People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

Hamma Lakhdar University of El-Oued

Faculty of Arts and Languages

Department of Arts and English Language

African Americans' Struggles for Voting Rights: From the Fifteenth Amendment to the Voting Rights Act of 1965

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of The Requirments For Master's Degree in Literature and Civlization

Submitted by:

LOGBI Fatma

LALA Nada

Supervised by :

Prof. GHEDEIR BRAHIM Mohmmed

Board of Examiners :

Dr. YOUMBAI Med Yacine	**President**	University of EL-Oued
Prof. GHEDEIR BRAHIM Mohammed	**Supervisor**	University of EL-Oued
Prof. NAOUA Mohammed	**Examiner**	University of EL-Oued

Academic year : 2025/2026

Dedication

We dedicate this research work to our parents, family members, colleagues and freinds.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we thank ***God Almighty*** for giving us willingness and strength to keep going to do this work.

We would like to express our sincere thanks and gratitude to our supervisor ***Prof. GHEDEIR BRAHIM Mohammed*** for his constant support and guidance.

We are very grateful to the jury members: Prof. NAOUA Mohammed and Dr. YOUMBAI Mohammed Yacine for accepting to review and evaluate this research work.

Abstract

This study traces back a hundred-years of African Americans struggle to claim their right to vote covering the century-long journey from the constitutional promise of the fifteenth Amendment in 1870 to the actual empowerment of voting Rights in 1965. The purpose is to investigate how constitutional protections were challenged over time and how decades of grassroots resistance eventually brought federal protection to the fight for voting rights. The study was conducted to present a comprehensive examination of the struggle's long-term continuity, rather than approaching Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement(s) as independent historical developments. Adopting qualitative research methodology, the study uses constitutional texts, congressional documents, historical newspapers, and scholarly works to examine three key phases of this history. The evidence indicates that the fifteenth Amendment was unable to secure substantive voting rights. Its limited language, together with discriminatory state laws such as poll taxes and literacy state, restricted judicial decisions that weakened federal enforcement, persistent violence and intimidation. These practices severely restricted Black Americans' ability to take part in the democratic process for generations. Decades of grassroots activism and collective resistance help to build the momentum for voting Rights Act of 1965, with Selma march and Bloody Sunday playing a significant role. This law ended unfair voting practices to allow more Black Americans to vote, marking the end of Jim Crow and the beginning of a new era of African American political participation, while demonstrating the importance of defending constitutional rights.

Key words: African Americans, Civil Rights Movement(s) , Fifteenth Amendement, Jim Crow, Voting Rights Act of 1965.

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

COFO	Council of Federated Organizations
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
DCVL	Dallas County Voters League
MFDP	Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NALO	National Association of Labor Organizations
NUL	National Urban League
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
U.S	United States
VRA	Voting Rights Act

List of Figures

Figure 1.1 Hiram Rhods Revels : The First U.S Senator in 1870 7

Figure 1.2 Blanche k. Bruce The First African American Served a Complete Six-Year Term 8

Table of Contents

Dedication ..... **I**

Acknowledgment ..... **II**

Abstract ..... **III**

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms ..... **IV**

List of Figures ..... **V**

Table of Contents ..... **VI**

General Introduction **1**

Chapter One

The Fifteenth Amendment and African American Disenfranchisement

Introduction **4**

1.1 The Adoption of the 15th Amendment: Promise and Compromise **4**

1.1.1 The Political and Constitutional Context (1866 -1870) 4

1.1.2 The Fifteenth Amendment 5

1.2 African American Political Participation During Reconstruction **6**

1.2.1 Election of Black officeholders at local, state, and federal levels 7

1.3 The Collapse of Reconstruction and the Rise of Discriminatory Laws **8**

1.3.1 State-Level Disenfranchisement Mechanisms 9

1.3.2 Mississippi Constitution of 1890 10

1.4 Judicial Nullification: Supreme Court Decisions that Undermined the 15th Amendment 10

1.4.1 United States v. Reese (1876) 10

1.4.2 United States v. Cruikshank (1876): Limiting Federal Enforcement Power 11

1.4.3 Williams v. Mississippi (1898): Upholding Facially Neutral Discriminatory Laws 11

1.4.4 The doctrine of state authority over voter qualifications 12

1.4.5 The court's role in enabling nearly a century of disenfranchisement 13

1.5 Violent Practices and Intimidation as Tools of Disenfranchisement 13

1.5.1 The Ku Klux Klan and Other White Supremacist Terrorist Organizations 14

1.5.2 Lynching and Physical Violence at Polling Places 14

1.5.3 Economic Coercion and Firing of Black Voters from Employment 15

1.5.4 Psychological Terror and the Destruction of Black Homes and Churches 16

1.5.5 The Failure of the Enforcement Acts to Provide Lasting Protection 16

1.6 Early Efforts to Resist Disenfranchisement 17

1.6.1 Grassroots Organizing Through Black Churches and Mutual Aid Societies 17

1.6.2 Petition Campaigns to Congress and State Legislatures 18

1.6.3 Early Legal Challenges (Pre-NAACP) Against Discriminatory Provisions 18

1.6.4 The Role of African American Newspapers and Orators in Exposing Disenfranchisement 18

1.6.5 Testimony Before Congressional Committees 19

1.6.6 The Founding Context of the Niagara Movement (1905) as a Precursor to Later Civil Rights Organizations 19

Conclusion 20

Chapter Two :

The Struggle For Voting Rights and The Act of Voting Rights of 1965

Introduction 21

1.1 The Legacy of Disenfranchisement and the Rise of Direct Action..... 21

1.1.1 Brief recap of the Jim Crow era and the persistence of discriminatory barriers that kept Black voters from the polls. 22

1.1.2 The shift from legal challenges to direct action and grassroots organizing as the primary strategy for achieving voting rights. 22

1.1.3 The emergence of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and its commitment to community-based voter registration in the Deep South 23

1.1.4 The role of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO)—a coalition of SNCC, CORE, NAACP, and SCLC—in coordinating voting rights efforts across Mississippi 24

2.1 Voter Registration Campaigns : Freedom Summer and Grassroots Organizing..... 24

2.1.1 Disenfranchisement in Mississippi and Early SNCC Initiatives (1961–1963) 25

2.2.2 COFO, Community Resistance, and the Planning of Freedom Summer 25

2.2.3 Activist Repression, Political Challenge, and National Impact 26

2.3 Mass Protests and the Selma Campaign 27

2.3.1 Direct Action and the Crisis on Bloody Sunday 27

2.3.2 Strategic Escalation from Turnaround Tuesday to the Federalized March 28

2.3.4 Coalition Leadership and National Momentum for Federal Action 28

2.4 The Federal Involvement 29

2.4.1 President Kennedy's Address and the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom..... 29

2.4.2 The Inadequacy of Previous Civil Rights Legislation..... 30

2.4.3 President Johnson's Response to the Selma Crisis 30

2.5 The Voting Rights Act of 1965: Provisions and Passage 31

2.5.1 The Suspension of Literacy Tests and Federal Examiners 31

2.5.2 The Preclearance Requirement and Challenge to Poll Taxes 32

2.5.3 Passage Through Congress and Signing into Law 32

2. 6 The Immediate Impact of the Voting Rights Act 33

2.6.1 Dramatic Increases in Black Voter Registration 33

2.6.2 The Beginning of a New Era of African American Political Participation 34

Conclusion 34

General Conclusion 37

Refrences 40

ملخص 46

General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

African Americans and people fighting for their voting rights. From the Fifteenth Amendment to the passage of the Voting Rights Act, nearly a century of struggle saw their hopes dashed by discriminatory laws designed to deny them from their rights. The Fifteenth Amendment fundamentally changed the U.S. Constitution by prohibiting the denial of voting rights to African Americans. During Reconstruction Era the number of African American voters reached 700,000, and for the first time it enable Black men to hold political office. For instance, Hiram Revels and Blanche K. Bruce becoming the first African Americans elected to the U.S. Senate. However, the Reconstruction soon collapsed and the disenfranchisement of Black Americans returned, as the withdrawal of federal troops from the Confederate states paved the way for white dominance in the southern states. Due to the loopholes of the 15th Amendment the Southern States enacted systematic discriminatory laws to disenfranchise Black Americans such as literacy tests, poll taxes, and grandfather clauses.

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (n.d.). Racial and ethnic tensions in American communities: Poverty, inequality, and discrimination (Vol. VII: The Mississippi Delta Report).

U.S. Senate. (n.d.). Senate stories: Civil War and Reconstruction.

The Civil Rights Movement played a major role in the struggle of African Americans for the voting rights. Even with the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and 1964 they were not enough to prevent the deeply entrenched racial discrimination. Moreover, the events of the Selma march on “Bloody Sunday” sparked widespread public outrage, prompting President Lyndon B. Johnson to intervene and direct Congress to enact legislation for implementing the Fifteenth Amendment and repealing laws that denied Black Americans their rights. In 1965, the Voting Rights Act was passed, abolishing literacy tests and ball taxes that had been required for African Americans to vote. It also required prior approval of all laws passed by the states and

mandated the presence of observers during voter registration. Ultimately, the implementation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 secured the right to vote for African Americans.

