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Episode 285: Election & Voting in the Early Republic

- Announcer:** [00:00:00](#) *Ben Franklin's World* is a production of The Omohundro Institute.
- Liz Covart:** [00:00:12](#) Hello, and welcome to episode 285 of *Ben Franklin's World*, the podcast dedicated to helping you learn more about how the people and events of our early American past have shaped the present-day world we live in. And I'm your host, Liz Covart. Independence from Great Britain provided the former British American colonists the opportunity to create a new, more democratic government than Americans had lived under before the American Revolution. What did this new American government look like? Who could participate in this new American democracy and what was it like to participate in this new democracy? These are big questions. They're also the questions we'll explore in the second of four episodes about the origins of early American elections and voting practices. Now, the founders of the United States wrote constitutions to establish governments on both the state and national levels. These constitutions often laid out the offices each government would contain and the requirements for those who wish to represent the people and hold those offices. Where constitutions bring government structure, elections bring them to life.
- Liz Covart:** [00:01:18](#) So to help us better understand the early national governments of the United States and the elections that brought them to life, we're going to consult with Terrance Rucker. Terrance is a Historical Publication Specialist in the Office of the Historian of the United States House of Representatives. In that office, Terrance assists with editing the online biographical directory of the US Congress and serves as a contributing writer to the four-volume series *Minorities in Congress*. In addition to this work, Terrance is also an active member of the Society for History in the Federal Government, a professional organization in which Terrance has served on both the executive council and as president. But before we meet Terrance, just a reminder that my teammates, Holly White, Joseph Adelman, and I have created a resource guide to help you explore the origins of American democracy and elections beyond this short podcast series. This resource guide contains not just the books and articles we use to



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prepare this series, but also additional books, articles, museum exhibits, and digital resources for you to explore.

Liz Covart:

[00:02:21](#)

You'll find this guide in The Omohundro Institute's brand new OI Reader, now a web-based app. The OI Reader offers digital additions of the *William and Mary Quarterly*, the leading journal of Early American history since 1943. Plus, it has an open *WMQ* section, where we can offer you additional digital resources for some of our podcast episodes and series, just like this one. To access this resource guide on elections and voting, visit benfranklinworld.com/oireader. That's benfranklinworld.com/oireader. All right, are you ready to investigate the early national governments of the United States and the elections that brought those governments to life? It's time for us to speak with Terrance Rucker. During and after the American Revolution, Americans really had to figure out how to conduct elections so that they could implement their new governments, plus Americans also had to sort out who they would vote for and who would be able to vote in these new elections. Terrance, would you tell us about representation in voting under the United States' first constitution, the Articles of Confederation?

Terrance Rucker:

[00:03:43](#)

Sure. Representation and voting under the Articles of Confederation was much more limited than voting is today. You basically had limited political participation between small groups of people. On the one side, you would have colonial landholders and merchants, and they will be working with or against royal governors sent from Great Britain or other British officials, basically for control of local resources. Your majority of voters, which was very small, were white males who either held property or weren't indentured servants. They would vote for their colonial or state assembly members and subsequently these legislators would vote for delegates who served in the Continental Confederation Congresses. The structure was reflective of the system that the United States inherited from Great Britain in that a small number of voters participated in local elections for large popular legislatures. Any decisions that were made to elect officials that would serve in a national capacity or a state multiregional capacity, that was decided by



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the members of the state legislatures and not by the voters themselves. There were no national elections in this era as we would consider them today.

Liz Covart: [00:04:56](#)

What if you were someone who wanted to be a congressman in the Confederation Congress, which was the governing body under the Articles of Confederation? How would you have run for office knowing that it was the representatives who served in state assemblies who would've elected you?

Terrance Rucker: [00:05:12](#)

According to Professor Joanne Freeman, much of the politics in this era transpired among elite practitioners that did not involve the general public very much. Basically, what an assembly candidate would do is he would go to people in his local area, he would ask for their support. He would also go to the state assembly and basically lobby for the seat, not only among the state legislature members that he knew, but he would also speak with other members who he knew or might be sympathetic to his position. It was very much a self-lobbying operation. You would continue to see this in the Federal Congress era when candidates would run for the United States Senate, but in the Confederation Congress era, it was very much an insular circle of practitioners within the colony or within the state, and they would basically appeal to each other for votes.

Liz Covart: [00:06:09](#)

That's really interesting, that if you wanted a seat in the Confederation Congress, you really had to run your campaign on two fronts. First with the people who would elect state assemblymen and House members, and second, you'd really have to campaign among the members of those state assemblies or House members, as they would really be the men who would vote for you to have a seat in the Confederation Congress.

Terrance Rucker: [00:06:31](#)

That was very much the trend because that electoral model derived from Great Britain in that citizens—mainly landholders, some taxpayers, some who weren't indenture servants—they could vote in large popular elections, so say for the House of Commons, but it would be the members of the House of Commons that would select candidates for other offices, mainly executive offices. So for the colonies, the colonies inherited that



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model, and we see that model being used within the colonial assemblies prior to the American Revolution, and we also see it within the Continental and Confederation Congresses, where a select number of colonial or state legislators chose the representatives that would serve in these national assemblies.

Liz Covart: [00:07:17](#)

Now, state assemblies or houses of representatives and the Confederation Congress served as the first representative governing bodies of the new United States. But in 1789, the Articles of Confederation and the Confederation Congress were superseded and replaced by the Constitution of 1787, and its bicameral, or two-house, Congress established by that constitution. Terry, would you tell us a bit about how the Confederation Congress worked and why Americans felt they needed to replace it with a new constitution and new congress in 1789?

Terrance Rucker: [00:07:51](#)

As the first formal national legislature for the United States, the Confederation Congress worked as well as its rules allowed. It was the primary forum for coordinating colonial resistance to Great Britain during the war and formalized American independence through the Articles of Confederation. The Congress also encouraged states to expand suffrage requirements by revising their constitutions and managed a diplomatic corps that negotiated the 1783 Treaty of Paris that recognized American independence and doubled the size of the nation. On one hand, the Confederation Congress showed that representative government by popular consent could work at the state and national levels. On the other hand, questions about whether the states or the federal government should preside over taxation, regulate interstate commerce, or manage external diplomacy were bitterly disputed as the Congress's responses to these crises left many Americans dissatisfied with its effectiveness. Although it had the authority to regulate the Continental Army, the Confederation Congress could not supply these troops or request funding for its maintenance.

