

## **ENGLISH 50 FINAL EXAM, FALL 2007**

**"Minors Should Have the Right to Vote"** by Jamuna Carroll  
*Children Have Rights?* 2006

*At Issue: Do*

... In 1971 the United States ratified the 26th Amendment to the Constitution granting the right to vote to 18-20-year-olds. The 26th Amendment was the fastest to be ratified in U.S. history. At the height of the Vietnam War most Americans realized the sick double standard inherent in sending 18-year-old soldiers to fight and die for their country when they weren't allowed to vote....

What kind of twisted message do we send when we tell youth they are judged mature, responsible adults when they commit murder, but silly, brainless kids when they want to vote? This is a double standard, no different than during the Vietnam War. War isn't a dead issue now either; leaders who youth can't vote for today may send them to war tomorrow. Lowering the voting age is the just, fair way to set things straight.

Just like all other Americans, young Americans pay taxes. In fact, they pay a lot of taxes. Teens pay an estimated \$9.7 billion dollars in sales taxes alone. Not to mention many millions of taxes on income. According to the IRS [Internal Revenue Service], "You may be a teen, you may not even have a permanent job, but you have to pay taxes on the money you earn." Youth pay billions in taxes to state, local, and federal governments yet they have absolutely no say over how much is taken. This is what the American Revolution was fought over; this is taxation without representation.

In addition to being affected by taxes, young people are affected by every other law that Americans live under. As fellow citizens in this society, every action or inaction taken by lawmakers affects youth directly, yet they have no say in the matter. In her 1991 testimony before a Minnesota House subcommittee, 14-year-old Rebecca Tilsen had this to say:

"If 16-year-olds are old enough to drink the water polluted by the industries that you regulate, if 16-year-olds are old enough to breathe the air ruined by garbage burners that government built, if 16-year-olds are old enough to walk on the streets made unsafe by terrible drugs and crime policies, if 16-year-olds are old enough to live in poverty in the richest country in the world, if 16-year-olds are old enough to get sick in a country with the worst public health-care programs in the world, and if 16-year-olds are old enough to attend school districts that you underfund, then 16-year-olds are old enough to play a part in making them better."

The just power of government comes from the consent of the governed: as it stands now youth are governed (overly so, some may say) but do not consent. This is un-American. Like all tax-paying, law-abiding Americans, youth must be given the right to vote....

For several reasons lowering the voting age will increase voter turnout. It is common knowledge that the earlier in life a habit is formed the more likely that habit or interest will continue throughout life. If attempts are made to prevent young people from picking up bad habits, why are no attempts made to get youth started with good habits, like voting? If citizens begin voting earlier, and get into the habit of doing so earlier, they are more likely to stick with it through life....

[According to consultant Richard Farson,] the argument that youth "should not vote because they lack the ability to make informed and intelligent decisions is valid only if that standard is applied to all citizens." But yet this standard is not applied to all citizens, only young people. [Farson points out,]

"We do not deprive a senile person of this right, nor do we deprive any of the millions of alcoholics, neurotics, psychotics and assorted fanatics who live outside hospitals of it. We seldom ever prevent those who are hospitalized for mental illness from voting."

Even beyond senile, neurotic, and psychotic adults, regular adults often do not meet the unrealistic standard opponents to youth voting propose. Turn on the *Tonight Show* one night and see the collection of adult buffoons who can't tell [host] Jay Leno who the vice-president is, or who have forgotten how many states are in this country. Yet these adults are happily given the right to vote. The fact is, intelligence or maturity is not the basis upon which the right to vote is granted; if that were the case all voters would need to pass a test before voting. [However,] "... under voting rights jurisprudence, literacy tests are highly suspect (and indeed are banned under federal law), and lack of education or information about election issues is not a basis for withholding the franchise," [according to *Children in the Legal System: Cases and Materials*.] Youth shouldn't be held to a stricter standard than adults; lower the voting age.

It is silly to fear that huge masses of youth will rush to the voting booth and unwittingly vote for Mickey Mouse and Britney Spears. By and large, those individuals with no interest in politics and no knowledge on the subject will stay home from the polls and not vote. This mechanism works for adult voters as well. Youth will behave no differently.

Besides foolishly throwing a vote away, some worry about youth voting for dangerous radicals. These fears are unfounded as well. [As child education specialist John Holt writes,] "We should remember, too, that many people today vote at first, and often for many years after, exactly as their parents voted. We are all deeply influenced, in politics as everything else, by the words and example of people we love and trust." One's political leanings are influenced by their community and their family, and it is likely young voters will vote in much the same way as their parents, not because they are coerced to do so, but because of shared values....

Granting youth the right to vote will have a direct effect on their character, intelligence and sense of responsibility. Is it any wonder why many youth feel apathetic towards politics? After 18 years of ... being told their opinion doesn't matter, they are just foolish children who should be seen and not heard, is anyone surprised that many people over 18 feel turned off by politics and don't vote? We can see this contrast between volunteering and politics. Teenagers have amazingly high levels of volunteering and community service, however many feel turned off by politics. Even small gestures like mock voting has a large effect on teen's interest in politics. [In our "Proposal to Lower the Voting Age," we noted that] of students participating in Kids Voting USA, "More than 71% of students reported frequently or occasionally questioning parents about elections at home. These same students also viewed voting with great importance. About 94% felt it was very important or somewhat important to vote." Including youth in a real, substantive way in politics will lead to even more interest as they take their public-spirited nature into the political realm....

Lowering the voting age may not be the magic bullet to improve the lives of youth, but by giving them a real stake in their futures and their present lives it will push them to become involved, active citizens of this great nation. The National Youth Rights Association strongly urges lawmakers and individuals in this country to seriously consider lowering the voting age.

English 50 Final Exam

**General Instructions**

For this exam, use ink, write legibly on every other line of your paper, and use only one side of each page. You may use a dictionary, an electronic speller, and a thesaurus. Print your instructor's name in the upper right corner of this page. Print your own name on the back of the last page of your essay. Turn in your copy of "Minors Should Have the Right to Vote" along with your written exam and this sheet. Failure to follow directions will disqualify your exam.

**Essay Format**

Your assignment is to write a 500-700 word essay addressing the prompt given below. This essay must include an introductory paragraph, several central paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. The first paragraph must identify the author of the article and provide a clear and identifiable thesis statement. Each central paragraph must be based on a topic sentence that supports your thesis and that is developed from a variety of methods, such as explanation and elaboration, facts, quotations, examples, and references to authority. The concluding paragraph must bring the essay to a satisfactory close.

**Prompt**

"Minors Should Have the Right to Vote"

In the essay "Minors Should Have the Right to Vote," Jamuna Carroll argues that the voting age should be lowered from eighteen to sixteen, offering several reasons to support her argument. What do you think would be the advantages and/or disadvantages of lowering the voting age to sixteen? Make sure that your thesis defines a clear position and is supported by your discussion.

**Final Note**

Remember that your general goal is to demonstrate to the reader of your essay that you have understood what you have read and that you have reacted sensitively and intelligently to it. Your specific goal is to write a well-constructed essay of the sort you have been studying and practicing all semester.