National Archives. (2016, August 15). Congress and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. https://www.archives.gov

2. Statement of the Problem

From 1865 to 1965 the African Americans faced several obstacles. Although the Fifteenth Amendment promised Black Americans voting rights, it remained largely unfulfilled. Even with the constitutional guarantees, loopholes existed and exploited. Not only that, but the Court's lenient interpretation of the Fifteenth Amendment's provisions also narrowed the scope of protection. Despite the continued struggles of Black Americans through various resistance strategies and the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, African Americans faced persistent challenges in protecting their right to vote.

3. Research questions

This research seeks to find answers to the following questions

1. Did the wording of the Fifteenth Amendment contribute to the emergence of systemic discriminatory laws and the disenfranchisement of Black voters voting rights ?

2. How did voter registration campaigns and mass protests contribute to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the increase in African American voter turnout ?

4. Research Aim(s)

This research aims to explore the struggles of Black Americans for their voting rights from the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

5. Methodology

This study employs the qualitative approach. It relied on official sources such as constitutional texts, Congressional documents, as well as political newspapers and historians. This research highlighted three key phases: the Reconstruction era, Jim Crow era, and the Civil Rights Movement to investigate the struggle of African Americans for voting rights.

6. Significance of the Study

The importance of this research lies in its comprehensive examination of the century-long struggle of African Americans for voting rights, rather than addressing each stage separately. All the information in this research has been gathered from sources that explored each period independently. This study also provides a historical perspective and a deeper understanding of contemporary events surrounding voting rights.

7. Research Structure

This study was organized in two chapters. The first chapter examines in the topic of "The Fifteenth Amendment and African Americans Disenfranchisement". It focuses on the beginning of the voting rights for the Black Americans during reconstruction and the restriction of them by using various mechanisms. The second chapter deals with "The Struggle for The Voting Rights and Voting Rights Act of 1965". It highlights the renewed fight that led to the passage of the voting rights act to protect the Black Americans' rights.

CHAPTER ONE

The Fifteenth Amendment and African American Disenfranchisement

Chapter One: The Fifteenth Amendment and African American Disenfranchisement

Introduction

The Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was the most important event in the nation's history as President Ulysses S. Grant described it. It fulfilled the hopes of African American men, as Frederick Douglass famously declared "We have all we asked, and more than we expected" (The New York Times, 2020, para. 4). In the beginning, this amendment seemed to fulfilled all the promise, and grant Black men the right to vote and equality, as it prevented their disenfranchisement based on race, color, or the legacy of slavery. However, this did not last long, and many Southern states worked to deny African Americans their right to vote through racist practices designed to make it more difficult for them to obtain these rights. For instance, poll taxes, literacy tests, and grandfather clauses. This was done to ensure white supremacy through the political manipulation of the Fifteenth Amendment, relying on systematic laws that deprived African Americans of their rights. All of these was with the approval of the Supreme Court.

This chapter argues that while the Fifteenth Amendment initially granted African Americans full voting rights and equality, legislators worked to deprive them in various ways in order to keep them away from the ballot boxes.

1.1 The Adoption of the 15th Amendment: Promise and Compromise

The demand for the Fifteenth Amendment was not born of a fleeting political moment, but rather was a result of an accumulation of sharp political and constitutional events witnessed during the reconstruction era.

1.1.1 The Political and Constitutional Context (1866 -1870)

After the civil war, the South was completely devastated, and despite all those losses, this war had positive results as it abolished slavery and worked to embody freedom and equality.

Lincoln proposed granting Black people the right to vote, but he certainly wouldn't have allowed illiterate Black people to do so. Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's successor, adopted a more lenient Reconstruction policy, which was met with fierce opposition from Radicals and Congress. Indeed, Andrew Johnson was a staunch defender of white rights, and his plan excluded African Americans from any political representation, leaving the decision to the Southern states. In late 1865, Southern states rushed to enact racist laws known as "Black Codes," which were cleverly designed to perpetuate slavery. These laws included mandatory annual work contracts and land ownership restricted to whites only…etc

However, in 1867, the Reconstruction Act extended voting rights to Black people after the U.S. Congress made the ratification of the 14th Amendment as a condition for accepting the Southern states into the Union. As a result, that year, Black people constituted the majority of registered voters compared to registered white people, with their number reaching 700,000, but most Black people in the North remained without a vote. After the Southern states ratified the 14th Amendment, it became officially recognized on July 28, 1868. However, the practical application of this amendment was disappointing due to the explicit denial of voting rights to Black Americans. This was an impetus that led to enacting the 15th Amendment to protect voting rights.

1.1.2 The Fifteenth Amendment

It was enacted by Congress on February 26, 1869, and ratified by three-quarters of the states on February 3, 1870. The Fifteenth Amendment of the American Constitution fulfilled promises that made to African Americans, as it stipulated that: “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” (U.S. Const. amend. XV, § 1) and “The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.” (U.S. Const. amend. XV, § 2). This amendment guaranteed the right of Black men to vote and prohibited

racial discrimination based on three specific grounds While also providing constitutional protection. Although the Fifteenth Amendment was the result of a struggle which met its demands initially, but its weak wording and negative phrasing led to its ineffectiveness. It ignored women's right to vote and lacked strong provisions to protect the laws. consequently, this amendment remained merely a formality, as its interpretation was manipulated to enact laws restricting the voting -rights of African Americans.

1.2 African American Political Participation During Reconstruction

During Reconstruction, the Freedmen's Bureau was tasked with overseeing the electoral process in the Southern states, including organizing and updating voter registration lists. On May 1, 1867, Circular No. 9 was issued, directing all eligible free citizens to begin registering to vote and emphasizing that "they should disregard all threats or undue influence tending to prevent or restrain the same" (U.S. Capitol Visitor Center, n.d.). Before this campaign began, the percentage of eligible Black male voters registered was less than 0.5% and by the end of that year, it had risen to 80.5%, largely due to campaigns by activists in the South to educate freedmen in schoolyards and church meetings.

With the widespread granting of voting rights, the U.S Commission on Civil Rights recorded staggering numbers of African Americans on the voter rolls, exceeding 700,000 within a single year. In this context, Harper's Weekly reported on September 28, 1867, that approximately 735,000 freed slaves had registered to vote in the Confederate states. This was an unprecedented turnout in American history. For instance, Virginia registered 105,832 African Americans, representing 90% of the electorate. Similarly, Alabama registered 104,518 African Americans, compared to 61,295 white voters. Mississippi also registered 79,176 Black men. Furthermore, freed men constituted 70% of the electorate in Georgia. As they also formed a majority in Louisiana and Texas. On October 22, 1867, more than 90,000 African American voters cast their ballots to elect delegates to the state's Constitutional Convention in Virginia.

1.2.1 Election of Black officeholders at local, state, and federal levels

According to historian Eric Foner during the Reconstruction era of 1865–1877, over 1,500 Black men held political office. Additionally, with the expansion of voting rights in the Southern states, African Americans began voting and running for office in state, legislative, and national elections. As they formed a majority in some of these states. For example, between 1869 and 1901, Mississippi elected three African Americans to Congress and 64 to legislators. During that period, the African Americans achieved significant accomplishments by electing two Black men.

In 1868, Hiram Rhodes Revels played a crucial role as a delegate to the Mississippi Republican Convention. He achieved significant gains for the Freedmen in terms of representation and equality, and he worked to end racial segregation. In 1870, he made history, reaching the peak of his success. That year, he was elected by the Mississippi Legislature as the first African American to the Senate, where he served from 1870 to 1871. After his term ended, he served as president of Alcorn University for African American students.

Figure 1.1 Hiram Rhods Revels : The First U.S Senator in 1870



In addition, Blanche K. Bruce was born into slavery and later moved to Mississippi, where he acquired considerable land and served as a local official. He was elected by the legislature to the U.S. Senate from 1875 to 1881, and he served a complete six year term. On February 14, 1879, Blanche K. Bruce presided over the Senate, becoming the first African American who was

formerly enslaved to do so. After that, no Black man served in the Senate until Edward Brooke's election nearly a century later.

Figure 1.2 Blanche k. Bruce The First African American Served a Complete Six-Year Term



1.3 The Collapse of Reconstruction and the Rise of Discriminatory Laws

The Compromise of 1877 marked the end of the Reconstruction era. It was an informal political agreement between Southern Democrats and allies of Republican Rutherford Hayes to settle the results of the 1876 presidential election. This partisan conflict centered on the three states that had remained under Republican control since the end of the Civil War. While Congress debated the results with a bipartisan committee, Hayes's allies held secret meetings with moderate Democrats to negotiate his victory. the Democrats agreed to recognize the Republican candidate's victory in exchange for the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, thus returning Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina to Democratic control and officially ending the Reconstruction era.

The Compromise of 1877 had dire consequences, as it dashed all hopes for the reconstruction of the South and the protection of the civil and political rights of African Americans there. The withdrawal of all federal troops from the southern states also strengthened the white Democrats and disenfranchised black voters. As Henry Adams, a black Louisianan,

lamented, “The whole South—every state in the South—had gotten into the hands of the very men that held us as slaves.” (Adams, 1951, p.715).

1.3.1 State-Level Disenfranchisement Mechanisms

Following the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1870, which granted African Americans the right to vote. Southern states was used this Amendment to serve "white supremacy" by denying them this right. They enacted a series of laws and procedures known as Jim Crow laws, which were systematically designed to discriminate against Black people. These laws were not merely symbolic according to ‘Our Unfinished March’, “It was enforced with broken bones and crushed skulls, with rope wrapped around trees and knots tied around necks, with bodies displayed in town squares or made to disappear at the bottom of rivers” (Holder and Kopelman, 2022). They included poll taxes, laws exempting convicts from voting, literacy tests, laws disenfranchising convicts, and white primaries.

