

# The Fight For Voting Rights

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# WARM UP:

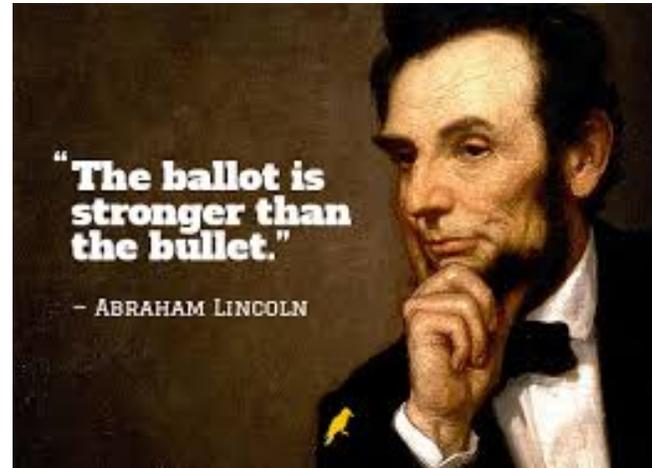
## Do you think is it important to vote? Why or why not? Do any of these quotes support your answer?

**YOU CAN EITHER**  
VOTE BY VOTING OR  
VOTE BY NOT VOTING.  
IF YOU DON'T VOTE,  
SOMEONE ELSE'S  
VOTE COUNTS MORE.  
**IT'S MATH.**



OCCUPY  
PRAGMATISM

Occupy! Photos: www.occupypragmatism.com



“  
**THE VOTE IS PRECIOUS.  
IT IS ALMOST SACRED.  
IT'S THE MOST POWERFUL NON-VIOLENT  
TOOL WE HAVE IN A DEMOCRATIC  
SOCIETY AND WE'VE GOT TO USE IT.**  
”  
**JOHN LEWIS**  
AUGUST 24, 2013



# 15<sup>TH</sup> AMENDMENT (1870)

## ARTICLE XV.

SECTION 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

SEC. 2. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

SCHUYLER COLFAX,

*Speaker of the House of Representatives.*

B. F. WADE,

*President of the Senate pro tempore.*

▲▲▲▲▲



# TYPES OF VOTER INTIMIDATION DURING JIM CROW

- **Poll Taxes:** Citizens had to pay a tax in order to vote. In most cases, the poll taxes were too expensive for many African American to afford.
- **Grandfather Clauses:** laws that made men eligible to vote if they had been able to vote before African-Americans were given the franchise (generally, 1867), or if they were the descendants of voters back then.

- Andrew Young was a Congressman in the 1970s. Listen as he discusses voting in the South in the 1950s.
- [Andrew Young Audio Clip](#)

ORIGINAL

**POLL TAX RECEIPT**  
STATE OF TEXAS  
COUNTY OF BEXAR No. 45073  
San Antonio, Texas, 1931

PRECINCT \_\_\_\_\_ PAGE \_\_\_\_\_  
LINE \_\_\_\_\_ RECEIVED OF *Ms Carrie Link*  
1931 the sum of One and 50/100 Dollars in payment of Poll Tax for the year 1931  
ADDRESS *2154 Fors City Rd*

AGE	LENGTH OF RESIDENCE			Native Born } Citizen of United States and Naturalized } was born in <i>Kans.</i>
<i>40</i>	State	County	City	
<i>20</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>20</i>	Occupation <i>Hom.</i> Where Issued <i>OK</i>

Race - White - Colored Sex - Male - Female

The said Tax Payer being duly sworn by me says that the above is correct. All of which I Certify.

By *E. F. Moore* Deputy. *Marion Maverick* Tax Collector, Bexar County, Texas.



Later, Young became the 1<sup>st</sup> African American US Ambassador to the United Nations and the mayor of Atlanta, GA.



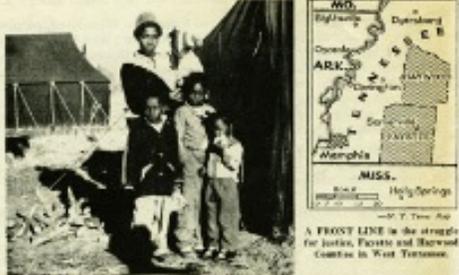
## A Call for Help

Families were turned out and boycotted because they vote

In the southwest corner of Tennessee is a county named Fayette whose southern border rests on the top of Mississippi. In this county, near a town named Somerville, is a group of 22 tents in which 155 people, all Negro, live on land belonging to a Negro farmer. This tent city known as "Freedom Village" sprang up last fall after Negroes in Fayette County had registered for the first time to vote. White land owners began to evict Negro renters and sharecroppers. Unwilling to leave the county that had always been their home, evictees began to camp out, taking their families into tents which were sent in by individuals and groups as soon as the first news of the evictions appeared in the press.

