

1776 White men with property have the right to vote but Catholics, Jews, Quakers and others are barred from voting.

1790 The Naturalization Act bars Asian Americans from becoming citizens.

1792 New Hampshire eliminates property ownership requirements, which gives more white men the opportunity to vote. New Hampshire becomes the first state to eliminate the rule that only property owners and taxpayers can vote. Following New Hampshire's lead, other states begin to shift away from such restrictions in an effort to open the electorate to more white males.

1812 Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry redraws voting district lines to favor the Republican-dominated legislature against the Federalist Party. Today, the term "gerrymander" means the drawing of legislative district lines, usually in a bizarre manner, to give an unfair advantage to one group or political party. Although the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1986 in *Davis v. Bandemer* that the question of partisan gerrymandering could be settled in a court of law, no court has ever invalidated a redistricting plan on the basis of partisan gerrymandering.

1848 The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ends the Mexican American War, giving Mexicans in Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas U.S. citizenship. Mexicans living in Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, and Nevada are guaranteed U.S. citizenship in 1848, but their voting rights are denied when English proficiency is required to vote. Property and literacy requirements are imposed to keep them from voting, along with violence and intimidation.

1856 Property qualifications for voting are eliminated in certain elections in North Carolina, giving all white men there the opportunity to vote. North Carolina becomes the last state to eliminate the rule that citizens must own property in order to vote in certain elections, effectively extending the right to vote to all white men within the United States (with the exception of those convicted of certain crimes). April 9,

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

1868 The Louisiana Republican Party platform includes a plank embracing equality for African Americans. John W. Menard is elected to Congress from Louisiana but is barred from taking his seat by white members of Congress. Oscar J. Dunn, a former slave, is elected lieutenant governor of Louisiana.

February 26, 1869 Congress passes the Fifteenth Amendment giving African American men the equal right to vote. The Fifteenth Amendment states: "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. "In addition to the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolishes slavery and the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees equal protection under the law, the Fifteenth Amendment is one of the major tools which enabled African Americans to more fully participate in democracy.

1870 Hiram Revels is the first African American elected to the U.S. Senate and Joseph Hayne Rainey becomes the first African American member of the U.S. House of Representatives. Jasper J. Wright is elected to the South Carolina Supreme Court.

February 3,

1870

The Fifteenth Amendment is ratified by the states, giving freed slaves and other African Americans the equal right to vote.

1871 The forty-second Congress includes five black members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

March 1877The Hayes-Tilden compromise marks the beginning of the end of Reconstruction and effectively gives white Democrats free reign to subjugate blacks and newly-freed slaves. Disputed returns from the November 1876 presidential election, in which Democrat Samuel J. Tilden won the popular vote against Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, but fell one electoral vote short of the 185 needed to win the presidency, provoke a Constitutional crisis. The crisis is resolved when Hayes agrees to recognize Democratic administrations in Florida, Louisiana and South Carolina - and return federal troops to their barracks - in exchange for Democrats in Congress accepting him as President. 1882Congress passes the Chinese Exclusion Act denying citizenship and voting rights to Chinese Americans.

November 3,

1884In a setback to Native American voting rights, the Supreme Court rules in *Elk v. Wilkins* that John Elk, a Native American from Nebraska, cannot vote. The court rules that Elk is not allowed to vote in Nebraska because his intention to become a citizen requires approval from the United States. The court also states that Elk is not a citizen because he does not "owe allegiance to the United States," and that the Fifteenth Amendment does not apply to him.

1887Congress passes the Dawes General Allotment Act which grants citizenship only to those Native Americans who give up their tribal affiliations. The Dawes General Allotment Act seeks to open Indian lands for white settlement and to coerce Native Americans to assimilate into white society.

1888The Florida legislature adopts multiple disfranchising provisions which cause voter turnout among adult African American men to plummet from 62 percent to 11 percent over the next four years. The disfranchising provisions adopted by the Florida legislature in 1888 included a poll tax and an "eight box law," under which voters were required to place ballots in correct boxes which were then shifted throughout the day.

1890The Indian Naturalization Act grants citizenship to Native Americans by an application process.

