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***Breaking the Bounds of Slavery
The Legacy of the Voting Rights Act of 1965***

*A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Master Degree in “Literature and Civilisation”*

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my dear parents, especially my lovely mother who never stopped giving me everything I dreamt to have.

To the precious woman who supported me to continue my studies.

To my dear family

To someone who used to be my close friend and gave me the will to never give, teaching me that everything is possible and expectable!

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Abstract

The American Civil War of 1861 marked a turning point in the history of the USA bringing many changes, more particularly, to the state of African Americans by liberating them from the bonds of slavery. However, despite the Emancipation Proclamation act Blacks, actually unchained, were to witness segregation, racism and bad treatments. In other words, African-Americans were not treated as a citizen and were deprived from the majority of rights. One of the most important forms of protest aiming at bringing more equality and freedom was the Civil Rights Movement of 1960s. An attempt to improve black people's life conditions and eradicate racism. Between 1954 and 1968, there was a passage of –at least-four major Civil Rights Acts thanks to the efforts made by the movement's marches, activities and demonstrations: the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the 1968 Housing Act. Each piece of legislation aimed to address racial problems during the time. These acts advanced the most important goal of the movement which is the improvement of black's rights opportunities. Hence, this research focuses on the examination of the ultimate effectiveness of the legislation, which is one of a matter of degree. It aims to enhance in particular the role of acts that called for voting. The right to vote was so important in the sense that it could be achieved and unthreatened; African Americans would have the ability to productively create change. This research evaluates a question of whether the 1965 Voting Rights Act provided African-Americans with an undeterred vote or not, by using participation rates, registration and data on black congressional representations.

The leader of the Civil Rights defined this goal through speeches and interviews, searching to improve black Americans conditions relative to whites. Indeed, the major civil rights act of voting was inspired by the efforts of the civil rights movement. In fact it was successful in bringing equality between the two races and helping blacks in terms of voting.

Finally, we will offer an interpretation as the degree that the movement has had.

Key words:

Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King, Jr, Civil War, Reconstruction, Voting Rights Act, Selma March.

Table of contents

Dedication.....	<i>I</i>
Acknowledgments.....	<i>II</i>
Abstract.....	<i>III</i>
Table of contents.....	<i>IV</i>
General introduction.....	<i>V</i>

Chapter one: The Voting Right: Its History and Current Issues

I.1 Introduction.....	2
I.2 A Brief History of Voting Rights act	3
I.3 The end of reconstruction and the ‘Jim Crow’ South	4
I.3.1 The Legacy of Reconstruction	5
I.3.2 Election of Black Members of Congress from the South	6
I.3.3 Black Political Participation in South Carolina and the white’s efforts to Disfranchise Blacks	8
1.4 The Rise of ‘Jim crow’ Politics and the continuing evolution of voters’ suppression	9
1.5 conclusion.....	10

Chapter two: Struggle for Equal Voting Right

II.1 Introduction	12
II.2 Jim Crow Laws as means to disfranchise blacks voting.....	14
II.2.1 Definition of the term Jim Crow	14
II.2.2 The Implementation of Poll Tax and Literacy tests.....	15
II.2.3 The Grandfather Clauses	15
II.2.4 The Test Oath	16
II.2.5 Violence	16
II.3 The Major Steps toward Equal Voting Right	17
II.3.1 The Civil Rights Movement.....	18
II.3.1.1 Definition of the Civil Rights Movement.....	19
II.3.1.2 Martin Luther King	19
II.3.2 Selma March.....	20
II.3.3 The Major Achievements of the Civil Rights Movement.....	21
II.3.3.1 The 1957 Civil Right Act	22
II.3.3.2 The 1960 Civil Right Act	23
II.3.3.3 Passing the 1965 Voting Rights Act	23
II.4 Conclusion.....	24

Chapter three: The Legacy of the Voting Right Act of 1965

III.1 Introduction ----- 26

III.2 Black Voter Registration ----- 26

III.2.1 Black Voter Registration before and During the Application of the VRA ----- 27

III.2.2 Black voter Registration, Pre and Post VRA ----- 29

III.3.3 Black Congressional Representation----- 30

III.3 Conclusion.....32

General Conclusion.....33

Works Cited34

General Introduction

Race and color have historically been difficult issues to confront. Slavery existed on the American soil from the colonial period until the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendments in 1865. In the United States slavery is understandably associated with the south since the Southern states were those which so vigorously defended the practice during the nineteenth century. Slavery was a simple fact of life throughout much of human history.

The historian David Brion Davis noted that in the 320 years from 1500 to 1820, every European immigrant who arrived in the New World was matched by at least two African slaves. Economic realities further made slavery more important to the southern colonies of North America since they grew crops that required more hand cultivation and cheap labor. Slavery created hateful sentiments of whites towards African Americans. It persisted into the 20th century and was presented in another political picture through laws and acts of segregation and racial discrimination. Blacks were oppressed by whites and were victims of all sorts of injustice.

The Civil Rights Movement came at a time when blacks were constantly facing violence and poor societal treatments that deprived them from many rights. In 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had supported court cases intended to overturn segregation. The Civil Rights Movement was a combination of peaceful protests, marches and demonstrations and aimed at achieving black Civil Rights and bringing awareness to the unequal treatments and injustice. Blacks in America fought for their freedom and asked for equality in all domains of the everyday life. The movement prompted different pieces of landmark legislation and helped to produce many significant laws and acts.

There is no question that the Civil Rights Acts were born from the pox of slavery. One of the major acts was the Voting Right Act, it was crucial pieces of the legislation, and it called for putting an end of unfair segregation in terms of voting. Actually it created a societal and political change.

In this research, we tried to give an understanding and examination of the extent of the changes wrought by the major laws passed in response to the Civil Rights Movement which lead us to raise the following questions:

- Was the movement successful enough to bring radical changes?
- To what extent could the Voting Right Act bring changes for the African-Americans and the struggle for the civil rights movement?

It is hypothesized that without this important Act, the attempts of African-Americans to achieve their rights would not have succeeded.

The current study is divided into three chapters. The first one deals with the history and the current issues of the Voting Rights Act. The second chapter is devoted to the examination of the hardship of the Jim Crow laws against black voters. Also, light will be shed on the role of the Civil Rights Movement in maintaining the black power and unity to achieve their rights. The last chapter gives an overview of data on the African American electorate, including participations and registrations percentage to confirm the successful role that the act had played.

Chapter One

The Voting Right: History and Current Issues

I.1 Introduction

An Act to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and for other purposes.

SEC. 2. No voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or Procedure shall be imposed or applied by any State or political subdivision to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color.

SEC. 4. (a) To assure that the right of citizens of the United States to vote is not denied or abridged on account of race or color, no citizen shall be denied the right to vote in any Federal, State, or local election because of his failure to comply with any test or device in any State ...

