

WHOSE RIGHTS ARE VOTED ON?

CAN A MAJORITY TAKE AWAY YOUR RIGHTS?

Governor Hiram Johnson began the initiative process in 1911 to give ordinary Californians a stronger political voice; he was trying to get around the state legislature, which was controlled by big railroads. Early initiatives granted women the right to vote, set a minimum wage, and limited the work day. But many ballot initiatives restricted people's rights. Majorities voted to bar Japanese immigrants from owning land, to ban fair housing laws, and to eliminate bilingual education and affirmative action. In 1994, Proposition 187, which compelled public workers to question immigrants about their legal status, passed by a two-thirds majority. A federal court prevented its implementation.



CHILDREN OF JANITORS' UNION MEMBERS, MANY OF WHOM WERE IMMIGRANTS, LED AN OAKLAND MARCH IN OPPOSITION TO PROPOSITION 187.

In 2008, 18,000 lesbian and gay couples wed following a court decision that the law banning same-gender marriages violated the California State Constitution's guarantee of privacy and personal freedom. Those nuptials ended when voters passed Proposition 8, by 52-48%, amending the state constitution to take away the right of lesbian and gay couples to marry.



...THE MINORITY POSSESS THEIR
EQUAL RIGHTS, WHICH EQUAL LAW
MUST PROTECT, AND TO VIOLATE
WOULD BE OPPRESSION.

- THOMAS JEFFERSON



THIS COUPLE, PICTURED HERE WITH THEIR CHILDREN, WED IN SAN FRANCISCO'S CITY HALL DURING A 5-MONTH PERIOD WHEN SAME GENDER COUPLES COULD MARRY. VOTERS RESCINDED THAT RIGHT BY PASSING PROPOSITION 8 IN 2008.

Prop 187: Courtesy of David Bacon

Family Photo: Courtesy of the Day-Rodriguez Family, Photo taken by David Rodriguez