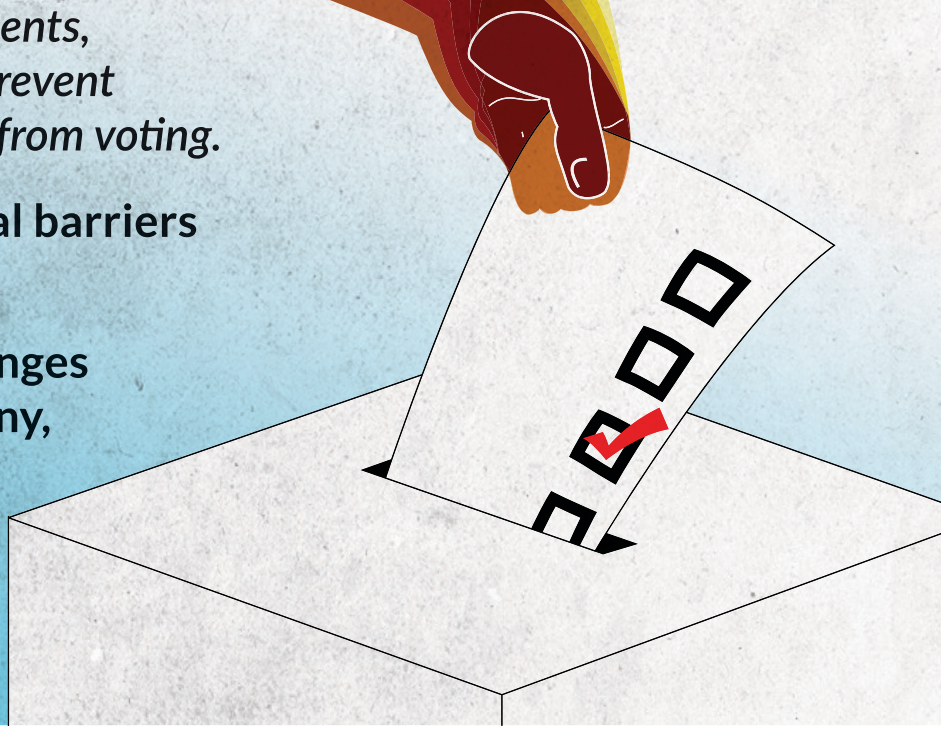
2020 NINTH CIRCUIT CIVICS CONTEST

The Right to Vote: MILESTONE ANNIVERSARIES

In the wake of the 15th and 19th Amendments, barriers remained to prevent United States citizens from voting.

Do formal or informal barriers remain today?

What additional changes would you make, if any, to Americans' voting rights?



An essay and video contest for high school students in the western United States and Pacific Islands. Contest rules and entry instructions available at

https://www.ca9.uscourts.gov/civicscontest

Entries accepted beginning **February 15, 2020**. Deadline for entries is **March 25, 2020**. Sponsored by the United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit.

CASH PRIZES *for Winners of the Essay and Video Competitions*

1st place: $2,000 2nd place: $1,000 3rd place: $500*

***Plus! Travel and accommodations to attend the 2020 Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference in Portland, Oregon**

The Right to Vote: MILESTONE ANNIVERSARIES

The right to vote is one of our democracy's most cherished civil rights. Voting is how we choose our leaders and express our support or opposition to government policies. The year 2020 marks the 150th anniversary of the ratification of the 15th Amendment and 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment.

Together, these two amendments dramatically changed America's political landscape, more than doubling the size of the electorate and granting the vote to millions of citizens who had previously been denied access to the ballot because of their race or gender.

The **15th Amendment** was ratified in 1870, one of three amendments to the Constitution enacted after the Civil War aimed at attaining equality for recently emancipated slaves. The 15th Amendment provides that the right to vote may not be denied **"*on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude*."**

Immediately following the passage of the 15th Amendment, many state and local governments took overt steps to impose legal barriers to the ballot that targeted minority voters, such as the imposition of poll taxes that required voters to pay a fee in order to cast their ballots. Other states enacted literacy tests and "civility tests" to dissuade or inhibit minority voter participation.

Ratified in 1920, the **19th Amendment** guarantees that the right to vote **"*shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex*."** Its passage granted the right to vote to women who were United States citizens. It took several generations before women and men voted in equal numbers, but the 19th Amendment paved the way for women to assert themselves in the electoral process and in politics generally.

The barriers erected after the 15th Amendment was passed continued to dissuade voters after ratification of the 19th Amendment. In addition—particularly impacting the West—Native American and Alaska Native men and women were deemed ineligible to vote because they were not recognized as United States citizens, and many Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders faced similar discriminatory laws.

The principles of equality enshrined in the 15th and 19th Amendments remain part of the ongoing discussion of voting and voting rights, as courts and legislatures grapple with intersecting questions of law and public policy concerning voter fraud, voter identification, felon enfranchisement, and alleged political gerrymandering.

The Supreme Court of the United States addressed voting rights protections for women and racial minorities in several cases, including: *Minor v. Happersett*, 88 U.S. 162 (1874); *Elk v. Wilkins*, 112 U.S. 94 (1884); *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections*, 383 U.S. 663 (1966); and *South Carolina v. Katzenbach*, 383 U.S. 301 (1966).

More recently, voting rights have been extended outside the court system: Colorado's *Voter Access and Modernized Elections Act* of 2013 and Florida's *Voting Rights Restoration for Felons* initiative of 2018.

Your essay and/or video should consider some or all of the court cases and state actions listed above when addressing the following: *In the wake of the 15th and 19th Amendments, barriers remained to prevent United States citizens from voting.* ***Do formal or informal barriers remain today? What additional changes would you make, if any, to Americans' voting rights?***

Individual students can express their thoughts and ideas on the theme in an essay of between 500 and 1,000 words. Individuals and teams of up to three students can produce a 3-5 minute video on the theme. A student may submit both an essay and video, and may submit only one essay and be involved in the production of only one video.

The contest is open to high school students in nine western states and two Pacific Island jurisdictions. Students from public, private, parochial and charter schools and home-schooled students of equivalent grade status may enter. Children of federal judges, chambers staff, and employees of federal court offices are not eligible to participate.

The United States District Court for the Southern District of California will conduct a local contest to select finalists for the circuit-wide competition. To be eligible to compete in the local contest, students must reside in **Imperial** or **San Diego** County. Local contest winners in each category also will receive prizes of $1,000 for 1st place, $500 for 2nd place, and $250 for 3rd place. The winners will be recognized at a reception for all contest participants to be held in Spring 2020.

For more information about the district contest, please contact the district's community outreach coordinator: **Lisa Christensen – (619) 557-6928 / community_outreach@casd.uscourts.gov**.