More than Fifty years ago, Congress passed the four major Civil Right Acts, which revolutionized the social culture of the American nation in part because of swift divisions by the Supreme Court. Congress passed the Voting Right Act of 1965; it was revolutionary in its concept. For the first time since the Reconstruction, the federal government applied legislation to reinforce the Fifteenth Amendment, which prohibited discrimination in voting on the basis of ‘race, color, or previous conditions of servitude’. This new commitment to voting rights was bolstered by the recently ratified twenty-fourth Amendment, known as the Poll Tax Amendment, which prohibited states from using the payment of taxes as requirement for voting in any federal election or any primary election for federal office (Kousser, 22). Since the end of the nineteenth century, state laws, local practice, bureaucratic intransigence, and sometimes intimidation and violence had prevented the majority of blacks from voting in the South; southern states used a variety of techniques to eliminate the black vote.

The Supreme Court struck down some state policies that blatantly violated the Fifteenth Amendment, but the court generally permitted onerous registration procedures that effectively disfranchised the vast majority of southern blacks. This chapter report provides background information on the historical circumstances that led to the adoption of the VRA. It presents an extended analysis of the reality of voting rights in South Carolina to explore the white primaries and different difficulties of the Voting Rights to illustrate how deeply entrenched discrimination in voting was before 1965.

I.2 A Brief History of Voting Rights Act

The Voting Rights Act is a landmark federal law enacted in 1965 to remove race-based restrictions on voting. It is perhaps the country's most important voting rights law, with a history that dates to the Civil War. After that conflict ended, a number of constitutional amendments were adopted addressing the particular circumstances of free slaves, including the Fifteenth Amendment that guaranteed the right to vote for all U.S. citizens regardless of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Initially, the Fifteenth Amendment profoundly changed electoral politics in the country and particularly in the former slave states. Based on some of the statistics approved by American studies, the first black Members of Congress was chosen in 1870 from Mississippi and South Carolina, respectively hundreds of black officeholders at all levels were elected in the following years.

During the Reconstruction, federal troops occupied the former Confederate states as they were reintegrated into the Union (Manning, 95). The Fifteenth Amendment achieved its purpose for a time and black voting participation and representation in the South increased rapidly in twentieth century, however, a little more than twenty years after the Reconstruction era ended, no African Americans served in Congress and all of the former Confederate states had rewritten their constitutions to exclude African Americans from voting (96). Despite the efforts of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), founded in 1909, the Civil Rights Movement, and congressional intervention with the enactments of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and 1964, the status of black disenfranchisement remained resistant to change until the adoption of the Voting Rights Act. The Civil Rights Movement and the federal government made progress in regaining the franchise for black voters by mid-century, but significant impediments remained. When efforts to register voters in the Deep South in the early 1960s provoked a violent backlash, a protest march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, was organized in March 1965. Attacks on the marchers by state troopers and others prompted the Johnson Administration to intervene and, shortly thereafter, to propose a voting rights law that called for upholding the guarantees of the Fifteenth Amendment. The Voting Rights Act

Chapter One The Voting Right: History and Current Issues

was enacted on August 6, 1965, and it prohibited states from imposing qualifications or practices to deny the right to vote on account of race. Permitted direct federal intervention in the electoral process in certain places, based on a “coverage formula”; and required preclearance of new laws in covered states ‘jurisdictions to ensure that they did not have the purpose, nor would have the effect, of denying the right to vote on account of race, among other provisions Black voter registration and participation increased dramatically shortly thereafter (Guerra, 22).

I.2.1 The End of Reconstruction and the ‘Jim Crow’ South

“The reconstruction followed the Civil War. It was applied by Congress in 1865-1877, and aimed to reorganize the southern states after the war and readmit them into the union”(Franklin, 69). Few periods in the history of the United States had produced as much bitterness and created enduring controversy as the era of Reconstruction¹- the years following the Civil War when Americans attempted to reunite their chattered union. The political landscape of the South was completely transformed in the years after the Civil War. The Reconstruction era began with military occupation and provisional state governments in the former Confederate states until they met certain conditions to be readmitted to the union. The conditions for readmission initially were based on a presidential version of Reconstruction, then according to the dictates of a series of Reconstruction acts passed when Congress took over the process. Although enfranchising the former slaves—the “freedmen”—was a matter of sharp dispute; several laws and a constitutional amendment were soon adopted to achieve that end (Kousser, 55). Under the Reconstruction regime, the freedmen were enfranchised while some former Confederates were excluded from voting.

I.2.3 The Legacy of Reconstruction

Reconstruction made some important contributions to the efforts of former slaves to achieve dignity and equality in American life. There was a significant re-distribution of income from which blacks benefited. There was a more limited but not unimportant redistribution of landownership, which enable some former slaves to acquire property. African Americans were proud of their realizations they were

¹ *The term Reconstruction refers to the efforts made in the United States between 1865 and 1877 to restructure the political, legal, and economic systems.*

Chapter One The Voting Right: History and Current Issues

able to make during Reconstruction. And future generations aimed at achieving the two great charters of freedom-the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments of the Constitution-which were ignored at the time, would one day serve as the basis for a “Second Reconstruction” that would renew the drive to bring freedom and equality to all Americans.

The Reconstruction government had been bold experiments in interracial politics. The congressional radicals were not saints, but they had displayed a genuine concern for the rights of slaves. And the seventeenth president of United States Andrew Johnson was not a martyred defender of the constitution, but a racist politician who resisted reasonable compromise and brought the government to a crisis. There had been no such thing as “Negro rule” in the south. Blacks were neglected by white community, and had played only a small part in Reconstruction governments. The Reconstruction regimes to the south helped establishing the region’s first public school system and other social changes. What was tragic about Reconstruction, the revisionist view claimed, was not what it did to Southern whites but what it did not do for Southern blacks. By stopping short of the reform necessary to ensure blacks genuine equality, Reconstruction had consigned them to more than a century of injustice and unfair discrimination. Leon Litwack’s *Been in the Storm So Long* (1979) reveals that former slaves used the relative latitude they enjoyed under Reconstruction to build certain independence for themselves within Southern society (Coleman, 56).

Slaves wanted to make a change by strengthening their churches and reuniting their families; they attempted to have a voice in the political system by refusing to work in the system of the plantations and forced the creation of a new labor system in which they had more control over their own lives. Eric Foner, in *Nothing but Freedom* (1983), compared the aftermath of slavery in the United States with similar experience in the Caribbean and concluded that what is striking about the American experience in this context is not how little was accomplished, but how far the former slaves moved toward freedom and independence in a short time(52). African Americans themselves played large and massive role in shaping Reconstruction and imposing their true identity. During Reconstruction blacks won a certain amount of legal and political power in the South; and even though they held that power

Chapter One The Voting Right: History and Current Issues

only temporarily, they used it for a time to strengthen their social positions and win a position of limited independence. “Through Reconstruction they won, if not equality, measure of individual and community autonomy, building blocks of the freedom that emancipation alone had not guaranteed”(Men,40).

