal statement in support of youth suffrage

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<sup>502</sup> House bills filed in 1946 by Jed Johnson (D-OK), H.J. Res. 357, 79<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d. sess., *Congressional Record* 92 (23 May 1946), 5562, and in 1947, 1949, and 1951 by Arthur G. Klein (D-NY), H.R. 2120, 80<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 93 (20 February 1947), 1254; H.J. Res. 148, 80<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Ibid*, 93 (10 March 1947), 1905; H.J. Res. 122, 81<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Ibid*, 95 (31 January 1949), 738; and H.J. Res. 103, 82<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Ibid*, 97 (15 January 1951), 302. Senate bills filed by Arthur Vandenberg (R-MI), S.J. Res. 71, 80<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Ibid*, 93 (19 February 1947), 1158 and Harley M. Kilgore (D-WV), S.J. Res. 73, 80<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Ibid*, 93 (19 February 1947), 1158.

<sup>503</sup> See Charles S. Murphy, Memorandum for Mr. [William D.] Hassett, 8 February 1949, White House Central Files: Official File 465 (January-March 1949), Box 1298, Harry S Truman Papers, Harry S Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>504</sup> For samples of Truman's support for extensions of voting, see *New York Times*, 18 May 1946, 11; 29 March 1952, 1 & 6; and 8 August 1952, 1.

nor did anything substantive to rally the public or push the 18-vote in Congress. The nearest Truman came to endorsing adolescent enfranchisement occurred at an informal question-and-answer session with Chicago high school students in April 1946. Truman told the group that he “didn’t see why any intelligent boy or girl of 18 should not have the right to vote if they prepared themselves since they proved in time of war that they can shoulder citizenship’s highest duty.”<sup>505</sup> He refused, however, to commit to sponsoring 18-vote legislation. “As far as I can discover,” Truman’s administrative assistant, Charles S. Murphy, wrote to a White House staff member inquiring about how to answer requests for the President’s views on reducing voting ages, “neither the President nor the Administration have taken a position on this issue beyond saying that it is a matter for state decision.”<sup>506</sup>

Truman’s cool response to youth suffrage mirrored the national mood. A June 1946 *Washington Post* survey of Maryland, Virginia, and District of Columbia

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<sup>505</sup> Ibid, 7 April 1946, 30. For contemporary corroboration of Truman’s opinion, see *Washington Post*, 7 April 1946, M1. For further information regarding Truman’s comment, see Webster G. Wallace to Harry S Truman, 10 April 1946, White House Central Files: Official File 465 (1945-June 1948), Box 1297, Harry S Truman Papers, Harry S Truman Library and Garland G. Fritts to Harry S Truman, 12 October 1951, White House Central Files: Official File 465 (1951-February 1952), Box 1299, Ibid.

<sup>506</sup> Charles S. Murphy, Memorandum for Mr. [William D.] Hassett, 8 February 1949, White House Central Files: Official File 465 (January-March 1949), Box 1298, Ibid. See also Harry Ackerman to Harry S Truman, 7 January 1949, Ibid, and William D. Hassett to Harry Ackerman, 10 February 1949, Ibid. Ackerman, president of the Young Democrat Clubs of Arizona, asked Truman to help the group convince the Arizona legislature to adopt an 18-vote resolution. Truman never publically endorsed the measure. For examples of requests for Truman’s opinion on the 18-vote, see M.J. Caddy to Harry S Truman, 15 May 1947, White House Central Files: Official File 465 (1945-June 1948), Box 1297; Eugene Horton to Harry S Truman, no date, White House Central Files: Official File 465 (1951-February 1952), Box 1299; Wayne Gourley to Harry S Truman, 6 November 1951, Ibid; June Harding to Harry S Truman, 28 December 1951, Ibid; Jennie Spehar to Harry S Truman, 7 January 1952, Ibid; and Joseph L. Scheiter, Jr. to Harry S Truman, 16 January 1952, Ibid.

residents found 52% of respondents opposed lowering voting ages from 21 to 18.<sup>507</sup> A February 1947 poll conducted by George Gallup showed 60% against the 18-vote. Gallup concluded the results revealed “a marked shift in public opinion since 1943, when sentiment favoring youth suffrage was at its height.”<sup>508</sup> Whereas lawmakers pondered the political and legal problems reduced voting ages might cause, many of their constituents wondered if adolescents had enough educational preparation to warrant enfranchisement. Some people agreed with a Nebraska school superintendent who avowed, “With the social studies and school discussions what they are today, many an 18-year-old is better qualified to vote than are his parents.”<sup>509</sup> University of Illinois president George D. Stoddard added, “There is no magic power in 20 or 19 or 18, but the last figure represents a young person farther along, thanks to science, education, and democratic procedures, than the 21 year old of the preceding century.”<sup>510</sup> Other adults, like a man from Silver Spring, Maryland, contested the logic that contemporary teenagers could vote more intelligently because they were “better educated” than past generations. “Government,” he argued, was “more complicated also, and a year or two of high school social studies is meager prerequisite for suffrage.”<sup>511</sup> The editors of the *Chicago Tribune* also disputed the notion “that thanks to science, education, etc.,

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<sup>507</sup> *Washington Post*, 24 June 1946, 1.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid*, 26 February 1947, 11.

<sup>509</sup> *New York Times*, 29 January 1945, 18.

<sup>510</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 4 October 1951, 8.

<sup>511</sup> “Teen-Age Voters,” letter to editor, *Washington Post*, 16 April 1956, 16.

the 18 year old today is more advanced than the 21 year old of the last century.”

They concluded, “Modern education has its points, but the early acceptance of adult responsibilities by young people can hardly be counted among them.”<sup>512</sup>

Young people, too, appeared conflicted about whether they had acquired enough education to be responsible electors. A Chicago youth who graduated with honors from a public high school admitted that “he knows too little about present social and political problems to take advantage of a lower voting age if it were established.”<sup>513</sup> Another honors student from Washington, D.C. countered that “a fellow in high school usually knows more about what’s going on in Government than a lot of adults. A lot of things are discussed in civics and history classes, you know.”<sup>514</sup> Adolescents also seemed to lack full confidence in the intelligence quotients of the teen masses. A Newark, New Jersey, girl opposed lowering voting ages because most teenagers, in her estimation, lacked “the seriousness required to choose good candidates for government offices. Eighteen-year-olds are too easily swayed to be able to make individual decisions.”<sup>515</sup> Another young female from New York City claimed “the ability to cast an intelligent ballot was primarily an individual matter,” but she conceded that “a two-and-a-half-year high school history

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<sup>512</sup> “Votes for Teen-Agers,” editorial, *Chicago Tribune*, 8 October 1951, 16.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid*, 13 June 1948, 10.

<sup>514</sup> *Washington Post*, 24 June 1946, 6.

<sup>515</sup> “Senior Class at Newark Central School Favors 18-Year-Old Vote,” *Congressional Record* 102 (14 June 1956): A4838.

course was not sufficient foundation for political intelligence.”<sup>516</sup> Doubts about the aptitudes of potential teenage electors were confirmed by reports that during the first year of the Korean War “more than 500,000 men were turned down for military service because they failed the educational examinations.”<sup>517</sup>

The general concerns about teen brainpower affected national conversations about youth suffrage during the Korean War. In June 1950, the Cold War erupted into a shooting war when forces from communist North Korea invaded South Korea. Under the assumption that the Soviet Union or China had instigated the attack, President Harry Truman obtained United Nations sponsorship of a collective effort to defend South Korea. Sixteen nations, including many North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies, sent troops to Korea, but the United States deployed most of the combatants, furnished most of the weapons, and planned most of the military strategy. The first U.S. soldiers rushed to Korea, however, were underprepared and suffered major defeats during the initial three months of the war. Shortly after a joint US-UN force successfully counterattacked and drove the North Korean army back to the border at the thirty-eighth parallel, the war fell into a stalemate. Americans grew increasingly frustrated with the impasse. Some people believed inept leadership caused the deadlock; others blamed the pampering and cosseting young soldiers had experienced as children. As Lieutenant Colonel John Michaelis, commander of the Army’s 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, grumbled, “These kids of mine . . .

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<sup>516</sup> *New York Times*, 1 November 1954, 31.

<sup>517</sup> “The Great Uneducated,” *Newsweek*, 6 April 1953, 57.

spent a lot of time listening to lectures on the differences between communism and Americanism and not enough time crawling on their bellies on maneuvers with live ammunition singing over them. They'd been nursed and coddled, told to drive safely, to buy War Bonds, to give to the Red Cross, to avoid V[eneral] D[isease], to write home to mother – when someone ought to have been telling them how to clean a machine gun when it jams.”<sup>518</sup>

The concerns of Michaelis and other officers about the battlefield consequences of mollycoddling postwar boys revived the issue of universal military training (UMT). After the cessation of World War II hostilities, the federal government stopped drafting men – like it had done at the end of World War I. The growing specter of communist expansion moved President Truman to advocate universal military training as a means of national preparedness in lieu of continuous conscription.<sup>519</sup> In every legislative session between 1945 and 1948, Truman asked Congress to create a system subjecting all males who graduated high school or turned eighteen to one year of training either in the regular army or National Guard. Upon completion of the training, the men would serve six years in the reserves. Many Americans opposed Truman's plan as advocating peacetime conscription. Some congressmen thought UMT needless within a national defense strategy based upon atomic power. Other lawmakers deemed Truman's suggestion

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<sup>518</sup> Harold H. Martin, “The Colonel Saves the Day,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 9 September 1950, 33. For additional information regarding the difficulties training contemporary youth, see Sam Boal, “New Soldiers for New Tasks,” *New York Times Magazine*, 23 July 1950, 7 & 40-41.

<sup>519</sup> *New York Times*, 19 December 1946, 26. See also Thomas D. Boettcher, *First Call: The Making of the Modern U.S. Military* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992).



too inflammatory in a time devoid of active warfare. Congress even let the Selective Service Act of 1940 expire, as legislated, in March 1947. Congressional inaction spurred Pentagon officials to discuss the possibilities of forming a national program based in high schools to improve the physical fitness and martial skills of young males.<sup>520</sup>

The communist uprisings in Greece and Turkey that inspired the Truman Doctrine and the diplomatic crisis in Germany that instigated the famous airlifting of supplies to West Berlin roused Congress to reinstate the Selective Service system. In June 1948, Congress adopted another Selective Service Act. The measure temporarily reestablished local draft boards and authorized conscription as needed to meet military force requirements.<sup>521</sup> Federal officials intended the renewal of Selective Service to provide the United States with a ready supply of manpower should the nation ever need to supplement active and reserve duty personnel. The 1948 legislation continued the basic scheme of universal registration, selective conscription, and draft classification administered by local boards as devised in the 1940 statute. However, the 1948 measure changed the mandatory enrollment ages from eighteen to forty-five, as previously designated, to nineteen through twenty-five. It also allowed 161,000 18-year-olds to volunteer for twelve months of service in any of the armed forces branches.<sup>522</sup> But it did not

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<sup>520</sup> *Congress and the Nation, 1945-1964: A Review of Government and Politics in the Postwar Years* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1965), 242-252.

<sup>521</sup> Selective Service Act, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. 62, ch. 625, (24 June 1948): 604.

<sup>522</sup> The one-year, under-age volunteer enlistment exempted such youths from being drafted at a later date. See *New York Times*, 25 June 1948, 1; 30 June 1948, 1 & 21; and 16 July 1948, 16.

create a system for universal military training despite pleas by Truman and the Pentagon. The first draft under the auspices of the 1948 act was conducted in June 1950 with the outbreak of the Korean War.

The combat struggles in Korea re-stoked Pentagon interest in universal training. In August 1950, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Omar Bradley warned the Senate Armed Forces Committee that America faced a manpower crisis if Congress failed to approve UMT. They speculated that the invasion of South Korea might be the precursor to a larger communist attack fomented by the Soviet Union in Europe or somewhere else. Johnson and Bradley argued UMT would be a great deterrent to Soviet plans.<sup>523</sup> Johnson's replacement, George C. Marshall, testified in January 1951 on behalf of UMT. With the outcome of the Korean War still in doubt, Marshall emphasized the importance of trained reserves as a vital piece to America's national security.<sup>524</sup>

In June 1951, Congress amended the 1948 Selective Service Act (which had technically expired in June 1950 and had been kept active via continuing resolution) and re-titled it the Universal Military Training and Service Act. Despite its title, the bill authorized a selective, not universal, draft of eligible males that would last four years (or until 1955). Conscripts would serve 24-month tours of duty, with the first four months dedicated solely to basic training, and instituted an

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<sup>523</sup> *New York Times*, 23 August 1950, 1 and 24 August 1950, 1.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid*, 18 January 1951, 1 & 11.

eight-year obligation for combined active duty and membership in the reserves.<sup>525</sup> Congress inserted a “blueprint” for UMT into the act, expecting a detailed plan to be drafted at some point.<sup>526</sup> In March 1952, it rejected a proposed training scheme as unnecessary. By that time, truce talks were about to commence; hence, the theory that Korea would be the antecedent to all-out communist assault elsewhere appeared increasingly unlikely.<sup>527</sup> Interest in UMT gradually waned. Historian Russell F. Weigley notes that in the midst of the Korean conflict the army shifted away from the massive troop structures employed during World War II toward a sleek and nimble force prepared for limited engagements. Plus, a growing reliance on air power and nuclear weapons made the need for a mass of trained reservists to repel large-scale attacks unnecessary.<sup>528</sup> The scheme for offering every youth training in martial basics was never devised, but continued worries about “soft” youth stirred federal investments into physical education classes and the establishment of the President’s Council on Youth Fitness in 1956.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>525</sup> Universal Military Training and Service Act, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. 65, ch. 144 (19 June 1951): 75. See also *New York Times*, 20 June 1951, 1. During the Korean War, Selected Service placed 1.5 million men into the armed forces, or just over half of the men who served. Between 1954 and 1961, it enlisted an additional 1.5 million – including its most famous inductee, 23-year-old Elvis Presley, in 1958 – to staff the posts upholding America’s global commitment to thwart communism. See Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America’s Anti-Statism and Its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 149-199.

<sup>526</sup> “Blueprint for UMT,” *Newsweek*, 11 June 1951, 27.

<sup>527</sup> “Pigeonholed Again,” *Ibid*, 17 March 1952, 27. See also, *Congress and the Nation, 1945-1964*, 266-272.

<sup>528</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1973), 393-397.

<sup>529</sup> For more about the connection between physical training and military preparation, see Donald J. Mrozek, “The Military, Sport, and Warrior Culture,” in *The Columbia History of Post-*

The deliberations over universal military training sparked a hot debate about draft ages. The Selective Service Act of 1948 established nineteen as the minimum conscription age. As U.S. troops struggled during the initial months of the Korean War, Selective Service Director Lewis B. Hershey hinted that Congress should consider returning the draft age to eighteen as it had been during World War II. Hershey conceded that his suggestion to reinstitute the 18-draft would nudge Congress into a “dangerous field,” but he insisted that tapping that “very rich source of manpower” was necessary to build the 3-million-man army President Truman wanted.<sup>530</sup> During the same January 1951 testimony in which he supported UMT, Secretary of Defense Marshall formally asked Congress to lower the age of conscription to eighteen because, as he declared, “We are confronted with a world situation of such gravity and such unpredictability that we must be prepared for effective action.”<sup>531</sup> Through the spring, the House and Senate reviewed Marshall’s request. Militarily, it made sense; the service branches, particularly the Army, needed the additional manpower (estimated to be a little more than one million 18-year-olds) to prevent communist takeover of the Korean peninsula.<sup>532</sup> Politically, Marshall’s appeal proved explosive.

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*World War II America*, ed. Mark C. Carnes, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 131-154.

<sup>530</sup> *New York Times*, 13 October 1950, 1. Hershey later blamed America’s manpower shortage on the decreased birth rate the nation experienced during the Great Depression. See *Ibid*, 10 May 1951, 9.

<sup>531</sup> “Manpower: 18-Year-Olds and 4-F’s,” *Newsweek*, 29 January 1951, 22.

<sup>532</sup> “The Manpower Pool,” *Newsweek*, 26 February 1951, 23, and *New York Times*, 25 May 1951, 32.

Almost from the moment Marshall posed his idea to draft 18-year-olds, irate citizens bombarded federal officials with heated objections. A White House summary of 300 letters sent to President Truman dated 5 January to 21 January 1951, for instance, showed only seventeen in favor.<sup>533</sup> A high school student from Dearborn, Michigan, impatiently asked him why teenagers must “be drafted at all? Are there not enough other men in the whole wide world to choose from without robbing the cradle? Men who have the right to vote are the ones that should be fighting for their country and not these mere boys who have just graduated and are entering the world as a new generation.”<sup>534</sup> Pacifists and peace groups complained a return to the 18-draft, in combination with the installation of America’s national security state, would cast a permanent militaristic pall over the nation and foist an “undemocratic program” of martial indoctrination on young people.<sup>535</sup> Educators claimed it would wreak havoc on the educational life of the nation by stripping colleges of potential students and reorienting high school curricula away from scholastic instruction towards military-influenced vocational preparation.<sup>536</sup> Parents, particularly mothers, argued eighteen was too tender an age to send green,

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<sup>533</sup> Eighteen Year Old Draft, 2 April 1951, White House Central Files: Official File 245 Misc., (Drafting Eighteen-Year-Old Boys), Box 849, Harry S Truman Papers, Harry S Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

<sup>534</sup> Miss Adele Myeck to Harry S Truman, 12 March 1951, Ibid.

<sup>535</sup> *New York Times*, 30 January 1951, 14.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid, 18 January 1951, 11; 19 January 1951, 12; 26 January 1951, 10; 28 January 1951, E2; 13 February 1951, 33; 14 February 1951, 6; 17 February 1951, 24; and 18 May 1951, 51; and “Feeling the Draft,” *Newsweek*, 22 January 1951, 81. College administrators predicted the 18-draft would reduce student enrollments as males graduating high school would defer signing up for classes. Those predictions became real for the fall semester of 1951: 250,000 fewer students enrolled than the previous year. See *New York Times*, 24 September 1951, 1 & 18.

undeveloped boys into violent combat overseas before they could embark upon adulthood. “Should they be forced to give up their future plans,” a housewife demanded of Representative Charles W. Vursell (R-IL), “when they are not considered old enough nor intellectual enough to give their vote as to who the leaders of our Government will be until they are 21 years old?”<sup>537</sup> Lawmakers considered manpower sources other than the 18-draft (such as re-calling World War II veterans who had served less than ninety days in uniform, reexamining males classified as 4-F, and enlisting married men under thirty who had no children) to balance the desires to meet Pentagon needs and muffle public complaints.<sup>538</sup> In the end, Congress compromised: it set age 18½ as the conscription age under the Universal Military Training and Service Act.<sup>539</sup>

The dispute over the draft age prompted another round of public conversations regarding suffrage ages. Like the World War II dialogues, the “old enough to fight, old enough to vote” aphorism controlled the discourse. The majority of Americans who linked soldiering and voting maintained the extension of suffrage

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<sup>537</sup> “Comparison of Draft Age and Length of Military Service in Atlantic Pact Nations,” *Congressional Record* 97 (2 February 1951): A537. Many fathers also supported the 19-draft. For example, see Harold P. McDonald to Richard B. Russell, 22 January 1951, Series XV, Subseries AY, Box 419, Richard B. Russell Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

<sup>538</sup> *New York Times*, 30 September 1950, 1; 13 January 1951, 1 & 7; 26 January 1951, 1 & 10; 30 January 1951, 1 & 14; 6 March 1951, 1 & 15; 10 March 1951, 1; 8 April 1951, 155; and 14 April 1951, 1 & 6; and “The Draft: After the 18-Year-Olds,” *Newsweek*, 22 January 1951, 19-20; “Battle of the 18s,” *Ibid*, 5 February 1951, 24; and “The Draft: Nearer for the 18s,” *Ibid*, 19 February 1951, 21.

<sup>539</sup> Debated in the Senate: 82<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 97 (1951), 1527, 1563, 1590, 1599, 1652, 1673, 1709, 1710, 1723, 1757, 1763, 1778, 1897, 1920, 1925, 1970, 1977, 1978, 1981, 1986, 2042, 2058, 2082, 2160, and 2168. Debated in the House: 82<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 97 (1951), 3205, 3297, 3366, 3406, 3588, 3673, 3752, and 3877.

to draft-eligible teenagers was a matter of simple fairness. As Illinois state senator Everett Peters summarized: “Any person of an age to be called to the country’s service has a right to vote for or against the persons governing him.”<sup>540</sup> The nature of the ballot-bullet debate, however, differed in the Korean War era. During World War II, Americans mainly discussed whether youths *should* (ought to) vote at all. As reflected in public opinion polls, most citizens outside of Congress believed that young people deserved to vote because of stellar war service. During the Korean War, people mainly disputed whether teenagers *could* (had the ability to) vote sensibly. The squabbles over youth qualifications considered if adolescents, in light of the battlefield difficulties in Korea, had the intellectual and emotional capacities to cast levelheaded ballots. Those deliberations became clouded by comparisons between youth generations. Whereas adolescents during World War II were remembered as tough, dedicated, and serious, Korea War-era teenagers were perceived as soft, apathetic, and juvenile. Parents and politicians alike divided over the question whether contemporary young people possessed the sober judgment expected of electors. In September 1951, George Gallup sensed the public uncertainty when he reported that “popular sentiment at present is about evenly divided” regarding youth suffrage: 47% for, 49% against, and 4% undecided.<sup>541</sup>

To buttress the overarching claim that young persons responsible enough to undertake warfare should be enfranchised, 18-vote advocates emphasized the

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<sup>540</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 4 October 1951, 8.

<sup>541</sup> *Washington Post*, 21 September 1951, 25 and George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 2: 1009.

mental and physical development of the teenage troops fighting in Korea. “The only possible excuse for not giving [youth] the voting privilege is one of maturity,” a man from Ponca City, Oklahoma, charged, “and in a world in which fighting for self-preservation has become a dominant requirement, who can say that the inducted youngster does not possess essential qualifications for representing that maturity?”<sup>542</sup> Some supporters stressed that contemporary warfare required high-level decision-making by young soldiers. “Modern warfare is mechanical and technical,” a mother from Paterson, New Jersey, wrote to Representative Victor Wickersham (D-OK), “Today’s soldier must be a responsible individual, a mature person.”<sup>543</sup> Others highlighted the advanced motor skills required of young combatants. Senator Blair Moody (D-MI) testified before a Senate subcommittee that “our jet planes are moving so fast these days that a pilot is considered old when he gets in his middle twenties because of the need for swift reflexes. . . .If they are old enough to fight, if they have sufficient maturity to be entrusted with jet airplanes and assigned to foxholes to defend our liberties, then they are old enough to vote.”<sup>544</sup> Several people suggested marrying the voting age and the draft age. Though enfranchising 18½-year-olds would create a logistical headache for local voting registrars, a woman from Washington, D.C. extolled its psycho-emotional

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<sup>542</sup> Untitled letter to editor, *Washington Post*, 4 February 1951, B4.

<sup>543</sup> Gretchen Thomason to Victor Wickersham, 19 January 1951, Folder “Draft 1951 (no. 2),” Box 57, MS 74-41, Victor Wickersham Papers, University Library, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas.

<sup>544</sup> *Constitutional Amendments: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate*, S.J. Res. 127, 82<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 27 June 1952, 63.



benefits. “Anyone who has been closely associated with boys just out of high school at 18,” she wrote, “knows that six months, just then, is an amazingly worthwhile ‘simmering down’ period.”<sup>545</sup> A few groups, such as the Junior Statesmen of America, called for an extension of voting rights to all members of the armed forces regardless of age.<sup>546</sup> The *Chicago Tribune* seconded the plea to enfranchise all U.S. troops by acknowledging that battlefield prowess had exposed an acumen not normally ascribed to adolescents. “The peacetime 18-year-old frequently is too immature to use the ballot intelligently,” it editorialized, “This is not true of the 18-year-old who is defending his country. Anyone old enough to fight is old enough to share in government.”<sup>547</sup>

Critics of the “old enough to fight, old enough to vote” position chipped away at the contention that capable soldiering implied competent voting. Most adversaries rejected the parallel between performing military duties ably and casting a ballot intelligently. The editors of the *Wall Street Journal* dismissed the correlation as a “beautifully sentimental non sequitur.” They opined:

It is impossible, of course, to determine an age at which every person becomes mentally qualified to choose executors of government. . . . We have settled on 21 years as the qualifying age in the belief that then most persons can do some thinking

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<sup>545</sup> “Sacrosanct 18s,” letter to editor, *Ibid*, 8 March 1951, 8.

<sup>546</sup> *New York Times*, 11 November 1950, 10.

<sup>547</sup> “Votes for Fighters, editorial, *Chicago Tribune*, 19 January 1951, 16. President Truman also seemed to approve an all-encompassing franchise for military personnel. One of his personal secretaries wrote in a letter to a person who questioned Truman’s position on the 18-vote that the President “has not discussed this general question but has supported legislation to enable members of the armed forces, eighteen years old and older to vote.” Mrs. Joseph Short to Keith Wallace, 26 June 1952, White House Central Files: Official File 465 (March-June 1952), Box 1299, Harry S Truman Papers, Harry S Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

and are less likely to be deceived by specious claims to statesmanship than at any earlier age. No one imagines that that theory holds true universally. But it is the long considered judgment of our people and as such it cannot be upset by attempting to draw a false analogy between voting and military service.<sup>548</sup>

Many 18-vote opponents refused to accept the syllogism that voting requires mature abilities, some young soldiers have demonstrated high-level skill-sets under duress, therefore, all teenagers between 18-and-20-years-old were qualified to vote. Some people asserted that the corporeal ability to fight bore no relation to the cerebral fitness to elect. As a man from Magnolia, Arkansas, insisted: “The catalytic action of physical maturity and duty and responsibility to defend the country physically does not bring about . . . the political maturity to vote.”<sup>549</sup> Still others disagreed with the claim that battlefield decision-making evidenced the capacity for individual judgment required at the ballot box. “[T]he very qualifications which make an 18-year-old a fine soldier – aggressiveness, daring, unquestioning obedience to command,” the *Morgantown (WV) Dominion-News* editorialized, “may well unfit him to cast an intelligent vote.”<sup>550</sup> Members of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs roundly refused to endorse lowering suffrage ages because they

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<sup>548</sup> “On the Voting Age,” editorial, *Wall Street Journal*, 7 July 1952, 6.

<sup>549</sup> “The Question of Lowering the Voting Age to 18,” *Congressional Digest* 33 (March 1954): 91.

<sup>550</sup> “Eighteen-Year-Olds,” editorial, *Morgantown (WV) Dominion-News*, 27 February 1954, 4, located in Constitution of the United States, Amendments, S.J.R. 179 Correspondence Folder, no box no., Jennings Randolph Papers, Salem International University, Salem, West Virginia. The editors of the *Washington Post* held the same view. They wrote, “The qualities which, according to the generals, make young men under 21 desirable as soldiers – impressionability, pliability, automatic response to stimuli, are the very reasons that should make them undesirable as voters.” See “Teen-Age Suffrage,” editorial, *Washington Post*, 6 April 1947, B4.

believed soldiers “were given orders and not expected to think for themselves.”<sup>551</sup> A handful of citizens, like a man from Delta, Utah, recommended raising the draft age rather than reducing the franchise age because, in his opinion, “youths of 18 are not mature enough for either task.”<sup>552</sup>

Adult uncertainty about adolescent maturity impeded the progress of youth enfranchisement during the Korean War era. Many Americans concurred with the sentiment of a “sincere 20-year-old” from Florida who declared young soldiers had earned suffrage rights for all youth for having carried “the responsibilities of our country on our shoulders.”<sup>553</sup> Just as many people, including adolescents, doubted whether enough teenagers had enough sense to justify enfranchising them. For example, several members of the 1956 senior class at Newark (NJ) Central High School (who entered as freshman during the time of the UMT and draft age debates) disagreed over the question whether military service validated teenage suffrage. One student thought that “any person who is physically fit to fight for his country has also to be mentally fit. If he is mentally fit to safeguard the welfare of his country, why is he not mentally fit to vote?” While another classmate insisted that “just because a boy is physically old enough to fight, it does not mean that he is mentally old enough to vote.”<sup>554</sup> The public’s inability to reach a clear consensus

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<sup>551</sup> *New York Times*, 26 May 1955, 21.

<sup>552</sup> “The 18-Year-Olds,” letter to editor, *Wall Street Journal*, 16 July 1952, 12.

<sup>553</sup> Henry O. Berryhill to Harry S Truman, 20 February 1951, White House Central Files: Official File 245 Misc. (Drafting Eighteen-Year-Old Boys), Box 849, Harry S Truman Papers, Harry S Truman Library.

<sup>554</sup> “Senior Class at Newark Central School Favors 18-Year-Old Vote,” *Congressional Record*

regarding the psycho-emotional acumen of adolescents checked the patriotic sentiment to grant youth the right to vote and stalled legislative action to enfranchise adolescents.

While the citizenry partook in a lively discussion about draft ages and voting ages, Congress generally ignored the teen enfranchisement issue as it oversaw the war effort in Korea. Only three lawmakers, Senator Blair Moody (D-MI) and Representatives Arthur Klein (D-NY) and Clyde Doyle (D-CA), offered 18-vote resolutions in the time between the first arrival of U.S. forces in Korea in July 1950 and the election of Dwight Eisenhower in November 1952. The House of Representatives neglected to consider Klein's or Doyle's proposals.<sup>555</sup> Moody's bill, however, garnered a hearing – the first by the Senate on any youth suffrage measure. In June 1951, Michigan governor G. Mennen “Soapy” Williams appointed Moody to serve out the unexpired term of Arthur Vandenberg who died of cancer the previous April.<sup>556</sup> Williams apparently named Moody to the post because he was familiar with the inside workings of federal politics having covered them as the Washington correspondent for the *Detroit News*, which was owned by Moody's uncle, William Scripps. In February 1952, Moody filed an 18-vote amendment (S.J.

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102 (14 June 1956): A4838 & A4837. Youth forums sponsored by the *New York Times* in May 1947 and November 1952 also split whether 18-year-old boys should be granted suffrage if drafted. See *New York Times*, 25 May 1947, 64 and 10 November 1952, 22.

<sup>555</sup> See H.J. Res. 103, 82<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 97 (15 January 1951): 302, and H.J. Res. 497, 82<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Ibid* 98 (6 July 1952): 9709.

<sup>556</sup> “Moody Marches On,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 6 June 1951, 136. See also, “Senator Die-Hard,” *Newsweek*, 1 December 1952, 18.

Res. 127) that repeated verbatim Vandenberg's motion from a decade earlier.<sup>557</sup>

On 27 June 1952, the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments allowed Moody and Ellis Arnall to speak on behalf of the bill. Senator Moody buttressed his proposal with the basic pro-18-vote arguments. He said he based his resolution “on the conviction that the best way of teaching citizenship to our young people is by permitting them to participate actively in the important tasks of citizenship.”<sup>558</sup> Moody asserted that “phenomenal advances” in modern education made contemporary 18-year-olds “more capable of performing the voting obligations of citizenship than were their fathers and grandfathers at the age of 21. . . . They have learned the facts and acquired the information on which to base an intelligent choice.”<sup>559</sup> He maintained that America needed the “idealism and vigor” of youth as well as “their new ideas, their selfless devotion, and their pioneering spirit” to combat the “widespread apathy toward the problems of our unstable and abnormal world.”<sup>560</sup> Moody noted that 20% of “our Army’s strength is composed of men between 18 and 20. These men are, by force of circumstance, mature enough to assume the obligations of full citizenship.”<sup>561</sup> He finished his presentation by insisting that only enfranchisement would prevent young people “from losing

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<sup>557</sup> S.J. Res. 127, 82<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., Ibid 98 (4 February 1952): 744-745. See also *New York Times*, 5 February 1952, 20.

<sup>558</sup> *Constitutional Amendments: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate*, S.J. Res. 127, 82<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 27 June 1952, 60.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>561</sup> Ibid, 63.

interest in public affairs between the time they leave school and the time they are eligible to vote.”<sup>562</sup> Arnall earnestly shored each of Moody’s points with affirmations trumpeting the electoral abilities of young enfranchised Georgians. He attested, “Many of the fears that used to be expressed by people about youth voting in my State were dissipated when it was put into effect. All of the bad things they said about it did not materialize, none of the bad ones. All of the good ones we predicted for it did come about.”<sup>563</sup>

On Monday, 1 July 1952, the full Senate Judiciary Committee voted viva voce to report out Moody’s 18-vote amendment.<sup>564</sup> When it reached the floor for consideration on 3 July, Senator Andrew Schoepel (R-KS) requested that S.J. Res. 127 be passed over.<sup>565</sup> Under the Senate’s standing rules, the first two hours of each new working day are dedicated to conducting routine business, such as introducing bills, concurrent resolutions, and committee reports. An important task during that time is to confirm the day’s legislative calendar. During the reading of the pending business, the majority and minority leaders (or their designees) either agree or object to unanimous consent requests asking for a bill to be considered by

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<sup>562</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid, 68.

<sup>564</sup> *Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of the United States to Grant Citizens of the United States Who Have Attained Age 18 the Right to Vote*, 82<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1 July 1952, Senate Report 2036. See also *Congressional Record* 98 (1 July 1952): 8707; *New York Times*, 2 July 1952, 20; *Wall Street Journal*, 2 July 1952, 1; and *Washington Post*, 2 July 1952, 10. The 1952 publications did not indicate the viva voce tally. In January 1954, the Associated Press reported Moody’s proposal “was approved, 4 to 3, by a bare quorum of the Judiciary Committee.” See *Chicago Tribune*, 23 January 1954, 1 and *New York Times*, 23 January 1954, 6.

<sup>565</sup> See *New York Times*, 2 July 1952, 20 and *Congressional Record* 98 (3 July 1952), 9105.

the Senate. A “pass over” dismisses a piece of legislation, either temporarily or indefinitely, from floor consideration.<sup>566</sup> On Wednesday, 3 July 1952, Minority Leader Styles Bridges (R-NH) designated Andrew Schoeppel as his proxy. Schoeppel had a busy morning negating bill proposals. He lodged twenty-three objections before voicing the pass over to S.J. Res. 127.<sup>567</sup> Schoeppel’s action jettisoned a measure that was temporally and politically fated to fail. With the second session of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Congress due to adjourn on Saturday, 7 July, there was not enough legislative time to move Moody’s constitutional amendment through both the Senate and House. Schoeppel’s maneuver also helped his Republican Party deny the Democrats a potential legislative score just before plunging headlong into the 1952 presidential campaign – particularly on an issue that the GOP candidate, Dwight Eisenhower, pledged to tackle if elected.

The ramp-up to the 1952 election generated party interest in adolescent enfranchisement. Both the Democrats and Republicans viewed young people as a potentially influential constituency in a period of deep political competitiveness. During the postwar years, the United States witnessed one of the rare instances of divided partisan government in its political history. From 1896 to 1946, America had experienced divided government (i.e. different parties in control of the legislative and executive branches) in only three of twenty-five congresses. From 1946 to 1960, the political party not occupying the White House controlled four of its

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<sup>566</sup> Valerie Heitshusen, *The Legislative Process on the Senate Floor: An Introduction*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, No. 96-548, (13 August 2014): 1-14.

<sup>567</sup> *Congressional Record* 98 (3 July 1952): 9042-9105.

seven congresses. The 1956 electoral outcomes marked a historical rarity: for the first time since 1876, a president was elected without majority control of Congress.<sup>568</sup>

This era of shifting congressional majorities and divided government engendered a spirited competition between the Democratic and Republican parties to enlist new young members. Party chieftains took note of the era's changing social patterns, especially the rising percentage of adolescents in the general population and the movement of young adults to suburbia, and tailored appeals to those demographic cadres. The recruitment of young people contributed to a political climate more attuned to youth issues than in the past. In particular, both the Republicans and Democrats believed that championing the 18-vote would yield partisan benefits. In 1946, the editor of the *Wilmington (DE) Morning News* predicted that future actions to lower the voting age would be motivated more by "political considerations" than patriotic sentimentalism, democratic idealism, or authentication of adolescent acumen. He postulated that lawmakers would "[take] the gamble" to support youth suffrage only if they had "good reason" to suspect that it would bolster "the relative strength of the two major parties."<sup>569</sup>

The Democratic Party worked to boost its existing advantage in youth allegiance. In 1946, for example, South Carolina Democrats decided to reduce the age of eligibility for their all-white primary elections to eighteen, although state law

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<sup>568</sup> See *Congress and the Nation, 1945-1964*, 1-32, and Stephen G. Christianson, *Facts About the Congress* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1996), 239-418.

<sup>569</sup> *Congressional Record* 92 (8 April 1946), A2004.



applicable to general elections kept the threshold at twenty-one.<sup>570</sup> Coming out of World War II, the majority of adolescents, like the bulk of the adult electorate, aligned with Democrats. A January 1946 Gallup poll revealed that 65% of 15-18-year-olds and 62% of persons aged 21-to-29 identified as Democrats.<sup>571</sup> Those results were understandable considering that other surveys showed postwar youth favored liberal policies and statist approaches to governing.<sup>572</sup> In addition, an entire generation of young people had only known Democratic rule. In reporting on soldier reaction to Franklin Roosevelt's death, Gene Currivan of the *New York Times* observed that his passing "was particularly affecting" among those troops "not yet of voting age" but who had matured during the New Deal. A frontline infantryman from Ohio told Currivan, "I can remember the President ever since I was a little kid. America will seem a strange, empty place without his voice talking to the people whenever great events occur."<sup>573</sup> Comfort with FDR-style liberalism and a desire for continuity of leadership fed youth devotion to the Democrats in the years after World War II. George Gallup underscored that the political significance of youth fidelity to the Democrats was linked to demographics. Normally, eight to ten million adolescents became eligible to vote between presidential elections. "If

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<sup>570</sup> *New York Times*, 3 September 1946, 8. Even after federal courts abolished the white primary, South Carolina retained the 18-vote standard for its primary elections. See *Ibid*, 20 July 1947, E10 and 25 April 1948, E7.

<sup>571</sup> *Washington Post*, 25 January 1946, 9. See also, *Congressional Record* 92, (29 January 1946): A325.

<sup>572</sup> Selden Menefee, "America at War: Predicting Opinion Trends," column, *Washington Post*, 16 March 1945, 9.

<sup>573</sup> Gene Currivan, "Generals and GI's Mourn Late Chief," *New York Times*, 14 April 1945, 6.

only 50 per cent of these young people turn out at the polls,” he noted, “their vote of almost two-to-one Democratic would be enough to offset a substantial defection among older voters.”<sup>574</sup>

Since Roosevelt’s first election in 1932, the Republicans had banked on men “in their late forties, fifties, or sixties” to carry the party.<sup>575</sup> To win elections, GOP strategists trusted their oldsters would turn out at the polls in greater proportion than younger voters. Census Bureau statistics, however, undercut the plan. Based on current population trends, the American electorate would become younger and more female with each future election cycle.<sup>576</sup> Motivated by the irrefutable demographics, the Republican Party labored to break the Democrats’ hold on young people. Their efforts began with the resuscitation of the Young Republican National Federation, which began in 1931 but became moribund during World War II. The Republican National Committee tasked the Federation with organizing Young Republican Clubs across the nation. Between 1946 and 1949, the number of states hosting clubs grew from 18 to 46 (and the District of Columbia); anyone between ages fourteen and thirty-nine could join. To rope in new young members, local clubs hosted civic education programs and social events, such as picnics, dances, athletic contests, and sleigh rides.<sup>577</sup> The Young Republicans also sought to increase their

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<sup>574</sup> *Washington Post*, 25 January 1946, 9. See also, *Ibid*, 21 August 1946, 3.

<sup>575</sup> James Reston, “Revitalized G.O.P. in Scientific Drive,” *New York Times*, 1 November 1950, 39.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid*, 28 August 1946, 15 and 25 February 1951, 64; *Washington Post*, 29 March 1948, 1 & 6; and *Chicago Tribune*, 26 April 1954, B14.

<sup>577</sup> *Washington Post*, 29 September 1945, 5 and 25 January 1948, B6.

presence on college campuses. Ralph E. Becker, chairman of the Young Republican National Federation, cited two motives for cultivating university cells: to combat pro-Democrat, left-wing student groups and to capture new young electors. Becker stated, “More students of voting age are attending our universities and colleges than ever before. Approximately 60 per cent of the 2½ million students, most of them veterans of World War II, are of voting age. This strong potential group is only part of the 47 million young Americans between the ages of 21 and 40 who will be eligible to vote this year.”<sup>578</sup> Many Republicans worried that the Democrats’ political dynasty would persist if their efforts to recruit young people flopped.

During Harry Truman’s second term, however, the Democratic Party saw its popular support slowly dissipate. Truman had attributed “our party’s success in years past, and the proud tradition it bears today, to the genuine spirit of youth which is inherent in its philosophy.” And he pledged “to retain the imagination and idealism of youth in our approach to the perplexing problems of government.”<sup>579</sup> More and more citizens reckoned the energetic methodology and activist philosophy of Truman and his Democrats as too statist in an era devoid of crises akin to the Great Depression or World War II. In particular, many Americans rebuffed Truman’s attempts to expand social welfare, create a universal health care program, and protect the civil rights of minorities as an overextension of federal power. Other people criticized the party’s legislative agenda as languid and

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<sup>578</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 1 March 1948, C5.

<sup>579</sup> Harry S Truman to the High School Youth of the Nation, n.d., White House Central Files: Personal File 89, (Elections), Box 174, Harry S Truman Papers, Harry S Truman Library,

outdated. Even Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. blasted his Democratic comrades during the 1948 campaign as “lazy” for “trying to meet today’s problems with yesterday’s programs,” namely, his dad’s.<sup>580</sup>

As the Democrats scuffled to rebrand their approach, internal clashes over political philosophy began to fracture the party membership, including its youth devotees. In the 1948 elections, Truman faced two in-house revolts. From the left, former vice president Henry Wallace led the new Progressive Party. From the right, South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond headed the “Dixiecrat” insurgents who had stormed out of the Democratic Party convention after it placed a civil rights plank onto the national platform. Young people got caught in the wake of the power struggle. The Progressives siphoned off those left-leaning youths (typically from urban areas) who were attracted to Wallace’s call for full voting rights for blacks and adolescents and alienated by what they perceived as the Democrats’ rightward-shift toward hawkish foreign policy. The Dixiecrats carried away young conservative southerners whose partisan loyalties were more regional than political. For young moderates, the internal strife belied the promises of Democratic chieftains to “heed the voice of youth” in party affairs.<sup>581</sup> As the disillusion with the intraparty squabbling grew, many young people reconsidered their political allegiance. Even the youngest delegate at the 1948 Democratic

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Independence, Missouri.

