



FRONT PAGE DIALOGUE

Women and Voting Rights

Passed in 1920, the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution secured the right to vote for women in America. Despite this, women of color faced state and local restrictions to exercising their vote freely, and many at the time noted that all women still had a long way to go to obtain equality where voting and equal rights were concerned." After the Amendment passed, women's rights advocate Alice Paul said, "It is incredible to me that any woman should consider the fight for full equality won. It has just begun." With the 100th anniversary of the Amendment come and gone, inequitable access to voting – among other things – remains a key issue for many marginalized groups, especially African American women and men. Debates over voter registration guidelines, gerrymandering, election monitoring, and the geographic location of polling centers are frequently heated and the sources of deep tension in communities across the country.

Voting can be an empowering assertion of voice, right and identity; but in practice it can also be an exclusionary and diminishing process where hierarchies are reinforced and power concentrated. Since 1920, several laws have passed that have alternately strengthened and weakened equal access to voting. For instance, while the Voting Rights Act of 1965 prohibited racial discrimination in voting, a 2013 Supreme Court ruling left states in charge of their own voting registration procedures with no requirement that they prove those procedures are equitable. This has enabled states to pass laws – surrounding new identification requirements and polling access, for example – that have negatively and disproportionately affected communities of color. In addition to race, literacy, gender, age, ethnicity and the existence of a criminal record all continue to be factors leveraged to shrink the voting power of traditionally disenfranchised groups, setting people at odds with each other.

As a result, six million Americans are currently forbidden to vote because of prior felony convictions alone – a disproportionate number of them people of color. Some states are cutting back, or eliminating, early voting which most impacts low income earners, who work more often for hourly wages. Further, the ACLU estimates that one in five people eligible to vote has a disability. While the Americans with Disabilities Act requires every polling center to have staff that can assist disabled voters, this is not always equally enforced. Finally, while women have fought for the right to vote throughout most of the 20th century, universal suffrage was only had in 2015 – when Saudi Arabia became the last country to allow women to vote. Despite this, many women across the globe endure violence and threats when voting today.

As we continue to redefine the right to vote, Sites of Conscience have an important role to play in facilitating constructive conversations and creating spaces where visitors, particularly those who may not always agree, listen to each other in new ways. Below is one model for engaging visitors in dialogue around voting rights. We encourage you to adapt and ground the dialogue in the unique history that your Site of Conscience works to preserve and share.



HOW TO USE FRONT PAGE DIALOGUES

Rather than using all the model questions suggested under each phase, facilitators may select questions that reflect the evolving conversation of the group they are guiding in dialogue. Some questions may be useful for multiple topics; we mark these with slashes (ex. gender/race/activism). Finally, we are always available to work with you as you develop your dialogue session. If you are not familiar with the Arc of Dialogue model, you can contact our team at training@sitesofconscience.org for support and more information.

GUIDELINES

What are the group agreements or guidelines for the dialogue that help us establish the “container” that the dialogue occurs within? Here are some sample agreements:

1. Share the air: leave room for everyone to speak.
2. Our unique backgrounds and social status give us different life experiences.
3. Seek first to understand—ask questions to clarify, not to debate.

PREPARATION

Facilitator should adhere enlarged versions of the quotes listed as Shared Content around the dialogue space.

SITES OF CONSCIENCE MEMBERS WHO CAN BE RESOURCES FOR YOUR EFFORTS

- Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation
- Women’s Rights National Historic Park
- Lowell National Historic Park
- Museum of Women’s Resistance

SHARED CONTENT:

“I do not think the mere extension of the ballot a panacea for all the ills of our national life. What we need today is not simply more voters, but better voters. — Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

“We have been holding conventions for years – we have been assembling together and whining over our difficulties and afflictions, passing resolutions on resolutions to any extent,” she wrote. “But it does really seem that we have made but little progress considering our resolves.” — Mary Ann Shad Cary

“And so, lifting as we climb, onward and upward we go, struggling and striving, and hoping that the buds and blossoms of our desires will burst into glorious fruition ere long. With courage, born of success achieved in the past, with a keen sense of the responsibility, which we shall continue to assume, we look forward to a future large with promise and hope. Seeking no favors because of our color, nor patronage because of our needs, we knock at the bar of justice, asking an equal chance.” — Mary Church Terrell