I.2.4 Election of Black Members of Congress from the South

The first black Members of Congress took their seats in 1870, when Hiram Rhodes Revels was elected by the Mississippi state senate to fill a vacant U.S. Senate seat and Joseph H. Rainey was elected to fill a vacant U.S. House of Representatives seat in the South Carolina delegation as table shows. In the years that followed, black officials were elected at all levels of government and the newfound political influence was evident in appointed federal offices as well, as blacks took office as ambassadors, Census officials, customs appointments , U.S. marshals and Treasury agents, mail agents and Post Office officials. In many of the former Confederate states, hundreds of black officeholders were elected in the Reconstruction period, including Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The electoral gains were remarkable, having occurred in states where the freedman had been enslaved only years earlier and provided testimony to the determination of Reconstruction Congresses, as well as the presence of federal troops (qtd.in Weinblatt 59).

Chapter One The Voting Right: History and Current Issues
African American Members of the U.S. Congress, 1870-1901

Name	Party Affiliation and State	Years of Service
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U.S. Senate

Hiram R. Revels	R-Mississippi	1870-71
Blanche K. Bruce	R-Mississippi	1875 -81

U.S. House of Representatives

Joseph H. Rainey	R-South Carolina	1870-79
Jefferson F. Long	R-Georgia	1870-71
Robert B. Elliot	R-South Carolina	1871-74
Robert C. DeLarge	R-South Carolina	1871-73
Benjamin S. Turner	R-Alabama	1871-73
Josiah T. Walls	R-Florida	1871-73
Richard H. Caine	R-South Carolina	1875-77
		1877-79

James T. Rapier	R-Alabama	1873-75
Alonzo J. Ransier	R- South Carolina	1873-75
Jeremiah Haralson	R- Alabama	1875-77
John A. Hyman	R-North Carolina	1875-77
Charles E. Nash	R-Louisiana	1875-77
Robert Smalls	R-South Carolina	1875-79
James E. O-Hara	R-North Carolina	1883-87
Henry P. Cheatham	R-North Carolina	1889-93

Source: CRS Report RL30378, African American Members of the United States Congress: 1870-2012, by Jennifer E. Manning and Colleen J. Shogan

I.3 Black Political Participation in South Carolina and the white's efforts to Disfranchise Blacks

“After the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment, African Americans voted in large numbers throughout the South” (M.Valelly, 101). Black political participation in South Carolina was particularly impressive and important step made by black community to start claiming of their rights. They participated in political life by holding public office.” In South Carolina more than 400 blacks served in public office when Reconstruction formally ended” (12). So as Reconstruction came to an end, the participation of African Americans in South Carolina politics decreased due to the passage of a series of laws designed to deny African Americans the ability to exercise their newly created voting rights. Moreover, some localities adopted schemes to prevent blacks from voting in primaries. In 1878, the state instituted the use of separate ballots boxes for state and federal elections, even if many voters were former slaves and fully understood that they wanted to vote for Republicans; the Party of Lincoln. This process was the beginning that was calculated to deprive blacks of the right to vote. History showed also another strategy was created and ratified in 1870s and 1880s, by white majority was the «Eight Box Ballot Law”. It was a new election law, designed to reduce the black vote without denying the right to vote on the basis of race, and making registration nearly impossible for most blacks. As one of the leading historian of voting in the south has noted, the “Eight Box Ballot Law was one of the most clever stratagems” (Kousser, 95.) Indeed it was a clever process adopted in this period to eliminate the black vote. In this process, voters placed a paper ballot, usually supplied by a candidate or a party, into a ballot box. Thus, by requiring multiple ballots and boxes, the state set the stage to legally not count numerous ballots. As one renowned scholar of southern voting rights explains:

Under this rule, ballots for individual offices had to be placed in separate ballot boxes. Put your ballot in the wrong box, and it would not be counted .Although the boxes were usually labeled properly, this meant little to illiterate black voters unable to read the labels. And if

Chapter One The Voting Right: History and Current Issues

this were not enough, many election supervisors shifted the boxes around periodically. Countless wrongly placed –and hence uncounted- ballots were the result. (Zelden, 54).

So, these rules were easily manipulated to prevent African Americans from voting and such efforts to strip South Carolina's blacks of their political rights and power began to have effects on the number of blacks were serving in public office. All of that was happening in the state because democrats controlling all of the state's public office. As a result, white democrats were able to adopt a new state constitution that was designed to eliminate completely the black political participation in the state.

I.4 The Rise of 'Jim crow' Politics and the Continuing Evolution of Voters' Suppression

“In the South racism was enlisted into a political purpose” (M.Moore111). People don't like doing something that they don't want to do; this was true of the South after the Civil War. Southerners were forced to follow the federal laws established by thirteen, fourteenth and fifteenth amendments, but they didn't have to like it. All of a sudden, people who were once considered “property” were citizens and according to the new amendments, had the same rights as their “owners”. We can imagine how difficult it would be for many white southerners. Many African-Americans men were now able to vote and serve in government. Between 1870 and 1877, sixteen African-Americans men were now able to vote and served in the United States Congress. The state legislature of Mississippi and South Carolina had black Speakers of the House. This terrified many white people in the South, and so they did something to make sure that the former slaves couldn't gain control of their state. Actually, they began passing laws known as “Jim Crow Laws”.

1.5 Conclusion

To sum up, this chapter has presented the role of Reconstruction in changing some events in the United States at that period. Slavery used to be a pillar of white community stability, supremacy and superiority in the region. With the coming of Reconstruction, African Americans sought to claim their freedom. During the first two years of Reconstruction, blacks organized Equal Rights League throughout the South². So, during the decade known as the radical Reconstruction³; congress granted blacks the right to vote and participation in election representation – even unfairly and unequally -. In fact it was the first sign to encourage political activism and help those former slaves gain their freedom and political rights. Therefore, in the next chapter, a focus will be on the extent to which this first struggle led to further radical changes mainly, the right to vote and the ability of African Americans to face white’s disfranchisements in attempt to guarantee a descent life for their race

² <http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/black-leaders-during-reconstruction>

³ *Radical Reconstructions believed blacks were entitled to the same political rights and opportunities as whites.*

Chapter Two

Struggle for Equal Voting Rights

II.1 Introduction

“ It is of great importance ...not only to guard the society against the oppression of its rulers, but to guard one part of the society against the injustice of the other part”When Reconstruction ended in 1877, states across the South implemented Jim Crow laws to restrict the voting rights of African Americans. These included requirements of owning property, paying poll taxes and passing literacy, not to mention violence treatments. Many African Americans who attempted to vote were also threatened physically or feared losing their jobs. For this reason and more the Civil Rights Movement appeared and was established to achieve specific major goals. Basically, it was to register voters across the South in order to gain political power for blacks. Most of the interviewees in the Civil Rights History Project were involved in voter registration drives; driving voters to the polls, teaching literacy classes for the purposes of voter registration, or encouraging local African Americans to run as candidates (Burgan, 82). However, they attempted to have a political act to save them from whites’ disfranchisements; which is The Voting Rights, as an important political system for people of color. But to achieve such an act, it needed a lot of efforts and struggles from black leader in particular and from all black people in general. Actually, it was not easy at all to claim of such right in the politic domain. The passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1984) was one thing; but guaranteeing them in reality was quite another. For this reason and more, “Civil Rights promised that government power will be used to ensure that individuals are treated equally and fairly by government and other individuals” (Zeldan, 21).

