

THE STRUGGLE TO VOTE

Being able to vote has been a major struggle in our country's history. At first only White men with property could vote. Women, people of color, and the poor could not.

Black Americans have faced daunting legal and financial barriers in their quest to vote. They have suffered the loss of jobs, the loss of homes, intimidation and violence including murder simply for wanting a say in the laws that shape their lives. Simply for wanting to vote.



REGISTERING TO VOTE : A DANGEROUS EXPERIENCE

Opposition to Black Americans voting was particularly intense in the South, where the enslavement of Black Americans had been most entrenched. It took great courage and persistence to attempt to register to vote.

- a) The Registrar's Office was open just a few hours each month.
- b) An already registered voter had to vouch for your character and few White voters dared to vouch for a Black applicant.
- c) The literacy test might involve interpreting a section of the state constitution to the Registrar's satisfaction.
- d) If the Registrar decided to register you, you would have to pay a poll tax that in today's dollars might run to \$100, more than many Southern Black Americans could afford.
- e) And if you actually tried to vote, you risked being physically attacked.

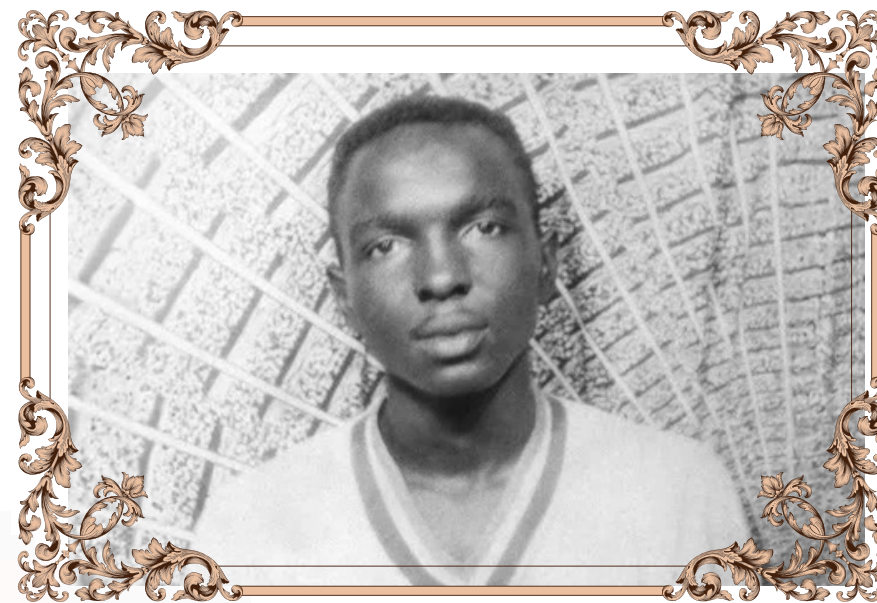


SUPPRESSING THE BLACK AMERICAN VOTE THROUGH VIOLENCE

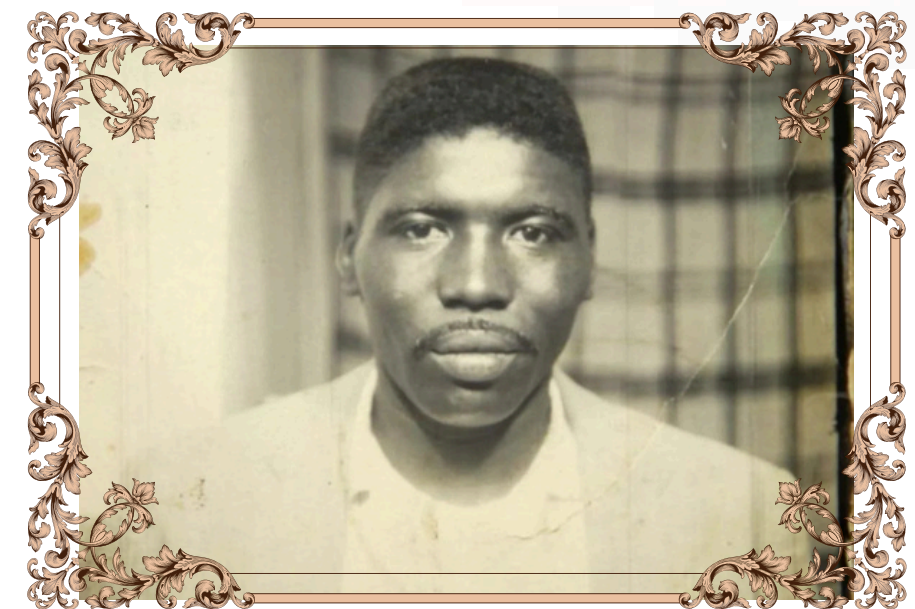
Hundreds, if not thousands, of Black Americans were lynched to stop them from voting. While most of these murders occurred in the decade after the Civil War, these acts of political terror continued into the 1960s. Here are just three examples:



Harry and Harriette Moore, husband and wife, spearheaded voter registration of Black Americans in Florida. On Christmas 1951, a bomb planted under their home exploded, inflicting fatal injuries.



James Chaney, along with White companions Mickey Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, was kidnapped and murdered by Mississippi KKK and Sheriff Department members in June 1964 for helping Black Americans register to vote.



