Votes Under Pressure

How a political challenge shaped voting rules in Alabama

SS24.5.2b "Describe how the Populist Movement influenced the creation of the 1901 Alabama Constitution and explain the effects of its adoption, including disenfranchisement of voters through literacy tests and poll taxes that affected both Black and..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two reasons leaders wanted the 1901 constitution, circle the two voting rules that made voting harder, and number the groups whose voting rights were harmed.

Who Could Vote in Alabama?

1. In the 1890s, many Alabama small farmers struggled with debt and low crop prices. The Populist Movement called for changes that would give ordinary people more power in government. Some Black and white farmers supported Populist candidates, though they did not always work together equally. Their votes challenged the Democrats who controlled state politics. For those leaders, an election could feel like a contest they might lose.

2. In 1901, Alabama leaders met to write a new state constitution. Many of these leaders wanted to keep Black citizens from voting. They also wanted to weaken the Populist challenge from poor white voters. The new constitution added voting rules, including a literacy test, which tested reading ability, and a poll tax, a tax people had to pay before voting. These rules made voting harder.

3. For a worker who earned little, a poll tax could take money needed for food. Someone who could not pass a literacy test could be turned away. Officials did not apply the rules fairly. After the constitution took effect, many Black men and some white male small farmers and laborers lost the vote. With fewer voters to challenge them, leaders in power had a stronger hold on elections.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Populist Movement challenge Alabama's leaders before 1901?

2. What two groups of voters did leaders want to stop or weaken when they wrote the new constitution?

3. How could each of the two new voting rules keep a person from voting?

4. Who lost voting power after the constitution took effect, and how did that help leaders in power?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write four sentences about two imaginary neighbors in 1904: a Black male laborer and a white male small farmer. Show how a different voting rule could block each neighbor, then explain why leaders wanted these rules and how losing voters affected elections.

ANSWER KEY

Votes Under Pressure

GRADE 5 · SS24.5.2b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two reasons leaders wanted the 1901 constitution, circle the two voting rules that made voting harder, and number the groups whose voting rights were harmed. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Populist Movement challenge Alabama's leaders before 1901?	**Populists called for more power for ordinary people, and votes for their candidates challenged the Democrats who controlled state politics.**
2	What two groups of voters did leaders want to stop or weaken when they wrote the new constitution?	**They wanted to keep Black citizens from voting and weaken the Populist challenge from poor white voters.**
3	How could each of the two new voting rules keep a person from voting?	**A person who could not pass the literacy test could be turned away. A person who could not pay the poll tax could not vote.**
4	Who lost voting power after the constitution took effect, and how did that help leaders in power?	**Many Black men and some white male small farmers and laborers lost the vote. With fewer voters able to challenge them, leaders in power gained a stronger hold on elections.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In 1904, a Black laborer could be kept from voting if he could not pass a literacy test. His white neighbor, a small farmer, could lose his vote if he could not pay the poll tax. Leaders wanted to stop Black voters and weaken the challenge from poor white Populist supporters. When people like these neighbors could not vote, leaders in power faced fewer challenges in elections.

Accept either voting rule for either neighbor if the example shows how it could prevent voting. Responses should connect the leaders' goals to the Populist challenge and explain how fewer voters strengthened those leaders' hold on elections.