

Guided Reading - The Voting Rights Act of 1965

This Voting Rights Act of 1965 was a pivotal federal law that aimed to protect the voting rights of racial minorities by eliminating discriminatory practices, such as literacy tests and poll taxes.

Task 1: Read the story of the Emancipation Proclamation below, highlight key facts and figures, and complete the activities.

Draw a small illustration for each box which captures the event.

A year after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, America took another crucial step towards racial equality with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Aimed to prohibit racial discrimination in voting, this landmark legislation was designed to secure and protect the voting rights of African Americans and other marginalized groups.

The need for the Voting Rights Act arose from the systemic disenfranchisement tactics employed in many Southern states. Despite the Fifteenth Amendment's promise, literacy tests, poll taxes, and intimidation tactics were commonly used to impede African Americans from exercising their right to vote.

The catalyst for the Act was the brutal response to the peaceful Selma to Montgomery marches, which advocated for voting rights. Images of marchers being attacked on "Bloody Sunday" shocked the nation and rallied support for voting rights legislation. Among the march leaders was John Lewis, a young activist who would later become a prominent Congressman. He proclaimed, "Our cause is right, our time is now."

President Lyndon B. Johnson, recognizing the urgency of the situation, proposed the Voting Rights Act to Congress. Upon signing it into law, Johnson declared, "Today is a triumph for freedom as huge as any victory that's ever been won on any battlefield."

The Act outlawed discriminatory voting practices and provided for federal enforcement of voting rights in areas with a history of voting discrimination. It resulted in a dramatic increase in African American voter registration, particularly in the South, and greatly expanded political representation for minorities.

The Voting Rights Act had a profound impact on the American political landscape. Its passage marked a turning point in American history, as African Americans and other marginalized groups gained political power, shaping policy and leading social change.

The Act, however, did not signify the end of voting discrimination, and its key provisions have been challenged and eroded over time. Despite this, the Voting Rights Act remains a critical piece of civil rights legislation and a testament to the ongoing fight for equal voting rights.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 embodies the struggle and eventual triumph over deeply ingrained racial discrimination. Its legacy serves as a reminder of the power of collective action in bringing about change and the importance of vigilant protection of our most fundamental democratic right, the right to vote.

Answer the below questions as you read through:

Why was the Voting Rights Act of 1965 necessary despite the Fifteenth Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964?

Describe the catalyst for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In your own words, describe what President Lyndon B. Johnson proclaimed?

There were many consequences of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Find a consequence for each of the below groups:

For African Americans :

For other marginalized groups :

For American political landscape :

Making Links: Despite the successes of the Voting Rights Act, what challenges and erasures has it faced over time why?

Guided Reading Activity 1expanding Voting Rights

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