

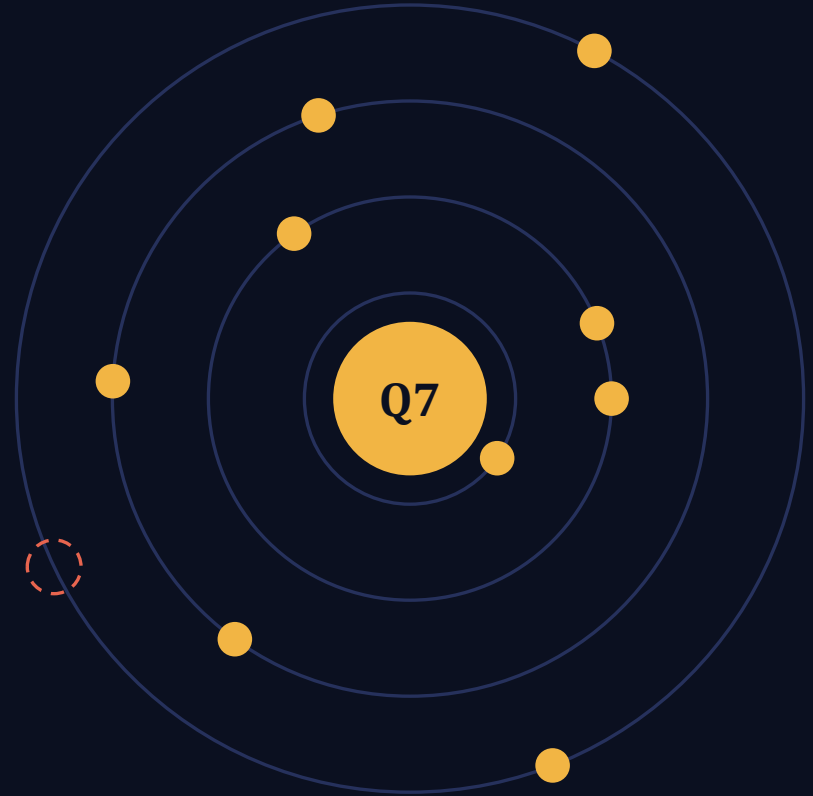
QUESTION 7

Widen the Circle

A critical historical perspective on the representative republic: its strengths, its failures, and an unfinished promise.

Esmaeel Ahmed Ansari

Grade 10 · Virtual North American Student Congress



A representative republic

1

We choose people to speak for us

2

A constitution fences in their power

3

Power rises from the people, not from a crown

Who was in the room?

Canada: constitutional monarchy. USA: republic. The same representative heart.

Sources: Plato, *The Republic*; G. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*

A promise worth keeping



Scale

Tens of millions governed without voting on every law.



Peaceful change

Power moves by ballot and by law, not by force.



Rights in writing

What is written can be pointed to: you promised.



Correctable

1929: women declared “persons” under Canadian law.

Sources: J.S. Mill, On Representative Government; Tocqueville, Democracy in America; J. Dewey, Democracy and Education

THE CONS

Which people?

3/5

An enslaved person, counted in the 1787 Constitution.

A promise on paper. A locked door in practice.

UNITED STATES

1920 Women win the vote

1924 Native citizenship;
some states still
block the ballot

1965 Voting Rights Act,
after Selma

CANADA

1876 Indian Act: keep your
status or your vote

1885–1923 Chinese Head Tax,
then exclusion

1942 Japanese Canadians
interned

1960 First Nations vote,
status kept

Sources: R. Dunbar-Ortiz, An Indigenous Peoples' History of the US; N. Hannah-Jones, The 1619 Project; Elections Canada

They did not wait.



CANADA

1946

Viola Desmond

Refused a segregated seat. Now on the \$10 bill.



USA

1964

Fannie Lou Hamer

Beaten for registering to vote. Testified to the nation.



USA

1965

John Lewis & Selma

Marchers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge led to the Voting Rights Act.



