

## **HIST 5453 – New American Republic**

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### **The Right to Vote and the Rise of Democracy, 1787-1828**

#### **Response Paper**

I was brought up that voting is important, but it was not until the 2016 election that I learned to appreciate the fight that was fought for me over 100 years ago. Around this time, a video on YouTube created by education company, Soomo Publishing, became popular. They created a parody video about the women's suffrage movement to the music video of Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance". Even though the video was created a few years earlier, the uptick of popularity could be due to the tightness of the 2016 race and the campaign focus of bringing in more voters on both sides of the spectrum. I feel like I am so far removed from the suffragist movement, but I am glad that there is resurgence for appreciation and gratitude.

A concept which should have been a no brainer stood out to me and caused me to think. The idea of commitment makes total sense once it is thought about. "Only people who had freehold landed property sufficient to ensure that they were personally independent and had a vested interest in the welfare of their communities could vote." That quote from page 220 causes me to pause. I guess I took for granted the idea of commitment to the area, as a qualification to vote. This idea was reiterated again on page 222: "On the other hand, many leading patriots

remained committed to the idea that voting was a privilege open to those who were tied to the community's long-term welfare and had a sufficient tangible measure of that commitment.”

A major theme I saw while reading the document was the lack of cohesion amongst the colonies regarding who has the right to vote. Each colony had their own stipulation on who qualifies. For example, the most familiar qualification I am aware of is the notion of needing to own land. This is stated on page 220: “During the colonial period, the right to vote for the lower house of colonial legislatures had been defined in traditional British terms: ... That qualification normally applied to men who were heads of households, since women were almost by definition dependent, but the right could extend to widows who had become responsible for the family property.” The author, Daniel Ratcliff, continues to show the diversity of each colony’s voter qualification by giving future examples. The explanation continues on page 221: “Six colonies also allowed alternative qualifications to freehold ownership in the form of personal property or payment of taxes, opening the suffrage to owners of urban property, and even to those prosperous farmers who rented their land or held it on some form of leasehold.” Page 224 continues the discussion by showing how colonies can lose voters: “in some older areas, notably New England, the limited availability of land and the practice of subdividing family plots among children reduced the number who possessed the minimum estate.” Now comparing what was needed back in the time of building the new government to current standards, the only regulations to vote is to be of age (18 years old) and be a United States citizen.

Unity is an idea that I am still grappling with. I presumed that there would be a united forefront amongst the colonies once the war was won. This theme of unity in the sense of lack of unity and needing to unite runs throughout this week’s reading, and previous readings. I did not

understand the gravity of the situation: the task at hand to unite the colonies on every level and have cohesive laws in place that could translate to each of the different colonies culturally.

I may conclude each assignment with this sentiment: I am dumbfounded and in awe of the complex tasks that were at hand after the Revolutionary War. I was aware of the daunting and life risking decisions and actions that lead up to the war, but I actually did not think or study in detail the consequences of winning the war.