“Think of Patrick and Sambo and Hans and Yung Tung who do not know the difference between a monarchy and a republic, who never read the Declaration of Independence or Webster’s spelling book, making laws for Lydia Maria Childs, Lucretia Mott, or Fanny Kemble.” — Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Frederick Douglass: ...I must say that I do not see how any one can pretend that there is the same urgency in giving the ballot to woman as to the negro. With us, the matter is a question of life and death... When women, because they are women, are hunted down through the cities of New York and New Orleans; when they are dragged from their houses and hung upon lamp-posts... when their children are not allowed to enter schools; then they will have an urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own. (Great applause.)

A Voice: Is that not all true about black women?



Mr. Douglass: Yes, yes, yes; it is true of the black woman, but not because she is a woman, but because she is black. (Applause.) ...

Susan B. Anthony: The old anti-slavery school say women must stand back and wait until the negroes shall be recognized. But we say, if you will not give the whole loaf of suffrage to the entire people, give it to the most intelligent first. (Applause.) If intelligence, justice, and morality are to have precedence in the Government, let the question of woman be brought up first and that of the negro last. (Applause.)... When Mr. Douglass mentioned the black man first and the woman last, if he had noticed he would have seen that it was the men that clapped and not the women. There is not a woman born who desires to eat the bread of dependence, no matter whether it be from the hand of father, husband, or brother; for any one who does so eat her bread places herself in the power of the person from whom she takes it. (Applause.) Mr. Douglass talks about the wrongs of the negro; but with all the outrages that he to-day suffers, he would not exchange his sex and take the place of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. (Laughter and applause.) https://archive.org/stream/historyofwomansu02stanuoft#page/382/mode/2up/history_of_women's_suffrage

Nine percent of black respondents and 9 percent of Hispanic respondents indicated that, in the last election, they (or someone in their household) were told that they lacked the proper identification to vote. Just 3 percent of whites said the same. Ten percent of black respondents and 11 percent of Hispanic respondents reported that they were incorrectly told that they weren't listed on voter rolls, as opposed to 5 percent of white respondents. Only 27 percent of white Americans say that eligible voters being denied the right to vote is a major problem today, and you have really strong majorities of black and Hispanic Americans—six in 10, roughly—saying that it is a major concern. — *The Atlantic* <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/07/poll-prri-voter-suppression/565355/>

...37 percent of white respondents reported that their parents had taken them to a voting booth when they were children, versus 24 percent of black respondents and 18 percent of Hispanics. In a region where, because of Jim Crow, many middle-aged or older people of color may not have had a parent who was even eligible to vote during their childhood, voting simply isn't as established an intergenerational civic institution as it is in white communities—even as it faces new threats today. — *The Atlantic* <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/07/poll-prri-voter-suppression/565355/>

In 2018, the Brennan Center's Voting Laws Roundup shows that lawmakers in eight states have introduced at least 16 bills making it harder to vote, and 35 restrictive bills in 14 states have carried over from previous legislative sessions. If passed, the laws would increase restrictions on voter registration and limit early and absentee voting opportunities, among other changes. <https://www.brennancenter.org/press-release/new-analysis-voter-suppression-laws-concern-2018-though-many-states-looking-expand>



PHASE I - COMMUNITY BUILDING

Questions in Phase 1 help build the “learning community” and break down artificial barriers between people by allowing participants to share information about themselves.

