

VOTING RIGHTS ACT: MAJOR DATES IN HISTORY

From the ACLU: www.aclu.org/voting-rights-act-major-dates-history

The Voting Rights Act is a historic civil rights law that is meant to ensure that the right to vote is not denied on account of race or color.

1867

1866 Civil Rights Act of 1866 grants citizenship, but not the right to vote, to all native-born Americans.

1869

Congress passes the Fifteenth Amendment giving African American men the right to vote.

1896

Louisiana passes "grandfather clauses" to keep former slaves and their descendants from voting. As a result, registered black voters drops from 44.8% in 1896 to 4.0% four years later. Mississippi, South Carolina, Alabama and Virginia follow Louisiana's lead by enacting their own grandfather clauses.

1940

Only 3% of eligible African Americans in the South are registered to vote. Jim Crow laws like literacy tests and poll taxes were meant to keep African Americans from voting.

Here is an example of real literacy test:

The State of Louisiana Literacy Test (this test is to be given to anyone who cannot prove a fifth grade education)

Do what you are told in each statement, nothing more, nothing less. Be careful as one wrong answer denotes failure of the test. You have 10 minutes to complete the test.

1. Draw a line around the number of letter of this sentence.
2. Draw a line under the last word of this line.
3. Cross out the longest word of this line.
4. Draw a line around the shortest word of this line.
5. Circle the first, first letter of the alphabet in this line
6. In the space below draw three circles, one inside by (engulfed by) the other.

1964

Poll taxes are outlawed with the adoption of the 24th Amendment.

Here is an example of a real sign:

PAY YOUR POLL-TAX NOW!
Deadline January 31st
Vote! And Protect Your Rights and Privileges
Be Ready for Every Election
Local Options and Other Special Elections are in Prospect for This Year

1965

More than 500 non-violent civil rights marchers are attacked by law enforcement officers while attempting to march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama to demand the need for African American voting rights.

1965

President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act into law, permanently barring barriers to political participation by racial and ethnic minorities, prohibiting any election practice that denies the right to vote on account of race, and requiring jurisdictions with a history of discrimination in voting to get federal approval for changes in their election laws before they can take effect.

1965

By the end of 1965, 250,000 new black voters are registered, one third of them by federal examiners.

1970

President Richard Nixon signed an extension of the Voting Rights Act.

Nixon: "The Voting Rights Act of 1965 has opened participation in the political process."

1972

Barbara Jordan of Houston and Andrew Young of Atlanta become the first African Americans elected to Congress from the South since Reconstruction.

1975

President Gerald Ford signed an extension of the Voting Rights Act.

1982

President Ronald Reagan signed a 25-year extension of the Voting Rights Act.

1990

Due, in part, to the enforcement of the Voting Rights Act, the number of black elected officials in Georgia grows to 495 in 1990 from just three prior to the VRA.

2006

Congress extended Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act for an additional 25 years.

2011

Restrictions to voting passed in South Carolina, Texas and Florida are found to disproportionately impact minority voters.

2010 to Present

Since 2010 alone, the Department of Justice has had 18 Section 5 objections to voting laws in Texas, South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, Mississippi and Louisiana.

2011

A record number of restrictions to voting were introduced in state legislatures nationwide, including photo ID requirements, cuts to early voting and restrictions to voter registration. Many of these states have histories of voter discrimination and are covered under the VRA.

States requiring federal approval: New Hampshire, New York, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arizona, South Dakota, California, Alaska.

2011

Restrictions to voting passed in South Carolina, Texas and Florida are found to disproportionately impact minority voters.

2011

Florida passed a law that restricts voter registration and made cuts to early voting. The majority of African Americans in Florida rely on early voting to cast a ballot, and register to vote through community based registration.

["The more we get out to vote, the better opportunities we'll have"](#)

Photo of and link to a podcast interview with Denese Meteye James, who registered voters in Florida.

2011

Texas passed one of the nation's most restrictive voter ID laws. Under the VRA, the state was required to submit the law to DOJ or the DC federal district court for approval. The court blocked the law, citing racial impact.

["Court Blocks Texas Voter ID Law, Citing Racial Impact"](#) links to a New York Times news story.

Photo reads: Must Show ID to Vote

2011

Under the VRA, the DOJ blocked South Carolina's voter ID law, saying it discriminates against minority voters. The DC federal district court later [precleared the law](#) but only because the state agreed that an ID was not required for voting.

Link to Washington Post article "Justice Dept. rejects South Carolina voter ID law, calling it discriminatory."

South Carolina Photo ID Law blocked

2011

South Carolina passed a restrictive voter ID law that would keep more than [180,000 African Americans](#) from casting a ballot.

2013

The ACLU represented the NAACP's Alabama chapter in *Shelby v. Holder*. In the decision, the Supreme Court gutted one of the most effective protections for the right to vote by rendering ineffective the requirement that certain jurisdictions with a history of voting discrimination get pre-approval for voting changes. States have wasted no time enacting potentially discriminatory laws including Texas, Mississippi, North Carolina, Florida, Virginia, South Dakota, Iowa, and Indiana.

[The good news is that we have the chance to fix it now.](#) Congress can pass a new, flexible and forward-looking set of protections that work together to guarantee our right to vote — and it's not just wishful thinking. Since 2006, Congress extended the key sections of the Voting Rights Act on four occasions in overwhelming, bipartisan votes. Once again, a bipartisan group of lawmakers have come together to work on these critical protections.