<sup>580</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 27 August 1948, 6.

<sup>581</sup> *New York Times*, 12 July 1948, 2.

national convention, 18-year-old Truman Williams of Douglas, Georgia, admitted that he “might be forced” to cast his first presidential ballot for Republican presidential nominee Thomas Dewey: “I can’t see [voting for] Truman. I am definitely against Henry Wallace.”<sup>582</sup>

After Harry Truman’s miraculous comeback victory in 1948, the Democrats struggled to retain the former strength of its youth following. During the 1950s, a cohort of young people came to political maturity more ideologically uncommitted than the previous generation.<sup>583</sup> The student council president of St. John’s University in New York City affirmed that his classmates and age peers elsewhere disdained “the ignorant element that follows either party blindly.”<sup>584</sup> “High school students may reflect their parents’ political beliefs,” a social studies teacher in Maryland conveyed, “but they sure don’t want you to know it.”<sup>585</sup> Several factors can explain why postwar youths coolly refrained from reflexively assuming the political affiliation of their families, particularly if they were loyal Democrats. The intense socioeconomic debates of the 1930s that had forged the hard-core partisanship of their Democratic parents had been tempered by the peace and prosperity of the postwar years. Because of an upsurge in internal migration, increasing numbers of American children grew up in the suburbs. The suburban

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<sup>582</sup> Ibid, 13 July 1948, 5.

<sup>583</sup> James MacGregor Burns and Philip K. Hastings, “As the Independent Voter Goes,” *New York Times Magazine*, 7 October 1957, 34.

<sup>584</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 15 October 1956, 1.

<sup>585</sup> *Washington Post*, 27 October 1952, 7.

emphasis on conformity, communal acceptance, and conservative politics encouraged many youths to adopt the political habits and prejudices of their neighbors.<sup>586</sup> The Democrats' domestic program also suffered under a wave of anticommunist hysteria that impugned statist liberalism as radicalized socialism. Beginning in the late 1940s, polling data indicated that the political affinities of young people had started to drift rightward along with the rest of the nation.<sup>587</sup> "I'm a Southerner, a Dixiecrat, and believe in states' rights," a 21-year-old female student at Southern Methodist University averred, "but the Republicans are now more what the Democrats ought to be."<sup>588</sup> Gallup polls in 1950 and 1951 showed the Democrats continued to attract the majority of young, first-time voters, but the number of them declaring as Republicans or independents increased.<sup>589</sup> By the presidential election of 1952, high school and college students self-identified nearly equally as Republicans and Democrats.<sup>590</sup>

During the 1952 campaign, both Democrats and Republicans tried to rally the support of young people. The Census Bureau estimated that approximately

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<sup>586</sup> See "The Suburban Voter: Which Way Does He Lean?" *Newsweek*, 1 April 1957, 42.

<sup>587</sup> Alanson C. Harper, "Student Poll in Conjunction with a National Election," *School Review* 57 (November 1949): 497-502.

<sup>588</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 15 October 1956, 1.

<sup>589</sup> The 1950 survey showed 43% Democrat, 21% Republican, and 31% Independent/Other, while the 1951 poll disclosed 34% Democrat, 24% Republican, and 42% Independent/Other. See *Washington Post*, 14 April 1950, 32 and 23 November 1951, 2.

<sup>590</sup> See "Young Voters Hope 1952 Politics Will Prove New and Different," *Saturday Evening Post*, 9 February 1952, 12; "Issues of 1952: Pro and Con Discussion of Party Differences," *Senior Scholastic*, 1 October 1952, 21-23; and "Who's for Whom: College Undergraduates' Presidential Preferences," *Newsweek*, 13 October 1952, 34.

98.4 million Americans were age-qualified to vote; 7.5 million were youths who had turned old enough to cast ballots for the first time.<sup>591</sup> Each political party aimed to broaden its partisan base by capturing the youth bloc of votes and recruiting under-age adolescents. Part of the tactics relied on savaging the policies of the opposing party as an imminent threat to the future lives that young people imagined for themselves.<sup>592</sup> Both parties also invited young people to take an active role in the election process. For example, the Republicans and Democrats included youths in campaign work, such as voter registration, preparation and distribution of campaign literature, rally organization, campus mobilization, membership recruitment, stumping for candidates, fundraising, policy planning, vote soliciting, and poll watching. Maryland Democrats even hosted “political birthday parties” that, akin to the Citizenship Day galas, celebrated those youths who reached the age of enfranchisement.<sup>593</sup> By meshing the experience of party regulars with the enthusiasm of the amateur volunteers, the Democrats and Republicans hoped not only to rouse an apathetic adult electorate but to show young people that, in the words of a Chicago committeeman, “Politics should be a young man’s game too.”<sup>594</sup>

Since voteless youth had no electoral skin in the game, both parties actively

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<sup>591</sup> The Census Bureau stated that approximately 3.5 million of the 7.5 million of-age youths would not be able to vote because of various disqualifications, such as imprisonment, insanity, alien status, or residency in Washington, D.C. See *New York Times*, 31 August 1952, 34; and *Washington Post*, 31 August 1952, M2 and 2 November 1952, B3.

<sup>592</sup> For example, see Blair Moody, “Opportunities for the Youth of America,” *Congressional Record* 98 (26 May 1952): A3224.

<sup>593</sup> *Washington Post*, 17 September 1952, 3.

<sup>594</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 29 June 1952, 5.

championed reducing suffrage ages. Democrat and Republican strategists hoped that adolescents would show their gratitude by joining the party they believed would best fulfill the pledge to enfranchise them. At an April 1952 campaign stop at the University of Miami, Senator Estes Kefauver (D-TN) became the first presidential contender to announce his support for lowering the national voting age to eighteen.<sup>595</sup> Known as a crusader against organized crime and government corruption, Kefauver had become the front-runner for the Democrat nomination by defeating Harry Truman in the New Hampshire primary, which caused Truman to quit the competition. During a June radio interview in New York City, Kefauver again advocated giving voting privileges to 18-year-olds. “They are better qualified to vote today than I was at the age of 21,” Kefauver said, because of the wide access to political information provided by modern mass media. He further asserted that to continue the 21-vote tradition risked “dampening their intelligent interest in government.”<sup>596</sup> Internal party politics caused Kefauver to lose the nomination to Illinois governor Adlai Stevenson.

Stevenson also backed the 18-vote. As a candidate for the Illinois governorship in 1948, he embraced a state party plank calling for a constitutional amendment to reduce the Land of Lincoln’s franchise age to eighteen.<sup>597</sup> As governor, he endorsed a drive launched by University of Illinois students to change

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<sup>595</sup> *New York Times*, 22 April 1952, 22.

<sup>596</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 25 June 1952, 3. See also, *Wall Street Journal*, 25 June 1952, 1.

<sup>597</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 27 August 1948, 6.



the state's legal age of majority, including voting rights, from 21 to 18. "I'm emphatically in favor of conferring full citizenship rights at 18," Stevenson asserted.<sup>598</sup> Part of Stevenson's presidential campaign strategy in 1952 sought to glean votes from new first-time electors and of-age university students by underscoring his intellectualism.<sup>599</sup> Though critics dubbed him an "egghead" for his professorial demeanor (and baldness), college students and urbane young people gravitated toward Stevenson. Future U.S. Senator Paul Simon (D-IL) recalled that Stevenson appealed to youth because they recognized he was "young himself, always growing, always eager to explore and probe untried paths."<sup>600</sup> Throughout the campaign, Stevenson reminded young people that his administration would tackle long-standing socioeconomic matters by employing novel methods, which included providing youth new opportunities for meaningful political action. In September, Stevenson proclaimed his support for a reduction of the franchise age to eighteen but acknowledged that the matter "presents difficult questions with respect to Constitutional amendment."<sup>601</sup> His squishy, overly analytical positions on the issues of the campaign, as exemplified by the hedging on the 18-vote, were contrasted by the firm, plain-spoken stances of the GOP candidate Dwight Eisenhower.

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<sup>598</sup> Ibid, 4 October 1951, 8.

<sup>599</sup> *New York Times*, 14 October 1952, 1 & 24.

<sup>600</sup> Paul Simon, "Young People Loved Him," *As We Knew Adlai: The Stevenson Story by Twenty-Two Friends*, ed. Edward P. Doyle, (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 130.

<sup>601</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 16 September 1952, 5. See also *New York Times*, 16 September 1952, 26.

Eisenhower maintained a comfortable lead in the polls throughout the 1952 campaign. His prestige as former Supreme Allied Commander during World War II made him an idol of many Americans, including young people. His civic esteem combined with the public's frustration with the Democrats' handling of the Korean War to propel Eisenhower's candidacy. Among the many assurances he made as a presidential contestant, Eisenhower affirmed that his administration would "bring the youth in[to]" the governing fold by offering a "vigorous, appealing, dynamic program" that would utilize "their freshness and their vigor."<sup>602</sup> At a June press conference in Detroit, Eisenhower said he backed lowering the legal voting age to eighteen.<sup>603</sup> The following day in Denver, he succinctly explained his reason: "If a man is old enough to fight he's old enough to vote."<sup>604</sup> On the campaign trail a month later in Iowa, Eisenhower stated that he would sponsor an 18-vote federal amendment in Congress if elected.<sup>605</sup> After he won the Republican nomination in August, several GOP stalwarts wondered if a 62-year-old political novice had the energy and skills to pull enough young "first voters" and electors under 30 away from Stevenson to win the presidency.<sup>606</sup>

Eisenhower's rout of Stevenson proved party worries to be unfounded. More people voted, 55 million, than ever before in a presidential election, which several

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<sup>602</sup> *New York Times*, 5 July 1952, 6.

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid*, 16 June 1952, 1.

<sup>604</sup> *Washington Post*, 16 June 1952, 2.

<sup>605</sup> *New York Times*, 5 July 1952, 6.

<sup>606</sup> *Washington Post*, 2 August 1952, 7.

pundits attributed to Eisenhower's fame.<sup>607</sup> His swamping of Stevenson (55% to 45% of the popular vote and 442-89 in the Electoral College) roused a popular majority reminiscent of Franklin Roosevelt's elections. Eisenhower offset Democratic strength in the cities by scoring well in the growing suburbs, and 20% of the votes cast for Ike came from registered Democrats, including a large chunk from the South by winning Florida, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.<sup>608</sup> Even more gladdening for the GOP, Eisenhower's landslide swept the party into majority command of both houses of Congress; not since 1930 had the Republicans controlled the White House and Capitol Hill. And in another bit of good news, a poll released less than a week before Election Day revealed that 65% of 18-to-21-year-olds supported Eisenhower for president.<sup>609</sup> The election data appeared to show that his spectacular triumph might yield a generation of Republican dominance.

Americans, young and old, obviously liked Ike, but most people still remained registered Democrats despite his big victory. To regain the majority status the Republicans once had, Eisenhower and party leaders adopted a two-pronged approach to woo more people to join. First, the GOP worked to expand its membership base by creating new auxiliaries (like Citizens for Eisenhower) that leveraged Ike's popularity to recruit new constituents, especially white

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<sup>607</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 22 December 1952, 4.

<sup>608</sup> *Washington Post*, 15 February 1953, M2, and "Landslide Sweeps Eisenhower into White House," *Newsweek*, 10 November 1952, 3-6.

<sup>609</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 31 October 1952, 1.

suburbanites and black southerners. Second, the party attempted to broaden the appeal of its principles and policies by softening its image as a club of rich, anti-government curmudgeons.<sup>610</sup> Both prongs of the strategy relied on leveraging Eisenhower's popularity and program for party gain; indeed, not only did millions of Americans personally like Ike, they also accepted his "dynamic conservative" philosophy. As Eisenhower explained, his approach charted a "middle way" that tried to balance the liberal prescription for an activist government with the conservative predilection for balanced budgets and local alternatives to federally-run programs.<sup>611</sup> His brand of moderate Republicanism and the grassroots work of the recruiting bureaus slowly began to revitalize the GOP.

Part of the effort to rejuvenate the Republican Party called for following up on Eisenhower's pledge to enfranchise juveniles. During the first three months of the 1953, Republican-controlled statehouses in California, Illinois, Iowa, and New York debated bills to reduce state franchise ages from 21 to 18.<sup>612</sup> In March, U.S. Senator William Langer (R-ND), chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

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<sup>610</sup> Robert Mason, *The Republican Party and American Politics from Hoover to Reagan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 148-181. For contemporary perspectives on Republican outreach efforts, see "GOP Week: Setting the Stage for November," *Newsweek*, 8 February 1954, 21-22, and Hugh Morrow, "The G.O.P. Will Never Be the Same!" *Saturday Evening Post*, 2 April 1955, 25 & 91-94. There is a minor historiographical disagreement regarding Eisenhower's party work. Some scholars, such as George H. Mayer, find Eisenhower "allergic" to party involvement and "apathetic" to party leadership. George H. Mayer, *The Republican Party, 1854-1964* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 496 & 497. Other historians, including Fred Greenstein, argue Eisenhower pursued a sustained program as president to strengthen the GOP. Fred Greenstein, "Eisenhower as an Activist President: A Look at New Evidence," *Political Science Quarterly* 94, no. 4 (Winter 1979-1980): 575-599.

<sup>611</sup> For more about Eisenhower's political beliefs, see Robert Griffith, "Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth," *American Historical Review* 87, no. 1 (February 1982): 87-122.

<sup>612</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 8 January 1953, 1 and *Washington Post*, 2 March 1953, 2.

proposed a constitutional amendment that would declare eighteen as the legal suffrage age for all elections.<sup>613</sup> Two months later, Leonard W. Hall, national chairman of the GOP, announced that President Eisenhower and Vice President Richard Nixon had “endorsed enthusiastically” the legislative efforts to establish eighteen as the national voting age. Hall expressed no preference to the method of adoption, claiming he would “support all valid proposals” at the state or federal level “with every effort at my command.” After stating that young people had been “more vigorous” than older groups in backing Eisenhower’s campaign, Hall framed the 18-vote as an issue of maturity rather than recompense for military service. Hall asserted,

The old argument that young people between the ages of 18 and 21 are not sufficiently matured to exercise the right of suffrage is as dead as a dodo bird, in my opinion. It has been my observation that the age of maturity has steadily been lowered in recent years. I am further convinced of it by the views of the President, who, after all, led the greatest army of youth ever assembled during World War II, and his judgment on the matter profoundly impresses me.<sup>614</sup>

Two days after Hall’s pronouncement, Representative Kenneth Keating (R-NY) introduced a constitutional amendment in the House of Representatives that would enfranchise all 18-year-olds.<sup>615</sup> Keating claimed the “backing of our enlightened

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<sup>613</sup> S.J. Res. 53, 83<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 99 (2 March 1953): 1513. See also *New York Times*, 3 March 1953, 1. Prior to Langer’s bill, no Senator had filed voting-age legislation, and only Clyde Doyle had done so in the House of Representatives. See H.J. Res. 30, *Ibid.*, (3 January 1953): 67.

<sup>614</sup> *New York Times*, 26 May 1953, 21. See also *Chicago Tribune*, 26 May 1953, 5.

<sup>615</sup> H.J. Res. 265, 83<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 99 (27 May 1953): 5747, and *New York Times*, 28 May 1953, 20.

President and Vice President” prompted him to put forth his measure. Echoing Chairman Hall, Congressman Keating said the demonstrated maturity of contemporary youth proved them capable of voting sensibly. Keating averred,

An 18 year old today has greater maturity of judgment than his grandfather had at 21. There are exceptions, of course, but that generalization would apply to nine-tenths of our youth. Improved educational facilities and their wide use are important contributing causes. In most schools young people are taught about the workings of their government in their early teens. Everyone in public life has enjoyed the stimulating experience of being questioned by these bright, alert youngsters. Their questions are often penetrating and searching to a degree every bit the equal of their elders. There is no magic in the figure 21. In determining the age at which a person should be permitted the franchise, competency, not arithmetic, should govern.<sup>616</sup>

During the summer of 1953, considerable momentum built in support of adolescent enfranchisement. In June and July, four more amendments were filed in the House and Senate to establish a national voting age.<sup>617</sup> On June 2<sup>nd</sup> and July 13<sup>th</sup>, the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments conducted hearings on Langer’s resolution and another filed by Hubert Humphrey (D-MN).<sup>618</sup> Both bills received hearty praise for recognizing the cognitive capacities of modern youth.

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<sup>616</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 28 May 1953, A2.

<sup>617</sup> In the House, Victor Wickersham (D-OK) and Louis C. Rabaut (D-MI) offered bills to enfranchise 18-year-olds, while Stuyvesant Wainright (R-NY) proposed a 19-vote bill. See, for Wickersham: H.J. Res. 274, 83<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 99 (10 June 1953): 6377; for Wainright: H.J. Res. 288, *Ibid*, (30 June 1953): 7736; and for Rabaut: H.J. Res. 311, *Ibid*, (29 July 1953): 10230. In the Senate, Wayne Morse (I-OR) introduced a resolution to set the suffrage age at eighteen. See S.J. Res. 103, *Ibid*, (18 July 1953): 9123.

<sup>618</sup> For Humphrey’s bill, see S.J. Res. 64, 83<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 99 (1 April 1953): 2596.

Rufus H. Wilson, national legislative director of the American Veterans of World War II, summarized the views of those witnesses who championed youth suffrage. He declared the 18-vote issue went beyond the “natural argument” of old enough to fight, old enough to vote “inasmuch as we believe that the educational standard of the United States has increased to a considerable extent over the last 150 years, and that the teaching of various democratic ideals in high schools and colleges certainly makes it obvious that the vast majority of people who are at this age do have the necessary qualifications to allow them to cast their legitimate and proper vote as a result of their convictions.”<sup>619</sup>

As the summer progressed, Republican operatives worked to inflate public support for teen suffrage. At the yearly meeting of Girls’ Nation, Bertha Adkins, assistant chairman of the Republican National Committee, encouraged the group to get behind lowering the voting age to 18.<sup>620</sup> At its national convention, the Young Republicans National Federation offered its support to the cause.<sup>621</sup> Meanwhile, President Eisenhower, Vice President Nixon, and Chairman Hall pushed Congress to pass one of the 18-vote bills. Republican lawmakers pressed the case that the nation would benefit by tapping the talents of adolescents. Senator Alexander Wiley (R-WI), for example, asserted that since many young people “had the maturity, the responsibility, the judicial temperament, the understanding of men

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<sup>619</sup> *Granting Citizens Who Have Attained the Age of Eighteen the Right to Vote: Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary*, S.J. Res. 53 and S.J. Res. 64, 83<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 2 June 1953, 2.

<sup>620</sup> *New York Times*, 5 August 1953, 49.

<sup>621</sup> *Ibid*, 14 June 1953, 56.

twice their age” they deserved to be “given some reins of responsibility today – now.”<sup>622</sup> Republican promotion of adolescent enfranchisement pumped public sentiment for the 18-vote to an all-time high. A July 1953 Gallup poll showed 63% of those people surveyed favored lowering voting ages to eighteen.<sup>623</sup> Republicans believed that their efforts to secure youth suffrage would reap a harvest of young, loyal constituents. According to the Census Bureau, there were 6.3 million youths between ages 18 and 20 potentially eligible to vote if they were enfranchised.<sup>624</sup> With so many virgin votes up for grabs, an unnamed GOP strategist admitted to the *Wall Street Journal*, “I’m surprised the Democrats didn’t do it long ago.”<sup>625</sup>

Like in 1952, the legislative clock expired before the House or Senate could approve any of the youth suffrage resolutions. On 3 August 1953, the first session of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress adjourned. Under institutional rules, however, bills pending in committee but not acted upon in the first session of a Congress could be considered without re-filing during the second session. William Langer’s amendment appeared the 18-vote measure most likely to be contemplated first upon the resumption of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress. Because he chaired the committee processing S.J. Res. 53, legislators presumed it would be quickly sent on to the full Senate early next session.

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<sup>622</sup> “Youth and the Eisenhower Administration,” *Congressional Record* 99 (1 July 1953): A4011.

<sup>623</sup> *Washington Post*, 4 July 1953, 5 and Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 2:1153.

<sup>624</sup> *New York Times*, 26 May 1953, 21 and 26 April 1954, 27; and *Chicago Tribune*, 26 April 1954, B14.

<sup>625</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 5 June 1953, 1.



At the beginning of 1954, the chances for passing a youth suffrage bill looked excellent. A Republican-controlled Congress seemed poised to advance a party-sponsored 18-vote amendment that had historically-high popular support and conspicuous backing from a well-liked Republican president. Among the twenty-two topics touched upon in his first State of the Union address (delivered 7 January 1954), President Eisenhower asked Congress to pass a constitutional amendment establishing age eighteen as the official voting age in federal elections. “For years our citizens between the ages of 18 and 21 have, in time of peril, been summoned to fight for America,” the Commander-in-Chief declared, “They should participate in the political process that produces this fateful summons.”<sup>626</sup> The *Washington Post* disagreed with the proposition to enfranchise 18-year-olds but commended Eisenhower’s request as an “astute political move” to consolidate youth support for the Republican Party.<sup>627</sup> James Reston, Washington correspondent for the *New York Times*, reported that the 18-vote proposal was one of “only two surprises” (besides an appeal to strip the citizenship from any American convicted of conspiring to overthrow the government) in the oration.<sup>628</sup> It caught journalists and congressmen unawares because Eisenhower had not commented publicly on any of the voting-age bills before the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress, and neither the president nor any of his aides had indicated that his State of the Union would include remarks

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<sup>626</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 8 January 1954, 8, and *New York Times*, 8 January 1954, 10.

<sup>627</sup> “Votes for Adolescents,” editorial, *Washington Post*, 11 January 1954, 10.

<sup>628</sup> James Reston, “Message on Union,” *New York Times*, 8 January 1954, 1.

about setting a national age of enfranchisement.<sup>629</sup> *Newsweek* claimed that “most legislators are leery” of the 18-vote proposal, and the *New York Times* predicted Eisenhower would have “more difficulty in securing” it than the other parts of his legislative slate.<sup>630</sup> By promoting the voting-age resolution within the speech, however, Eisenhower signaled to Congress that it was “high on the list” of his legislative priorities for 1954.<sup>631</sup>

In the hours immediately following the State of the Union (which ended around 3:00 p.m.), Republicans and Democrats quickly introduced legislation to carry out Eisenhower’s recommendation. In the Senate, three Republicans (Francis Case of South Dakota, Homer Ferguson of Michigan, and William Knowland of California), three Democrats (Robert Hendrikson of New Jersey, Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, and Alton Lennon of North Carolina), and independent Wayne Morse of Oregon joined to sponsor a constitutional amendment to enfranchise all citizens who had reached age eighteen.<sup>632</sup> Representatives Dwight Rogers (D-FL) and William Widnall (R-NJ) introduced similar measures in the House.<sup>633</sup> Rogers claimed that he had already prepared his bill prior to hearing Eisenhower’s

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<sup>629</sup> See *New York Times*, 30 December 1953, 8, 2 January 1954, 1 & 9, and 3 January 1954, 1 & 36; and *Washington Post*, 17 December 1953, 2, 28 December 1953, 6, 29 December 1953, 1 & 9, 2 January 1953, 2, 4 January 1954, 1 & 2, and 6 January 1954, 1 & 2.

<sup>630</sup> “‘Middle Road’ Legislation – An Election Year Showdown,” *Newsweek*, 18 January 1954, 23, and “The President’s Program,” editorial, *New York Times*, 8 January 1954, 20.

<sup>631</sup> *Washington Post*, 8 January 1954, 1.

<sup>632</sup> S.J. Res 112, 83<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 100 (7 January 1954): 56.

<sup>633</sup> H.J. Res. 341, *Ibid*, 84; and H.J. Res. 342, *Ibid*, 84.

request.<sup>634</sup> The three new resolutions of 1954 added to the eight measures still pending from the 1953 session gave the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress eleven possible voting-age bills to contemplate – the most that any Congress would have to sift through before the 90<sup>th</sup> Congress of 1967-68.

Eisenhower’s call to enfranchise adolescents inspired several states to consider 18-vote legislation. One week after the State of the Union, South Carolina Governor James Byrnes, a former Supreme Court Justice nominated by Franklin Roosevelt and Secretary of State under Harry Truman, urged his legislature to reduce the state suffrage age. “If today’s youths between 18 and 21 are not more mature and better informed than persons of that age a century ago,” Byrnes maintained, “we have wasted millions in education.”<sup>635</sup> Several states, including Virginia, Mississippi, and Maryland, mulled over 18-vote bills.<sup>636</sup> The governors of Massachusetts and Michigan also asked their statehouses to consider youth suffrage legislation. Eisenhower’s proposal to reduce franchise ages received solid bipartisan gubernatorial sponsorship. A *New York Times* poll revealed that 29 of the nation’s 48 governors backed dropping their state’s voting age to eighteen; only seven executives rejected the proposition outright. However, the supportive governors overwhelmingly said it should be accomplished by state action rather than federal amendment.<sup>637</sup>

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<sup>634</sup> *New York Times*, 8 January 1954, 11.

<sup>635</sup> *Ibid*, 14 January 1954, 11.

<sup>636</sup> *Washington Post*, 26 January 1954, 22 and 5 February 1954, 28; and *New York Times*, 5 March 1954, 8.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid*, 25 January 1954, 1 & 7.

The auspicious state response to Eisenhower's 18-vote pitch paralleled the "particularly favorable" public reaction.<sup>638</sup> Robust support came from familiar allies. Ellis Arnall penned a special piece for the *Washington Post*, apparently targeted at federal lawmakers, lauding the positive effects of youth electors upon Georgia politics. "The people of the state have never had cause to regret their decision," he affirmed, "No responsible political leader, of any party or faction today would suggest that the change has not benefited the state and all its people." Arnall concluded that the nation as a whole would "profit by the idealism, the instinctive sympathy and generosity, the courage and the good intentions of young voters."<sup>639</sup> The American Association of School Administrators adopted a resolution supporting Eisenhower's amendment request. The group claimed civics classes and other programs that familiarized high-school students with the democratic process had amply prepared youth for the "assumption of responsible citizenship."<sup>640</sup> In a speech to a New York City youth forum hosted by the Teachers College at Columbia University, Eleanor Roosevelt again espoused dropping the age of enfranchisement to eighteen nationwide.<sup>641</sup> Praise for the cause of youth suffrage even came from overseas. Afrikaner Nationalists from South Africa had advocated allowing 18-year-olds to vote as part of the process of creating a republic independent from British rule. "When a good democrat like Eisenhower decides that 18-year-olds

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<sup>638</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 9 January 1954, 4.

<sup>639</sup> *Washington Post*, 17 January 1954, B1.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid*, 18 February 1954, 14.

<sup>641</sup> *New York Times*, 5 March 1954, 12.

should have the vote,” the main Afrikaner newspaper crowed, “then certainly there can be no protest when nationalists here do the same.”<sup>642</sup>

Opposition to Eisenhower’s 18-vote appeal emphasized its potential political harm. Many critics insisted that the impulsiveness and gullibility of youth would make them acutely susceptible to radical ideas and subversive forces that could imperil the Republic. They highlighted recent historical examples of foreign demagogues exploiting impressionable and inexperienced – but enfranchised – young people to seize power. The day of the State of the Union, Representative Emanuel Celler (D-NY) blasted the president’s proposal as dangerously “naïve.” He stressed, “It is significant that Hitler and Mussolini lowered the voting age to help create their dictatorship.”<sup>643</sup> The editors of the *New York Times*, claimed the “greatest factor” that allowed Hitler, Mussolini, Lenin, and Mao to rise to power was “their success in capturing and misusing the youth of their countries, especially among the student groups whose book learning had not yet been tempered by practical experience.” They reminded their readers that young people “in times of stress, if not in this country then in others, have proved themselves the easiest victims of demagogues propounding easy solutions through direct action leading to tyranny.”<sup>644</sup> Sponsors of the 18-vote found the notion of adolescents as witless dupes insulting. “The idea of getting the young people of America to do any goose-

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<sup>642</sup> Ibid, 10 January 1954, 34.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid, 8 January 1954, 11.

<sup>644</sup> “The Voting Age,” editorial, Ibid, 12 January 1954, 22.

stepping around seems to me to show an utter lack of comprehension of American youth,” Representative Kenneth Keating (R-NY) maintained, “I don’t think you can regiment the youth of this country in this way. In fact, I think just the opposite is true. You can’t dictate to the young people the way you can to some of the older people. They have more independence of judgment.”<sup>645</sup>

The confidence in youth abilities expressed by Keating and other 18-vote advocates clashed with the “grave doubt” other elected officials had about enfranchising callow juveniles.<sup>646</sup> Casting teenagers as credulous, which in the context of the Cold War served to pique suspicions about their fidelity and trustworthiness, underscored the uncertainty many politicians held regarding whether adolescent enfranchisement would improve the quality of the electorate. To some, like former president Harry Truman, the continued qualms about the reliability, maturity, and capacity of young people seemed to necessitate lifting rather than lowering suffrage ages. “The more a man knows, the more intelligently he can vote,” Truman contended, “I do not think he has that knowledge at 18; 21 is a better age; 24 would be still better.”<sup>647</sup> Truman’s comment seemed to play directly into Republican plans to use the 18-vote amendment as a wedge issue. The weekly newsletter of the Republican National Committee, “Straight from the Heart,” debuted the week after Eisenhower’s address with the headline: “Ike Likes

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<sup>645</sup> “The Question of Lowering the Voting Age to 18,” *Congressional Digest* 33 (March 1954): 78 & 80.

<sup>646</sup> “The President’s Message,” editorial, *Wall Street Journal*, 8 January 1954, 8.

<sup>647</sup> *New York Times*, 9 January 1954, 6 and *Washington Post*, 9 January 1954, 22.

Voters of 18: HST Says They're Dumb.”<sup>648</sup> Sullivan Barnes, chairman of the Young Republican National Federation, wisecracked that Truman's call arose from the bitterness over youth repudiation of the Democrats' "alien socialist philosophy" in 1952. Barnes also said Truman's suggestion to disfranchise 6.5 million 21-to-24-year-old voters was "shocking."<sup>649</sup> No congressman, Republican or Democrat, proposed legislation to raise franchise ages. In March 1954, however, Representative Celler submitted an amendment barring citizens under age twenty-one from voting in any election or primary.<sup>650</sup> "Fixing the age of 21 as the age of majority," he declared, "is the result of the accumulated wisdom of the centuries. It has been tested through the ages."<sup>651</sup> Celler's resolution was the last suffrage-age bill filed during the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress.

By the time Celler offered his 21-vote measure, William Langer's 18-vote amendment had eased through the committee review process. In late January, the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments forwarded S.J. Res. 53 to the full Judiciary Committee. All three Republicans on the subcommittee (Langer, Everett Dirksen of Illinois, and John Butler of Maryland) endorsed the proposal. The two Democratic members were absent from the closed-door meeting, but Harley Kilgore of West Virginia later registered his aye vote, and Estes Kefauver was a known supporter of the 18-vote. Several southern senators voiced opposition to

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<sup>648</sup> "GOP Week: Setting the Stage for November," *Newsweek*, 8 February 1954, 22.

<sup>649</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 10 January 1954, 7.

<sup>650</sup> H.J. Res. 463, 83<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 100 (8 March 1954): 2870.

<sup>651</sup> *Congressional Record* 100 (10 March 1954): 3050.

changing franchise ages by federal action. Two Judiciary Committee members, Olin Johnston (D-SC) and James Eastland (D-MS), maintained any change to voting qualifications, including age of eligibility, should come from the states.<sup>652</sup> Despite their objections, on 15 March 1954, the Judiciary Committee voted 7-3 (with eight members absent) to send Langer's resolution to the full Senate – the first time any legislation to establish a national voting age had gotten to the stage of floor deliberation.<sup>653</sup> The *Washington Post* noted that a tally indicating how each individual committeeman voted on S.J. Res. 53 “was not officially announced,” which the *New York Times* interpreted “as to foreshadow a bitter fight in Congress.”<sup>654</sup>

Though the scrap over Langer's amendment was forecast to be acrimonious, Washington insiders expected it to be approved by the Senate. Opinion polls identified a marked degree of public support for the proposal. A March 1954 survey taken by George Gallup revealed adults endorsed the 18-vote by a wide margin (58% to 34%); among 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds, it received over a 2-to-1 majority (64% to 31%).<sup>655</sup> Gallup also undercut the claim that young people were not smart enough to vote through a quiz of basic political knowledge given to five different age groups: 18-20, 21-29, 30-39, 40-49, and over 50 years old. The results showed that,

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<sup>652</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 23 January 1954, 1; *New York Times*, 23 January 1954, 6; and *Washington Post*, 23 January 1954, 23.

<sup>653</sup> *Congressional Record* 100 (15 March 1954): 3205.

<sup>654</sup> *Washington Post*, 16 March 1954, 17, and *New York Times*, 16 March 1954, 27. See also *Chicago Tribune*, 16 March 1954, A7.

<sup>655</sup> *Washington Post*, 6 March 1954, A6.



“on the whole, the 18 to 20 age group does far better than their elders.”<sup>656</sup> Representative Charles Howell (D-NJ) contended Gallup’s findings were of “considerable value” in proving to skeptical lawmakers that adolescents possessed equal, if not better, educational qualifications than current adult voters.<sup>657</sup> For those congressmen concerned that lowering the suffrage age might disproportionately benefit one political party, another Gallup survey found that the allegiance of young people (51% Democrat to 49% Republican) almost duplicated that of adults (50% Democrat and 50% Republican).<sup>658</sup> The overwhelmingly positive polling results emboldened congressional supporters of the 18-vote. On the eve of Senate deliberation of Langer’s bill, Democrat Hubert Humphrey confidently predicted it would pass. Not only did the public and President Eisenhower “want it,” Humphrey said, but he personally knew a “number of Senators of both parties” who supported the resolution.<sup>659</sup>

On 21 May 1954, the Senate debated S.J. Res. 53. A plurality of senators approved the measure, 34-24, but it did not garner enough votes to receive the two-thirds majority required by the Constitution for the authorization of amendments.<sup>660</sup> C.P. Trussell of the *New York Times* reported that the vote on

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<sup>656</sup> Ibid, 3 March 1954, 9.

<sup>657</sup> “Eighteen to Twenty-Year-Olds Surpass Adults in Political Quiz,” *Congressional Record* 100 (5 March 1954): A1777.

<sup>658</sup> *Washington Post*, 7 March 1954, B5.

<sup>659</sup> *New York Times*, 10 May 1954, 1.

<sup>660</sup> Ibid, 22 May 1954, 1, and “Youth v. the Constitution,” *Time*, 31 May 1954, 15.

Langer's amendment "could not have been made on a worse day."<sup>661</sup> Trussell's insight proved prescient on multiple levels. May 21<sup>st</sup> was a Friday, the traditional day of the week congressmen left Washington, D.C. to tend to political matters or go home to family and constituents. In an era in which trains still predominated for long-distance traveling, many lawmakers frequently departed after the completion of morning business to begin their treks. The floor debate on S.J. Res. 53 began around 2:30 p.m. and lasted, off and on, for nearly two hours. Within the first hour, Senate majority leader William Knowland (R-CA) called for a quorum and ordered the Sergeant at Arms to summon the missing legislators. During the roll call of names, majority whip Leverett Saltonstall (R-MA) and minority leader Lyndon Johnson (D-TX) announced that sixteen colleagues were gone on "official business," nine were "necessarily absent," and four were "absent by leave of the Senate."<sup>662</sup> Another six senators who had been present at the quorum call left before the vote on S.J. Res. 53.<sup>663</sup> Some of the staunchest supporters of the 18-vote bill were among the absentees, including Harley Kilgore, Wayne Morse, and Hubert Humphrey.

After the Senate vote, a mini-tempest brewed whether Knowland deliberately scuttled S.J. Res. 53 by intentionally scheduling it to be considered late in the afternoon on the Friday before the Memorial Day recess. The timing of the bill's

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<sup>661</sup> C.J. Trussell, "Senate Defeats Presidents Plan for Voting at 18," *New York Times*, 22 May 1954, 1. The Times consistently blamed poor timing on the failure of S.J. Res. 53. See "The Nation: 21, Not 18," *Ibid*, 23 May 1954, E2 and "Eighteen Is Too Young," editorial, *Ibid*, 23 May 1954, E10.

<sup>662</sup> *Congressional Record* 100 (21 May 1954), 6959. On this day, the Senate had only 95 members; on 12 May 1954, Clyde Hoey (D-NC) died in his senatorial office. *Washington Post*, 13 May 1954, 1. A month later, Sam Ervin was appointed to fill Hoey's seat. *Ibid*, 13 June 1954, M20.

<sup>663</sup> *Congressional Record* 100 (21 May 1954), 6979.

calendar call was more accidental than purposeful. The legislation had been passed over twice, first on 5 April and again on 4 May 1954, at the request of Democrats.<sup>664</sup> On Thursday, 20 May, the Senate agreed to a motion by Knowland to take up the Langer's amendment. Rather than immediately proceeding to debate, Knowland instead chose to announce the legislative program for the days leading up to the Memorial Day recess, slated to begin on Friday, 28 May. He stated his priority to be the passage of an appropriations bill before adjourning for the holiday break. Before consideration of that measure, Knowland wanted to finish deliberations on other pending legislation, including S.J. Res. 53, beginning the following day, Friday, 21 May. He received unanimous consent to start that day's business at noon.<sup>665</sup> After discussing various legislative matters for over two and a half hours, the Senate finally got to Langer's amendment. At a June 2<sup>nd</sup> press conference with President Eisenhower, Sara McClenden of the *El Paso Times* asked him about rumors that Knowland had deliberately bungled the bill. She said she heard chatter from "Senators on both sides of aisle" that Knowland's "lack of organization and purposeful planning" suggested he "didn't intend for [S.J. Res. 53] to pass." Eisenhower disavowed the gossip by claiming that he "never had heard any such – this was the first time I had heard such an idea."<sup>666</sup>

The convoluted leadership issues unique to the 83<sup>rd</sup> Senate (1953-1955)

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<sup>664</sup> Spessard Holland of Florida voiced the first pass over and Albert Gore of Tennessee the second. *Ibid.*, (5 April 1954), 4558 and (4 May 1954), 5943.

<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*, (20 May 1954), 6911.

<sup>666</sup> *New York Times*, 3 June 1954, 18.

shaped the milieu that framed the rumors about Knowland's alleged managerial misconduct. That Senate, unlike any other, endured extraordinary roster turnover due to nine deaths and one resignation. Because of the personnel tumult, the 83<sup>rd</sup> Senate witnessed continuous shifts in party majority. The elections of 1952 garnered for the Republicans hair-thin control of the Senate by capturing 48 out of the 96 available spots. Democrats held 47 seats, and independent, but GOP-caucusing, Wayne Morse of Oregon held one. Even if Morse switched to the Democrat side of the aisle to deadlock votes, Senate rules empowered Vice President Richard Nixon to break any potential ties. State laws outlined varied procedures for replacing federal lawmakers who could not complete their elected terms. Most every state allowed governors to appoint interim congressmen until another election (either specially-arranged or regularly-scheduled) could be held; a handful of states mandated waiting until the next election cycle to determine the new legislator. Whilst the states resolved who should fill the vacant legislative posts, the Senate continued conducting business, and each new personnel replacement altered the balance of institutional power. In two cases, Robert Taft (R-OH) and Pat McCarran (D-NV), the deceased senator was replaced by a person from the opposite party. And at several moments during the 83<sup>rd</sup> Senate, a death reduced the interparty division to a tie or resulted in the Republicans temporarily losing their slender margin of control.<sup>667</sup>

William Knowland became Senate majority leader due to Robert Taft's

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<sup>667</sup> "The 1954 Biennial Elections," *Congressional Digest* 33 (October 1954): 225-232.

passing. After Senator Hiram Johnson's death in 1945, California governor Earl Warren named Knowland to complete Johnson's term as a favor to his father Joe Knowland, a major campaign contributor and owner/editor of the *Oakland Tribune*, an influential GOP organ in California. At 37-years-old, Knowland became the Senate's youngest lawmaker.<sup>668</sup> After winning the seat outright in 1946, Bill Knowland made his reputation as a hard-nosed partisan who specialized in lambasting the Democrats' containment strategy as too passive and their welfare policies as too aggressive. He had a reputation for being curt with constituents, pedantic in committee, aloof with colleagues, and pompous in public. In a profile for the *Saturday Evening Post*, journalist Paul Healy tagged Knowland as the "grim Senator from California" and noted that his fellow legislators teased him for "being the Senate's youngest fogey."<sup>669</sup> The left-leaning political journal *New Republic* mocked him as the "boob in armor" for his self-aggrandizing jingoism. Knowland, however, was a dyed-in-the-wool GOP loyalist. During the 1952 Republican national convention, he earned the respect of party leaders for his attempts to smooth the rift between the Taft and Eisenhower camps. As a reward, his partymates elected him chairman of the Senate Republican Policy Committee (a weekly steering group to map GOP legislative strategy) for the 83<sup>rd</sup> Senate.

At the opening of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Senate in January 1953, the GOP leadership selected Taft as majority leader. In June, doctors diagnosed Taft with bone cancer

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<sup>668</sup> "Just the Man," *Time*, 27 August 1945, 24.

