



CITIZENSHIP & THE ELECTIONS

THE IMPORTANCE OF A BALLOT

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OVERVIEW

Voting rights have played a crucial role throughout the history of our nation. Initially, the eligibility to vote was determined by individual states, with the majority restricting voting rights to white, male property owners. However, marginalized communities, including Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, women and individuals facing economic hardship, tirelessly advocated for their right to participate in the democratic process. The ongoing debate surrounding the expansion of ballot access remains relevant today and is likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

The exercise of voting rights among residents of New York City has evolved significantly over time. From the establishment of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution in 1870, which granted voting rights regardless of race, to the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, achieving racial equality in voting was a prolonged and challenging journey. Amidst this struggle, the 19th Amendment, passed in 1920 after years of protest and advocacy, finally granted women the right to vote.

In this lesson, you will engage with audio clips and visual sources that offer insights into the trajectory of these transformative changes in voting rights.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

In this curriculum resource, students will engage with a variety of primary source documents focusing on elections and voting rights. This process offers them the opportunity to analyze and interpret these documents, thus deepening their understanding. Their interactions with these sources will bolster their comprehension by highlighting pertinent laws and constitutional amendments related to voting rights.

By exploring these materials, students can discern the barriers to voting and assess whether marginalized groups, such as Black individuals and women, had access to the ballot box. They will also ascertain the pivotal moments in history when these disenfranchised groups secured voting rights through legislative actions and constitutional amendments.

The array of resources available to students includes voter registration ledgers, timelines, articles, photographs and audio clips. While written texts hold significant power, audio content adds an extra dimension to the learning experience. For instance, listening to the Assistant Mayor's radio press conference on voter registration provides students with a sense of the era, its context, and its objectives. By closely listening to the audio clip, students can discern details that offer insights into how the creator intended the audience to think, feel, and respond.

There are numerous approaches to introducing this curriculum resource, one of which involves a warm-up exercise called "think-pair-share." This exercise encourages students to brainstorm, share their knowledge, and make connections regarding the history of voting rights.

To initiate the exercise, present a broad question about elections and voting, such as "How has the right to vote evolved throughout history?" Encourage students to independently contemplate potential responses. Following this, have them share their ideas with a partner. Conclude the activity by inviting some students to share their thoughts with the class while the teacher charts the responses.

STANDARDS

NYS Standards

12.G3 Rights, Responsibilities, and Duties of Citizenship: Active, engaged, and informed citizens are critical to the success of the United States representative democracy. United States citizens have certain rights, responsibilities, and duties, the fulfillment of which help to maintain the healthy functioning of the national, state, and local communities.

12.G4 Political and Civic Participation: There are numerous avenues for engagement in the political process, from exercising the power of the vote, to affiliating with political parties, to engaging in other forms of civic participation. Citizens leverage both electoral and non-electoral means to participate in the political process.

12.G4b Allowing citizens to vote does not ensure that a system is a democracy. Open, safe, and honest elections are essential to a democratic system. Engaged and informed citizens should know the mechanics associated with voting, including when major local, state, and national elections are held, how to register to vote, who currently holds each office, who is running for office, and what the central issues are pertaining to that election.

NYCDOE Civics for All

8.2 A Changing Society: Industrialization and immigration contributed to the urbanization of America. Problems resulting from these changes sparked the Progressive movement and increased calls for reform. (Standards: 1, 2, 4; Themes: MOV, SOC, TECH, EXCH)

RH 2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate, objective summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Grades 9—12

9-10 RH 2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop within a text.

KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Absentee Ballot

Amendment

Assembly District

Ballot

Candidate

Corruption

Poll Site

Tammany Hall

EXTERNAL LINKS

<https://electionlab.mit.edu/research/voting-mail-and-absentee-voting>

<https://www.history.com/news/vote-by-mail-soldiers-war>

<https://blogs.shu.edu/nyc-history/2022/04/24/mayor-fiorello-h-laguardia/>

[https://www.weteachnyc.org/media2016/filer_public/26/22/26224d4d-066e-473f-9718-f068c9d5b9ed/vote an instruction guide to elections ada v2.pdf](https://www.weteachnyc.org/media2016/filer_public/26/22/26224d4d-066e-473f-9718-f068c9d5b9ed/vote_an_instruction_guide_to_elections_ada_v2.pdf)

<https://archive.fairvote.org/?page=2553>

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF VOTING RIGHTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Selected Chronology, 1776—2002

1776

Property owners – who were mostly white and male – are the only people allowed to vote.

1856

The last state removes property ownership requirements; now nearly all white men can vote.

1870

15th Amendment to the Constitution passes, establishing the right to vote without regard to race.

1872

Susan B. Anthony and 11 other women are arrested for voting in Rochester, NY.

1876

Native Americans are “not citizens,” according to a ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court; and cannot vote.

1890

Wyoming joins the union, and is the first state to allow women to vote.

1917

Women win the right to vote in New York State.

1920

19th Amendment passes, granting women the right to vote in the U.S.

1924

Ratification of the 20th Amendment, the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, granting citizenship and the vote to Native Americans. Many states continued to prohibit them from voting. States were only prohibited from barring Native Americans from voting by the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

1965

Voting Rights Act passes, barring racial discrimination in voting.

1971

26th Amendment passes, lowering the voting age to 18.