CANADA

1929

The Famous Five

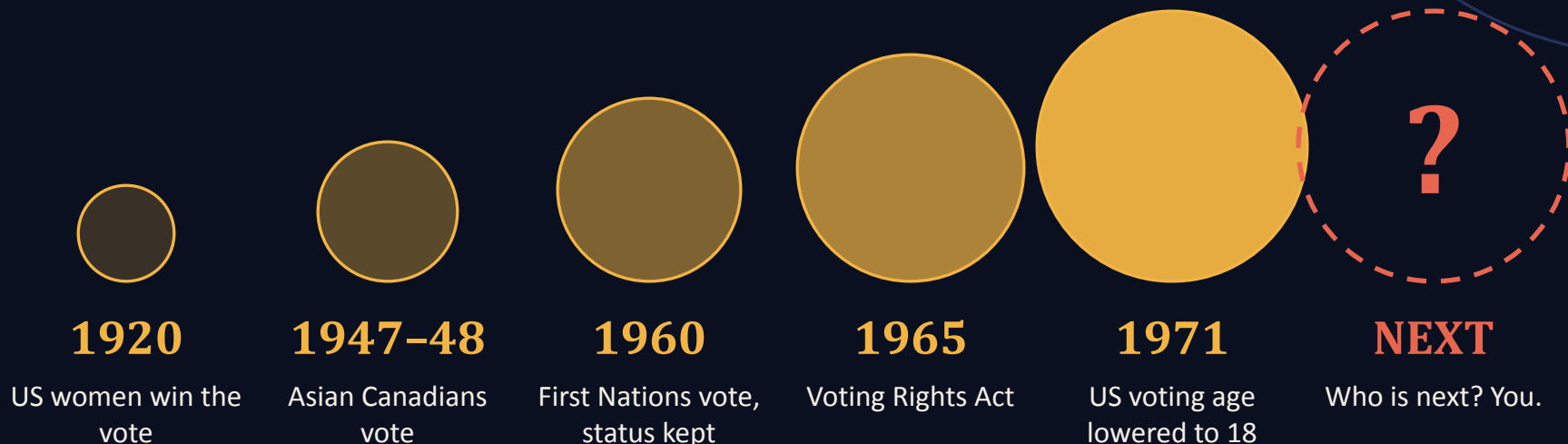
Won “persons” status. Idle No More rose in 2012.

Democracy was never a gift handed down. It is a demand rising up.

Sources: N. Hannah-Jones, The 1619 Project; Library and Archives Canada; US National Archives

Every open door was pushed

Each circle is a door somebody demanded.



Sources: Elections Canada; US Congress; National Archives; Library and Archives Canada

Other ways to govern were here all along

THEN



Great Law of Peace

Consensus. Clan mothers choose and remove leaders. Congress acknowledged its influence in 1988.



Two Row Wampum

Two vessels, side by side, each self-governing.

NOW



Nunavut and NWT

Consensus governments with no political parties.



TRC and UNDRIP

94 Calls to Action (2015). UNDRIP Act (2021).

Not relics. Blueprints.

Sources: R. Dunbar-Ortiz; Tocqueville, Democracy in America; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

Not yet.

The cons that remain

40% → 54%

of the vote became seats
(Canada, 2015)

2 presidents

took office without the popular
vote (2000, 2016)

Treaties

Promises to First Nations still
argued in court

Youth

Longest affected, least power

Sources: Elections Canada; US Electoral College records; Rousseau; M. Sandel, Democracy's Discontent

Youth have always moved the line

1963

The children of Birmingham march

1971

26th Amendment lowers the US voting age to 18

2018–19

Autumn Peltier addresses the United Nations

THREE FIXES

1

Honour treaties; act on UNDRIP and the TRC

2

Study fairer voting so every vote counts

3

Give youth a real seat: civic education, youth councils

You are not too young to...

learn

Read the 94 Calls to Action and Indigenous authors.

register

Join the Register of Future Electors at 14. Vote at 18.

speak

Write to your representative.
Speak at a council meeting.

HIGH SCHOOL

Build a seat

Start the student or youth council that hears every voice.

UNIVERSITY

Use your leverage

Libraries, research, campaigns. Mentor a younger student. One day, run for office.

The 30-day challenge

1

2

3

4

WEEK 1

Learn

Read three of the 94 Calls to Action. Ask your family: who was in the room?

WEEK 2

Register

Join the Register of Future Electors or register to vote. Find your representative.

WEEK 3

Speak

Send one letter or email to your MP about a fix you care about.

WEEK 4

Build

Invite five friends to start or join a club, youth council or dialogue circle.

Start tonight.