<sup>669</sup> Paul Healy, "The Grim Senator from California," *Saturday Evening Post*, 25 April 1953, 26 & 27.

in his right hip. Before he left Washington to begin treatments, Taft handpicked Knowland to fill-in as interim majority leader.<sup>670</sup> Taft did not consult senior party leadership about his decision or give an official explanation of his reason to skip over majority whip Leverett Saltonstall. Cabell Phillips, the Senate beat writer for the *New York Times*, speculated that Taft bypassed Saltonstall for ideological reasons. Phillips deduced that since Taft and Knowland had “seen eye to eye” on most foreign and domestic issues, Taft saw Knowland as “a man more nearly of his own kidney” than Saltonstall.<sup>671</sup> In his autobiography, Saltonstall admitted that his “feelings were hurt” over Knowland’s appointment “because no one in the Republican leadership discussed the move with me.” But he also confessed, “I don’t think I had the temperament for the job.”<sup>672</sup> Saltonstall, a moderate East Coast establishmentarian, was known as a “senator’s senator” for his courtesy, cooperation, and tact.<sup>673</sup> However, as Taft biographer William S. White contends, Taft thought Saltonstall had done too much wheedling and not enough whipping. Taft sensed that Knowland’s tenacity, partisanship, and shrewdness could both thwart Democrat ambitions and unite a GOP still smarting from the intraparty

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<sup>670</sup> *Washington Post*, 11 June 1953, 1, and “Doctors’ Report,” *Time*, 22 June 1953, 20.

<sup>671</sup> Cabell Phillips, “Majority Leader of a Majority of One,” *New York Times Magazine*, 19 July 1953, 13.

<sup>672</sup> Leverett Saltonstall, *The Autobiography of Leverett Saltonstall: Massachusetts Governor, U.S. Senator, and Yankee Icon* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 213.

<sup>673</sup> Stephen T. Riley, “Leverett Saltonstall,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 91, third series, (1979): 225-227. In 1939, as governor of Massachusetts, Saltonstall opposed a call by Aubrey Williams, director of the National Youth Administration, to set age eighteen as the national voting age. “A most unwise move,” Saltonstall commented, “To grant suddenly the right to vote to a great mass of young people might make for sudden changes in our laws.” *New York Times*, 6 August 1939, 29. As Senate minority whip in 1954, Saltonstall voted for Langer’s amendment.

bruises of 1952. White stated Taft regarded Knowland as “a man who would not in any circumstance panic in the face of any internal Republican trouble and who certainly would not deal with the Democratic minority any more gently than the circumstances might require.”<sup>674</sup> As Taft supposedly told Styles Bridges (R-NH), the president pro tempore of the Senate, upon choosing Knowland to become the next majority leader, “I’m going away and I’ve asked Bill to carry on for me. Nobody can push him around.”<sup>675</sup>

Within two months of his appointment, Knowland faced being pushed out of his post. In a span of seven days between July 24<sup>th</sup> and July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1953, the deaths of Taft and Charles Tobey (R-NH) shifted the party balance in the Senate: 46 Republicans, 47 Democrats, 1 Independent, and 2 vacancies. On 1 August, two days before the first session of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress was scheduled to adjourn and one day after Taft died, Wayne Morse, who had bolted GOP ranks during the 1952 presidential campaign to support Adlai Stevenson, announced he would vote to keep Republicans in control of the Senate during the next session. Three days later, Senate Republicans unanimously elected the 45-year-old Knowland majority leader.<sup>676</sup> With Morse’s vote lost and looking to avoid throwing the Senate into further turmoil, minority leader Lyndon Johnson (D-TX) stated he would not challenge GOP control even if Democrats won the special elections for the two

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<sup>674</sup> William S. White, *The Taft Story* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 261.

<sup>675</sup> *Ibid*, 259.

<sup>676</sup> *Washington Post*, 5 August 1953, 1.

vacant seats, which, technically, would give his party a majority.<sup>677</sup> The GOP retained Tobey's seat but lost Taft's; that meant when the second session of the 83<sup>rd</sup> started in January 1954, the Democrats held the majority 48-47. The election results placed Knowland in a precarious position: never before (and never since) had the official majority leader of the Senate been a member of the minority party.

During the first weeks of the second session of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress, Knowland scrambled to shore his shaky situation. His first order of business was to set the committee assignments; once completed, the Senate could get the legislative process started with GOP lieutenants in place. On 11 January 1954, he forged an agreement with minority leader Lyndon Johnson to change the institutional rules regarding committee memberships. The previous rules limited each senator to two committee assignments, but seventeen senators, fourteen of them Republican, held a third assignment because of the flux in Senate membership during the previous session. The new formula allowed four more Republicans to serve on three committees, which gave the GOP one-vote majorities on each of the fifteen Senate committees.<sup>678</sup> In March, those Republican majorities helped William Langer's S.J. Res. 53 get reported out of the Judiciary Committee to the full Senate for floor consideration.

Clayton Knowles of the *New York Times* stated that the new committee

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<sup>677</sup> Ibid, 2 August 1953, M1.

<sup>678</sup> "The 2<sup>nd</sup> Session Gets Under Way," *Congressional Digest* 33 (February 1954): 33.



arrangement represented “a remarkable degree of Democratic largesse.”<sup>679</sup> Benevolence, however, did not motivate Johnson to accept Knowland’s tender. Johnson clearly understood the true nature of the Democrats’ Senate condition. Wayne Morse’s alignment with the Republicans, plus the tie-breaking vote of Vice President Richard Nixon, actually made the outnumbered Republicans the “majority” party. Johnson also knew that the GOP’s slender margin meant Knowland needed blocs of Democrat votes to fulfill Eisenhower’s legislative wishes. With the 1954 mid-term elections on the horizon, Johnson calculated that he could leverage Knowland’s wobbly “majority” for Democrat gain by gridlocking the Senate at advantageous moments and hanging the responsibility for its futility onto the GOP leadership.<sup>680</sup>

Republican leaders recognized Knowland lacked the political skills to match Johnson’s tactical talents and parliamentary finesse.<sup>681</sup> To help Knowland parry Democrat maneuvers, President Eisenhower became more involved in senatorial operations. During his first year in office, Eisenhower delegated much legislative authority to experienced Republican lawmakers as he focused on fulfilling his campaign promise to wind down the Korean War. They struggled, however, to turn

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<sup>679</sup> Clayton Knowles, “Senate G.O.P. Gets Committees’ Rule,” *New York Times*, 12 January 1954, 1.

<sup>680</sup> For a more detailed examination of Johnson’s strategy and its application during the 83d Senate, see Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 517-541.

<sup>681</sup> For contemporary descriptions of Knowland’s leadership difficulties, see Marquis Childs, “Leadership Needed: Taft’s Ailment in GOP Misfortune,” column, *Washington Post*, 8 July 1953, 11; Robert Barkdoll, “Democrats Hint Senate GOP Faces Trouble Without Taft,” *Ibid*, 10 July 1953, 23; “Leader of the Senate,” editorial, *Ibid*, 4 August 1953, 10; and Marquis Childs, “Leadership Needed: Who Will Fill the Void Left by Taft?” column, *Ibid*, 5 August 1953, 9.

Eisenhower's electoral mandate into national policy, particularly in domestic affairs.<sup>682</sup> Consequently, Eisenhower decided to take more direct control over the legislative agenda. In December 1953, he unveiled his plans to be visibly involved in crafting, explaining, and lobbying for his programs. Eisenhower also pledged renewed efforts to create more congenial personal relations with members of Congress, particularly the leadership cadre of the House and Senate, to help carry his proposals.<sup>683</sup> The bulk of the legislation that Eisenhower advocated for 1954, like the 18-vote amendment, was generally non-partisan. Columnist Marquis Childs of the *Washington Post* described it as a "middle-of-the-road program . . . designed to appeal to the great band of middle-of-the-road voters, which includes not only Republicans but independents and Democrats."<sup>684</sup> Most of the bills reflected the president's moderate political philosophy and could not be classified as obviously pushing a particular ideological slate.

The success of Eisenhower's agenda relied on Republican congressional leadership. Political scientist Henry Z. Scheele contends Eisenhower tapped House Majority Leader Charles Halleck (R-IN) as his chief legislative lieutenant on

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<sup>682</sup> See Floyd M. Riddick, "The Eighty-Third Congress: First Session," *Western Political Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (December 1953): 776-794.

<sup>683</sup> Robert C. Albright, "Three-Day Talks Close on Note of Optimism," *Washington Post*, 20 December 1953, 1 & 2; Roscoe Drummond, "President's Skillful Appeal to Congress," column, *Ibid*, 23 December 1953, 22; Joseph and Stewart Alsop, "How Eisenhower Shaped a Program," *Ibid*, 25 January 1954, 4; and "Pressure Makes Arithmetic," *Time*, 11 January 1954, 12. See also, Richard E. Neustadt, "Presidency and Legislation: Planning the President's Program," *American Political Science Review* 49, no. 4 (December 1955): 980-1021, and Michael J. Birkner, "More to Induce than Demand': Eisenhower and Congress," *Congress and the Presidency: A Journal of Capitol Studies* 40, no. 2 (2013): 165-194.

<sup>684</sup> Marquis Childs, "Eisenhower's Program: Signs of Change in Policy Appear," column, *Washington Post*, 19 December 1953, 13.

Capitol Hill because, as the president wrote in diary, he considered Halleck “smart, capable, and courageous.”<sup>685</sup> House Speaker Joseph Martin (R-MA) became, according to *Time*, “Ike’s grand legislative strategist.”<sup>686</sup> Eisenhower marveled at Martin’s political acumen and deeply valued his patient but persistent leadership. In contrast, Eisenhower distrusted and disliked Bill Knowland, and the president became one of the people the majority leader refused to let push him around. Knowland thought his job required serving the needs of the Senate first and the wants of the president second. Because Knowland believed he should speak to the president for the Senate rather than address the Senate for the president, scholars Neil MacNeil and Richard A. Baker maintain, “Knowland felt no obligation to his party’s president, regularly finding fault with Eisenhower’s policies and programs.”<sup>687</sup> Knowland drew Ike’s ire by brazenly criticizing his approaches in the media and on the Senate floor; he especially chided Eisenhower for failing to take a stronger stand against communism in China, Korea, and Vietnam. Knowland really got under Eisenhower’s skin during the weekly strategy sessions the president hosted for GOP leaders. Knowland routinely scowled, grumbled, and disapprovingly shook his head at administrative plans; sometimes, he angrily interrupted the president mid-sentence. Eisenhower interpreted Knowland’s

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<sup>685</sup> Henry Z. Scheele, “President Dwight D. Eisenhower and U.S. House Leader Charles A. Halleck: An Examination of an Executive-Legislative Relationship,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 294. See also, Robert C. Albright, “Halleck Is Ike’s Long Right Arm,” *Washington Post*, 2 May 1954, B1.

<sup>686</sup> “Lord of the Citadel,” *Time*, 9 August 1954, 18.

<sup>687</sup> Neil MacNeil and Richard A. Baker, *The American Senate: An Insider’s History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 204.

peevish tantrums as undisciplined egocentrism that, at times, crossed from rudeness to insubordination. “In his case,” Eisenhower wrote in his diary about Knowland, “there seems to be no final answer to the question, ‘How stupid can you get?’”<sup>688</sup>

The mutual disdain between Knowland and Eisenhower underpinned the rumors about an intraparty plot to undermine S.J. Res. 53. Clearly, Eisenhower’s extensive program for 1954 had more trouble in the Senate than in the House. Unlike Speaker Martin, political scientist Randall B. Ripley contends, Knowland weakened his leverage as majority leader because he was “torn between being a good soldier for Eisenhower and being a dedicated conservative.”<sup>689</sup> Knowland also struggled to keep his chamber in order. Too often, Knowland slavishly adhered to the Senate’s custom of allowing extended deliberations rather than push a bill along. His laissez-faire approach stroked the egos of vainglorious senators and provided frustrated GOP right-wingers a stage to vent against the administration, yet it also stalled legislative business. Knowland possessed tireless energy, but, seeing himself more as a statesman than a politician, he appeared indifferent to parliamentary deal-making. He also regularly failed to perform the routine homework required for successful lawmaking, such as counting heads before allowing a floor vote on a piece of legislation and maintaining a strict legislative

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<sup>688</sup> Quoted in Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 334.

<sup>689</sup> Randall B. Ripley, “Power in the Post-World War II Senate,” *Journal of Politics* 31, no. 2 (May 1969): 490.

calendar. And his humorless, abrasive personality certainly put off many senators, including fellow Republicans.<sup>690</sup>

Ironically, historian Thomas M. Gaskin notes, President Eisenhower “actually found it easier to deal with” Lyndon Johnson than Knowland.<sup>691</sup> Johnson fostered cordial relations with Eisenhower, and occasionally, Ike invited him to have a nightcap in the White House. To the chagrin of his Democratic flock, Johnson adopted a collaborative tack with Eisenhower, particularly on foreign affairs. Historian Robert Caro explains that Johnson’s cooperation strategy sought to neutralize the legislative influence of conservative Republicans, which Johnson believed would so enflame internal GOP divisions that the public would overlook their like for Ike and scorn congressional Republicans for failed statecraft ahead of the 1954 mid-term elections.<sup>692</sup> Of course, as scholars Neil MacNeil and Richard A. Baker point out, Johnson’s “supportive bent stood in striking contrast to Senator Knowland’s bristling independence.”<sup>693</sup> Eisenhower routinely turned to Johnson to get his key legislation adopted, including passage of the act to fund construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway several days before the Senate considered S.J. Res. 53.

In the weeks prior to deliberations on the 18-vote bill, Knowland’s flawed

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<sup>690</sup> On Knowland’s leadership approach, see Gayle B. Montgomery and James W. Johnson, *One Step from the White House: The Rise and Fall of Senator William F. Knowland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 132-149.

<sup>691</sup> Thomas M. Gaskin, “Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, the Eisenhower Administration and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1957-1960,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 341. See also, Ken Collier, “Eisenhower and Congress: The Autopilot Presidency,” *Ibid*, 309-325.

<sup>692</sup> Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate*, 517-541.

<sup>693</sup> MacNeil and Baker, *The American Senate*, 204.

headship and indifferent parliamentarianism had widened the rift between him and the president. Knowland sided with GOP isolationists to support John Bricker's (R-OH) amendment to grant Congress regulatory power over all international agreements made by the executive branch. Only a hastily-cobbled coalition of liberal Democrats and GOP stalwarts kept the president from an embarrassing defeat.<sup>694</sup> Knowland failed to hold his Republican colleagues together for key Eisenhower bills on Hawaii statehood and a revision of the Taft-Hartley Act. Nor did he do much to rein in or cut off Joseph McCarthy's unruly hearings on communism in the Army.<sup>695</sup> But more often than not, Knowland delivered for Eisenhower. Historians Gayle B. Montgomery and James W. Johnson assert, "Knowland supported Eisenhower a vast majority of the time," particularly on domestic policy.<sup>696</sup> Political scientists George Edwards, Andrew Parrett, and Jeffrey Peake find that the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress only rejected six bills that the president supported.<sup>697</sup> In a review of its legislative record, journalist Roscoe Drummond, longtime Washington correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor*, reckoned

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<sup>694</sup> "Vote, Vote, Vote," *Time*, 8 March 1954, 29. See also Duane A. Tananbaum, "The Bricker Amendment Controversy: Its Origins and Eisenhower's Role," *Diplomatic History* 9, no. 1 (January 1985): 73-93.

<sup>695</sup> "The Mess in Washington," *Time*, 17 May 1954, 26-29.

<sup>696</sup> Gayle B. Montgomery and James W. Johnson, *One Step from the White House: The Rise and Fall of Senator William F. Knowland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Contemporary assessments of Knowland's outlook square with the historical evaluation. In factual profile of him, for instance, *Time* summarized that "Knowland has voted with the Administration on domestic matters, but has veered farther and farther away on foreign policy." See "Senator Knowland," *Time*, 13 December 1954, 15.

<sup>697</sup> George C. Edwards III, Andrew Parrett, and Jeffrey Peake, "The Legislative Impact of Divided Government," *American Journal of Political Science* 41, no. 2 (April 1997): 553. See also, William S. White, "Eisenhower Ahead on 5 of 11 Issues," *New York Times*, 6 July 1954, 1 & 12.

that the 83<sup>rd</sup> had been “more responsive to the President’s requests on domestic matters than any previous Congress since the first two years of the New Deal.”<sup>698</sup> Even Eisenhower said he was “proud” of the 83<sup>rd</sup> for its record of “effective accomplishments,” especially in areas, like tax reform, “that previous Congresses have tried time and time again to do and they failed to do so.”<sup>699</sup> Knowland might have been stubborn when dealing with the president and sour about many of his policies, but he was first and foremost a party loyalist. Like many Republicans, Knowland favored youth suffrage, and he co-sponsored an 18-vote bill early in the 1954 legislative session in support of Eisenhower’s State of the Union appeal.<sup>700</sup> When S.J. Res. 53 came up for vote, he worked on its behalf and, unlike many of the more recent administration-sponsored bills, managed to unite all twenty-seven Republicans present behind the amendment. Knowland’s scheduling of the bill was certainly inopportune, and possibly inept, but not purposefully injurious.

The rumors of spiteful sabotage overlooked that Knowland probably harbored more hard feelings toward William Langer than Dwight Eisenhower. In mid-January 1954, President Eisenhower asked the Senate to confirm Earl Warren as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.<sup>701</sup> Since September 1953, Warren had served

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<sup>698</sup> “Best Congress since Early New Deal Years,” *Time*, 23 August 1954, 25.

<sup>699</sup> *New York Times*, 24 August 1954, 14. See also, *Chicago Tribune*, 24 August 1954, 1, and *Washington Post*, 24 August 1954, 1 & 7.

<sup>700</sup> Knowland’s support for the 18-vote persisted beyond his congressional career. In his unsuccessful 1958 contest for the California governorship against Democrat Pat Brown, for example, he advocated lowering the state’s voting age to eighteen. See *New York Times*, 5 October 1958, 56.

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid*, 12 January 1954, 10.

as the interim Chief Justice after Fred Vinson died of a heart attack. For seven weeks, Langer conducted a “one-man campaign” to bottle up the confirmation of Knowland’s friend and benefactor. Langer delayed action on Warren’s nomination while supposedly examining his qualifications for the judgeship. *Newsweek* reported he held Warren’s appointment hostage in committee until securing more federal patronage for his home state of North Dakota. And, in unprecedented fashion, Langer allowed inflammatory statements against Warren to be aired in public during the Judiciary Committee’s vetting process.<sup>702</sup> Before Warren’s confirmation vote in the Senate, Knowland blasted Langer’s probe as the “most shocking” and “irresponsible” investigation he could remember in his senatorial career.<sup>703</sup> Over two months passed between the approval of Warren as Chief Justice and the vote on Langer’s 18-vote amendment. Though Knowland held grudges and occasionally betrayed colleagues who he believed had wronged him, his animosity toward Langer had no visible bearing on the defeat of S.J. Res. 53. In fact, they collaborated on the Senate floor to try to persuade their colleagues to pass the measure. As the majority leader of a body in which his party was actually in the minority, Knowland simply could not get around a cold political reality: he did not have the votes, even with every Republican present in support, to harvest a legislative victory for his partymate or his president.

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<sup>702</sup> “Why Langer Outburst,” *Newsweek*, 1 March 1954, 19-20. The magazine contended that Langer’s “political career has been a pepper box of controversy.” In 1934, as governor of North Dakota, Langer was convicted of extracting political contributions from state employees on work relief; he later won acquittal. In 1940, the Senate Elections Committee initially refused to seat Langer for violations of “moral turpitude;” that decision was reversed by a vote of the full Senate.

<sup>703</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 March 1954, 1.



Unfortunate timing, rather than malicious scheduling or purposeful bungling, prevented Knowland from gathering enough votes to secure S.J. Res. 53. On 17 May 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that state laws establishing racially segregated public schools were unconstitutional.<sup>704</sup> The Court's decision, announced a mere four days before deliberations on Langer's amendment, enraged southern congressmen, and their anger enflamed opposition to the 18-vote proposal. From the start of the 1954 session, most southern Democrats appeared to disfavor the federal route to establishing eighteen as the nation's voting age. A January poll conducted by the *New York Times* indicated a smattering of southern support, as Alton Lennon of North Carolina and both Tennessee senators, Albert Gore and Estes Kefauver, said they would vote affirmatively. A strong contingent opposed Eisenhower's call for a constitutional amendment, including John Sparkman of Alabama (Adlai Stevenson's running-mate in 1952) and three senators "who carry great influence": Harry Byrd of Virginia, James Eastland of Mississippi, and Clyde Hoey of North Carolina.<sup>705</sup> During the late winter and early spring, southern state legislatures sent conflicting messages regarding lowered voting ages. Mississippi's statehouse rejected an 18-vote measure after opponents claimed it would increase the number of African-American voters.<sup>706</sup> Maryland

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<sup>704</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>705</sup> *New York Times*, 25 January 1954, 1. On 12 May 1954, Hoey died and would be replaced a month later by Sam Ervin.

<sup>706</sup> *Delta* (Greenville, MS) *Democrat-Times*, 4 March 1954, 1; and *New York Times*, 5 March 1954, 8.

lawmakers refused to report an 18-vote resolution out of committee.<sup>707</sup> Kentucky legislators, however, sent an 18-vote referendum to Bluegrass State voters for approval over the objections of governor Lawrence W. Wetherby.<sup>708</sup> A week before consideration of S.J. Res. 53, Senator Olin Johnston of South Carolina slightly darkened the afterglow of Kentucky's action by reaffirming the majority viewpoint of his southern cohorts: "The federal government has no right to legislate for the states on the question of the lower voting age."<sup>709</sup>

When S.J. Res. 53 came up for deliberation, Lyndon Johnson allowed his mentor, Richard Russell of Georgia, to lead the Democratic opposition to the amendment.<sup>710</sup> The 57-year-old Russell spent more than half of his lifetime, from 1933 to 1971, in Congress, but was the "junior" U.S. Senator from Georgia for three-fourths of his career because of Walter George's long service. Russell's colleagues recognized him as the "dean" of the southern Democrats because of his intellect, eloquence, integrity, affable personality, mastery of parliamentary maneuver, and ability to forge compromises. By 1954, according to his biographer Gilbert C. Fite, Russell had completed a metamorphosis from a moderate liberal to a conservative on social legislation. He had been an ardent New Dealer, championing rural

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<sup>707</sup> *Washington Post*, 20 February 1954, 17.

<sup>708</sup> *New York Times*, 26 March 1954, 27; and John E. Kleber, "Lawrence W. Wetherby," in *Kentucky's Governors*, Lowell H. Harrison, ed., 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 194.

<sup>709</sup> *New York Times*, 10 May 1954, 1.

<sup>710</sup> For additional information on the Johnson-Russell relationship, see John A. Goldsmith, *Colleagues: Richard B. Russell and His Apprentice Lyndon B. Johnson* (Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press, 1993).

electrification, conservation, forestry, and agricultural programs. Russell never married or had children but felt compelled by the abject poverty in his state to combat the undernourishment of America's youth. In 1946, Russell originated the national school lunch program to promote adequate nutrition among school-aged kids.<sup>711</sup> By the late 1940s, however, Russell had become an opponent of Harry Truman's Fair Deal because he believed it overinflated federal involvement in the private lives of citizens, particularly regarding racial concerns. As leader of the Southern Caucus, Russell organized southern Democrats in the Senate to block any and all legislation that threatened desegregation, such as anti-lynching laws, integration of the armed forces and public schools, and fair employment practices.<sup>712</sup>

Citizens inundated Russell with comments regarding S.J. Res. 53. A few letters, like one from a man in San Francisco, urged him to fight the measure to prevent "extreme left-wingers" from radically altering the nation's laws.<sup>713</sup> Most people, particularly adolescents, asked Russell to support the resolution. A high-school senior from Atlanta, for example, insisted that the Senate extend to America's youth the same electoral trust "Georgia has given us."<sup>714</sup> Russell's stock

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<sup>711</sup> National School Lunch Act, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. 60, ch. 281, (4 June 1946): 230. See also, James Thomas Gay, "Richard B. Russell and the National School Lunch Program," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 859-872.

<sup>712</sup> Gilbert C. Fite, *Richard B. Russell, Jr.: Senator from Georgia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>713</sup> D.J.D. Coleman to Richard B. Russell, 21 May 1954, Series XV, Subseries AY, Box 349, Richard B. Russell Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens.

<sup>714</sup> Marvin C. Goldstein to Richard B. Russell, 16 March 1954, *Ibid.* Goldstein was the commander of Atlanta Post 112 of the Jewish War Veterans of the United States. He forwarded to Russell the winning essay from a contest his group sponsored, "How Georgia Encourages Good

reply underscored how the 18-vote “has worked out very well in my own state” but emphasized that “each and every one of the states has adequate legal machinery for fixing the age of suffrage at either eighteen, nineteen, or twenty years.”<sup>715</sup> His ever-deepening conservatism honed his sharp antagonism toward federal action to establish a national suffrage age. Unlike Estes Kefauver and Adlai Stevenson, Russell opposed congressional legislation to lower voting ages as a Democratic presidential candidate in 1952.<sup>716</sup> And he vocally contested Eisenhower’s call for federal 18-vote legislation. Immediately after the president’s 1954 State of the Union address, Russell lambasted his plea for a constitutional amendment as “an invasion of states’ rights.”<sup>717</sup> He later wrote to a state representative from Idaho:

I am very much opposed to the Federal Government coercing any state in this field, and believe the President’s recommendations only point to a classic illustration of an instance where people should go to their state government and promote the changes rather than to dictate to sister states from Washington. I regard this tendency, and the concentration of power here, as the greatest threat to our individual rights and our form of government.<sup>718</sup>

Some letter-writers pleaded with Russell to look past his dogmatism to give the

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Citizenship by Permitting Her Eighteen Year Old Citizens to Vote,” in Atlanta high schools.

<sup>715</sup> Richard B. Russell to Mrs. Charles D. Logan, 26 May 1954, *Ibid.* See also, Richard B. Russell to J.P. Sommer, 15 January 1954, *Ibid.*

<sup>716</sup> “Reader Meter: Who Votes? State Law, Not Voters’ Age Is Gauge,” *Washington Post*, 27 June 1954, 43. For a contemporary review of his decision to seek the presidency, see Raymond Moley, “The Russell Candidacy,” *Newsweek*, 10 March 1952, 28.

<sup>717</sup> *New York Times*, 11 January 1954, 11.

<sup>718</sup> Richard B. Russell to Ralph R. Harding, 15 January 1955, Series XV, Subseries AY, Box 349, Richard B. Russell Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies.

letter of the 18-vote amendment a fair evaluation. “I also believe in states’ rights,” a 17-year-old girl from Chicago affirmed, “but don’t you think that in a National Election it is for the National government to decide?”<sup>719</sup>

Russell’s correspondence shaped the carefully-parsed words he spoke during floor debate on S.J. Res. 53. He expressed support for the principle of youth suffrage and praised Georgia adolescents for their able electorship in the decade since they had been enfranchised. Russell also agreed with 18-vote advocates that young people possessed the mental, emotional, and educational fitness to vote.<sup>720</sup> But he firmly opposed William Langer’s resolution on the grounds that determining voter qualifications, including age requirements, was solely a state matter. The crux of Russell’s argument was made plain in a repartee with fellow Democrat Thomas Hennings of Missouri:

Mr. HENNINGS. I am sure the Senator from Georgia and many other Senators would not assume an attitude of old-fogyism or rigidity to the extent of believing that the human race does not make progress and suggesting that some boys and girls 18 years of age have not attained sufficient maturity and a sufficient degree of wisdom and judgment to exercise the franchise. I believe there are many youngsters of 18 years of age who can, perhaps, vote more intelligently than can some who have attained a much greater age.

Mr. RUSSELL. I stated that that was not the issue at all, that there is much merit to the contention that 18-year-olds are qualified to vote, and my State permits them to vote. But the question is whether we should have a Federal strait-jacket

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<sup>719</sup> Sandra Colkins to Richard B. Russell, 22 May 1954, *Ibid.*

<sup>720</sup> Russell consistently maintained that adolescents had the requisite psycho-emotional qualities to vote. As he wrote to a University of Virginia student in 1958, “I have felt that the young people eighteen years of age in this modern day have acquired sufficient maturity and education to enable them to participate in the affairs of government.” Richard B. Russell to Donald Broda, Jr., 28 February 1958, *Ibid.*

placed on the States by amending the Constitution which was deliberately drawn to provide the States some elasticity in requirements for voting.<sup>721</sup>

The *Brown* decision was clearly on Russell's mind as he spoke out against S.J. Res. 53. Robert C. Albright, Senate correspondent for the *Washington Post*, observed that Russell was "still bridling at the Supreme Court decision outlawing public school segregation" when he denounced the 18-vote proposal as an "inexcusable infringement" on states' rights.<sup>722</sup> Russell complained that the hearings on it in the Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments inadequately vetted the proposal. He had a point. The first inquiry on 2 June 1953 lasted ten minutes, and the second on 13 July 1953 finished in thirty minutes. Only four people testified (all in favor), and one of them (a political science professor from Wabash College) volunteered to do so after Langer, chairman of the subcommittee, asked at the end of the June hearing if anyone in the audience wanted to speak publically on the issue. Of the four written statements submitted to the subcommittee, three supported the resolution.<sup>723</sup> Without directly referring to the mountain of case documents involved in the *Brown* litigation, Russell, a lawyer by training, charged, "So I say it is a sad commentary on our times that it is proposed to have the Federal power invade the several States and prescribe the qualifications

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<sup>721</sup> *Congressional Record* 100 (21 May 1954), 6967.

<sup>722</sup> Robert C. Albright, "Senate Kills Plan to Fix Voting Age at Eighteen," *Washington Post*, 22 May 1954, 1.

<sup>723</sup> *Granting Citizens Who Have Attained the Age of Eighteen the Right to Vote: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments on S.J. Res. 53 and S.J. Res. 64*, 83<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 2 June and 13 July 1953.

of the electors, and to have that done on such skimpy and inadequate hearings as those which were conducted by the subcommittee in this case.”<sup>724</sup>

Russell’s criticism of the 18-vote resolution laid bare his and the white South’s condemnation of the *Brown* verdict. He alleged that S.J. Res. 53 was “only one more illustration of the theory of trying to carry on all government from Washington.”<sup>725</sup> Russell charged that the states “are fast losing their identity as units of Government. Our once proud dual system seems to be giving way to the view that all power should be concentrated in Washington, that only Washington has the wisdom to direct and control the people of the United States in every detail of their daily lives.”<sup>726</sup> Russell postulated that congressional rejection of the 18-vote bill might spur executive action to change state franchise ages by fiat, which would give the Warren Court cause to “incorporate the order into a decision” that would seek “to force compliance by the States.”<sup>727</sup> In a press conference after the defeat of S.J. Res. 53, Russell expressed “gratification” that it had been sent to the Senate as a constitutional amendment. He pointed out that had it been submitted as a statute, it would have passed muster since it gained a simple majority (34-24) – then, he alleged, “the present Supreme Court would have seen fit to try to enforce it.”<sup>728</sup>

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<sup>724</sup> *Congressional Record* 100 (21 May 1954): 6963.

<sup>725</sup> *Ibid*, 6966.

<sup>726</sup> *Ibid*, 6964.

<sup>727</sup> *Ibid*, 6980.

<sup>728</sup> *New York Times*, 22 May 1954, 1.

Republican sponsors of S.J. Res. 53 became openly frustrated during floor debate that it would be thwarted by the sociopolitical grievances of southern Democrats regarding a judicial matter that had little direct bearing on the voting-age measure. Republican strategists staked passage on convincing enough non-southern Democrats to break party ranks and back the amendment. Because Majority Leader Knowland lacked the personal charms and political muscle to manufacture a favorable outcome, they hoped to parlay the public's support of youth suffrage and Eisenhower's popularity into legislative success. As William Langer declared, "[T]his is as good a time as any to press the amendment. With the public support for the amendment increasing all the time, with the occupant of the White House and the present majority leader in the Senate supporting it, this is an excellent time to approve it. I am satisfied in my own mind that the issue narrows down to the simple question: Eventually, why not now?"<sup>729</sup>

Republican pleas to take advantage of the ripe legislative moment on behalf of youth suffrage, however, did not break the Democrat bloc. Because Senate Republicans lacked a working majority, they depended on sizeable blocs of Democrat votes to pass virtually every bill. In the weeks just prior to debating S.J. Res. 53, Democrats had become less willing to go along with Eisenhower's program, reckoning there was no political profit in helping the GOP build up a legislative record before the 1954 mid-term elections. Under the temporal circumstances shaped by the timing of the *Brown* decision announcement, Republicans were

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<sup>729</sup> *Congressional Record* 100 (21 May 1954): 6958.



unable to steer the deliberations away from the politics of states' rights onto the merits of enfranchising teenagers. Russell and his Democrat allies cleverly redirected the floor debate to the federalist question every time a Republican offered a reason why adolescents deserved to vote. When Langer referenced the opinion polls that demonstrated broad public support for youth suffrage, for example, Russell agreed that adolescents should be enfranchised, like in his state, but not by federal action.<sup>730</sup> When Langer and Knowland highlighted Eisenhower's espousal of the amendment, Thomas Hennings noted the president had recently stated that nineteen might be a better franchise age than eighteen; if the chief executive was unsure what the exact suffrage age should be, Hennings maintained, the Senate could not impose age uniformity on the states.<sup>731</sup> And when Knowland impatiently thundered, "What in the world are those who are opposing the amendment afraid of in submitting the matter to the 48 States of the Union? Why not let the States express themselves?," Carl Hayden (D-AZ) calmly interjected that, as of May 1954, 36 out of 37 state legislatures had already spoken by rejecting proposals to lower voting ages.<sup>732</sup>

In the recent past, southern Democrats had employed parliamentary legerdemain to defeat bills anathema to their interests or philosophy. Vanquishing S.J. Res. 53 required no such trickery. Russell and his regional brethren simply

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<sup>730</sup> Ibid, 6963.

<sup>731</sup> Ibid, 6967. For Eisenhower's wavering on the proper voting age, see *New York Times*, 13 May 1954, 14.

<sup>732</sup> *Congressional Record* 100 (21 May 1954): 6976.

repeated the chorus that the amendment constituted a gross violation of states' rights. Enough of their non-southern partymates heeded the refrain so as to retain the unity necessary to kill the bill. Clearly, the undertow of *Brown v. Board of Education* snagged S.J. Res. 53 by pulling the deliberations away from what should have been a discussion about the democratic justice of youth suffrage toward a dispute about the constitutional principles of states' rights. As Senator John Kennedy (D-MA) concluded at the end of the floor debate, "Reluctance to amend the Constitution is one of our most valuable safeguards and bulwarks of stability. . . . [A]lthough the maturity and wisdom of those in this age group is not to be deprecated – indeed, I would support such an amendment in my own State, and in the Congress if it were supported by the experience and demand of many States – there have not been demonstrated sufficient grounds for changing this basic document today."<sup>733</sup>

Neither a popular majority leader nor impeccable bill management could have saved Langer's amendment in the torrent of southern umbrage to the *Brown* ruling. The accidental timing of its promulgation so close to the date of Senate deliberation on S.J. Res. 53 inadvertently doomed the voting-age proposition. "There wasn't any visible connection between the Supreme Court's anti-segregation ruling and President Eisenhower's proposal for a constitutional amendment to lower the voting age from 21 to 18," *Newsweek* observed, "but that made no difference. All riled up over the court's decision, the Southern Democrats had to let

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<sup>733</sup> Ibid, 6978.

off steam some way. So they blocked the amendment in the Senate.”<sup>734</sup> William Moore of the *Chicago Tribune* reported that the “determined stand” of southern Democrats against the resolution “was regarded by many as a slap at the Eisenhower administration occasioned by their resentment over the recent Supreme Court decision banning segregation in the public schools.”<sup>735</sup> Southern scorn of Earl Warren turned Eisenhower’s endorsement of the 18-vote into a detriment because the president had chosen him to be Chief Justice. The rage the Court stoked among southern senators also damaged Ike’s rapport with Democrat leaders to such a degree that he could not mend the regional, partisan, and ideological divides, like he had on other measures, to rescue Langer’s measure. Indeed, the Senate’s rejection of the 18-vote bill withered the informal bipartisan coalition Eisenhower had cultivated. In the days afterwards, congressional Republicans and White House officials charged Democrat chiefs with duplicity for agreeing to help advance the president’s legislative agenda – including youth suffrage – at the outset of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress then reneging by constructing barriers to stymie most of the president’s priorities.<sup>736</sup> Some people blamed Russell directly for undermining S.J. Res. 53. “You ought to be ashamed of yourself for having defeated it,” a man from Kansas City, Missouri, charged, “I don’t like the Supreme Court’s decision any better than

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<sup>734</sup> “Not for 18-Year-Olds,” *Newsweek*, 31 May 1954, 24.

<sup>735</sup> William Moore, “Senate Kills Plea to Lower Vote Age to 18,” *Chicago Tribune*, 22 May 1954, 1.

<sup>736</sup> *Washington Post*, 25 May 1954, 1 and *New York Times*, 26 May 1954, 20. See also, *New York Times*, 28 May 1954, 1 & 16, and 3 June 1954, 1 & 18; *Washington Post*, 28 May 1954, 37; and *Chicago Tribune*, 11 June 1954, 1.

you do, but, don't take it out on the younger generation."<sup>737</sup> Of course, Democrats had planned from the beginning of the 1954 congressional session to stonewall GOP domestic legislation whenever politically gainful. To southern Democrats still smarting from the *Brown* case, thwarting an administration-backed voting rights amendment appeared to be the proper political retort to shield the states from another federal attempt to encroach upon constitutionally-protected rights.

Although the 18-vote measure failed, Eisenhower and the GOP gleaned a smidgeon of satisfaction in the outcome. Republican support for adolescent enfranchisement cut into a long-standing Democratic voting stronghold in presidential elections: the 21-to-29-year-old demographic. In 1952, according to George Gallup's calculations, 49% of electors in that age class cast ballots for Eisenhower; in 1956, 57% of them voted for Ike.<sup>738</sup> "This shift is significant," *Time* maintained, "because 8,600,000 adults have reached voting age since 1952, and more are coming fast."<sup>739</sup> The vote on Langer's bill also begat a rare display of party solidarity. Not one Republican in attendance voted against it, rallied by Bill Knowland to fulfill their president's request. The cohesion exhibited by the GOP on behalf of an administration-backed amendment showed that conservative Republicans could be more loyal to party than to ideology under the right episodic circumstances. Since the late 1930s, GOP right-wingers had often allied with

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<sup>737</sup> Gail R. Smith to Richard B. Russell, 12 June 1954, Series XV, Subseries AY, Box 349, Richard B. Russell Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, Athens, Georgia.

<sup>738</sup> "Polls: Two Shifts," *Newsweek*, 28 January 1957, 32.

<sup>739</sup> "The Shifting Vote," *Time*, 28 January 1957, 24.

southern Democrats in a “conservative coalition” to suppress congressional attempts to expand social welfare and civil liberties. Typically, as political scientist Mack C. Shelley argues, southern Democrats were the swing bloc that decided whether the coalition formed at all and determined if conservatives would be in the majority on a particular vote.<sup>740</sup> Scholars Ira Katznelson, Kim Geiger, and Daniel Kryder contend, however, Republicans represented the swing votes on civil rights issues, including the expansion of voting rights.<sup>741</sup> The circumstances of S.J. Res. 53 turned the usual equations upside down, as united Republicans relied on Democratic defections to halt southern attempts to derail the 18-vote amendment. In the end, GOP leaders managed to capture only seven out of seventeen non-southern Democrats, which left the resolution five votes short of achieving the two-thirds majority required for the acceptance of a constitutional amendment. Not until 1970 did the Senate again consider a bill to establish a national suffrage age.

After the defeat of S.J. Res. 53, federal interest in reducing franchise ages dwindled. In the midst of staring down the menaces of communism and smoothing out the vicissitudes of capitalism, congressmen regularly snubbed calls for youth suffrage. Between 1955 and 1960, only four 18-vote measures were introduced in

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<sup>740</sup> Mack C. Shelley, *The Permanent Majority: The Conservative Coalition in the United States Congress* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1983).

<sup>741</sup> Ira Katznelson, Kim Geiger and Daniel Kryder, "Limiting Liberalism: The Southern Veto in Congress, 1933-1950," *Political Science Quarterly* 108, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 283–306. In particular, see Table 6, “Congressional Coalitions by Policy and Period, 1933-1950: Index of Likeness Scores,” p. 300.

the Senate.<sup>742</sup> Ten resolutions were filed in the House, but seven of them were submitted by the same three congressmen: Clyde Doyle (D-CA), Kenneth Keating (R-NY), and William Widnall (R-NJ).<sup>743</sup> Each of the bills died in committee. President Eisenhower said he had “terrific interest” in young people and placed 18-vote proposals on his post-1954 legislative agendas.<sup>744</sup> Part of the president’s “zeal” for reducing voting ages, journalist Robert J. Donovan of the *Saturday Evening Post* stated, was his desire “to build the Republican Party up to a point where it can win without him in 1960.”<sup>745</sup> The polls revealing an uptick in youth support for the GOP boded well, but Eisenhower failed to follow up by choosing not to push Congress to adopt a national youth suffrage bill. He calculated that the legislative toil on behalf of adolescent enfranchisement would ultimately be futile for two reasons. After the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress and for the remainder of his term, Eisenhower faced a Democrat-controlled Capitol Hill staffed with southern committee chairman outwardly hostile to any legislation that suggested voting rights expansion, including the 18-vote. In addition, Eisenhower recognized that the majority of federal lawmakers viewed

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<sup>742</sup> S.J. Res. 40, 84<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 101 (8 February 1955), 1250; S.J. Res. 11, 85<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Ibid* 103 (7 January 1957), 255; S.J. Res. 81, 86<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Ibid*, 105 (24 March 1959), 5024; and S.J. Res. 179, 86<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., *Ibid* 106 (29 March 1960), 6739.

<sup>743</sup> H.J. Res. 12, H.J. Res. 37, H.J. Res. 51, H.J. Res. 89, H.J. Res. 93, 84<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Congressional Record* 101 (5 January 1955), 49-51; H.J. Res. 34, H.J. Res. 51, and H.J. Res. 109, 85<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Ibid* 103 (3 January 1957), 89-91; H.J. Res. 193, 86<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Ibid* 105 (26 January 1959), 1143; and H.J. Res. 515, 86<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., *Ibid* 105 (1 September 1959), 17633.

<sup>744</sup> *New York Times*, 12 October 1956, 22. For Eisenhower’s post-1954 18-vote tenders, see *Ibid*, 7 January 1955, 11; 1 January 1957, 12; 25 August 1957, 175; and 24 August 1958, 58.