1993

National Voter Registration Act passes, allowing people to register to vote at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

2002

Help America Vote Act passes, aims to streamline and improve the voting process.

PRIMARY SOURCE 1

74 Consecutive number of Voter. Enter at close of next registration day	Date of registration	NAMES OF ELECTORS		Residence or designation	RESIDENCE Name of street or avenue in city, or R. F. D. address in town	Number of persons counted by voter	FULL NAME OF HOUSEHOLDER, TENANT, SUBTENANT OR APARTMENT LESSEE WITH WHOM ELECTOR RESIDES	Age of elector when first registered in U.S. (year)	Married or Single	LENGTH OF RESIDENCE			Country of nativity	NATIVITY If the elector be a citizen by marriage, enter the name of person to whom married, and if the husband was a naturalized citizen the date of his naturalization certificate	Court issuing naturalization certificate	
		Surname	Christian name							In State (years)	In County (months)	In election district (days)				
269	6/17	Pallock	Ascher	200	Broome St.	4	Householder	35	Married	11	11	1 1/2	Russia		Nov 5, 1916 U.S.S.D. Aug 7, 1899 U.S.S.D.	
270	6/17	Pallock	Jacob	200	Broome St.	4	Householder	75	Married	27	27	5	Russia			
271	6/18	Pallock	Russie	200	Broome St.	4	Householder	36	11	Married	11	11	1 1/2	Russia	Pollock Ascher Nov 5, 1916 Aug 24, 1917	U.S.S.D. Supreme
272	" 8	Pittat	Isadore	60	Suffolk St.	2	C/o Lewis	30	Single	9	9	6	Russia		Supreme	
273	" 8	Pivnick	Charles	96	Suffolk St.	1	Householder	32	Married	13	13	9	Russia	March 18, 1913	Supreme	
274	" 8	Perlman	Isaac	146	Calinton St.	1	Householder	39	"	14	14	3	Russia	Feb 23, 1910	Supreme	
275	" 9	Pellman	Eva	188	Broome St.	709	Householder	48	48	Married	48	48	9	U.S.		
276	" 9	Plotkin	Roise	78	Worfolk St.	1	Householder	31	15	"	15	15	10	Russia	Just Plotkin April 7, 1915	Sup.
277	" 9	Pivnick	Fannie	96	Suffolk St.	1	Householder	29	14	"	14	14	9	Austria	March 18, 1913 Charles Pivnick	Sup.
278	" 9	Posternack	Max	29	Attorney St.	1	Householder	36	"	14	14	2	Russia	Feb 18, 1916 Max Posternack	Sup.	
279	" 9	Posternack	Anna	29	Attorney St.	1	Householder	33	9	"	9	9	7	Russia	Feb 18, 1916	Sup.
280	" 10	Posternack	Benjamin	29	Attorney St.	1	C/o Max Posternack	24	Single	7	7	1	Russia	Nov 11, 1917	Supreme	
281	" 10	Priess	Edith	169	Broome St.	2	Parents	23	Single	23	23	23	U.S.			
282	" 14	Reinsky	Sadie	164	Broome St.	3	C/o Nod	23	Single	23	23	7	U.S.			
283	" 14	Reinsky	Sarah	164	Broome St.	3	C/o Nod	23	"	23	23	7	U.S.			
284	" 14	Plotkin	Jacob	78	Suffolk St.	1	Householder	39	Married	15	15	9	Russia	April 7, 1915	Sup.	
285	" 14	Perkin	Louis	135	Delancey	4	"	24	"	24	24	1	U.S.			

The above image is a page from the 1918 voter registration ledger for the 20th Election District/4th Assembly District (modern 65th Assembly District in Lower Manhattan). The data includes the names and addresses of voters, the day they registered to vote, citizenship status, country of origin, length of residence in the United States, and date of naturalization, when applicable.

TRANSCRIPTION—PRIMARY SOURCE 1

FULL NAME	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	ADDRESS
Asher Pollock	Russia	200 Broome Street
Jacob Pest	Russia	204 Broome Street
Gussie Pollock	Russia	200 Broome Street
Isador Pittel	Russia	64(?) Suffolk Street
Charles Pivnick	Russia	76 Suffolk Street
Max Perlman	Russia	146 Clinton Street
Eva Pellman	United States	188 Broome Street
Rosie Plotkin	Russia	78 Norfolk Street
Fanny Pivnick	Austria	76 Suffolk Street
Max Pasternack	Russia	29 Attorney Street
Annie(?) Pasternack	Russia	29 Attorney Street
Benjamin Pasternack	United States	29 Attorney Street
Edith Prieser	United States	169 Broome Street
Sadie Pearsy	United States	164 Broome Street
Sarah Pearsy	United States	164 Broome Street
Jacob Plotkin	Russia	78 Norfolk Street
Louis Peshkin	United States	135 Delancey Street

The above table contains 17 transcribed names and addresses from Document 1.

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 1

- 1) By glancing at this ledger, where were most of these Lower East Side voters born?
- 2) Most Jewish people left Eastern Europe to escape religious persecution and oppressive government rule. Many moved to the Lower East Side where they lived in crowded conditions, struggling to survive. Why do you think their right to vote was so important?
- 3) Almost half the voters on this 1918 ledger were women who were granted the right to vote in 1917. How did this this new right change the lives of immigrant women?