At that time, when poverty was rampant and illiteracy rates were high among Black people, Southern states introduced the poll taxes as one of the first measures to disenfranchise African Americans. This tax required Black voters to pay fees to vote, which was prohibitively expensive due to their limited income. Furthermore, literacy tests were imposed, which routinely passed white voters while causing Black voters, even those with basic education, they failed. Moreover, the Grandfather Clause disenfranchised Black Americans whose ancestors had not voted before 1867, due to their enslavement at the time. Additionally, white primary elections were another example of this oppressive system, effectively denying African Americans any say in choosing their representatives. This began with the Democratic primaries in Mississippi and spread to other Southern states, where the party faced no real competition, thereby ensuring easy victories for Democratic nominees.

1.3.2 Mississippi Constitution of 1890

In 1890, Mississippi adopted a new constitution aimed at disenfranchising Black people and restoring the white supremacy as the Senator James K. Vardaman declared, “Mississippi’s constitutional convention of 1890 was held for no other purpose than to eliminate the Black people from politics.” (Mississippi Today, 2024). The 1890 Mississippi Convention sought to circumvent the Fifteenth Amendment, which granted voting rights to African Americans. Many other Southern states followed Mississippi's lead in excluding Black people from the ballot box. These measures had a devastating impact, and it led to reducing the number of Black voters. In Mississippi alone, their numbers plummeted from over 130,000 to less than 1,300. While, in Virginia, they constituted only 15% of the electorate. In Alabama and Mississippi, their representation fell to less than 2%. Ultimately, this constitution achieved its goal of depriving Black people of all their rights.

1.4 Judicial Nullification: Supreme Court Decisions that Undermined the 15th Amendment

1.4.1 United States v. Reese (1876)

United States v. Reese (1874) was the Supreme Court's initial structural reduction of constitutional guarantees in the Reconstruction era. As a result of Kentucky election officials including Hiram Reese, refused to receive and count the votes of an African American citizen, under the Enforcement Act of 1870, the Court canceled sections 3 and 4 of the statute. In an article written on behalf of the majority, Chief Justice Morrison Waite adopted a purely literal and restrictive textual interpretation ,he ruled that the Fifteenth Amendment does not grant any citizens a positive right to vote, but only guarantees immunity against discrimination based explicitly on “race, color, or previous condition of servitude”.

By declaring that Congress exceeded its constitutional mandate by enacting penal sanctions against electoral interference, that failed to identify explicitly the racist motive in the legal text, Reese severely restricted Congress's power under Section 2 of the Amendment. As

legal historians such as Eric Foner and Pamela S. Karlan noted, this narrow structure effectively separated federal protection from practical voter management mechanisms, which led to the creation of a legal scheme for Southern state legislators to design non-racial mechanisms circumventing federal oversight.

1.4.2 United States v. Cruikshank (1876): Limiting Federal Enforcement Power

The decision issued on the same day as Reese, United States v. Cruikshank, significantly weakened federal civil rights enforcement following the Colfax Massacre of 1873. In the Cruikshank case, the Court overturned federal convictions of white paramilitaries who killed dozens of Black Freedmen in Louisiana. Chief Justice Morrison Waite formulated a strict interpretation of state action doctrine, considering that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments only restricted the work of the state government, not private armed violence or conspiratorial terrorism. Accordingly, the Court ruled that the right to peaceful assembly and the right to vote in local elections are not federal constitutional rights protected against private interference, and delegated the protection of the physical integrity and political rights of Freedmen to state authorities complicit in their repression.

Legal scholars, including Michael G. Klarman and Richard H. Biles, assert that by stripping the federal government of its authority and the law enforcement laws to prosecute private political violence, Cruikshank effectively enabled racial terrorism and dismantled the federal law enforcement agency needed to support Black suffrage.

1.4.3 Williams v. Mississippi (1898): Upholding Facially Neutral Discriminatory Laws

The Supreme Court ended its constitutional approval to deny Jim Crow the right to vote in Williams v. Mississippi. Henry Williams, an African American man charged with murder by an all-white grand jury, challenged the suffrage provisions of the Mississippi Constitution of 1890,

specifically literacy tests and poll tax requirements, arguing that they were deliberately designed to disenfranchise Black citizens in violation of the 14th and 15th Amendments.

Giving his opinion for a unanimous court opinion, Justice Joseph McKenna, acknowledged that the Mississippi Constitution Convention sought to restrict the right to vote, but he believed that since the legal text did not explicitly mention race, the provisions were constitutionally permissible. The Court justified that the administrative discretion granted to local registrars was apparently neutral, ignoring overwhelming evidence and comprehensive and racially discriminatory implementation. As historian Alexander Keyssar points out, Williams established jurisprudence on intentional clouding. This provided constitutional legitimacy to the Mississippi plan and signaled to the Southern state that ostensibly neutral devices could be employed to systematically eliminate Black voters without federal judicial intervention.

1.4.4 The doctrine of state authority over voter qualifications

A key element of the Supreme Court's constitutional foundation during this era was the lifting of state sovereignty over electoral organization, grounded in Article □, Section 2, and Article □, Section 1 of the U.S. Constitution. Through a series of post-Reconstruction rulings, the Court established the doctrine that primary authority over voter qualification lies essentially within state legislature, and formulated federal constitutional amendments. As merely negative restrictions rather than positive grants of federal regulatory authority, this federalist difference allowed states to place complex administrative hurdles, including grandfather clauses, and literacy clauses, poll taxes, and white primaries, under the guise of regulating state civil health, voter efficiency by separating state police power from federal civil rights mandates, the judiciary allowed local jurisdictions to weaponize qualification standards against Black voters while isolating state legal schemes from strict federal judicial scrutiny.

1.4.5 The court's role in enabling nearly a century of disenfranchisement

Reese, Cruickshank ,Williams collectively demonstrate how the systematic narrowing of constitutional by the judiciary dismantled the transformative potential of the 15th Amendment. This has enabled states to disenfranchise African American nearly a century. Across the American South, instead of acting as a bulwark against majority tyranny and constitutional subversion, the Supreme Court's effort as a factor of judicial retreat from Reconstruction resulted in destroying the legal protections provided by Congress and legitimized state-level disenfranchisement schemes. The structural vacuum created by these decisions continued until the mid-20th century, when the federal judiciary began to reverse course with decisions such as Smith v. Allwright (1944) and Terry v. Adams (1953), which eventually reached its peak in Congress passing the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The historical trajectory(1876 -1965) , shows that voting was suppressed at the state level, relied mainly on the deliberate case law of the Supreme Court's inaction and textual evasion, which subjected constitutional equality to regional political reorganization.

1.5 Violent Practices and Intimidation as Tools of Disenfranchisement

Although the Reconstruction, Modification, and Enforcement Acts exhibited the government's commitment to the multiracial democracy, a coordinated campaign of extrajudicial violence and terrorization had, in fact, eroded these achievements. This section demonstrates how white nationalists systematically prevented Blacks from participating in politics by using a combination of economic punishment and psychological intimidation, and physical violence. This effectively neutralized rights granted on paper. Ultimately, the report claims that while federal legislation provided temporary oversight of these violations, the failure to maintain implementation allowed this violence counterrevolution to succeed in restoring white political dominance.

1.5.1 The Ku Klux Klan and Other White Supremacist Terrorist Organizations

The most visible organized agents for this violent counterrevolution are white supremacist groups most notable “Ku Klux Klan “as well as organizations such as “the Knights of the White Camelia”. These groups operated as terrorist organizations with the explicit political purpose of overthrowing Republican state governments and disenfranchise men their right to vote. The most comprehensive basic evidence of their activities comes from the Joint Select Committee to Investigate the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States, known as the Ku Klux Klan hearings)1871 to 1872).

Testimonies collected by Congress revealed a coordinated campaign of murder, flogging, and political assassination, aimed to neutralize the political participation of Black men. As the historian Sean Lee Alexander referred in his edited collection of these hearings, the Klan functioned as an insurrectionary force, targeting systematically the Republican leaders, both Black and white, with the intention of “restoring Democratic control through terror” (Alexander, 2015, p. 12). The organizational structure to these groups, and their use for disguises and night raids, and its explicit political speech, was a deliberate political army's waging into a counterinsurgency against Reconstruction government.

1.5.2 Lynching and Physical Violence at Polling Places

Physical violence was more concentrated and strategically prevalent during election seasons, when Black voters' presence at polling stations became a direct challenge to white supremacy. Lynching- extrajudicial murder by mob-, was not used as punishment for alleged crimes only, rather it used proactively as mean of political deterrence.

The Eufaula, Alabama, massacre of November 3, 1874, served as a paradigmatic case. According to research conducted by the Equal Justice Initiative, white mobs in Eufaula attacked Black citizens, those who gathered to vote, leading to the deaths of many Black residents and the effective suppression of Republican votes in Barbour County.

Polling stations became sites of terrorism, where armed white mobs assaulted Black voters overtly, confiscate their ballots, or forcibly expel them with weapons. The testimony of Abram Colby, a Georgia state legislator, before the hearings of the Klan, illustrate this dynamic vividly; Colby recounted how brutally he was dragged from his home by masked men, explicitly informed he was being punished for his political activities and his efforts to encourage Black voting. Such testimonies confirm physical violence at polling stations was incidental. Rather, it was central to white supremacist strategy of nullifying the Fifteenth Amendment.