Many negroes in Haywood County, adjacent to Fayette, had also been registering to vote. As in Fayette, evictions immediately followed. But more of the Negroes in Haywood own their farms, so the evicted families found shelter in buildings on the farms of Negro landowners. On Dec. 30 the Dept. of Justice in Washington obtained a restraining order which temporarily halted the evictions, charging that the landowners had violated the new Civil Rights Act. In these two counties are now some 700 families who have been served with eviction papers and subjected to serious boycotts.

**A  
Call  
for  
Help**



**FREEDOM VILLAGE**, near Somerville, symbol of courage. Family shown is that of Early B. Williams who narrowly escaped death when he was struck by a bullet from a high-powered rifle, late in December.

**FAMILIES WERE TURNED OUT AND BOYCOTTED BECAUSE THEY VOTED**

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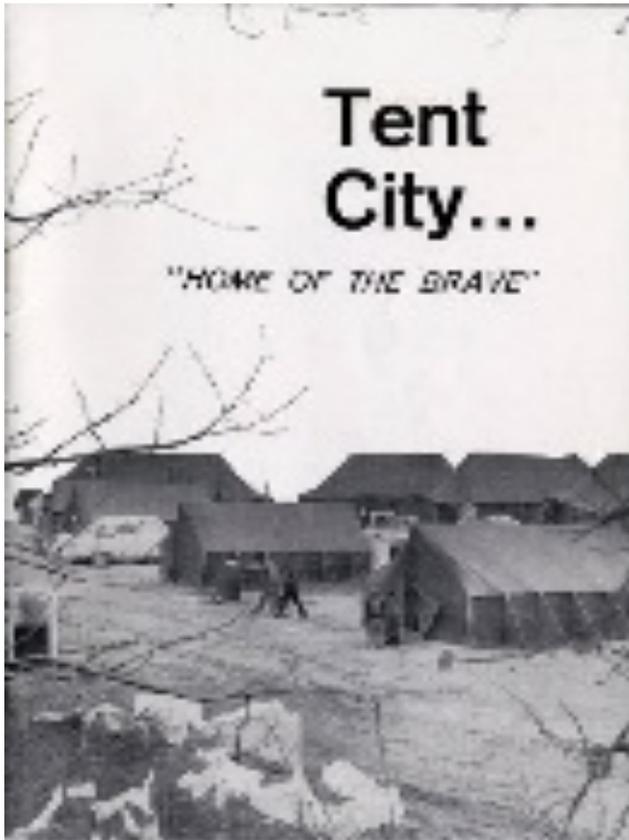
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**THEY CHOSE FREEDOM** - What happened when Negroes registered to vote in Fayette and Haywood counties, Tennessee

This 40 minute long-play record is a factual documentation of what has happened in southwest Tennessee. Several people who live in these two counties tell first hand what has taken place. Excellent to play for groups. Order from Operation Freedom address: 1111 Dayton St., Cincinnati 14, Ohio, \$3 postpaid.