PROCESS FOR VOTING

The County Board of Election ensures that all elections are conducted in a fair and honest fashion according to New York State Election Law.

As an American citizen, exercising your right to vote is fundamental. Every individual deserves the opportunity to voice their opinions through the electoral system. Registering to vote is a crucial step in this process. Additionally, online services offer convenience and accessibility, allowing you to join a political party, update your party affiliation, or make changes to your personal information such as name and address on file with the Board of Elections.

To verify your identity, you will need to provide certain documentation. This includes a New York State driver's license, permit, or non-driver ID card, ensuring your zip code is on record with the Department of Motor Vehicles, and furnishing the last four digits of your social security number. It is imperative to submit this information to the County Board of Elections to complete the registration process. If you are unable to provide these forms of identification, other government documents with your name and address may be required.

New York State Voter Registration Form

Register to vote

With this form, you register to vote in elections in New York State. You can also use this form to:

- change the name or address on your voter registration
- become a member of a political party
- change your party membership

To register you must:

- be a US citizen,
- be 18 years old by the end of this year,
- not be in prison or on parole for a felony conviction,
- not claim the right to vote elsewhere.

Send or deliver this form

Fill out the form below and send it to your county's address on the back of this form, or take this form to the office of your County Board of Elections.

Mail or deliver this form at least 25 days before the election you want to vote in. Your county will notify you that you are registered to vote.

Questions?

Call your County Board of Elections listed on the back of this form or 1-800-FOR-VOTE (TDD/TTY Dial 711). Find answers or tools on our website www.elections.ny.gov.

Verifying your identity

We'll try to check your identity before Election Day, through the DMV number (driver's license number or non-driver ID number), or the last four digits of your social security number, which you'll fill in below.

If you do not have a DMV or social security number, you may use a valid photo ID, a current utility bill, bank statement, paycheck, government check or some other government document that shows your name and address. You may include a copy of one of those types of ID with this form—be sure to tape the sides of the form closed.

If we are unable to verify your identity before Election Day, you will be asked for ID when you vote for the first time.

Información en español: si le interesa obtener esta formulación en español, llame al 1-800-367-8683. 中文資料: 若您有興趣索取中文資料表格, 請電: 1-800-367-8683. 한국어: 한국어 양식을 원하시면 1-800-367-8683 으로 전화 하십시오. বাংলা: আপনি এই ফর্মটি বাংলায় পেতে চান বায়ন 1-800-367-8683 নম্বরে যোগাযোগ করুন।

It is a crime to procure a false registration or to furnish false information to the Board of Elections. Please print in blue or black ink.

1 Are you a citizen of the U.S.? Yes No
If you answer No, you cannot register to vote.

2 Will you be 18 years of age or older on or before election day? Yes No
If you answer No, you cannot register to vote unless you will be 18 by the end of the year.

Your name

3 Last name _____ Suffix _____
First name _____ Middle Initial _____

More information (Items 5, 6 & 7 are optional)

4 Birth date _____ **5** Sex M F
6 Phone _____ **7** Email _____

The address where you live

8 Address (not P.O. box) _____
Apt. Number _____ Zip code _____
City/Town/Village _____
New York State County _____

The address where you receive mail (Skip if same as above)

9 Address or P.O. box _____
P.O. Box _____ Zip code _____
City/Town/Village _____

Voting history

10 Have you voted before? Yes No **11** What year? _____

Voting information that has changed (Skip if this has not changed or you have not voted before)

12 Your name was _____
Your address was _____
Your previous state or New York State County was _____

Identification (You must make 1 selection. For questions, please refer to Verifying your identity above.)

13 New York State DMV number _____
 Last four digits of your Social Security number x x x - x x - _____
 I do not have a New York State driver's license or a Social Security number.

Political party (You must make 1 selection. Political party enrollment is optional but that, in order to vote in a primary election of a political party, a voter must enroll in that political party, unless state party rules allow otherwise.)

14 I wish to enroll in a political party

- Democratic party
- Republican party
- Conservative party
- Green party
- Working Families party
- Independence party
- Women's Equality party
- Reform party
- Other _____

I do not wish to enroll in a political party

- No party

16 Affidavit: I swear or affirm that

- I am a citizen of the United States.
- I will have lived in the county, city or village for at least 30 days before the election.
- I meet all requirements to register to vote in New York State.
- This is my signature or mark in the box below.
- The above information is true, I understand that if it is not true, I can be convicted and fined up to \$5,000 and/or jailed for up to four years.

Sign _____
Date _____

Optional questions

15 I need to apply for an Absentee ballot.
 I would like to be an Election Day worker.

Image via NYC Board of Elections

DESCRIPTION — PRIMARY SOURCE 2

Document 2 depicts the official New York State voter registration form. This form can be submitted via mail or in person to the Board of Elections. Online registration is also available through the Department of Motor Vehicles. It requests essential information including citizenship status, age, name and address, and optional enrollment in a political party.

The purpose of the voter registration form is to enable individuals to exercise their fundamental right as American citizens - the right to vote. To be eligible to vote, one must meet specific criteria: being a United States citizen, attaining the age of 18 by December 31st of the filing year, maintaining residency in the state, county, or village for at least 30 days before the election, and refraining from claiming the right to vote elsewhere.