1.5.3 Economic Coercion and Firing of Black Voters from Employment

During Reconstruction, economic coercion emerged as a major tool, alongside physical assault, to disenfranchise Black citizens their rights. Because most freed people worked as agricultural laborers or sharecroppers, they were highly dependent on white landowners and employers, who exploited their weakness in two ways; Expulsion of individual workers because of their political activity and cutting off job opportunities on a larger scale for Black Republican-leaning communities.

The Klan hearing testimonies recorded many cases of Black workers being told their jobs depended on their political choices. A legal testimony from Demopolis, Alabama, described white employers firing Black workers who registered to vote or attended Republican meetings, resulting in impoverishment of whole families. Looking back in 1901, the Atlantic Magazine noted that farmers "withdrew all employment from their enemies," (William, 1901) turning freedmen’s economic dependence into a political weapon.

This tactic was particularly effective because it worked through legal, property, and labor relations, making it difficult to prosecute voters federally, while still forcing Black voters to choose between their livelihoods and their voting rights.

1.5.4 Psychological Terror and the Destruction of Black Homes and Churches

Klan violence had gone beyond physical and economic harm to form a broader strategy of psychological terror aiming at undermining Black communities' sense of safety and collective political agency. Night rides, arson of Black homes, and attacks on churches and schools aimed to spread pervasive fear. Churches were particularly targeted because they served as a central hub of Black community life and political organization.

The Black press was also a target. The Equal Justice Initiative documented that Opelousas, Louisiana, 1868 massacre included the deliberate destruction of the St. Landry Progress newspaper printing press, a pro-Republican newspaper, indicating that the rise of Black political expression was a central goal.

This terror became more powerful due to the fact that the local law enforcement was either complicit or unable to act. Henry Giles's testimony before the Klan hearings, Black families who lived in constant fear that any political activities could lead to violent retaliation against their homes and families. Ultimately, this terror campaign designed to isolate Black individuals from their communities and from the state protection, transforming voting from a civil act into an extraordinary dangerous undertaking.

1.5.5 The Failure of the Enforcement Acts to Provide Lasting Protection

The Enforcement Acts (1870 -1871) granted the federal government expansive authority to suppress Klan violence, criminalizing voter intimidation and allowing the use of military force. It worked at first, leading to numerous convictions, and the Klan was largely broken by the mid-1870s.

However, the protection proved short-lived due to three factors. United States v. Cruikshank, 1876, undermined the act's legal basis by ruling that the 15th Amendment did not cover private conspiracies. The economic depression of 1873 shifted national attention to economic concerns. And the Compromise of 1877 ended Reconstruction by withdrawing federal

forces from the South. Goldman claims the withdrawal of troops allowed for a return to violent disenfranchisements under “ Redemption”.

Although the Enforcement Acts were never repealed, it became unenforceable as the nation lost interest in the Southern question, allowing physical coercion, economic retaliation, and psychological intimidation to succeed once their legal counterweight disappeared.

1.6 Early Efforts to Resist Disenfranchisement

The rollback of a black voting rights after Reconstruction faced a sustained resistance through institutions, legal advocacy, journalism, and political testimonies, which, despite its failure to stop Jim Crow, laid the foundation for later organizations such as the NAACP.

1.6.1 Grassroots Organizing Through Black Churches and Mutual Aid Societies

The Black church and the Mutual Aid Society formed the foundational basis for early resistance to disenfranchisements, parallelly developing structures during the pre-Civil War and early Reconstruction periods. Besides being purely spiritual or charitable, these institutions worked on developing political awareness and organizing collective action. This tradition of self-help as political resistance dates back to the founding documents such as the Free African Societies' 1787 charter, created by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, which developed mutual aid, caring the sick and orphans, and widows as an act of building Black institutions independent of a hostile state. By the post-Reconstruction period, mutual aid networks arose to become organizations capable of mobilizing voters, spreading information, and financing legal challenges. Black churches played a parallel role, serving as an unofficial headquarter for the resistance by providing space for meeting, communication channels, and moral authority. This grassroots infrastructure was particularly important because it existed outside white political control, giving African Americans a degree of Organizational independence unavailable within official political institutions.

1.6.2 Petition Campaigns to Congress and State Legislatures

From the earliest days of republic, African Americans employed the constitutional right of petition as a recurring tool for defending civil rights, especially during the disenfranchisement era. One of the key examples include the 1780 Dartmouth, Massachusetts petition, which linked taxpayer status and Revolutionary War service to voting rights. The 1797 petition submitted to Congress by four free Black men. Perhaps the most impressive example was the 1838 “Appeal of Forty Thousand citizens” in Pennsylvania, which developed a model for public signature, constitutional appeals, and public opinion campaigns. By 1890s, Black communities in states like Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina used petitions to formally protest disenfranchisement laws. Although these campaigns rarely changed the legislative results, it left behind documented evidence of systematic voter suppression.

1.6.3 Early Legal Challenges (Pre-NAACP) Against Discriminatory Provisions

Before NAACP organized legal campaigns in the 1930s-40s, African American prosecutors and lawyers were already challenging discriminatory voting laws through state courts and federal courts. These early cases argued that poll taxes, literacy tests, grandfather clauses, and similar neutral provisions violate the fourteenth and fifteenth Amendments by concealing racial discrimination. Many cases had failed often due to procedural barriers or restrictive Supreme Court rulings like United States v. Reese, 1876, and Giles v. Harris, 1903 However, these efforts have built a foundation of legal precedent and arguments, while also producing trial records documenting discriminatory practices.

1.6.4 The Role of African American Newspapers and Orators in Exposing Disenfranchisement

Before the advent of mass electronic media, the Black press was the main channel to expose the Black community's disenfranchisement. Papers like The Advocate (Winter Park, Florida) and The Twin-City American (Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota), functioning as the

“race journals”, provided extensive reports on racial discrimination, mob violence, and loss of political rights, linking disenfranchisement to the broader climate of racist terrorism, including lynching.

These papers also provided a platform for Black preachers and writers and continued a tradition from Frederick Douglass to the Niagara Movement, whose speeches and articles reached black readers nationally. Together, this press network formed a counter public sphere, an independent space where African Americans could criticize and organize against disenfranchisement away from white editorial control.

1.6.5 Testimony Before Congressional Committees

Congressional testimony was another form of resistance, granting a direct platform to document electoral violence, fraud, and discrimination. Benjamin Singleton, a former slave and leader of Exoduster movement, testified before a Senate committee in 1880, describing economic pressures that drives the migration of blacks to the North and the disenfranchisement making Southern political life unacceptable. Such testimonies placed disenfranchisements in the federal record, provided the advocates with evidences to cite, and allowed African Americans to express their grievances directly to federal authorities. Likewise, hearings on Mississippi's disenfranchisement scheme resulted in detailed testimony revealing its deliberate and systematic design. This was confirmed by contemporary press reports, including a Yorkville Inquirer report in 1895, citing a politician who admitted that the plan's goal was to eliminate Black votes.

1.6.6 The Founding Context of the Niagara Movement (1905) as a Precursor to Later Civil Rights Organizations

By the early 1900s, activists realized that scattered efforts, petitions, litigation, press, couldn't match the forces of disenfranchisement and white supremacy , leading to the founding of the Niagara Movement in 1905, dedicated to manly agitation for full rights. The Declaration

of Principles, drafted mainly by Du Bois and Trotter, rejected Booker T. Washington's adjustment policy and demanded the restoration of suffrage as non-negotiable.

The movement's constitution and by-laws of 1905 established a formal structure for sustained political action across the states. Although short-lived and absorbed into the NAACP by 1910, the Niagara Movement marked a decisive shift from widespread popular resistance to centralized and professional organization of civil rights, combining legal challenges, political agitation, and public protest in a strategy that preceded subsequent NAACP campaign. It served as a bridge between the traditions of resistance in the 19th century and the modern rights movement.

Conclusion

This chapter traces the voting rights of Blacks since the Reconstruction's promise until their systematic dismantling under Jim Crow. The Fifteenth Amendment was undermined by a three-part mechanism: discriminatory laws like poll taxes, literacy tests; judicial deference, federal courts refused to intervene; and extrajudicial violence, lynching and terrorism, imposing white supremacy at the polls. However, resistance continued through litigation, organizing, and protesting, although early efforts failed. As historian Richard Valley claims, the collapse of Reconstruction was not inevitable. Rather, it was the result of a deliberate political counterrevolution that briefly shut down the electoral gains made by Black citizens.

The foundation upon which previous battles were based proved essential to later struggles. The NAACP's challenges to voting restriction, such as the White Texas primaries of the 1920s-30s, achieved partial victories on the Supreme Court, revealing shortcomings in Jim Crow voting law. But it left a long, disputed road ahead of him. It took more decades of popular organization, mass protest, and the violence of Selma's "Bloody Sunday" to force Congress to pass the Voting. Right Acts of 1965, as legal researcher Pamela Karlan points out, the law was a fundamental break with the past. It shifts the burden of proof to discriminatory jurisdiction, rather than forcing citizens to fight each new obstacle individually. Signed on August 6,1965, it marked not the end,

but the beginning of a new phase in the ongoing struggle that continues to shape American Democracy.

