

Justice Talking Listening Guide
Should Felons Have the Right to Vote?
10/23/06

SHOW SUMMARY

Currently, 4.7 million Americans are unable to vote due to state policies that bar convicted felons from the polls. In some states the ban is permanent despite the fact that the defendant may have served his or her time and been released from probation and parole. Last year the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear a lawsuit from Florida challenging as unconstitutional felon disenfranchisement laws, but activists continue to push for reforms that will enable convicted felons to participate in the political process. Tune in to this edition of Justice Talking as we ask whether those who commit serious crimes should have the right to vote.



Christopher Uggen

- Part 1: Margot speaks with **Andres Idarraga**, a 28-year-old ex-convict who first began thinking about his voting rights while educating himself in prison. He is currently a junior at Brown University in Rhode Island. Under current Rhode Island law, he will not be able to vote until 2037.



Spencer Overton

- Part 2: Margot discusses crime and criminal voting with criminologist **Chris Uggen**, who is the author of "Locked Out: Felon Disenfranchisement and American Democracy."



John R. Lott

- Part 3: **Spencer Overton**, author of "Stealing Democracy: The New Politics of Voter Suppression," debates **John Lott**, author of "More Guns, Less Crime: Understanding Crime and Gun Control Laws," on whether or not convicted felons should have the right to vote.



Bobby Scott

- Part 4: Margot speaks with Virginia Congressman **Bobby Scott** about his state's voting laws.



Maggie Williams

- Part 5: Reporter **Susan Phillips** tells the story of a convicted felon in New York State who has filed suit from his prison cell seeking the right to vote for all prisoners in the state.

- Part 6: Margot speaks with **Maggie Williams**, founder and project director of the Voter Enfranchisement Project.

- Part 7: Margot talks to **Miriam Shehane**, who founded Victims of Crime and Leniency after her daughter was murdered.



RHODE ISLAND CONSIDERS VOTING RIGHTS FOR FELONS

Listen to this National Public Radio report from October 30th, 2006 at:

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6405977>



Host Margot Adler

Margot Adler is a National Public Radio correspondent based in NPR's New York Bureau. Adler has thirty years of experience as a radio host and reporter and is the author of several books. She lives in New York City with her husband and son.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 – Finding that existing federal anti-discrimination laws, particularly the Civil Rights Act of 1964, were not sufficient to overcome the resistance by state officials to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment (as soon as one discriminatory practice was held unconstitutional, states would impose a new one), Congress adopted this comprehensive voting rights law. The legislation, which President Johnson signed into law on August 6, 1965, temporarily suspended literacy tests, and provided for the appointment of federal examiners (with the power to register qualified citizens to vote), in divisions across the nation. Under this act any racially discriminatory act which prevented Americans from voting was prohibited.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Some argue that keeping felons from voting is just another kind of “poll tax” that discriminates against certain segments of society, particularly minorities and the poor. Do you agree or disagree and why?
2. Is it more important to keep ex-felons from voting as an ongoing punishment for their crime (and to deter others from committing such crimes) or to give them the right to vote to help them become responsible members of society?

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1869: Differences in opinion of many women over the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments and the relationship between women’s suffrage and the movement for racial equality split the women’s rights movement with allegiances divided between two main organizations: the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association. With the passage of the 15th Amendment that granted the right to vote to men of color and former slaves, but not women, the National Woman Suffrage Association broke with their abolitionist and Republican supporters.

Check out the Justice Learning Voting Rights Module,
where you’ll find an interactive timeline and much more!

<http://www.justicelearning.org/viewissue.asp?issueID=14>