# In Tennessee, some families were even evicted from their homes after registering to vote.



*Pamphlet of the story of "Tent City" Fayette County, Tennessee, circa 1960*

<http://digital.library.nashville.org/cdm/ref/collection/nr/id/569>

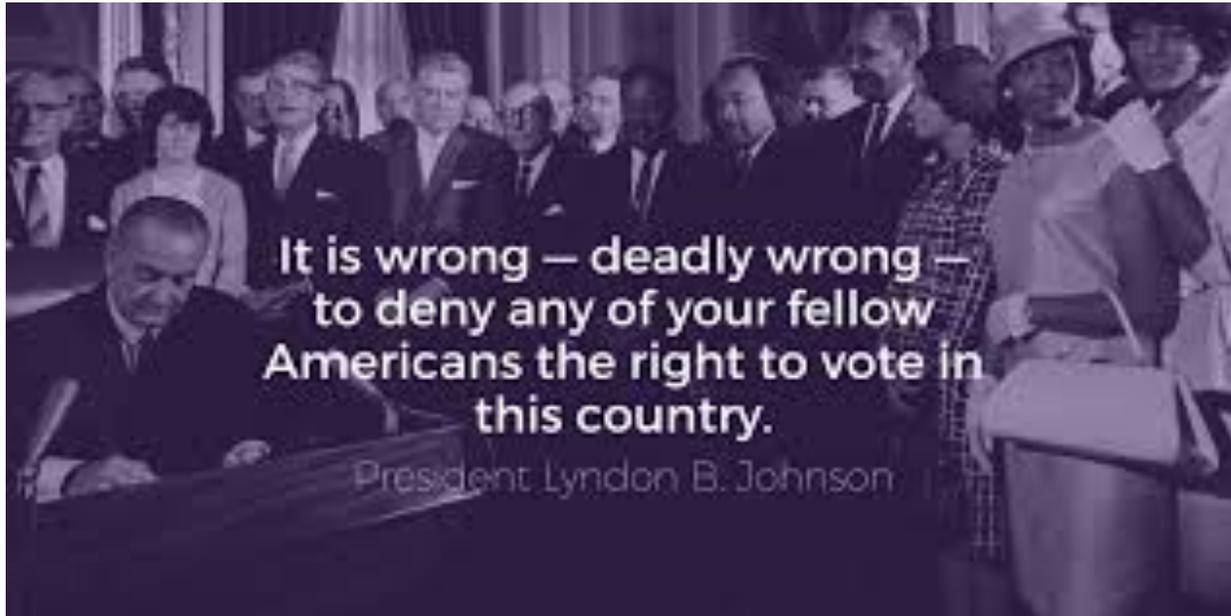


*"Tent City" family, Fayette County, TN, 1960*

<http://africanamericanart.si.edu/items/show/88>



# VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965: WHAT DID IT DO?



President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the act into law

- Abolished literacy tests and poll taxes
- Section 4 is a key part of the Voting Rights Act, because it provided a formula for the federal government to use in identifying jurisdictions with problematic histories of racial discrimination.
- Section 5 required all problematic jurisdictions identified by Sec 4. to get preclearance from the Department of Justice before making any changes to their registration and voting laws.
  - Entire States covered by Sec. 5:
    - Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia
  - States with Specific Counties/Cities Covered
    - California, Florida, New York, North Carolina, South Dakota, Michigan
- Federal laws are supreme over state laws, so even in NC, the literacy test and poll taxes were abolished.



# THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT AT 50: HOW IT CHANGED THE WORLD

It was only eight days after President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act on Aug. 6 of 1965 that federal voting examiners speedily dispatched to Selma, Ala., proceeded in a single day to register 381 new black voters, more than had managed to register in Dallas County [Alabama] over the last 65 years. Local Sheriff Jim Clark's hair-trigger resort to physical violence against would-be black registrants had left little doubt of his determination that such a day would never come for his town. Yet, ironically, he had actually [helped to assure that it did](#), when, back in March of that year, he led the charge in the savage "Bloody Sunday" beating and maiming of voting-rights marchers, an event that had sparked national outrage and spurred demands for stronger federal intervention. By November, the county had 8,000 new black voters—and, not coincidentally, after the next May's primary elections it would have a new sheriff as well, leaving Jim Clark to try his hand at selling mobile homes.

- By [JAMES C. COBB](#) August 6, 2015 *TIME*



# VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965

## SECTION 4

- (c) The phrase "test or device" shall mean any requirement that a person as a prerequisite for voting or registration for voting (1) demonstrate the ability to read, write, understand, or interpret any matter, (2) demonstrate any educational achievement or his knowledge of any particular subject, (3) possess good moral character, or (4) prove his qualifications by the voucher of registered voters or members of any other class.
- (d) For purposes of this section no State or political subdivision shall be determined to have engaged in the use of tests or devices for the purpose or with the effect of denying or abridging the right to vote on account of race or color if (1) incidents of such use have been few in number and have been promptly and effectively corrected by State or local action, (2) the continuing effect of such incidents has been eliminated, and (3) there is no reasonable probability of their recurrence in the future.



# VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965

## SECTION 10

- (a) The Congress finds that the requirement of the **payment of a poll tax as a precondition to voting** (i) **precludes persons of limited means from voting or imposes unreasonable financial hardship upon such persons as a precondition to their exercise of the franchise**, (ii) does not bear a reasonable relationship to any legitimate State interest in the conduct of elections, and (iii) in some areas has the purpose or effect of denying persons the right to vote because of race or color. Upon the basis of these findings, Congress declares that the constitutional right of citizens to vote is denied or abridged in some areas by the requirement of the payment of a poll tax as a precondition to voting.
- (b) In the exercise of the powers of Congress under section 5 of the fourteenth amendment and section 2 of the fifteenth amendment, the Attorney General is authorized and directed to institute forthwith in the name of the United States such actions, including actions against States or political subdivisions, for declaratory judgment or injunctive relief **against the enforcement of any requirement of the payment of a poll tax as a precondition to voting**, or substitute therefor enacted after November 1, 1964, as will be necessary to implement the declaration of subsection (a) and the purposes of this section.