CHAPTER TWO :

The Struggle For Voting Rights and The Act of Voting Rights of 1965

Chapter Two : The Struggle For Voting Rights and The Act of Voting Rights of 1965

Introduction

After the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, African Americans in the South were systematically excluded from the ballot box through devices that reduced black voter registration; such as poll taxes, literacy test, as a result Black voter registration was less than two percent in many Deep South states by the early twentieth century. This contrast between constitutional promise and persistent denial has defined the renewed struggle for voting rights.

The Civil Rights Movement relied on direct action, mass protests and demonstrations to draw national attention about voter inequality. Legal limitations failed to ban voter suppression, which led to minimal Black voter registration in places like; Dallas County, Alabama. The Voting Rights Act forced a federal protection and prohibited discriminatory practices like; literacy tests, and shifted legal advantage for disenfranchised voter - a landmark measure supported by The Supreme Court in South Carolina v. Katzenbach

This chapter explored the structure of disenfranchisement in the South, then it moves to national attention forced by the popular mobilization and protests, and concludes it with how the Voting Rights Act was emerged and its lasting but disputed legacy.

1.1 The Legacy of Disenfranchisement and the Rise of Direct Action

The struggle for Black voting rights in the South was not a product of the 1960 civil rights movement, and did not end with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Rather, it was the culmination of century-long disenfranchisement that continued long after the end of slavery. By early 1960's , activists were frustrated by the slow pace of legal challenges and the federal government's unwillingness to act, which prompted a shift towards popular organization and direct action. This section covers the lasting impact of Jim Crow voting restrictions, the move towards community mobilization and key organization, SNCC, COFO, that positioned Mississippi at the heart of this struggle.

1.1.1 Brief recap of the Jim Crow era and the persistence of discriminatory barriers that kept Black voters from the polls.

until lately in the twentieth century , African Americans were prevented the access to the ballot box . Although the ratification of the fifteenth amendment that granted the right to vote to African Americans , Southern states excluded them using Jim Crow laws . Through restrictive practices include poll taxes , literacy tests and other measures designed purposely t black citizens were restricted from the access to the ballot box

Regarding the challenges imposed by Jim Crow Laws , the NAACP combat these unjust measures . Smith v. Allwright (1944) was the embodiment of the NAACP's legal strategy , where they successfully used court to ban all white primaries elections and prove litigation over disenfranchisement. However , winning in the court was insufficient tear down the white supremacist system , particularly in the states of the Deep South . alongside legal obstacles , black citizens also experienced extrajudicial violence and intimidation that prevented them from going to the polls.

1.1.2 The shift from legal challenges to direct action and grassroots organizing as the primary strategy for achieving voting rights.

Although legal issues persisting ,a strategic shift emerged within the civil rights movement in the 1960s . a growing number of activists concluded that grassroots community organizing and direct action were crucial factor for significant change ,particularly within The Student Nonviolent Committee .as a response to the perceived shortcomings of Federal intervention this shift happened . As SNCC leaders noted, that despite the existing constitutional and legal authority the federal government frequently expressed unwillingness or inability to protect activists and voters . Moreover, powerful figures in the Democratic Party ,including Attorney General Robert Kennedy , encouraged to focus on voter registration as it less likely to cause disruption

This position caused internal debate within SNCC. A powerful faction favoured to continue direct action tactics such as sit-ins and boycotts rather than compromising with untrustworthy liberals . However, SNCC coordinators and others argued that voter registration was an important path toward lasting empowerment for building Black political power in the Deep South

The early experience of SNCC in McComb, Mississippi, showed that grassroots organizing could show better results than top-down legal strategies alone. Therefore , organizers learned how to integrate themselves into communities, benefit from local networks, and develop new leaders from within the Black population.

1.1.3 The emergence of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and its commitment to community-based voter registration in the Deep South

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) emerged from the 1960 sit-in movement . At first , it prioritized direct action to fight discrimination and eventually SNCC's organizers relized the need for political empowerment to make lasting changes . According to the SNCC Digital Gateway, a documentary project collaboratively funded by the SNCC veterans and historians, SNCC field secretaries concluded that the only way to empower black people in the South was to increase significantly the number of Black voters to change the political landscape

SNCC worked differently than the older group, it focused on building power within local communities . The archival sources recounts how young activists partnered with Black residents in the Deep South to build grassroots movement to empower the Black community . SNCC workers lived in the resident's house , followed the guidance of the local leaders , and relied on the support of local community network.

The 1961 McComb voter registration drive offered formative lessons for SNCC organizers. Bob Moses, for example, found that local leaders were willing to connect them with networks of older activists. New leaders, including young people who became SNCC field secretaries, emerged from the movement itself. Despite strong opposition, including murders and

imprisonments, SNCC carried these lessons into subsequent campaigns throughout the Delta and beyond.

1.1.4 The role of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO)—a coalition of SNCC, CORE, NAACP, and SCLC—in coordinating voting rights efforts across Mississippi

The Council of Federated Organizations COFO was created to unify the efforts of different civil rights groups to work on the right to vote. Historical records from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History demonstrate that leaders like Medgar Evers , Aaron Henry and Carson Hall, fomed COFO to negotiate with Governor Ross Barnet to release the imprisoned Freedom Riders . After a period of inactivity, Bob Moses brought COFO to life again in January 1962 , believing in combining the efforts civil rights organization operating in the state to defeat deep-rooted discrimination

Four major national organizations joined COFO : SNCC ,CORE and the Martin Luther King's SCLC , alongside with the grassroots Mississsippi groups such as the Holmes County Voters League and the Ruleville Citizenship Organization

COFO 's main goal was to work as team on voter registration across Mississippi . Combining forces allowed young activists to work with older and respectful leaders giving them instant credibility . However the group still had internal struggles over funding , especially the NAACP's hesitation to share its money . As a result to the COFO's efforts ,the famous 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer project was launched allowing the country to see the violent suppression against Black voters . This project changed the Mississippi's political scene forever

2.1 Voter Registration Campaigns : Freedom Summer and Grassroots Organizing

Between 1961 and 1964 Mississippi had the most popular voting rights campaign . Due to the the federal inaction and the limitations of legal challenges groups like COFO and SNCC changed their strategies and built grassroots movements , leading to the 1964 Mississippi

Freedom Summer Project and forming the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) to challenge the national Democratic establishment

2.1.1 Disenfranchisement in Mississippi and Early SNCC Initiatives (1961–1963)

Mississippi was one of the worst southern states to deny basic African Americans rights , particularly the right to vote. using violence , intimidation , and designed measures such as literacy tests , poll taxes , and arbitary discretion they excluded black citizens from ballot box . Ultimately fewer than 7 % of black population could vote , by 1961 .

The MacComb's campaign succeded in helping and building the civil rights movement's tacticts , however it exposed activists to physical danger . Members of SNCC as they start organizing they immediately were physically attacked and intimidated by both local govermnet officials and white opponents. Movment leader "Bob Moses " himself recounted his first experience being imprisoned while helping Black citizens register to vote . He also described his traumatic experience to identify the body of Herbert Lee - a local farmer who supported voter registration efforts- . This proved that organizing in Mississippi braught deadly consequences . the campaign also witnessed school boycott organizing ; demonstrating that young people also played important role in the movement

Although the anticipated risks , SNCC found the only way to empower Black southerns in the South was to increase the number of Black registered voters . This changed the focus from relying on federal power to build Black political strength. By 1963 , SNCC expanded it's work to all across Mississippi, and created local community organizations.

2.2.2 COFO, Community Resistance, and the Planning of Freedom Summer

The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) united four major civil rights organizations SNCC, CORE, the NAACP, and SCLC . Its main goal was to unite voter registration efforts to a single campaign across all Mississippi. It was founded in 1961, to free imprisoned Freedom Riders, then it evolved to fight local and government resistance to Black

voter registration. COFO primarily had only 200 workers , and when COFO launched its programs "Register Freedom" and "Vote for Freedom" which challenged the official all-white electoral system , it attracted huge number of participants (more than 80,000) .

COFO voter registration' campaign's next step was creating "Freedom Summer " project .In September 1963, Bob Moses formally proposed the project's idea . Leaders start planning for the project , predicting resistance and white violence. however they were confident their participants would resist it.

COFO took volunteer's training very seriously , and prepared them to the violent and dangerous conditions they would face .It provided security handbooks and role-playing stimulation to react in violent situations .Moreover , COFO's Leaders including Howard Zinn and Bob Moses, requested top officials to provide federal protection to secure activists lives . However the federal government was unwilling or unable to intervene.

2.2.3 Activist Repression, Political Challenge, and National Impact

Freedom Summer was launched ,in late June 1964,when civil rights movements organizations mobilized hundreds of Northern volunteers and local activists to challenge political system in Mississippi.

The campaign faced huge immediate and systematic suppression , marked by murdering ; James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner-civil rights workers - by Ku Klux Klan members , alongside bombing , and burning churches , and police brutality .

Despite this terrorism, the project had established over 40 Freedom School , and built 13 community center for building grassroots infrastructure , it culminated in the creation of Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). MFDP organized over sixty thousands of Mississippi Black citizens to challenge the legitimacy of all-white Democratic delegation in the state in the Democratic National Convention ,in 1964. When Jhonson administration reached a compromise , to protect Southern party loyalty by offering only guest seats to MFDP . The party rejected the offer causing huge disappointment among SNCC's activists toward prevailing liberal

politics. Ultimately National media coverage of violence and political resistance generated decisive momentum contributed directly to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

2.3 Mass Protests and the Selma Campaign

The Selma campaign of 1965 was a pivotal turning point in the Black voting rights' struggle . After years of grassroots organizing , Civil Rights movements - particularly SNCC and SCLC - intensified their efforts toward a mass protest that draw national attention .