II.2 Jim Crow Laws as means to disfranchise blacks voting

II.2.1 Definition of the term Jim Crow

The origin of the term Jim Crow came from a popular song titled “Jim Crow” around 1830, written by Thomas Dartmouth. Who was a white actor; he blacked his face and hands with burnt cork and danced while singing the lyrics to the song “Jump Jim Crow” with a black dialect. ‘Jim Crow Laws‘ were a group of barriers to black participation in elections. It began to crumble as laws were used by southern states and protected by the constitution between 1877 and 1965, in which white community in the south wanted to keep control over the blacks by segregating them in every aspect of public and social life in general and to prevent them from participating in political life and having a voice as any American citizen in particular.

From about 1900 to 1965, most African Americans were not allowed to vote in the South, this was especially true in the Deep South: Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. Each of the southern states had its own Jim Crow laws, white people in power used many methods to prevent African Americans from participating in vote, and it began to be effective after the end of Reconstruction. The passage of the fourteenth and fifteenth Amendment to the constitution had granted blacks the same protection as whites but they became limited when Jim Crow laws began. However the blacks were denied from the right to vote by many laws; tactics were created by whites like grandfather clause, poll taxes and violence.

II.2.2The Implementation of Poll Tax and Literacy tests

In the twentieth, people had to pay a tax to vote in southern states. Most African-Americans had extremely low incomes and could not afford this tax. This poll tax was a new state constitution required voters to pay a poll tax and pass literacy test, it was applied to all people who wanted to vote – blacks in particular-in order to prevent them from voting. It demanded that only people who can read and understand have the right to vote; while illiterate people were not allowed to vote at all. Most of blacks could not read at that time, but they could understand somehow. However white officials

claimed that only whites could understand what was read even if they could. Thus, such an arbitrary method made it completely impossible to make the great majority of black have the possibility to vote.

II.2.3The Grandfather Clauses

The term of Grandfather Clause had originated during the United States Civil War era as a group of permanent laws were applied by South in an attempt to block African Americans from participating in vote. It was considered as another repressive politics against blacks to disenfranchise them from voting by legislation such law. These requirements allowed citizens to vote only if their grandfather had cast ballots in election held before 1860.the aim was eliminating and excluding most African Americans from sharing in political domain. Of course, the law worked only for white community, because practically no blacks could vote before 1867. Blacks were excluded under charging of petty crimes and the state make them ineligible to vote. Such devices removed enough black voters.”Politician sometimes arranged for circuses and other entertainments to tour black districts before elections and collect poll tax as the price of admission”(Kousser, 22). The one can says that without these receipts, black voters would not be permitted to cast their ballots.

Such disfranchisement movement aimed to prevent blacks from participating in politic by voting. As a result they were all excluded and the Jim Crow laws succeeded in splitting insurgent white from blacks.

II.2.4The Test Oath

In the United States, there are usually two rounds of elections: first the primary, then the general. In the primary, Republicans run against Republicans and Democrats run against Democrats. In the general election, the winner of the Republican primary runs against the winner of the Democratic primary. The Republican or Democrat who gets the most votes is elected (Morill, 102). In South Carolina, there was a new method to maintain white supremacy and prevent black participation in the primaries, required that all voters had to take an oath declaring “I believe in and I will support the social (religious) and educational separation of races». Actually this test oath was, on its face, the mirror of the party ideology of the party and the main goal of the statement, however, was to keep

blacks out of the party, and to be able to prevent them from voting in primaries if they were members of Civil Rights organizations or if they were against segregation. This oath, constituted a transparent aimed to present and show the racism in general and also to prevent any blacks from voting in the Democratic primaries in particular. “In the South from about 1900 to about 1960, the Democratic candidates usually won. Republicans were almost never elected, especially in the Deep South” (Leonard, 24). This means that the Democratic primary election was usually the only election that mattered. African Americans were not allowed to vote in the Democratic primary elections.

II.2.5Violence

Blacks were considered as second class citizens, they had no freedom, no justice and no wealth. Some of them who tried to vote were threatened and killed. Their families were also harmed, homes were burned down and jobs were lost. There is no doubt that whites community used violence to intimidate blacks and prevent them from even thinking about voting. Still, some blacks passed the requirements to vote and took the risk to make their dreams toward dignity and respect real.

Table 1 lays out the adoption of Jim Crows suppression laws by year and state across some states in the United States. This table illustrates the fact that was adopted at that period.

	LITERACY TEST	POLL TAXES	WHITE PRIMARIES	GRANDFATHER CLAUSES
Alabama	X	X	X	X
Arkansas	X			
Florida	X			
Georgia	X			
Kentucky	X	X	X	X
Louisiana	X	X	X	X
Mississippi	X			X
North Carolina	X	X		X
North Carolina	X			X
Tennessee	X			
Virginia	X	X	X	X

Jerrold G. Rusk, A Statistical History of the American Electorate (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2001), pp. 33-35.

II.3 The Major Steps toward Equal Voting Right

The right to vote was the most critical and important goal of the civil rights movement. African Americans in the South faced many obstacles, both legal and extra-legal, to exercising their constitutional right to vote. They were threatened and forbidden by laws of discriminations from registering to vote. The presence of grandfather clauses, the implementation of poll taxes, and the use of literacy tests all prevented African Americans from voting. In 1961, the United States Commission on Civil Rights stated that “there are many counties in the South where a substantial Negro population not only has no voice in government, but suffers extensive deprivation—legal, economic, educational, and social” (United States Commission: Voting 1961 5). The right to vote was so important in that once it could be achieved; African Americans would have the ability to create change and have the ability to elect leaders who would support their cause. “Black voter

registration and political participation gradually became the movement's dominant vehicle for implementation of its legislative agenda" (Nobleman). These efforts culminated into one of the major successes of the civil rights movement. The passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act, the 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights Act drastically changed African Americans ability to vote.