1896The adoption of a new "grandfather clause" by Louisiana legislators disfranchises African American voters. The percent of registered black voters drops from 44.8% in 1896 to 4.0% four years later. In addition to Louisiana, statewide disfranchising conventions specifically designed to undermine black voters are held in Mississippi, South Carolina, Alabama and Virginia from 1890 to 1902. Adopted as an amendment to the state constitution, Louisiana's grandfather clause prompts a huge decrease in registered African American voters. The provision requires voters to register between January 1, 1897 and January 1, 1898, and only allows literate property owners to register. Illiterate or non-property owning voters whose fathers or grandfathers could vote in 1867 also are allowed to register. Because nearly all African Americans were slaves two generations earlier, the measure effectively disfranchises all black voters who cannot read or write or who do not own more than \$300 in property. June 21,

1915The U.S. Supreme Court rules in *Guinn v. United States* that Oklahoma's "grandfather clause," which is used to disfranchise black men, is unconstitutional. Oklahoma's "grandfather clause," designed to disfranchise people of color and enforce segregation, is found unconstitutional in *Guinn v. United States*. The clause allows illiterate men to vote if they can prove that their grandfathers could vote. Because the grandfathers of most African American men in 1915 had been slaves, they did not have the right to vote. Consequently, the clause enabled illiterate white men to vote but not illiterate African Americans. July 20,

1917In a setback to Native American voting rights, the Minnesota Supreme Court rules in *Opsahl v. Johnson* to deny members of the Red Lake Chippewa Tribe the right to vote. The Minnesota Supreme Court rules that members of the Red Lake Chippewa Tribe cannot participate in county elections because tribal members have not "yielded obedience and submission to the [Minnesota] laws." May 26,

1920 Native Americans in North Dakota who had abandoned their tribal ties secure the right to vote in *Swift v. Leach*. The North Dakota Supreme Court rules that 273 Indians of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe are eligible to vote under the North Dakota Constitution because they "had adopted and observed the habits and mode of life of civilized people." August 26,

1920 The Nineteenth Amendment, adopted by Congress on June 4, 1919, is finally ratified by the states and becomes national law, giving women the right to vote. Voting rights for women were first proposed in July 1848, at the Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention organized by suffragists Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott. It took 72 years of protest and activism for the Nineteenth Amendment to become law. The measure was ratified by a single vote margin in the Tennessee state legislature on August 18, 1920 and became national law eight days later. November 13, 1922 In *Takao Ozawa v. United States* the U.S. Supreme Court upholds the Naturalization Act of 1790, which means that aliens are ineligible for citizenship. February 19,

1923 The U.S. Supreme Court rules in *Bhagat Singh Thind v. The United States* that Asian Indians are eligible for citizenship, which technically gives them the right to vote. Bhagat Singh Thind was born in Punjab, came to America in 1913, and later joined the U.S. Army. Thind applied for U.S. citizenship in 1920 and was approved, but a naturalization examiner appealed the decision. The U.S. Supreme Court then ruled in Singh's favor. June 2,

1924 The Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 declares all non-citizen Indians born within the United States to be citizens, giving them the right to vote. Despite passage of the Indian Citizenship Act, the right to vote is still governed by state law, and many Native Americans are effectively barred from voting until 1948. December 6,

1937 In a setback to African American voting rights, the U.S. Supreme Court rules in *Breedlove v. Suttles* to uphold the constitutionality of Georgia poll taxes. Because many African Americans can not afford to pay poll taxes, they are effectively denied the right to vote. Challenged as violating both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, Georgia's poll tax is upheld, making *Breedlove v. Suttles* a major obstacle to African American voting rights. 1940 Only 3% of eligible African Americans in the South are registered to vote. December 17, 1943 In a major civil rights victory, the Chinese Exclusion Act is repealed, giving Chinese immigrants the right to citizenship and the right to vote. December 6,

1944 The U.S. Supreme Court rules in *Smith v. Allwright* that it is unconstitutional for political parties in Texas to discriminate based on race. In *Smith v. Allwright*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that excluding African Americans from membership in the Democratic Party and from participating in primary elections is unconstitutional. According to the Court, primary elections are essential parts of the election process and subject to the Fifteenth Amendment. 1946 Filipinos are granted the right to become U.S. citizens. April 1,

1946 The federal court rules in *King v. Chapman* that white primary systems in Georgia are unconstitutional. In *King v. Chapman*, the federal court overturned Georgia's white primary systems saying, "The exclusions of voters made by the party by the primary rules become exclusions enforced by the State and when these exclusions are prohibited by the Fifteenth Amendment based on race or color, the persons making them effective violate under color of State law a right secured by the Constitution and laws of the United States within the meaning of the statute..."

