

Edward P. Gray’s reference to “**intelligent suffrage**” versus “**universal suffrage**” reflects a major political and ideological debate in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. Here's a brief explanation of the terms and what Gray likely meant, including the racial and political subtext:

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### “Universal Suffrage”

- **Definition:** The right to vote extended to **all adult men**, regardless of race, education, or property ownership. (At the time, "universal" still generally excluded women.)
  - **Radical Republican Goal:** After the Civil War, Radical Republicans pushed for formerly enslaved Black men to receive full voting rights, especially in the Southern states.
  - **Gray’s View:** He criticizes universal suffrage as a “degenerating process” and links it to political corruption and mob rule. He argues that allowing “millions of incompetent voters” (including uneducated freedmen and immigrants) would weaken democratic institutions.
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### “Intelligent Suffrage”

- **Definition:** Voting rights limited to those deemed "intelligent"—typically meaning literate, educated, or property-holding men.
  - **Proposed Alternative:** Some Northern moderates (e.g., the *Springfield Republican* newspaper Gray cites) proposed this as a compromise—extend the vote **not by race**, but by **qualifications** like literacy or taxpaying.
  - **Underlying Purpose:** Though racially “neutral” in wording, it would **effectively exclude most newly freed African Americans**, who were largely illiterate due to slavery, as well as many poor whites and immigrants.
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### Was This Just a Way to Keep Former Slaves from Voting?

In practice: **Yes.**

Even though Gray doesn’t state it in overtly racial terms, “intelligent suffrage” was widely understood as a way to **slow or block Black enfranchisement** without appearing directly racist. It allowed people to argue for voter restrictions on the basis of **education** or **civic competence**, rather than race—though the **racial outcome** was the same.

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### Gray’s Broader Argument

- He claims the “**ignorant vote**” (immigrants, freedmen, and the poor) leads to **corruption** and **bad governance**.

- He criticizes **both parties**: Democrats for encouraging immigrant votes, and Republicans for now pushing Black enfranchisement.
  - His fear is of **mob democracy**: a voting public not “fit” to make decisions, resulting in political decay.
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So, in summary, “intelligent suffrage” was indeed a **coded term**—it framed the **denial of voting rights** in a way that sounded principled but had clear **racial and class-based implications**, especially in the context of Reconstruction.

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Here's a direct quote from **page 4** of Edward P. Gray's 1866 letter where he addresses this issue, including his reference to “intelligent suffrage”:

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*“They had the opportunity of adopting the principle of intelligent suffrage, as advocated by the Springfield Republican, but this was not a sufficient ‘moral idea’ for their purposes; and so an opportunity which may never occur again without danger of a revolution, was allowed to slip.”*

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This passage reveals a few key things:

- Gray acknowledges there was a moment after the Civil War when the **rules for voting** could have been redefined.
- He clearly supports the idea of **“intelligent suffrage”**—a more selective, qualification-based approach to enfranchisement.
- He laments that this was **not adopted**, suggesting it was passed over in favor of more sweeping changes like universal male suffrage (including Black men).
- The phrase “may never occur again without danger of a revolution” shows he saw this as a crucial turning point—a missed opportunity to set limits before a more radical democratic expansion took hold.