II.3.1 The Civil Rights Movement

Black Americans suffered from problems under segregation laws, racial discrimination, unfair treatments and deprivation from essential rights. The leaders of the movement sought out an endangered ability to vote in congressional and presidential elections, and bring attention to their cause. It was the high time for black Americans to make a revolution as a hope for all mankind. It came as a solution to these problems; and to improve themselves as American citizens. Revolution started with courageous actions and major events such as freedom rides in 1960s, establishing several associations and organizing peaceful manifestations and marches. Each of these devices aimed at claiming the right of black community and achieving equality between the two races. They putted into the consideration their desire to omit inferiority and superiority terms from society. The blacks in the American society were deprived from the simplest rights; they lacked jobs, homes and opportunities. They had not a voice in the political square which could overhear their demands to supremacy and jurisdiction; at least they could have hopes to make their dreams true. They always asked why they should be excluded from charities, while whites received better life conditions. Thus African Americans wanted to actualize freedom and gaining their full rights. One of the most important rights was the voting rights; because it was the key of equality and justice. Such a clever step was proposed by Martin Luther King was very necessary right because it could bring massive changes.

II.3.1.1 Definition of the Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Right Movement was a group of peaceful protests led by African Americans leaders in 1950s and 1970s, seeking to obtain civil rights that they believed they deserve as any citizen of the

United States. Its leaders included individuals such as Martin Luther King and John Lewis..., they worked together to overcome racist policies; looking to guarantee equality between the two races. It came as a reaction to some of the events that occurred in American society, when blacks American faced violent waves of painful racism by the fierce opposition of white supremacists. Children and women were killed by police without committing any crime; for this reason and more, the Civil Rights Movement was established in attempt to achieve the voting right as a bridge to claim of African American rights and dignity. The movement was under control of blacks leader, but to some extent, it was also supported by whites allies. The movement involved national, regional and local organizations that worked together (Nobleman, 08).

II.3.1.2 Martin Luther King

Martin Luther King was born in Atlanta, USA on 15th of January 1929. He was the leader of Civil Rights Movements. He used techniques and strategies rooted in nonviolent civil disobedience in order to end the persecution of African Americans. His leadership was fundamental to that movement's success in ending the legal segregation of African Americans in the South and other parts of the United States.⁴ His approaches and methodologies were organized under peaceful means and actions in the first degree. He made courageous efforts and worked hard to promote equality in the sense of voting right and reaching to a community based on justice and respect. The right to vote has been seen as a main goal for leaders of the CRM, such a goal was clearly articulated within influential leader's speeches. In a speech titled "A Realistic Look" at the question of progress in the area of race relations, king highlighted three goals of the CRM. One of the great goals was: having the right to vote. King mentioned the desire to have the ability to vote. This would provide black Americans with hopes and opportunities. Another speech was titled "Give us the Ballot", in which he described how illegally blacks were subjected to methods and way that would prevent them from voting. He said "All type of conning methods is still being used

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Luther-King-Jr>

to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters”. Also, he added by saying” Get the ballot and through gaining the ballot you gain political power. You can call the politicians and tell them that certain thing will have to be done” (King 1957). Well, Martin Luther King believed that voting would provide black race with a political capacity that would bring their freedom and rights.

II.3.3 Selma March

“When efforts to register voters in Deep South in the early 1960s provoked a violent backlash, a protest march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama was organized in March 1965” (Coleman,3). “In Selma,” King wrote, “we see a classic pattern of disenfranchisement typical of the Southern Black Belt areas where Negroes are in the majority” (King, “Selma—The Shame and the Promise”). It was a symbol expressed unfair justice of government when they excluded blacks from voting and applied racial segregation terrifyingly and violently. 335 adults succeeded in registering themselves on the electoral rolls. Perhaps it was a sign to make blacks revolt for the aim of achieving voting rights. The governor of Alabama, Wellace was a Democratic Party racist and did not hide that by saying: Separation and discrimination today, Separation and discrimination tomorrow, Separation and discrimination forever. Selma event raised a wave of insurgency in all countries. It ended up by breaking out violently by the National Guard. Marchers have been chased and hit by batons. The Marche indicate to draw one common aim that all blacks shared which was denying voting on account of race because it was stripped from many African Americans.

II.3.4 The Major Achievements of the Civil Rights Movement

After several protests and long struggle toward achieving a descent life for black Americans, the Civil Rights Movement could bring massive positive changes in many areas. It was not easy to reach such level through obstacles and disappointments they faced along the revolutionary road. The movement had perfectly organized the major steps toward actualizing equal voting right in particular. “The Civil Rights Movement ...made a progress in regaining the franchise for black voters by mid-century”

(Coleman, 3). Actually the government had finally passed very important acts were in favor of serving their demands, interests and more importantly improving their political conditions and states.

Table A3. Major civil rights legislation in United States

Name of legislation	Statutes at large	Date/ passed/ratified	Purposes	Subsequent history
Civil Rights Act of 1957	71stat. 634-38	September 9,1957	Provides additional penalties for interfering with voting rights; establishes U.S. Commission on Civil Right	
Civil Rights Act of 1960	74stat. 86-92	May6,1960	Provides criminal penalties for obstruction of court orders; permits federal inspection of voting	
Voting Rights Act of 1965	79stat. 437-46	August6,1965	Comprehensively regulates elections to enforce Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments; provides penalties for use of poll taxes and literacy tests	Extended and expanded by amendments in 1970, 1975, 1982,2006

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II.3.3.1 The 1957 Civil Right Act

President Dwight Eisenhower signed into law the Civil Right Act on 9th of September. It was an introductory episode to include the 1960 Civil Rights Act and the Voting Right Act of 1965. The act marked the first occasion since Reconstruction that the federal government undertook significant legislative action to protect civil rights⁵. These act played an important role in the US; it brought justice and satisfaction to blacks. It aimed to improve political participation of blacks and ensure their

⁵ <https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/research/online-documents/civil-rights-act-1957>

full rights to vote as any American citizens. The CRA of 1957 attempted to increase the number of registered black voters. Thus, the act was considered as a contributed factor toward achieving voting right. But the push for voting rights encountered a policy of delay, repression, and reprisals used by white southerners in this act.

II.3.3.2 The 1960 Civil Right Act

The 1960 Civil Right Act was passed toward the end of 1958, following the 1957 Civil Right Act. It was signed by President Eisenhower. As an introduction of penalties to levy against people who obstructed to prevent someone's to register to vote. In 1960 presidential election, voter turnout among African Americans was barely more than 20 percent nation (Jillson, 355). Though the act did little to improve black right in term of voting, the leaders of Civil Rights believed that the path was not easy at all, and problems were still existed. "The two extra Civil Rights Acts only added 03% black voters to the electoral roll for the 1960 election"(356). Which means the two acts did not prove voting rights in reality. The Civil Rights Act of 1957 and 1960 were criticized by African Americans activists, because they lead to violations of existing voting rights laws, and progress was very slow.