- **INTERVIEWERS:** John, how important, or how do you assess the importance of the Voting Rights Act itself?
- **JOHN LEWIS:** I think the Voting Rights Act, no question about it, was a turning point and probably one of the most significant points in this whole struggle for black people to become truly free and liberated in the American society, particularly in the South. It made it possible for hundreds and thousands of people to become registered.
- **INTERVIEWERS:** How important is it for it to be renewed in 1975?
- **JOHN LEWIS:** [unclear] I think it's a must that the Voting Rights Act [be renewed] in 1975. There's still places in the South where people are unable to register, unable to vote. Just taking part in the political process – it's not easy. In many parts of the South, the county courthouse is still the only place for people to come to register. It's not convenient – not just for black people, but it's not convenient for white people – particularly low income people.
- And this particular administration has done very, very well to enforce the Voting Rights Act. Only on one occasion, in 1971, have we had federal registrars sent into any parts of the South and that was in Mississippi in June of 1971.

## CONGRESSMAN JOHN LEWIS DISCUSSES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT (1973)

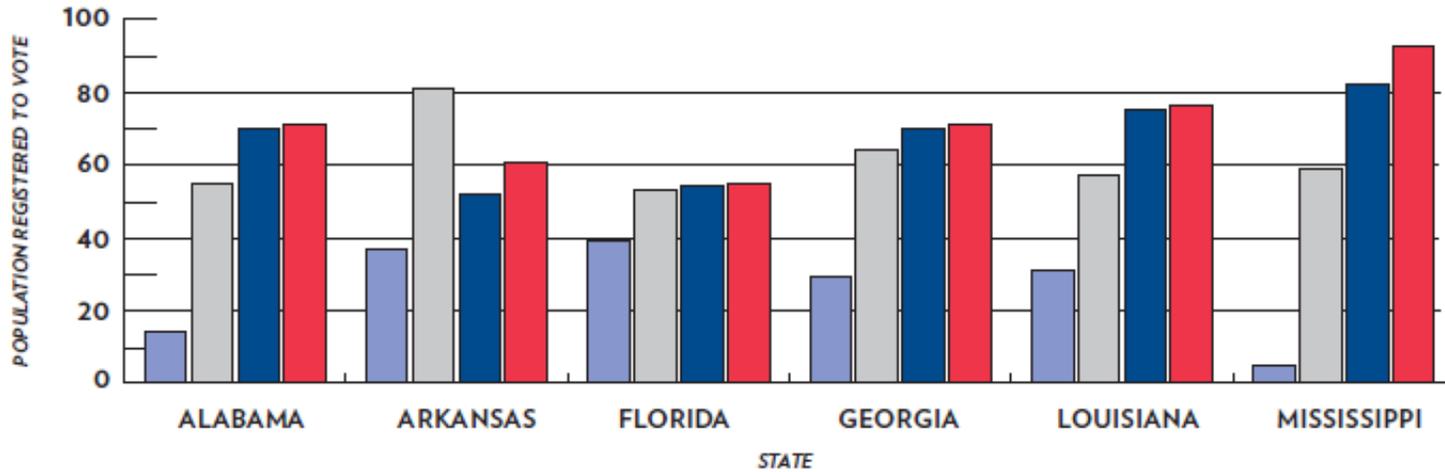
### JOHN LEWIS AUDIO CLIP

The Voting Rights Act was written in a way that it would need to be renewed after so many years.

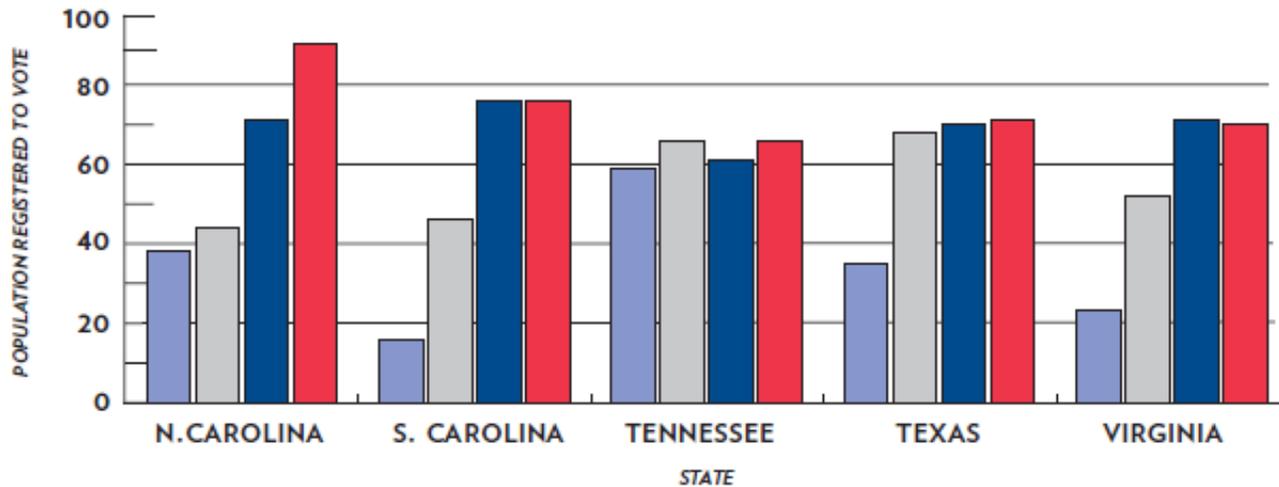
John Lewis is discussing that it is important to renew the act in 1975.



