



>> African Americans vote in the 1964 presidential election in New York City. In the South, however, it was much more difficult for African Americans to vote.

Interactive Flipped Video

>> Objectives

Explain the significance of Freedom Summer, the march on Selma, and why violence erupted in some American cities in the 1960s.

Compare and contrast the goals and approaches taken by African American leaders to expand political rights and economic opportunities.

Describe the social and economic situation of African Americans by 1975.

>> Key Terms

- Freedom Summer
- Voting Rights Act
- Twenty-fourth Amendment
- Kerner Commission
- Malcolm X
- Nation of Islam
- black power
- Black Panthers
- Lester Maddox
- affirmative action

During the 1950s and 1960s, the civil rights movement made great strides forward. Yet racial injustice was not fully eradicated. Frustration with this situation led some African Americans to turn to more radical and sometimes violent methods. African Americans achieved further successes, but for some the radicalism of the times left a bitter legacy.

Successes and Setbacks

Increasing Participation in the Political Process

None of the federal court decisions or civil rights measures passed through 1964 fundamentally affected the right to vote. The problem was a southern political system that used literacy tests, poll taxes, and intimidation to keep blacks from voting.

In Mississippi, in 1964, for instance, not a single African American person was registered to vote in five counties that had African American majorities. All of the major civil rights organizations sought to overcome these political injustices.

SNCC and Political Rights SNCC had spent several years organizing voter education projects in Mississippi. It met with little success and a great deal of violent opposition. But in 1964, it decided to get more directly involved in the political process. It called for a major campaign, known as **Freedom Summer**. About 1,000 volunteers, mostly black and white students, were to flood Mississippi to register African Americans to vote. They also formed the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), an alternative to Mississippi's all-white

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regular Democratic Party, to give African Americans a voice in state politics.

Even before most of the Freedom Summer volunteers had arrived, three civil rights workers—Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman—disappeared. SNCC claimed that they were murdered; state authorities denied these charges.

President Johnson ordered a massive search for the three, which ended when their bodies were found buried in an earthen dam. All had been shot at point-blank range. Yet, despite the obvious dangers, almost all of the other volunteers remained in the state.

Work of Political Organizations After Freedom Summer ended in August 1964, an MFDP delegation traveled to the Democratic Convention in New Jersey, seeking to be recognized as Mississippi's only Democratic Party. At the convention, Fannie Lou Hamer, one of the MFDP's leaders, gave powerful testimony. She described how she and other activists had been beaten, fired from their jobs, and displaced from their homes all because, as she put it, they wanted "to register" and "live as decent human beings."

Despite Hamer's testimony, the Democrats refused to seat the MFDP. Instead, party officials offered a compromise: they would seat two MFDP members as "at-large delegates" and reform the nomination rules to

guarantee greater minority representation in the future. The MFDP rejected this offer. Ironically, Mississippi's regular Democratic delegation left the convention in protest because the national party had made the offer to the MFDP.

Martin Luther King, Jr., Leads the March on Selma Early in 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the SCLC organized a major campaign in Selma, Alabama, to pressure the federal government to enact voting rights legislation. The protests climaxed in a series of confrontations on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, on the main route from Selma to Montgomery. The first of these confrontations took place on March 7, 1965, a day that became known as "Bloody Sunday." Heavily armed state troopers and other authorities attacked the marchers as they tried to cross the bridge. Sheyann Webb, a six-year-old girl at the time, recalled the scene:

I heard all of this screaming and . . . somebody yelled, 'Oh God, they're killing us!' . . . And I looked and I saw the troopers charging us . . . swinging their arms and throwing canisters of tear gas. . . . Some of them had clubs and others had ropes and whips. . . . It

Civil Rights Organizations

ORGANIZATION AND DATE FOUNDED	KEY PEOPLE	KEY FEATURES
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) 1909	Thurgood Marshall	Focused on legal cases to end segregation and gain legal equality
Nation of Islam 1930	Elijah Muhammad Malcolm X	Advocated separation of the races
Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) 1942	James Farmer	Organized peaceful protests to gain civil rights
Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) 1957	Martin Luther King, Jr. Ralph Abernathy	Church-based group dedicated to nonviolent resistance; organized demonstrations and protest campaigns
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) 1960	James Lawson Ella Baker Stokely Carmichael	Grass-roots movement of young activists; organized voter education projects in the South
Black Panther Party 1966	Huey Newton Bobby Seale	Militant group advocating armed confrontation; organized antipoverty campaigns

>> **Analyze Charts** What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of each organization's approach to gaining civil rights for African Americans?

was like a nightmare. I was then that I was going to die.