2.3.3.3 Passing the 1965 Voting Rights Act

"The ability to cast a ballot was seen as the foundation for political action that could create effective social change and would lead the advancement of a progressive agenda" (Guinier, 1991). Voting was greatly desired by African Americans throughout the Civil Rights Movement, because it would provide a potent opportunity for blacks all across the nation to vote. The desire was created to make political progress and change by having the right to vote and making an end to violence towards blacks. Struggle for equal voting right was long and hard to be reached, but as long as the spirit of resistance was at the height of its ferocity. It was not until 1965 when the government passed an act provided blacks Americans the right to participate in voting." Congress passed and President

Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, creating an extraordinary solution to Southern discrimination that consigned some states and municipalities to federal supervision. African Americans in Deep South would first gain voting right to vote” (Coleman, 3). The Voting Right Act was enacted on August 6, 1965. The passage of the Voting Rights Act eliminated discrimination in voting and registration. Its legislation empowered blacks’ ability in participating in elections and it prevented states from imposing qualification or practices to deny the right to vote on account of race. “It permitted direct federal intervention in the electoral process in certain places, required preclearance of new laws in covered states jurisdiction”(Weinblatt, 56). The act was established to ensure that blacks Americans would not be prohibited from voting on account of skin color. In fact, black voter’s registrations and participations increased dramatically shortly thereafter. The act showed its effects, it could summarize the whole aim of black revolution during years of struggle, hardship and sacrifices. They could have a political voice can be heard from people with positions of power; their demands became worthy to be claimed of.

2.3.3.4 Conclusion

During a long period in history, African Americans were a symbol of slavery and pillar of economic stability in the region. Until the coming of different generation who hold the flame of courage and insistence to face whites disfranchisement. This chapter puts the lights on the role of the Civil Rights Movement and its activists in the black revolution that fought for the rights to vote as a vital one. Thanks to the several acts that were passed, one can say that the Civil Rights Movement has participated in enhancing the position of many African Americans after enforcing government to pass the Voting Right Act in 1965.

Chapter Three

The Legacy of the Voting Right Act of
1965

3.1 Introduction

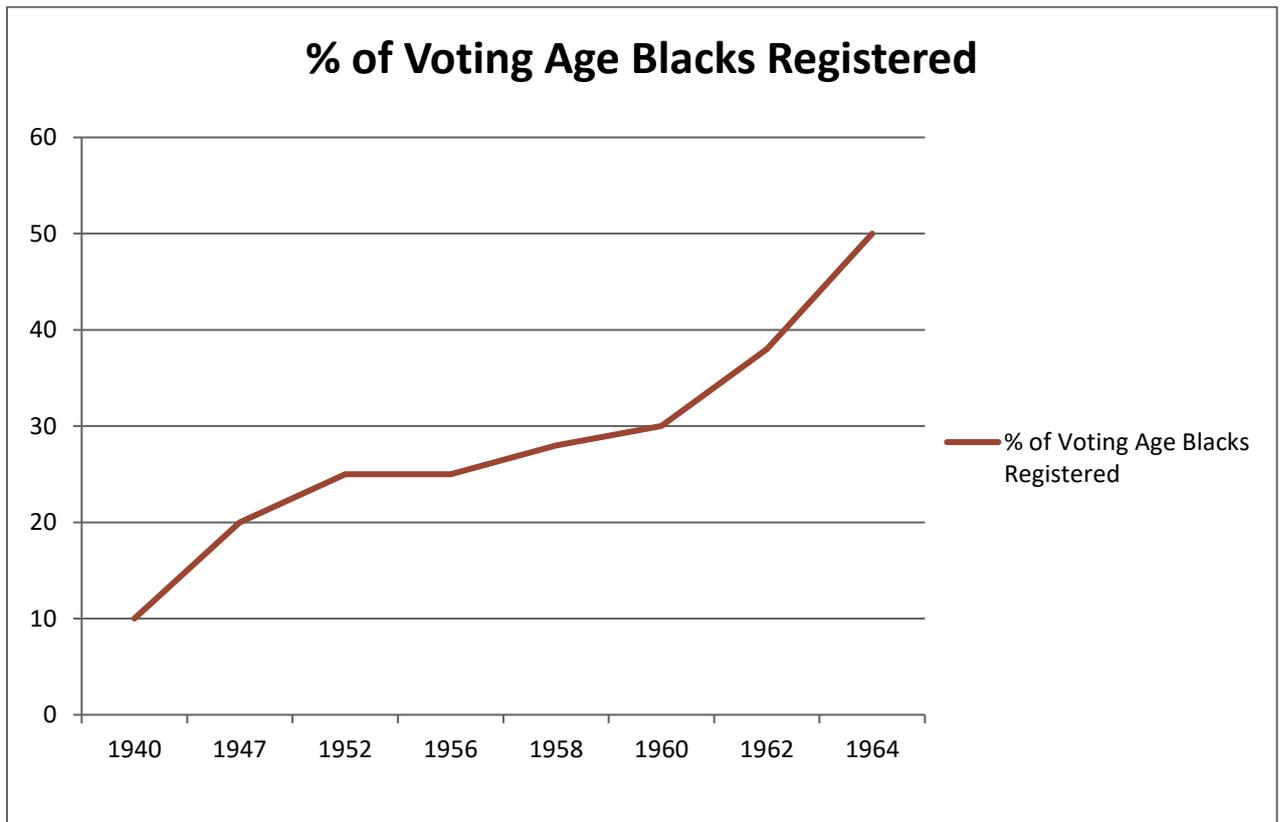
When liberty, equality, democracy and individualism ideas spread as new American commitment, a new political system was built under basics of fairness and justice. The rights of citizens- black in particular- was the major principle to achieve positive changes in society. There were many ways in which people came together to make radical changes in all areas of social life. Moreover, the full participation of every American citizen in elections was an ideal that has never been reached. Interest groups and social movements like the Civil Right Movement struggled for seeking much broader improvements in the way social, economic and political sides. “Americans have always been concerned about the effects of interests groups” (Jillson, 126). Thus, black who hold the flag of equality had caused much pressure on the political level; which pushed the government pass four major acts in the benefit of African Americans. One among the important acts was the Voting Right Act of 1965. There was no doubt that such an achievement was considered as a strong storm broke completely the old system and proved a lot. Its actual effects were very successful in the Deep South. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 offered African Americans a way to get around barriers at the state. The act significantly widened the franchise and is considered among the most far-reaching pieces of civil rights legislations in U.S. history.⁶

3.2 Black Voter Registration

Based on the table bellow which represents black voters’ participation before the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, African Americans voter registration was nearly nonexistent in the South. In 1940, 5 % of voting-age blacks were registered in Southern States. The rate of participation increased in 1957 and 1962 from 25% to 30%, and that return to the passage of the two important acts; the Civil Right Act of 1957 and the Civil Right Act of 1960 which they helped to improve blacks registrations to some extent. The lack of voters’ registration and participation in the South in particular was the result of societal discrimination and public policy effects.

⁶ <https://www.nritanica.com/event/Selma-March>

Figure 1:



Source: U.S. Commission on Civil Right. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2000.