Terrance Rucker: [00:08:53](#)

It could request money from the states, as it did in 1783 to pay for war debts, but it could not compel them to pay on a consistent basis. The Confederation Congress also could not



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regulate foreign trade or interstate commerce, so states enacted their own policies. By 1786, a number of states considered foreign regional blocks to expand business opportunities and protect their commercial interests. The Confederation Congress had designed a framework for territorial expansion via the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which determined how public lands will become territories and petition for statehood. However, it was unable to protect US sovereignty in the West against the British, French, and Spanish Empires due to the limits outlined in the articles. Also, the Congress's inability to control the numbers of white settlers who encroached on land that belonged to American Indians erupted into armed conflicts. When settlers requested military help, the Congress could not provide arms or military aid in a timely fashion.

Terrance Rucker: [00:09:50](#)

A significant diplomatic blow occurred when the Spanish government closed the Mississippi River to US trade in 1784. A two-year diplomatic effort that was led by John Jay, who was the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, failed to reopen the trade route. In response, a number of states considered forming regional alliances to protect their commercial interests. What ultimately led the Confederation Congress delegates to consider revising the Articles was the Congress's inability to recover from the effects of a recession and the loss of public confidence in the Confederation that resulted from it. Although the Congress called for states to pay for its portion of the war debt, their inability to pay left the nation insolvent by the end of 1786. The Congress's inability to protect American commercial interest in the West and episodes of civil unrest like Shays's Rebellion in western Massachusetts also undermine confidence in the Confederation. By February 1787, a critical mass of delegates agreed to revise the articles in a formal convention in Philadelphia during the summer.

Liz Covart: [00:10:51](#)

Yeah, that's right. In 1787, the Confederation Congress called for a meeting to revise the Articles of Confederation. But what came out of this meeting, which we now know as a constitutional convention, was a brand-new constitution. Terry, would you tell us a bit about the Constitution of 1787 and what this constitution



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had to say about representative government and who could vote for national representatives?

Terrance Rucker: [00:11:16](#)

In terms of representation, the Constitution departs from the Articles in two ways. First, whereas the Confederation Congress was a unicameral legislature, the Constitution called for a bicameral Congress with the House of Representatives, where members would serve for two years, and a Senate, where members would serve for six. Second, the Constitution expanded voting qualifications via Article I, Section 2, Clause 1, by making the voting requirements for state legislative elections and US House elections the same. In essence, the Constitution enabled states to expand its suffrage requirements where necessary. This was an important change because prior to the revolution, states had tied voting participation to holding property of some kind. After the revolution, states began to loosen these restrictions by allowing citizens who either held property or pay taxes to vote in the state elections. So overall, you see this broad expansion really over this fifteen-to-twenty-year period prior to the convening of the First Federal Congress.

Liz Covart: [00:12:19](#)

So the Constitution really left it up to the states and their constitutions to define who could participate in American democracy?

Terrance Rucker: [00:12:27](#)

Yes, that's correct, and one reason that the delegates chose this route was because they would run into frequent deadlocks within the federal convention as to what a uniform requirement should be for voting qualifications for citizens who were voting in national elections that we see with the US House of Representatives, and because there is a deadlock between delegates who wanted to expand the franchise versus delegates who wanted to restrict the franchise, they chose to leave it to the states. The other worry that they had was that if they imposed a uniform qualification on all of the states, some states would either reject it outright or they would resist ratifying the Constitution as a whole because it could be a case of the federal government—a federal government that doesn't exist yet—imposing itself upon a state government. So, in a way to keep the peace, but also to allow the states to exert their own autonomy,



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they left those voting requirements to the states, but they left that guideline in the Constitution basically making voting requirements between state legislative elections and US House elections the same

Liz Covart: [00:13:39](#)

If the states got to determine who could participate in American democracy by voting, what did that mean exactly for the transition of power between the Confederation Congress and the Federal Congress of the United States Constitution in 1789? Could you tell us a little bit about the Election Ordinance of September 1788 and what that ordinance has to say about the first federal elections?

Terrance Rucker: [00:14:04](#)

My feeling about the election ordinance is that this is one of the Confederation Congress's greatest success stories that has not been covered, that isn't discussed very much. So, in July 1788, the Confederation Congress formed a committee dedicated to organizing the implementation of the new Constitution. This committee worked very quickly by submitting an action report to the Congress within one week. I mean, one advantage that they had is that this implementation plan, part of it was mapped out at the federal convention, and this committee basically filled in the details. The committee in its report offered a timeline with three objectives. They envisioned a December 1788 to a February 1789 timeline. Those three objectives were by December 1788, electors will be appointed in the states to ratify the Constitution. By January 1789, electors for selecting the president would be appointed, and by February 1789, the new Congress would convene to serve the nation.

Terrance Rucker: [00:15:13](#)

After the committee forwarded these recommendations to the Confederation Congress, it didn't approve an election ordinance for three months because of the intense debates over where the new capital would be. Should it be in New York, should it be in Philadelphia, should it be somewhere else? To make their lives easier, they decided to remain in New York, and once that issue was resolved, the Confederation Congress issued a two-paragraph ordinance on September 13, 1788. So, if you read it in the journals, it doesn't seem like there's a whole lot to it, but there is, particularly in the planning and the execution. Like the



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ratification process, much of this work was left to the states to figure out. One big change in the ordinance was that the preparation calendar was moved one month ahead from the December, January, February timeline suggested by the committee to a January, February, March timeline to accommodate the opening of the new Congress. And although it is explicitly stated in the ordinance, the assumption was that states would act on what became Article I, Section 4 of the Constitution to schedule elections for representatives and senators within the three-month timeframe specified by the ordinance.

Liz Covart: [00:16:20](#)

Now that we know a bit about what the Confederation Congress and the Constitution of 1787 had to say about elections, how did elections work on the ground? When we look at the first federal elections in 1788–89, how did the individual states interpret the Election Ordinance of 1788 and hold their elections?

Terrance Rucker: [00:16:41](#)

Well, states have interpreted this ordinance as a set of guidelines instead of an explicit federal order, basically in the way that states had treated other Confederation Congress suggestions. Consequently, there was a fear among state officials and some confederation delegates that if the states either disregarded the ordinance or acted on it in a way that they had acted on previous legislation, that the new government would not survive. So there was a serious urgency at both the state and what would be the federal levels to act decisively. The states use two methods for this first set of elections, and then they also use the hybrid system. I'll describe the hybrid system a little bit later. The two methods that they used are called the at-large system and the single-member district system. For the at-large method, citizens could vote for as many candidates as there were House seats until winners were determined.