June 10,

1946 The U.S. Supreme Court permits unequal voting districts in *Colegrove v. Green*, thereby unfairly denying citizens equal representation in Congress. After the Illinois legislature redrew Congressional district lines and put more citizens in some districts than others, the redistricting was challenged as unfairly denying equal representation. In a setback to voting rights, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Illinois redistricting as constitutional by ruling that the way legislative districts are

drawn is a political question best left to state legislatures, not the courts.¹⁹⁴⁷Only 125,000 African Americans in Georgia, or 18.8% of the population, are registered to vote. ¹⁹⁴⁷South Carolina's effort to save its white primary is invalidated by federal court in *Elmore v. Rice*. In an effort to remove federal court jurisdiction from its primaries and thereby preserve its discriminatory white primary system, South Carolina had repealed all of its primary election laws. Ruling in *Elmore v. Rice*, the federal court still invalidated the white primary.¹⁹⁵²The McCarran-Walter Act gives first generation Japanese Americans the right to become citizens. The racial restrictions of the 1790 Naturalization Law are repealed by the McCarran-Walter Act, giving first generation Japanese Americans the right to citizenship. May 17,

¹⁹⁵⁴The U.S. Supreme Court unanimously rules in *Brown v. Board of Education* that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional. By ruling that racial segregation in public schools violates the Fourteenth Amendment, the decision overturns the doctrine of "separate but equal" established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. August 29,

¹⁹⁵⁷Congress passes the Civil Rights Act of 1957, giving the U.S. Attorney General the authority to bring lawsuits on behalf of African Americans denied the right to vote. The Civil Rights Act of 1957 is the first such measure to pass Congress since adoption of the federal civil rights laws of 1875. Among other things, the Act authorizes the U.S. Attorney General to sue to correct discrimination and intimidation of potential voters. June 8,

¹⁹⁵⁹In a major setback to voting rights, the U.S. Supreme Court rules in *Lassiter v. Northampton County Board of Elections* that literacy tests for voting in North Carolina do not violate the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. May 6,

¹⁹⁶⁰Congress passes the Civil Rights Act of 1960. The Civil Rights Act of 1960 requires election officials to have all records relating to voter registration and permits the Department of Justice to inspect them. The Act also allows African Americans whose registration was previously rejected by local election officials to apply to a federal court or voting referee. March 26,

¹⁹⁶²In *Baker v. Carr*, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that courts can direct legislatures to redraw district boundaries to ensure citizens' political rights. Despite 60 year-old district boundaries that are unrepresentative of the true distribution of the population, Tennessee still uses them to elect members of its legislature. This gives rural citizens greater clout compared to urban residents, and conveniently dilutes the voting power of ethnic minorities and urban blacks. In *Baker v. Carr*, the Court rules that courts can order district boundaries to be redrawn, marking a major step forward for African American voting rights. March 18,

¹⁹⁶³In *Gray v. Sanders* the U.S. Supreme Court finds that Georgia's "county unit" system of voting is unconstitutional and articulates the essential concept of "one person, one vote." The U.S. Supreme Court rules that Georgia's "county unit" voting system violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Under this system, the state gave greater weight to rural votes and smaller urban counties than urban votes and larger rural counties. Because urban districts are much larger, individual voters had less say compared to rural voters over who got nominated in statewide primaries. Writing for the majority, Justice Douglas states: "The conception of political equality from the Declaration of Independence, to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, to the Fifteenth, Seventeenth, and Nineteenth Amendments can mean only one thing - one person, one vote." August 28,