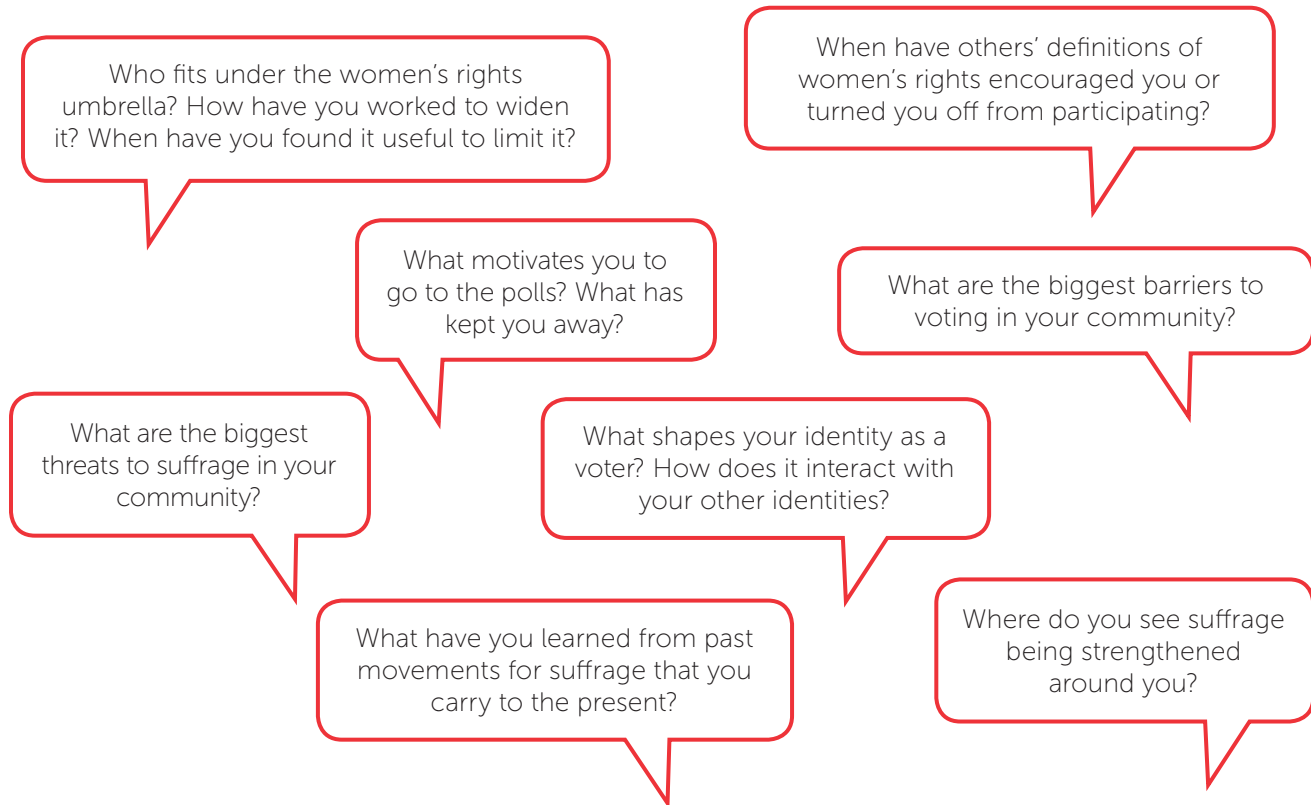
Facilitator should welcome the group, introduce themselves, explain their role, and explain the purpose of the dialogue. Facilitator should also ask for agreement to the guidelines established for the group.



PHASE II - SHARING OUR OWN EXPERIENCES

Questions in Phase 2 help participants recognize how their experiences are alike and different and why.

Facilitator should invite participants to move around the space and read all of the quotes, silently. After reading, participants are instructed to stand near the quote that they would like to speak more about. Participants are then encouraged to discuss why they chose that quote within their small group before returning to the large group to explore any of the following:





PHASE III - EXPLORING BEYOND OURSELVES

Questions in Phase 3 help participants engage in inquiry and exploration about the dialogue topic in an effort to learn with and from one another.

What is gained by calling any movement anything other than a human rights movement? What is lost?

What is the biggest barrier to achieving gender equality?

How have recent elections changed the way you think about gender/race/activism in America?

What role should white, cisgendered women play in today's movement?

Which is more problematic: that someone who shouldn't vote, votes or that those who should vote, don't?

What does a fully enfranchised community look like?

Where and in what ways do you see race and gender put in competition with each other?

When does wealth allow you to bypass other identities? When doesn't it?

Whose voice does voting in America amplify; whose does it minimize?

Voting is an action, but it requires a culture to support it. What are the key aspects for of a voting culture?

Voting is a right, what responsibilities go along with it?

Whose voting rights are most pressing to fight for now?

PHASE IV - SYTHESIZING THE EXPERIENCE

Questions in Phase 4 help the group to reflect on the dialogue and what they learned.

What will you do differently?

If we could continue this conversation, what would you want to discuss?

What aren't we talking about with these topics?

How will you strengthen the vote or voting culture?