Jimmie Lee Jackson was killed in February 1965 during a peaceful voting rights protest. State troopers were clubbing Jackson's mother and grandfather when Jackson intervened and was shot. Martin Luther King Jr. called Jackson a "martyred hero of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity."

THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1965

The Voting Rights Act removed legal barriers to voting. Two of the most significant provisions that gave the Voting Rights Act its enforcement strength were Section 2 and Section 5.

- Section 2: Outlawed any voting practice that "results in a denial or abridgement of the right of any citizen to vote on account of race or color".
- Section 5 (Preclearance): Counties and states with a history of voter discrimination had to get federal approval before changing their election laws.

After its passage, voter registration and voting by Black Americans increased dramatically. In Alabama, Black voter registration jumped from 11% to 51% between 1965 and 1966. In Mississippi, it increased from 6% in 1964 to 59% in 1969.



GUTTING THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT

In the 2013 case, *Shelby County vs. Holder*, an increasingly conservative U.S. Supreme Court struck down the preclearance (Section 5) requirement. Those states which had engaged in racially discriminatory voting practices no longer needed to get approval from the federal government before changing their election laws.

In 2021 the U.S. Supreme Court issued a ruling that made it harder for individuals or groups to file suit under Section 2. And it is likely that in 2026 the Court will allow states to redistrict in a way that makes it even harder for a person of color to win election to Congress.



NEW BARRIERS TO VOTING

Since the Supreme Court's 2013 Shelby vs. Holder ruling, at least 31 states have enacted 114 restrictive voting laws. These included stricter voter ID laws, reductions in the number and locations of polling places, and limits on mail-in voting.

For example, within hours after the Supreme Court's Shelby decision, Texas introduced a strict voter ID law that resulted in the ineligibility of an estimated 608,470 already registered voters because they didn't have either the money, or the time, or the transportation to obtain the new government issued photo ID or even to obtain the preliminary documents, like a birth certificate, required to even apply for the new ID.



NEW BARRIERS TO VOTING

These new restrictions have dramatically reduced the opportunity for people of color, the elderly, young adults, and for poor people in general to exercise a basic function of adult citizenship...the ability to vote.

"We may no longer have to guess the number of jelly beans in a jar in order to cast a ballot, but even as we sit here, there are those in power who are doing their darnedest to discourage people from voting by closing polling locations, and targeting minorities and students with restrictive ID laws, and attacking our voting rights with surgical precision..."

Former President Barack Obama speaking at Congressman John Lewis's funeral, held at Ebenezer Baptist Church (where Martin Luther King, Jr. had been pastor) in Atlanta, GA July 30, 2020.



MODERN VOTER SUPPRESSION TACTICS

VOTER ROLL PURGES	POLLING PLACE CLOSURES / REDUCTIONS	VOTE BY MAIL RESTRICTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Voters removed for inactivity, minor address/name mismatches, or registration challenges.• Eligible voters often don't know they were purged.• Purges disproportionately impact minority communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Polling sites closed or relocated away from minority neighborhoods.• Reduced early-voting hours → long lines, harder access.• Many closures increased after Shelby County v. Holder (2013) removed Section 5 preclearance.• Without preclearance, discriminatory practices re-emerged	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limits on who can vote by mail.• Shortened deadlines, fewer drop boxes.• Disproportionately affects voters who rely on alternatives to in-person voting (elderly, disabled, rural, full-time workers).

MODERN VOTER SUPPRESSION TACTICS

LANGUAGE & ACCESSIBILITY BARRIERS	MISINFORMATION & INTIMIDATION	RACIAL DISCRIMINATION & PRECLEARANCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ballots or instructions often not provided in community languages.• Inaccessible polling places for voters with disabilities or older adults.• Results in reduced participation from minority and aging populations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Targeted misinformation campaigns about voting dates, methods, and eligibility.• Intimidation at polling sites or through mass voter challenges disproportionately harms minority communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Act would restore preclearance, requiring certain states/jurisdictions to get DOJ or federal court approval before changing voting practices.• Intended to prevent racially discriminatory election changes.

A LOOMING THREAT TO VOTING

SAVE Act (Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act)

The SAVE Act is based on the unfounded claim that large numbers of noncitizens vote in U.S. elections. In 2025 the SAVE Act passed the House by a 220-208 vote but was blocked in the Senate. Its backers will try again in 2026.

If passed, the SAVE Act would...

- Require in-person proof of citizenship (a passport or an official birth certificate) to register to vote.
- Grant greater leeway for states and localities to purge voting rolls.

These are serious threats to voting: a) voting roll purges are fraught with errors which deny the vote to eligible voters, and b) only half of Americans have passports and getting one or an official birth certificate cost money and time that many Americans don't have.



THE WAY FORWARD

Congress must restore and strengthen parts of the historic Voting Rights Act of 1965. A bill has been introduced to do just that, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. But both the House and Senate are currently controlled by members who do not want to counter the states' restrictive voting laws. They do not want to expand the opportunity to vote.



THE SOLUTION

Those who can still vote need to exercise their vote and elect members of Congress who do believe in democracy and the right of the people...all the people...to have a voice in their country's policies, laws, and future.