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 2

- 1) Why do we have voter registration in the United States?
- 2) What is the purpose of the top portion of the New York State Voter Registration Form?
- 3) Why is question 1 of the “Qualification” section of the registration form so important?
- 4) How can New Yorkers reflect their political views when filling out the voter registration form?



[Audio Segment 10/4/1946](#)

This audio segment originated from a broadcast aired on the local radio station WNYC on October 8, 1946, during a week-long voter registration campaign. The recording captures a gathering at City Hall organized by the Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts and Sciences and Professions, aiming to promote voter registration.

Among the speakers featured in the recording were Deputy Mayor Thomas J. Corcoran, representing Mayor O'Dwyer, alongside Broadway actors Gordon Heath and Adele Jerome. Concluding the broadcast was a brief announcement urging women to exercise their right to vote, underscoring the significance of their participation in the electoral process.

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCE 3

- 1) What was the message behind the Public Service Announcement on WNYC?
- 2) Social media did not exist in 1946. How was the message to register shared with the public to encourage NYC citizens to register to vote?
- 3) Why did the mayor's office in NYC use the Independent Citizens Committee of the Arts to promote the 1946 Voter Registration Week?
- 4) Gordon Heath, Broadway performer and guest speaker on this radio spot, was African-American. Why might the Committee have chosen him to speak about voting rights?
- 5) Adele Jerome spoke about women achieving the right to vote only in the last 25 years. Why was this so important?

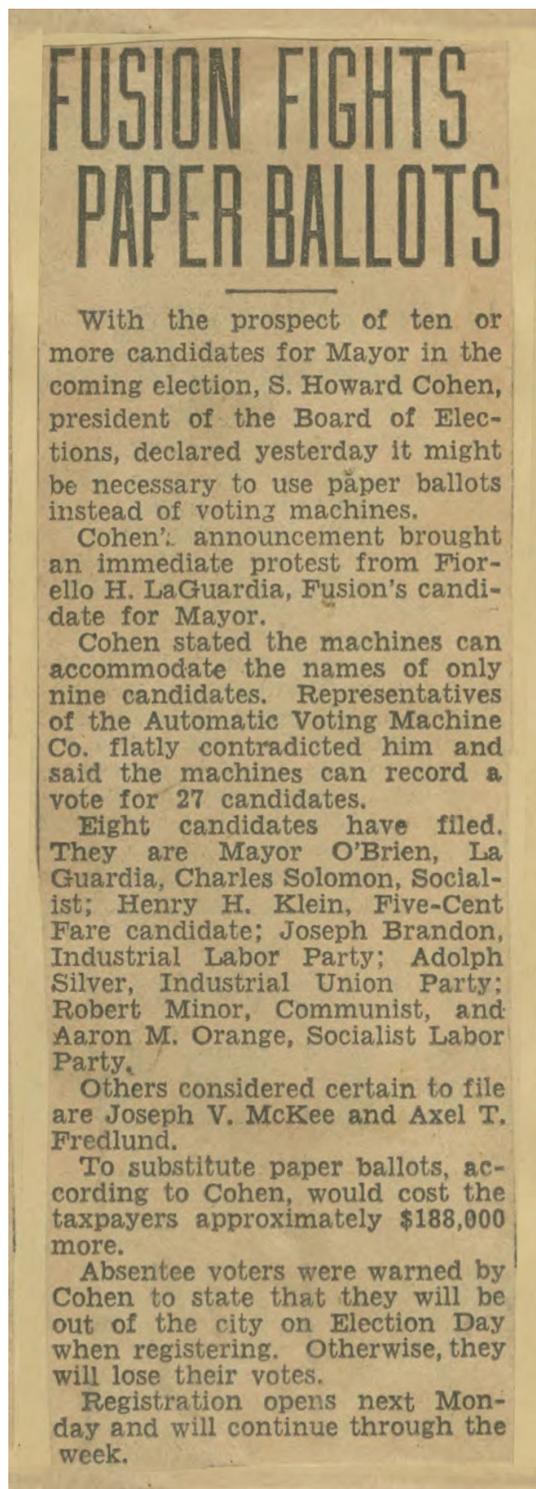
ELECTION CONTROVERSY

The New York City mayoral election in 1933 was controversial. Mayor Jimmy Walker, a Democrat, was forced out of office in 1932 because of several political scandals where he accepted bribes from businesses looking for municipal contracts. Many workers under Walker were employed by a system called patronage. This system rewarded those loyal to Walker and was not based on skill and merit.

The election took place on November 7, 1933. Incumbent mayor John P. O'Brien, who was elected in a special election after the resignation of Walker, faced 1929 republican mayoral candidate Fiorello La Guardia, and former acting mayor and President of the NYC Board of Alderman Joseph V. McKee.

New York City was ready for change when LaGuardia was elected. He focused on a five-point approach which he called a return to New York City values. The goal was to restore finances and provide a free market, develop relief programs and clean up political corruption of patronage positions replacing this with merit-based employment.

His goal was to transform New York into a modern city. Of all the areas of his agenda, LaGuardia was most successful in disabling corruption in Tammany Hall, a political organization associated with the mayoral campaign of the Democratic party and its gangs that dominated New York City.



This article was published in the *New York Journal-American* on October 4, 1933, about one month before the 1933 mayoral election. Fiorello LaGuardia, who won the race, saved this clipping in a scrapbook.