## Growing Ranks of Registered Voters



What do the states in the table have in common? Why are these states (rather than others) included here?

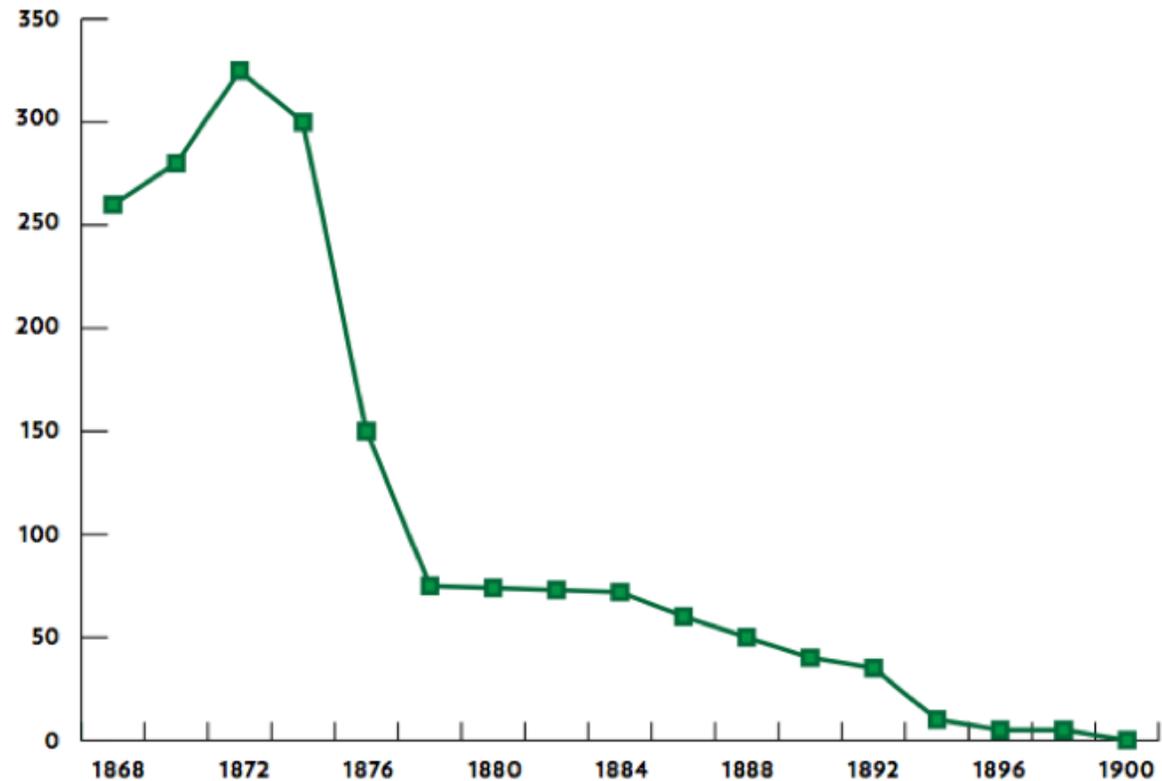


Look closely at the data in the table. What overall trend do you see? What do you think accounted for the trend?