Terrance Rucker: [00:17:39](#)

For example, if there are six seats available for a slate of ten candidates, citizens would vote until the six candidates who received the largest number of votes were determined. Six states—Connecticut, Delaware, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island—used this at-large system. The single-member district method, on the other hand, it works



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differently. For that method, states designated a certain number of congressional districts based on apportionment. Within each district, voters would select a winner from a single slate of candidates. Five states—Massachusetts, North Carolina, New York, South Carolina, and Virginia—preferred this method. The states of Maryland and Georgia, being the rebels that they are, used a hybrid method in which citizens from all over the state voted for candidates from any congressional district. So instead of this hybrid system being an asset, this method revealed the weaknesses of both systems in that citizens could vote for as many candidates as the general ticket allowed but because there were multiple districts, the winner may not receive the majority of votes from a specific congressional district. So for example, there was a possibility that a House candidate from Maryland state capital in Annapolis, which is in about the middle of the state, could win a seat for a district that encompassed Baltimore, which would leave voters in both districts unhappy. Each state learned its lessons from that experience in that when the federal election for the Second Congress occurred in 1790, Maryland chose the district method and Georgia selected the at-large method.

Liz Covart: [00:19:17](#)

One of the interesting aspects of this first federal election is just how little interest people had in the first presidential election, and that's because everyone assumed the Electoral College would elect George Washington to the presidency. But there was a ton of interest in this first federal election to Congress. Terry, would you tell us why there was so much interest in this first election to the House of Representatives and why this particular election of 1788–89 seems so important to the new nation and its government?

Terrance Rucker: [00:19:47](#)

One reason that these elections garnered so much attention is because it was really right on the heels of the ratification debates. So really, for the previous ten months, from up to September 1787 to July 1788, citizens had been following the ratification debates for the new Constitution through newspapers and through the public forums. So, in the transition for the elections, you already had an active, engaged citizenry that had already been discussing political issues really for much of the year.



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Despite all of this attention, many citizens had not actively engaged in selecting representatives of this nature at the state level, but the revision of state constitutions after the American Revolution enabled larger numbers of people to participate. You know, so throughout this phase as we move into the first federal elections, the significant transition that occurs is that US House candidates, unlike Confederation Congress delegates moved from the smaller, insular circles that had worked with each other, worked against each other in the colonial assemblies, into more of a rough-and-tumble environment where they had to appeal to a larger public for support. Of course, they continually sought to receive the approval of their peers within the legislatures and work within a specific honor code. But unlike the confederation era, US House candidates' campaigns to the general public were requirements to participate in politics on a national stage.

Liz Covart: [00:21:18](#)

There's two different parts of this federal election that I'd like for us to investigate. First, it really sounds like the American people, with this change in the national constitution that allows them to vote for national representatives, it really sounds like the American people were excited about this change and the election of 1788–89. Do you think that was the case, Terry? Is there any evidence to support that idea?

Terrance Rucker: [00:21:42](#)

No. No. There was a general excitement. There was a large excitement about it just from their reactions that were recorded in the newspapers that we see, or in the letters that we read from congressional candidates or from your man on the street. There was quite a bit of excitement, and there was one case that I was reading in the newspapers where, in some cases, citizens were advocating for either the single-method district system or the at-large district system, and the one case I was reading about was an individual by the name of Numa, and in a widely reprinted public letter, Numa was talking about the virtues of the single-method district system, and he was really trying to convince his fellow voters to support the system. On the other hand, you would have other newspaper articles describing the benefits of the at-large system. Much of this depended on the political activities going on within the states at the time. But no, there was a large bit of excitement.



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- Liz Covart:** [00:22:46](#) And the second part of this first federal election that I'd like for us to investigate is reaching the engaged citizenry. If you were a candidate for the US House of Representatives in this election, I think you'd have to go out and try pretty hard to capture the attention of this already engaged citizenry. So how would you do that? What was it like to campaign for these first seats in the US House of Representatives?
- Terrance Rucker:** [00:23:09](#) Campaigning in this timeframe was different from today in that candidates could not directly run for seats, in that they could not announce that they were running for a seat. So the idea we think about today of throwing one's hat in the ring, you didn't do that in that kind of fashion at the time. Instead, you announced your intention to serve. You announced your intention to serve publicly, but then privately you worked behind the scenes to build support for your case. You also sought allies who would basically campaign for you. So you're exhibiting civic virtue by announcing your intention to run, but you're not as obvious about it because for many people in that timeframe that would be considered crass. That's how it worked.
- Liz Covart:** [00:24:00](#) So, say you're a candidate in this first federal election, first seat in the first House of Representatives, and you've announced your intention to serve. How do you get your supporters to help you get elected? What kinds of campaign work would you expect from your supporters to get you elected?
- Terrance Rucker:** [00:24:17](#) What they would do is they would attend public debate forums and argue on your behalf. They could write public letters to the newspapers. They could also write letters to others on your behalf privately, you know, and advocate for you that way. You could also advocate that way for yourself. One case that I'm thinking of in particular would be James Madison's case and what was Virginia's fifth congressional district. This is a famous case because this is the one election where you had two future presidential candidates running against each other, Federalist James Madison and Anti-Federalist James Monroe, who ran against each other for a US House seat. Scholars dispute whether an Anti-Federalist dominated general assembly, which was led by Patrick Henry, deliberately altered the state's congressional



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district lines to ensure that Madison would lose, or if it was a case of very bad luck with Virginia's districting system. Regardless of the reason, Madison was running as a Federalist in an Anti-Federalists district, so he knew that he had a fight on his hands.

Terrance Rucker: [00:25:25](#)

He dismissed the advice from friends that he should run from friendlier territory, and he actually left New York in December 1788 to run for the seat. Madison had a number of factors in his favor. He had successfully consolidated support in areas like his home county of Orange, Virginia. He had allies on the ground who were working on his behalf within the Virginia General Assembly and also on the campaign trail. One ally told Madison that he could split the difference in the other counties that may have been hostile to him, or he could win them over with some hard campaigning. So Madison took a two-pronged approach. He launched a public relations offensive in a series of public letters that outlined his views of the new Constitution to several newspapers that circulated throughout the district. Because it was an Anti-Federalists district, Madison ran on a pledge that he would secure a Bill of Rights for the new Constitution. Along with the letters, Madison directly engaged voters in public forums who had doubts about his effectiveness as a representative for their interests. And this was a about a six-to-eight-week campaign. So, he basically started running in December 1788. The election was held on February 2, 1789, in which more than two thousand voters braved subzero temperatures to cast ballots in the eight-county district. Madison won election to the House with 57% of the vote and will be reelected to three more Congresses by decisive margins. In his last house election, Madison ran unopposed.

Liz Covart: [00:26:58](#)

So Madison and others really ran for their seats in this first House of Representatives by campaigning a bit indirectly, you know, they write to newspapers rather than go out and directly speak to voters. Do we know when candidates like Madison would come out and directly campaign for office like we see the candidates doing today?