(NY Journal-American, 10/4/1933)

“FUSION FIGHTS PAPER BALLOTS

With the prospect of ten or more candidates for Mayor in the coming election, S. Howard Cohen, president of the Board of Elections, declared yesterday it might be necessary to use paper ballots instead of voting machines.

Cohen’s announcement brought an immediate protest from Fiorello H. LaGuardia, Fusion’s candidate for mayor.

Cohen stated the machines can accommodate the names of only nine candidates.

Representatives of the Automatic Voting Machine Co. flatly contradicted him and said the machines can record a vote for 27 candidates.

Eight candidates have filed. They are Mayor O’Brien, LaGuardia, Charles Solomon, Socialist; Henry H. Klein, Five-Cent Fare candidate; Joseph Brandon, Industrial Labor Party; Adolph Silver, Industrial Union Party; Robert Minor, Communist, and Aaron M. Orange, Socialist Labor Party.

Others considered certain to file are Joseph V. McKee and Axel T. Fredlund.

To substitute paper ballots, according to Cohen, would cost the taxpayers approximately \$188,000 more.

Absentee voters were warned by Cohen to state that they will be out of the city on Election Day when registering. Otherwise, they will lose their votes.

Registration opens next Monday and will continue throughout the week.”

85 Arrests Mark Violent City Election

More Than Score Hurt by Hoodlums' Weapons—10 Nabbed Here

New York's most violent election since the days of Croker went into history today with a record of 85 arrests and more than a score of citizens suffering from injuries inflicted by blackjackets, brass knuckles, knives and lead pipes at the hands of cruising bands of hoodlums.

Brooklyn was comparatively peaceful. The bulk of arrests and virtually all of the strong-arm work were reported from Tammany Hall's stamping ground in Manhattan.

The arrest score by boroughs was: Manhattan, 66; Brooklyn, 10; Bronx, 5; Queens, 2, and Richmond, 2.

Comparatively Peaceful

Police Commissioner Bolan viewed the election as "comparatively peaceful" considering the three-

cornered fight. William Chadbourne, manager of Mayor-elect LaGuardia's campaign and president of the Honest Ballot Association, pronounced the election New York's most violent and turbulent.

"All the gangs were out in full force," said Chadbourne, citing particularly the Manhattan 2d, 11th and 17th Assembly Districts, led, respectively, by Al Marinelli, Jimmy Hines and Alderman William Solomon as Tammany's representatives. Chadbourne added that the "bloody 8th in the Gowanus-Red Hook section of Brooklyn lived up to its reputation for violence," though police reports failed to bear out this statement.

Mayor-elect LaGuardia braved the threatened assault of hoodlums in his home district when he pushed his way through a mob into a polling place at 113th St. and 2d Ave. Manhattan, and tore the Tammany badges off of two burly ward-healers who were disregarding the law requiring them to remain 100 feet away from the polls.

"You're a thug," LaGuardia snapped as he ripped the first badge off. "Get out of here and keep moving."

The Mayor-elect pressed his demand on the police on duty to clear the polling place. The routed Tammanyites vented their wrath by beating up a photographer and smashing his plates.

Land in Police Station

Chadbourne and two Tammany election representatives found themselves in a police station on the lower east side after preferring charges and counter-charges in Public School 201, on Elizabeth St.

The Fusion manager was paroled for hearing on a charge of disorderly conduct by Magistrate Ford, while Pasquale Caffre, Tammany member of the board, was held in \$500 bail on similar charges.

Touring crews of hoodlums created terror through the lower East Side, Greenwich Village and Harlem, inflicting beatings on known LaGuardia and McKee managers and stoning headquarters of the Fusion and Recovery parties.

One crew blackjacked William R. Covington, a special deputy attorney general. Another sought to overpower Patrolman Fred Wedinger after he had arrested an alleged floater, to be driven away when the policeman drew his revolver.

Watcher Stabbed

In the 16th A. D. in Brooklyn a machine pulled up in front of a polling place at 2705 Avenue U and its occupants piled out and stabbed George Bennett, 40, 2049 Haring St., a McKee watcher.

Terence J. McNamara, 40, 20 E. 32d St., was arrested on a charge of electioneering at the 18th A. D. polling place at 1511 Nostrand Ave. Deputy Attorney General Max Koenig claimed he was wearing a Democratic badge within 100 feet of the polling place. Patrick Noonan, 39, 420 Baltic St., was arrested on a charge of illegal voting in the 8th A. D.

This article was published in *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* on November 8, 1933, the day after the mayoral election. It is another clipping from one of the scrapbooks of Fiorello LaGuardia, who won the race and served as mayor for 12 years.

TRANSCRIPTION (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 11/8/1933)

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QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCES 4 & 5

- 1) In the New York Journal-American article of October 4, 1933, candidate Fiorella LaGuardia protested about the use of paper ballots. Explain why LaGuardia objected to this.
- 2) In the article of October 8, 1933, Tammany Hall, had its representatives cause trouble throughout the city on Election Day. What were some of the violent acts that were done by the gangs?
- 3) Why do you think such violence was going on in the city on Election Day?
- 4) Both articles showed the character of mayoral candidate Fiorello LaGuardia. From reading the two articles, how can we describe LaGuardia's character?