<sup>745</sup> Robert J. Donovan, “What Ike Will Do,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 19 January 1957, 74. In the summer of 1956, Donovan, feature reporter for the *New York Herald Tribune*, wrote a highly controversial, behind-the-scenes account of administration decision-making during Ike’s first term. See Robert J. Donovan, *Eisenhower: The Inside Story* (New York: Harper, 1956).

suffrage age requirements as “a matter for the states to decide.”<sup>746</sup>

Three states and one U.S. territory did choose to reduce franchise ages during the Eisenhower era. Guam’s legislature voted in July 1954 to reduce its age of enfranchisement to eighteen.<sup>747</sup> In November 1955, Kentucky became the second state to reduce its voting age to eighteen.<sup>748</sup> On 3 January 1959, Alaska and Hawaii joined the United States having different suffrage ages; Alaska set its age at nineteen, and Hawaii at twenty.<sup>749</sup> The actions of Kentucky, Alaska, and Hawaii were noteworthy when compared to the number of states that considered youth-suffrage propositions. Between 1952 and 1960, thirty-seven state assemblies entertained proposals to reduce franchise ages. However, a mere eighteen states (Alaska, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Montana, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin) experienced having at least one house of its legislature vote affirmatively; the vast majority of voting-age bills never got past committee review. Only Idaho (1960), Kentucky (1955), Oklahoma (1952), and South Dakota (1952 and 1958) allowed plebiscites to reduce suffrage ages, with Kentucky representing the singular success.<sup>750</sup> The consistency of the rebukes strongly

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<sup>746</sup> *New York Times*, 13 October 1956, 6.

<sup>747</sup> *Ibid*, 9 July 1954, 19 and *Washington Post*, 9 July 1954, 51.

<sup>748</sup> *New York Times*, 10 November 1955, 26 and *Chicago Tribune*, 13 November 1955, 22. Kentucky’s 18-vote amendment passed by 85,188 votes out of 300,488 cast; see, *Frankfort (KY) State Journal*, 30 November 1955, 1 and 1 December 1955, 2.

<sup>749</sup> *New York Times*, 4 January 1959, 1.

<sup>750</sup> Walter Kravitz, *State Action to Lower the Voting Age, 1943-1960* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, Legislative Reference Service, 1961).

indicated, according to *Congressional Digest*, that “there was no compelling need or widespread national demand” for enfranchising 18-year-olds.<sup>751</sup>

State lawmakers and their constituents rebuffed actualizing youth suffrage because of broad adult skepticism about the maturity of adolescents. Dwight Eisenhower claimed that his 18-vote proposals were inspired by his observations of the maturity of young soldiers. Eisenhower’s military experiences rooted his “faith and trust” in the ability of young people to take responsible actions, make sensible decisions, and form considered opinions.<sup>752</sup> As he said before the national convention of 4-H Clubs in 1954: “I personally think that your judgments in the destiny of this nation are about as good as those of some of us who are many years your senior.”<sup>753</sup> Other adults lacked the president’s conviction. Various grown-ups agreed with 18-vote advocates that citizenship training and modern education provided youth the academic credentials to proffer electoral consent as knowledgeably as adults. Many parents and politicians also accepted the insights of social scientists and businessmen that showed adolescents to be more developmentally and cognitively adult-like than previously known.<sup>754</sup> The steady climb in public approval of the 18-vote in postwar polls reflected a sentiment that

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<sup>751</sup> “The 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress Draws to a Close,” *Congressional Digest* 33, (June-July 1954): 161.

<sup>752</sup> *New York Times*, 12 October 1956, 22.

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid*, 18 June 1954, 15.

<sup>754</sup> For the social science theories regarding youth cognition and development, see Jean Piaget, *The Psychological of Intelligence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947) and Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950). For the business awareness of the consumer sophistication of adolescents, see Eugene Gilbert, *Advertising and Marketing to Young People* (Pleasantville, NY: Printers’ Ink Books, 1957).



both the brawn and brains of youth justified enfranchisement. Nevertheless, individual affirmations in response to the queries of a pollster did not indicate collective interest in or widespread demand for the enactment of youth suffrage among adults. Not only did many authorities curtly dismiss the issue as unimportant when compared to more serious concerns at home and abroad, countless other adults flippantly disparaged it as unwise in the context of contemporary angst about “teenagers.”

Prior to World War II, the word “teenager” did not exist as part of the American lexicon. According to the *Dictionary of American Slang*, the United States became the first nation with a specific word to distinguish the adolescent cohort and the only country to consider it “a separate entity whose influence, fads, and fashions are worthy of discussion apart from the adult world.”<sup>755</sup> Age-based cultural differences had existed since ancient times, but, as historian Thomas Hine asserts, the identification of a discrete “teenage” lifestyle had never occurred before World War II.<sup>756</sup> By the mid-1950s, the teen world of high school and hanging out, replete with academic and socioeconomic activities, had become a fairly finite social orbit. To adolescents, the noun “teenager” captured more than an age in one’s life; it encapsulated a distinct youth culture, an inimitable cohort identity with values, understandings, and practices unlike that of children and adults. Teen culture

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<sup>755</sup> Harold Wentworth and Stuart Berg Flexner, eds., *Dictionary of American Slang*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1975), 538-539.

<sup>756</sup> Thomas Hine, “The Rise and Decline of the Teenager,” *American Heritage* 50, no. 5 (September 1999): 70-82. See also Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager: A New History of the American Adolescent Experience* (New York: Bard, 1999).

drew heavily from socially marginal groups, such as working-class gangs and African-Americans, who overtly or covertly opposed the conformity imposed by the dominate middle-class culture.<sup>757</sup> The most visible features of teendom seemed to copy from these groups: the distinctive hair styles, special clothing (such as blue jeans and t-shirts), use of slang and profanity, souped-up cars, smoking, drinking, and unabashed sexuality. Because of the flowering of youth culture, all things tagged with the adjective “teen” became the exclusive domain of adolescents, and age became a primary determinant of social behavior equal to, and in some cases greater than, race, class, gender, or ethnicity. According to postwar critic Dwight Macdonald, teenagers had taken shape as “a caste, a culture, [and] a market.” They were “not just children growing into adults,” he asserted, “but a sharply differentiated part of the population” practicing “a style of life that was *sui generis*.”<sup>758</sup>

As teen culture matured, the social distance between adults and adolescents widened. Postwar America prescribed individualism, freedom of expression, socioeconomic mobility, and self-determination as the antidote to the stultifying tyranny of communism. Adolescents broadly accepted those aspects of Americanism and trusted the precepts would also apply to them; as a 17-year-old New Yorker

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<sup>757</sup> See Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter-Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1968). Historian Joseph F. Kett claims adolescents identified with these groups, in part, because they also saw themselves as marginalized, or condemned to a “passive dependency” imposed on them by adult authorities. See Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 268.

<sup>758</sup> Dwight Macdonald, “A Caste, a Culture, a Market – Part I,” *The New Yorker*, 22 November 1958, 57.

averred, “teen-agers are citizens and entitled to protection, too.”<sup>759</sup> Age conflicts arose, however, as teenagers insisted upon pursuing self-identity on their own terms and adults demanded conformity to social norms.<sup>760</sup> Many adults, even the ones who listened to rock-n-roll “tunes” and bought youth-inspired “threads,” lambasted the messages and mores of teen culture for flouting traditional values and behaviors and disrespecting authority. An endless stream of adult-produced essays and profiles portrayed young people as churlish hellions bent on nihilism.<sup>761</sup> Such alarmist portrayals convinced millions of adults that an epidemic of “juvenile delinquency” had swept over the nation. The archetype of the “juvenile delinquent” as defiant, self-centered, and emotionally-troubled – which closely mirrored the imagery of the “turbulent” adolescence described by G. Stanley Hall – fostered judgments of teenagers as not just troublesome but rebellious. In a 1957 special issue on youth, *Cosmopolitan* magazine mused, “Are Teenagers Taking Over?” and conjured images of “a vast, determined band of blue-jeaned storm troopers forcing us to do exactly as they dictate.”<sup>762</sup> In the context of the fears about internal subversion fomented by the Cold War, imagining adolescents as automatons in

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<sup>759</sup> *New York Times*, 3 February 1958, 47.

<sup>760</sup> Scholar Jon Savage contends that the most endearing (to adolescents) and maddening (to adults) quality of youth culture was its nurturing of self-identity. See Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York: Viking, 2007).

<sup>761</sup> Historian James Gilbert argues that social commentators and political officials raised alarms about the lifestyle of teenagers when elements of youth culture began to seep into mass culture. See James Gilbert, “Mass Culture and the Fear of Delinquency in 1950s,” *Journal of Early Adolescence* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 505-516.

<sup>762</sup> Richard Geham, “That Nine Billion Dollars in Hot Little Hands,” *Cosmopolitan*, November 1957, 72.

dungarees envisioned something sinister: the disintegration of sociopolitical conventions historically defined by adults. Concerns about the potential for youth to undermine American institutions appeared to so consume adults that, in 1959, sociologist Edgar Friedenberg observed, “The ‘teen-ager’ seems to have replaced the Communist as the appropriate target for public controversy and foreboding.”<sup>763</sup>

The social anxieties about teenagers framed the political concerns about enfranchising them. In the context of the postwar “youth problem,” many parents and politicians alike simply doubted that adolescents collectively possessed sufficient judgment about their own wellbeing to make responsible electoral decisions regarding the welfare of other people. They summarized their skepticism by claiming teenagers unfit to vote because of their “immaturity,” by which, depending on the context of its usage, adults meant youths were emotionally disturbed, socially gauche, culturally insolent, personally inexperienced, and/or politically naïve. A New York City resident, for instance, asserted that the “obvious argument” against youth suffrage was that “juvenile fads, adolescent crazes, schoolgirl hysteria and passing hero-worship are widespread evidence of political immaturity.”<sup>764</sup> A man from Des Plaines, Illinois, advocated lifting the voting age “to 25 or even 30” because, based on his own adolescence, teenage minds were addled by thoughts of “girls, dances, parties, boxing, vaudeville, and burlesque

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<sup>763</sup> Edgar Friedenberg, *The Vanishing Adolescent* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), 115. Friedberg argued adult hysterics regarding teenagers stemmed from “a kind of repressed panic-response to the liquidation of authority over them.” *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>764</sup> “Earlier Voting Age Opposed,” letter to editor, *New York Times*, 4 March 1954, 24.

shows.”<sup>765</sup> Some older people reckoned that enfranchising youth might destabilize adultocracy. In 1957, Maryland’s House Judiciary Committee heard testimony on legislation granting 18-year-olds voting rights. Committee members appeared to support the measure until Elvis Presley’s name entered the debate. After Secretary of State Claude B. Hellman stated that lowering franchise ages would “encourage greater responsibility among young people toward government,” Representative Daniel M. Murray challenged, “Don’t you believe that most Elvis Presley fans are in this age bracket? Do you think that’s a proper frame of mind for voters?” Before Hellman could respond, Representative Edgar P. Silver yelled, “Presley could conceivably be elected President” on the strength of the 18-to-20-year-old demographic. The committee summarily killed the teenage suffrage bill.<sup>766</sup>

Legislative denials of adolescent enfranchisement fell within a body of legal prohibitions on teen activities. Scholar Ronald D. Cohen contends that “adults’ fear of youthful rebellion and their urge to control youth” prompted the promulgation of such restrictive laws as curfews, loitering ordinances, and car cruising bans.<sup>767</sup> Several cities even tried to neuter “Elvis the Pelvis” by barring rock-n-roll from the airwaves.<sup>768</sup> While adult authorities busily tried to stifle expressions of youth culture, they chided teenagers for becoming a “silent generation” unconcerned about

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<sup>765</sup> “The Voting Age,” letter to editor, *Chicago Tribune*, 16 January 1954, 9.

<sup>766</sup> *Washington Post*, 27 February 1957, B1. See also, *Ibid*, 3 March 1957, B1.

<sup>767</sup> Ronald D. Cohen, “*The Delinquents: Censorship and Youth Culture in Recent U.S. History*,” *History of Education Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 251.

<sup>768</sup> Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave, *Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock ‘n’ Roll*, (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1988), 3-78.

political matters, including youth suffrage. After sending another voting-age request to Congress in 1955, Dwight Eisenhower commented that young people “don’t seem steamed up” about their own enfranchisement.<sup>769</sup> Whereas the president lamented youth indifference as “sad,” other politicians believed it to be damnable. In 1956, Maryland governor Theodore McKeldin blamed the “apathy of youth itself” for the failure of the Old Line State to lower its voting age. Speaking before a seminar of Young Democrats and Republicans, McKeldin demanded, “Where were you when the question was before the Legislature a few years ago? Where were the 18-year-olds themselves – where were the 19-year-olds and the 20-year-olds?” when he and other state lawmakers led the charge.<sup>770</sup> The adult explanation for youth apathy asserted that pleasure-seeking teenagers had other things on their minds besides voting. Hal Boyle of the Associated Press, for example, observed that adolescents cared more about securing a drivers license than suffrage. “They’d fight by fair means or foul – even ask dad and mom to help – to preserve what they regard as youth’s inalienable right to drive a motor car,” Boyle noted, “But several million teen-agers now have the opportunity to fight for the greatest single privilege of American democracy, and, by and large, their attitude seems to be one of indifference.”<sup>771</sup>

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<sup>769</sup> *Frankfurt (KY) State Journal*, 24 February 1955, 6.

<sup>770</sup> *Washington Post*, 8 April 1956, A1.

<sup>771</sup> *Frankfurt (KY) State Journal*, 24 February 1955, 6. Cars, of course, became a central part of teen culture. Kenneth Jackson states that getting a driver’s license, obtainable in most states at age sixteen, became “the most important rite of passage” in America. See Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 246. Amy L. Best emphasizes that because the places where adolescents congregated required the

Postwar youths were not uncaring about suffrage. Based upon polling statistics, they were, as former Georgia governor Ellis Arnall insisted, “most active and most anxious to vote.”<sup>772</sup> During the 1950s, a handful of teenagers organized a few small bands on behalf of adolescent enfranchisement. Several national youth associations publicly supported reducing voting ages, but no countrywide youth-led, 18-vote movement developed, though the Future Voters of America tried.<sup>773</sup> Teen efforts to revise suffrage ages were unconsolidated, haphazard, and short-lived, and their campaigns were limited to individual cities or states. Mostly, the young advocates wrote petitions to influential lawmakers urging a reconsideration of franchise ages; sometimes, they travelled to statehouses to pitch lawmakers in person. Their endeavors to win adult endorsements of the 18-vote and to stir a youth groundswell to the cause were equally fruitless. Most teenagers simply saw no need to get agitated over an issue utterly out of their control. Whereas indignation over adult-made political decisions fueled youth in the 1960s to clamor for voting rights, the events of the postwar era stoked no such teen fury. Domestic political matters sometimes irked and even angered adolescents, including their votelessness, but they had been socialized in their homes and classrooms to handle

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use of automobiles, such as drive-in theaters and cruising lanes, youths saw the car as a chariot for freedom and fast times. See Amy L. Best, *Fast Cars, Cool Rides: The Accelerating World of Youth and Their Cars*, (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

<sup>772</sup> *New York Times*, 25 October 1953, 51.

<sup>773</sup> For additional information regarding the Future Voters of America, see Ina Don Manzanares to Harry S Truman, 10 March 1952, White House Central Files: Official File 465 (March-June 1952), Box 1299, Harry S Truman Papers, Harry S Truman Library, Independence, Missouri.

troublesome matters democratically, i.e. by patient submissions within proper governmental channels. Within a social milieu paranoid about youth subversion and frenzied by depictions of juvenile delinquency, the vast majority of teenagers grasped the futility of petitioning legislators for a redress of their electoral grievances. Adolescents clearly understood that adult intransigence rather than youth indifference was the central obstacle to the attainment of suffrage. As a teenager remarked in 1954, “It seems everything we do has to be sanctioned by adults.”<sup>774</sup>

The denial of adolescent enfranchisement epitomized the postwar tension between adults and teenagers. The view of teenagers as a vital but alien social group and the perception of teenage culture as vivid but deviant would derail the political efforts to establish youth suffrage. Stereotyping teenagers as dunderheaded and angst-ridden prompted numerous adults to suspect that adolescents were psychologically and emotionally unfit to vote. Lawmakers saw no compelling need to adopt youth suffrage legislation because of the fears and uncertainties about enfranchising immature teenagers. As Puerto Rico’s Senate succinctly declared upon declining a 18-vote bill in 1953: “We feel it a risk for democracy to give voting rights to impulsive youth.”<sup>775</sup> The travails of youth suffrage in the postwar era evidenced that political regulations establishing who can vote within democracies are lashed to social beliefs determining which people

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<sup>774</sup> Ibid, 19 April 1954, 25.

<sup>775</sup> *Washington Post*, 8 May 1953, 2.



should vote. Young people believed adults would eventually see them as persons rather than stereotypes and consider them as citizens rather than outliers. And they trusted that authorities would one day uphold the inclusive, democratic rhetoric civic leaders espoused every Citizenship Day by counting them as electors. “The perpetuation of our freedoms will ultimately depend not so much on patriotic oratory,” Oscar Benton, leader of the National Lutheran Council, declared, “as on the attitudes we develop in the hearts of our youth.”<sup>776</sup> During the 1960s, those young people who had taken the rhetoric about self-determination to heart would demand that adults practice what they preached by enfranchising teenagers.

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<sup>776</sup> *Frankfort (KY) State Journal*, 1 February 1955, 8.

## CHAPTER V

### LIBERALS, YOUTH, AND THE 18-VOTE, 1960-1971

If you're under 25, YOU are the MAJORITY, YOU can RUN the COUNTRY!

“Wild in the Streets,” (1968)<sup>777</sup>

To many Americans, 1968 appeared to be the year that the United States would achieve domestic meltdown. A long train of internal pressures percolating over the course of the decade seemed poised to dissolve the essential sociopolitical elements that had ever-so tenuously held the nation together. Social, cultural, and political fissures so harried feelings and shook nerves that many people behaved as though a genuine revolution would begin at any moment. Adults, in particular, worried that America's young demi-monde, allegedly stoked by mindless hedonism and dangerous nihilism, would push the country toward violent destruction. Many of the movies in that polarizing year of 1968 tried to explain why an ever-increasing number of supposedly good kids had rebelled against established authorities. While the teen-pics of the 1950s chronicled the impish fascinations of youth culture (like rock-n-roll, drag racing, and delinquency), the hippie-flicks of the 1960s detailed the insurrectionary allure of the counterculture's casual sex, psychedelic drugs, acid

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<sup>777</sup> *Wild in the Streets*, directed by Barry Shear (American International Pictures, 1968), movie trailer, accessed 24 July 2015, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRLwV2xafpk>.

rock, and radical politics. These hippie-exploitation movies cautioned adult viewers that their images of adolescents needed immediate readjustment. Contemporary youth were not, as played by James Dean, merely estranged progeny seeking acceptance from parents; rather, they appeared to be alien creatures busily creating an alternative universe that rebuffed adults and traditional mores.

“Wild in the Streets” offered moviegoers a campy slice of sociopolitical paranoia. Based on a 1966 short story by Robert Thom, “Wild in the Streets” depicts the ascent of Max Frost, a 22-year-old rock star millionaire, to the presidency of the United States.<sup>778</sup> Frost’s climb to the White House begins with a flash of insight when he hears a politician declare that voting ages should be lowered to eighteen because 52% of the American population was under age 25.<sup>779</sup> Frost decides to lead his “troopers” (i.e. devoted young fanatics) into the political arena to gain power for disfranchised youth. He convinces Congress to accept a constitutional amendment declaring fourteen as the national franchise age by having his merry pranksters spike the Washington, D.C. water supply with LSD. After Frost sweeps into the presidency riding the youth vote, he makes executive decisions based on what his young majority wants, such as withdrawing U.S. troops from Vietnam, disbanding the FBI, shipping surplus grain to third-world nations,

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<sup>778</sup> Robert Thom, “The Day It All Happened, Baby,” *Esquire*, vol. LXVI, no. 6 (December 1966): 220-240.

<sup>779</sup> During the 1960s, public officials often repeated that statistic in support of youth causes. Between 1960 and 1970, Americans under age 25 actually constituted 45% of the national population. See U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “Annual Estimates of the Population, by Age: 1900 to 1970,” Series A 29-42, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, Part 1, Chapters A-M (White Plains, NY: Kraus International Publications, 1989; reprint of 1970 edition), 10.

instituting 30 as the new mandatory retirement age, and sending all persons over 35 to “re-education camps” where young guards force them to imbibe water laced with LSD. With the adult population perpetually incapacitated, Frost has fully consolidated his power, or so he thinks; in the film’s final sequence, Frost gets surrounded by a pack of hostile children for killing a pet crawfish, and one menacing-looking kid vows to “put everybody over [age] ten out of business.”

“Wild in the Streets” fizzled at the box-office despite its election-year topicality.<sup>780</sup> Released two months after Eugene McCarthy’s “children’s crusade” pushed Lyndon Johnson out of the Democratic race for president, the movie exposed the depth of the generational tension between adolescents and adults. It underscored a paradox that had increasingly smoldered within American civic life during the 1960s: while adults fetishized being young, they feared young people. The film’s absurdist depictions of obsequious parents, feckless politicians, and merciless teens resonated with those adults concerned about enfranchised teenagers hijacking America, culturally and politically. Its dystopian portrayal of hippie fascism certainly took the ‘60s catch phrase “Never trust anyone over 30” to its most extreme consequence. To many grown-ups, Frost and his adolescent acolytes symbolized a rebellious youth cohort not just aimlessly running amok, but one that posed a subversive threat to America’s sociopolitical order. Their young foils seemingly agreed with Frost’s mother who, when pressed by reporters to explain his actions, exclaimed, “I’m sure my son has a very good reason for paralyzing the

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<sup>780</sup> *Variety*, 8 May 1968, 6.

country.” Terry Clifford, film critic for the *Chicago Tribune*, surmised that the “effectively smug, demagogic, and ruthless” young antiheroes in the movie would deeply appeal to the “Now Generation” who had switched their collective focus “from electric guitars to electoral college, from Clearasil to Congress.”<sup>781</sup>

“Wild in the Streets” presented an over-the-top, apocalyptic vision of the consequences of youth suffrage. A New York City resident lambasted the film as an “insult” for scaring adults into believing that “simplistic, sinister, and totalitarian” impulses motivated potential youth electors.<sup>782</sup> Yet the movie tapped into a sense of “moral panic,” clearly palpable in 1968, that all young people posed serious peril to time-honored conventions, domestic tranquility, and autocratic command.<sup>783</sup> As Cornell University political scientist Andrew Hacker illuminated in July 1968, “Not only do many adults fail to discriminate between non-rebellious and rebellious youths, they fail to discriminate between the various types of rebellion; every published vignette of dissent and disorder is added to the total impression of a uniform and pervasive state of social chaos in the youthful sector of the nation.”<sup>784</sup> Throughout the 1960s, the fear of unhinged teenagers electorally and politically going berserk (i.e. voting irrationally and governing irresponsibly) kindled an fretful

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<sup>781</sup> Terry Clifford, “Wild in the Streets’ Hits Potholes,” *Chicago Tribune*, 21 May 1968, C7.

<sup>782</sup> *New York Times*, 25 August 1968, D30.

<sup>783</sup> Sociologist Stanley Cohen claims “moral panic” occurs when a “condition, episode, person, or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests.” Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of Mods and Rockers*, (London: Paladin, 1972), 9.

<sup>784</sup> Andrew Hacker, “If the 18-Year-Olds Get the Vote. . .,” *New York Times, Magazine*, 7 July 1968, 6.

uncertainty within parents and politicians whether enfranchising adolescents would energize or eviscerate the body politic.

A favorite parlor game of Americans tries to tag historical decades with a pithy descriptor. The “gay” 1890s and the “roaring” 1920s, for example, supposedly illustrate the cultural vivaciousness of those particular years. Such brands, of course, speciously oversimplify; no decade can be described by an exclusive epigram. Though “the Sixties” were one of the most exciting, fascinating, and troubling decades in American history, popular evaluations have yet, thus far, to fix onto those years a fashionable, one-word label. For many years, however, academic assessments of the era remained singularly lashed to the “declension” thesis. This interpretative framework postulates that the decade began bathed in a buoyant optimism, symbolized by President John Kennedy’s call to service, civil rights sit-ins, and the rhetoric of the Port Huron Statement. At mid-decade, the hopeful idealism reached its acme with the Mississippi Freedom Summer campaign, Lyndon Johnson’s electoral landslide, the Free Speech Movement, and the transformative legislation of the Democrat-controlled 89<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> Congresses (especially the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965). During the last third of the decade, ever-escalating social dislocations at home and military incursions in Vietnam curdled optimism and buoyancy into disillusionment, anger, and despair. The declension thesis concludes that 1968 “delineated the end of the Sixties.”<sup>785</sup>

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<sup>785</sup> Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.

That year, Americans endured the revelations of government falsehoods about progress in Vietnam (as exposed by the Tet Offensive), assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, LBJ's decision to not seek re-election, hostilities at Columbia University and other campuses, and a bloody riot outside the Democrats' national convention in Chicago. Those events fed the growing distrust of public officials, the disintegration of the New Left and civil rights movements, the embrace of violence by radical activists, the unraveling of the liberal consensus, and the victory of Richard Nixon.<sup>786</sup>

In recent years, scholars have challenged the hegemony of the “good sixties/bad sixties” canon. Several historians of the black freedom struggle, for instance, claim the Black Power movement represented an evolutionary growth out of, rather than dramatic departure from, the civil rights movement.<sup>787</sup> Local and regional case studies expose the idiosyncratic limitations of social movements often portrayed as organizational and ideological monoliths controlled from bases in New York City or San Francisco.<sup>788</sup> Several works contest the notion of 60s activist

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<sup>786</sup> For examples of the declension analysis, see Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS*, (New York: Random House, 1973); Irwin Unger, *The Movement: A History of the American New Left, 1959-1974*, (New York: Dodd Mead, 1974); Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1984); Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1987); James Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987); and David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>787</sup> See Timothy B. Tyson, “Robert F. Williams, ‘Black Power,’ and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle,” *Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (September 1998): 540-570; Lance Hill, *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Simon Wendt, *The Spirit and the Shotgun: Armed Resistance and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007).

<sup>788</sup> See Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Rusty L. Monhollon, *This Is*

movements as being exceptionally American by chronicling the global reach of dissent, especially the international protests of 1968.<sup>789</sup> Historians of women's rights, gay liberation, and the New Right propose that the story of the 1960s entailed more than the rise and fall of the Students for a Democratic Society and the triumphs and travails of liberalism.<sup>790</sup> Significantly, these scholars champion the concept of a "long 1960s" by tracing the origins of the feminist, homosexual, and conservative movements back to the 1940s or 1950s and tracking their development into the 1970s and beyond. These works suggest that the chronology of the 1960s

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*America? The Sixties in Lawrence, Kansas*, (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Paul Lyons, *The People of This Generation: The Rise and Fall of the New Left in Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Gregg L. Michel, *Struggle for a Better South: The Southern Student Organizing Committee, 1964-1969*, (New York: Palgrave, 2004); and Jeffrey Turner, *Sitting In and Speaking Out: Student Movements in the American South, 1960-1970*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

<sup>789</sup> Books and articles that emphasize the global aspects of 1960s include Jeremy Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolutions and the Rise of Détente*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Peniel E. Joseph, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 96, no. 3 (December 2009): 751-776; Daniel Geary, "Becoming International Again: C. Wright Mills and the Emergence of a Global New Left, 1956-1972," *Journal of American History* 95, no. 3 (December 2008): 710-736; Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Simon Hall, *Rethinking the American Anti-War Movement*, (New York: Routledge, 2012). For pieces about 1968, see Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2004); Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Jeremy Suri, *The Global Revolutions of 1968*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007).

<sup>790</sup> Women's Rights: Sara M. Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), and Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Gay Liberation: John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) and "Placing Gay in the Sixties," in Alexander Bloom, ed., *Long Time Gone: Sixties America Then and Now*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 209-229. New Right: Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), and Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).



sociopolitical crusades should be broadened; they also maintain that the idealism and activism of the 1960s survived the implosion of SDS and the election of Nixon. When to date precisely the start and finish of the “long 1960s” remains a fervent historiographical subject.<sup>791</sup>

The topic of youth suffrage has been minimized, if not overlooked, within the recent revisions of 1960s historiography. The protracted gestation of the Twenty-sixth Amendment certainly squares with the “long 1960s” interpretation. The effort to enfranchise adolescents was not an exclusive cause of SDS or liberals for it attracted broad, but not necessarily deep, support across various social, cultural, ideological, and political spectrums. Nor was the quest to reduce voting ages a particularly American venture; numerous nations, including communist countries, enfranchised teenagers during the postwar era and into the 1970s. The course of youth suffrage within the 1960s also contradicts the declension thesis. As the decade ended, hopes for lowering the franchise age among 18-vote devotees had never been higher. By 1970, genuine legislative progress toward granting adolescents electoral rights had been made in Congress, and a lobbying campaign to legalize youth balloting had coalesced for the first time. When the Sixties began, however, the prospects for achieving the 18-vote appeared dim.

The decade’s first serious discussion of youth suffrage occurred in connection

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<sup>791</sup> For overviews of the “long 60s” interpretation, see Stephen Tuck, “Introduction: Reconsidering the 1970s – The 1960s to a Disco Beat,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 4 (October 2008): 617-620; Dan Berger, ed., *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010); and Heather Ann Thompson, ed., *Speaking Out: Activism and Protest in the 1960s and 1970s*, (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2010).

with the passage of the Twenty-third Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Proposed by Congress in June 1960, it became effective in March 1961 after ratification by the states. The amendment allowed the residents of the District of Columbia to vote in presidential elections and a vote in the Electoral College, but it did not grant District residents representation in Congress.<sup>792</sup> Upon the amendment's ratification, Congress empowered the Washington D.C. Board of Commissioners to determine the city's election laws; once promulgated, the laws were submitted by the Board to Congress for approval.<sup>793</sup> The age of enfranchisement became an immediate flashpoint of contention. At the Board's initial meeting, held 3 April 1961, the commissioners heard recommendations from local Democratic and Republican leaders. The Democratic spokesman, Joseph Rauh, Jr., proposed a voting age of eighteen; the Republican, Carl Shipley, countered with twenty-one as the suffrage age.<sup>794</sup> In the days and weeks following

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<sup>792</sup> Article II, Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution made clear that elected federal officers were to be chosen "by the people of the several states." Since the District of Columbia was not a state, there was no legal basis for its citizens to vote in presidential or congressional elections. In 1973, Washingtonians were allowed to elect a mayor and council, but they still lack representation in Congress. For a synopsis of the city's odd place in America's democratic landscape, see J. Valerie Fifer, "Washington, D.C.: The Political Geography of a Federal Capital," *Journal of American Studies* 15, no. 1 (April 1981): 5-26 and "D.C. Voting Rights Overview," *Congressional Digest* 86, no. 5 (May 2007): 132-136.

<sup>793</sup> Established in 1874, the Board jointly governed Washington, D.C. with Congress. It consisted of three members: two appointed by the President of the United States and one assigned by the Chief of Army Engineers. One of the two commissioners nominated by the President served as the de facto mayor of Washington. In 1967, the Board of Commissioners dissolved when Congress granted the District partial self-government. In 1973, Congress gave Washington residents to authority to elect a mayor and city council, though Congress retained the power to review and overturn any locally-passed bills. See Congressional Quarterly, *Congress and the Nation, 1965-1968: A Review of Government and Politics During the [Lyndon] Johnson Years*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1969), 955, and *Ibid*, vol. 3, *A Review of Government and Politics During [Richard] Nixon's First Term, 1969-1972*, (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1973), 459-468.

<sup>794</sup> *Washington Post*, 4 April 1961, B1.

the meeting, Rauh and Shipley fiercely accused each other of trying to rig municipal voter laws, including suffrage age, to manipulate the allocation of Washington's 1964 Electoral College representatives. At a Harvard Club luncheon, for example, Shipley charged local Democrats had sinister reasons for supporting the 18-vote: they wanted to "scoop up a lot of irresponsible" teenagers to inflate vote totals, which, Shipley alleged, Democrats had traditionally done via "fraud" and "tombstone voting." Rauh countered Shipley backed a high suffrage age to "keep down the vote to try to pull out an election the Republicans can't win."<sup>795</sup>

On 13 April 1961, the Commission adopted twenty as the minimum age to vote after the Board's lone Republican, Robert E. McLaughlin, agreed to yield his party's line. McLaughlin claimed he had been swayed by talks with Senator Jennings Randolph (D-WV), well-known stalwart for the 18-vote, that contemporary adolescents could cast ballots responsibly because they "probably are more mature" than past youth due to the "pressures of our civilization and our political life."<sup>796</sup> Commission President, Walter N. Tobriner, acknowledged the Board's compromise as only a "gesture" because Congress held the final authority to fix the District's voting age, which the *Washington Post* editorialized "is not likely to be 20."<sup>797</sup>

In May 1961, a special House subcommittee formed to consider the Commission's proposals. President John Kennedy asked its chairman, James C.

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<sup>795</sup> Ibid, 30 April 1961, A4.

<sup>796</sup> Ibid, 14 April 1961, B1.

<sup>797</sup> Ibid and 15 April 1961, A8.

Davis (D-GA), to set Washington's voting age at 18 so as to enfranchise "the greatest possible number" for the 1964 presidential election.<sup>798</sup> Kennedy's encouragement of youth to get involved in public affairs served as one of his core presidential themes. His 1961 inaugural address famously implored Americans, especially those young citizens of the "new generation" to whom "the torch has been passed," to "ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." Kennedy never formally or publicly sponsored youth suffrage before his request to establish eighteen as Washington D.C.'s voting threshold. As a Senator in May 1954, he voted against a constitutional amendment setting the national suffrage age at eighteen. As a presidential candidate in 1960, the closest Kennedy came to advocating under-21 voting came during an October rally at American University when he told the students that he "wished all of you lived in Kentucky, where you could vote."<sup>799</sup> During the campaign, Kennedy eagerly solicited the votes of enfranchised college students and tapped campus Young Democrat clubs as a source of campaign support.<sup>800</sup> Upon election to the presidency, he sought ways to expand civic opportunities for America's youth. To that end, Kennedy established the Peace Corps via executive order in March 1961 – the same month the Twenty-

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<sup>798</sup> Ibid, 17 May 1961, C1. The Twenty-third Amendment enfranchised close to 300,000 Americans. Census records counted some 59,000 District residents between ages 18 and 21. Ibid, 2 August 1961, B1 and 10 September 1961, B12.

<sup>799</sup> *Washington Post*, 8 October 1960, A2. Kennedy visited Kentucky the next day and did not mention any desire to expand the Bluegrass State's 18-vote nationwide. See *Chicago Tribune*, 9 October 1960, 14.

<sup>800</sup> *New York Times*, 2 October 1960, E11 and 16 October 1960, 73.

third Amendment became law.<sup>801</sup>

Kennedy's actions to integrate young people into America's civic life underpinned his support for the 18-vote in the nation's capital. On behalf of the District Commission, Walter Tobriner testified before Davis's subcommittee that it backed the president's position. When pressed by members why the Commission now supported 18 as the District suffrage age, Tobriner said conversations with administration officials convinced them that including teenagers in the presidential election process would infuse D.C. youths with "a feeling of responsibility" that might benefit the nation. Tobriner further argued that "the greater danger is not to allow them to have a voice."<sup>802</sup> The "chilly reaction" of the subcommittee to Kennedy's request and Tobriner's testimony indicated scant interest in establishing eighteen as the franchise age.<sup>803</sup> The editors of the *Washington Post* identified Chairman Davis as the main 18-vote killjoy, though he represented a state that had already enfranchised adolescents. They challenged Davis to undo a seemingly undemocratic double-standard: "Will he now hold that the 18-year-old vote is acceptable in his own district but not for the young people of Washington?"<sup>804</sup> In August 1961, Davis's subcommittee reported out legislation that preserved twenty-

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<sup>801</sup> See Gerard T. Rice, *The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps*, (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985) and Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, *All You Need Is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>802</sup> *Washington Post*, 16 May 1961, A1. Besides the District Commission, Kennedy's tender was also supported by the Washington, D.C. League of Women Voters, the Washington, D.C. Young Democratic Club, and the American Civil Liberties Union. Ibid, 17 May 1961, C1.

<sup>803</sup> Ibid, 16 May 1961, A1.

<sup>804</sup> Ibid, 17 May 1961, A16.

one as the suffrage age in Washington.<sup>805</sup>

That same month, the Senate's District Committee took up its own bill to implement the 23<sup>rd</sup> Amendment. Supporters of the D.C. 18-vote actively lobbied the committee. Commissioner Tobriner reminded them of a unique temporal issue facing young Washingtonians: "If we adopt a 21-year-age limit in the District, where elections are held only once every four years, a person whose 21<sup>st</sup> birthday came just after an election would have to wait until he was almost 25 years old before he could vote." Joseph Rauh, Jr. reiterated President Kennedy's view that "as many people as possible should vote in the Nation's Capital."<sup>806</sup> Senator Jennings Randolph (D-WV), former chairman of the House District Committee from 1939 to 1945, urged his colleagues to enfranchise 18-to-21-year-olds because they "already bear the responsibilities of citizenship without its privileges." Senators Kenneth Keating (R-NY) and Estes Kefauver (D-TN) seconded Randolph's entreaty.<sup>807</sup> On 29 August 1961, the committee recommended eighteen as the minimum voting age for Washington residents.<sup>808</sup> Chairman Alan Bible (D-NV) concurred with the Kennedy administration's position of expediting youth involvement in electoral politics. Bible stated, "The very strength and vigor of America's democratic heritage are dependent upon our young people being

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<sup>805</sup> Ibid, 2 August 1961, B1. Twenty-one had been the age requirement for presidential primary elections held in Washington during 1956 and 1960.

<sup>806</sup> Ibid, 5 August 1961, C1.

<sup>807</sup> Ibid, 23 August 1961, C8.

<sup>808</sup> Ibid, 30 August 1961, A1 and *New York Times*, 30 August 1961, 21.

integrated into our democratic processes by being allowed to participate at an early date commensurate with their abilities.”<sup>809</sup>

Political observers foresaw a tense fight over the differing ages of suffrage based on what had transpired during the congressional debate on the Twenty-third Amendment in 1959 and 1960. Northern Democrats had strongly supported enfranchising District 18-year-olds, but Republicans and southern Democrats forced them in committee action to logroll on the age qualification to secure passage of the amendment. Prior arguments notwithstanding, reconciling the age discrepancy between the House and Senate measures proved simpler than anticipated. On 19 September 1961, the Senate voted 38-36 to accept an amendment to the Bible committee’s proposal offered by Russell Long (D-LA) to establish twenty-one as Washington’s suffrage age. Senate approval of Long’s amendment marked a clear defeat for President Kennedy, the majority of the Senate District Committee, and the 59,000 young D.C. residents between 18 and 21.<sup>810</sup> Because the congressional settling of which citizens would be enfranchised by the Twenty-third Amendment did not get much discussion outside of the District of Columbia, there was little national attention brought to the youth suffrage issue.

Congress’s failure to adopt the 18-vote for Washington, D.C. exposed a juicy irony. Southern congressman utilized federal authority to deny a local government its preferred choice of whom to enfranchise. Stark racism rather than defense of

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<sup>809</sup> *Washington Post*, 10 September 1961, B12.

<sup>810</sup> *Ibid*, 20 September 1961, A1 and A5, and *New York Times*, 20 September 1961, 60.

states' rights inspired southern antagonism to the doling of the franchise under the Twenty-third Amendment. "There has been heavy Southern opposition to enfranchising the District of Columbia," the *New York Times* reported, "because of its large Negro population."<sup>811</sup> Though ratified by the states in only 286 days, no southern state accepted the amendment. According to Congressional Quarterly, southern refusal "was apparently motivated by the race issue;" in particular, the fear that Washington would elect a city government dominated by blacks.<sup>812</sup> Washington, D.C. was the only major American city in which African-Americans constituted a majority of the population: 54% of the city according to the census of 1960 and 59.9% according to Census estimates for 1961.<sup>813</sup> The *Washington Post* reported that "among Washingtonians of voting age, there are actually more white persons (248,000) than nonwhites (244,000)," but with D.C.'s growing black demographic "this balance may shift by 1964," the first year the 23<sup>rd</sup> Amendment would take effect.<sup>814</sup> A few weeks before the 1964 presidential election, Carlo J. Salzano of the *Chicago Tribune* conveyed that southern congressmen were stalling attempts to grant Washington, D.C. self-government "on the ground the Negroes would take control."<sup>815</sup> Typically rural and conservative, white southern Democratic

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<sup>811</sup> *Washington Post*, 30 March 1961, 16.

<sup>812</sup> Congressional Quarterly, *Congress and the Nation: A Review of Government and Politics in the Postwar Years, 1945-1964*, vol. 1, (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1965), 1516.

<sup>813</sup> *Newsweek*, 3 April 1961, 32, and *Washington Post*, 1 October 1961, E2.

<sup>814</sup> *Washington Post*, 1 October 1961, E2.

<sup>815</sup> Carlo J. Salzano, "White House Neighbors to Vote at Last," *Chicago Tribune*, 25 October 1964, A1.



congressmen apparently reckoned that expanding democracy in Washington, including a lowering of its voting age, might markedly enhance D.C.'s national influence as an urban, liberal, and black city. Normally slavish supporters of local political decisions, southern Democrats defied the requests of Washington's District Commissioners to defeat, for the second time, an 18-vote proposal before Congress.

The D.C. youth suffrage issue of 1961, like the federal 18-vote amendment of 1954, got tangled in the obstructionist politics orchestrated by southern Democrats. Though they constituted a numerical minority (e.g. only 128 of the 535 legislators serving in the 87<sup>th</sup> Congress that met in 1961-62), southern Democrats possessed an inordinate amount of institutional power.<sup>816</sup> Political scientists Ira Katznelson and Quinn Mulroy argue they formed a “structurally pivotal bloc” because of the need for southern votes to pass legislation.<sup>817</sup> Southern Democrats practiced what Katznelson and Mulroy label “situated partisanship”: some legislative situations called for the maintenance of regional needs, while others required acquiescence to national party wants. Southern Democrats realized that the best way to maintain white supremacy in their region was to retain majority standing within their party. Only through sustained party status could southern Democrats receive the rewards of congressional influence afforded by seniority. The key legislative question for Congresses in the New Deal-Great Society era involved when, rather than whether

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<sup>816</sup> Stephen G. Christianson, *Facts About the Congress*, (New York: H.W. Wilson and Company, 1996), 419.

