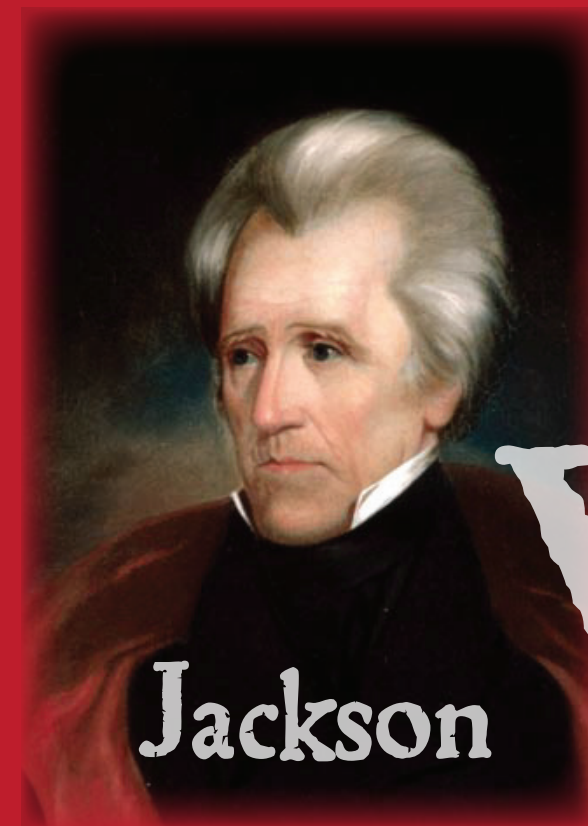


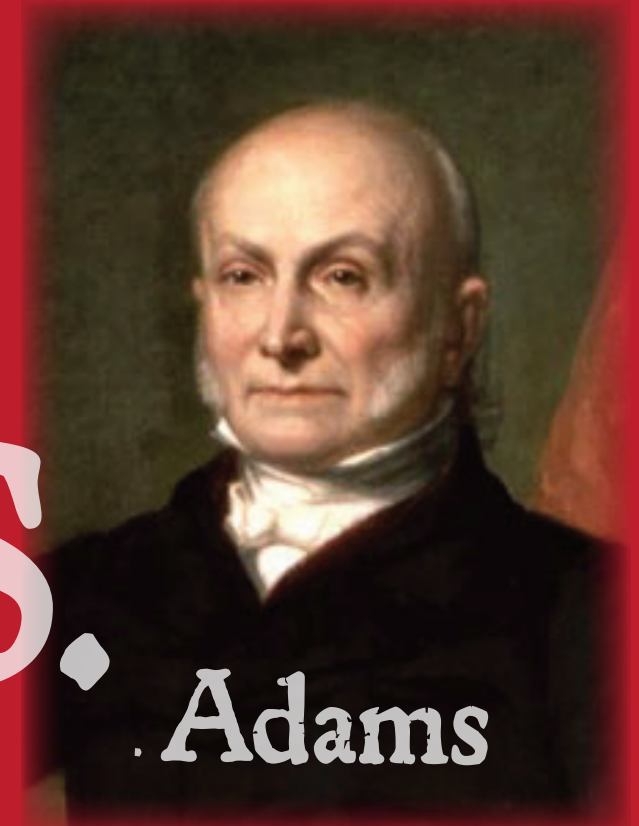
INTERPRETING THE DOCUMENTS: Equality and Voting

The Declaration of Independence states that all men have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but equality for the Founding Fathers had a different meaning than the one we presently have. The Founding Fathers wanted to create a government representative of and elected by its people. However, the only people allowed those rights were free white men who were literate and owned property. Even though the founders spoke of equality, **not everyone was truly equal** in the eyes of government.

One of the ways equality in America has been reinterpreted over the centuries is through voting rights. Our Founding Fathers did not forge a government that included voting freedoms for all people, but they did forge a government that could change with the social, political, and historical climate to extend those freedoms.