Disagree well, or the republic breaks

**Disagreement is not the
enemy of democracy.**

Contempt is.

George & West

A conservative and a progressive, friends, chasing truth with humility and courage.

John Inazu

Disagree with empathy and respect: tolerance, humility, patience.

Diana Mutz

Hearing the other side builds tolerance, but can lower participation.

Sources: R. George & C. West, Truth Matters (2025); J. Inazu, Learning to Disagree (2024); D. Mutz, Hearing the Other Side (2006)

I believe a system that can be amended can be redeemed.

I believe the circle that once held a few landowners can hold every one of us.

I believe the nation that counted a person as three-fifths can, in time, count every person whole.

I believe Nunavut's consensus, the Great Law of Peace, and the courage of Viola Desmond and John Lewis are its future.

And it begins here, in this room, with us.

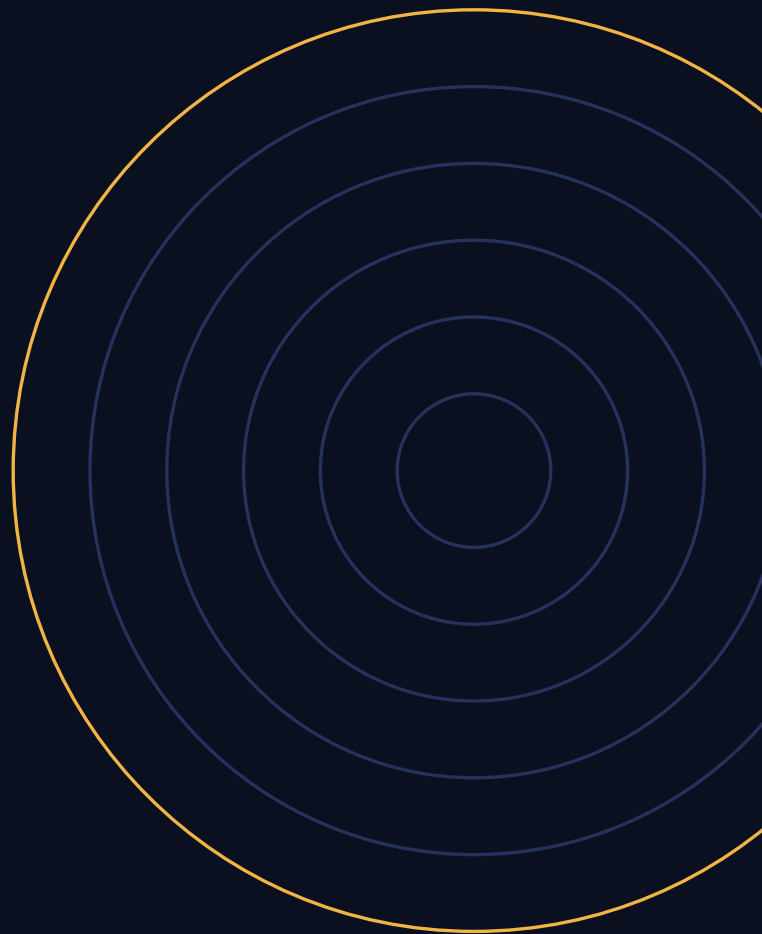
Widen the circle.

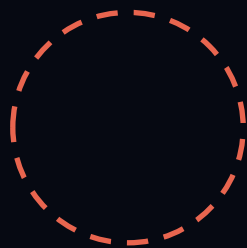
For the child in Birmingham.

For the family under the Head Tax.

*For the First Nations man who had to choose
between his name and his vote.*

For the youth at a desk, watching, waiting.





**Who is still not
in the room?**

Thank you.

Sources and further reading

Plato, The Republic

G. Wood, The Creation of the American Republic

A. de Tocqueville, Democracy in America

J.S. Mill, On Representative Government

J. Dewey, Democracy and Education

G. Orwell, Animal Farm

M. Sandel, Democracy's Discontent

G. Garrard, Rousseau's Counter-Enlightenment

R. Dunbar-Ortiz, An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States

N. Hannah-Jones, The 1619 Project

Fung, Moss, Westad (eds.), When Democracy Breaks

D. Mutz, Hearing the Other Side (2006)

J. Inazu, Learning to Disagree (2024)

R. George & C. West, Truth Matters (2025)