Practising violence against peaceful demonstrators on the Edmund Pettus Bridge encouraged public opinion and putted federal government under pressure

This section deals with the Bloody Sunday crisis, the strategic escalation that followed, and the coalition leadership that turned Selma into a catalyst for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

2.3.1 Direct Action and the Crisis on Bloody Sunday

In early 1965 , Selma, Alabama , became the main focus of the voting rights struggle in the Deep South . The Dallas County Voters League (DCVL) worked for years to register Black voters despite the existing obstacles . In 1964 DCVL realized that local efforts alone would not overcome opponents resistance, so it invited Martin Luther King Jr's SCLC to Selma to bring national significance and political pressure to their case.

The motive for a mass action was in February 1965, when a state trooper in Alabama murdered Jimmy Lee Jackson - a young Black activist , during a nighttime demonstration Marion .This was direct motive for James Bevel - a leader in SCLC- to organize a marche from Selma to Montgomery to express their grievances to Governor George Wallace and ask for federal protection to Black voters

On March 7, 1965, nearly 600 demonstrators gathered at Brown Chapel AME Church and departed a marche toward Montgomery , under the guide of Hosea Williams (SCLC) and John Lewis (SNCC). the demonstrators walked in pairs through the streets of Selma . When they reached the Edmund Pettus Bridge , they were forced to scatter by 150 Alabama state troops

After warning , Law enforcement officers started attacking using clubs and tear gas . a huge number of marchers were injured and hospitalized. This brutality was displayed on television world widely, Shocking the public and leading federal government to pass voting rights law forcibly .

2.3.2 Strategic Escalation from Turnaround Tuesday to the Federalized March

The brutality caused by Bloody Sunday and provoked instant national outrage , led to strategic reassessment in the movement . On March 9,Martin Luther King led nearly 2500 marchers to demonstrate for the second time to the Edmund Pettus Bridge. This demonstration was banned by federal court , it was called " Turnaround Tuesday" .

Confronting the blockade of the state forces, king led demonstrators to prayer and returned obeying federal court's order . That evening Ku Klux Klan members attacked James Reeb - a white unitarian minister , supporting the movement- . Reeb's death resulted in intense national anger ,political pressure , and forced federal intervention. As a response to the crisis President Lyndon Johnson federalized the Alabama National Guard to protect demonstrators. On March 21,1965, the third marche was under full federal protection. 3000 demonstrators departed from Selma on five days , 54 miles march to the State Capitol in Montgomery , under full federal protection. There , they presented a grievance petition to Governor Wallace . Unfortunately , while transporting demonstrators between Selma and Montgomery , a white volunteer - Viola Liuzzo- was murdered by a Klan member.

2.3.4 Coalition Leadership and National Momentum for Federal Action

Selma's Campaign showed highly coordinated level between local and national civil rights organizations . DCVL provided local leadership and legitimacy , built upon years of prior knowledge and experience, SNCC for grassroots organizing , and SCLC for national media and strategic leadership .

SNCC's activists criticized SCLC's top-down strategy , that focuses on media , because of fear it expose undernamed protestors to police violence . SNCC officially rejected to participate March 7 marche (Jhon Lewis marched individually) , it later redirected its efforts away from SCLC's campaigns

The brutality of Bloody Sunday and the white supermacist against activists , generated national outrage ,leading to political pressure foe federal actions . On March 5, president Lyndon Jhonson declared that America must fulfill its democratic obligations , and pass strong voting rights protection .

Local grassroots organizing shifted to federal legal protection , after presenting Voting Rights Act to Congress on March 17 (10 days after Bloody Sunday) and was signed into law in August 6,1965 .

2.4 The Federal Involvement

The federal government played a pivotal role in passing the Voting Rights Act and guaranteeing voting rights for African Americans, as presidential leaders had a major part in this process

2.4.1 President Kennedy's Address and the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

On June 11, 1963, President John F. Kennedy delivered a historic speech on civil rights when his administration had sent National Guard troops to escort the first Black students admitted to the University of Alabama. In this speech, Kennedy called for racial equality, which he described it as long overdue. He stated, "It ought to be possible for American citizens of any color to register to vote in a free election without interference or fear of reprisal" (JFK Library, n.d., para. 10). In addition, the president asked the United States Congress to eliminate racial discrimination in all matters and services, guaranteeing the Black citizen many rights, such as the right to vote and education. In this speech, he also indicated that the federal government would actively uphold these civil rights.

On August 28, 1963, about 200,000 to 250,000 people from rural and urban areas gathered in Washington, D.C., for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. This peaceful event had ten main demands. The first was for formal legislation guaranteeing civil rights for all Americans, such as Adequate housing, education, and voting. It also demanded job creation for the unemployed and the establishment of a fair minimum wage. The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was organized by six organizations, namely: the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Negro American Labor Organization (NALO), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Urban League (NUL).

2.4.2 The Inadequacy of Previous Civil Rights Legislation

The Civil Rights Act of 1957, 1960, and 1964 were insufficient to prevent local authorities from discriminating against Black voters. For instance, the 1957 Act relied on the courts to address voter disenfranchisement. Following this, the 1960 Act appointed federal judges to oversee the voting process. While, the 1964 Act mandated that officials should apply the same laws to both Black and white voters.

Therefore, the failure of all these laws stemmed from the slowness of the legal processes, which could take up to four years to reach a final ruling in a single case. Furthermore, a large number of cases were added to the court system due to discriminatory tests issued by Southern legislatures when courts removed certain voting requirements. In addition, officials circumvented the laws by ignoring the illiteracy of white voters. It was then concluded that deeply entrenched racial discrimination could only be eradicated by completely abolishing literacy tests.

2.4.3 President Johnson's Response to the Selma Crisis

On March 15, 1965, in a televised address to Congress, President Lyndon B. Johnson delivered one of the most important speeches of his career. He addressed the events of Selma

marches and defended human dignity. The President framed the issue as a universal American cause, rather than one confined to any particular race or region.

President Lyndon B. Johnson used the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement in his speech, declaring that "the nation must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And, we shall overcome" (West Virginia University, n.d., para. 7). In response, all members of the House of Representatives, except the southerners, interrupting the president with 39 times of ovation. Moreover, President Johnson ordered Congress to pass uniform voting laws. As he stated in his speech, "Every American citizen must have an equal right to vote. There is no reason which can excuse the denial of that right" (Miller Center, 2016, paras. 17-19).

2.5The Voting Rights Act of 1965: Provisions and Passage

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is considered the most important reform law since Reconstruction, as it guaranteed Black Americans' right to vote in practice through many changes stipulated in this law.

2.5.1 The Suspension of Literacy Tests and Federal Examiners

Literacy tests were suspended under the Voting Rights Act, along with the discriminatory practices used against Black Americans to prevent them from exercising their voting rights since Reconstruction. Specifically, southern states used these tests as a requirement for voter registration, but they were not applied fairly. For instance, most of the time the illiterate white people passed, while educated Black citizen failed. So that section 4 of the Voting Rights Act suspended systematic discriminatory practices, most notably the literacy tests.

In addition, Section 4 mandated the appointment of a federal registrars to oversee voter registration in states that had engaged in discriminatory practices. Furthermore, it authorized the Attorney General to appoint federal examiners to prevent local officials from enforcing discriminatory practices and to ensure the rights of eligible voters.

These observers were dispatched to specific areas by the Attorney General and the federal court order. Their primary role was to receive complaints from citizens that unjustly denied from the voting right, examine citizens' documents, and add them to official lists called "federal registered voters." After the Voting Rights Act was passed, this provision led to the registration of a large number of eligible Black voters.

2.5.2 The Preclearance Requirement and Challenge to Poll Taxes

Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) was a central of the provisions, restricting the powers of the state legislatures by requiring " preclearance" from the Attorney General or the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia before making any changes to the electoral procedures. This law was enacted to prevent the jurisdictions from implementing new discriminatory procedures against Black voters. The primary significance of this section lies in the prior approval requirement, which was determined by whether states imposed tests or procedures for exercising the right to vote, as well as by the low voter turnout in the 1964 elections (less than 50 percent of eligible voters). Consequently, this section expanded the federal government's authority, and restricted the states from having complete autonomy in administering their elections.

Despite the ratification of 1964 about the 24th Amendment to the United States Constitution that repealed the poll taxes against Black voters in federal elections, many Southern states did not comply. Section 10 of the Voting Rights Act allowed the Attorney General to file lawsuits against states that still relied on poll taxes to restrict Black people from voting. On the day Johnson approved this law, he stated that four lawsuits would be filed by Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach against these states.

2.5.3 Passage Through Congress and Signing into Law

On August 3, 1965, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Voting Rights Act by a vote of 328 to 74. In the following day, the Senate approved it by a vote of 79 to 18. Republican

support for the bill was evident, as they voted 30-2 in the House. On August 6, 1965, the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol witnessed a significant historical moment marked by the presence of some civil rights leaders, including John Lewis, Martin Luther King Jr, and Rosa Parks, were present to witness President Johnson's signing of the Voting Rights Act.

This law abolished the discriminatory practices in the Southern states, most notably the literacy tests, and it transferred voter registration authority from the states to the federal government. The House of Representatives considered the Voting Rights Act as a pivotal turning point in the Civil Rights Movement, because it fulfilled the promises of the Fifteenth Amendment, which had been passed a century earlier.

