



A week after Bloody Sunday, civil rights protesters appealed to President Johnson to address the situation in Selma. Later that evening, Johnson would appeal to a joint session of Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act.

*Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

## **Dedication:** **50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act**

In 1965, exactly 50 years ago, the Civil Rights Act had been signed into law. The 24th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States had banned poll taxes and the 15th Amendment had guaranteed all Americans the right to vote, but African Americans continued to face tremendous obstacles to voting—or even registering to vote. Many states, particularly in the Deep South, employed oppressive tactics including grandfather clauses, literacy tests, physical intimidation, restrictive residency policies and a new version of the poll tax: voter registration fees. Civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr. and John Lewis, focused on this last, critical frontier of voting rights.

Systematic denial of black Americans' constitutional right to vote was institutionalized in the Jim Crow South for generations after slavery was ended by the Civil War and the 13th Amendment. Nearly 100 years after the 14th and 15th Amendments abolished the denial of voting rights based on race and guaranteed the protections, freedoms and rights of the federal constitution—theoretically trumping all contrary state constitutions and laws—millions of black Americans could not exercise their constitutional right to vote.

The federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned racial discrimination in everything from housing to hiring, education to public accommodations—a historic, monumental achievement. But Martin Luther King, Jr. and other grassroots activists in the civil rights movement faced an even more difficult challenge: vanquishing insidious restrictive voting practices once and for all, and truly allowing access to the ballot box for all Americans. In a January 1965 conversation with King, President Lyndon Johnson said there would not be anything as powerful for the civil rights movement as unfettered access to the ballot box; that a comprehensive voting rights act would be bigger than the Civil Rights Act.<sup>1</sup> Yet Johnson struggled with competing issues on his legislative agenda such as Medi-

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<sup>1</sup> Beschloss, Michael R. *Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson's Secret White House Tapes, 1964-1965*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001. Print. pp. 161-162.

care and the war on poverty at home, while the growing conflict in Vietnam was consuming more time, resources and attention overseas.

Civil rights activists were not deterred by competing national interests. The American constitution delegated many powers to the states, and election administration was traditionally controlled locally. In counties with majority black populations across the Deep South there was scarcely any voter participation among African American citizens. An overwhelmingly white voting population repeatedly elected segregationist politicians who kept in place discriminatory and oppressive policies. Civil rights activists knew that democracy existed in theory and on paper for black men and women of the South, but not in reality.

Most importantly, civil rights activists knew that the historic achievements of the Civil Rights Act would hold no real meaning if voting rights could effectively be denied based on race. King said, “So long as I do not firmly and irrevocably possess the right to vote I do not possess myself. I cannot make up my mind—it is made up for me. I cannot live as a democratic citizen, observing the laws I have helped to enact—I can only submit to the edict of others.”<sup>2</sup>

In early 1965, a push began for federal legislation that would protect the right to vote for every American citizen, and abolish discriminatory and restrictive local voting laws designed to exclude non-whites. King, Lewis, and the leadership of various civil rights organizations knew their move would be controversial--even among their political allies in Congress--and it would be earlier than President Johnson would have preferred.

These civil rights leaders also knew that their mission would be dangerous. Local politicians, including Sherriff Jim Clark of Dallas County and Governor George Wallace of Alabama viewed protecting the white-only vote as the last stand for racial segregation. They were likely to suppress a grassroots voter registration drive with violence, and use state and local police forces to beat the protesting black citizens and their allies from across the country into submission and retreat. They knew that the

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<sup>2</sup> King, Jr., Dr. Martin Luther. “Give Us the Ballot, We Will Transform the South.” March on Washington. Lincoln Memorial, Washington, DC. May 17, 1957. Speech.

people who participated in the struggle for voting rights would almost certainly be arrested, many would be beaten; some might die.