<sup>817</sup> Ira Katznelson and Quinn Mulroy, “Was the South Pivotal? Situated Partisanship and the Policy Coalitions during the New Deal and Fair Deal,” *Journal of Politics* 74, no. 2 (April 2012): 604.

or how, southern Democrats would choose to exercise their institutional advantage. Katznelson and Mulroy contend southern Democrats most often affected the course of national politics, especially in thwarting proposals related to social justice, when they prioritized regional concerns over party interests.<sup>818</sup> “Acting as it did,” Katznelson and Mulroy conclude, “the South altered the vectors of lawmaking, including the era’s most significant policy decisions.”<sup>819</sup>

Into the 1960s, southern Democrats constituted the main congressional obstacle to the advance of youth enfranchisement. They consistently balked at the use of federal power to expand voting rights and routinely flexed institutional muscle to obstruct the extension of suffrage to disfranchised groups. The sway southern Democrats held in congressional committees served as a key impediment to franchise initiatives. The modern Congress relies on committees to shoulder the burden of lawmaking. The authors of the Constitution assumed that an irregular arrangement of temporary ad hoc panels could handle America’s legislative workload. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the developmental complications of national expansion spawned a system of permanent congressional committees to process the increased volume and complexity of federal legislation. By the early twentieth century, centralized majority-party control over legislative politics had given way to centralized committee government. As Congress institutionalized the system, the

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<sup>818</sup> This conclusion conforms to V.O. Key, Jr.’s thesis that in “its grand outlines, the politics of the South revolves around the position of the Negro.” V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 5.

<sup>819</sup> Katznelson and Mulroy, 616.

number of standing committees multiplied until reaching a peak in 1913 of 61 in the House and 74 in the Senate.<sup>820</sup> In 1946, Congress overhauled the committee structure via the Legislative Reorganization Act. The act's main feature reduced the number of standing committees to nineteen in the House and fifteen in the Senate. Streamlining the committee scheme to better regulate the flow of legislation seemed to fit the needs of Congress to check the increasing power of the executive branch.

Consolidation, however, inadvertently enhanced the autonomy of the committees and the power of their chairmen. Chairs possessed immense command over legislative operations by holding undisputed control over the agenda, resources, meeting times, structure, and staffing of committees. The deferential culture of Congress reinforced their authority. In a study of the postwar Congress, political scientist Richard F. Fenno, Jr. showed that sitting congressmen expected new members to serve an apprenticeship period during which they refrained from active participation in committee or floor deliberations. He found junior congressmen usually acquiesced to senior lawmakers, especially committee chairs, because an institutional culture predicated on reverence emphasized that deference to, and the development of, congressional expertise would yield high-quality legislation.<sup>821</sup> After passage of the 1946 Act, the committees so commanded the

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<sup>820</sup> Congressional Quarterly, *How Congress Works*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2013), 142.

<sup>821</sup> Richard F. Fenno, Jr., *Congressmen in Committees* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973).

lawmaking process that scholars called them “little legislatures.”<sup>822</sup> Party leaders in Congress labored to influence committee actions, but the chairmen, usually southern Democrats, possessed enough institutional independence to operate virtually as they wished.<sup>823</sup>

Southern Democrats often chaired committees in the postwar era because of the inexorable workings of a rigid seniority system within Congress. “Seniority” meant that longevity of congressional service, rather than individual ability or personal work ethic, determined the assignment of committee posts. The unwritten seniority system conferred chairmanships on the member of the majority party with the longest continuous service on the committee.<sup>824</sup> Because of good health, political acumen, and mal-apportioned home districts, a number of southern congressmen accumulated seniority. Because of the national electoral brawn of the Democratic Party, they gained access to prestigious committees in disproportionate numbers. Between Franklin Roosevelt’s victory in 1932 and Jimmy Carter’s defeat in 1980, the Democrats controlled both houses of Congress during every session

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<sup>822</sup> George Goodwin, Jr., *The Little Legislatures: Committees of Congress* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970).

<sup>823</sup> For a historical overview of the committee system, see Steven S. Smith and Christopher J. Deering, *Committees in Congress*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1990).

<sup>824</sup> Congressional historians identify two main reasons why seniority became the critical factor in determining committee chairmen. Some point to the 20<sup>th</sup>-century evolution of congressmen from part-time amateurs to professional politicians as the impetus. See David Brady, Kara Buckley, and Douglas Rivers, “The Roots of Careerism in the U.S. House of Representatives,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 4, (November 1999): 489-510. Other scholars emphasize that the 1910 “revolt” that removed the committee appointment power from the Speaker of the House necessitated seniority as the benchmark for assigning chairs. See Nelson W. Polsby, “The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives,” *American Political Science Review* 62, no. 1, (March 1968): 144-168.

except two: the 80<sup>th</sup> (1947-1949) and 83<sup>rd</sup> (1953-1955). Regionally, Democrats enjoyed a nearly 100-year political monopoly owing to the evisceration of the southern wing of the Republican Party during Reconstruction. Within the one-party South, those politicians who seemed to best deliver socioeconomic benefits to and maintain racial segregation for white constituents managed to construct lengthy legislative careers.<sup>825</sup> Repetitive incumbency allowed southern congressmen to accrue seniority, which gave them appointments and chairmanships on important committees whenever the Democrats controlled the House and/or the Senate. When John Kennedy took office in January 1961, southern Democrats chaired exactly half (12 of 24) of the standing committees though they constituted only 39% of their party's congressional delegation.<sup>826</sup>

Since Franklin Roosevelt's second term, southern Democrats had bolstered their congressional clout through an unofficial governing coalition with conservative Republicans (usually from the Midwest) based upon a common aversion to liberal and statist legislation.<sup>827</sup> The coalition usually materialized when southern Democrats (who feared federal activism would promote desegregation) crossed party lines to ally with conservative Republicans (who feared federal activism would

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<sup>825</sup> See Marian D. Irish, "The Southern One-Party System and National Politics," *Journal of Politics* 4, no. 1 (February 1942): 80-94 and V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation*.

<sup>826</sup> "Southern" congressmen were counted as those legislators who represented a former Confederate state. If congressmen from ex-border states (i.e. Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri) were added, 49% of Democrats in the 87<sup>th</sup> Congress (1961-62) were southerners, and the number of committee chairs held by southern Democrats would increase from 12 to 14. See Christianson, *Facts About the Congress*, 419-425, and *Congress and the Nation*, 1: 86a-91a.

<sup>827</sup> James T. Patterson, "A Conservative Coalition Forms in Congress, 1933-1939," *Journal of American History* 52, no. 4, (March 1966): 757-772.

provoke authoritarianism) to defeat social welfare, economic regulation, and foreign aid bills. With their power magnified by the seniority system, the conservative coalition regularly constricted congressional policy-making and repeatedly foiled executive activism. An analysis of roll-call votes between 1953 and 1980 by political scientist Mack C. Shelley II revealed the presidents in that era “had relatively little impact on conservative coalition success” in foiling executive policy wishes.<sup>828</sup> The conservative coalition seemed to so dominate national politics that scholar James MacGregor Burns described postwar America as a four-party political system in which Democrats and Republicans each divided into a progressive-urban-presidential wing and an obstructionist-rural-congressional oligarchy.<sup>829</sup>

Scholars often present the coalition (implicitly or explicitly) as a floor-voting bloc united by an ideological predisposition to block liberal initiatives.<sup>830</sup> Political scientist John F. Manley argues that southern Democrats and Republicans often informally coordinated tactics and strategy during both “the committee stage and the floor stage” of the legislative process to achieve policy success.<sup>831</sup> Though the conservative coalition had no formal leadership, staff, or structure akin to other congressional caucuses, Manley contends its ability to block bills in committee

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<sup>828</sup> Mack C. Shelley II, “Presidents and the Conservative Coalition in the U.S. Congress,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (February 1983): 93.

<sup>829</sup> James MacGregor Burns, *The Deadlock of Democracy: Four-Party Politics in America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963).

<sup>830</sup> For example, see David W. Brady and Charles S. Bullock, III, “Is There a Conservative Coalition in the House?” *Journal of Politics* 42, no. 2 (May 1980): 549-559.

<sup>831</sup> John F. Manley, “The Conservative Coalition in Congress,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 17, no. 2 (November/December 1973): 231.

before they reached either the House or Senate floor was its most powerful institutional weapon against liberal or statist measures. Government scholar Roger H. Davidson holds that the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 unintentionally strengthened “the grip the conservative coalition held upon the legislative apparatus.”<sup>832</sup> The consolidation of committees reduced the number of chairmen, which emboldened power of the remaining chairs – the majority of whom were southern Democrats. Their alliance with conservative Republicans, the iron-clad rules of accumulated seniority, and the national electoral muscle of the Democratic Party in the postwar era allowed a handful of southern chairmen to dominate congressional policymaking.

The names of Howard Smith (D-VA, House Rules), Wilbur Mills (D-AR, House Ways and Means), Richard Russell (D-GA, Senate Armed Services), Harry Byrd (D-VA, Senate Finance), and James Eastland (D-MS, Senate Judiciary) epitomized the period of southern-controlled, committee-centered government. Eminent historian of Congress, Donald A. Ritchie, notes that they, like other chairmen, “acted as barons who ruled their committees in styles ranging from despotic to democratic.”<sup>833</sup> This southern gang of chairmen formed a ruling elite that subscribed to an interpretation of American government in which the institutions of Congress were designed more to thwart than to promote action. House chairs

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<sup>832</sup> Roger H. Davidson, “The Advent of the Modern Congress: The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (August 1990): 73.

<sup>833</sup> Donald A. Ritchie, *The U.S. Congress: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 47.

routinely smothered progressive, reform-minded bills in committee; if Senate chairs could not do so, southern Democrats (sometimes in concert with their GOP allies) could talk measures to death on the legislative floor. The ability of chairmen to bend institutional rules to facilitate the South's needs turned Capitol Hill into a citadel for defending white southern interests and made congressional committees the front-line guard against perceived federal over-reach into regional affairs.

The command of southern chairmen over the national legislative agenda cleaved the Democratic Party. Since the 1920s, the Democrats had been a party divided by region, religion, culture, and ideology. The southern, native-born, white, rural, Protestant conservative branch found little common ground with the northern, immigrant, urban, Catholic-Jewish liberal wing. This unruly amalgam managed to coalesce behind the electoral bids of Franklin Roosevelt but fractured over his New Deal policies and Harry Truman's efforts to expand them. While northerners sought to enact legislation that would directly address the nation's most vexing socioeconomic issues, southerners united to resist any and all efforts that might impinge states' rights or allow the federal government to reshape sociopolitical practices in their region. Liberal Democrats grew more and more perturbed with the obstructive shenanigans orchestrated by southerners to defend white supremacy. During the late 1940s and 1950s, they watched their southern partymates block or water down bills related to education, housing, desegregation, fair employment practices, and voting rights. Southern Democrats, often in league with conservative Republicans, regularly torpedoed undesirable liberal legislation



via wily procedural maneuvers such as committee holds, points of order, and quorum calls.<sup>834</sup>

Democratic party leaders grew increasingly exasperated with the obstinacy of their southern brethren. The two Texans who led congressional Democrats for the majority of the 1950s, House Speaker Sam Rayburn and Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson, carefully straddled the liberal-northern and conservative-southern divisions within the Democratic Party. Rayburn and Johnson believed that the survival and enhancement of the New Deal agenda should be their party's chief legislative goal. They did not envision themselves as programmatic innovators nor as organizational reformers but as brokerage politicians who would advance Democratic policy ends through the means of accommodation and compromise. The sum of their individual talents equaled a formidable congressional team. The knowledge of Rayburn and Johnson about the norms and folkways of Congress, their working relationship with key lobby groups, their persuasive powers with fellow lawmakers, and their personal friendship yielded significant legislation, including the Interstate Highway and National Defense Education Acts, increased funding Social Security and the minimum wage, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

The power of the conservative coalition tempered the legislative activism of Rayburn and Johnson. Conservatives used their control of committees to dominate House proceedings and resorted to filibusters to stymie Senate business. Non-

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<sup>834</sup> See Ira Katznelson, Kim Geiger, and Daniel Kryder, "Limiting Liberalism: The Southern Veto in Congress, 1933-1950," *Political Science Quarterly* 108, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 283-306.

southern Democrats believed the conservative coalition operated as a cartel unjustly manipulating the levers of power to sustain ideological and individual self-interests. They chafed as southern committee chairmen and their Republican confederates manipulated the legislative agenda of Congress to push conservative initiatives.<sup>835</sup> Rayburn and Johnson had to bargain, cajole, and persuade southern chairs to follow the party's legislative wishes, but, often, their committees refused to adopt the slate of Democrat-preferred priorities. The frustrations with organizational obstructionism inspired liberal Democrats (who, over the course of the 1950s, had become the party's congressional majority) to demand that Rayburn and Johnson do something to check the conservative southerners who dominated the committee leadership positions. Rayburn and Johnson hesitated to tinker with institutional rules or intraparty regulations that might limit the authority of the chairmen, however, out of fear that a southern backlash might splinter the party.<sup>836</sup>

The mid-term elections of 1958 served as the catalyst that sparked the congressional reforms during the 1960s that curbed southern power. Sensing popular discontent over a sharp recession, an unemployment spike, and the launching of Sputnik, Democrats aggressively accused President Dwight Eisenhower of feckless policy-making and slack administering. Voters in 1958 handed the GOP its worst electoral defeat in twenty-five years. Democrats gained

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<sup>835</sup> See Eric Schickler and Kathryn Pearson, "Agenda Control, Majority Party Power, and the House Committee on Rules, 1937-1952," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (November 2009): 455-491.

<sup>836</sup> See Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), and D.B. Hardeman and Donald C. Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography* (Austin, TX: Texas Monthly Press, 1987).

fifteen members in the Senate (raising their majority from 49 to 64 of the 98 seats) and forty-eight in the House (increasing their majority from 234 to 282 of the 436 seats). All of the Democratic newcomers hailed from outside of the South, and, because of them, the former Union states had as many Democrats in Congress as the old Confederate states. Most of the greenhorns were liberals (giving the Democrats their largest liberal majority since 1936), and many were younger than the lawmakers they replaced.<sup>837</sup> Several of them, such as Representatives John Brademas (D-IN), Ken Hechler (D-WV), James O'Hara (D-MI), and Dan Rostenkowski (D-IL) and Senators Thomas Dodd (D-CT), Clair Engle (D-CA), Philip Hart (D-MI), Edmund Muskie (D-ME), and Jennings Randolph (D-WV), would play prominent roles in changing congressional operations, passing civil rights legislation, and/or championing youth suffrage.<sup>838</sup>

Soon after the elections of 1958, liberal Democrats began to unravel the establishmentarianism that had permitted the conservative coalition to dominate Congress. Former U.S. Senator Fred Harris's (D-OK) insider account of Congress's inner workings details how legislative titans such as Sam Rayburn, Wilbur Mills, Lyndon Johnson, Everett Dirksen, and Richard Russell presided over an "inner club" that commanded lawmaking. According to Harris, that clique controlled the

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<sup>837</sup> "Democrats Sweep 1958 Elections; Will Have 64 Senators, 283 Representatives, 35 Governors," in *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1958*, 14<sup>th</sup> ed., (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1959), 713-716 and *Congress and the Nation*, 1: 1516.

<sup>838</sup> Scholars Burdett Loomis and Timothy J. Barnett maintain that large, partisan congressional classes often change the institutions of the House and Senate in dramatic ways and produce significant legislation that had lasting effects. See Burdett Loomis and Timothy J. Barnett, "Thinking About My Generation: The Impact of Large Congressional Cohorts," *Forum* 12, no. 3 (October 2014): 499-517.

nation's legislative business because its members were insulated from public pressure due to longevity of service and empowered by the seniority-based hierarchical norms of Congress.<sup>839</sup> Political scientist Kenneth Kofmehl contends liberal Democrats eventually broke the entrenched institutional dominion of this "Establishment" by forming themselves into a viable activist bloc.<sup>840</sup> Their ends were plain: to increase the rate of Congress's productivity and improve the quality of its performance. Their motives were clear: to install a philosophy of lawmaking that emphasized active problem-solving. Their means were direct: to give more congressmen a "piece of the action;" i.e. to expand policymaking power and participation to wider circles of legislators. According to historian Julian E. Zelizer, the lawmakers who pushed for structural reforms saw the institutional culture of the seniority system and the organizational hegemony of the committees as impediments to solving the social justice problems that persistently plagued the nation.<sup>841</sup> Little by little, they chipped away at the power of senior congressional leaders and worked to clear the procedural clogs southern Democrats and their GOP partners had created to stymie the policymaking process.

In September 1959, liberal Democrats in the House of Representatives

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<sup>839</sup> Fred R. Harris, *Deadlock of Decision: The U.S. Senate and the Rise of National Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>840</sup> Kenneth Kofmehl, "The Institutionalization of a Voting Bloc," *Western Political Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (June 1964): 256-272.

<sup>841</sup> Julian E. Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill: The Struggle to Reform Congress and Its Consequences, 1948-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See also Michael Foley, *The New Senate: The Senate Liberals and Institutional Change, 1959-1972* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980).

formally organized a caucus, the Democratic Study Group, to spearhead efforts for institutional reform. Political scientists Arthur G. Stevens, Jr., Arthur H. Miller, and Thomas E. Mann assert that creation of the DSG “marked the first sustained effort to counter the conservative coalition” by House liberals.<sup>842</sup> Led by Richard Boling (MO), Lee Metcalf (MT), and Frank Thompson (NJ), the DSG labored to redefine the omnipotent role of the committees and reduce the hegemony of their chairmen – particularly Howard W. Smith of the Rules Committee. The Rules Committee played a critical role in the lawmaking process of the House of Representatives. It controlled whether a piece of legislation would be taken up by the House. If the Rules Committee allowed a proposal to be pondered by the full body, it determined the schedule of legislation for consideration. It also set the floor guidelines that framed the amount of time allotted for discussion and the types and number of amendments that could be offered to a bill. Because all House measures required specific rules for deliberation, the chairman of the Rules Committee possessed life-or-death power over legislation.<sup>843</sup>

Howard W. Smith of Virginia, a cantankerous and racist septuagenarian first elected to the House of Representatives in 1930, chaired the Rules Committee from 1956 to 1966. Congressman Carl Albert (D-OK), who served as Speaker of the House in the 1970s, described Smith as a “Tenth Amendment congressman. .

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<sup>842</sup> Arthur G. Stevens, Jr., Arthur H. Miller, and Thomas E. Mann, “Mobilization of Liberal Strength in the House, 1955-1970: The Democratic Study Group,” *American Political Science Review* 68, no. 2 (June 1974): 669. See also Mark J. Ferber, “The Formation of the Democratic Study Group,” in Nelson W. Polsby, ed., *Congressional Behavior*, (New York: Random House, 1971), 249-269.

<sup>843</sup> James A. Robinson, *The House Rules Committee*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963).

.brought up believing that Yankees, carpetbaggers, Republicans, and foreigners were enemies of his people and the way of life they enjoyed.”<sup>844</sup> Smith gained wide respect among his colleagues for his parliamentary prowess, especially his knowledge of House rules and how to use them ingeniously to block bills potentially harmful to white southerners. During most of Smith’s reign, the twelve-member Rules Committee consisted of eight Democrats and four Republicans. Smith and fellow southerner William Colmer of Mississippi (the next senior Democrat) frequently aligned with the four conservative GOP members to deadlock the group in 6-6 votes. Committee guidelines stipulated that bills had to receive a simple majority of 7-5 to reach the House. The other Democrats on the committee, Bolling, Tip O’Neill, and Homer Thornberry, became increasingly frustrated by Smith’s power as head gatekeeper of House legislation to forestall Democratic policy initiatives. Smith’s obstructionism was particularly galling since liberal Democrats had steadily increased their majority on Capitol Hill after 1956 and a progressive had captured the White House in 1960 by promising vigorous federal action to tackle America’s tough socioeconomic problems. The iron law of the seniority system, however, prevented Smith from being dislodged from his chairmanship.

Because he was so publicly antagonistic to John Kennedy’s proposals and worked so openly with conservative Republicans, Sam Rayburn and the DSG boldly moved to weaken Smith. In January 1961, they proposed increasing the size of the Rules Committee from 12 to 15. The three new seats were to be allocated to junior

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<sup>844</sup> Quoted in Bruce J. Dierenfield, *Keeper of the Rules: Congressman Howard W. Smith of Virginia*, (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1987), foreward.

Democrats. The “packing” ploy intended to neutralize Smith by ostensibly giving the majority party an 8 to 7 working margin within the committee. After intense lobbying by President Kennedy, Vice President Lyndon Johnson, and Speaker Rayburn (who each wanted the New Frontier legislative agenda to have fair consideration), the House narrowly (217 to 212) approved enlarging Rules to fifteen members. The change was only supposed to be applicable to the 86<sup>th</sup> Congress. But in 1963, the new Speaker, John McCormack (D-MA), convinced the House to adopt a resolution (235-196) that set fifteen as the permanent membership.<sup>845</sup> The “packing” scheme tilted the Rules Committee in a liberal direction and withered Smith’s obstructionism, thereby setting the stage for the historically transformative civil rights, voting rights, and social welfare legislation passed during the 1960s.

The change to the Rules Committee did not garner immediate returns for the 18-vote. Before 1970, no youth suffrage bill ever reached Rules because they were bottled up in the House Judiciary Committee by its chairman Emanuel Celler. Known for his genial disposition, hard-nosed partisanship, and arch-liberalism, Celler (b. 1888) became the fourth longest-serving congressman in House history by representing the New York City boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens for fifty years, 1923-1973.<sup>846</sup> His Columbia University law degree and the heterogeneous

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<sup>845</sup> Robert V. Remini, *The House: The History of the House of Representatives*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 366-387; Congressional Quarterly, *Congress and the Nation, 1945-1964*, 1407-1426 and Christianson, *Facts About the Congress*, xxi-xxii and 418-425. Smith tried, but failed, to convince the House to cut the Rules Committee back to twelve members. See *New York Times*, 7 January 1963, 1.

<sup>846</sup> Only Michigan’s John Dingell (59 years), Mississippi’s Jamie Whitten (54 years), and Georgia’s Carl Vinson (53 years) had longer tenures in the House.

demography of his district prompted Celler to seek a position on the Judiciary Committee, which holds oversight purview over immigration and civil rights legislation.<sup>847</sup> As chairman of Judiciary from 1949 to 1973 (except for 1953 and 1954 when the GOP controlled the House), Celler became a staunch advocate of liberal causes. He vigorously fought for the Twenty-third and Twenty-fourth Amendments, the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, 1964 and 1968, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Just as ardently, Celler opposed bills enfranchising adolescents. His anti-18-vote position remained firm for the entirety of his legislative career. The father of two daughters, Celler consistently maintained that teenagers simply lacked the mental maturity to cast a sensible vote. He emerged as a chief critic of youth suffrage during World War II. On a national radio program, he argued that “the average youths of 18 could not properly evaluate the intricate questions of economics and government, though they might be splendid physical specimens for fighting forces.”<sup>848</sup> He lampooned Dwight Eisenhower’s 18-vote proposal as “immature and naïve” for enfranchising credulous juveniles susceptible to demagoguery as a reward for their military service in Korea.<sup>849</sup> In March 1954, Celler offered a constitutional amendment barring all persons under age twenty-one

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<sup>847</sup> Emanuel Celler, *You Never Leave Brooklyn: The Autobiography of Emanuel Celler* (New York: John Day Company, 1953).

<sup>848</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, 20 October 1943, 8.

<sup>849</sup> *Ibid*, 8 January 1954, 11.



from voting in any election or primary as a counter to Eisenhower's measure. "Voting is as different from fighting as chalk is from cheese," Celler stated upon filing his bill, "Young men under 21 are more pliable and more amenable to indoctrination. Instant and unquestioning obedience may be most desirable from soldiers in the battlefield, but in a voter such obedience would be most undesirable. Self-interested groups and corrupt politicians would find such obedience a fertile playground."<sup>850</sup>

During the 1960s, Celler stepped up his advocacy for federal voting rights laws on behalf of disfranchised minorities. Before then, Celler accepted state jurisdiction over deciding the lawful prerequisites for enfranchisement – except in the case of poll taxes. In 1949, Celler argued before a House subcommittee that poll taxes should be outlawed as an undue financial obstacle to electoral participation. When asked if he supported additional federal impingements upon state voter requirements, Celler replied that he had "sufficient confidence in Congress to believe that it would not remove reasonable qualifications such as character – preventing criminals from voting – age, length of residence, and intelligence."<sup>851</sup> Though not a crony of Howard W. Smith, Celler put himself in de facto league with Smith's efforts to impede suffrage expansion due a shared philosophical accord for the right of states to set the legal determinants of enfranchisement.

As the civil rights movement exposed the struggles of southern blacks to vote,

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<sup>850</sup> *Congressional Record* 100 (10 March 1954): 3050.

<sup>851</sup> *New York Times*, 5 May 1949, 18.

his multiracial constituents prodded Celler to reverse his stance on states' rights. He came to see state stipulations for residence requirements and literacy tests more as undemocratic restrictions than acceptable prerequisites. Celler instigated the bill that eventually became the Twenty-third Amendment; he even served as the "principal sponsor" of the Twenty-fourth Amendment banning poll taxes as a prerequisite for voting in federal elections.<sup>852</sup> During House debate on the Voting Rights Act of 1965, according to historian Robert V. Remini, Celler steadfastly "demanded that the trickery and legalisms and coercion that blocked the voting rights of blacks in the [S]outh 'must be smashed and banished.'"<sup>853</sup> But Celler refused to budge on teen suffrage. Scholars Charles Whalen and Barbara Whalen find that his obstinacy exasperated some of his younger colleagues. They knew, however, that Democratic leaders would not diminish Celler's command or pack the Judiciary Committee as punishment for his inflexibility on the 18-vote because of his senior status and unyielding commitment to civil rights legislation.<sup>854</sup> Free from institutional or party pressure, Celler stymied all House efforts to reduce the age of enfranchisement.

The longtime chairman (1956-1978) of the Senate Judiciary Committee, James Eastland (D-MS), appeared equally adverse to youth suffrage. Known as the

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<sup>852</sup> Ibid, 28 August 1962, 19. See also Richard B. Bernstein with Jerome Agel, *Amending America: If We Love the Constitution So Much, Why Do We Keep Trying to Change It?* (New York: Times Books, 1993), 136-138.

<sup>853</sup> Remini, *The House*, 408.

<sup>854</sup> Charles Whalen and Barbara Whalen, *The Longest Debate: A Legislative History of the 1964 Civil Rights Act* (Cabin John, MD: Seven Locks Press, 1985), 29-30.

“Authentic Voice of the White South,” Eastland became the cigar-chomping caricature of segregationist intransigence.<sup>855</sup> Inside the corridors of Congress, Eastland was called “The Chairman,” and through his committee passed more than half of the legislation filed in the Senate. Historian Chris Myers Asch notes that Eastland’s fair handling of judicial nominations earned the grudging respect of his liberal colleagues, which blunted much of their disgust at his ardent defense of the South’s Jim Crow system.<sup>856</sup> Until Senate leaders figured out how to circumvent his powers in the 1960s, Eastland mercilessly killed numerous pieces of civil rights legislation.

Eastland was not as outspoken as Celler in his opposition to reducing voting ages, but he was more strident in his commitment to states’ rights. Most anytime the Senate considered a bill to expand suffrage, Eastland excoriated the action as an unlawful federal power grab. “The proposed legislation now before us,” he charged in a rebuke of the voting rights provisions within the Civil Rights Act of 1964, “usurps and arrogates to the National Legislature a constitutional prerogative that has been fixed and vested in the several States since the formation of the Union.”<sup>857</sup> Like other southern Democrats, Eastland categorized the 18-vote as one part of a congressional civil-rights campaign designed to cripple states’ rights and kneecap white supremacy. In a 1970 speech arguing against the extension of the

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<sup>855</sup> “The Authentic Voice,” *Time*, 26 March 1956, 48.

<sup>856</sup> Chris Myers Asch, *The Senator and the Sharecropper: The Freedom Struggles of James O. Eastland and Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: New Press, 2008).

<sup>857</sup> *Congressional Record* 110 (18 April 1964): 8362.

Voting Right Act, Eastland charged the Act was “unfair, unconstitutional, and discriminatory” because, as the Supreme Court had consistently determined, “Residence requirements, age, previous criminal record are obvious examples indicating factors which a State may take into consideration in determining the qualifications of voters.”<sup>858</sup>

The authority to set committee agendas provided Chairman Eastland an effective tool to impede Senate legislation anathema to his personal or political interests. But, as the 1960s progressed, Eastland and other southerners felt greater intra-committee pressure from northern and western Democrats to adopt the social justice measures that party leaders prized. As a result, southern senators increasingly resorted to the threat of filibusters to impede civil rights legislation.<sup>859</sup> Because of Senate rules that permitted extended discussion of pending bills, filibusters allowed a determined minority of one or a few senators to prevent passage of a proposal by prolonging debate and monopolizing floor action. Since filibusters ground Senate business to a halt, the threat of one often compelled bill managers to amend controversial legislation or resist bringing it to the floor.<sup>860</sup>

Southern senators often utilized the menace of a filibuster as an effective tactic against civil rights legislation. They generally followed a two-pronged

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<sup>858</sup> Ibid, 116 (5 March 1970): 6150 and 6151. Eastland cited *Lassiter v. Northampton Board of Elections*, 360 U.S. 45 (1959) that upheld the legality of North Carolina’s literacy test.

<sup>859</sup> For more about southern filibustering strategy against civil rights laws, see *Newsweek*, 19 August 1963, 31.

<sup>860</sup> Sarah A. Binder and Steven S. Smith, *Politics or Principle: Filibustering in the United States Senate* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1997).

strategy: talk disagreeable proposals to death or emasculate them by tacking on cumbersome amendments. In 1943, for instance, Theodore Bilbo (D-MS) halted a federal anti-poll tax measure via a week-long, intermittent talk-a-thon that involved burying the bill in a flurry of amendments, including a youth suffrage tender that became its poison pill. Political scientist Bruce I. Oppenheimer finds that the most successful filibusters, either really conducted or tactically feigned, occurred near the end of a legislative session (when it could threaten the completion of other business) or when a sizeable number of senators vehemently opposed a measure (as southern Democrats were to most civil rights bills). Oppenheimer argues timing was crucial to filibuster strategy because delaying maneuvers had to be precisely sprung to minimize the likelihood of gathering enough votes to invoke cloture, or the parliamentary petition to limit or end debate in the Senate.<sup>861</sup>

Established in 1917, Senate Rule XXII required extraordinary majorities to bring debate to an end: two-thirds of those senators present for a chamber vote between 1917 and 1949, two-thirds of the entire membership between 1949 and 1959, and, again, two-thirds of senators in attendance between 1959 and 1975. Because both of the two-thirds requirements were difficult to obtain, only four out of 23 cloture proposals were successful between 1917 and 1960. Calls for cloture mostly occurred when southern Democrats engaged in filibusters of civil rights bills. Prior to 1964, historical Gregory Koger reports, the Senate rejected cloture in every

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<sup>861</sup> Bruce I. Oppenheimer, "Changing Time Constraints on Congress: Historical Perspectives on the Use of Cloture," in *Congress Reconsidered*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1985), 393-414.

one of those instances, and each effort to reduce the two-thirds requirement to three-fifths or a simple majority was defeated.<sup>862</sup> Though the 1959 reversion to the original two-thirds present-and-voting rule (shepherded through the Senate by Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson) appeared modest, it frustrated the ability of southern senators to employ unlimited debate as a stratagem to stall or dilute unwanted legislation.<sup>863</sup> As scholars Neil MacNeil and Richard A. Baker state, “Tampering with Rule 22 suggested the weakening of the Southern bloc’s once formidable power.”<sup>864</sup> In June 1964, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-MT) defanged southern obstructionism by engineering the cloture of a 75-day filibuster against the Civil Rights Act.<sup>865</sup> The following year, he steered another cloture motion through the Senate to cut off southern scheming against the Voting Rights Act.<sup>866</sup> The historic cloture votes, according to *Washington Post* congressional correspondent Robert C. Albright, “broke the Senate sway of King Filibuster, the

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<sup>862</sup> Gregory Koger, *Filibustering: A Political History of Obstruction in the House and Senate* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 99-188.

<sup>863</sup> Johnson, who was trying to cultivate a statesman-like image to burnish his presidential chances in 1960, made sure the modification had constancy by writing into it that Senate rules shall henceforth “continue from one Congress to the next Congress” unless changed in accordance to other circumstances. See *New York Times*, 13 January 1959, 1. In 1975, the Senate loosened Rule XXII by setting a new requirement that three-fifths of the total membership be required to end debate.

<sup>864</sup> Neil MacNeil and Richard A. Baker, *The American Senate: An Insiders History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 326.

<sup>865</sup> *New York Times*, 11 June 1964, 1 & 21. Political scientists Gregory J. Wawro and Eric Schickler contend senators have historically supported the maintenance of the filibuster as a tool for upholding minority viewpoints. However, they find that senators also have been able to make procedural adjustments to limit filibusters, such as in 1964, when obstructionism threatens a legislative priority of the majority. See Gregory J. Wawro and Eric Schickler, “Legislative Obstructionism,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (June 2010): 297-319.

<sup>866</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 26 May 1965, 3.

Old South's modern day refuge."<sup>867</sup> The ability of Mansfield and other liberal Democrats to secure cloture on two major civil rights bills in two years loosened the southern grip on the Senate's domestic policy-making agenda.

Emboldened by their success in overcoming southern intransigence, northern Democrats pursued additional reforms inside Congress. Junior liberal lawmakers in the House and Senate pushed the effort to streamline institutional business and reduce the independent powers of the committee chairmen. They reckoned that moving toward a more equitable distribution of influence in shaping legislative agendas would eventually undermine the conservative coalition. Key regulations adopted between the mid-1960s and early 1970s allowed committee members other than the chair the ability to force the consideration of an issue, capped the amount of time committees could deliberate on legislation, stripped chairs of the exclusive authority to set meeting dates, set limits on proxy voting, and called for majority consent to table bills in committee.<sup>868</sup> Subcommittees also grew in number and autonomy, thereby growing the number of leadership positions and strengthening the checks on rogue chairmen. The institutional reforms harnessed the unbridled obstructionism of the past by shifting legislative controls from committee chairmen to party leaders and rewarding party loyalty over seniority. The net effect of such

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<sup>867</sup> Robert C. Albright, "Senate Invokes Cloture in Vote Rights Speedup," *Washington Post*, 26 May 1965, A1.

<sup>868</sup> See Arthur G. Stevens, Jr., Arthur H. Miller, and Thomas E. Mann, "Mobilization of Liberal Strength in the House, 1955-1970: The Democratic Study Group," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 68, no. 2 (June 1974): 667-681; and Barbara Sinclair, "The Distribution of Committee Positions in the U.S. Senate: Explaining Institutional Change," *American Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 2 (May 1988): 276-302.

changes wrested deal-making clout from southern Democrats and their conservative GOP sidekicks, which, according to political scientist Eva Bertram, yielded the transformative social justice legislation that liberals had long pursued – including youth suffrage.<sup>869</sup>

The efforts to restructure the conduct of institutional business engendered generational discord among congressmen. Political scientist Nelson Polsby finds that the procedural reforms within Congress coincided with a great turnover of its personnel roster. Polsby contends that immense demographic transformations (particularly mass suburbanization and the Baby Boom) spurred the growth of heterogeneous metropolitan population centers. The lawmakers elected from these districts tended to be relatively young, independent, and disdainful of traditions that impeded reform or innovation – just like the constituents they represented. By the early 1970s, Polsby concludes, successive crops of such like-minded congressmen gradually replaced older politicians (usually from the rural South or urban North) who had accumulated institutional power within the seniority structure.<sup>870</sup> During the 1960s, elder lawmakers sought to sustain the establishmentarian culture that emphasized congeniality, collegiality, and conventionality as the time-honored mores of a professional legislator. Political scientists who studied the postwar Congresses chronicled the internal socialization and intense coercion upholding the

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<sup>869</sup> Eva Bertram, “Democratic Divisions in the 1960s and the Road to Welfare Reform,” *Political Science Quarterly* 126, no. 4 (Winter 2011/2012): 579-610.

<sup>870</sup> Nelson W. Polsby, *How Congress Evolves: Social Bases of Institutional Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).



institutional folkways that governed congressional operations. Their studies revealed that inexperienced lawmakers endured an “apprenticeship” that emphasized homage to tradition, respect for elders, and acquiescence to superiors as the basis for legislative accomplishment and career advancement.<sup>871</sup> In 1964, journalist David S. Broder observed that most every high-ranking congressman had followed the “established route up the seniority ladder to a committee chairmanship and increasing influence with The [leadership] Establishment.” But Congress, Broder asserted, also provided “outlets for ‘the angry men’ who cannot conform to these comfortable career lines.”<sup>872</sup>

In the decade after the historic 1958 elections, more and more legislators, both Democrat and Republican, conspicuously defied Congress’s establishmentarian ethos. In particular, junior congressmen increasingly refused to abide customs that muted their representative voices or limited their legislative agency. They insisted that individual capacity rather than years of service should determine institutional ranks of influence. These younger, reform-minded lawmakers seemed to be inspired by a zeitgeist emphasizing, as *New York Times* political commentator Arthur Krock explained, “fresh approaches to public problems to which youth is supposed to be

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<sup>871</sup> See, for example, Herbert Asher, “The Learning of Legislative Norms,” *American Political Science Review* 67, no. 2 (June 1973): 499-515; Ralph K. Huitt, “The Congressional Committee: A Case Study,” *American Political Science Review* 48, no. 2 (June 1954): 340-365; Donald R. Matthews, “The Folkways of the United States Senate: Conformity to Group Norms and Legislative Effectiveness,” *American Political Science Review* 53, no. 4 (December 1959): 1064-1089; Nelson W. Polsby, “The Institutionalization of the U.S. House of Representatives,” *American Political Science Review* 62, no. 1 (March 1968): 144-168; and David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion* (New York: Knopf, 1951).

<sup>872</sup> David S. Broder, “What Makes a Great Senator?” *New York Times Magazine*, 14 June 1964, 80.

more responsive than maturity.”<sup>873</sup> They also appeared to be motivated by a perception that Congress had failed to uphold its part in the national lawmaking process. Tom Wicker, Washington correspondent for the *New York Times*, remarked in 1965 that “Congress has let itself become too small.” While the modern presidency had evolved to become a “remarkable instrument of governing power,” Wicker maintained, “Congress has not similarly grown and adapted itself to new conditions.”<sup>874</sup> Among several explanations of its deficiencies, many contemporary political observers faulted Congress for maintaining a dogmatic internal culture that ranked its members by experience rather than talent and valued the following of arcane institutional procedures over achieving notable legislative results.<sup>875</sup>

The jolting assertiveness of the greenhorns was a byproduct of a moment of significant turnover in congressional membership. Nearly 60% of the legislators who served in Dwight Eisenhower’s last Congress (1959-1961) would leave Capitol Hill before Richard Nixon’s election to the presidency in 1968. Though the average age of Congress fluctuated little in that decade, the newcomers appeared “younger” (i.e. more energetic, strong-willed, and activist) than their predecessors.<sup>876</sup> Raymond Moley, lead columnist for *Newsweek*, observed that they were “not merely an ‘angry’

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<sup>873</sup> Arthur Krock, “Youth Versus Age: A Trend to the Younger Candidates Is Stirring Republican Apprehension,” *New York Times*, 2 October 1960, 11E.

<sup>874</sup> Tom Wicker, “Congress: What Role in the Twentieth Century?” *Ibid*, 24 August 1965, 30.

<sup>875</sup> See, for example, Charles L. Clapp, *The Congressman: His Work as He Sees It* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1964).

<sup>876</sup> The average age of the legislators at the beginning of the 86<sup>th</sup> Congress (1959-1961) was 52.7 years; for the 91<sup>st</sup> Congress (1969-1971), it was 53 years of age. See “Who Gets Elected,” *Congressional Quarterly’s Guide to Congress*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1991), 700.

generation bent on revenge against their elders;” rather, “these young members of both parties” generally refused to abide the orthodoxy imposed by “their own party leadership.”<sup>877</sup> As Moley sensed, the youthful neophytes who came to Congress in the 1960s were more self-assured and less conformist than past members. They respected institutional traditions but were unwilling to defer robotically to the orders of senior congressmen. Most of them refused to accept the apprenticeship custom, especially within their committees. Importantly, they disregarded Sam Rayburn’s classic dictum, “The way to get along is to go along.” Instead, they worked to weaken the grip of the seniority system and the committee structure to allow rank-and-file lawmakers meaningful participation in policymaking. Such institutional changes, along with the election of more iconoclastic legislators, eventually wrought the enactment of historic civil rights bills and major suffrage laws, including the Twenty-sixth Amendment. David Broder described this cohort of eager legislators as a “new breed . . . impatient with the old ways of doing business; less willing to ‘move up the chairs,’ waiting silently for years for their turn at a subcommittee chairmanship; less deferential to their elders; and more insistent on grabbing a piece of the action now.”<sup>878</sup> The claims of this “new breed” of junior congressmen for their rightful share of congressional power mirrored the demands of the “new generation” of young citizens for an equal voice in national decision-

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<sup>877</sup> Raymond Moley, “Perspective: Determined Young Men,” column, *Newsweek*, 23 October 1961, 108.

<sup>878</sup> David S. Broder, “Reforming the House,” *Washington Post*, 24 September 1972, B7 and “The Changing House,” *Ibid*, 26 November 1972, B7.

making.

