

VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965

Passed by Congress and signed by President Lyndon Johnson, it outlawed discriminatory practices that prevented non-White Americans from being able to vote.



“The command of the Constitution is plain...It is wrong — deadly wrong — to deny any of your fellow Americans the right to vote in this country.”

- PRESIDENT JOHNSON

WHY WAS IT NEEDED?



1870 - The 15th Amendment gave Black men the right to vote. Barriers to voting remained in the South.

1920 - The 19th Amendment gave women the right to vote. Black women faced the same barriers as Black males.

1900's - Indigenous Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino Americans were legally able to vote; however, they, too, faced similar barriers.

WHAT WERE THE BARRIERS?



After the 15th Amendment passed, many states charged a poll tax for the right to vote. In 1964, the 24th Amendment abolished poll taxes, but five states continued to levy them until 1965.

Whites-Only Primary elections, mandated in some states, determined who would run for office. The Supreme Court ended this practice in 1944.

Grandfather Clauses restricted voting to individuals whose actual grandfathers had voted. The Supreme Court ended this practice in 1915.

Literacy Tests were used to prevent minorities from registering to vote and they varied by state. Citizens might have had to interpret a portion of a state constitution, write an essay, or answer many questions about the government without getting any incorrect.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?



Prior to the Voting Rights Act, an estimated 23% of voting-age Blacks were registered to vote. By 1969, the number increased to 61%.

Since 1965, the number of elected officials who are not White has increased, but not significantly. Prior to November of 2022, African Americans held fewer than 1,000 elected offices across the country. Latino and Asian Americans were elected in small numbers. Today, African Americans hold over 10,000 offices (11%), Latinos over 6,000 (8.6%), and Asian Americans over 1,000 (3.2%).