VOTING METHODS

The evolution of voting methods throughout American history has been marked by significant milestones. In the early 19th century, paper ballots emerged as simple blank pieces of paper. Later, political parties began printing tickets featuring the names of candidates. This practice heralded a new era in voting procedures.

A notable advancement took place in 1888 when New York and Massachusetts introduced pre-printed ballots, resembling tickets, listing all candidates' names. This innovation allowed voters to easily select their preferred candidates along party lines.

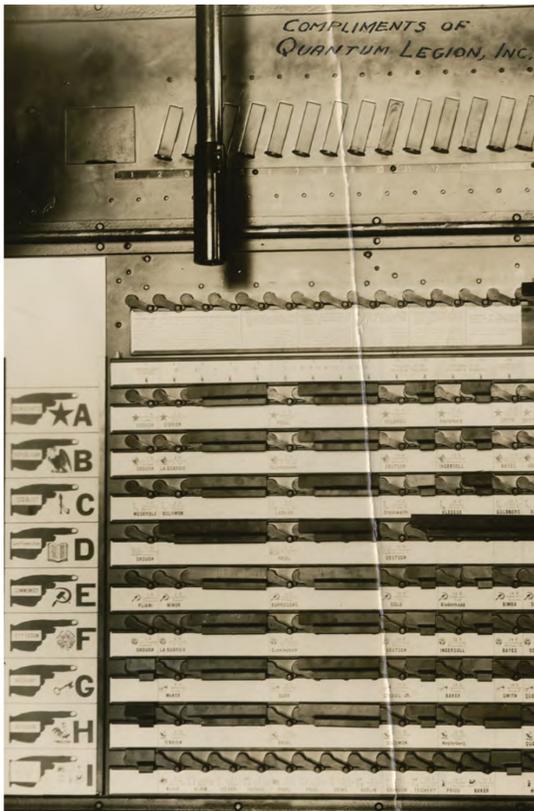
The advent of the automatic lever voting machine in the 1930s revolutionized the voting process. Unlike before, where workers manually collected individual ballots for later counting, this machine tallied votes automatically each time a lever was pulled. Additionally, opening and closing the voting booth curtain served as an extra verification method for the vote count.

Currently, most states employ a ballot scanner system. This portable electronic voting system utilizes an optical scanner to interpret paper ballot marks and swiftly calculate results. This efficient system can both tally and detect errors.

Absentee Ballots

The concept of absentee ballots traces its roots back to the Civil War when soldiers stationed far from home sought a means to cast their votes. Absentee voting experienced a resurgence during World War II, particularly for military personnel. It wasn't until the 1980s that some states began to grant unconditional absentee voting rights. Over time, more states adopted this practice, and by 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the vast majority of states allowed absentee ballots.

PRIMARY SOURCE 6



This photograph shows the inside of a voting booth during the 1933 mayoral election. Voters moved a mechanical lever, and the number of times each lever was moved was tracked. This technology promised to speed up the voting process and cut down on the chances of dishonest vote counts. In 1933, 2.2 million votes were cast in the mayoral election. The 1930 census reported that New York City's population was 6.9 million people (which included both registered and non-registered voters).

