You Can Make a Difference

IN MOST STATES an important first step in exercising your right to vote is registration. In Roswell, Georgia, high school senior Tyler Mann discovered that less than half of 18- to 20-year-olds had registered for the upcoming presidential election. “I knew that people my age were concerned about public issues and the future of this country. . . . I thought about what I could do to increase participation in the voting process.” Tyler started a project to encourage students to register as soon as they turned 18. With school approval, he made up a list of students’ 18th birthdays. He sent them personal reminder letters and organized regular voter registration drives.

Section 1

The Right to Vote (pp. 148–150)
★ The history of the expansion of the right to vote in the United States can be divided into five distinct steps.
★ The Constitution places five restrictions on the States’ power to set voting qualifications.

Section 2

Voter Qualifications (pp. 152–157)
★ All of the States set citizenship, residence, and age requirements for voting.
★ Other voting qualifications have been imposed by various States over time. Literacy tests and tax payment have been eliminated; registration is required in all but one State today.

Section 3

Suffrage and Civil Rights (pp. 159–163)
★ The 15th Amendment, ratified in 1870, declared that the right to vote cannot be denied to a citizen because of race.
★ Southern States used a variety of devices to circumvent the 15th Amendment and deny African Americans the vote. These tactics included literacy tests, white primaries, and gerrymandering.
★ The Voting Rights Act of 1965 and its later amendments finally ensured African American suffrage.

Section 4

Voter Behavior (pp. 164–172)
★ Millions of Americans who are qualified to vote do not do so.
★ Those who choose not to vote often lack a feeling of political efficacy. Age, education, income, and geography also affect whether a person is likely to vote or not.
★ Sociological factors—such as occupation, gender, and ethnic background—influence a person’s voting choices.
★ Psychological factors—including party identification and perception of the candidates and issues—also contribute to voter behavior.

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