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- Terrance Rucker:** [00:27:19](#) I can't say that there is a specific date when that occurs, but this is an evolution over time throughout the early republic period. What we see in the first federal elections is really the first transition that we see with House candidates where they will be appealing to their peers within the assemblies, but also appealing to the general public for votes. As candidates became more experienced in public campaigning, as we see the formation of what would become party organizations, I've seen scholars refer to parties in this period as protoparties, such as the Federalists or the Anti-Federalists or the Jeffersonian Republicans. You'll see that in publications. As these candidates and these organizations became more sophisticated in campaigning, we start to see more discernible, more identifiable party platforms. We also see candidates running less on their personality and more on running as a representative of their party. But without the first federal elections, you would not see the widespread political changes that you see in say, the elections of 1800, the elections of 1812, the elections of 1824. The 1780s and the 1790s is very much a period of experimentation in campaigning and representation.
- Liz Covart:** [00:28:42](#) Now, say you're an informed citizen in 1788–89. You've gone to public debates, you've read the newspapers, you know what you need to know about the candidates. When it's election day, you're ready to vote. What was the process of casting your vote like in this first federal election?
- Terrance Rucker:** [00:29:00](#) In this timeframe, voting and election is very different from the voting process that we're familiar with today. You did not walk into a booth and cast your vote in private. In this timeframe, voting was very public, and it went one of two ways. If it was a written ballot that you received, you would fill out the slate right there in front of the election judge and everyone else, you would hand it to the election judge and then your votes would be recorded. Your other option is to call out your vote. Basically, just yell the vote out to a clerk who would write down, you know, who you're supporting and then the clerk would hand that sheet to the election judge for certification. So, you could either write down your choices in public or you could shout out your choices in public. But either way, voting in this time was very public.



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- Liz Covart:** [00:29:53](#) We've acknowledged that the election of 1788–89 was an experiment. It was the first federal election. No one had ever elected anyone to national office before. How did this election turn out? When all was said and done, all the votes were counted, was this an election that early Americans could look back on and say it went smoothly?
- Terrance Rucker:** [00:30:13](#) I would say yes, it did. In that ten of the thirteen states held elections between December 1788 and March 1789, which fell within the election ordinance's specified timelines. The three exceptions were New York, North Carolina, and Rhode Island. New York held its elections between March 3 and March 5, 1789, as the first federal Congress convened. North Carolina and Rhode Island ratified the Constitution after Congress had started. So they held elections in the spring and fall of 1790, respectively. According to First Federal Congress scholars Charlene Bickford and Kenneth Bowling, serious contests for House seats emerged in fifteen of the forty-three House districts. The Federalists held an overwhelming majority in this Congress by sending thirty-seven of sixty-five representatives and eighteen of twenty-six senators to the First Federal Congress. The institutional continuity between the prefederal and federal Congresses was also strong. Thirty-five of the sixty-five members of the House and nineteen of the twenty-six members of the Senate had previously served in the Continental or Confederation Congresses at some point in their careers.
- Liz Covart:** [00:31:27](#) For the first time in their history, Americans were allowed to vote directly for their national representatives in the first federal election of 1788–89. In fact, the new Constitution of 1787 significantly expanded voting rights in urban areas by stating in Article I, Section 2, Clause 1 that the qualifications for voting for members of the United States House of Representatives would match those for state assemblies. This meant that not just landowners but taxpayers were able to vote in the election of 1788–89 and beyond. Still, the Constitution did not impose a uniform voting requirement on the nation. It leaves it to the individual states to determine who can participate in American democracy by voting. It also leaves to the states the power to decide how elections will be held. So what did voting and



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elections look like on the ground? How did states determine who could participate in American democracy by voting?

Liz Covart: [00:32:26](#)

To answer these questions, I think we need to investigate specific examples of early state voting requirements and elections. I think that by narrowing our focus a bit, we'll be able to see who the state's allowed to vote and why and how, and how the first federal election played out on the ground. This is why we're going to consult with Marcela Miccuci. Marcela is a museum curator who has a historical expertise in the history of voting. She's held in Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellowship at the Museum of the City of New York, where she curated exhibits such as *Beyond Suffrage: 100 Years of Women and Politics in New York*. And most recently, Marcela curated an exhibit at the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia. That exhibit's called *When Women Lost the Vote: A Revolutionary Story, 1776–1807*. I know Marcela can help us answer our questions about elections in voting in individual states, and we'll start to ask her our questions right after we take a moment to talk about our episode sponsor.

Liz Covart: [00:33:28](#)

Can you imagine the transition Americans must have felt when they went from having royally appointed governors and dictates from a king and Parliament, a legislature that they had no representatives in, to being able to vote for representatives who would serve them in a national legislature? I think it's really fascinating to think about just how refreshing, exciting, and perhaps even jarring that change must have felt like, especially as it culminated in the first federal elections of 1788–89. Now, as you know from many of our conversations on this podcast, most of what historians know about the past and past elections comes from their research in historical records. Conducting historical research is a real painstaking process. It's a multiyear process that includes searching out historical sources, interpreting those sources, and then taking what you find to make a case for why we should view the past a certain way.

Liz Covart: [00:34:22](#)

Likewise, each episode of *Ben Franklin's World* is also the result of a painstaking process. Each minute you hear on this podcast is a result of one hour of the audio team's labor. Now, The



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Omohundro Institute and I are committed to putting in this work because we want you to have access to well researched history and information about the early American past. But this commitment takes a lot of resources and we could really use your help. This is why I'm asking you to support our work by joining the *Ben Franklin's World* Subscription Program. Your subscription of \$5.99 per month or \$60 per year will help us continue to produce the high-quality episodes that you've come to love. Episodes that skip hyperbole and provide solid historical research on complex issues. Plus, you'll also be supporting a podcast that finds its way into classrooms and study guides, lunchtime learning sessions, and extended dinner time conversations.

Liz Covart:

[00:35:15](#)

Now, as a thank you for your support, you'll receive a monthly bonus episode on the last Friday of each month, and you'll never have your episodes interrupted again with ads like this one. Please become a subscriber. Join our subscription program, benfranklinworld.com/subscribe and help us continue to bring exciting new historical scholarship right to your ears. Join us at benfranklinworld.com/subscribe. The rhetoric of the American Revolution tells us that Americans wanted freedom, equality, and the right to govern themselves. Marcela, we're really curious about who could vote in the early United States. So, would you tell us who had the ability to vote and participate in the United States' self-government during the first state and federal elections?