PRIMARY SOURCE 7

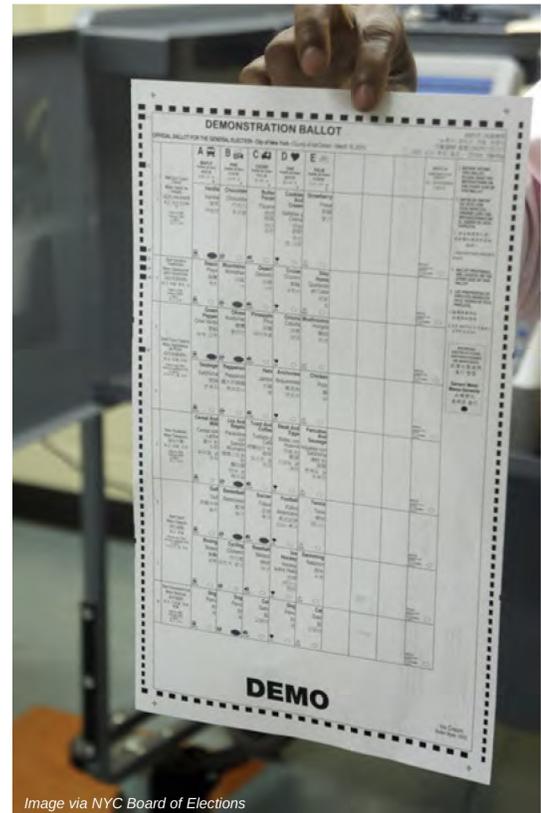
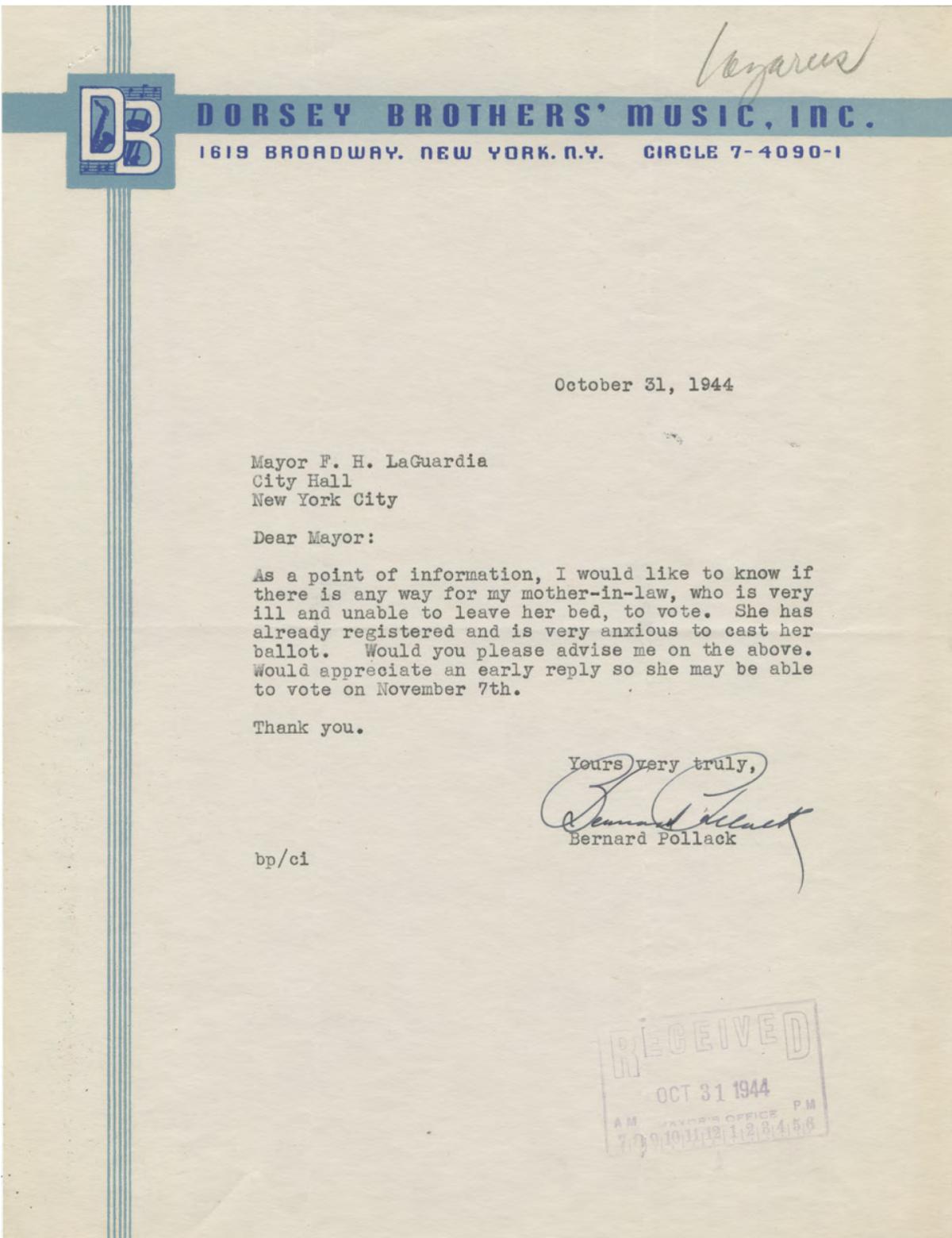


Image via NYC Board of Elections

This is a photograph of the kind of paper ballot voters use today in New York. People cast their vote by marking the ballot with a pen and scan the ballot in a machine that keeps track of the number of votes. In 2013, 1.1 million votes were cast in the mayoral election. A few years before, the 2010 census reported the population of New York City was 8.2 million people (which includes both registered and non-registered voters).



This letter was delivered to New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia before the 1944 presidential election.