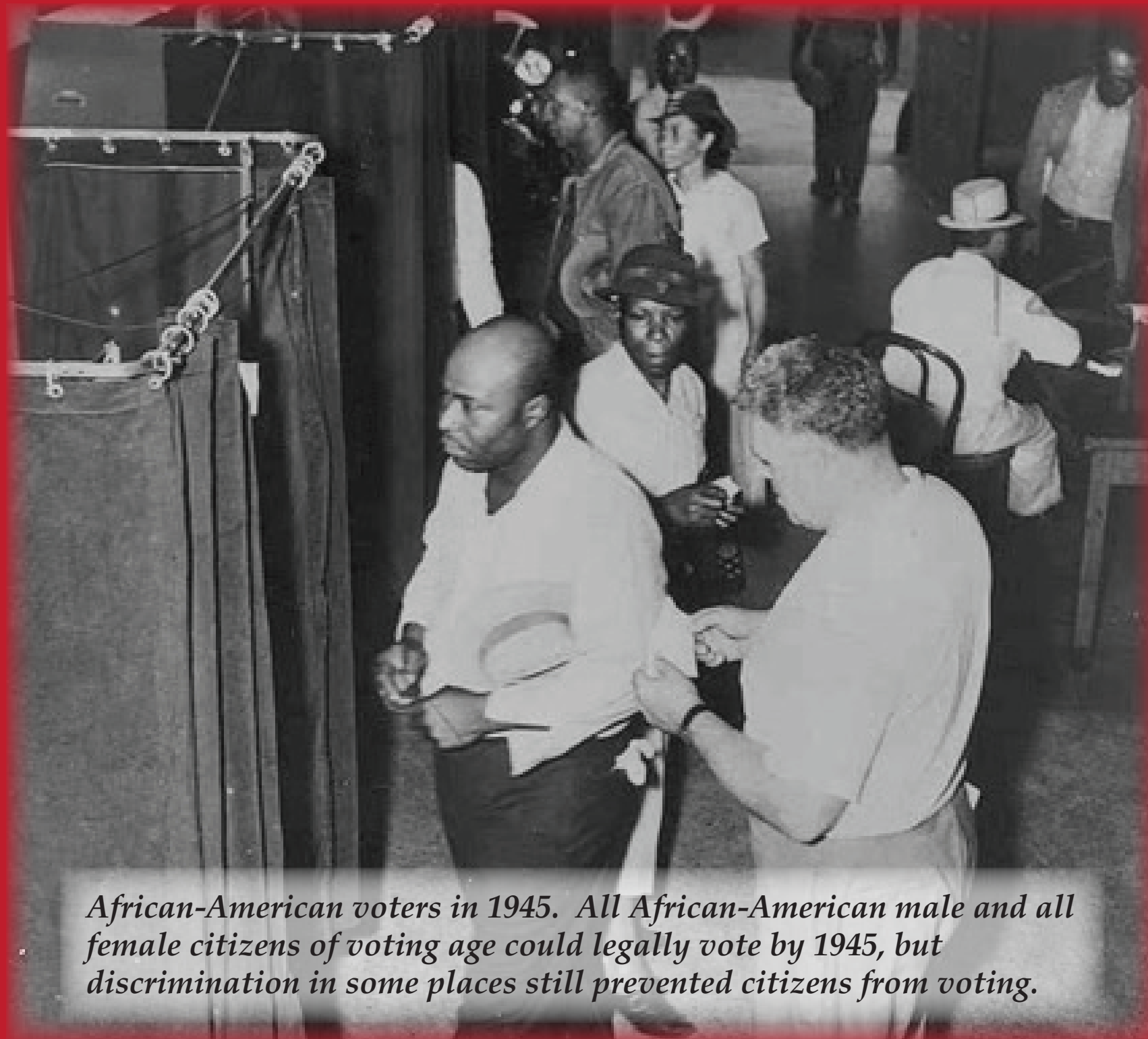


VS.



Most Americans did not have the opportunity to vote in early presidential elections. The 1824 United States presidential election was the first to have a popular vote in addition to the electoral vote. All **free white male citizens without property could vote** (with the exception of six states). Even though Andrew Jackson won the popular vote and received more electoral votes, he did not have an electoral majority. The House of Representatives stepped in and chose John Quincy Adams as the next president.

INTERPRETING THE DOCUMENTS: Equality and Voting



African-American voters in 1945. All African-American male and all female citizens of voting age could legally vote by 1945, but discrimination in some places still prevented citizens from voting.

By 1870, ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment gave all men the right to vote without any discrimination but, in many cases, African-Americans were still denied their constitutional rights until the **Civil Rights Act of 1965**.

For women the struggle lasted until the **twentieth century**. They were finally given the right to vote when the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920.

There are still accounts of alleged voting discrimination, but America has come a long way in extending equal voting rights to all of its citizens.