Marcela Miccuci:

[00:36:02](#)

Yeah, you know, I think that's a great question. First of all, I think it's important to note that election laws were left up to the states. So it was each state that was actually able to determine voter qualifications and eligibility. So this really depended on where and when you lived. When we do see, you know, in 1776, as we start seeing some state constitutions coming to fruition, we begin to see many of them, actually ten, in fact, from 1776 to 1790, that actually define voters as male or free men. But we do see some that have no gender requirements. We see some that define voters specifically as being white, and then in most of them we see a six month at least residency requirements to be able to vote. But again, all of this is to be determined by each of



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the states. It's not yet federally regulated. And actually even today, as you know, election laws are still in the hands of the states. Before New Jersey, specifically, their 1776 state constitution used a gender-neutral pronoun, "they," and actually used the words "all free inhabitants" in its election law. So, there were no gender or race limitations. It did, however, limit the vote by wealth. So only those that were possessed of £50 proclamation money were entitled to vote in the state of New Jersey. And this really did open the electorate to any property-owning men or women, white or black, throughout the state.

Liz Covart: [00:37:29](#) Do we know what the founders were thinking when they decided to leave the development of voting requirements to the states?

Marcela Miccuci: [00:37:36](#) You know, if I had to guess, it would just be because this is a brand new electoral system and a new nation. So I think it's just a matter of being able to leave those determinations up to the states because there are so many other things that are left up to them as well. Things like currency. So, for instance, if we're looking at voter requirements and we need to be able to look at how much, you know, wealth someone needs to possess or how much property one needs to own in order to be able to vote, those property requirements and even how they're counting their currency is determined by the states individually as well. So I think that there's just a lot of factors that come to play there.

Liz Covart: [00:38:13](#) Now you mention New Jersey allowed women and African Americans the right to vote. Would you tell us more about why New Jersey gave the right to vote to women and people of color? Because it just doesn't seem like many states gave women and people of color the right to vote during this early national period.

Marcela Miccuci: [00:38:30](#) That's a great question. They didn't, and actually a lot of historians make the argument that we don't actually quite know what the influence was or why New Jersey specifically decided to do this. Some historians have suggested that, you know, actually using this gender-neutral pronoun of "they" wasn't, in fact, intentional. Others have made the argument that New Jersey, for example, a mid-Atlantic state, was highly Quaker and that perhaps the Quakers had some influence over the New



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Jersey State Constitution. And actually the Cooper family, who is attributed with writing parts at the New Jersey State Constitution, were heavily Quaker. So we have to ask if perhaps their more egalitarian views toward women are responsible for the fact that they may have intentionally left this vague. We do, however, very importantly, see in 1790 that the New Jersey State Constitution amends its election law. And in this reformed law in 1790, which first only applies to seven of the thirteen counties there, that it actually explicitly writes in the “he or she” clause into the election law, explicitly noting that in 1790 women absolutely have the right to vote in New Jersey. And in 1797, this statute is amended once more to go statewide.

- Liz Covart:** [00:39:55](#) It's interesting you mentioned that perhaps we can attribute New Jersey's inclusive voter requirements to a Quaker influence because you'd think that Pennsylvania, which also had a very strong Quaker influence, would've also developed inclusive and expansive suffrage requirements. Did early Pennsylvania allow women and people of color to vote?
- Marcela Miccuci:** [00:40:15](#) They did not, but that's actually a great question. A lot of people do speak to the mid-Atlantic states of, you know, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania as being kind of different from, you know, New England and the South. These states were a little bit more diverse, both in religion and ethnicity. They created a more open culture of gender in many ways. We do see, especially in New Jersey, strong Dutch and Scottish populations, for instance, and they actually tended to give women more control over their property and more voice in public matters. So while we do see this being similar to other mid-Atlantic states like Pennsylvania, we do see New Jersey being the only state to explicitly give women the vote, and we're not quite sure why.
- Liz Covart:** [00:40:58](#) It also seems quite controversial in this late eighteenth-century period for any state to give African Americans the right to vote. Do we know why early New Jersey decided to grant African Americans suffrage or the right to vote?
- Marcela Miccuci:** [00:41:12](#) I mean, New Jersey, like many other states, was, you know, a slave-holding state. So it's important to note that southern states



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particularly are especially barring the vote from people of color and from slaves, because allowing those minorities to vote really had the potential to dismantle in a system of slavery that their economy and their political world really depended on. And this could lead to, you know, fears of social chaos or disorder. This was a bit different in New Jersey, especially among the Quaker population. There was a lot of antislavery sentiment in New Jersey, especially in more urban places, and it was more of the rural communities that relied on slave labor. But yeah, it's actually a really interesting question to be able to ask why people of color specifically are getting the vote with women in New Jersey. And you know, if we look beyond religion and ethnicity and we begin to look at the rise of partisan politics in particular, we do see a really staunch Federalist majority in New Jersey up to the late 1790s and the early 1800s. We actually won't see the shift to Democratic-Republican or Anti-Federalists until 1801. So some historians have suggested that New Jersey opened the vote to women and people of color specifically to offset the rise of this rising Democratic-Republicanism, which is, you know, in tandem with the rise of partisan politics in the 1790s.

Liz Covart: [00:42:36](#)

Do we know anything about specific voters in New Jersey? Did your research for the Museum of the American Revolution's *When Women Lost the Vote* exhibit turn up anything in the historical record that can tell us about New Jersey women and African Americans who voted in these early elections?

Marcela Miccuci: [00:42:52](#)

We absolutely do. That's a great question. Part of our mission at the museum has been first to prove that women and people of color did vote in the early republic. Historically, we have a lot of anecdotal evidence that speaks to women voting. For instance, newspaper accounts that say, you know, women at the total of seventy-five heads showed up to the polls in Elizabethtown, or you know, the federal ladies turned out to so-and-so election. But we had very little primary evidence or poll lists that could actually speak to whether or not women were actually going to the polls. And if, you know, these weren't just exaggerated or fabricated accounts. So, cue the museum's curatorial staff, who since 2018 have really began researching, going into, you know, the cultural institutions and archives in New Jersey to begin



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locating some of these poll lists that can identify women and free people of color.

Marcela Miccuci: [00:43:47](#)

And we've been very fortunate in that regard. We have found eighteen poll lists so far, and nine of those lists have included the names of women voters on them. And among those lists, we've been able to identify 163 women so far. So the museum is currently undergoing a massive genealogical research project to be able to trace the lives and experiences of some of these early women voters. And we do hope to feature this on our website, as well, so that, you know, visitors will be able to go in and explore the lives and stories of these women and free people of color as well. I do think it's important to note that while we've identified 163 women and at least three free men of color that have voted, we haven't yet been able to identify a free woman of color on the list. But it's very important to note that just like white women and free black men, that women of color, provided they could meet the property requirement, were just as eligible to vote as anyone else.

