

Appendix E

Assessing Students' Proficiency with Critical Reading of History

Directions

Read the following narrative and use complete sentences to answer the questions that follow.

The 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The path to lowering the voting age in the United States from 21 to 18 was peppered with debate that was often influenced by the tumultuous events of the 1960s. At the center of the debate on whether 18-year olds should vote was the matter of the draft and men's obligation to fight wars. The matter was resolved in 1971 as the war in Vietnam was coming to a close.

The idea of allowing 18-year-olds the vote was first considered in World War II. President Franklin Roosevelt lowered the draft age from 21 to 18. This Congressional interest in lowering the voting age. Though he disliked the idea of linking voting rights to fighting in wars, in 1954, President Eisenhower called for Congress to lower the voting age. The argument that 18-year-olds should vote because they were drafted into the U.S. armed forces alarmed people because they thought it would lead to drafting women to fight. The argument was also insulting to African Americans who were old enough to vote in 1954. At the time, many Southern states used literacy tests, harassment, assault, and lynching to prevent them from voting and registering to vote.

War, anti-war protests, and social unrest over racism, police brutality, and poverty drew many people between the ages of 18 and 25 into political activism in the 1960s. Many believed that the 26th Amendment would allow them to legislate sweeping reforms that would end discrimination, war, and poverty. The war in Vietnam amplified demands to lower the voting age. Males 18 and older were being drafted to fight in Vietnam and thousands lost their lives and were disabled in combat. They argued "old enough to fight, old enough to vote!" Others believed that since millions of men and women over the age of 16 were in the labor force and paying taxes, they had an interest in who governed them.

Those who opposed the 26th Amendment claimed that 18-year-olds were too immature to vote. Representative Emanuel Celler (D-NY) declared that while 18-year-olds had enough good judgement to fight in wars, they lacked the good judgment necessary to make wise decisions concerning governance. During the 1960s, anti-war and civil rights demonstrations proliferated in the streets and on college campuses. Some lawmakers rightfully saw this as evidence that these long-haired 18-year-old hippies were too radical to have the vote.

1. Whose voices are used to provide this account of the struggle for the 26th Amendment? Whose voices are omitted and what might they contribute to the narrative?
2. Does the last paragraph reveal about the author's potential bias?
3. Does the author establish a clear cause-effect relationship between the war and the ratification of the 26th Amendment? Explain.