

Good Citizenship

As You Read

Explore These Questions

- How was the Bill of Rights limited?
- How did the Supreme Court use the Fourteenth Amendment to expand citizens' rights?
- What are the rights and responsibilities of citizens?

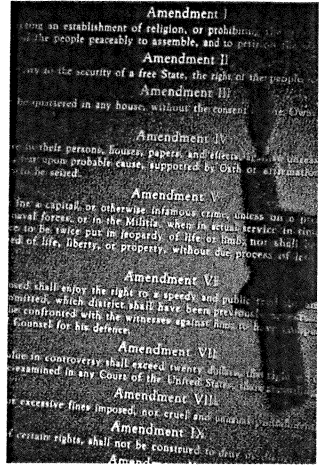
Define

- due process

Identify

- *Gideon v. Wainwright*

Plaque listing the Bill of Rights



SETTING the Scene

Americans first proclaimed their rights in the Declaration of Independence. In it, they declared boldly:

“All men are created equal; . . . they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

Since the birth of the nation, Americans have struggled to reach this ideal of basic rights for all. They have learned, however, that along with the rights of citizenship come responsibilities.

Citizens' Rights

The Constitution originally protected some individual rights by limiting government actions. For example, Article 6, Section 3, prevents the government from making religion a requirement for public service. Article 1, Section 9, prohibits Congress from passing a law punishing an act that was not illegal at the time it was committed.

Bill of Rights

Many Americans, however, demanded a more specific list of rights. In response, the first Congress drew up and the states ratified the Bill of Rights.

Still, the Bill of Rights applied only to the federal government. States were free to restrict or deny basic rights of many people, in-

cluding women, African Americans, and Asian Americans. At times, the federal government also restricted rights through laws and court decisions.

Fourteenth Amendment

An amendment passed in 1868 paved the way for a major expansion of rights. The Fourteenth Amendment states that persons born or naturalized in the United States are citizens of both the nation and their state. No state may limit the rights of citizens or deny citizens *due process*, or a fair hearing or trial. States are also forbidden to deny citizens “equal protection of the laws.”

Over the years, the Supreme Court has decided that the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantee of due process and equal protection includes rights listed in the Bill of Rights. States cannot deny citizens the protections of the Bill of Rights.

For example, in the 1960s, the Supreme Court ruled that due process includes the Sixth Amendment right to representation by a lawyer. The case of *Gideon v. Wainwright* involved a poor Florida man who had been convicted of breaking and entering. The judge hearing the case had refused the defendant’s request for a lawyer. The Supreme Court ruled that a state court must appoint a lawyer for any defendant who cannot afford to hire one.

What are basic rights?

As the Ninth Amendment states, the people have rights beyond those listed in the Constitution. Americans still strive to define these rights. Some people believe that a citizen's basic rights include the opportunity to get a good education and to find a job. Others argue that these rights are not guaranteed by the Constitution.

Citizens' Responsibilities

Like every citizen, you must do your part to safeguard your rights. At the same time, you must accept the civic responsibilities that are a part of living in a free and democratic society.

Know your rights

You cannot protect your rights unless you know what they are. Books, government pam-

phlets, and groups such as the League of Women Voters, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Legal Aid Society can give you information about your rights and the law.

You must also know the limits of your rights. A popular saying states, "Your right to swing your fist ends where my nose begins." As part of your civic responsibilities, you must respect the rights of others. After all, your rights are only as safe as your neighbor's. If you abuse or allow abuse of another citizen's rights, your own rights may be at risk someday.

Become involved

Good government depends on good leaders. Therefore, citizens have the responsibility to exercise their right to vote. A good citizen studies the candidates and the issues in order to make responsible choices.

Linking United States and the World

United States



South Africa



Getting Out the Vote

Voting is both a right and a responsibility. Yet, many take this right for granted. In 1996, only 48.8 percent of Americans who were eligible to vote actually voted. In 1994, when South Africa's black majority won the right to vote for the first time (right), 86.9 percent of eligible voters cast their ballots. ★ **Why do you think South Africans were so eager to vote? What point is the cartoon on the left making?**

Why Study *History?*

Because Citizens Have Responsibilities

Historical Background

For many Americans, providing unpaid community service is an important civic responsibility. In the 1770s, cities like Boston and Philadelphia had volunteer fire departments. During the Revolution, thousands of Americans volunteered to serve in state militias. By the mid-1800s, women took a leading role in charitable organizations that cared for the sick and needy.

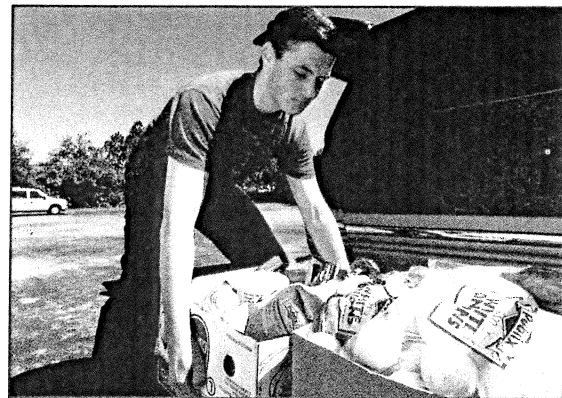
In April 1997, the Presidents' Summit for America's Future encouraged a national spirit of volunteerism. At the meeting, President Bill Clinton said good citizenship meant that you "serve in your community to help make it a better place."

Connections to Today

Adults are not the only volunteers. Young people can also find ways to serve their community. Consider, for example, the story of David Levitt.

David Levitt was a sixth grader in Florida when he read about Kentucky Harvest. This organization collected leftover food from restaurants and distributed it to people in need. David had an idea. He had seen how much unused food was thrown out in his school cafeteria. Why not start a similar program himself?

David presented his plan to the local school board and got permission to start a food distribution program. His first delivery was cartons of milk and bags of salad. Over the next few years, David sent more than 250,000 pounds of cafeteria leftovers to



David Levitt collects food for the needy.

shelters and food banks all over Florida. While still in middle school, he was invited to the White House and awarded a medal for his volunteer work.

Connections to You

There are many ways for you to volunteer in your community. You can participate in a food or clothing drive. You can help clean up a neighborhood park. Perhaps you would like to tutor a younger child or help at a local hospital or senior citizen center. To learn more about these and other opportunities, look up community organizations in your local telephone directory.

- 1. Comprehension** (a) How did President Clinton define good citizenship? (b) How did David Levitt help his local community?
- 2. Critical Thinking** How might volunteering affect the cost of government?

**Activity*

Writing a Proposal Decide on a volunteer program that might be helpful in your community. Describe the benefits of the program and how it could be set up. Write your plan as a formal written proposal.