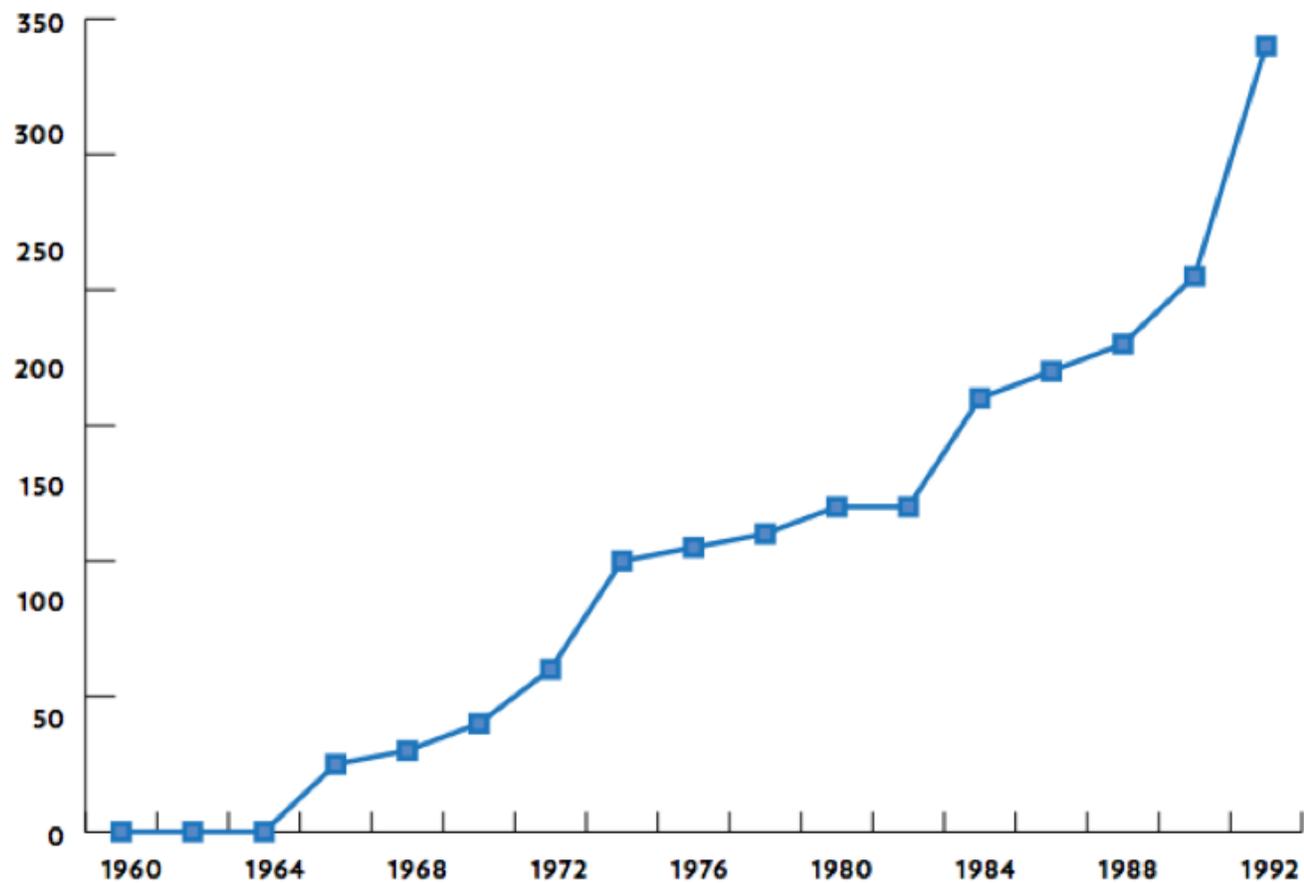
% OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN BLACK VOTING-AGE POPULATION 1960\*
  % OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN BLACK VOTING-AGE POPULATION 1971\*
  % OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN BLACK VOTING-AGE POPULATION 2008\*\*
  % OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN BLACK VOTING-AGE POPULATION 2012\*\*\*



**BLACK LEGISLATORS IN THE SOUTH  
1868-1900**



**BLACK LEGISLATORS IN THE SOUTH  
1960-1992**



# VOTING GIVES PEOPLE A VOICE!

- Listen as John Lewis describes how people's needs are met once they are able to vote.

- [John Lewis Audio Clip](#)





Listen as Henry Frye describes the effects of the Voting Rights Act

[Henry Frye Audio Clip](#)

## HENRY FRYE WAS ONE OF THOSE ELECTED OFFICIALS

### More Facts About Henry Frye

\*1959 – 1<sup>st</sup> African American to complete his entire law education at UNC Chapel Hill

\*1963 – 1<sup>st</sup> African American Assistant US District Attorney

\*1968 – Elected 1<sup>st</sup> African American NC legislator since 1899

\*1983 – 1<sup>st</sup> African American appointed to NC Supreme Court

\*1999 – 1<sup>st</sup> African American Chief Justice of the NC Supreme Court





**HENRY FRYE  
WORKED AS A  
LAWYER AND AN  
ASSISTANT US  
DISTRICT  
ATTORNEY BEFORE  
THE PASSAGE OF  
THE CIVIL RIGHTS  
ACT (1964) AND  
THE VOTING  
RIGHTS ACT (1965)**

Listen as Henry Frye describes his appointment and one problem with being a black ADA in 1963

[Henry Frye Audio Clip](#)



# VOTER REGISTRATION AND THE "FREEDOM SUMMER"

- Intensive, organized voter registration activities in the South started in 1961, with efforts led by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). Their work had two goals: register voters and build local Black community organizations that could fight for political change in the South.
- After the Freedom Rides of 1961, local and national Black leaders began a drive to register African Americans in Mississippi – a state chosen because it had the lowest percentage of eligible Black voters registered in the country (6.7%) and some of the greatest barriers to African American voting in the nation.
- The project, known as “Freedom Summer,” recruited over 1,000 out-of-state volunteers to work with thousands of African American Mississippians to register voters over the summer of 1964.
- They were met with violence from police, white supremacy organizations, and private citizens. Over the 10-week summer project, more than a thousand people were arrested. Black churches were bombed and at least 80 “Freedom Summer” workers were beaten.

