

Voting Rights Act of 1965



The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is a piece of legislation that was signed by Lyndon B. Johnson on August 6, 1965. The Act was designed to carry out the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. After the 15th Amendment gave all U.S. citizens the "right to vote regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude," Southern states used poll taxes, literacy tests, and other methods of intimidation to prevent African Americans from voting. Throughout the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, activists fought to gain more rights for African Americans. On March 7, 1965, the SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. planned a peaceful march from Selma to Montgomery to try to gain voting rights in Alabama. They were attacked by Alabama state troopers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma. Many African Americans were brutally injured on national television. Because of the publicity, and national outrage, President Lyndon B. Johnson asked Congress to sign a law that outlawed Southern voting restrictions. The bill passed through the House of Representatives and Senate, and was finally signed by Lyndon B. Johnson on August 6, 1965. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 banned literacy tests that were required for many votes to vote, investigated the illegal poll taxes, and sent federal officials to supervise areas where there were significantly low African American voter turnout. African American voter turnout rose dramatically in the South, and many people consider it the most influential legislation in American history. Amendments have been made to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to provide voting rights for all citizens.

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- 1) Is this a primary or secondary document?
- 2) What did the 15th Amendment grant?
- 3) What was the point of the March from Selma to Montgomery?
- 4) What happened to the marchers as they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma?
- 5) Why do you think that it took this national outrage to get this legislation passed?
- 6) What were three ways that the government helped African Americans to vote with this law?
- 7) What groups do you think have had trouble voting throughout American history?
- 8) What role does the government have in ensuring their citizens' rights?
- 9) Why do you think that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is considered by many people to be the most influential legislation ever signed in America's history?
- 10) What do you think is the overall impact that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had on America?