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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2019 Volume III: American Democracy and the Promise of Justice

Expanding Rights in American Democracy - Coalitions, Conflict, & Controversy

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This unit deals with the difficulties in creating and expanding rights in a democratic society where majority rule exists. It discusses difficulties caused by factions and how coalitions form. Included is a discussion outlining the elements of successful coalitions. Present day and historical examples are used. The Transgender rights movement provides a contemporary example while historical examples from the 19th Century include the Abolition movement and Women’s Rights movement. How these groups worked together (or didn’t) is the student learning goal. Students should be able to demonstrate learning by using the provided framework of elements to analyze reform movements.

The unit as written is intended for 8th grade and connects to several CA content standards. It is, however, certainly adaptable and this unit in whole or in part could be used in senior year government classrooms when discussing the development of the constitution or the 19th century reform movements. Some of the content and simulations described could also be useful in later year elementary classrooms as well. An annotated bibliography that will give teachers a sense of what other materials are available to them to review and study for their own uses is also included.

(Developed for Social Studies, grade 8; recommended for U. S. History, grade 11, and U. S. Government, grade 12)

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