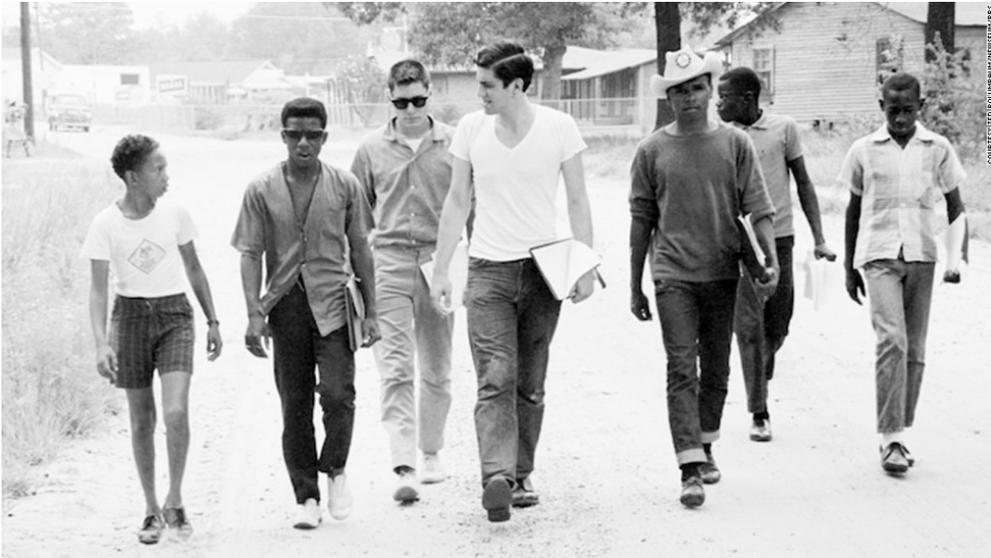
Source – Your Vote, Your Voice, “Voter Registration and the Civil Rights Movement”

<http://www.yourvoteyourvoicemn.org/past/communities/african-americans-past/civil-rights-movement-and-right-vote-1954-1965/voter>

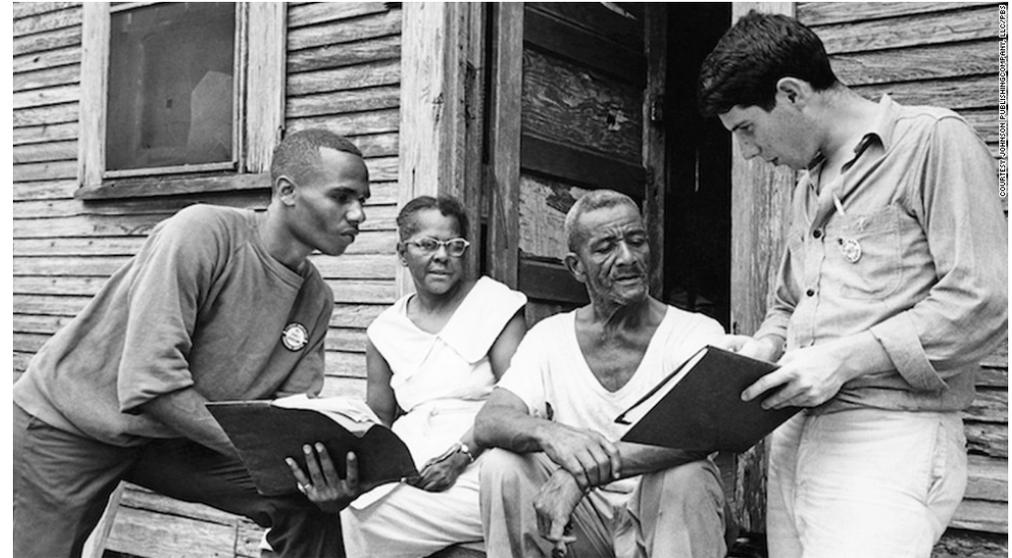


# VOTER EDUCATION PROJECT (VEP)

- Raised and distributed foundation funds to civil rights organizations for voter education and registration work in the southern United States from 1962 to 1968.
- The project was federally endorsed by the Kennedy administration in hopes that the organizations of the ongoing Civil Rights Movement would shift their focus away from demonstrations and more towards the support of voter registration.
- Contrary to the initial hopes of the Kennedy administration, the VEP did not reduce the violent realities of resistance to integration found in the South and highlighted by news stations around the world. In the Deep South, white resistance to Black voting rights turned out to be even more violent than their opposition to integrating lunch counters and bus depots.



