**WHAT THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT SAID**

1. Watch a short NBC news clip from 1965 called, “The Right to Vote” that reports on then-President Lyndon Johnson signing the Voting Rights Act.

2. In 1965, the United States enacted the Voting Rights Act. It laid out strict rules that would enable African Americans to exercise their right to vote, particularly in Southern states that had created significant barriers to prevent them from doing do.  Watch the “Signing of the Civil Rights Act” video.

 3. To learn what the Voting Rights Act said, read the handout [The Voting Rights Act of 1965](https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/voting%20rights%20act.pdf). After reading it together, have students write a few sentences to explain what barriers to voting the new law banned, and why the law was necessary.

**THE EFFECTS OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT**

3. The Voting Rights Act had both immediate and long-term effects. Look at the graphics [Percentage of Registered Voters in Black Voting-Age Population](http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/Percentage%20of%20Registered%20Black%20Voters.pdf) and the [Number of Black Legislators in the South (1868-1900 and 1960-1992) handouts](https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/black%20legislature.pdf).

a. Complete the activities on each handout as a class.

b. Discuss the effects that the Voting Rights Act has had. Would you say it has been successful? Why or why not?

**CHALLENGES TO THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT**

4. The Voting Rights Act was reauthorized in 1970, 1965, 1982 and 2006. In each instance, Congress looked at evidence that showed that African Americans’ voting rights were still in danger in the states identified in the original 1965 law. In 2009 and 2013, the Voting Rights Act faced challenges in the Supreme Court.

a. Watch these two NBC Learn videos about the 2009 challenge: “Supreme Court Re-Examines 1965 Voting Rights Act” and “Supreme Court Narrowly Allows 1965 Voting Rights Act to Stand”.

Ask students why the law was challenged. On what grounds was it challenged? Why did the Supreme Court uphold the law? With what reservations?

b. Read the handout [Voting Issues Today](http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/Selma-TBTTB_voting_handout.pdf) about the successful 2013 challenge, *Shelby County v. Holder*.

**CURRENT CHALLENGES TO VOTING RIGHTS**

5. Civil rights activists struggled and sacrificed for a long time to push the federal government to take action to ensure that African Americans could exercise their right to vote. Recently new roadblocks have arisen that many people think threaten the hard-earned successes of the civil rights movement. In many states, new restrictions have been enacted for the stated reason of combating voter fraud. In reality, instances of voting fraud are nearly non-existent. The new restrictions actually threaten the voting rights of African Americans and Latinos, as well as young voters and low-income people.

Look at [this map](http://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/States%20with%20Voting%20Restrictions.pdf) and [this graph](https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/general/Percentage%20of%20People%20Who%20Lack%20ID_0.pdf) that show how new voter registration requirements affect different groups of Americans.

Discuss these questions:

What does each document show about who is or would be most affected by government ID requirements or other voting restrictions?

What conclusions can you draw when you look at both documents together?

Compare your conclusions about these documents with what you know about how African Americans in the South were prevented from voting in the century between Reconstruction and the civil rights movement.