—Sheyann Webb, *Selma, Lord, Selma*, 1980

Webb survived, but the rampage continued. Television coverage of the violence outraged the nation. On March 15, President Johnson went on national television and called for a strong federal voting rights law. Historically, regulation of voting rights had been left to the states, but Johnson argued that "it is wrong to deny any of your fellow citizens the right to vote." He added, "Their cause is our cause too, because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And we shall overcome."

Voting Rights Act of 1965 Spurred by the actions of protesters, lobbying by the Washington bureau of the NAACP, and the words of the President, Congress passed the **Voting Rights Act** of 1965. The act banned literacy tests and empowered the federal government to oversee voting registration and elections in states that had discriminated against minorities. In 1975, Congress extended coverage to Hispanic voters in the Southwest.

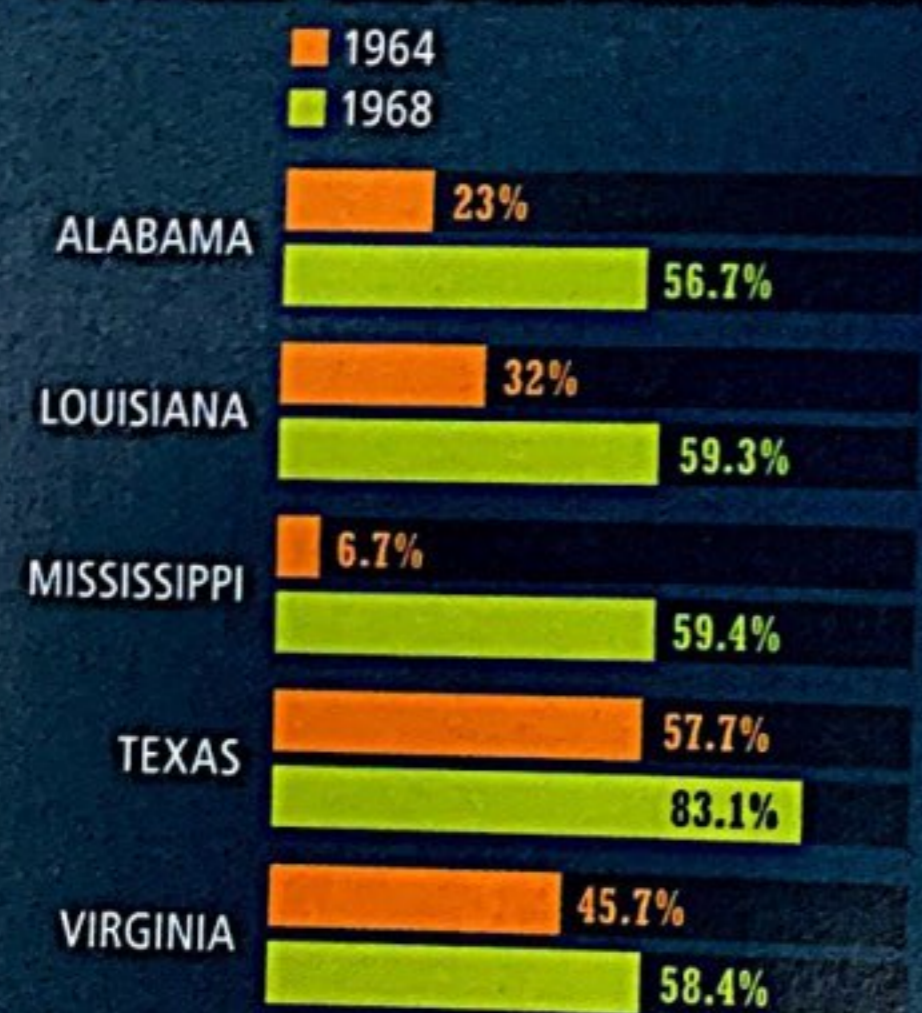
fourth Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1964. It banned the poll tax, which had been used to keep poor African Americans from voting. Also in response to litigation, the federal courts handed down several important decisions that expanded the right to participate in the democratic process. *Baker v. Carr* and *Reynolds v. Simms* limited racial gerrymandering, the practice of drawing election districts in a way as to dilute the African American vote, and established the legal principle of "one man, one vote." In 1973, the Supreme Court further challenged gerrymandering in *White v. Regester*.

These laws and decisions had a profound impact. Particularly in the Deep South, African American participation in politics skyrocketed. In Mississippi, the percentage of African Americans registered to vote jumped from just under 7 percent in 1964 to about 70 percent in 1986. Nationwide, the number of African American elected officials rose from fewer than 100 more than 6,000 by the mid-1980s.