Interracial group of Freedom Summer volunteers and locals canvass in Mississippi.



Johnny Waters, Ceola Wallace and Jake Plum explain registration procedures to prospective voter Willie McGee

# THE SELMA TO MONTGOMERY MARCH AND "BLOODY SUNDAY"

- The Selma to Montgomery March marked the height of the battle for African American enfranchisement.
- The march was actually three marches that took place in March 1965. On March 7, about 600 voting rights activists started a march from Selma, Alabama, to Alabama's capital, Montgomery. They were led by **John Lewis** of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and **Hosea Williams** of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).
- At the time, less than 1% of eligible Black citizens were registered to vote in Dallas County, Alabama, where Selma was located.
- At Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge, the marchers were brutally attacked by Alabama state troopers wearing gas masks, along with local police and a posse on horseback. The day became known as "Bloody Sunday" because of the unprovoked, extreme police violence against peaceful marchers. [Television footage of the attack shocked the nation.](#)



John Lewis and other marchers being beaten by Alabama State Troopers

Source – Your Vote, Your Voice, "Voter Registration and the Civil Rights Movement"  
<http://www.yourvoteyourvoicemn.org/past/communities/african-americans-past/civil-rights-movement-and-right-vote-1954-1965/voter>



# THE SELMA TO MONTGOMERY MARCH AND "BLOODY SUNDAY"

- People from all over the country traveled to Selma to support the cause and finish the march to Montgomery that was disrupted on Bloody Sunday.
- On March 9, Dr. King led another march from Selma ("Turn Around Tuesday") that turned back because of a federal court order. The third march succeeded in completing the five-day journey to Montgomery, on March 22.
- When the marchers reached the state capital, King delivered a powerful speech, including the famous line, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."



Source – Your Vote, Your Voice, "Voter Registration and the Civil Rights Movement"  
<http://www.yourvoteyourvoicemn.org/past/communities/african-americans-past/civil-rights-movement-and-right-vote-1954-1965/voter>





*The 1965 Selma to Montgomery March; Source: Associated Press*

Listen as John Lewis describes Freedom Summer and the Selma marches

[John Lewis Audio Clip](#)



# ROSANELL EATON HAS REGISTERED THOUSANDS OF VOTERS



*Young woman receives her voter registration card, Fayette County, TN, 1960, 1960*

<http://africanamericanart.si.edu/items/show/88>

## Reading Passage, “The Battle for North Carolina”

- While the early stirrings of the civil-rights movement—often referred to as the Second Reconstruction—began in churches, bus depots, and lunch counters across the South, Eaton soon developed a reputation as an activist in her own right in her corner of the backwoods of Franklin County. **Early on, she was given permission to register other people, and eventually led a small black voter outreach team across the county and state.**
- In 1995, she received the “Invisible Giant” award from the National Voting Rights Museum in Selma for her contributions to the Civil Rights Movement registering voters. When she was nominated, she sent in documentation of her activism, including a skit she wrote, performed, and video taped in which she described what it was like to educate and register a person to vote. Listen, as she describes the skit. [Rosanell Eaton Audio Clip](#)



# VOTING TODAY

From the American Revolution to the Civil Rights movement to the recent establishment of democracy in South Africa and Eastern Europe, citizens across the globe have long struggled for the right to vote. Upon earning such rights, voters have turned out en masse. Whether new or old, most modern democracies enjoy voting rates of 90 percent and higher.

Yet in the United States today, citizens of all racial, political, economic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds vote at rates lower than those of other modern democracies.

In the U.S., only about 50 percent of eligible voters are registered; of that 50 percent, only about half vote in presidential elections. With only about a quarter of eligible voters casting ballots, few victorious candidates walk away with much more than an eighth of the potential vote.

Recent elections on the local, state, and national level have proved that election results can be breathtakingly close -- and the polls are not always accurate.

Source: PBS, Voting Then & Now [https://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/voting\\_today.html](https://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/voting_today.html)

## READ THIS PASSAGE, THEN ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

1. List at least 2 to 3 reasons (more, if you can) why an eligible voter (an 18+ citizen) wouldn't vote in an election?
2. What do you think we could do as a country to increase voter turnout?

John Lewis believed we would need an ongoing voter education program

[John Lewis Audio Clip](#)



# BARACK AND MICHELLE OBAMA DISCUSS SELMA & VOTING



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3E7atni5dg>