October 31, 1944

Mayor F.H. LaGuardia
City Hall
New York City

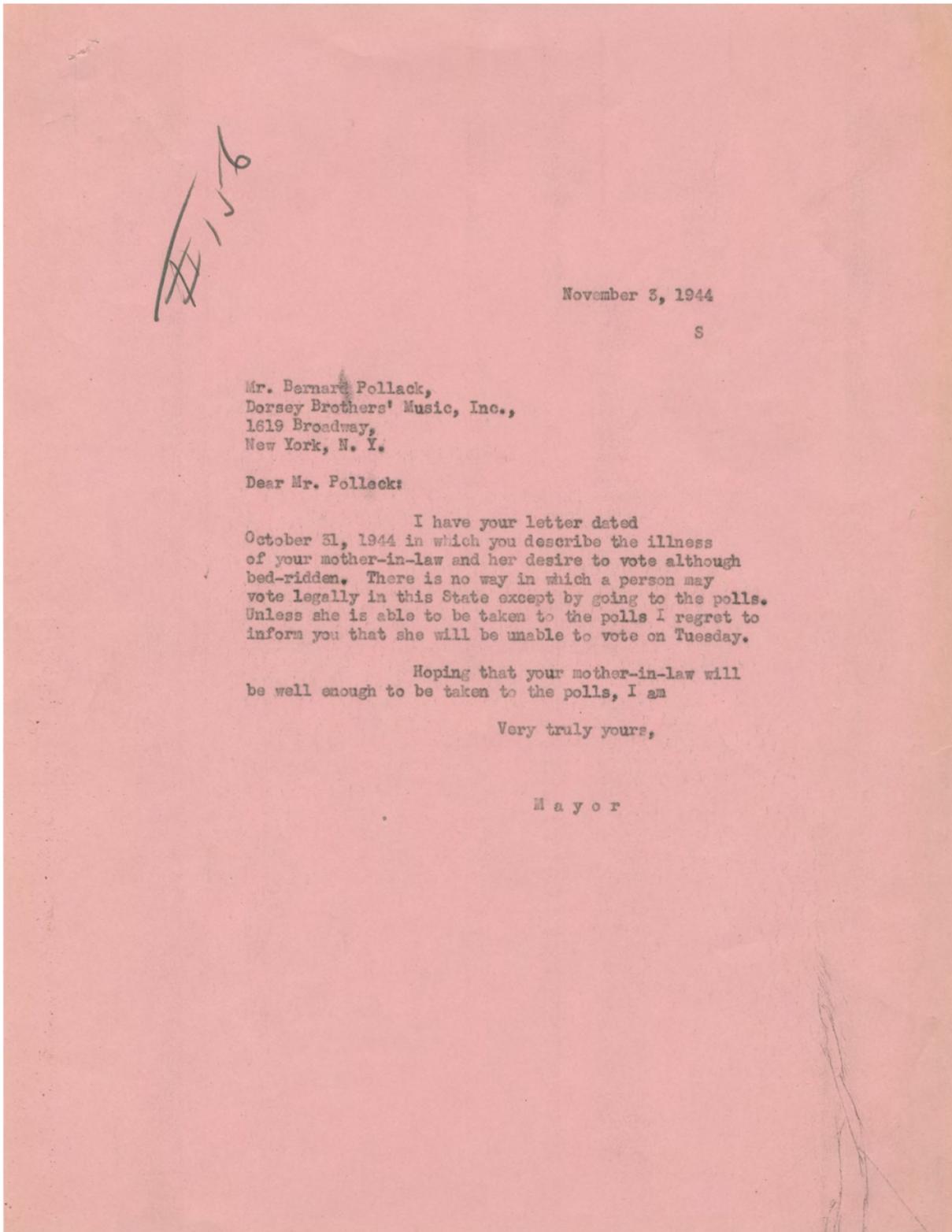
Dear Mayor:

As a point of information, I would like to know if there is any way for my mother-in-law, who is very ill and unable to leave her bed, to vote. She has already registered and is very anxious to cast her ballot. Would you please advise me on the above. Would appreciate an early reply so she may be able to vote on November 7th. Thank you.

Yours very truly,
Bernard Pollack

This letter was delivered to New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia before the 1944 presidential election.

PRIMARY SOURCE 9



This is Mayor LaGuardia's reply to the letter shown on page 25.

TRANSCRIPTION—PRIMARY SOURCE 9

November 5, 1944

Mr. Bernard Pollack

Dorsey Brothers Music, Inc.

1619 Broadway

New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Pollack,

I have your letter dated October 31, 1944, in which you describe the illness of your mother-in-law and her desire to vote although bed-ridden. There is no way in which a person may vote legally in this State except by going to the polls. Unless she is able to be taken to the polls I regret to inform you that she will be unable to vote on Tuesday.

Hoping that your mother-in-law will be well enough to be taken to the polls, I am,

Very truly yours,

Mayor

QUESTIONS—PRIMARY SOURCES 6 - 9

- 1) Look at Document 6, the photograph of the voting machine. Why do you think this was a more effective way to tally votes than counting paper ballots?
- 2) The ballot scanner system is said to be the most efficient method for tallying votes. Please explain why.
- 3) Please read Document 8, the letter to Mayor LaGuardia and Document 9, his response to Mr. Pollack. Each of these letters was written in 1944 during WWII. We know soldiers stationed away from home were permitted absentee ballots. With this information, what have you learned about absentee voting laws at that time?

CULMINATING ACTIVITIES

Review the primary sources that you've encountered in this curriculum aid. Which do you feel most demonstrates the importance of our right to vote? Explain why.

CONCLUSION

The right to vote stands as one of the fundamental pillars of America's democracy. From the inception of the Constitution, voting rights were initially limited, with eligibility determined by individual states. Typically, voting was restricted to white male landowners, gradually extending to non-landowning white males over time.

In 1870, a significant milestone was reached with the ratification of the 15th Amendment, which prohibited the denial of voting rights based on race. However, certain groups, such as Native Americans born in the United States, were excluded from full citizenship and voting rights until 1924.

Over the years, these barriers were gradually dismantled, broadening the scope of voting rights to encompass other marginalized groups. The ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920, for instance, ensured that voting rights would not be denied based on gender. This momentous achievement was underscored in a 1946 WNYC radio broadcast of Broadway performer Adele Jerome urging women to exercise their right to vote.

The enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by Congress was pivotal, aimed at preventing the denial of voting rights based on race or any other inherent attribute. Since then, some states have attempted to suppress the voting rights of individuals of color, Native Americans, and immigrants.

The voting landscape in New York City has evolved over time, leading to significant changes within the city. For instance, the election of Mayor LaGuardia in 1934 exemplifies how voting has empowered citizens to enact necessary reforms and combat corruption.

As our voting systems and technologies continue to evolve, it is our hope that these advancements will inspire all eligible voters in New York City to participate in the electoral process, ensuring their voices are heard in decisions that directly impact their lives.

ABOUT US

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