By all accounts, the 1960s were years of extraordinary domestic turbulence. As historian James Miller contends, “The Sixties’ represented not just a span of time but an impetuous, extreme spirit – youthful and reckless, searching and headstrong, foolhardy, romantic, willing to try almost anything.”<sup>879</sup> The upheavals that define “The Sixties” as exciting and transformative took place because the nation’s most excluded members insisted upon full and equal access to all the privileges and opportunities afforded American citizens. Many of the decade’s storms and stresses were set off by disgruntled adolescents. Idealistic young people rebelled against the enduring inequalities and injustices that stained the American Dream but adults had abided. They rejected mainstream beliefs, engaged in direct-action protests, and defied government bureaucracies. In seeking to empower disadvantaged groups, youth activists took to the streets to contest the power of elites, reform social conventions, end the Vietnam War, fight for socioeconomic justice, revamp university governance, and democratize political life. Young people also sought to empower themselves by insisting that adult lawmakers enfranchise citizens at least 18-years-old.

Two sources of inspiration roused young people to get actively involved in public affairs. Many youths were moved by the uplifting words of John Kennedy’s inaugural address. In his speech, Kennedy purposefully spoke as the leader of “a

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<sup>879</sup> James Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 317.

new generation of Americans,” implying that Dwight Eisenhower and Congress’s leadership cadre had come to represent older Americans. He had promised during the 1960 campaign to get the nation “moving again” and outlined in the inaugural how muscular governmental activism at home and abroad would invigorate the nation. Many young Americans who were attracted to Kennedy’s youth, will, and dynamism took to heart his call to public service, especially those idealistic teenagers and 20-somethings who joined the Volunteers in Service to America or the Peace Corps.

The bold activism of the civil rights movement stirred other youths. The sit-ins, marches, protests, ideals, and sacrifices associated with the black offensives against white supremacy in the South captured the imaginations of young people all over the nation. “There was a feeling that they were us and we were them, and a recognition that they were expressing something we we feeling as well,” recalled Rennie Davis, an Oberlin College student who became a leader of the Students for a Democratic Society.<sup>880</sup> The civil rights movement gave cause to many youths, particularly from minority groups, to rebel against all forms of injustice and inequality. The energy, tactics, and courage of civil rights activists inspired other social reform movements, such as those on behalf of women, Latinos, Native Americans, homosexuals, and disabled persons, that were infused by young advocates.

By the mid-1960s, the heightened interest in social causes and public service

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<sup>880</sup> Quoted in Milton Viorst, *Fire in the Streets: America in the 1960s* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 176.

stoked by the civil rights movement and President Kennedy propelled youth activists into political work. Academic explanations of 60s political advocacy among young people generally divide along two theoretical tracks. While some scholars argue youth political involvement was a predictable outgrowth of the youthful rebellion against the older generation, others contend young people merely put into action the political attitudes and behaviors taught to them by their parents and teachers.<sup>881</sup> Whether of liberal or conservative bent, young partisans challenged what they perceived to be the unfulfilled political promises and unacceptable social circumstances created by their elders.

Through various means of petition and protest, young people forced issues to the forefront of national concern that had been ignored or deferred by adults. Young liberals insisted that politicians take direct, remedial action against discrimination, poverty, ignorance, and the military-industrial complex. During the early and mid-1960s, they organized and staffed seminal movements on behalf of civil rights for minorities, aid to the underprivileged, the elimination of nuclear weapons, and peace in Vietnam. Those movements inspired liberal Democrats in Congress to initiate bold policies, which moderate Republicans mostly supported, that advanced equality and opportunity at home and goodwill and amity abroad.

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<sup>881</sup> See E. Wight Bakke and Mary S. Bakke, *Campus Challenge: Student Activism in Perspective* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1971); Anthony Esler, *Bombs, Beards, and Barricades: 150 Years of Youth in Revolt* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971); Lewis S. Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations: The Character and Significance of Student Movements* (New York: Basic Books, 1969); Richard Flacks, "The Liberated Generation: An Exploration of the Roots of Student Protest," *Journal of Social Issues* 23, no. 3 (July 1967): 52-75; George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1987); and David L. Westby, *The Clouded Vision: The Student Movement in the United States in the 1960s* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1976).

Lyndon Johnson unreservedly embraced the idealistic commitment of John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and their youthful devotees to improve America's quality of life. Johnson's executive dash and legislative savvy advanced a broad reform agenda he called the "Great Society." The Great Society produced a torrent of new federal programs that addressed problems regarding segregation, prejudice, poverty, food security, housing, health care, job training, education, immigration, and the environment. The great bulk the Great Society emerged during the 89<sup>th</sup> Congress of 1965-66, a legislative session many people regard as one of the most significant in U.S. history.<sup>882</sup>

Johnson's presidency also witnessed a historic expansion of voting rights. Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy had moved cautiously in the field of suffrage; neither administration wanted to get too far ahead of public opinion on broadening the franchise nor cared to challenge the tradition of state prerogative in determining voter qualifications. By the time Johnson's term began, many Americans insisted that the franchise was less a privilege and more a right that should be extended to as many qualified citizens as possible. Media exposés chronicled suffrage problems rooted in local prejudices that consistently stymied

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<sup>882</sup> For example, journalist Jonathan Darman states, "Historians would in time come to view the Eighty-Ninth Congress as perhaps the most productive legislative session in American history, and for later generations of progressives, the Congress that produced the Voting Rights Act, Medicare, and so many other programs would come to seem the greatest Congress of all time." See Jonathan Darman, *Landslide: LBJ and Ronald Reagan at the Dawn of a New America* (New York: Random House, 2014), 316. For laudatory views of the 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, see G. Calvin Mackenzie and Robert Weisbrot, *The Liberal Hour: Washington and the Politics of Change in the 1960s* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008) and Edward D. Berkowitz, "The Great Society," in *The American Congress: The Building of Democracy*, ed. Julian E. Zeilzer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 566-583. For contemporary praise of the 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, see "Hard Act to Follow," *Newsweek*, 26 April 1965, 23 and "LBJ and the Fabulous 89<sup>th</sup> Go Home," *Ibid*, 1 November 1965, 21-23.

minorities and suburban migrants who wanted to vote. Government studies bolstered the press reports. In October 1963, the Commission on Civil Rights detailed the pathetic stunts of bigotry employed by white voter registrars to reject black applicants. The Commission called for uniform voter-registration standards, enforced by federal officials if necessary, to thwart “the evil of arbitrary disfranchisement.”<sup>883</sup> In December 1963, the President’s Commission on Registration and Voting Participation, a special bipartisan panel appointed by JFK the previous March, made public its examination of the procedural restrictions that deterred Americans from voting. Chaired by Richard M. Scammon, director of the Census Bureau, the 11-member commission found that “unreasonable, unfair, and outmoded” election laws denied millions of capable citizens the opportunity to vote.<sup>884</sup> The Commission offered three core proposals to swell the ranks of voters: shorten residency requirements to thirty days, abolish literacy tests and poll taxes, and lower franchise ages to eighteen. The commission reasoned that establishing the 18-vote might fix the dismal turnout rate among voters under age thirty. It claimed a “major reason” young electors stayed away from the polls was that “by the time they have turned 21 . . . many young people are so far removed from the stimulation of the educational process that their interest in public affairs has waned. Some may be lost as voters for the rest of their lives.”<sup>885</sup>

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<sup>883</sup> *New York Times*, 1 October 1963, 20.

<sup>884</sup> *Report of the President’s Commission on Registration and Voting Participation* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963): 11.

<sup>885</sup> *Ibid.*, 43. See also *Newsweek*, 30 December 1963, 16.



Like many Americans, President Johnson thought of suffrage denial as a problem that demanded federal remedy since state statutes and local ordinances suborned disfranchisement. “I am told that it is easier today to buy a destructive weapon, a gun, in a hardware store than it is to vote,” Johnson remarked upon receiving the President’s Commission inquiry, “Why should we make it difficult for people to vote?”<sup>886</sup> Taking the commission reports as a blueprint, Johnson sought to maximize voter turnout and minimize voter discrimination – even if that meant bending states’ rights tradition. For geographically mobile Americans, he pursued standardizing residency requirements and registration procedures to spur electoral participation. For black southerners, Johnson pushed hard to collapse the racial disfranchisements whites constructed to circumvent the Fifteenth Amendment. Civil rights leaders put suffrage high on their political agenda, and, one by one, Johnson, Congress, and the Supreme Court labored to smash the undemocratic barriers to African-American voting. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 barred voter registrars from applying unequal criteria in registration procedures or rejecting applications because of immaterial errors. The Twenty-fourth Amendment, also promulgated in 1964, made poll taxes unconstitutional as a requirement for voting in national elections. In 1966, the Supreme Court nixed poll tax prerequisites for balloting in state and local elections.<sup>887</sup> The Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibited any government from using voting procedures that denied a person suffrage on the

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<sup>886</sup> *New York Times*, 21 December 1963, 11.

<sup>887</sup> *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections*, 383 U.S. 663 (1966).

basis of race or color. It abolished the use of literacy tests for anyone who had completed sixth grade or its equivalent for naturalized citizens schooled outside of the United States. The Act also allowed the U.S. attorney general to send federal election registrars to places with long histories of voter discrimination. These same areas had to submit all proposed changes in their suffrage laws or voting practices to federal officials for approval.<sup>888</sup>

Advocates of youth suffrage realized that the actions of Congress and the Supreme Court had undercut the states' rights arguments against the 18-vote. The provisions of the laws and rulings circumscribed the power of states to have sole discretion over the determination and application of voter requirements. Moreover, the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts squashed the argument that teenagers were not smart enough to vote by defining literacy, in terms of legal qualification to cast a ballot, as the attainment of a 6<sup>th</sup>-grade education. The institution of federal checks on state administration of suffrage forever transformed American politics by empowering formerly disfranchised voters and enabling their election to public office. Federal activism did much to expand the right to vote to all citizens – except young people. While government officials eased residency requirements and eliminated literacy tests and poll taxes, they neglected to lower voting ages to eighteen. During the era 1960 to 1967, legislators in twenty-seven states filed sixty-seven 18-vote measures. Of those 67 resolutions, only two were sent to state

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<sup>888</sup> In 2013, the Supreme Court overturned the preclearance section of the Voting Rights Act. It held that the formula of events and facts used to place a state or county under the Act's coverage was unconstitutional because it was based on 1975 data and violated the equal sovereignty of states as applied. See *Shelby County v. Holder*, 570 U.S. 193 (2013).

voters for approval, and both were rejected. In addition, New York's 1967 constitutional convention declined an opportunity to promulgate eighteen as the state's new suffrage age.<sup>889</sup> Federal proposals to establish eighteen as the standard franchise age proved equally fruitless. Between the 87<sup>th</sup> (1961-62) and the 90<sup>th</sup> (1967-68) Congresses, lawmakers proposed 98 constitutional amendments to set the national voting age at eighteen: 11 in the Senate and 87 in the House of Representatives; none were reported out of committee in either body.<sup>890</sup>

Reasons for the legislative inaction on youth suffrage varied. In statehouses, the issue got wrapped into drives to modernize constitutions. The passage of federal civil rights laws and the promulgation of the "one man, one vote" standard by the Supreme Court spurred several states to update outmoded and cumbersome franchise statutes.<sup>891</sup> The goal of modernizing suffrage laws was to inspire renewed interest in voting by loosening old voter requirements. The revision of state codes, however, stopped short of enfranchising new classes of voters; instead, lawmakers

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<sup>889</sup> Connecticut (1965) and Michigan (1966) electors declined to lower franchise ages to eighteen. See Frederick H. Pauls and Louise Comfort, *State Action to Lower the Voting Age: A Report in Two Parts*, Legislative Reference Service, Report GGR-222R, (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1969), 2-10.

<sup>890</sup> See 87<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session (1961): Senate Joint Resolutions 20, 54, 67, and 71, and House Joint Resolutions 81, 350, and 368. 88<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session (1963): Senate Joint Resolutions 2 and 38. 88<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session (1964): House Joint Resolution 941. 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session (1965): Senate Joint Resolution 35, and House Joint Resolutions 52, 59, 432, 440, 620, 623, 652, 655, 656, 663, 670, 672, 674, 675, 677, 680, 686, 698, and 782. 89<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session (1966): Senate Joint Resolution 177, and House Joint Resolutions 796, 811, 861, 907, 1134, 1274, and 1303. 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session (1967): Senate Joint Resolutions 8, 14, and 78, and House Joint Resolutions 18, 50, 56, 85, 86, 95, 107, 118, 130, 134, 136, 188, 205, 211, 232, 260, 288, 289, 322, 326, 328, 330, 331, 332, 334, 336, 337, 341, 342, 344, 346, 353, 356, 374, 375, 386, 440, 486, 502, 570, 574, 632, 665, 695, 775, 809, and 842. 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session (1968): House Joint Resolutions 977, 1078, 1137, 1189, 1195, 1260, 1275, 1375, 1382, and 1394.

<sup>891</sup> *New York Times*, 14 October 1965, 49 and *Washington Post*, 27 July 1967, F8.

worked to broaden electoral access for people already enfranchised, which was an effort encouraged by the federal government. As Attorney General Robert Kennedy told the 1961 graduates of the University of Georgia's law school, "we must make a total effort to guarantee the ballot to every American of voting age – in the North, as well as in the South."<sup>892</sup> The attention given to boosting the turnout of adult voters caused state assemblymen to bypass enfranchising adolescents. In addition, many state officials contended that extending voting rights to inexperienced and immature teenagers might pose unintended harm to American democracy. Naïve and impressionable juveniles, they posited, could be easily manipulated to subvert public order by unscrupulous schemers. Maryland's 1967 Constitutional Convention Commission, for example, rebuffed an 18-vote proposal because it would: 1) add "idealistic rather than practical" persons to the voting populace, 2) enfranchise people "highly influenced by their parents, schools, television, and special interest groups," and 3) spur "energetic college students" to "overrun" the local governments of small college towns.<sup>893</sup>

In the White House, the issue of adolescent enfranchisement stirred yawning indifference. Neither Democratic president of the 1960s, John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, made reducing suffrage ages a top legislative priority. Their aloof position on the issue seemed unusual because of their avid encouragement of youth participation in civic matters, which stemmed from an unreserved confidence in the

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<sup>892</sup> *New York Times*, 7 May 1961, 62.

<sup>893</sup> *Washington Post*, 31 July 1967, B4.

capacities of adolescents. In 1962, for example, Kennedy challenged the participants of the Girl Scout Senior Roundup to “make the most of your natural abilities, develop your skills and character, seek wider horizons in order to become more constructive citizens of our nation and the world even before you become of voting age.”<sup>894</sup> Both Kennedy and Johnson couched their political appeals in language that implied that being young in spirit, if not in years, would offer a fresh and vigorous approach for dealing with the aging international and domestic problems of the postwar era. Johnson even hailed a throng of college students gathered on the White House lawn in 1965 as his “fellow revolutionaries” in the cause of change and progress.<sup>895</sup> LBJ and JFK certainly appreciated the labors of young Americans on behalf of their nation.

Though Kennedy and Johnson asked young people to do things for their country, they never asked Congress to do anything for voteless youths. Both men warmly espoused the idea of youth suffrage, but neither felt compelled to force legislation on the issue. As senators, Kennedy and Johnson voted against Dwight Eisenhower’s 1954 proposal to establish eighteen as the voting age in federal elections as a violation of states’ rights prerogative.<sup>896</sup> As a presidential candidate, Kennedy replied to questionnaire that he supported the teen franchise but felt “that the voting age should remain a matter for state decision.”<sup>897</sup> In June 1961,

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<sup>894</sup> *New York Times*, 21 July 1962, 9.

<sup>895</sup> *Ibid*, 5 August 1965, 13.

<sup>896</sup> *Congressional Record* 100 (21 May 1954): 6979.

<sup>897</sup> Quoted in Wendell W. Cultice, *Youth’s Battle for the Ballot: A History of Voting Age in*

Assistant Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach testified before a Senate subcommittee that the president opposed a constitutional amendment offered by Estes Kefauver (D-TN) to lower the national voting age to eighteen as potentially injurious to federalist tradition.<sup>898</sup> In contrast, the Kennedy administration vigorously pursued passage of the federal amendments that took away from states the power to charge poll taxes and utilize literacy tests to screen possible electors. President Johnson unabashedly employed federal authority to secure the right to vote for African-Americans and other minority groups but exerted little effort to enfranchise adolescents. In March 1965, Johnson said he wanted to add an 18-vote provision to the Voting Rights Act but held back because “the lawyers felt that that would complicate the matter and that it should be approached otherwise.”<sup>899</sup> For the Machiavelli of congressional machination to shrink away from a legislative battle on behalf of teen voting within the arena of a civil rights bill appeared both shrewd (to adults) and timid (to adolescents). Because Kennedy and Johnson did not consider youth suffrage one of the big domestic issues of the day, they viewed it as a low executive priority compared to more pressing matters, such as containing communism, winning the space race, establishing welfare programs, and eliminating racial segregation.<sup>900</sup> Even though junior lawmakers were ascending

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*America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 65. Cultice apparently sent an issues survey including the question about reducing the voting age to both Kennedy and his opponent Richard Nixon.

<sup>898</sup> *New York Times*, 29 June 1961, 22.

<sup>899</sup> *Ibid*, 21 March 1965, 70.

<sup>900</sup> *Ibid*, 31 May 1968, 16.

and the committee oligarchies were crumbling inside Congress, there was still enough bipartisan resistance to youth suffrage that Kennedy and Johnson reckoned a legislative battle on its behalf was not worth putting other, more important concerns at risk. Hence, the 18-vote languished without a strong push from the White House.

On Capitol Hill, most congressmen did not rank reducing voting ages as an issue of critical importance. The transformative legislation Congress passed during Kennedy-Johnson years showed they were willing to take on the toughest challenges of the moment. Nor did they have to be afraid of political fallout since support and opposition for youth suffrage cut across ideological and party lines. Yet the legislative inaction on the ninety-eight 18-vote proposals offered between 1960 and 1968 clearly signified Congress's indifference to enfranchising adolescents. And never in that span did either the House or Senate host a genuine floor debate about the pros and cons of teen voting similar to what had taken place in 1954. Congressional advocates could have used parliamentary maneuvers to ramrod 18-vote bills through the lawmaking process like other social justice measures of the period. Promulgating a national suffrage age, however, simply did not garner "the fierce urgency of now" that drove passage of the era's progressive initiatives and electoral reforms.<sup>901</sup> Legislative apathy allowed Judiciary chairs Emanuel Celler and James Eastland to let voting-age measures expire of neglect within their committees.

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<sup>901</sup> See Julian E. Zelizer, *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Lyndon Johnson, Congress, and the Battle for the Great Society* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015).

The lack of legislative resolve in Washington and the states paralleled contemporary disinterest for recalibrating franchise ages. George Gallup's polling organization, a reliable barometer of public opinion on the hot topics of the moment, took no surveys gauging civic views on youth suffrage between March 1954 and August 1965.<sup>902</sup> Prior to 1965, discussion of the issue in the public domain occurred chiefly among young people. Many youths subscribed to the "old enough to fight-old enough to vote" aphorism. Other teens, like a male from Indianapolis who wrote Senator Richard Russell, pointed out that since the "federal government helped the Negroes and the women" gain the right to vote, "It is time for the federal government to help the young adults."<sup>903</sup> However, most youths appeared to disfavor the idea. In 1960 and 1961, for example, the Illinois teens who attended the YMCA's mock "Youth Legislature" turned down bills favoring voting rights for 18-year-olds.<sup>904</sup> An informal poll of high-schoolers attending a regional Junior Achievement conference in December 1962 also revealed a clear distaste (340-136) for reducing franchise ages to eighteen.<sup>905</sup> The prevailing sentiment against the proposals emphasized that adolescents were too inexperienced and immature to be enfranchised. "I happen to be almost 21 years old, and believe me," a Chicago

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<sup>902</sup> George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 2:1218 and 3:1958.

<sup>903</sup> William R. Cook to Richard B. Russell, 30 April 1960, Series XV, Subseries AY, Box 349, Richard B. Russell Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens.

<sup>904</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 24 April 1960, 16 and 26 April 1961, B12.

<sup>905</sup> *Ibid*, 30 December 1962, 16.



resident declared, “no 18-year-olds (or teen-agers collectively) are prepared to vote. They don’t have enough brains or interest. They are preoccupied with cars and girls and probably won’t even bother to vote when they are 21 or older.”<sup>906</sup>

Adults questioned whether teenagers possessed the emotional and cognitive capacity to vote sensibly. The allies and adversaries of the 18-vote shared a common view of teenagers as idealistic, passionate, willful, and immature, but they disagreed which qualities mostly defined youth. Advocates of the 18-vote believed young people had, in the words of a Long Island resident, “the ability as a group to make contributions to wise decision making” in political venues.<sup>907</sup> Representative Ken Hechler (D-WA) questioned why ignorant elders could vote while knowledgeable teenagers could not since, as statistical data plainly showed, “There is far more illiteracy among people over sixty than there is among people between 18 and 21.”<sup>908</sup> However, most adults agreed that young people were too callow to be entrusted with the franchise. A 18-vote bill filed in the Wisconsin legislature in 1961 prompted the *Milwaukee Journal* to affirm, “Voting intelligently requires knowledge, judgment, and maturity. . . . Many young persons lack these qualities. Those who have them won’t mind waiting three years for the right to vote.”<sup>909</sup> The conservative editors of the *Wall Street Journal* urged state and federal legislators to

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<sup>906</sup> G. Piekarczyk, “Teen-Agers Too Dumb to Vote?” letter to editor, *Ibid*, 10 January 1964, 16.

<sup>907</sup> Patrick D. Gill, “Lower Voting Age Wanted,” letter to editor, *New York Times*, 28 December 1963, 22.

<sup>908</sup> *Congressional Record* 109 (23 December 1963): 25498.

<sup>909</sup> “No Teen-Age Voting,” guest editorial, *Chicago Tribune*, 16 March 1961, 16.

uphold the 21-vote standard to “protect our society and its governments against the irresponsible, and against those who understand neither our political system nor the issues facing it nor the full meaning of the voting privilege.”<sup>910</sup> Lawmaking adults in Washington, D.C. and the states concurred. Executive and legislative indifference curtailed the opportunity to build momentum on behalf of adolescent enfranchisement. Nor did government officials feel a compelling need to act since there was no widespread demand or vibrant grassroots support among adults or adolescents to lower voting ages.

The Vietnam War revived public interest in youth suffrage. In 1965, Lyndon Johnson made the fateful decision to use military means to contain communism in South Vietnam. Sending American troops into combat to prevent the communist dominoes from falling across the rest of Asia eventually doomed LBJ’s presidency. Initially, support for the war was high across all demographic groups, including youth. A Gallup survey taken in August 1965 revealed that 76% of Americans under age 30 backed the war, compared to 64% of persons between 30 and 49 and 51% of those over age 50.<sup>911</sup> The same month, Gallup found a “majority of America’s adults believe that the voting age should be lowered, to permit persons 18, 19, and 20 years old to vote.”<sup>912</sup> The numbers of adults who accepted the 18-vote in August 1965 (57%) nearly replicated the approval rating in Gallup’s last teen voting poll

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<sup>910</sup> “Lower Standards for Better Politics,” editorial, *Wall Street Journal*, 27 December 1963, 4.

<sup>911</sup> Arnold R. Isaacs, *Vietnam Shadows: The War, Its Ghosts, and Its Legacies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 54.

<sup>912</sup> *Washington Post*, 25 August 1965, A2.

taken in March 1954 (58%). Public support for enfranchising adolescents never fell below 57% nationally, as registered by the Gallup group, throughout the duration of the Vietnam War.<sup>913</sup>

The war added an emotional quotient to the civic discussions about youth suffrage not present between 1954 and 1965. “When there’s a war on,” an adult from Nebraska admitted, “it gets harder and harder to say to a kid is old enough to defend his country in Vietnam but not old enough to vote.”<sup>914</sup> The vast majority of 18-vote advocates argued that young troops deserved enfranchisement because of their service to the nation. They insisted that the draft age represented the most important legal marker signifying adulthood, for it reflected a collective decision that 18-year-olds should be considered of full age to defend and possess the rights and privileges afforded adults – including suffrage. “If a person is old enough to be drafted and be asked to fight for his country he is old enough to vote,” a Georgia high-school succinctly proclaimed.<sup>915</sup> Many people claimed that performing the duties involved with warring in the tricky jungles of Vietnam against a tough enemy proved adolescents were more than capable to handle the task of voting. “If 18-year-old boys are smart enough to die for their country,” a Michigan

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<sup>913</sup> Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 3:2057, 2229, 2243, and 2303-2304.

<sup>914</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 20 March 1968, 1.

<sup>915</sup> Judy McDaniel to Herman E. Talmadge, 26 March 1967, Series V, Subseries A-1967, Box 36, Folder 1, Herman E. Talmadge Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia, Athens. A few persons wanted the draft age raised to 21 if the voting age was not lowered. For example, see Darius K. Rasco, “Voting and the Draft,” letter to editor, *New York Times*, 8 January 1969, A20.

businessman asserted, “they should be smart enough to vote.”<sup>916</sup> Some citizens pointed out the irony of adolescents fighting for democracy against communist forces abroad without having full voting rights at home. “How can our soldiers be expected to sincerely defend ‘American ideals,’ nebulous at best, in an inhospitable foreign country while they are being denied their constitutional rights at home?” a New Jersey 18-year-old demanded.<sup>917</sup>

Between 1965 and 1968, as President Johnson steadily increased the number of American servicemen and the death toll of young soldiers mounted, the dialogue about teen suffrage became evermore charged. In those years, an ever-increasing number of youths began to question the necessity of “a bewildering struggle whose origins are unclear, whose progress is unsure, whose aims are unsettled, and whose outcome is in doubt.”<sup>918</sup> Like those young people who had staffed the civil rights movement, antiwar youths claimed that adults could no longer be the sole custodians of truth and reason. They emphasized that enfranchising the generation shouldering the burdens of the war was a matter of simple democratic justice. A pamphlet issued by the Fair Franchise Committee declared, “American democracy is based upon a social contract: the right to vote in return for meeting adult citizen responsibilities. Those over 18 are meeting their responsibilities. They have

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<sup>916</sup> Position Ballot of F.E. Saalman for the National Federation of Independent Business, 18 March 1967, Box 10, James G. O’Hara Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

<sup>917</sup> Bruce Pfund, No Title, letter to editor, *New York Times Magazine*, 21 July 1968, 2.

<sup>918</sup> “A New Sophistication,” *Newsweek*, 10 July 1967, 20.

earned the citizen's franchise."<sup>919</sup> Non-combatant teens on the homefront forcefully insisted that they, too, were fulfilling their obligations, and, therefore, earned voting rights. As girl from Michigan fumed to her congressman:

I'm 17 years old, and still don't understand how they run the government. For instance, I work, pay taxes, and naturally I am too young to vote. . . .Now, you tell me how can I be old enough to work, own a car, pay insurance, and go to school, plus saving money for my college education, and still I don't have the right to vote, or at least determine what I'd like to do with the taxes I pay out. If this is the way it has to be for the government's sake, I think it is a very unfair proposition for all the young adults under 21. . . .If the government is going to treat us like kids, they I think it's cruel to send a child to Viet Nam to get killed and take away the money he or she is working hard for. So you tell me why I'm not considered an adult, who can vote, either on taxes or for offices?<sup>920</sup>

The Vietnam War served as a galvanizing agent pulling together a public consensus in support of the 18-vote. That accord prompted renewed congressional interest. During the 90<sup>th</sup> Congress (1967-68), lawmakers offered sixty 18-vote bills, which represented a 114% increase in filings from the 89<sup>th</sup>. The emotionalism stoking the action on behalf of teen enfranchisement, however, did not yield legislation. While the young people who connected soldiering and suffrage insisted that voting was a right, congressional opponents of the 18-vote maintained that voting was a privilege. And as a privilege, they contended, suffrage unquestionably required specific qualifications. Mainly, detractors of youth enfranchisement

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<sup>919</sup> *New York Times*, 15 January 1967, 39.

<sup>920</sup> Beverly Plambeck to James G. O'Hara, n.d. Box 10, James G. O'Hara Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

questioned whether the mass of teenagers possessed the maturity required for making consequential political decisions irrespective of a youth's ability to respond to military commands. Most congressmen, across the ideological spectrum, held that the vast majority of 18-year-olds lacked the life experience, emotional stability, and common sense to exercise good voting judgment. House Judiciary chairman Emanuel Celler (D-NY) alleged that teenagers were "easily enflamed" and usually saw things "in patterns of black and white without shadings." Because of the tempestuousness inherent to adolescence, Celler asserted, "There are sound psychological reasons why the age of 21 has been considered the beginning of maturity."<sup>921</sup>

The sense that adolescents were too immature to vote heightened as youth activism against the war and for social justice causes intensified. During the 1960s, young people led and staffed a series of widely disparate protest movements that expressed discontent with American politics and society. Spurred on by the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and a growing counterculture, youth organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Students for a Democratic Society rose to prominence by protesting long-accepted conduct codes that grounded the subjugation experienced by powerless citizens. They advocated populist democracy and socioeconomic justice and criticized corporate-military interlocks and unresponsive government bureaucracies. Their tactics included rhetorical appeals, political lobbying, peaceful protests, and mass

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<sup>921</sup> Quoted in John Chamberlain, "These Days. . .Should 18-Year-Olders Vote?" column, *Washington Post*, 1 May 1967, A18.

demonstrations. The threat that tied many of these groups was a desire to redefine American democracy to make it more inclusive and responsive to the members of previously underrepresented groups – including women, ethnic and racial minorities, students, and youth – who sought a greater role in determining the goals, values, and policies of the U.S. government. Tom Hayden, original organizer of the Students for a Democratic Society, famously penned in the Port Huron Statement that young activists sought “the establishment of a democracy of individual participation, governed by two central aims: that the individual share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life; that society be organized to encourage independence in men and provide the media for their common participation.”<sup>922</sup>

In its crusade to establish participatory democracy, the Students for a Democratic Society led a loose coalition of left-wing youths deeply committed to the ideas of liberal politics and social progress. The “New Left” of the 1960s was born from the experiences of civil rights activists, opposition to the Vietnam War, and disillusionment with Lyndon Johnson’s version of liberalism. Initially, the New Left focused on the issues facing the students at the growing “multiversities,” such as limitations on free speech and the persistence of *in loco parentis* as the philosophical basis for administering campus life. By the end of the decade, New Left activists had moved on to deal with troubles in the jungles of Vietnam, the

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<sup>922</sup> “The Port Huron Statement,” in *The Port Huron Statement: Sources and Legacies of the New Left’s Founding Manifesto*, Richard Flacks and Nelson Lichtenstein, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 242.

inner cities of America, and the legislative halls of Washington, D.C. They blamed Johnson for trading away the populist inclusiveness intrinsic to modern liberalism in exchange for an impersonal, corporatized politics that valued exercising power more than advancing social justice. And they railed against the sluggish progress toward solving the problems that had beset generations of Americans, especially ageism, racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, and imperialism.<sup>923</sup> Even President Johnson admitted in the final months of his presidency that in spite of all the progress his administration had made “we are still unable to set a precise date for the arrival of equality, the advent of peace, the curing of old ills, and the healing of old wounds.”<sup>924</sup>

British journalist Henry Fairlie identified the “politics of expectation” as a key source of 60s sociopolitical turmoil. He argued that the decade’s political bigwigs, following the example of John and Bobby Kennedy, carefully crafted images of themselves as leaders who could spectacularly deliver on quixotic promises. Fairlie concluded that the Kennedy brothers taught their contemporaries to think more about image than achievement.<sup>925</sup> Young people, however, had been socialized to believe that results mattered more than style in politics, especially in

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<sup>923</sup> For more about the New Left, see Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973); Edward J. Bacciocco, *The New Left in America: Reform to Revolution, 1956 to 1970* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1974); Irwin Unger, *The Movement: A History of the New Left, 1959-1972* (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1974); and James Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (1987).

<sup>924</sup> *New York Times*, 30 May 1968, 16.

<sup>925</sup> Henry Fairlie, *The Kennedy Promise: The Politics of Expectation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973).



the substance-laden realm of the White House. As the Johnson presidency unfolded, many politicized youths reckoned his administration would not fulfill the idealistic pledges of John Kennedy or complete the reform agenda of the Great Society. That realization either disillusioned or angered thousands of young liberals. Because they sensed that “no one is listening,” Bobby Kennedy averred, “we can understand why so many of our young people have turned from engagement to disengagement, from politics to passivity, from hope to nihilism, from S.D.S. to LSD.”<sup>926</sup> Young leftists acknowledged that many Johnson initiatives suffered from unrealistic hopes and poor execution. But they blamed America’s expanding military involvement in Vietnam for impeding a full political commitment to social transformation. And they charged “the Establishment” – that mysterious cabal of Wall Street tycoons, Pentagon brass, and Ivy League-trained bureaucrats – with monopolizing governmental power to benefit their elite self-interests at the expense of the needs of the people.

As criticism of LBJ, Vietnam, and the Establishment mounted, young people disillusioned with the federal government and authority of all kinds became evermore radicalized. In a 1969 special broadcast trying to explain why youths were rebellious, CBS news anchor Walter Cronkite concluded young people most wanted to “make things happen now” because of a shared “frustration, restiveness, and dissatisfaction” with the persistence of bigotry, intolerance, and militarism.<sup>927</sup> A

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<sup>926</sup> *New York Times*, 7 March 1967, 37.

<sup>927</sup> *Washington Post*, 3 June 1969, B7.

1968 Gallup poll indicated that the youth revolt “appears directed against traditionalism and complacency, or ‘the Establishment.’ Sometimes this takes the form of attacks on the [Johnson] Administration’s Vietnam policies, other times against the slowness of efforts to help the Negro race.”<sup>928</sup> A man from West Chatham, Massachusetts, justified his support for the 18-vote by highlighting that youth “are almost the only ones among us who in recent years have had the audacity to point to the emperor’s nakedness. And naked he has been on many of the matters these committed young people have decried.”<sup>929</sup> Whether Johnson under-delivered or youths demanded too much, the disappointments of unrealized expectations fueled the generational crises that convulsed American society between the mid-1960s and early 1970s.

That brief era marked the singular time in U.S. history when sociopolitical conflict manifestly divided along age-group lines. Many of the same forces that had fostered the complacent prosperity of the 1950s – the Baby Boom, Cold War, and burgeoning consumer culture – helped set off the volatile clashes between young and old during the 1960s and 1970s. The chasm between the traditionalism of adults and the iconoclasm of adolescents, contemporaneously referred to as the “generation gap,” appeared unbridgeable. A 1969 Gallup survey found that 70% of college students and adults believed a “generation gap” existed and that it would most likely persist because adults were “too set in their ways” and adolescents

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<sup>928</sup> *New York Times*, 29 June 1968, 13.

<sup>929</sup> Duane Lockard, “To Lower Vote Age,” letter to editor, *Ibid*, 13 July 1967, 36.

fancied “undisciplined behavior.”<sup>930</sup> Whereas adults expected young people to conform to the norms of mainstream culture, adolescents insisted that all individuals had a right to self-determination – even if its expressions were disobedient or disruptive. Age-based social differences have existed since the beginnings of recorded history. Only in the post-World War II era, however, did “teenagers” become recognized as distinct cultural personae with their own lifestyles separate from adults. The adult-adolescent cultural strife of the 1950s begot the young-old generational hostilities of the 1960s. When the decade began, most youths were either apolitical or dedicated to working peacefully for change within the existing systems of governance. By the end of the decade, large numbers of young people had become politicized, and many disbelieved peaceful change was possible.

As the sixties unfolded, more and more young people assailed time-honored notions of authority. Civil rights marches, counterculture be-ins, student strikes, antiwar rallies, and protests against the Johnson administration each contested the values and rules that elders claimed made America exceptional among world nations. Young people of all ideological stripes criticized the special privileges attached to age and seniority within America’s sociopolitical system. Hardly any civic institution dominated by adults escaped scrutiny or challenge from some youth group. The most revolutionary of youths saw themselves as the vanguard of “the Movement,” a supernatural force of history that would overthrow a corrupt and

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<sup>930</sup> Ibid, 26 May 1969, 39.

outdated way of life perpetuated by adults. By the late 1960s, it had evolved from a generally passive civil disobedience to aggressive resistance. An angry rebelliousness stoked the most aggrieved and disaffected youth. They harbored a bitter resentment that the majority of adults and government officials patronized, neglected, or ignored the issues they found morally compelling. Abandoning the idealistic rhetoric of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., young activists openly questioned the efficacy of sociopolitical change through existing institutions. They concluded that the American political system was utterly impotent and had to be fundamentally reformed. Believing they had been duped by the politics of expectation, young nihilists launched a multidimensional assault upon virtually every aspect of the mainstream life. More militant youths prepared for a war with adult authorities.<sup>931</sup> As more and more youths insisted upon a greater voice in campus affairs, demanded justice for oppressed people, burned their draft cards, and, occasionally, bombed university buildings, their increased belligerence enflamed national tensions. Across the United States, multiple places, particularly university campuses, witnessed disruption, violence, and, on occasion, fatalities. The young radicals who pursued “liberation” from social and political constraints became the focus of the public’s scorn. Parents and politicians alike worried that Bob Dylan was right when he sang in his hit “The Times They Are A-Changin’” that

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<sup>931</sup> For more information regarding the evolution of youth viewpoints, see George R. Vickers, *The Formation of the New Left* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1975); Terry Anderson, *The Sixties* (New York: Longman, 1999), 19-44 and 73-153; and Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 138-178 and 210-228.

“your sons and your daughters are beyond your command.”<sup>932</sup>

The rising tide of youth outrage crested in 1968. “There was a sense everywhere in 1968 that things were giving way,” journalist Garry Wills observed, “That man had not merely lost control of his history, but might never regain it again.”<sup>933</sup> In a year of chaos punctuated by violence and enveloped by tragedy, the spring of 1968 proved to be the most traumatic season: LBJ announced he would not run for reelection after a narrow victory over an antiwar candidate, Senator Eugene McCarthy, in New Hampshire’s Democratic primary; assassins murdered Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy; and campus unrest boiled over across the nation. In a semester that began the month of the Tet Offensive, major protests (i.e. those involving at least 1,000 people) erupted at more than 200 colleges. At fifty-nine universities, students occupied campus buildings, mainly administrative centers. Students on at least another thousand campuses held smaller demonstrations, usually against the Vietnam War.<sup>934</sup> The spring campus unrest reached its acme at Columbia University. Beginning on 23 April 1968, SDS radicals and black militants occupied the president’s office and classroom buildings for eight days in protest of a defense research center on campus and the construction of a gymnasium bordering Harlem that would be closed to community members. The

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<sup>932</sup> Bob Dylan, “The Times They Are A-Changin,’” by Bob Dylan, recorded 24 October 1963, on *The Times They Are A-Changin’* album, released 13 January 1964, Columbia Records, Columbia CL 2105, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm.

<sup>933</sup> Garry Wills, *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 34.

<sup>934</sup> Alan E. Payer and Alexander W. Astin, “Violence and Disruption on the U.S. Campus, 1968-1969,” *Educational Record* 50 (Fall 1969): 337-350.

strike paralyzed the campus, forcing administration officials to summon New York City police to arrest the students – a process that turned bloody as many officers, resentful of what they saw as privileged students who lacked respect for authority, beat the protestors and their faculty advocates indiscriminately.<sup>935</sup> Similar clashes among students, administrators, and police at Harvard, Cornell, San Francisco State, and other universities further widened generational rifts.

The incessant on-campus havoc convinced many adults that a full-fledged youth revolt had erupted. When the 1960s began, most Americans lauded the idealism, courage, and restraint of young demonstrators, particularly the students involved in the civil rights movement. As the decade ended, public opinion registered confusion, fear, and anger over the escalation and extremism of youth protest. The vehement challenges of the “Me Generation” to the existing social order and dominant value system added to the anxiety. By the end of the 60s, historian Carl Boggs writes, most adult authorities agreed that the hopeful visions of change outlined by young activists had turned into “a nightmare of adventurous violence, dogmatic posturing, and a decaying drug culture.”<sup>936</sup> Millions of vexed adults thought that young people, whether Black Panthers, student militants, or

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<sup>935</sup> See Jerry L. Avorn, *Up Against the Ivy Wall: A History of the Columbia Crisis* (New York: Atheneum, 1969) and Stefan Bradley, “Gym Crow Must Go!”: Black Student Activism at Columbia University, 1967-1968,” *Journal of African American History* 88, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 163-181.

<sup>936</sup> Carl Boggs, “Rethinking the Sixties Legacy: From New Left to New Social Movements,” in *Breaking Chains: Social Movements and Collective Action*, Michael P. Smith, ed., vol. 3, *Comparative Urban and Community Research*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1991), 55. Boggs disagrees with the “total break” thesis that posits the collapse of 60s radicalism during the years 1968-1970. He argues that the core philosophies of the New Left (especially participatory democracy, communitarianism, cultural renewal, environmentalism, and collective consumption) carried forward to inform modern social movements. *Ibid*, 50-68.

hippie chicks, threatened to shred the sociopolitical fabric of America. As New York City Mayor John Lindsay observed, “The country is virtually on the edge of a spiritual – and perhaps physical – breakdown. For the first time in a century, we are not sure there is a future for America.”<sup>937</sup>

Adults pondered how to rescue America from the young insurgents and how to save fanatical youths from self-ruination. Some adults championed suppression of youth activism. In 1968, J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, established a nationwide program to disrupt the lives of key New Left leaders. He deployed hundreds of undercover agents in a massive surveillance program to neutralize civil disorders.<sup>938</sup> Other people sought a salve for the social wounds inflicted by intergenerational conflict by resurrecting the issue of lowering the voting age. For many adults, the specter of youth-inspired domestic calamity, especially the mayhem instigated by college-age activists, convinced them of the sociopolitical need to enfranchise young people. As a mother from East Detroit averred, “I believe that in lowering the voting age to 18, student protest and violence would diminish. Through the elections of candidates who represent the views of the youth today, their ideas could be put across in a non violent manner.”<sup>939</sup> Most adults who supported adolescent suffrage did not necessarily hanker after the political insights of youth; rather, they believed including young voices in national

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<sup>937</sup> *New York Times*, 7 May 1970, 24.