¹⁹⁶³The "March on Washington" led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. receives worldwide attention. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his "I have a Dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC and says, "Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. Those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is

granted his citizenship rights. "

February 4,

1964 Poll taxes are outlawed with the adoption of the 24th Amendment. June 15,

1964 In *Reynolds v. Sims*, a major voting rights victory, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that the one person, one vote rule applies to legislative bodies. Noting that "the right to exercise the franchise in a free and unimpaired manner is preservative of other basic civil and political rights," the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Alabama legislative boundaries that had not been changed since 1900. July 2,

1964 Congress passes the Civil Rights Act of 1964, making it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, religion, and gender in voting, public places, the workplace and schools. January 15,

1965 A Jackson, Mississippi, federal grand jury hands down indictments for the June 1964 slaying of three civil rights workers—James E. Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner.

Among those convicted are Deputy Sheriff Price, sentenced to six years in jail. Ku Klux Klan leader Sam Bowers and KKK member Wayne Roberts are sentenced to 10 years each. Mississippi made national news again in January 2005 when Edgar Ray Killen, a 79-year-old preacher and reputed Klansman, was arrested on murder charges regarding the 1964 slaying. March 7,

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 dramatize the need for African American voting rights and to protest the fatal police shooting of Jimmy Lee Jackson, a civil rights activist. On Sunday, March 7, 1965, more than 500 peaceful demonstrators were brutally beaten on the outskirts of Selma, Alabama, after marching across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The dramatic events of "Bloody Sunday" were broadcast on national television and one week later President Lyndon B. Johnson gave a televised speech before Congress denouncing the assault as "wrong, deadly wrong." Five months later, he signed the Voting Rights Act (VRA) into law, making August 6, 2005, the historic 40th anniversary of the Act. August 6,

1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act into law, permanently barring direct 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 of changes in their election laws before they can take effect. The Voting Rights Act is enacted as a permanent federal statute that allows for direct action to ensure the protection of minority voting rights. The Act forbids literacy tests and other barriers to registration that have restricted minority access to voting. The Act also empowers the Department of Justice and the courts to monitor problem jurisdictions and ensures that private citizens can seek redress through the courts to remedy violations of minority voting rights. 1965 By the end of 1965, 250,000 new black voters are registered, one-third of them by Federal examiners. Black voter registration dramatically impacts politics in localities throughout the South. For example, in Dallas County, Alabama, where civil rights marchers were brutally attacked in Selma, the number of registered African American voters increased from 383 before the passage of the Voting Rights Act, to approximately 8,000 - which was slightly more than half the black voting age population in the county - by November 1965. March 7,

1966 In *South Carolina v. Katzenbach*, the U.S. Supreme Court upholds the constitutionality of the Voting Rights Act. The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the enforcement clause of the Fifteenth Amendment gives Congress "full remedial powers" to prevent racial discrimination in voting, and holds that the Voting Rights Act is a "legitimate response" to the "insidious and pervasive evil" which has denied blacks the right to vote since adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870. The Court

further finds that Section 5 of the Act, which requires state and local officials in targeted jurisdictions to obtain federal preclearance before implementing changes in voting, was designed "to shift the advantage of time and inertia from the perpetrators of the evil to its victims." 1967 African American voter registration jumps from 6.7% in Mississippi before passage of the Voting Rights Act, to 59.8% in 1967. 1968 Nine African Americans are elected to Congress, the largest number since 1875. The group includes Shirley Chisholm of New York, the first black woman to be elected to Congress. March 3, 1969 In *Allen v. State Board of Elections*, the Supreme Court interprets Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act broadly to require preclearance for a wide range of election practices. 1970 Congress renews the temporary provisions of the Voting Rights Act for five years, and they are signed into law by President Richard Nixon. While there has been some progress made in registration and voting, Congress finds that many states purposefully ignore the preclearance provisions of Section 5. 1971 Following the election of 12 African Americans to Congress in 1970, Congressman Charles C. Diggs, Jr. of Michigan establishes the Congressional Black Caucus to secure a larger voice for African Americans in public affairs. July 5, 1971 The 26th Amendment gives 18-year-olds the right to vot