? IDENTIFY CAUSE AND EFFECT What impact do the protests in Selma, Alabama, have on the nation?

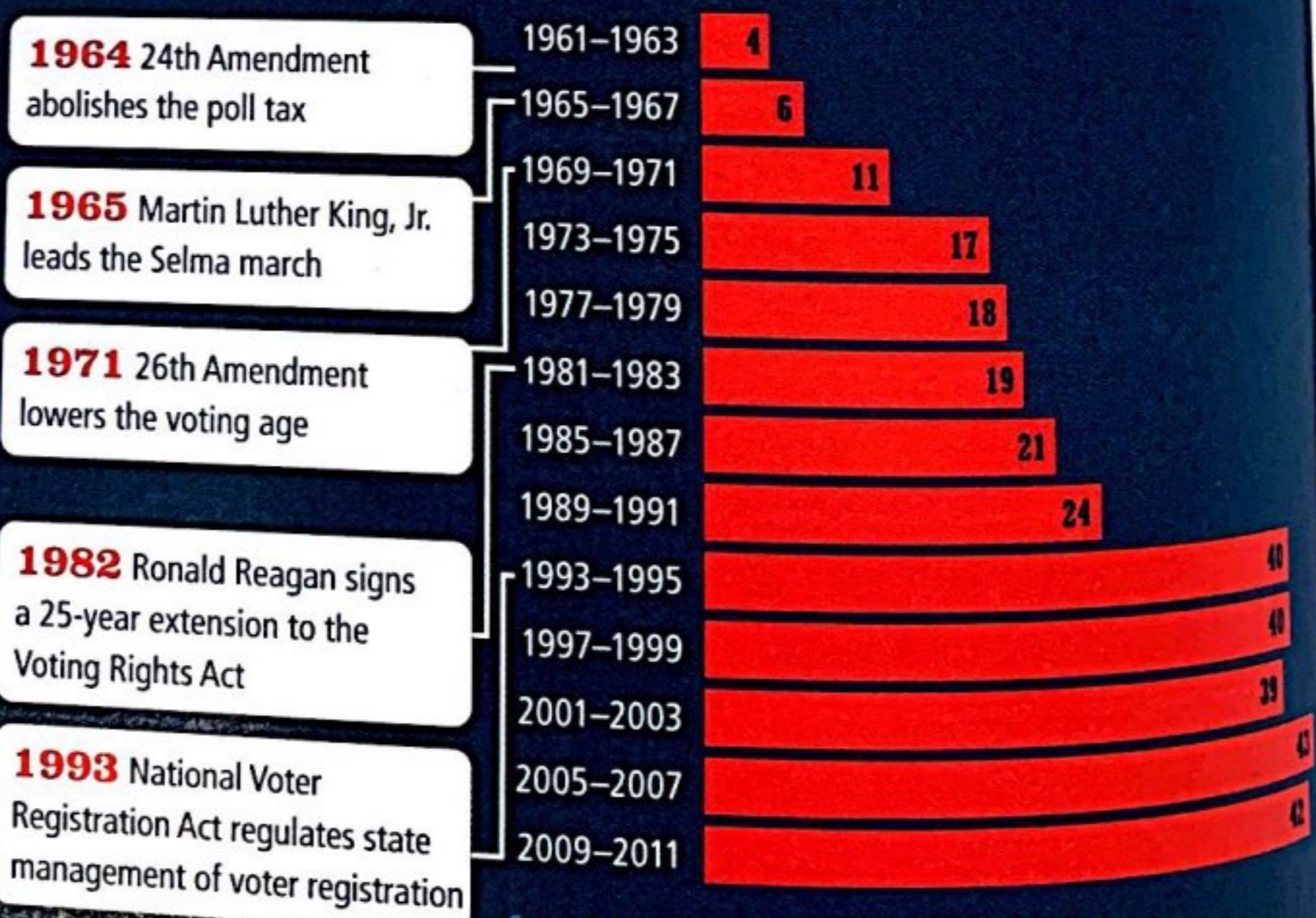
THE BATTLE FOR VOTING RIGHTS

AFRICAN AMERICAN VOTER REGISTRATION



Source: Stanley, Harold W. *Voter Mobilization and the Politics of Race: The South and Universal Suffrage, 1952-1984*

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN CONGRESS



Source: Congressional Research Service

>> Analyze Data In which state did African Americans make the most gains in voter registration? Do you believe it's more important for African Americans to increase their representation in Congress, or in state government?