Marcela Miccuci: [00:44:48](#)

And that just because we haven't necessarily found one of these women on these lists doesn't mean that they're not there yet. We just haven't yet been able to identify her. And this, you know, goes back to a lot of the obstacles of researching women in early American history. In many cases, these women go from being their father's daughters to their husband's wives, and their identities are mainly subsumed by the men in their lives and their last names especially, which makes it incredibly difficult sometimes for us to be able to track them through the historical record. And then among those women who we have been able to identify on the list, only one of the lists that we've identified so far actually includes the names of the candidates that women voted for. So, the people that the women voted for when they went to the polls. And, you know, this absolutely allows us to identify partisan affiliation. For instance, on that list we have two of three women voters who are actually voting Democratic-Republican that we can show. And also being able to just explore when and what these elections are for, and, you know, when the women specifically are going to vote, again, can really help us trace their partisan affiliation.



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- Liz Covart:** [00:46:00](#) You mentioned that women went from being their father's property to their husband's property. Was this fact why New Jersey's early voting law stipulated that in addition to having these £50 worth of property, a woman either had to be unmarried or widowed in order to vote?
- Marcela Miccuci:** [00:46:18](#) Yes, absolutely. I should be clear, the New Jersey State Constitution doesn't actually say that married women cannot vote. But to backtrack a little bit, you're absolutely right on. We do see under English common law the process of femme coverture, or a woman being legally covered by her husband once she gets married. Under coverture, a woman cannot legally own property under marriage and all of her rights, not only her economic rights, but also her political and her social rights, are subsumed by her husband. We do see some loopholes for women in this period because of that. For instance, some women signing prenuptial agreements or, you know, various other marital settlements, deeds of gifts or trusteeships, that all really did in some ways serve to protect married women's property that they brought into a marriage. And then of course, we see once, you know, a husband passes away the right to a woman's dower thirds.
- Marcela Miccuci:** [00:47:15](#) So, when a woman marries, she brings her dowry into the marriage. When her husband passes away, one-third of that dowry is legally entitled to be returned to her. And all of these are meant to provide some sort of protection for married and for widowed women. Now, we do find in some cases on the poll list that there are women who we do suspect who have been married at the time that they voted. So, we do think that some of these loopholes were actually beneficial for some of these women in allowing them to have property that they could call their own so that they would be able to go to the polling place and cast their ballots.
- Liz Covart:** [00:47:51](#) Now, speaking of poll lists, you mentioned that you found eighteen New Jersey poll lists, and that nine of those lists included women on them, with one even including information about who voters voted for. Could you tell us more about these



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poll lists? What do they look like and what kind of information do they contain?

Marcela Miccuci: [00:48:11](#)

The poll lists are actually quite fascinating. They're all handwritten. And just to give kind of a brief breakdown of what this would look like, so to show you a little bit of the walkthrough of the voting process. So, on these poll lists, at the beginning, it will say, you know, the date and time where the election took place. Typically, as I mentioned, at a tavern or an inn or, you know, sometimes a person's home. We've seen some of these lists, noting poll lists, that are elections that are occurring in schoolhouses, for instance. And after noting all of that and also what the election is for, whether it's a county or state election for voting for things like legislative council and assembly, the county sheriff and the county coroner for instance, or congressional or federal elections, that will typically be noted at the top. And then it will also list the judge and the inspector's names.

Marcela Miccuci: [00:49:06](#)

So, when you go to an election, you have a judge that oversees the election. You have typically two poll inspectors and also the town clerk and possibly also a tax collector that are all present at the election. And one of those officials will actually write the names of each of the people that appear at the polling list in the order that they appear. Elections typically in this period occurred over two days. So there was, you know, a decent amount of time for, you know, people that might have lived in more rural areas to be able to get to their polling place to be able to cast their ballots. And they would come in and, you know, what we can assume, you know, form some sort of line, they would move through similar to, you know, any sort of election that we might have today. And then once they got to the ballot box, they would recite their name, their name would be recorded by one of those election officials.

Marcela Miccuci: [00:50:00](#)

And then at that point, there would have to be possibly any objection that might be said, for instance, and although we don't have much evidence of this, there could be a circumstance in which somebody believed that somebody was not capable of meeting the property requirement to be able to vote. And either



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one of the officials, or actually even one of the voters present, would have to state some sort of objection to that person voting. And then that person would either have to prove their voter eligibility or they would have to recite some sort of oath of eligibility to be able to vote. After all of that is done and provided that there might not be any sort of objection, they would take a handwritten ballot and put it into the ballot box. And handwritten ballots are something that we see as early as 1790 in New Jersey with the implementation of township voting as being a way to regulate elections.

Marcela Miccuci: [00:50:55](#)

So, prior to this, oftentimes elections in New Jersey and throughout the colonies and also the states and the nation were taken by *viva voce*, which means that would be an oral ballot. You would go up to the polling place and you would actually say out loud the candidate that you were voting for, and that would be recorded. And after 1790, we begin to see with township voting a way to make this more secretive and also to regulate elections and prevent things like voter fraud and suppression that really begin to emerge, or at least accusations of voter suppression and fraud, beginning to emerge in the 1780s. So using a secret handwritten ballot was a way to combat some of that alleged suppression.

Liz Covart: [00:51:38](#)

You know, when we tend to think of voting today, I think many of us think of the uniform secret ballot because for us, voting has really become a private practice. But it sounds like in the early days of the United States, the voters might encounter two very different forms of voting, one being the handwritten ballots that we just discussed, or that voting by public declaration.

Marcela Miccuci: [00:52:00](#)

Oh, absolutely. And, you know, this was a very, at least semipublic system in the early years of the republic, for sure. But New Jersey, just like so many other states, are really just beginning to determine, you know, what they want this regulation of elections to look like. And that's why we see, in part, see so many of these statutes in 1790 and 1797 being passed in New Jersey to be able to regulate these elections.



