

PART FIVE

After Viewing

The Voting Rights Act of 1965

Obstacles Cleared

In spite of the fact that the 15th Amendment was intended to guarantee African-American men the right to vote, states—particularly Southern states—had found ways to circumvent the law. Poll taxes, grandfather clauses, literacy and civics tests, as well as violence, made it virtually impossible for many black Americans to exercise their right to vote. Civil rights activists had challenged these restrictions in court, but in 1965, Congress determined that these case-by-case lawsuits were ineffective.

Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot ends with news of the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which includes several key points.

- No requirement or procedure may be used to deny the vote to any citizen of the United States based on race.
- No “test” (e.g., literacy or civics tests) or “device” (e.g., grandfather clause) may be used as a prerequisite for voting.
- States and localities that most severely restricted voting rights before this 1965 law will now require special attention. The Voting Rights Act identified these as states that used any “test or device” to limit voting based on race or color on November 1, 1964, or places where less than 50 percent of people of voting age were registered to vote on November 1, 1964.
- When one of the states or localities requiring special attention wants to change voter qualifications or voting procedures, it needs court approval to do so.
- Federal examiners and observers may, at the request of the U.S. attorney general, oversee voter registration, voting and vote-counting sites.

Focus Questions

What barriers faced by residents of Dallas County did the Voting Rights Act of 1965 ban?

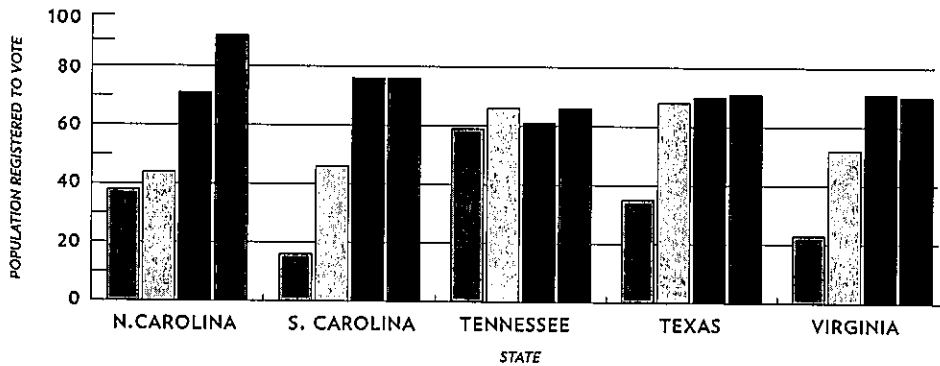
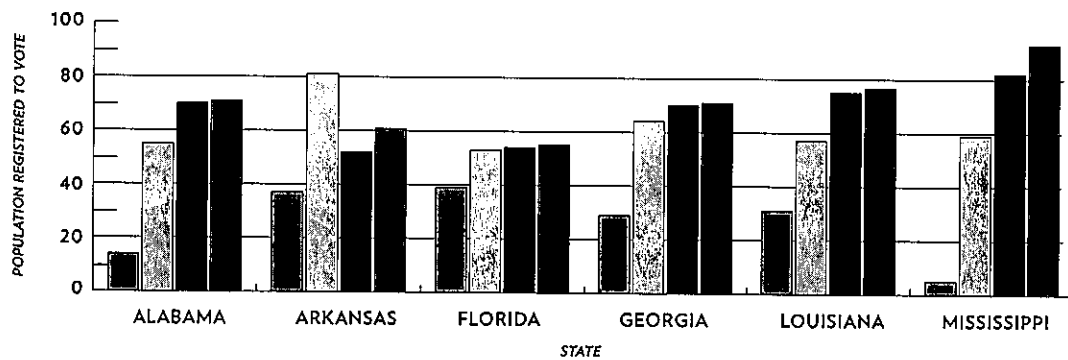
What provisions in the legislation ensured that the Act would remain effective over time?

The Voting Rights Act, 1965

Impact in the South

Selma: The Bridge to the Ballot ends with passage of the Voting Rights Act and with the news that over 250,000 new black voters were registered in Alabama by the end of 1965. The impact wasn't limited to Alabama, however—it was felt throughout the South.

Growing Ranks of Registered Voters



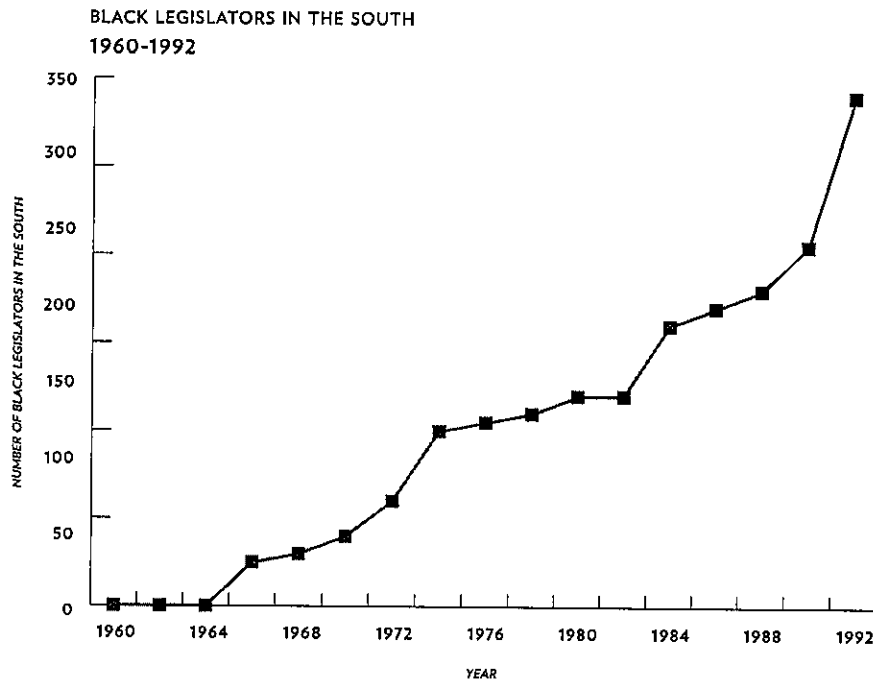
% OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN BLACK VOTING-AGE POPULATION 1960*
 % OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN BLACK VOTING-AGE POPULATION 1971*
 % OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN BLACK VOTING-AGE POPULATION 2008**
 % OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN BLACK VOTING-AGE POPULATION 2012***

*Source: Swanson, et al. (2003). *Out of Many: A History of the American People*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ): p. 492.
 **Source: Table 4b. Reported Voting and Registration of the Voting-Age Population, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, by State: November 2008. Link through www.census.gov/hhes/tables/tables.html.
 ***Source: Table 4b. Reported Voting and Registration of the Voting-Age Population, by Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, by State: November 2012. Link through www.census.gov/hhes/tables/tables.html.

Focus Questions

- What do the states shown have in common? Why are these states included in this graph and not others?
- What trend do you see between 1960 and 1971? Between 1971 and 2008? Between 2008 and 2012? What do you think accounts for each change?
- Are there exceptions to the trend? What might account for these?

Expanding Numbers of Black Legislators in the South



Numbers Tell a Story

- What story does this graph tell?
- Based on what you've learned about U.S. history, can you explain the trend depicted on the graph?
- Write a sentence to describe the data captured in this graph. What story does this graph tell?
- When did the number of elected black legislators begin to rise? What might account for that increase?