<sup>938</sup> David Cunningham, *There's Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>939</sup> Lynne Wayne to James G. O'Hara, 27 May 1970, Box 13, James G. O'Hara Papers.

dialogues might yield social tranquility. Pro-18-vote adults reckoned that young people, upon enfranchisement, could no longer protest that they lacked a say in shaping the laws and policies that directly affected their lives. Of course, the youth activists who turned university campuses and political conventions into battlegrounds turned some adults against adolescent suffrage. An eighty-year-old woman from Minnesota told the *Minneapolis Tribune*, “When I think of the way kids are acting on campuses these days, I certainly don’t think they should have the vote.”<sup>940</sup> Although Representative James Harvey (R-MI) stated that continued campus protests would create “a most unfavorable atmosphere for this deserved legislation,” his colleague Howard Robison (R-NY) speculated that Congress might reconsidered the 18-vote issue “if there is a groundswell of public interest in and support for the proposal.”<sup>941</sup>

During 1968-69, the effort to lower the voting age steadily gathered momentum. High school students flooded state and federal representatives with petitions asking for a legislative redress of the youth suffrage grievance. “I stand with the thousands of responsible, respectable, educated teenagers, members of my generation who want to take an important part in their country’s welfare and help in the election of their representatives and those who will represent their children,” a 14-year-old Michigan resident wrote to House Minority Leader Gerald Ford, “Sir, I hope that you will have faith in my generation and promote any bill that will

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<sup>940</sup> *Congressional Record* 115, 17 February 1969: 3589.

<sup>941</sup> *Ibid* 115, 1 April 1969: 8373.



enable us the right to vote.”<sup>942</sup> Eugene McCarthy’s “Children’s Crusade” spurred the formation of youth groups to promote the 18-vote, such as the Youth Franchise Coalition and Let Us Vote. Both the YFC and LUV constructed national coalitions on behalf of adolescent enfranchisement with such organizations as the AFL-CIO, NAACP, Young Republican and Young Democrat clubs, National Educational Association, and United States Youth Council. Let Us Vote formed 327 college and 3,000 high school chapters.<sup>943</sup> A Gallup survey taken in December 1969 indicated that 76% of college students favored allowing 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds to vote.<sup>944</sup> Other polls indicated broad-based support for teen suffrage among adults.<sup>945</sup> While some adults feared the granting “hippies, yippies, and other beatnik types” voting power, an ever-increasing number of parents and politicians came to believe that enfranchising “the handful of [youth] trouble makers” might calm their antinomianism.<sup>946</sup>

Influential government officials also agreed a lower franchise age could

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<sup>942</sup> Sharon Hattis to Gerald R. Ford, n.d. Folder “Voting” (51), Box B132, Ford Congressional Papers, Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

<sup>943</sup> *Time* 93, 31 January 1969, 20. *Time* described the leader of LUV, Dennis Warren (a 21-year-old prelaw student from the University of the Pacific), as the “very antithesis of the stereotype student radical, Warren wears his hair closely cropped and dresses in conservative pinstripe suits and black shoes.”

<sup>944</sup> Gallup, *The Gallup Poll*, 3:2229.

<sup>945</sup> A *Minneapolis Tribune* poll found that 58% of those persons asked approved of a lowered voting age. The same poll also indicated that 68% of people between ages 21 and 29 favored the 18-vote as compared to only 44% of persons age 60 or over. The poll noted that percentage approval youth suffrage in Minnesota had climbed up from 43% in May 1964. *Congressional Record* 115, 17 February 1969: 3589.

<sup>946</sup> James G. O’Hara to Andrew J. Jasina, Jr., 17 March 1969, Box 13, James G. O’Hara Papers.

become part of the cure for the youth-fired social distempers unsettling the nation. Early in the first session of the 91<sup>st</sup> Congress, lawmakers in support of the 18-vote intently lobbied their ambivalent colleagues. Jennings Randolph (D-WV) and Jacob Javits (R-NY), for example, tried to impress upon fellow senators that the valor of youths abroad, “their political involvement at home, and their deep concern for the complex social problems of our times, clearly indicate new compelling reasons for the vote.” They acknowledged that “contemporary frustrations” had driven “some of our most capable and inquisitive youth to seek less acceptable means of making known their views on public affairs.” But, Randolph and Javits concluded, “We feel our Nation also should benefit from the creative energy of these individuals.”<sup>947</sup>

Beginning in the summer of 1969, a task force within Richard Nixon’s administration began work on a national youth policy to remedy the “crisis of authority” stoked by the pervasive sense of alienation among youth. Part of the strategy to integrate young people into mainstream politics included establishing eighteen as the national suffrage age – a suggestion that President Nixon endorsed.<sup>948</sup>

In November 1969, the National Violence Study Commission, impaneled by Nixon in June 1968 to study the causes of social unrest, issued a report that advocated easing marijuana laws, enacting draft reforms, expanding public service activities, and lowering the voting age to eighteen as steps to dampening the “youth

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<sup>947</sup> Jennings Randolph and Jacob K. Javits to Richard B. Russell, 31 January 1969, Series XV, Subseries AY, Box 44, Folder 9, Richard B. Russell Collection.

<sup>948</sup> *New York Times*, 8 December 1969, 54.

rebellion.” The Commission asserted that enfranchising 18-year-olds would be an important part of the process to woo alienated youths back into the mainstream of American society: “The anachronistic voting age limitations tend to alienate them from systematic political processes and to drive them into a search for alternative, sometimes violent, means to express their frustrations over the gap between the nation’s ideals and actions. Lowering the voting age will provide them with a direct, constructive and democratic channel for making their views felt and for giving them a responsible stake in the future of the nation.”<sup>949</sup> The torrent of positive support, both public and political, encouraged Representative James Howard to report to his House colleagues “that the majority of the population of the country supports the need for lowering the minimum voting age.”<sup>950</sup>

The civic demand that social order be restored became the motivating force propelling Congress to lower the voting age to eighteen. In May 1968, the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments conducted hearings on a handful of 18-vote resolutions. In his opening statement, Subcommittee Chair Birch Bayh (D-IN) noted that American youth were “deeply involved” in political campaigns, civil rights, the Peace Corps, Volunteers in Service to America, and the “issues of war and peace.”<sup>951</sup> Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-MT) maintained that “the

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<sup>949</sup> *Washington Post*, 26 November 1969, A4 and *Lowering the Voting Age to 18: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments on S.J. Res. 7, S.J. Res. 19, S.J. Res. 32, S.J. Res. 34, S.J. Res. 38, S.J. Res. 73, S.J. Res. 87, S.J. Res. 102, S.J. Res. 105, S.J. Res. 141, and S.J. Res. 147*, Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 91<sup>st</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 16 February 1970, 22.

<sup>950</sup> *Congressional Record* 115, (5 February 1969): 2823.

<sup>951</sup> *Lowering the Voting Age to Eighteen: Hearings Before the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments*, 14 May 1968, 3.

age of 21 is not simply the automatic chronological door to the sound judgment and wisdom that is needed to exercise the franchise of the ballot, or, for that matter, to assume any other responsibility.” He also claimed that the great majority of unradicalized youth should be granted the franchise because “their probing intelligence, deep interest, and eagerness to participate in the elective process exemplify the best qualities of responsible citizenship.”<sup>952</sup> Other supporters argued that the denial of a formal voice in political processes, particularly suffrage, fueled the palpable distrust of “the Establishment” among young people. As John Owen, president of the Philodemic Debating Society at Georgetown University, charged:

The big student complaints are that students are not consulted in decision making. . . . This sort of thing has just snowballed to the point where the mind of the young people age 18 to 21, many people who feel themselves excluded from the political process or just any decision making process, they feel the exclusion and their idealism turns to some form of cynicism. Their cynicism then turns into some sort of violence, which they feel is the last way they have of communicating with the older generation.<sup>953</sup>

The justification most often cited in support of the 18-vote emphasized its potential to diminish, if not stop, the violent machinations of those angry and dispossessed young people. Proclaiming that youth needed “both a stake and a role” in American government, Senator Howard Cannon (D-NV) declared that “it is important, indeed crucial, that young adults – especially the concerned and active young person – be convinced that improvement can still occur through the

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<sup>952</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>953</sup> Ibid, 16 May 1968: 97.

established processes.”<sup>954</sup> Mansfield underscored that dissatisfied youth “need to know that their participation and counsel is sought and valued.”<sup>955</sup> Jack McDonald, chairman of the Young Republican National Federation, asserted that reducing the franchise age “would do a lot to make young people realize that they are involved rather than alienated from today’s society in America.”<sup>956</sup> Senator Javits said he was “convinced that self-styled student leaders who urge acts of civil disobedience would find themselves with no support if students were given a more meaningful role in the electoral process.”<sup>957</sup> On the final day of the hearings, Representative Ken Hechler (D-WV) provided insightful testimony linking the continuation of youth disfranchisement and the prolongation of youth radicalism. He warned:

Today, the 18-year-old vote is needed to harness the energy of young people and direct it into useful and constructive channels, not simply for their benefit, but for the benefit of the entire Nation. . . . [I]f we deny the right to vote to those young people between the ages of 18 and 20, it is entirely possible that they will join the more militant minority of their fellow students and engage in destructive activities of a dangerous nature.<sup>958</sup>

The 18-vote resolutions received overwhelming bipartisan support within the subcommittee, but it did not forward the bills to the full Senate Judiciary Committee for consideration. Though the successes of the Civil Rights Act and

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<sup>954</sup> Ibid, 15 May 1968: 39.

<sup>955</sup> Ibid, 14 May 1968: 5.

<sup>956</sup> Ibid, 15 May 1968: 45.

<sup>957</sup> Ibid, 14 May 1968: 12.

<sup>958</sup> Ibid, 16 May 1968: 74.

Voting Rights Act had weakened Chairman Eastland, he still held considerable sway within the Judiciary Committee to thwart legislation he considered a threat to states' rights. Bayh and other youth suffrage supporters on the committee reckoned that the time was not advantageous for an aggressive push. The hearings took place less than a month after President Johnson's decision not to seek reelection. Democratic leaders sought to hold onto as much southern support within the party as they mustered could for the upcoming elections since Republicans captured a large number of congressional seats in the 1966 mid-term elections. Republicans found ready allies in southern Democrats and a few of them, like Strom Thurmond, had switched their party affiliation to the GOP. Intraparty politics halted the Senate's progress on youth suffrage, but the issue had garnered serious congressional attention. The May 1968 hearings showed that the majority of congressmen approved youth suffrage regardless of the conservative resurgence. Hence, the debate over the 18-vote had shifted from a question of *should* Congress grant youth the right of suffrage to *how* Congress could most suitably establish a national voting age.

The 1970 renewal of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 provided pro-18-vote congressmen a ripe legislative circumstance to enfranchise adolescents. The Voting Rights Act intended to facilitate black voter registration in the South by outlawing the legal barriers at the state and local level that prevented African-Americans from exercising their right to vote under the Fifteenth Amendment. Congress mandated that the Act be reexamined every five years to gauge compliance. The

initial debate on the extension of the Act focused on whether its “triggering formula” within Section 4 or the “preclearance” measures of Section 5 would remain unchanged as a common national standard. Section 4 banned literacy tests for five years in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia, and several counties in North Carolina; it also allowed federal officials to enfranchise African-Americans and monitor elections within the aforementioned states. Section 5 dictated that federal courts and agencies could hold up the passage of suffrage laws in the seven affected states until approved by a three-judge federal court in the District of Columbia. In January 1969, Representative Emanuel Celler introduced H.R. 4249 to extend, with no modifications, the 1965 Act. In July 1969, House Minority Leader Gerald Ford, prompted by the Nixon administration, offered several amendments to Celler’s bill. Ford’s proposal sought to change Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act by authorizing a nationwide ban on literacy tests and prohibiting extended residential requirements for voting in presidential elections; it also altered Section 5 by placing jurisdiction over voting rights cases in local federal district courts.<sup>959</sup> On 11 December 1969, the House agreed to Ford’s modifications to H.R. 4249 and sent the amended resolution to the Senate.<sup>960</sup>

Five days later, the Senate unanimously referred the bill to its Judiciary Committee. The referral specified that the committee should report back to the full Senate by 1 March 1970 and mandated that the bill, whether marked up or

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<sup>959</sup> *Congressional Record* 115 (9 July 1969): 18855.

<sup>960</sup> *Ibid.*, (11 December 1969): 38535-38536.

accepted in toto, become the pending order of business upon its return to the Senate. Liberal Democrats secured the special instructions because they worried that Judiciary Chairman James Eastland would kill the measure by purposely refusing to schedule committee discussion about it. The Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights discussed the House amendments to the Voting Rights Act extension over five nonconsecutive days during the latter part of February 1970.

The day before the Subcommittee on Constitution Rights initially met to talk about H.R. 4249, the Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments concluded its two-day hearings regarding a Senate-derived youth suffrage bill. In August 1969, Jennings Randolph and 67 co-sponsors offered S.J. Res. 147 to declare eighteen as the national voting age.<sup>961</sup> The first day of the hearings, 16 February 1970, repeated the positive support for the 18-vote heard during the 1968 inquiry. Subcommittee Chairman Birch Bayh opened the proceedings by emphasizing, “I know of no other step that government can take that will lessen discontent and provide a viable alternative to activities outside of the system than giving young people a voice, an act, a responsible position within the system.”<sup>962</sup> Dr. S.I. Hayakawa, who as president of San Francisco State had become renowned for his calm defusing of on-campus tensions, seconded Bayh’s thesis by asserting suffrage held “symbolic meaning” for adolescents because it represented an acknowledgment

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<sup>961</sup> *Congressional Record* 115 (12 August 1969): 23526.

<sup>962</sup> *Lowering the Voting Age to 18*, 91<sup>st</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 16 February 1970, 19.



of adulthood.<sup>963</sup> Theodore Sorenson, a well-respected former advisor to John and Robert Kennedy, said Congress should view the 18-vote as a “moral issue” that, if not adopted, threatened to tear asunder the common democratic standards that had traditionally rooted political socialization in America.<sup>964</sup> Senator Randolph, a staunch supporter of youth suffrage since World War II, focused his testimony on the national political benefits of adding 11 million new electors to the voting rolls.<sup>965</sup>

The following day of hearings proved more contentious, as the participants debated whether Congress held the power to lower voting ages in federal, state, and/or local elections. Deputy Attorney General Richard Kleindienst stated that President Nixon and the Justice Department both disagreed with S.J. Res. 147 because it established eighteen as the national age of enfranchisement for all elections. Kleindienst affirmed that the Nixon administration would only support a constitutional amendment that restricted 18-year-olds to vote in federal elections. He claimed that the qualification of age, unlike the categories of race and sex, remained a “compelling interest” of the states; therefore, Kleindienst argued, Congress possessed no power to require the states to reduce their minimum age qualifications for enfranchisement.<sup>966</sup> The other witnesses disagreed with Kleindienst’s stance. Charles Gonzalez, president of the Student National Education Association, labeled Kleindienst’s position “tokenism” and urged the

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<sup>963</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>964</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>965</sup> Ibid, 3-15.

<sup>966</sup> Ibid, 17 February 1970: 78-92.

subcommittee to accept S.J. Res. 147 as proposed.<sup>967</sup> Former Attorney General Ramsey Clark also backed an unadulterated S.J. Res. 147 and criticized the limiting of the 18-vote to federal elections because “halfway steps are one of the causes of [young people’s] doubt that we understand the times.”<sup>968</sup> The hearings again revealed widespread support for the idea of reducing suffrage ages. However, the dispute over congressional authority to alter voting-age qualifications in state and local elections stymied approval of S.J. Res. 147 in the subcommittee.

The spurning of S.J. Res. 147 did not derail the 18-vote effort, however, as its senatorial proponents found a different path to promulgate youth suffrage. As specified by the Senate’s special instructions, Emanuel Celler’s H.R. 4249 to extend the Voting Rights Act of 1965 became the pending order of business on 1 March 1970. On 2 March, Senators Hugh Scott (R-PA) and Philip Hart (R-MI) offered an amendment, in the nature of a substitute bill, to Celler’s measure. The Scott-Hart proposal narrowed Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act from nationwide application to only those affected southern states as originally provided in 1965.<sup>969</sup> Two days later, Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, on behalf of Warren Magnuson (D-WA) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA), introduced an amendment to the Scott-Hart substitute bill. Quickly named the Mansfield Amendment, the tender sought to lower the voting age to eighteen in all local, state, and federal elections. Senators

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<sup>967</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>968</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>969</sup> *Congressional Record* 116 (2 March 1970): 5516.

quickly realized that Mansfield's amendment, as a rider to preexisting law, schemed to establish a national 18-vote via legislative statute. Mansfield claimed that he proposed the statutory route because the "states simply have not taken the initiative."<sup>970</sup>

Several senators criticized Mansfield's action. Hugh Scott charged it would jeopardize the extension of the Voting Rights Act. Jennings Randolph stated that he preferred a constitutional amendment rather than a congressional statute to establish youth suffrage. He suggested that Mansfield's ploy to make an end run around the traditional amendment process might not even be necessary. Randolph announced to his senate colleagues that James Eastland had assured him the Judiciary Committee would not impede passage of S.J. Res. 147 (which Eastland later confirmed on the Senate floor).<sup>971</sup> But Randolph asked to co-sponsor Mansfield's measure "to join others who feel that the statutory approach is possible."<sup>972</sup> Southern Democrats, led by Sam Ervin, opposed the rider as a threat to a state's right to determine suffrage qualifications. Ervin objected to the statute as a violation of four sections of the Constitution (Section 1 of Article 2, Section 2 of Article 1, the Tenth Amendment, and the Seventeenth Amendment) that he claimed prohibited Congress from interfering with state determination of voting requirements, including age specifications. In summarizing southern objections to

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<sup>970</sup> Ibid, (4 March 1970): 5951.

<sup>971</sup> For Eastland's confirmation, see Ibid, (11 March 1970): 6956.

<sup>972</sup> Ibid, (4 March 1970): 5952.

the Mansfield amendment and the Voting Rights Act, Ervin forcefully inquired: “Are we going to strive to have an indestructible Union composed of indestructible States, or are we going to attempt to destroy, in an unauthorized manner, in an unconstitutional manner, that Union by usurping for the Congress the powers reserved to the States to prescribe the qualification for voting?”<sup>973</sup>

The central controversy that consumed the Senate involved an argument over the means to begat the 18-vote. While some senators backed the slow but legally certain path of a constitutional amendment, others preferred the expedient but legally dubious course of a legislative statute. Supporters of Mansfield’s amendment argued that the Supreme Court’s recent ruling in *Katzenbach v. Morgan* offered a solid constitutional basis for declaring a national suffrage age via statute. In *Katzenbach*, the Court declared that the enforcement powers written into Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment allowed Congress to enact laws that increased the rights of citizens beyond what the judiciary had previously recognized. The case originated from a suit brought by New York voters who contested Section 4(e) of the Voting Rights Act, which provided that no person who had successfully completed sixth grade in a school accredited by the commonwealth of Puerto Rico could be denied the right to vote because of an inability to read or write English. The plaintiffs argued that Section 4(e) violated New York elections laws that specifically required reading and writing literacy in English as a condition to vote. A three-judge federal district court concurred with the plaintiffs. It held that

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<sup>973</sup> Ibid, 6013.

Congress had infringed on rights reserved to the states by the Tenth Amendment and exceeded its powers of enforcement under the Fourteenth Amendment in enacting Section 4(e). In a 7-2 decision written by Justice William J. Brennan, the Supreme Court ruled that Section 4(e) was constitutional because Congress had exercised its powers consistent with those afforded it by Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment. Brennan held that the supremacy clause embedded into Article VI, Paragraph 2 of the U.S. Constitution prevented the enforcement of New York's English literacy requirement since Congress specifically wrote Section 4(e) of the Voting Rights Act to enfranchise educated but non-English literate Puerto Ricans. Brennan theorized that Congress could ratchet up civil rights beyond what the Supreme Court had recognized via legislation enacted under Section 5 of the Fourteenth Amendment that expressly sought to uphold or expand its equal protection clause. He concluded that Section 5 offers "a positive grant of legislative power authorizing Congress to exercise its discretion in determining the need for and nature of legislation to secure Fourteenth Amendment guarantees."<sup>974</sup>

Proponents of Mansfield's amendment seized onto Justice Brennan's "ratchet theory" as justification for the statutory route to promulgate the 18-vote into federal law. In testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, former Solicitor General Archibald Cox and Harvard constitutional law professor Paul Freund backed the statutory approach to the 18-vote. Both men asserted that Justice Brennan's "ratchet theory" allowed Congress full authority to expand those

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<sup>974</sup> *Katzenbach v. Morgan*, 384 U.S. 642 (1966).

rights recognized by the judiciary as essential to the types of civil equality intended by the Fourteenth Amendment. Since Brennan's theory proposed that Congress could not ratchet down judicially recognized rights, Cox and Freund maintained that Mansfield's rider had constitutional validity because the Supreme Court had frequently protected infringements of suffrage as potential violations of the equal protection clause. Cox and Freund agreed that Brennan's "ratchet theory" allowed for multiple interpreters of the Fourteenth Amendment. They concluded that the statutory route to youth suffrage would most likely pass constitutional muster if a court clearly saw that Congress deliberately intended through legislation to deem persons at least 18-years-of-age to be a class of citizens worthy of voting rights equal to those of enfranchised adults.<sup>975</sup>

Opponents of Mansfield's rider solicited the counsel of six Yale law professors, including Alexander Bickel and Robert Bork, who rejected Brennan's "ratchet theory." Bickel and Bork defended Justice John Marshall Harlan's minority opinion in *Katzenbach* that allowing Congress to interpret the Fourteenth Amendment undercut the power of the judiciary. In particular, Bickel and Bork concurred with Harlan's objection to Congress having the power to interpret the Fourteenth Amendment substantively, which, in their view, would permit Congress great latitude under the 14<sup>th</sup>'s Section 5 enforcement provision to create new rights with scant limitation and little judicial oversight. They insisted that Brennan's "ratchet theory" would harm the Constitution's separation of powers by sanctioning

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<sup>975</sup> *Lowering the Voting Age to Eighteen*, 91<sup>st</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 9 March 1970, 170-200.

judicial deference to Congress's authority to interpret the equal protection clause as it saw fit. Bickel and Bork argued that limiting congressional use of Section 5 power to the enforcement of judicially-recognized Fourteenth Amendment rights was the proper constitutional safeguard. Bickel and Bork rebuffed Brennan's opinion as a foundation for justifying a statute overturning a state's right to determine age qualifications for voting, and they questioned the applicability of the *Katzenbach* case to support any federal expansion of voting rights.<sup>976</sup>

The position of the Nixon administration further confused the situation. President Nixon supported the use of the *Katzenbach* ruling by the Justice Department and in Gerald Ford's amendments to H.R. 4249 to validate the abolition of state literacy tests and the reduction of state residency requirements for voting. But in the case of youth suffrage, Nixon accepted the view of Bickel and Bork that an overzealous interpretation of the "ratchet theory" posed potential harm to federalist traditions regarding the locus of suffrage laws. William Rehnquist, who served as the Assistant Attorney General of the Office of Legal Counsel under Nixon, testified before the Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments that the statutory route to adolescent enfranchisement would confuse the legality of the upcoming 1972 presidential election. He claimed Nixon supported voting rights for young people, but the president preferred the more certain and less polarizing amendment process to Mansfield's rider.<sup>977</sup> Edward

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<sup>976</sup> Ibid, 233-272.

<sup>977</sup> Ibid, 233-249.

Kennedy highlighted the seeming incongruity of Nixon's employ of *Katzenbach* to argue the case offered blanket constitutional protection for changing state suffrage qualifications via federal decree. "If it is constitutional to change literacy and residence requirements by statute," Kennedy declared, "then it is also constitutional to change age requirements for voting."<sup>978</sup>

The floor debate on the Mansfield amendment to H.R. 4249 repeated, virtually verbatim, the arguments for and against the statutory approach to establishing a national voting age. Senator Vance Hartke (D-IN) believed passage of the rider "both morally right and politically expedient."<sup>979</sup> Eugene Talmadge (D-GA) insisted, "The worthiness of a cause and the popularity of an issue should not and cannot be used to circumvent the process by which the Constitution can be amended."<sup>980</sup> Birch Bayh reminded his colleagues of their legislative duty despite their personal or political beliefs:

Whether it is by statute or by constitutional amendment, we must proceed until we succeed. We must not raise the expectations of young people that we are going to give them a place in the system and then fail them once more. We must continue until they are full participatory partners in this great system of ours.<sup>981</sup>

On 12 March 1970, the Senate accepted Mansfield's amendment 64-17.<sup>982</sup> The

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<sup>978</sup> *Congressional Record* 116 (18 May 1970): 15870.

<sup>979</sup> *Ibid* (11 March 1970): 6950.

<sup>980</sup> *Ibid*, 6930.

<sup>981</sup> *Ibid*, 6963.

<sup>982</sup> *Ibid*, (12 March 1970): 7095.



following day, the Senate agreed to the Scott-Hart substitute bill (51-22) and passed H.R. 4249 as amended back to the House by a vote of 64 to 12.<sup>983</sup> The success of the Mansfield rider, in part, stemmed from the potent leadership of the Democratic majority leader, plus bipartisan support from moderate and liberal senators who overcame the objections of a small group of Republican and southern conservatives backed by the Nixon administration.

In returning the substitute bill to the House, the Senate placed great cross pressure on Emanuel Celler. Since World War II, he had staunchly opposed any measure intending to establish a national voting age. But he had just as resolutely supported any legislation proposing to uphold the civil rights of oppressed minorities, especially African-Americans. Celler eventually relented from his warning that he would “fight like hell” against the inclusion of the 18-vote rider to the Scott-Hart bill. Celler reasoned that the Supreme Court would swiftly determine the constitutionality of the Mansfield amendment prior to the effective date (1 January 1971) of the Voting Rights Act renewal.<sup>984</sup> He did, however, garner a rule (H. Res. 914) from the Rules Committee that instructed the House to vote on the Mansfield provision first, and then, if accepted, to next vote on the Scott-Hart substitute bill. The rule also designated a one-hour time limit for debate on the House floor.

House Minority Leader Gerald Ford attempted to send Scott-Hart to a

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<sup>983</sup> Ibid, (13 March 1970): 7335-7336.

<sup>984</sup> *New York Times*, 12 March 1970, 1 and 14.

conference with the Senate to delete the Mansfield rider. He charged that the extraordinary legislative step to bypass committee and take up the Mansfield amendment on the House floor was “the most indefensible procedure I have ever seen.”<sup>985</sup> Celler, however, realized the potential for southern obstructionism against the renewal of the entire Voting Rights Act if Scott-Hart was tabled to conference. When Celler pointed out that James Eastland would take part in the conference as chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, congressmen anxious about the potential derailing of the Voting Rights Act extension rallied to reject Ford’s conference call. After Celler openly approved Scott-Hart on the House floor, passage of the measure was virtually guaranteed, and the majority of representatives who commented during the bill’s discussion castigated the Senate for the House’s predicament.<sup>986</sup> On 17 June 1970, the House passed the Mansfield rider by a margin of 224-183, and then quickly agreed 272-132 to the Scott-Hart substitute extending the Voting Rights Act until 1975.<sup>987</sup> President Nixon signed the amended H.R. 4249 into law on 22 June 1970. Nixon said he accepted the resolution despite disagreeing with its 18-vote statute. Nixon explained, “If I were to veto, I would have to veto the entire bill – voting rights and all. . . .Because the basic provisions of this Act are of great importance, therefore, I am giving it my approval.”<sup>988</sup>

At the request of President Nixon, the constitutionality of the Mansfield

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<sup>985</sup> *Congressional Record* 116 (17 June 1970): 20197.

<sup>986</sup> *Ibid*, 20159-20198.

<sup>987</sup> *Ibid*, 20198-20199.

<sup>988</sup> *Ibid*, (22 June 1970): 20830.

provision to Public Law 91-285 was immediately tested before the Supreme Court. Many of the most fundamentally important and politically controversial decisions of the Supreme Court since the 1930s had pondered the federal-state balance. The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, for example, placed the most traditionally local of all governmental institutions, the public school, under the scrutiny of the federal judiciary. In other rulings, the Court reconsidered the proper reach of the Fourteenth Amendment while debating the limits of how far state regulation of behavior might properly extend. The case concerning Mansfield's amendment, *Oregon v. Mitchell*, exemplified the Court's post-New Deal forays into federal-state relations. The ruling, however, represented one of the few Court decisions that sided with the states at the expense of individual or group rights.

The Court actually reached three verdicts in deciding *Oregon v. Mitchell*. The justices decided by a 5-4 vote that Congress held the power to lower the voting age in federal but not in state or local elections. They also ruled 8-1 to restrict state residency requirements for voters in presidential elections. And in another 8-1 vote, they banned literacy tests as a voter qualification device in any election.<sup>989</sup> The Court's ruling violated the intended spirit of the Voting Rights Act to facilitate voter participation among historically vote-deprived social groups. But it also upheld a core federalist tenet fixing within the states the primary responsibility for determining the age qualifications of potential voters. To youth, the ruling evidenced the vast gulf between democratic promise and adult action.

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<sup>989</sup> *Oregon v. Mitchell*, 400 U.S. 112 (1971).

Senator Birch Bayh said the Court's verdict produced "some significant problems" for the states.<sup>990</sup> In ruling that Congress's statute was only good in federal elections, the Supreme Court created a gaping discrepancy in election laws that threatened to muddle the upcoming 1972 plebiscite. The Court's decision placed profound administrative and financial burdens upon the 47 states that did not allow 18-year-olds to vote. To oblige the judgment, those states would be required to keep two voter registration lists: one for federal offices and one for all other offices. State administrators told federal officials that the added expense of holding simultaneous federal elections that included 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds while conducting state elections that disfranchised persons under age 21 would exhaust state electoral budgets. They also claimed the task of producing dual registration books, ballots, and voting machines to comply with *Oregon v. Mitchell* could not be completed in time for the 1972 election. Costs of conducting dual-age voting were estimated at \$5 million for New York City, \$2.5 million for St. Louis, and between \$10 and \$20 million for the nation as a whole. Further, because of state requirements for amending state constitutions, twenty-two legislatures could not act to lower state voting age laws before November 1972.<sup>991</sup>

The 91<sup>st</sup> Congress had determined how a national voting age could be established. The Supreme Court's half-hearted acceptance of the 18-vote statute, however, engendered a dilemma for the 92<sup>nd</sup> Congress: how quickly could it pass a

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<sup>990</sup> *Congressional Record* 116 (22 December 1970): 43251.

<sup>991</sup> *Lowering the Voting Age to 18, a Fifty State Survey of the Costs and Others Problems of Dual-Age Voting*, Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, 92<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1971.

constitutional amendment to simplify for the states the “dangerously complicated” construction of dual-age voting systems?<sup>992</sup> A *New York Times* editorial aptly described the problem as “no longer of philosophical preference, but only of smooth mechanics . . . to bring uniformity out of confusion – ideally in time for the 1972 elections.”<sup>993</sup> Early in the 92<sup>nd</sup> session, lawmakers in both the House and Senate filed numerous 18-vote measures. Two identical bills, S.J. Res. 7 and H.J. Res. 223, that set eighteen as the national age of enfranchisement age became the focus of legislative action. The House resolution garnered attention because Emanuel Celler proposed it and House Speaker Carl Albert (D-OK) endorsed it; the Senate measure, put forth by Jennings Randolph, had 85 co-sponsors.<sup>994</sup> In late January, Judiciary chairmen Celler and James Eastland announced they had pledged cooperation to expedite passage of a youth suffrage amendment. Their timeline appeared unusually aggressive. Celler and Eastland aimed for congressional approval by the first week of March, so as to give state legislators enough time to act before the end of 1971.<sup>995</sup>

The rush to get a youth suffrage amendment passed truncated debate on the youth suffrage resolutions. A few conservative lawmakers repeated the dictum

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<sup>992</sup> During a February 1971 press conference, Senator Birch Bayh uttered the quoted phrase to underscore the electoral chaos left in the wake of the *Oregon v. Mitchell* ruling. See *New York Times*, 13 February 1971, 28.

<sup>993</sup> “Uniform Voting Age,” editorial, *New York Times*, 8 March 1971, 25.

<sup>994</sup> For S.J. Res. 7, see *Congressional Record* 117 (25 January 1971): 271. For H.J. Res. 223, see *Ibid* (29 January 1971): 1047.

<sup>995</sup> See *Wall Street Journal*, 29 January 1971, 1 and *Washington Post*, 13 February 1971, A2.

against federal infringements upon traditional state prerogatives. Opposing legislators, mostly Republicans, also questioned whether the American people wanted Congress to enfranchise adolescents by highlighting the 1970 state referendums in Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, and Michigan that rejected youth suffrage proposals. Representative John G. Schmitz (R-CA) revealed that he planned to introduce a bill to repeal the federal statute that had promulgated the 18-vote to thwart congressional action on a national voting age resolution. In announcing his plan to his House colleagues, Schmitz declared, “There is no reason whatever to assume that we must resolve the present chaos by a constitutional amendment compelling the states to reject the will of their own people and lower the voting age for state as well as federal legislatures.”<sup>996</sup>

Republican resistance to the 18-vote measures got undercut by the Nixon administration. In early February, Vice President Spiro Agnew proclaimed at the annual Hearst Senate Youth Conference that he backed the efforts to lower the voting age via constitutional amendment. Though Richard Nixon never publically weighed in on the issue during the 92<sup>nd</sup> Congress, the implication of Agnew’s message was that the president concurred.<sup>997</sup> Some citizens claimed Nixon’s use of Agnew as a proxy exposed the depth of the president’s scheming political opportunism. Dr. E. James Lieberman, former director of the Center for Studies of Child and Family Mental Health at the National Institute of Mental Health,

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<sup>996</sup> *Congressional Record* 117 (22 January 1971): 241.

<sup>997</sup> *Ibid*, (9 February 1971): 2255.

charged: “With the lowering of the voting age and the erosion of his leadership among the living, perhaps Mr. Nixon is pursuing the silent majority all the way back to the womb.”<sup>998</sup> After Agnew’s speech, however, Republican challenges to youth suffrage faded, and congressional support swelled.

During the last week of February 1971, work on the 18-vote resolutions began in the Judiciary Committees. On 23 February, a House Judiciary subcommittee unanimously accepted H.J. Res. 223.<sup>999</sup> On 2 March, the full Judiciary Committee approved the bill “with little argument and practically no opposition” 32-2 after a closed meeting lasting less than an hour; only Wiley Mayne (R-IA) and Charles Wiggins (R-CA) dissented.<sup>1000</sup> Later that afternoon, the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments unanimously endorsed S.J. Res. 7 by a vote of 5-0. Afterwards, Subcommittee chair Birch Bayh insisted, “It’s imperative that we [the Senate Judiciary Committee] take action quickly on this.” He worried that acceptance of the resolution might be impaired by the addition of other popular proposals, such as congressional representation for the District of Columbia or equal rights for women.<sup>1001</sup> Emanuel Celler also urged his House colleagues to act posthaste. He noted that several states had begun to amend their

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<sup>998</sup> E. James Lieberman, M.D., “Abortion: Necessity or ‘Waste?’” letter to editor, *New York Times*, 13 April 1971, 38.

<sup>999</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 24 February 1971, B8; *Wall Street Journal*, 24 February 1971, 1; and *Washington Post*, 24 February 1971, A12.

<sup>1000</sup> *New York Times*, 3 March 1971, 26. Mayne and Wiggins explained their votes against H.J. Res. 223: “We are convinced this Republic will be better served in the long run if the sovereignty of our States is not further eroded by denying them the power to fix non-discriminatory qualifications for voting in their own elections.” *Congressional Record* 117 (23 March 1971): 7568.

<sup>1001</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 3 March 1971, 3.

own constitutions to reduce voting ages, but he cited an informal survey that found insufficient time for the states to accomplish a uniform 18-year-old standard by 1972. Celler claimed there existed a “realistic possibility” that enough state legislatures could ratify a federal constitutional amendment ahead of the 1972 elections if Congress worked rapidly.<sup>1002</sup>

On Thursday, 4 March 1971, the Senate Judiciary Committee, “moving with uncommon speed,” unanimously endorsed S.J. Res. 7.<sup>1003</sup> “In an unusual display of agreement on a constitutional question,” United Press International commented, “conservatives and liberals, Republicans and Democrats got behind a bill to straighten out what they felt was certain to become an electoral mess next year without the amendment.”<sup>1004</sup> Eastland kept his word not to muck up the 18-vote amendment in committee by getting it reported out by the first week of March. In its official report to the Senate explaining why the body should approve the resolution, the committee averred “that the time has come to lower the voting age to 18 in every election across the land – because it is right. Lowering the voting age is sound principle, sound policy, and sound practice.”<sup>1005</sup> The unanimous consent of the committee virtually assured Senate passage of S.J. Res. 7.

On Monday, 8 March, the Senate agreed to consider the resolution. Majority

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<sup>1002</sup> Ibid, 1. See also, *Washington Post*, 3 March 1971, A3.

<sup>1003</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 5 March 1971, 14.

<sup>1004</sup> *New York Times*, 5 March 1971, 29.

<sup>1005</sup> Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Lowering the Voting Age to 18*, 92<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1971, Senate Report 92-26, 18.



Leader Mike Mansfield indicated there would be no filibuster holdups because of the Judiciary Committee's categorical support. He tapped Birch Bayh to be the floor manager for the bill. While delivering the keynote affirmation of the measure, Bayh emphasized it would help restore domestic order by cooling the allure of radical sets. He argued, "How devastating it would be to the main rallying cry of these groups if the very system they say is sterile and unresponsive to change proves that it can change, and purges itself of inequities. No other one piece of legislation can do as much to convince the younger people that there is a place for them within the system."<sup>1006</sup> As Bayh had previously predicted, however, the addition of tangential amendments threatened to delay enactment of the 18-vote. On Wednesday, 10 March, Ted Kennedy and Tom Eagleton (D-MO) attempted to add, in essence, another constitutional amendment onto S.J. Res. 7 by proposing full voting representation for the District of Columbia within Congress.<sup>1007</sup> To accomplish their aim, which Eagleton claimed was an essential "attribute of citizenship" that Washington's residents deserved, they sought to replicate Kennedy's 1970 scheme to enfranchise youth.<sup>1008</sup> Kennedy and Eagleton argued that their attachment to S.J. Res. 7 was the only way to bypass the hostility within the Senate Judiciary and House Rules committees towards congressional representation for D.C. "I doubt," Kennedy affirmed, "that there has ever been a

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<sup>1006</sup> Congressional Record 117, (9 March 1971): 5492.

<sup>1007</sup> Their pitch would have given Washington, D.C. two elected senators and as many as two representatives. Kennedy had been a long-time advocate of D.C. representation. Eagleton was Senate District Committee chairman.

<sup>1008</sup> *Congressional Record* 117 (10 March 1971): 5807.

more meritorious case in Congress that called out for the unusual procedure of legislation by rider.”<sup>1009</sup>

Mansfield spiked the proviso by asking for it to be tabled, to which the Senate agreed 68-23.<sup>1010</sup> “Unquestionably,” Mansfield assented, “the people of the District deserve full and fair representation.” But he contended that the D.C. issue lacked the same “unanimity” of congressional accord that the cause to enfranchise youth fully had garnered.<sup>1011</sup> Mansfield stressed, “It is imperative that no action be taken to jeopardize the effort to extend to 18, 19, and 20-year-olds the full franchise of the ballot in all elections.”<sup>1012</sup> Mansfield’s parliamentary move to kill the Kennedy-Eagleton amendment before it could be brought to a vote seemed unusual because of its intra-party, fratricidal quality. To those people who knew the inside baseball of the Senate, however, the tabling motion appeared to widen the rift that had developed between Mansfield and Kennedy the previous year over the 18-vote rider during the Voting Rights Act renewal.<sup>1013</sup>

After tabling the Kennedy-Eagleton tender, Senate discourse regarding S.J. Res. 7 resembled more a pep rally than a debate. Before announcing his support for the resolution, Senator James Allen (D-AL) noted, “Usually it is said that there are

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<sup>1009</sup> Ibid, 5810.

<sup>1010</sup> Ibid, 5816.

<sup>1011</sup> Ibid, 5815.

<sup>1012</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 11 March 1971, 3.

<sup>1013</sup> See *New York Times*, 11 March 1971, 1 and 20; *Wall Street Journal*, 11 March 1971, 5; and *Washington Post*, 9 March 1971, C2, 10 March 1971, C2, and 11 March 1971, A6.

two sides to every question; but, apparently, there is only one side to the issue now before the Senate, and that is the matter of granting the vote to young people of the age of 18 years and older.”<sup>1014</sup> All the senators who spoke in favor of the resolution praised its judicious mending of the electoral fissure left by the Supreme Court. As Strom Thurmond (R-SC) summarized, “It just does not make sense to permit young people to have a voice in choosing national leaders while denying them the opportunity to participate in local government.”<sup>1015</sup> Many senators took the opportunity to lionize Jennings Randolph for his long efforts to enfranchise American youth; Marlin Cook (R-KY) even suggested naming the measure the “Randolph Amendment.”<sup>1016</sup> Birch Bayh was the last senator to speak on behalf of the resolution. He admitted that “lowering the voting age is not a panacea for the problems confronting us.” He asserted the 18-vote would “give the 11½ million young people who are outside of much of the legislative process, young people who are subject to all laws passed in this body and in all other legislative bodies, the right to participate in the election process and shape and mold their own futures.” Bayh concluded with a confident forecast: “I predict that young people will vote, in large numbers. I believe that once these younger citizens have the right they have sought, they will use it.”<sup>1017</sup> The Senate unanimously approved S.J. Res. 7 by a vote

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<sup>1014</sup> *Congressional Record* 117, (10 March 1971): 5828.

<sup>1015</sup> *Ibid*, 5824.

<sup>1016</sup> *Ibid*, 5830.

<sup>1017</sup> *Ibid*, 5829-5830.

of 94-0.<sup>1018</sup>

The youth suffrage bill in the House received a little more pushback. A few representatives envisioned doom if H.J. Res. 223 passed: adult residents in college towns held hostage to the whimsies of transitory young voters and local governments occupied by charming radical carpetbaggers skilled in wooing gullible teenagers. A handful of other congressmen pointed to recent failures of 18-vote legislation in the states as indication of popular disdain for adolescent enfranchisement. Charles Wiggins spoke for a few lawmakers when he lamented that the resolution would pass “for no other reason than that the young people are asking for it and we don’t want to say ‘no’ to them. In this, we sadly mirror the permissiveness of society in general.”<sup>1019</sup> A small contingent of conservatives, both Republican and Democrat, objected on the grounds that voting requirements for electors should be decided by the citizens of the localities involved.<sup>1020</sup> John Schmitz revived his suggestion that Congress should repeal youth suffrage in federal elections instead of seeking to broaden voting rights to 18-year-olds. The newly-formed Committee for Constitutional Integrity headed by Francis G. Wilson, emeritus professor of political science at the University of Illinois, encouraged House resistance. Wilson mailed circulars to all fifty governors and each of the

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<sup>1018</sup> Ibid, 5830. The six senators not in attendance, Mike Gravel (D-AK), Fred Harris (D-OK), Mark Hatfield (R-OR), Benjamin Jordan (D-NC), Karl Mundt (R-SD), and Edmund Muskie (D-ME), had their intentions recorded before their colleagues voted, and each would have said “yea” if present.