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- Liz Covart:** [00:52:29](#) Given that women and people of color could vote in early New Jersey if they met the mandatory property requirement, did you find any evidence to suggest that women and people of color attempted to run for political office in these early days of the early republic?
- Marcela Miccuci:** [00:52:46](#) So we don't actually have much evidence of that, but I think it's important to note that especially with women, we won't actually see women being candidates for office or attempting to be elected until the latter half of the nineteenth century, I would say. So I'm sure, of course, there were thoughts of running for office, but we don't see any women or people of color actively running until the nineteenth century, at least in New Jersey. And then nationwide, you know, of course we have people like Victoria Woodhull who runs for president 1872. We have Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who actually attempts to run for the House of Representatives in 1866, but we won't actually see a female elected until the twentieth century. And one of those leading females is Jeannette Rankin, who runs for Congress in 1916 in Montana and is successful. Of course, I would like to think that there were thoughts of running for office, but we also have to consider that township elections, actually, in New Jersey were quite different from the state and county and federal elections that we have our poll lists for, in that town elections were reserved for white free men when that was very clear in those laws.
- Marcela Miccuci:** [00:54:03](#) So, actually, many of the people who are actually holding office and especially local offices in this period are not able to be anyone other than white free men.
- Liz Covart:** [00:54:15](#) Wow. So if you are a woman or free person of color and you're allowed to vote in early New Jersey, your voting rights, they're only for state and national elections. They're not for local elections. So you wouldn't be allowed to vote for, say, your mayor or constable, but you could vote for your representative to the US House.
- Marcela Miccuci:** [00:54:34](#) Correct.



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- Liz Covart:** [00:54:35](#) Do we know why New Jersey made that distinction? Why the state allowed women and people of color to vote in state and federal elections, but not in their own local elections?
- Marcela Miccuci:** [00:54:45](#) We don't, but we can surmise that it might have something to do with tax paying. Again, tax laws are in their formative moment and stage here in New Jersey determining who has the right to pay taxes, who needs to pay taxes, who's actually even eligible to own property to pay taxes on. And there's even some historians who suggest that free people of color were not actually legally entitled to own property in the state of New Jersey prior to 1798. So, you know, there's a lot of uncertainty here, and especially for us as historians going through all these legal records and being able to trace, you know, how often and when these laws are changing and why they're changing it. It's very difficult to know.
- Liz Covart:** [00:55:30](#) During your research for the Museum of the American Revolution's *When Women Lost the Vote* exhibit, did you find anything in the records of early elections, either in New Jersey or elsewhere in the United States that revealed more about women and African Americans participating in politics? Because, I mean, in early New Jersey, many women and African Americans could vote, but that wasn't really the case elsewhere. So how did women and African Americans who couldn't vote participate in American democracy?
- Marcela Miccuci:** [00:56:02](#) Yeah, I think that's a great question. And, you know, one of the questions I get a lot is, you know, what were the types of issues that women and free people of color may have been interested in in this period? In other words, you know, what were the women's issues of the day in the eighteenth century? And I find it to be a really fascinating question because they had the same issues that, you know, white men of all classes and backgrounds had as well. In many cases, we do see women, for instance, on petitions throughout the state of New Jersey who are petitioning for, you know, a bridge to be built down the street from their house or for, you know, various infrastructure. We see women petitioning to, you know, own taverns to be able to run their own businesses. Similar to many men, women are just trying to live and survive and take care of themselves and their families and their



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households. And the issues that are relevant to them are the issues that are relevant to everyone. It's just trying to build a new nation and all that that entails. So there were no specific women's issues that they might want to get involved in. They were really just parts of a political process that just didn't necessarily alienate them because of their gender or their race.

Liz Covart: [00:57:15](#) Now, in 1807, New Jersey passed another election bill. Would you tell us about the 1807 bill and what it meant for women and African Americans who were voting

Marcela Miccuci: [00:57:26](#) Absolutely. In November of 1807 New Jersey's, what I would consider, Democratic experiment ended, at least temporarily, with the loss of the vote for women and also for free people of color and aliens or immigrants. And the state's new election statute passes unanimously by forty state assemblymen, so there's really not much of an argument to whether it's passed, and it redefines voters in the election law as being “free white male citizens worth fifty pounds.” So, this follows a disputed election in Essex County. As I mentioned before, we do begin to see increased accusations of voter fraud occurring over the late 1790s and early 1800s. And these come to a head in Essex County in 1807 over the location of a local courthouse. And in response to that election, it's actually Democratic-Republican Senator John Condit [transcript corrected], who attributed actually one of his early near electoral defeats, to women voters coming to the polls, ironically enough, who introduces the bill to reinterpret the New Jersey State Constitution of 1797 Election Law and effectively, as a result of that, write women and free people of color out of it.

Marcela Miccuci: [00:58:40](#) To give you just a little bit more of a background on what I mean when I say things like voter fraud, for instance, I think one of the more telling examples we have is from a petition for an accusation of voter fraud from 1802 in Hunterdon County, New Jersey. And in this petition, and there's actually multiple petitions that are claiming the same thing, they're really casting blame on women and minority groups for why the election may not have gone in the favor of, in this case, the Federalists. And there's an amazing quote that I want to share with you. And it's:



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“The judge and inspectors admitted many persons to vote who are not by law entitled to that privilege. Persons underage, persons who are not resided in that township, a numerous body of Negroes, some of whom are actually slaves, citizens of Philadelphia, married women, and even went so far as to allow votes to be given by proxy.”

Marcela Miccuci: [00:59:33](#)

And if you continue reading through this petition, it actually says that, you know, the poll inspectors and the judges walked away from the polling place and left it unattended, allowing people to just put their ballots into the box. It says that, you know, people were actually going and pulling women off of carriages to bring them to the polling place to be able to cast their ballot. And all of this really emphasizing that, you know, there was no regulation of this election and as a result of that, it should have been overturned. This election in 1802 does not end up being overturned, but the one in 1807 over the courthouse in Essex County does. And that is where we really see this 1807 reform to the election law that reserves the vote to free white male citizens come to fruition.

Liz Covart: [01:00:21](#)

But why did New Jersey go after women and African Americans? Because it doesn't seem like allowing women and African Americans to vote equals voter fraud.

Marcela Miccuci: [01:00:31](#)

Oh, that's a great question. We do definitely see that women and African Americans became scapegoats for a lot of this fear of social disorder and chaos, especially at the polling place. And in many ways, this was also part of a larger, what historian actually, Rosemarie Zagarrri refers to as a backlash against women's political, social, and economic gains in the early nineteenth century. Really against, you know, political women's progress. In the 1790s we see some very profeminist women, emerging women, even overseas like Mary Wollstonecraft, who writes *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, but also women right here in the United States, like Judith Sargent Murray of Massachusetts, Susanna Rowson of Philadelphia, when all these women begin to publish, Judith Sargent Murray publishes “On the Equality of the Sexes.” Susanna Rowen is actually a pretty renowned playwright, and in actually delivering one play in 1794



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in Philadelphia, she comes out and hand delivers the epilogue to the audience in which she says something along the lines of, and I don't want to misquote her, but it's something along the lines of: women were born for universal sway, men to be silent, adore, and obey. And you know, the proverbial mic drop happens, I think, at that moment. We, you know, begin to see women really pushing and coming into these new political roles. And this can be seen as very potentially threatening, especially to male-dominated spaces like the political sphere. So we really do see women being kind of pushed out of it as a result of this. And I think that women losing the vote, at least in New Jersey in 1807, is one part of this larger backlash that begins to take place. In the early nineteenth century.