3.2.1 Black Voter Registration before and During the Application of the VRA

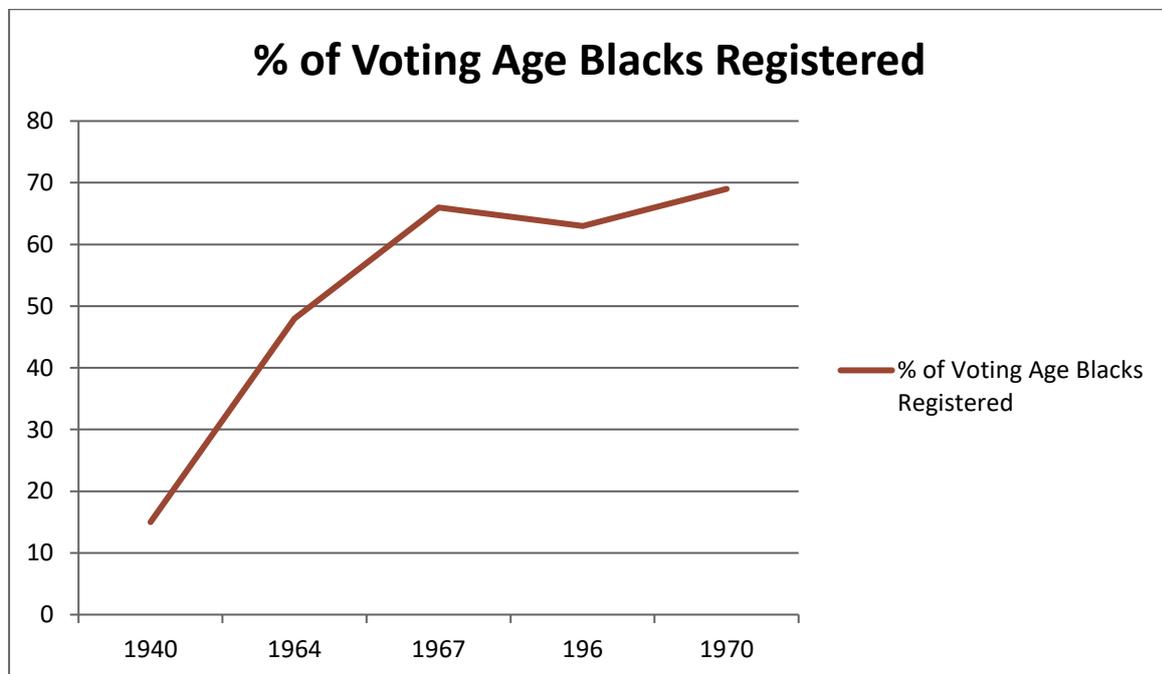
It was not until 1965, after the passage of the Voting Right Act, black voters registration gain a near 25% increase; when the rate surged from 50% to 57%. “It took years to increase some percentage points. But it took only six years after the act passage to surpass that total” (Weinblatt, 56). By 1970, black voters participation in the South increased to 66, 9%. Actually, this change was the result of the Voting Right Act. The act assured that local election officials permitted all citizens to register to vote. “By 1970, 10 million new black voters were on the rolls...Large numbers of registered black voters simply could not be ignored by politicians expecting to remain in office” (Jillson, 371). It was a huge success for the Civil Right Movement to achieve victory for black race in America when there was more than 1, 5 million voters increase. The act facilitated registration

Chapter Three The Legacy of the Voting Right Act of 1965

and eliminated injustice; it is clear that it was the most effective act in the history of black voting.

Even after the passage of the Civil Rights Acts and elimination of discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion or national origin, African Americans registered to vote at low rate. The Voting Right Act could break the old policy in managing voting in the United States and could provide African Americans with the legal ability to an unthreatened vote as well as the federal enforcement necessary to deter voter discrimination (Burgan, 12). Voting Rights Act was an exception in most of Civil Rights legislations. It had a significant and immediate impact on people's life.

Figure 2:



Source: U.S. Commission on Civil Right. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2000.

3.2.2 Black voter Registration, Pre and Post VRA

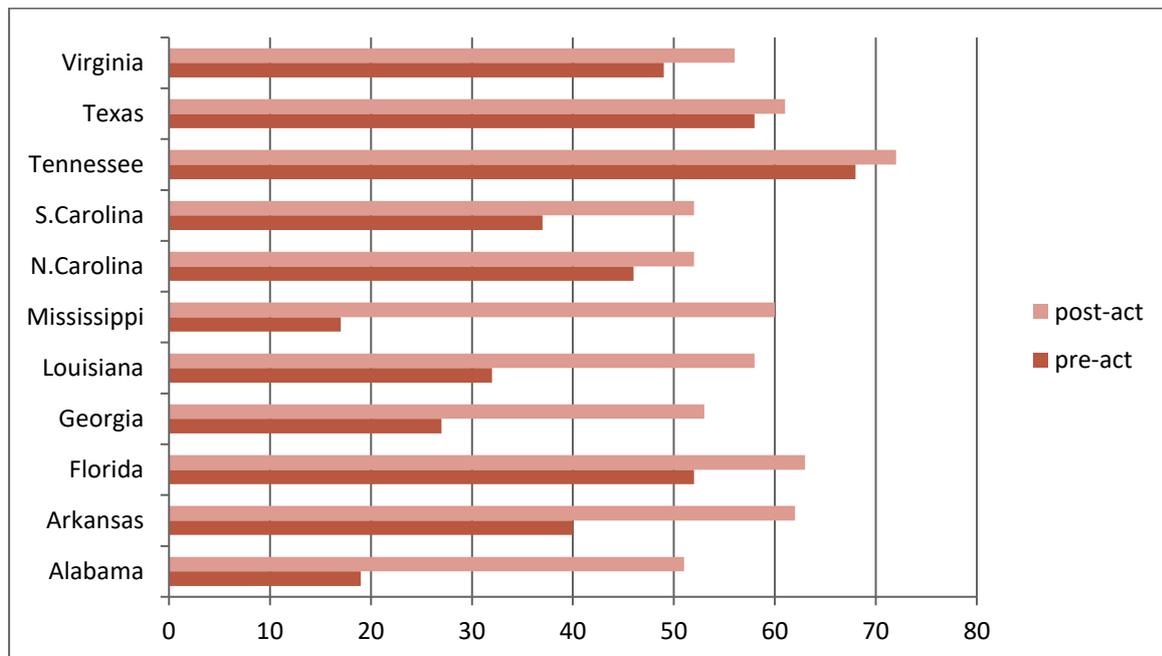
In these figures, some southern states are shown with the rate of blacks' participation within each state before and after the application of Voting Right Act. What is clear is that there is a remarkable change and improvement between the two voting registration. The pre Voting Right Act includes 1963 and 1964 voter level, while the post Voting Right Act includes registration from 1966 and

Chapter Three The Legacy of the Voting Right Act of 1965

1967. This graphic shows pre and post act changes, which embodied a drastic improvement in the percentage of registered black voters. In Georgia there was a 27, 4% registration rate, less than 4 years later, registration increased to a rate of 52,6%. It was because of blacks' desire and will to exercise their rights to vote as any American citizens. So, it is concluded that the act of 1965 proved the opportunity for African Americans to vote and the ability to use federal enforcement to prevent discrimination that was applied in southern states. "It is quite conclusive that as a result of the passage of 1965 Voting Rights Act, counties and states in which federal enforcement and examination was implemented, voting registration of African Americans increased"(Weinblatt, 59). The positive effect of the Voting Right Act legislation was clear in term of blacks' participation and registration. Its legacy went deeper after the passage of the act; voting registration rates in south states like Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama estimated to be around 57% to 67%. Voter registration for blacks was in continued increasing.

