

Chapter 8

Montana's Quiet Revolution

1965–1975

(22:52 minutes)

Synopsis

This 23-minute video describes the “quiet political revolution” of the 1960s and 1970s that culminated in Montana’s 1972 Constitutional Convention. The resulting new and progressive state constitution demonstrated how grassroots democracy was able to take account of Montana’s past in order to instill the greatest opportunity possible for Montana’s future.

► The video begins with students giving their best answer to the following focus question: “**What do you know about the Montana constitution?**” Teachers may wish to ask their students the same question before viewing the episode.

The narrator answers the focus question:

“During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Montana experienced a ‘quiet political revolution.’ Issues like environmental conservation, grass-roots democracy, and ‘the quality of Montana life’ captured Montanans’ attention. This revolution was marked by statewide redistricting, a critical study of the 1889 Constitution, and the convening of a new Constitutional Convention in 1972. Montana’s Constitutional Convention proved an exercise in populism—in terms of the delegates elected, the body’s procedures, and the participation of the public. The draft document that the delegates produced was especially noteworthy for its Declaration of Rights. These statements gave Montanans the rights to individual privacy, to participation in governmental processes, and to a clean environment. Voters narrowly approved the final document in 1972. How and why Montanans adopted a new constitution defines the state’s late Twentieth Century history.”

Post-viewing Discussion Questions

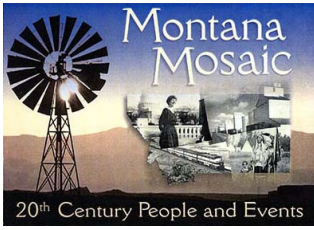
Engage students’ critical thinking skills and elicit their emotional responses with the following four questions, most easily remembered through the acronym DICE: What **disturbed** you? What **interested** you? What **confused** you? What **enlightened** you?

“Getting at the Meaning” Questions

1. The video states that the delegates of the constitutional convention had “virtually complete ignorance in the art of writing constitutions.” Explain why you feel this was a positive or negative fact.
2. In your opinion, have the goals of the 1972 Montana constitution been achieved? Think specifically about the requirements to protect Montanans’ rights to a “clean and healthful environment” and to preserve American Indian culture. How does the 1972 constitution reflect the era in which it was written?
3. Republicans, Democrats, and Independents worked remarkably well together during the constitutional convention. This contrasts with recent legislatures, where conflict between political parties has increased. What do you think explains the difference?

Vocabulary Terms

Populism: politics based on issues important to everyday people. Populists fight to give common people more voice in government and protest laws and economic policies that favor the rich and powerful.



(Chapter 8, continued)

Sunshine laws: “Right to know” legislation (particularly laws that guarantee public access to information about how government officials make decisions). Such laws are often called “sunshine laws” because they draw back the curtains of secrecy that cloaked state government since its earliest years, and let in the “sunshine” of public observation.

Supplementary information: The 1889 Montana constitution prohibited a person from holding two public offices simultaneously. Therefore, no active legislators or political appointees were eligible to serve as constitutional delegates. This meant that the 100 people elected as delegates to the constitutional convention, for the most part, were not professional politicians and represented a broad cross-section of Montana citizens.

Additional Resources

For more information on topics addressed in this episode, see *Montana: Stories of the Land*, Chapter 21, “A People’s Constitution, 1972” (<https://mhs.mt.gov/education/textbook/chapter21/Chapter21.pdf>).

Content Standards

This chapter of *Montana Mosaic* aligns to the Montana Social Studies Content Standards as follows: 2.1, 2.3, 2.5, 2.6, 3.3, 4.2, 4.4a, 6.1, 6.2, 6.6