<sup>1019</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 24 March 1971, 2.

<sup>1020</sup> *Congressional Record* 117, (23 March 1971): 7532-7569. See also *Washington Post*, 24 March 1971, A1 and A8.

7,500 state legislators urging them to refrain from taking up any 18-vote measure passed by Congress. He highlighted that Virginia had filed a petition to repeal the statute, arguing it was an “act of usurpation” by granting suffrage powers to Congress outside of its prescribed authority established in the Constitution.<sup>1021</sup>

This time, however, the adherents of states’ rights could not derail a federal youth suffrage amendment. For most congressmen, including those who had voted against the 18-vote in 1970, the practical need to avoid the confusion and expense of dual-age voting systems outweighed the philosophical want to maintain states’ rights. As Representative William L. Scott (R-VA) expounded,

I have considerable reservations about permitting 18-year-olds to vote and, as the record will show, did vote against the provision in the Voting Rights Act last year to permit those between 18 and 21 to vote in Federal, State, and local elections. One basis for the vote at that time is a belief that voting age is a matter to be determined by the State rather than the Federal Government. In my opinion, the Constitution so provides. However, the Supreme Court has now decided that Congress by general legislation can regulate the voting age in Federal elections but not in State and local elections. The result of the recent decision of our highest Federal court is that there are two classes of voters and, apparently, those States which have not reduced the voting age to 18 must keep separate voting lists. Moreover, the counting of ballots would be complicated if the present condition of the law continues to exist. Therefore, I intend to support the present resolution which, when ratified by 38 States of the Union, will make uniform the voting age for citizens within our States as well as throughout the country. The action of the Supreme Court, in my opinion, has deprived us, as well as the individual States, of the opportunity to decide the question of whether 18-year-olds should vote on its merits. We have to approve the resolution

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<sup>1021</sup> Willard Edwards, “Capitol Views: Congress Shuffles 18 Vote to States,” column, *Chicago Tribune*, 20 March 1971, 12. See also *Washington Post*, 29 March 1971, C1, 1 April 1971, F3, and 11 May 1971, C5.

to obtain orderly electoral procedure.<sup>1022</sup>

For the other legislators, the time had come to enfranchise adolescents irrespective of the measure's utility. As Representative James Kee (D-WV) asserted on the House floor, "I am going to support this constitutional amendment not because it will save the taxpayers money, not because the two-track system would be difficult to administer, but because I believe it is right."<sup>1023</sup>

Democratic leaders allowed Emanuel Celler, the oldest member of the House, to floor manage H.J. Res. 223. Their choice illustrated just how far many adults had come in their view of the 18-vote since the 1940s. Celler commenced the House discussion of the resolution by acknowledging his longtime criticism of youth suffrage. He reminded his colleagues of his constant advocacy for civil rights, including co-sponsorship of the Twenty-third and Twenty-fourth Amendments, to argue that his support for the Twenty-sixth Amendment was "part of a constitutional tradition of enlarging participation in our political process." Celler wrapped up his speech by championing the capacities of young people. "Some of our youth have disappointed us, but the preponderant majority are as sound of mind as they are strong in body," he averred. "Youth will be served," Celler rousingly concluded, "by giving them the ballot."<sup>1024</sup>

As the proceedings on 23 March neared the time to vote on H.J. Res. 223,

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<sup>1022</sup> *Congressional Record* 117 (23 March 1971): 7546.

<sup>1023</sup> *Ibid.*, (22 March 1971): 7293.

<sup>1024</sup> *Ibid.*, (23 March 1971): 7532 and 7533.

Representative James J. Howard (D-NJ) proposed a last-second amendment. Howard sought to enlarge the resolution to establish eighteen as America's legal age majority. He argued that if 18-year-olds were old enough to vote, they should be allowed to assume the full responsibilities of adulthood, including the rights to enter contracts, be sued in court, have an abortion, carry a firearm, and run for Congress. On a point of order raised by Celler, the chairman presiding over the House, Richard Bolling (D-MO), ruled Howard's amendment non-germane to the resolution at hand, thus killing it.<sup>1025</sup> Celler then asked for an immediate vote on H.J. Res. 223, which the House overwhelmingly adopted in a roll-call vote by a margin of 400 to 19.<sup>1026</sup>

Acceptance of resolution kicked in a directive of the Rules Committee. After the Senate had passed its 18-vote measure, Rules members understood the time pressures to fix the dual-age voting fiasco created by the *Oregon v. Mitchell* verdict. On 17 March, exactly one week after the Senate had approved S.J. Res. 7, the House confirmed by unanimous consent the bounds of debate for H.J. Res. 223 set by the Rules Committee. One of the terms allowed the House to consider S.J. Res. 7 immediately following the approval of H.J. Res. 223. Rules member Thomas "Tip" O'Neill (D-MA) explained the simple goal was to expedite the legislative approval

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<sup>1025</sup> Ibid, 7568. See also *New York Times*, 24 March 1971, 26.

<sup>1026</sup> Ibid, 7569-7570. Of the nineteen representatives who opposed, seven were Democrats (Omar Burlison, O.C. Fisher, and W.R. Poage of Texas, Edith Green, Oregon; Tom Gettys, South Carolina; and F. Edward Hebert and John R. Rarick of Louisiana) and twelve were Republicans (Del Clawson, Barry Goldwater, Jr., John Rousselot, John Schmitz, and Charles Wiggins of California; H.R. Gross and Wiley Mayne of Iowa; Durward Hall, Missouri; Edward Hutchinson, Michigan; Robert Michel, Illinois; Sam Steiger, Arizona; and Wendall Wyatt, Oregon).

process. O'Neill said the committee wished to assure that a youth suffrage amendment would be "ratified prior to the 1972 presidential election."<sup>1027</sup> Since both the Senate and House 18-vote resolutions were identical, Rules members saw no need to ship them to a joint conference for mark up or language resolution. Once the House consented to H.J. Res. 223, Emanuel Celler requested immediate consideration of S.J. Res. 7. Speaker pro tempore Hale Boggs (D-LA) ordered the House clerk to give it a third reading, a basic parliamentary rule for the enactment of congressional legislation. Upon the reading, Boggs declared the passage of S.J. Res. 7 the question before the House. The terms of debate accepted on 17 March allowed the final vote total on H.J. Res. 223 to stand as the House's tally for S.J. Res. 7. Boggs declared the Senate resolution approved under the declared rules and ordered the House measure to be tabled.<sup>1028</sup> The House action meant that the Twenty-sixth Amendment had passed Congress; whether the necessary number of states would accept it became the new political cause célèbre.

Article V of the U.S. Constitution requires that a minimum of three-fourths of the states (38 out of 50) must ratify an amendment proposal before it can become law. S.J. Res. 7 allowed state legislatures seven years to approve the Twenty-sixth Amendment. Support for quick ratification appeared strong. The *Wall Street Journal* claimed there was "an excellent chance" that enough states would consent

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<sup>1027</sup> Ibid, (17 March 1971): 6847.

<sup>1028</sup> Ibid, (23 March 1971): 7570.



to the 18-vote by the November 1972 elections.<sup>1029</sup> A *New York Times* survey taken in the days after the House's consent vote indicated "that at least 38 states will approve it within a short period."<sup>1030</sup> State sanction of the amendment appeared to be driven more by a desire to avoid the procedural headaches and financial drains of dual registration than an eagerness to enfranchise 18-year-olds. For reasons related to internal politics and distrust of adolescents, ten states had rejected youth suffrage bills in the past two years. Faced with the heavy costs of possibly having to hold separate federal and state elections to accommodate *Oregon v. Mitchell*, however, most states, including those that had previously rejected the 18-vote, seemed ready to ratify the Twenty-sixth Amendment.<sup>1031</sup> Three states, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming, could not act because their legislatures had recently adjourned and would not reconvene until 1973.

Among those state legislatures currently in-session, several hurriedly maneuvered to become the first to approve the amendment. Within thirty minutes after the House approval of S.J. Res. 7 – and without even waiting for an official copy of the amendment certified by Congress – Minnesota and Delaware ratified it; later in the afternoon of 23 March, Connecticut, Tennessee, and Washington also gave consent.<sup>1032</sup> "The bandwagon's already rolling," whooped Emanuel Celler upon

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<sup>1029</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 24 March 1971, 3.

<sup>1030</sup> *New York Times*, 24 March 1971, 1.

<sup>1031</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 and 7 April 1971, 22.

<sup>1032</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 24 March 1971, 1.

hearing news about the 26<sup>th</sup>'s acceptance by the first five states.<sup>1033</sup> Conservative opponents of the 18-vote futility scrambled to stifle ratification. They warned that enactment of the amendment would lead to student takeovers of governments in college towns. A Republican state senator from Illinois bemoaned enfranchising “the same people who have caused us so much trouble at S.I.U. [Southern Illinois University] and Kent State.”<sup>1034</sup> Most state legislators, however, rushed to relieve themselves of the logistical and financial burdens of creating separate voting-age systems to accommodate the Supreme Court’s decision, thereby steamrolling resistance to the Twenty-sixth Amendment. Within thirty days of the House of Representatives’ passage, 60% of the necessary 38 states had approved it; within two months, 75% had consented.<sup>1035</sup>

As the 18-vote amendment neared final approval, a handful of states maneuvered to become the historic 38<sup>th</sup> state to ratify. As Ian McGowlan of Common Cause said, “Nobody wants to be 39<sup>th</sup>.”<sup>1036</sup> A mini-tempest arose regarding which state actually became the 38<sup>th</sup>. On the morning of 30 June 1971, Alabama became the 36<sup>th</sup> state to accept the amendment. Three other states, Oklahoma, Ohio, and North Carolina, only needed one house of their legislatures to complete ratification. Around 4:00 p.m. EST, North Carolina’s Senate gave final

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<sup>1033</sup> *New York Times*, 24 March 1971, 26.

<sup>1034</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 25 March 1971, A1.

<sup>1035</sup> Thomas H. Neale, *The Eighteen Year Old Vote: The Twenty-Sixth Amendment and Subsequent Voting Rates of Newly Enfranchised Age Groups*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, No. 83-103 GOV, (29 May 1983): 14-15.

<sup>1036</sup> *New York Times*, 28 June 1971, 35.

approval. As news of the Tar Heel State's feat spread, it spurred Oklahoma lawmakers to call a special session just to endorse the 18-vote. R.W. Apple, Jr., of the *New York Times* reported that Oklahoma's action caused an "atmosphere of near-panic" in the Ohio general assembly.<sup>1037</sup> Charles F. Kurfess, the Ohio House Speaker, furiously gavelled through a motion to cut off debate and ordered an immediate roll-call vote, which ended a little after 8:00 p.m. EST. The *Times* and other news outlets crowned Ohio as the 38<sup>th</sup> and necessary state to make youth suffrage part of the Constitution.<sup>1038</sup> However, the General Services Administration (the federal agency responsible for preserving and safekeeping the nation's historical documents) considers North Carolina to be the 38<sup>th</sup> state because its governor delayed signing the official copy of the assembly's bill until just after midnight on 1 July.<sup>1039</sup> A total of 42 states eventually endorsed the 18-vote. In October 1971, Georgia, the first state to permit 18-year-olds to vote, became the last state to ratify the Twenty-sixth Amendment.

The 100 days to ratification established a record for swiftest approval of a constitutional amendment.<sup>1040</sup> President Nixon declared that unprecedented speed of the 18-vote's ratification "affirms our nation's confidence in its youth and its trust in their responsibility."<sup>1041</sup> Most state lawmakers, however, were driven by a

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<sup>1037</sup> Ibid, 1 July 1971, 1 and 43.

<sup>1038</sup> See Ibid,; *Chicago Tribune*, 1 July 1971, 1; and *Washington Post*, 1 July 1971, A1 and A7.

<sup>1039</sup> Neale, 15.

<sup>1040</sup> The previous record time for ratification was 189 days for the Twelfth Amendment.

<sup>1041</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 1 July 1971, 1.

practical want to have the process completed in plenty of time to accommodate the registration of new young voters before the presidential election in November 1972. According to David C. Huckabee of the Congressional Research Service, the average ratification time, excluding the Twenty-seventh Amendment (which took more than 202 years), was one year, eight months, and seven days.<sup>1042</sup> Had that historical standard been maintained, the 11 million newly enfranchised 18-to-20-year-olds would have had to wait until 1974 to vote in a federal election and until 1976 to cast their first ballot for president.

On 5 July 1971 – the day America officially observed its 195<sup>th</sup> birthday – Robert L. Kunzig, head of the General Services Administration, certified the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment as part of the Constitution. At a ceremony held in the East Room of the White House attended by federal officials and nearly 500 members of the singing group, Young Americans in Concert, Kunzig presented President Nixon an official copy of the amendment.<sup>1043</sup> Nixon and a trio of 18-year-olds (Julianne Jones of Memphis, Joseph Loyd, Jr. of Detroit, and Paul Larimer of Concord, California) chosen by lot from the choir signed as witnesses to Kunzig's certification, thereby making the 18-vote national law.<sup>1044</sup> In his prepared remarks, Nixon never specifically endorsed the amendment. Rather, he lauded the potential contributions

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<sup>1042</sup> David C. Huckabee, *Ratification of Amendments to the U.S. Constitution*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 97-222 GOV (30 September 1997): 1.

<sup>1043</sup> Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the Constitution, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, vol. 85, (5 July 1971): 829-830. On 7 July 1971, Kunzig's certifying statement that the amendment had become valid was published. See F.R. Doc. 71 09999691, 36 F.R. 12725.

<sup>1044</sup> *New York Times*, 6 July 1971, 1 and 21.

enfranchised young Americans could make to the nation. “We can have confidence that these young Americans will provide America with what it needs now,” Nixon declared, “[They] will infuse into this country some idealism, some courage, some stamina, some high moral purpose.”<sup>1045</sup> The Census Bureau determined that the Twenty-sixth Amendment enfranchised a little over eleven million persons aged 18 to 21. Despite optimistic predictions that young people would vote in large numbers, however, only 5.3 million of the new electors actually voted in the 1972 presidential election.<sup>1046</sup>

The Twenty-sixth Amendment overcame many obstacles before achieving passage and ratification. The youth suffrage issue had been a “perennial political lemon” since its introduction during World War II.<sup>1047</sup> Going into the 1960s, American lawmakers and their constituents appeared patently disinterested in reducing franchise ages. During the postwar era, nearly all the states (except for Georgia, Kentucky, Alaska, and Hawaii) had refused to lower voting-age requirements, and only once, in 1954, had either house of the U.S. Congress voted on a youth suffrage bill. But during the postwar era, adult advocates for the 18-vote successfully nudged adolescent enfranchisement from an issue on the outer

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<sup>1045</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, 6 July 1971, 1 and *Washington Post*, 6 July 1971, A4.

<sup>1046</sup> Bureau of the Census, *Voter Participation in November 1972*, Series P-20, No. 244, December 1972.

<sup>1047</sup> Fred P. Graham, “Lowering Voting Age Is an Idea Whose Time Has Come,” *New York Times*, 29 March 1970, 154.

edges to the margins of political discourse. Youth suffragists in the 1960s would push enfranchisement into the political mainstream, and in doing so, public and political support for teen enfranchisement gradually built. Like Max Frost and his troopers, a handful of youth activists reckoned young people could not hope to topple “the Establishment” or remake “the System” without voting rights. A spike of intense sociopolitical shocks between summer 1968 and spring 1969 triggered by young demonstrators made youth suffrage a legislative priority. The violent riots of the Democratic national convention in Chicago, bellicose antiwar rallies, and combative confrontations on university campuses convinced most lawmakers that enfranchising adolescents might keep young militants from running wild in the streets.

Paradoxically, the Establishment politicians that young people often rebelled against acted responsibly on their behalf. Influential federal officials championed youth suffrage as a political therapeutic to relieve generational tension. The legislative toil of pushing the 18-vote through Congress proved arduous. The task was indirectly aided by liberal Democrats who, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, pushed Congress to streamline its institutional operations. In a political era that demanded forceful legislative responses to severe domestic and international crises, an energetic, motivated group of junior lawmakers were inspired by the zeitgeist to reform congressional practices. Their actions overcame the procedural obstructionism orchestrated by conservative Republicans and southern Democrats against civil rights and social welfare legislation. The cause of youth suffrage most

benefitted from a small cast of committed Senators who cleverly steered the 18-vote through Congress's byzantine lawmaking System. Their labors, prodded by youth dissidents and abetted by young lobbyists, produced an enduring electoral reform that remains an important political achievement of the long 1960s.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

Nature herself has provided the distinction [between rulers and subjects] when she made a difference between old and young within the same species, of whom she fitted the one to govern and other to be governed. No one takes offense at being governed when he is young, nor does he think himself better than his governors, especially if he will enjoy the same privilege when he reaches the required age.

Aristotle<sup>1048</sup>

Aristotle argued in his seminal treatise *The Politics* that the political history of human beings is the story of an evolution from the rule of a few to the government by the many. Common people gained power, he asserted, because “man is by nature a political animal” who positively values, and even enjoys, participation in decision-making associations.<sup>1049</sup> Aristotle uncovered what he believed to be an incontrovertible correlation: the more democratic the government, the more the people possessed decision-making power. But Aristotle acknowledged that democracies could not give every person an equal share in governing the state. He reckoned that “nature herself” conceived age as the most fundamental chain of command: between the old, “whom she fitted. . .to govern,” and the young, “whom she fitted. . .to be governed.” Age was not as onerous in its dimensions of

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<sup>1048</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, 7.1332b.

<sup>1049</sup> Ibid, 1.1253a.



inequality as other restrictions, like race or gender, for all humans, save untimely death, will eventually reach majority age. Nonetheless, age-based prejudices constrained the sociopolitical autonomy and agency of all non-adults.

Control over governmental decision-making processes became the foundation for adultocracy, or the rule of adults. Because adults were presumed to have the knowledge and experience seemingly required for self-rule to endure, all western democracies vested them with the power to make decisions applicable to all the people. Arguments about which adults comprised “the people” roiled democracies, ancient and modern. Long before the creation of republicanism, adultocracy narrowed the connotation of “the people” to mean *political* people, or those adults empowered to act politically through voting, lawmaking, and administering on behalf of the demos. Certain adults were expected to lead community discussions, define civic goals, formulate public policy, and persuade (or coerce) the populace to follow along. The methods for making choices and reaching conclusions varied, but democratic states always granted those persons considered adults the privileges of voting and office-holding. Limiting decision-making authority to adults meant that the franchise served as a vital reinforcement of their sociopolitical omnipotence.

Adultocracy framed suffrage battles. The ancient progenitors of democracy in Greece and Rome devised the two major types of restrictions on suffrage: those based on citizenship and those based on competence. Greco-Roman legalists scripted community-based voter qualifications to assure that only those adults who had a vested socioeconomic stake in the outcomes of electoral affairs should be

allowed to participate in them. Citizenship requirements also meant that every citizen was either a potentially-eligible or legally-enfranchised voter. Competence-based restrictions emerged from a common-sense notion that only those people deemed mentally proficient should be allowed to serve as electors, jurors, or lawmakers.<sup>1050</sup> Setting the criteria for determining competency was rooted more in stereotype than objective standard. Among adults in early America, for example, all persons not male, property-owning, white, and of European descent were denied suffrage for supposedly lacking the cognitive capacities deemed necessary for reasoned decision-making. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, political agitation by groups of voteless adults eliminated competence-based disfranchisements based on sex, class, race, and ethnicity by framing suffrage as an inherent birthright of citizenship. As a result, American conceptions of “the people” expanded to include new factions of adult constituents.

Widening the circle of *who* could vote proved less complicated than determining *when* a person should be enfranchised. Across polities that granted suffrage, age has been the most universal of all voting qualifications. The “natural” hierarchy of age that Aristotle alluded to informed normative expectations associated with a particular chronological age. Age norms structured social perceptions of what children, adolescents, adults, and elders should or should not be allowed to do – notions often summarized by the dictums “You’re not old enough

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<sup>1050</sup> See E.S. Staveley, *Greek and Roman Voting and Elections* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972).

yet” or “Act your age.” The cultural construction of age abilities shaped defining the temporal thresholds used by parents and the law for bestowing individual autonomy, social empowerment, and political enfranchisement to individuals and groups. Age of majority laws codified links between status and entitlements to man-made dating schemes founded on chronology. Not only was age a correlate of lawful privileges, legally-defined majority ages served as the prerequisite to acquire individual rights. Simply, a person had to meet certain chronological benchmarks as determined by law to officially perform “adult” actions, such as to marry, enter contracts, or vote. The word “majority” held dual political limitations for young people. They were not of sufficient demographic numbers to wrest power from adults, and they had not attained the status of having reached full legal age to effect change. Hence, American youth endured an exclusive tyranny of the “majority” never suffered by other disfranchised social groups.

Age-based allocations of suffrage anchored adultocracy. Regardless of other cultural, socioeconomic, or educational disfranchisements, every citizen first had to first reach a prescribed age before being considered eligible to cast a ballot officially. When to offer those persons considered “adults” the authority to make binding decisions for whole societies became a political conundrum. Bands and tribes never set a majority age for voting because they did not tender suffrage; whereas, democratic states had to promulgate precise ages because they formally enfranchised citizens. At their genesis, suffrage edicts reflected the band-tribal custom of deputizing able constituents to decide upon communal matters. The size

of states, however, made ready assessments of individual competency exceedingly complicated. In promulgating suffrage ages, lawmakers drew upon customs that gradually meted the responsibilities of adulthood across adolescent years. That tradition was based upon a presumption that as people aged they became “mature,” or more stable, sensible, rational, and wise. To identify potential voters, states utilized subjective perceptions of maturity rather than objective measures of ability as the sorting mechanism. Western democracies, sociologist Frank Henderson Stewart observes, believe that

a person should not be given the right to vote until he has reached a certain degree of maturity. We do not believe, however, that he suddenly achieves this degree of maturity on his eighteenth birthday. We recognize that age is not an exact measure of maturity, but we use it because, in this case, it has many practical advantages: above all, it is a measure of maturity that is generally accepted and that is cheap and simple to apply. In both these respects it has the advantage over some psychological test.<sup>1051</sup>

The ancient framers of western suffrage struggled to pinpoint the exact temporal moment when persons had chronologically matured enough to impanel them as voters. The necessity of establishing a standard for enfranchisement led them to set arbitrary age floors, such as 21 or 18, as the determinants for exercising electoral power. Choosing the precise chronological ages to grant electorship reflected, as Aristotle referenced, the supposed “natural” distinctions between adults and youth. To legislators and jurists, the central age difference seemed to be

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<sup>1051</sup> Frank Henderson Stewart, *Fundamentals of Age-Group Systems* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 202.

that adolescents were more naïve, impulsive, and unruly than adults. A common understanding of adolescence as a turbulent time of the lifecycle defined by anxiety and rebelliousness framed the western system for parceling majority ages over the course of the teenage years. Adult evaluations of electoral competency usually relied on some fuzzy combination of personal anecdote and private intuition lashed to public perceptions of a riotous adolescence. This fickle rubric yielded a pastiche of voting-age laws that reflected a general adult indifference towards the true or known capabilities of young people. Adolescents might have thought of themselves equal in capacity and knowledge to adults, but the law viewed youth as inherently inferior in temperament and judgment – the core aptitudes demanded of democratic electors. No empirical evidence could prove conclusively that majority-age persons were any more able to cast an unadulterated ballot than teenagers or that adolescents were any less cognitively or emotionally fit to vote than enfranchised adults. Yet the determination of a particular franchise age squared with a cultural construct that emphasized the perception of maturity over proof of capacity when dispensing legal freedoms. Hence, the promulgation of voting-age statutes framed suffrage more as a privilege of adulthood than as a birthright guaranteed by government.

The Twenty-sixth Amendment broadened the scope of electoral adulthood. It confirmed that what passes in the modern American polity as “the people” means males and females over the age of eighteen who have also qualified by birth (or naturalization) and residence to be participatory political citizens. In stretching the

bounds of who are considered “the people,” the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment closed the gap between the promise and the actuality of full democratic citizenship for adolescents. American youth, like other social groups, overcame daunting political barriers and pervasive social obstacles to achieve suffrage. Though teenagers had made distinctive contributions to the development of American institutions and culture, a combination of circumstances, customs, and laws hindered their enfranchisement. Extending suffrage to young people once seemed dangerously harebrained; by 1970, it seemed assuredly democratic and profoundly just.

The Twenty-sixth Amendment overturned several centuries of Anglo-American jurisprudence. Twenty-one was the age fixed by medieval English jurists for full majority within the common law, and 21 had been observed informally as the chronological benchmark for suffrage. In 1696, Parliament codified the custom by establishing twenty-one as the official age of enfranchisement. American colonies and states maintained the 21-vote until 1943, when Georgia electors, spurred by a progressive governor, Ellis Arnall, voted to lower the suffrage age to eighteen. Georgia’s action inspired the federal government to consider fixing eighteen as the uniform national voting age. Proposals to establish an 18-vote amendment to the U.S. Constitution became a source of sociopolitical consternation for the next three decades. In 1971, the United States declared that all citizens at least 18-years-old could not be denied suffrage. Today, the overwhelming majority of world democracies set eighteen as the minimum voting age.

The long, strange trip of the Twenty-sixth Amendment exemplifies the

stresses and strains of the political-social dynamic that informs American lawmaking. Only the Twenty-Seventh Amendment has had a longer period of gestation from initial introduction in Congress to eventual addition to the Constitution.<sup>1052</sup> One of the driving forces within modern political historiography is an interest in tracing the modifications made to New Deal-style liberal statism during the post-World War II period. The varied scholarship of political scientists and historians shows that American democracy cannot be explained by recourse to a simple narrative of political events. Political history is more than what lawmakers did and the people endured; it has deep connection to cultural practices. Constitutional historians, for example, dispute whether amendments are primarily an exercise of legislative or constituent power. Bruce Ackerman maintains that any alteration to the Constitution, particularly amendments, can only be achieved when popular will supports the change.<sup>1053</sup> Richard B. Bernstein and Jerome Agel hold that amending the Constitution also requires a mobilization of political will to undertake the arduous Article V process.<sup>1054</sup> As Ackerman, Bernstein, and Agel allude, scholars must explain both the constitutional arrangements and the cultural mores that made political transformation possible (or in some cases impossible) to provide a fuller account of postwar political history.

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<sup>1052</sup> U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Ratification of Amendments to the U.S. Constitution*, by David C. Huckabee, CRS Report 97-922 GOV, (30 September 1997).

<sup>1053</sup> Bruce Ackerman, *We the People: Foundations* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>1054</sup> Richard B. Bernstein and Jerome Agel, *Amending America: If We Love the Constitution so Much, Why Do We Keep Trying to Change It?* (New York: Times Books, 1993).

The tumult over youth suffrage illuminates the theory of historian Michael Zuckerman that there exists a “social context” to American democracy that shapes political behavior.<sup>1055</sup> The polling on the 18-vote issue followed a postwar political trend: public opinion often tracked ahead of the legislative willingness to act. Millions of Americans wanted Congress to do more to broaden the electoral base of democracy, but many lawmakers, particularly southern Democrats and conservative Republicans, resisted new political initiatives. Historian John Patrick Diggins contends that the conservative coalition foisted upon the postwar era a “politics of inertia” defined by “a retrenchment of federal power” and “a rise in local state jurisdiction.”<sup>1056</sup> Their state-centered view of federalism proscribed any and all congressional actions that sought to widen the franchise, including the thwarting of an 18-vote constitutional amendment in May 1954.

The social understanding of adolescence as a time of “storm and stress” buttressed the obstructionism of conservative congressmen and other like-minded adults. G. Stanley Hall’s theory of a biologically-deterministic, tumultuous adolescence indelibly burned an image of the adolescent as hormonal, emotional, and irrational into the American *mentalité*. Postwar social scientists showed conclusively that there was no reason to deprive adolescents of consent powers on the basis of inferior competence; their research suggested that adolescent reasoning

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<sup>1055</sup> Michael Zuckermann, “The Social Context of Democracy in Massachusetts,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, vol. 25, no. 4 (October 1968): 523-544.

<sup>1056</sup> John Patrick Diggins, *The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace, 1941-1960* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 128 and 132.



capabilities were not significantly different from that of adults. Yet, according to a 1968 *Newsweek* piece, the 21-vote endured “more because of legal convenience and medieval custom than through biological necessity.”<sup>1057</sup> The majority of adults could not identify G. Stanley Hall or describe his seminal thesis in much detail, but they certainly believed “storm-stress” valid. Their proof was more personal and anecdotal: the moody and mistake-prone teenagers who seemed to laze too much, listen too little, and dissent too often within their homes. Adults also worried that “juvenile delinquents,” “beatniks,” and “hippies” were encouraging the “good kids” to defy traditional notions of propriety and authority. Until adolescents could show themselves capable of providing a thoughtful and responsible vote, adults would not invite youth to join the American electorate.

In the years between the initial raising and final ratification of the 18-vote amendment, the basic arguments for and against youth suffrage stayed remarkably consistent. Adults never seriously considered whether adolescents, as citizens, possessed an inherent right to vote; instead, they debated whether teenagers possessed the requisite competency to justify enfranchisement. Advocates of the 18-vote argued that adolescents deserved suffrage because they had, just like adults, ably served the nation as soldiers, taxpayers, and workers. Opponents of lowering the voting age countered that adolescents under age 21 lacked the intellectual or emotional maturity to proffer electoral consent sensibly. Though popular opinion polls indicated that Americans accepted the notion of teen voting, most adults,

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<sup>1057</sup> “Old Enough to. . .,” *Newsweek*, 29 July 1968, 53.

especially federal and state legislators, appeared thoroughly disinterested in reducing franchise ages until youth activism shook American society during the 1960s. Some adults pointed to the leftist ideology and aggressive tactics of the young militants as evidence of a congenital nihilism that made adolescents unfit for enfranchisement. Other adults contended that the radical fringe should not deprive the majority of America's responsible young people from voting. They argued that expressing discontent with continued adult tolerance for bigotry, conformity, and the military-industrial complex evidenced an analytical maturity among youth; hence, exercising the rights to petition and assemble for a redress of grievances showed adolescents were savvy enough to proffer electoral consent. By 1970, the 18-vote became a national legislative priority. Most congressmen eventually reckoned that suffrage could restore social order by giving talented and energetic young people what they demanded: a real, consequential stake in the political fate of the nation. As Senator Richard Schweiker (R-PA) asserted: "the primary reason for endorsing the 18-year-old vote is on the merits. Our young people have continually demonstrated the political awareness, the public concern, the desire to participate in our process, and the capability of exercising responsible judgment, sufficiently to have earned the right to vote."<sup>1058</sup>

Several immediate outcomes of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment can be readily observed. Constitutionally, it settled the question of whether or not Congress could determine voter qualifications in federal, state, and local elections. A key reason

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<sup>1058</sup> *Congressional Record* 117 (11 February 1971): 2612.

some congressmen ratified the amendment was to satisfy a legal problem: the dual-age voting system created by the *Oregon v. Mitchell* ruling. Legally, the amendment spurred many states to lower the basic age of majority from age twenty-one to eighteen. States rationalized that if Congress accorded 18-year-olds greater authority to give consent, then state laws should be changed to allow them greater authority to make binding decisions on matters involving their personal welfare and legal condition. Additionally, state lawmakers worried that maintaining variant ages of majority (for example, those statutes allowing different marriage ages based on sex) would lead to a myriad of constitutional challenges. Some states lowered the general age of majority but retained higher minimum age requirements for particular acts, especially the purchase of alcohol.

Politically, the establishment of the 18-vote achieved both the inclusion and the quieting of American youth. Lowering the voting age satisfied youth demands for full democratic participation. Enfranchisement also granted young activists an opportunity to change the political status quo through electoral pressure. Young politicians, however, could not take advantage because they lacked the consistency of organization and leadership common to other minority groups because of aging. As the former firebrands grew older, the protests, movements, and identity politics that defined '60s social activism were not sustained by the ensuing cohort of youth: Generation X. It lacked the rich, highly-charged formative experiences of Vietnam, Selma, or Chicago. The tangible risks of military conscription, the denial of freedom, or violent physical harm never deeply threatened Gen Xers. Nor did they

show any interest in ideological engagement; they preferred embarking on quests of personal fulfillment to contemplating the deep existentialism of liberal humanism.<sup>1059</sup> Those young people who tried to retain the activist spirit of the '60s discovered that a ballot afforded youth no special political standing. Competing against other groups for influence and working the process for results did not appear as politically gainful, or as culturally sexy, as the renegade agitation of oppositional activism. Adult anxiety about what adolescents would do with their votes was proven misplaced; youth predictions of transforming the system from within proved false. Having reckoned the suffrage mission accomplished, Generation X felt secure in its civil rights and political equality. Hence, the sociopolitical activism that had defined the protests of the 1960s culminated with the ratification of the Twenty-sixth Amendment.

Enfranchisement entailed a responsibility to exercise the privilege, and, in that regard, youth voter turnout rates have generally disappointed. Prior to the 1972 election, the Census Bureau estimated that the vast majority of 18-to-21-year-old voters would cast their first ballot, but less than 50% of newly-enfranchised youths actually voted.<sup>1060</sup> Since 1972, young Americans have never been the crucial constituency in any election. In marketing, media, fashion, and technology, adolescents have been an earth-shattering demographic. But youth have not been

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<sup>1059</sup> For additional information regarding their political views, see Stephen C. Craig and Stephen Earl Bennett, eds., *After the Boom: The Politics of Generation X*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).

<sup>1060</sup> Bureau of the Census, *Voter Participation in November 1972*, Series P-20, No. 244, December 1972.

all that consequential as voters; in all elections since ratification of the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment, young people consistently vote at lower rates of participation than older voters. The general lack of electoral interest among American youth has puzzled pundits and politicians. Well-publicized civic programs to register new young voters, especially the continuing efforts of MTV's "Rock the Vote," seemed to awaken youth to the importance to voting every presidential election cycle. As the United States entered the 2000s, those endeavors did not spur widespread or continuous execution of the franchise among adolescent voters.

The first three presidential elections of the new millennium rejuvenated youth electors. The controversial circumstances of George W. Bush's electoral victory in 2000 reminded young Americans of an important civics lesson: every vote counts, including theirs. During Bush's first term, his decision to fight Iraq on the shaky grounds that Saddam Hussein was building weapons of mass destruction and supporting terrorism and his conservative positions on abortion, stem cell research, and homosexuality riled left-leaning youths. In 2004, they rallied behind Democrat John Kerry, but his candidacy was undone by the unsupported claims of a well-funded right-wing group that Kerry had lied about his service in Vietnam. In 2008, young people flocked to the campaign of Barack Obama. He ran for president as a fresh-faced alternative to the Washington status quo. He pitched himself as a candidate who would bring the nation together after eight years of bitter divisiveness. Obama electrified Democratic audiences with his call for "hope" and "change," and he ran his campaign around the vague but appealing slogan, "Change

We Can Believe In.” Obama’s campaign events drew enormous crowds. His supporters, who were younger and more racially diverse than the population as a whole, were highly motivated. Obama won the election with a clear majority of the electorate, and a handful of commentators gushed that his triumph heralded a political watershed: the passage of governmental power from the graying Baby Boomers to the youthful Millennials.

Political observers pointed to the success of Obama’s massive youth-get-out-the-vote operation as key to his victory. Labeled the “Millennial Tidal Wave” or the “Youthquake,” young people accounted for 23 million votes in 2008 (or 18% of the aggregated total) – and increase of 2 million as compared to the 2004 election.

Nearly 55% of all eligible voters between ages 18 and 29 cast ballots, which represented the highest turnout among youth since 1972, and they overwhelmingly supported the 47-year-old Obama (68%) over his 72-year-old Republican opponent, John McCain (32%).<sup>1061</sup> The prospect of a rush of liberal-leaning young people into mainstream politics startled conservatives. They worried that the demography behind Obama’s youth-fired conquest might relegate the Republican Party to permanent minority status. After the election, the GOP made a concerted effort to stem the seemingly-imminent progressive swell by moderating some of its social policy positions and by broadening its youth recruitment programs. Conservative commentators recommended a more blunt approach. Near the fall 2010 mid-term

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<sup>1061</sup> See Amanda Ruggeri, “Young Voters Powered Obama’s Victory While Shrugging Off Slacker Image,” *USA Today*, 6 November 2008, 1 and 2 and Scott Keeter and Juliana Horowitz, “Young Voters in the 2008 Election,” Pew Research Center, 13 November 2008, accessed 30 November 2008, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/11/13/young-voters-in-the-2008-election>.

elections, analyst Ann Coulter proposed a repeal of the Twenty-sixth Amendment. Coulter based her pitch on her observation that young people are not as politically serious as adults. Her proof: the 2008 election of Obama, which Coulter blamed on youths who lacked “fully functional brains.”<sup>1062</sup> The public, outside the conservative blogosphere, responded to her call with a collective yawn.

Whether Obama’s 2008 victory was the result of a generational shift toward an era of liberal governance or represented a quirk of political circumstances remains to be seen. Conservative hyperventilating about 2008 notwithstanding, the Twenty-sixth Amendment has had negligible electoral impact since its promulgation. That historical trend can be partly explained by consistently low turnout among young voters. It can also be further clarified by the incomplete enfranchisement the amendment offered. While the 26<sup>th</sup> guaranteed Americans at least 18-years-old the privilege of suffrage, it did not concurrently lower the constitutional ages for holding political office: 25 for representatives, 30 for senators, and 35 for presidents. Young people between ages eighteen and twenty-four remain the only voter group that cannot elect members of their constituency to serve as federal congresspersons. The rules and regulations regarding enfranchisement stemmed from an ethos that declaimed citizenry as shareholding in the political community and voting as the essential act of citizenship. The sense of equality bore by the status “of majority age” engendered a belief among adolescents that they were equal in capacity, aptitude, and worth to adults, and,

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<sup>1062</sup> Ann Coulter, “Repeal the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment,” *Human Events*, 15 November 2010, 5.

therefore, entitled to the full entitlements of adulthood. But the adult lawmakers who authored the Twenty-sixth Amendment never considered making teenagers full governing partners. They recognized in youth an ability to vote maturely but did not believe young people had the capacity to govern wisely. By not specifically granting persons aged 18 to 24 the privilege of office-holding in its language, the 26<sup>th</sup> Amendment provided adolescents electoral parity, but not full political equality, with adults. Incomplete enfranchisement might explain why many young people do not see voting as a tool to change the political system and why youth suffrage did not loosen the grip of adulthood.

Although the Twenty-sixth Amendment failed to become the springboard for political transformation as its devotees predicted, it registered significant legal impact. The amendment clarified age eighteen as the formal commencement of adulthood. Throughout the 1970s, state governments responded by recalibrating their ages of majority at eighteen to correlate with the federal standard. Like the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Amendments, the Twenty-sixth did not shake the fundamentals of social stratification, redefine social relationships, or improve social rank for the newly enfranchised. Nevertheless, the clear public acknowledgement of adolescents as persons equally capable to give consent as adults certainly revised their legal identity and condition. The Twenty-sixth Amendment indirectly granted to teenagers a degree of legal self-determination unknown to previous generations of adolescents. It also unambiguously guaranteed to persons at least eighteen years-of-age the rights and privileges of citizenship free from competency-based



assessments. Resetting the legal threshold of adulthood from 21 to 18 spawned a reconsideration of whether persons in their mid-teens could be considered mature enough to make autonomous decisions – a notion that has informed recent attempts to extend suffrage downward to 16- and 15-year-olds in Great Britain, Australia, and several municipalities in the United States. Such efforts signify that adolescence is no longer viewed as a period of crisis that threatens social order or adult-centric age norms. That adolescence can be wholly defined by the “storms and stresses” of the biological changes related to sexual maturation seems quaint. Whether contemporary teenagers should be assigned their sociopolitical status based on ascription or ability remains a civic question because of the Twenty-sixth Amendment.

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## VITA

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1969 to Dennis J. and LaDonna J. Henderson, Russell J. Henderson spent the majority of his boyhood in Mehlville, Missouri and all of his adolescence in Defiance, Missouri. He graduated from Francis Howell Senior High School (Weldon Spring, Missouri) in 1987. For college, he attended Washington University in St. Louis. He lettered in football, majored in History, and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in May 1991. He entered the Graduate School at the University of Mississippi in August 1991. In 1993, he earned his Master of Arts in History and joined the Ph.D. program the same year. In December 1996, he passed his Ph.D. comprehensive examinations. In fall 1997, the History Department awarded him a semester-long travel grant to begin research on this dissertation. Upon returning home in spring 1998, he served as an adjunct professor at St. Charles County (Mo.) Community College and Maryville University. In 2001, he began full-time employment at East Central College in Union, Missouri as a History Instructor. In addition to his work as a faculty member, he has served East Central in a variety of capacities. He has been president of the Faculty

Association, faculty co-sponsor of Student Senate, lead academic advisor for the History Department, and coordinator of the Social Sciences Department. In November 2010, he received the Emerson Excellence in Teaching Award. The award recognizes public, private, and parochial teachers at the kindergarten through college level in the St. Louis metropolitan area for their contributions to the educational community. In addition to his employ at East Central, he has taught U.S. History and American Government at Missouri University of Science and Technology (Rolla, Missouri) since 2015. He is a member of the Organization of American Historians, Missouri Historical Society, Missouri Council for History Education, National Council for History Education, and National Council for the Social Studies. His community involvement includes serving as a state director for the Missouri Council for History Education and coaching football at St. Francis Borgia Regional High School in Washington, Missouri. He and his wife, Susan, currently live in Washington with their children, Madeleine and Jack.