Liz Covart:

[01:02:26](#)

Voting was a familiar activity to Americans, both before and after the American Revolution. But what made voting in the early days of the early republic new and novel, were the number of men who could vote, and the number of experiments states like New Jersey undertook to figure out how best to hold elections and to find who could participate in the New American democracy by voting. From 1776 to 1807, the state of New Jersey allowed all free inhabitants who met a £50 property requirement to vote. This meant that married an unmarried women and free African Americans who owned some property could act on their political ideas at the ballot box. Now, New Jersey was alone in this more inclusive democratic experiment. The other twelve states restricted voting to white male citizens who paid taxes or owned some property. But it didn't take very long, not long at all, just thirty-one years, for New Jersey to end its broad political participation and resemble the other states.

Liz Covart:

[01:03:22](#)

As political parties developed—the Federalists and Jeffersonians—and anxieties increased about the rapid pace of change in the United States', social, political, and economic orders we can see how New Jersey's once broad ideas about who should be able to participate in the new American democracy shrank. We can also see how these broad ideas fell victim to divisive party politics and ultimately to white men's fears over the future of the nation and their role in it. Now, after this change in the New Jersey voting law in 1807, Americans wouldn't see



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voting rights broadly extended to people of color or women until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. African American men would receive the right to vote, at least per the Constitution, in 1870 with the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, women would have to wait to vote until the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

Liz Covart:

[01:04:12](#)

And then there's the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a congressional law that makes it illegal to discriminate against voters because of their race. So when we look at questions of what did voting in elections look like on the ground and how the states determined who could participate in American democracy by voting, we see a lot of similarities and differences between the past and present. But mostly I think we can see that even today we Americans are still trying to answer who is American democracy for and who gets to participate in that democracy. Look for more information about Terrance Rucker, Marcela Miccuci, and their work, plus notes and links for everything we talked about today on the show notes page, benfranklinworld.com/285. Now, if you're curious about the Museum of the American Revolutions new exhibit, *When Women Lost the Vote*, be sure to listen all the way to the end.

Liz Covart:

[01:05:05](#)

As very shortly, Marcela will rejoin us to tell us all about this exhibit and how we can visit it both in person and virtually. And speaking of virtual programming, on Wednesday, October 28 at 8:00 p.m. (eastern), Joseph Adelman, Holly White, and I will be live in the *Ben Franklin's World* community on Facebook, so we can answer any questions you might have about elections and voting in early America, and so we can take you behind the scenes of this series. This event is free and no preregistration is needed. All you need to do is log into the *Ben Franklin's World* listener community on October 28 at 8:00 p.m. (eastern). And if you're not a member of the listener community, you can join. Just visit benfranklinworld.com/facebook. I hope you're enjoying this series on elections and voting in early America. If you are, please consider telling your friends and family about it.

Liz Covart:

[01:05:56](#)

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comes from The Omohundro Institute's digital audio team, Joseph Adelman, Martha Howard, Holly White, Karin Wulf, and Peyton Young. Breakmaster Cylinder composed our custom theme music. Finally, we've now explored traditions of democracy and voting in colonial British America, the first federal elections of the new United States, and we've partly answered the question of who gets to participate in American democracy in the early republic. Next week, we'll continue our investigation of who could participate in American democracy by exploring Native American sovereignty and how sovereign Native Nations fit within early American democracy. *Ben Franklin's World* is a production of The Omohundro Institute. A lot of the research we've been talking about today was conducted to inform a new exhibit at the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia. And that exhibit is called *When Women Lost the Vote: A Revolutionary Story, 1776–1807*. Marcela, would you tell us about this exhibit and how we can view it?

Marcela Miccuci: [01:07:16](#)

Yes, absolutely. The physical exhibition itself opens to the public at the Museum of the American Revolution on October 2. And this will be incorporated into our core galleries. So you'll actually be able to go into our permanent exhibition at the museum and go through various cases throughout the galleries in which you'll be able to explore women voters, but also women's experiences in the American Revolution more generally. And that will be accompanied by an audio tour. So you can buy tickets online to do that. And also, of course, learn more about the museum's precautionary measures that we're taking and the climate that, you know, we live in right now. And then to accompany that, we also have a full-scale digital exhibition that's set to launch in the fall, as well, for those visitors, obviously, that're unable, maybe, to attend the museum in person. So this will provide a full walkthrough of all the exhibition content, the objects that you'll be able to see in the exhibition.

Marcela Miccuci: [01:08:13](#)

And also, as I mentioned earlier, our full poll list interactive, where visitors can actually go in and study and examine the poll lists, they can look at them, they can click on the women's names, learn more about the elections, and about the women



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voters and the free people of color that we've identified on the lists as well. And all of this will also be accompanied by a digital timeline and a bunch of teacher resources and guides for teaching all of this material in the classroom. And that will all be available online and is completely free to the public. But some of the things that you'll still be able to see, of course, in the exhibition, either if you are able to go in person or if you just want to look online, will be the original manuscript of the 1776 New Jersey State Constitution, which will be on loan from the New Jersey State Archives.

Marcela Miccuci: [01:08:59](#)

That will also include, in addition to the original manuscript of the 1776 Constitution, the manuscripts for the 1790, 1797 and 1807 statutes. Of course, we'll also have Abigail Adams's famed, "remember the ladies" letter and the 1776 letter from Abigail to John, we believe will be making its first return to Philadelphia since John originally received it from Abigail in 1776. So that's really cool for us. That will be on loan from the Massachusetts Historical Society, and I think it's just the first or second time they've actually loaned out that letter, so we're very thankful and grateful to have it. In addition to that, we have a whole plethora of women's objects from New Jersey and also objects that explore voting in early republican New Jersey. For instance, we have a ballot box from Deptford Township, dated to 1811. We have an 1802 hand painted Thomas Jefferson Tavern sign that hung outside of a tavern in Bergen County. We have multiple samplers, textiles, furniture, works of art, and other manuscripts. We are just, I think so excited to be able to share so many of these objects with everyone. It's been a long time coming for us, so we're really looking forward to it.

Liz Covart: [01:10:12](#)

And what the digital exhibit also launch on October 2, 2020,

Marcela Miccuci: [01:10:16](#)

Either early October or perhaps a few weeks earlier.