2. 6 The Immediate Impact of the Voting Rights Act

The Voting Rights Act had a direct impact on changing the number of Black voters and the beginning of a new phase of political activism for African Americans.

2.6.1 Dramatic Increases in Black Voter Registration

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 fulfilled the promises of the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution by guaranteeing voting rights for African Americans. It had an immediate impact; shortly after the law came into effect, the Southern states witnessed a significant increase in the number of Black voters. Due to the disenfranchisement they had previously suffered from, the number of registered black voters reached a quarter of a million. In 1966, the majority of Southern states (9 out of 13 states) registered over 50% of eligible African American voters, and only 4 states had fewer than 50%. For instance, with the implementation of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), Mississippi saw a dramatic rise in registered Black voters, reaching 59.8%. Which was a substantial rise from its previous average of 6.7%. Similarly, between 1964 and 1968, Alabama doubled its previously registered Black voters from 19.3% to 51.6%. During the same period, Louisiana also experienced a surge in African American voters from 31.6% to 58.9%. The Voting

Rights Act boosted the Black voter turnout to as much as 25% by 1968 elections and played a pivotal role in shaping American political parties.

2.6.2 The Beginning of a New Era of African American Political Participation

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 marked the end of Jim Crow era in the Southern states. It eliminated the obstacles that had prevented Black Americans from exercising their rights, such as literacy tests and poll taxes. Consequently, this law became a pivotal turning point by abolishing discriminatory laws that enforced white primaries to enable Black voters in the Southern states to participate in elections.

Although this law did not eliminate all forms of discrimination, it marked an unprecedented stage in Black participation in elections. Particularly their voter turnout and their representation in political office at all levels increased, and the number of elected black American representatives had risen to 10,000 in half a century after the implementation of the V RA. By 1970, the percentage of Black voters had reached 66.9%. Thus, the Voting Rights Act was one of the most successful pieces of legislation passed by Congress. finally, the immediate results of this act were the increase in the number of African American voters and representatives, and allowing them to exercise their political rights. Which had remained largely a dead letter in the Fifteenth Amendment.

Conclusion

To conclude, voter registration campaigns and mass protests played a significant role in the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Particularly, the Selma to Montgomery march, and especially the horrors of “Bloody Sunday”, fueled widespread public outrage, prompting President Lyndon B. Johnson to urge Congress to intervene immediately. This law provided protection and guaranteed the voting rights of African Americans, as promised by the Fifteenth Amendment, through provisions such as the elimination of literacy tests, abolition of poll taxes,

the appointment of federal registrars, and the requirement for preclearance by the Attorney General or the U.S District Court for the decision District of Columbia. In other words, this law marked the end of the Jim Crow era and the beginning of the new one. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 had a direct impact on increasing the number of Black voters and their representation in political office, particularly in Southern states that had historically restricted Black participation.

General Conclusion

This study discuss the struggle of African Americans to obtain voting rights from the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870 to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The research was prompted by the fact that despite the Fifteenth Amendment most Black Americans were still unable to vote due to discriminatory laws, rulings, and violence over the century. The aim is to explain how voting rights struggles evolved in three phases: during the Reconstruction period, Jim Crow laws, and the Civil Rights Movement to learn how African Americans responded to these challenges in various ways. Voter registration campaigns and mass protests ultimately led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This study adopted a qualitative method of research through analyzing non numerical data like ; historical sources , government records , and newspapers.

The first chapter showed how the Fifteenth Amendment had weaknesses that was used to disenfranchise Black citizens . The amendment didn't deny the African Americans' their right to vote on the basis of race, but it failed to guarntee everyone's the right to vote . This loopholes allowed Southern states ; through subtle, tricky rules like literacy tests,poll taxes , grandfather clauses , to restrict the Black American's access to the ballot box . Main court rulings (such as Reese, Cruikshank, and Williams) expressed that federal government unwillingness to intervene, legalizing discriminatory laws . These judicial decisions, alongside the withdrawal of federal troops after the Comprmise of 1877 , it drastically affected the registration to vote so that it decreased from over 130,000 to under 1,300 by the early 1900s. Physical violence , economeic threats were actively used to intimidate African Americans from trying to vote . Despite the suppression ,Black communities began organizing early on through church, legal challenges, petitions paving the way for Modern Civil Rights Movement.

The second chapter examined the strategic shift from litigation in court to direct action and grassroots organizing . The emergence of SNCC and the COFO represented crucial turning point toward voter-registration organized within local communities in the Deep South ,

particularly in Mississippi. High-visibility campaigns like (The Freedom Summer project of 1964 , The Selma Campaign) that proved the power of mass protests, and exposed the brutality of White supremacists and generated national outrage . The violence of "The Bloody Sunday" ,on March 7, 1965, where peaceful marchers were attacked by state troopers , the national outrage from this event forced The President Lyndon B. Jhonson to call for , strong voting rights legislation from Congress.On August 6, 1965 law was signed , it included banning literacy tests, authorizing federal observers , ...etc. As a result Black voter registration in Mississippi increased from just 6.7% to nearly 60%

The findings of this study indicated that the fifteenth amendement was unsufficient to secure African Americans' voting right , without efforts - wether it's litigation or active public action- . As the first research question asked , the wording of the amendment definitely encouraged the emergance of sysetematic discriminatory laws leaving space for narrow interpretations ,and evading legal accountability. The second research question is answered by the represented evidence combination of grassroots organizing , nonviolent protests , and media coverage of violence Southerns that generated the necessary political conditions for the passage for Voting Rights Act . Previous civil rights legislation failed and the Voting Rights Act , because it shifted the strategy from individual litigants fight on their own to replacing responsibility directly on the federal government to enforce the law.

This research has some limitations. It mostly used existing books, articles, and published records, rather than relying primary archival research, as a result it lack the depth of details on the interaction within individual communities . Additionally, the research was limited to the period 1870 and 1965, and showed only the immediate results of the Voting Rights Act, neglecting later challenges and issues such as (Shelby County v. Holder). Future research could study more the long-term impacts of the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the ongoing challenges up to present day, and comparative studies about the voting rights struggle in the U.S. and other

similar national movements . Such studies would demonstrate the fragile nature of democracy and the continuing importance of the struggle for voting rights in shaping democracy.

Refrences

Alexander, S. L. (Ed.). (2015). Reconstruction violence and the Ku Klux Klan hearings: A brief history with documents. Bedford/St. Martin's.

American Enterprise Institute. (2009, June 22). Integration now. https://www.aei.org/

Appeal of forty thousand citizens, threatened with disfranchisement, to the people of Pennsylvania. (1838). In M. L. Rogers & J. Turner (Eds.), African American political thought: A collected history. University of Chicago Press.

Daily Herald. (2019, September 16). Foner writes timely new book on Reconstruction amendments.

Davidson, C. (1992). The Voting Rights Act: A brief history. In B. Grofman & C. Davidson (Eds.), Controversies in minority voting: The Voting Rights Act in perspective (pp. 7–51). Brookings Institution.

Digital History. (n.d.). Congressional Reconstruction.

DocsTeach. (2009, December 2). Voting Rights Act of 1965. National Archives. https://www.docsteach.org/

Edmonds, M. (Ed.). (2014). Risking everything: A Freedom Summer reader. Wisconsin Historical Society Press.

Editors. (2009, November 9). 15th Amendment: Constitution & voting rights. History.

Editors. (2011, March 17). Compromise of 1877. History.

Equal Justice Initiative. (2018). Opelousas massacre, 1868. https://eji.org/

Equal Justice Initiative. (2020). The Eufaula, Alabama massacre, November 3, 1874. https://eji.org/

Evans, F. (2021, May 13). How Jim Crow-era laws suppressed the African American vote for generations. History.

Foner, E. (1988). Reconstruction: America's unfinished revolution, 1863–1877. Harper & Row.

Foner, E. (1996). Freedom's lawmakers: A directory of Black officeholders during Reconstruction. Oxford University Press.

Free African Society. (1787). Preamble and articles. Episcopal Church Archives.

Goldman, R. M. (1990). A free ballot and a fair count: The Department of Justice and the enforcement of voting rights in the South, 1877–1893. Garland Publishing.

HarpWeek. (n.d.). Elections, 1867 and 1868. 15th Amendment Site.

JFK Library. (n.d.). Radio and television report to the American people on civil rights, June 11, 1963. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. https://www.jfklibrary.org/

Karlan, P. S. (2007). Maps and misreadings: The role of geographic compacting in racial gerrymandering. Harvard Law Review, 121(1), 1–45.

Karlan, P. S. (2009). Section 5 and the protection of minority voters. Yale Law Journal, 118(4), 728–757. https://www.yalelawjournal.org/pdf/736_4e7wpxx9.pdf

Keyssar, A. (2000). The right to vote: The contested history of democracy in the United States. Basic Books.

King Institute, Stanford University. (n.d.). Voting Rights Act of 1965. Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute. https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/

Klarman, M. J. (2004). From Jim Crow to civil rights: The Supreme Court and the struggle for racial equality. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/uspolitical/0195129032.001.0001

Legal Information Institute. (n.d.). Doctrine on abolition of poll tax. Cornell Law School. https://www.law.cornell.edu/

Library of Congress. (n.d.-a). Jim Crow in America primary source set. https://www.loc.gov

Library of Congress. (n.d.-b). NAACP primary source set. https://www.loc.gov/

Library of Congress. (n.d.-c). Today in history - August 28: March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. https://www.loc.gov/

Library of Virginia. (n.d.). The first vote [Engraving published in Harper's Weekly, 1867].