Percent of Registered Black Voters Out of All Eligible Black Voters

Figure 3:



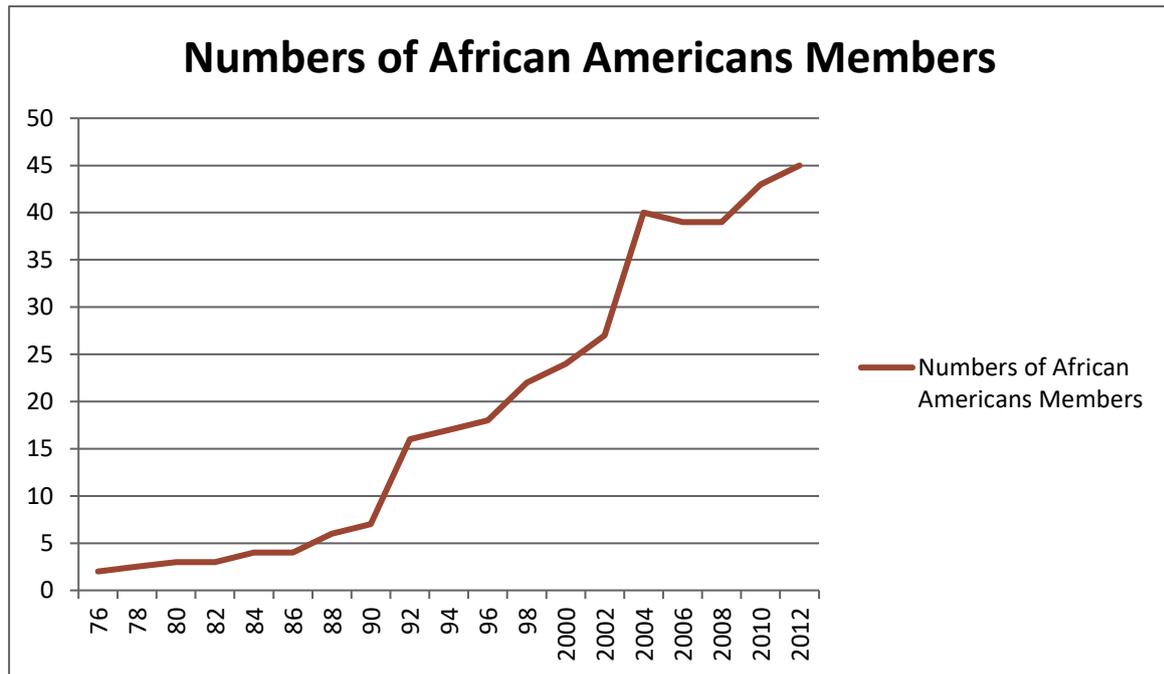
Source: U.S Commission on Civil Rights. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2000.

Chapter Three The Legacy of the Voting Right Act of 1965

3.3.3 Black Congressional Representation

The leaders of the Civil Rights Movement assured that the large number of registered black voters simply could not be ignored by politicians' policy by legislating the Voting Rights Act of 1965. They seized the opportunity to be a part of Americans government. Black congressional representation was permitted while African Americans were unable to vote; the reason which leaded them to elect black officials. The level of black congressional representation of today was the result of Civil Rights Movements efforts and victory. Leaders of the movement knew that "a Political improvement was a vehicle for mobilizing the black community, articulate a black social and economic agenda, and electing both authentic black and responsive white officials" (Guinier 1991). The presented graph shows the number of African Americans representation in congress from 1939 to 2012. The number of African Americans members of congress has seen a steady increase since the implementation of the voting rights legislation. As it is evident in the figure, by the 98th United States congress; African Americans members of congress reached 23. Representative James E.Clyburn, a democrat of South Carolina, served as the House majority whip in the 110th and 111th congress. John Lewis an individual responsible of the Civil Rights Movement progress has served as the Democratic senior chief deputy (Manning, 66). The acquisition of political power was one of the major objectives of civil rights leader. The number of African Americans members of Congress has seen obvious increase since the implementation of Voting Rights Act of 1965. In 2012 the number of African Americans members reaches its high peak of 44 members. By 2004 and 2012 "Organizations, campaigns and all of the major civil rights organizations developed projects to increase political participations during the 1960s". These pieces of legislation allowed black Americans to cast a ballot without fear, and share in the state's political system." There can be no doubt that the major increase in the registration of blacks" (Andrew, 63).

Figure 4:



Source: "The Impact of the Voting Rights Act on Black Representation in Southern State Legislatures"

3.3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented irregular and different rates of participations and registrations before and during the application of the Voting Right Act of 1965 to show the impact of the act on the political state of blacks. It has provided the results of this piece of legislation in making historical change in the United States. There is no doubt that the act improved a lot in having a positive impact, more particularly in the South. The Civil Rights Movement made an important progress in regaining the franchise for black voters.

General Conclusion

Conclusion

“The civil rights agenda of the 1950s and 1960s demanded equality of opportunity and nondiscrimination. These ideas were embedded...in the Voting Rights Act of the mid-1960s” (Jillson, 375). The civil rights legislation aimed at achieving equal social, economic and political rights. It was a challenge made by group interests and societal movement to help African Americans in many areas of their life conditions. Over time, their rights became a priority as people worked at all levels to enact constitutional amendments. Efforts and demands of Martin Luther King and his followers could achieve the most important right of voting which permitted black citizens to have the ability and liberty to be represented within the United States political system. African Americans have made progress since the 1960s in winning election to public office. The Voting Right Act of 1965 demanded by Civil Rights leaders is a success to the progress of the Civil Rights Movement. The passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 marked turning point in the civil rights movement. The movement had now achieved its two major legislative goals. Segregation had been outlawed and new federal laws were in place to protect voting rights. After 1965 the movement began to shift its focus. It began to pay more attention to achieving full social and economic equality for African Americans. As part of that effort, the movement turned its attention to the problems of African Americans trapped in poverty and living in ghettos. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was readopted and strengthened in 1970, 1975, and 1982.

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