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# ASSIGNMENT - Comparing Voting Rights of the Constitutions of Tennessee

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#### **ASSIGNMENT**

# Comparing Voting Rights of the Constitutions of Tennessee

**Teacher Scholar Fellow:** Patricia Brake Rutenberg, PhD **Course:** The City as History: Introduction to Public History **Possible Course Adaptations:** History, Political Science

#### **OBJECTIVES**

- 1. To learn and understand how changes in state constitutions have an impact on voting rights.
- 2. To enhance students' abilities to analyze and synthesize primary documents.
- 3. To prepare students for a site-based experience, with a visit to Blount Mansion in Knoxville, Tennessee. William Blount signed the US Constitution as a delegate from North Carolina, and Blount Mansion was the site of the drafting of the first Tennessee Constitution in 1796. There was a significant enslaved population at Blount Mansion.

# **Background Readings and Context**

- Read assigned sections of: Franklin, Sekou M. and Ray Block Jr. 2020. Losing Power:
   African Americans and Racial Polarization in Tennessee Politics. Athens: University of Georgia Press; or a book that addresses this subject for your state.
- Read: Douglas, Joshua A. 2014. "The Right to Vote Under State Constitutions." Vanderbilt Law Review 67 (1).
- Prior to our visit to Blount Mansion, a historic home in Knoxville, Tennessee, read the background history of Blount Mansion. Blount Mansion Association. <a href="https://blountmansion.org/">https://blountmansion.org/</a>. Last accessed April 10, 2024.
- Read the 1796 and 1834 Tennessee State constitutions (or the version of your state constitutions): Tennessee Secretary of State. 2023. "Tennessee State Constitution." <a href="https://sos.tn.gov/civics/guides/tennessee-state-constitution">https://sos.tn.gov/civics/guides/tennessee-state-constitution</a>.
- In addition, read any subsequent revisions of the Tennessee Constitution (or your state constitutions).
- Read: Oakley, Anna Lisa. 1966. "Interpreting the Frontier Slave Experience: Slavery at Blount Mansion, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1792–1800." MA thesis. Middle Tennessee State University; and Lovett, Bobby L. 2021. "A Profile of African Americans in Tennessee History." Digital Scholarship @ Tennessee State University. Or read related articles about the enslaved populations at a historic home that you visit in person or virtually.

## **Assignment**

- Incorporating the readings above, please answer the following question in a one- to two-page essay. To what extent did the Tennessee Constitution and its revisions reflect national trends in voting rights?
- Reflecting on your visit to Blount Mansion, what does the site present to the public as
  the narrative (a monument to constitutional progress in state constitutions, endorsed by
  Washington himself) versus the reality of the Blount Mansion as a site of enslavement?
  Please write a one- to two-page essay addressing this.
- Be prepared to discuss your essays in small groups in class.
- This activity could be modified to examine the constitutional changes in voting rights for any specific state.