Miller Center. (2016, October 20). March 15, 1965: Speech before Congress on voting rights. University of Virginia. https://millercenter.org/

Minnesota Secretary of State. (n.d.). Voting Rights Act of 1965. Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State. https://www.sos.state.mn.us/

Mississippi Department of Archives and History. (n.d.). Council of Federated Organizations records (Z/1867) [Archival collection]. Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS, United States.

Mississippi Encyclopedia. (2018). Constitution of 1890.

Mississippi Today. (2024, November 1). 1890: Mississippi adopts new constitution.

NAACP. (2005). Reauthorization of expiring portions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

National Archives. (n.d.-a). John Lewis - March from Selma to Montgomery, "Bloody Sunday," 1965 [Primary source material]. National Archives and Records Administration. https://www.archives.gov/

National Archives. (n.d.-b). Selma marches [Primary source material]. National Archives and Records Administration. https://www.archives.gov/

National Archives. (n.d.-c). Selma to Montgomery: 50 years later. National Archives and Records Administration. https://www.archives.gov/

National Archives. (n.d.-d). Statement by the Vice President on anniversary of March from Selma to Montgomery. National Archives and Records Administration. https://www.ar chives.gov/

National Archives. (n.d.-e). The march that changed us: Selma, Alabama, then and now. National Archives and Records Administration. https://www.archives.gov/

National Archives. (n.d.-f). Voting Rights Act of 1965. https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/voting-rights-act

National Archives. (2016, August 15). Congress and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. https://www.archives.gov

National Archives. (2021, October 6). Voting Rights Act (1965). https://www.archives.gov/

Niagara Movement. (1905a). Constitution and by-laws of the Niagara Movement: As adopted July 12 and 13, 1905, at Buffalo, N.Y.

Niagara Movement. (1905b). Niagara's declaration of principles. In M. L. Rogers & J. Turner (Eds.), African American political thought: A collected history. University of Chicago Press.

Petition for voting rights from seven African American men, Dartmouth, Massachusetts. (1780, March). In M. L. Rogers & J. Turner (Eds.), African American political thought: A collected history. University of Chicago Press.

Petition of four free blacks to the United States House of Representatives, as presented to Congress on January 30, 1797. (1797). In M. L. Rogers & J. Turner (Eds.), African American political thought: A collected history. University of Chicago Press.

Pildes, R. H. (2000). Democracy, anti-democracy, and the canon. Constitutional Commentary, 17(2), 295–319.

Reagan Library. (n.d.). Dawn of the Voting Rights Act – Voting Rights Act of 1965. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/

Singleton, B. (1880, April 17). Testimony before the Senate Select Committee to investigate the causes of the removal of the Negroes from the Southern States to the Northern States. In M. L. Rogers & J. Turner (Eds.), African American political thought: A collected history. University of Chicago Press.

Smith v. Allwright, 321 U.S. 649 (1944).

Smithsonian Institution. (n.d.). White only: Jim Crow in America.

Smithsonian National Museum of American History. (1961–1970). Ed King collection of civil rights material [Archival collection]. Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, United States.

Smithsonian National Museum of American History. (1964–1966). Ruth Koenig Mississippi Summer Project collection [Archival collection]. Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, United States.

SNAC. (n.d.). Alabama. Constitutional Convention (1867).

SNCC Digital Gateway. (n.d.-a). Selma voting rights campaign. Duke University Libraries. https://snccdigital.org/

SNCC Digital Gateway. (n.d.-b). SNCC digital gateway: Learn from the past, organize for the future. Duke University Libraries. https://snccdigital.org/

Social Welfare History Project. (2011, February 3). The Voting Rights Act of 1965. Virginia Commonwealth University. https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/

South Carolina v. Katzenbach, 383 U.S. 301 (1966). https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/383/301/

Terry v. Adams, 345 U.S. 461 (1953).

The Advocate. (n.d.). Library of Congress Chronicling America Collection.

The New York Times. (1965, August 8). Voting Rights Act of '65 resulted from failure of previous laws. The New York Times.

The New York Times. (2017, November 4). The right to vote is never safe.

The New York Times. (2020a, February 7). Why voting discrimination haunts America.

The New York Times. (2020b, February 14). There have been 10 Black senators since emancipation.

The Twin-City American. (n.d.). Library of Congress Chronicling America Collection.

The undoing of Reconstruction. (1901). The Atlantic Monthly, 88(525–530), 81–94.

U.S. Capitol Visitor Center. (n.d.). Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, Circular No. 9, regarding Freedmen's Right to Vote, May 1, 1867.

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (n.d.). Racial and ethnic tensions in American communities: Poverty, inequality, and discrimination (Vol. VII: The Mississippi Delta Report).

U.S. Courts. (n.d.). Voting Rights Act expands voter registration (1965). United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit. https://www.ca9.uscourts.gov

U.S. Department of Justice. (n.d.-a). Federal examiners. https://www.justice.gov/

U.S. Department of Justice. (n.d.-b). History of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. https://www.justice.gov/crt/history-voting-rights-act-1965

U.S. Department of Justice. (2015, August 6). About Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. https://www.justice.gov/

U.S. Department of Justice. (2022, August 5). Statement of Attorney General Merrick B. Garland on the 57th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act. https://www.justice.gov/

U.S. House of Representatives. (2015, February 24). The Voting Rights Act of 1965. History, Art & Archives. https://history.house.gov/

U.S. Senate. (n.d.). Senate stories: Civil War and Reconstruction.

United States v. Cruikshank, 92 U.S. 542 (1876).

United States v. Reese, 92 U.S. 214 (1876).

Valelly, R. M. (2004). The two Reconstructions: The struggle for Black enfranchisement. University of Chicago Press.

Washington Post. (2021, May 1). The 'Mississippi Plan' to keep Blacks from voting in 1890: 'We came here to exclude the Negro'.

Washington State Legislature. (n.d.). Voting Rights Act coverage formula. https://leg.wa.gov/

West Virginia University. (n.d.). For the dignity of man and the destiny of democracy: The Voting Rights Act of 1965. https://www.wvu.edu/

Williams v. Mississippi, 170 U.S. 213 (1898).

Wisconsin Historical Society. (1961–1963). Robert Moses account of voter registration in Mississippi [Anne and Carl Braden Papers, Box 35, Folder 12]. Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, WI, United States.

Wisconsin Historical Society. (1964). Howard Zinn papers [Mississippi Summer Project documents, planning memos, correspondence, and security materials]. Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, WI, United States.

Yorkville Enquirer. (1895). Library of Congress Chronicling America Collection.

ملخص

تتتبع هذه الدراسة مسيرة كفاح الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي على مدى مائة عام من المطالبة بحقهم في التصويت حيث تتناول الرحلة التي امتدت لقرن من الزمان، وذلك بدءاً من الوعد الدستوري الذي تضمنه التعديل الخامس عشر عام 1870 وصولاً إلى التمكين الفعلي لحقوق التصويت عام 1965. تهدف هذه الدراسة للبحث في كيفية تعرض الضمانات الدستورية للتحدي بمرور الوقت، وكيف أدت عقود من المقاومة الشعبية في نهاية المطاف إلى توفير حماية فيدرالية للنضال من أجل حقوق التصويت. أُجريت هذه الدراسة لتقديم فحص شامل للاستمرارية طويلة المدى لهذا النضال، وذلك بدلاً من تناول حقبة "إعادة الإعمار"، قوانين "جيم كرو"، وحركة الحقوق المدنية بوصفها تطورات تاريخية منفصلة. واعتماداً على منهج البحث النوعي، تستعين الدراسة بالنصوص الدستورية، وثائق الكونغرس، الصحف التاريخية، والأعمال الأكاديمية للبحث في ثلاث مراحل رئيسية من هذا التاريخ. كما تشير الأدلة إلى أن التعديل الخامس عشر لم ينجح في ضمان حقوق تصويت فعلية؛ فقد أدت صياغته المحدودة، إلى جانب قوانين الولايات التمييزية مثل ضرائب الاقتراع واختبارات القراءة والكتابة والقرارات القضائية المقيِّدة التي أضعفت آليات الإنفاذ الفيدرالية ،حيث ادى استمرار أعمال العنف والترهيب إلى تقييد قدرة الأمريكيين السود بشكل كبير على المشاركة في العملية الديمقراطية لأجيال عديدة. وقد ساهمت عقود من النشاط الشعبي والمقاومة الجماعية في بناء الزخم اللازم لإقرار "قانون حقوق التصويت لعام 1965"، حيث لعبت مسيرة "سلما" وأحداث "الأحد الدامي" دوراً محورياً في هذا المسار. لقد أنهى هذا القانون ممارسات التصويت العنيفة، مما أتاح للمزيد من الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي تسجيل أسمائهم في قوائم الناخبين؛ وقد مثّل ذلك نهاية لحقبة "جيم كرو" وبداية لعهد جديد من المشاركة السياسية للأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي، مبرزاً بذلك أهمية الدفاع عن الحقوق المدنية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأمريكيون من أصل أفريقي؛ حركة الحقوق المدنية؛ التعديل الخامس عشر؛ قوانين جيم كرو؛ قانون حقوق التصويت لعام 1965.