But King and other civil rights leaders had a shrewd sense of the American moment, and they were committed to non-violent protest as modeled by Mahatma K. Ghandi. President Johnson told King, “If you can find the worst conditions that you run into in Alabama, Mississippi, or Louisiana, or South Carolina . . . and if you just take that one illustration and get it on radio and get it on television, and get it in the pulpits, get it in the meetings, get it every place you can, pretty soon, the fellow that didn’t do anything but drive a tractor will say, ‘That’s not right. That’s not fair.’”<sup>3</sup>

Less than two months later, on March 7, 1965, the “worst conditions” were realized: violent beatings stemming from the first attempt to march in Selma, now known as Bloody Sunday. The tragic events on the Edmund Pettus Bridge were broadcast nationwide on live television, witnessed, finally, by all Americans, including the President. After that fateful day, it became very clear that opposing voting rights for all citizens was the same as defending the actions of a segregationist power structure that brutally repressed any opponents. The national political tide quickly turned against Governor Wallace and his contemporaries, as the public grew disgusted with such brutality in plain sight, for all to see.

On March 15, 1965, President Johnson addressed a joint session of Congress and the nation, calling for swift passage of a strong voting rights act. “At times,” Johnson stated, “history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man’s unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was a century ago at Appomattox. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama . . . Rarely in any time does an issue lay bare the secret heart of America itself.”

He continued, “There is no Southern problem. There is no Northern problem. There is only an American problem . . . the most basic right of all [is] the right to choose your own leaders. The history of this country, in large measure, is the history of expansion of that right to all of our people. Many of the issues of civil rights are very complex and most difficult. But about this there can and should be no argument. Every

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<sup>3</sup> Beschluss p.162.

American citizen must have an equal right to vote . . . There is no duty which weighs more heavily on us than the duty we have to ensure that right.

“ . . . It is wrong—deadly wrong—to deny any of your fellow Americans the right to vote in this country. There is no issue of states’ rights or national rights. There is only the struggle for human rights . . . really it is all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. And we shall overcome. All Americans just must have the right to vote.”<sup>4</sup>

The legislation was more powerful than its most ardent backers could have imagined, and the final vote for passage in both the House and Senate saw strong, bipartisan majorities. The Voting Rights Act banned states and local jurisdictions from enacting laws that instituted “voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure . . . in a manner which results in a denial or abridgement of the right . . . to vote on account of race,” color, or language minority status. The act also banned the practice of gerrymandering voting districts in such a way as to intentionally dilute the power of minority voters. The law allowed any American citizen disenfranchised by election laws violating this provision of the Voting Rights Act to sue in federal court to have these laws overturned.

The Voting Rights Act established a preclearance process for all new election laws in jurisdictions with a history of racial discrimination in voting. Under federal preclearance, before a new voting law could take effect, the federal justice department evaluated it for compliance with the Voting Rights Act. This was a crucial check on state and local governments that had stood in the way of voting rights for black Americans. Over the ensuing decades, hundreds of state and local voting laws were rejected by the federal Department of Justice after being found to violate the Voting Rights Act.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 has accomplished much. Millions of black Americans have cast ballots, changed governments and elected African Americans to office at every level of government. But the law

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, President Lyndon B. “The American Promise.” Congress. House Chamber, United States Capitol, Washington, DC. March 15, 1965. Congressional Address.

remains at the center of debates around voting in this country. On June 25, 2013, the United States Supreme Court decided *Shelby County v. Holder*. In a 5-4 decision the court effectively struck down the preclearance section of the Act, asserting that Congress relied on outdated data when renewing the law. The court said that the Department of Justice had to show a current pattern of discriminatory intent in the enactment of election law, one which would harm certain groups of voters. If such a pattern were shown, then federal officials could still use the “bail-in” provision of the Voting Rights Act to subject a state or local jurisdiction to preclearance—but only based on current circumstances, not past practice.

To the plaintiffs in the case, the government of Shelby County, Alabama, the 2013 decision represented a vindication that times had changed and Jim Crow was gone. They argued that even though their predecessors had enforced white-only voting for generations, the current local government should not have to continue to pay for the sins of the past. They argued that strong enforcement of the Voting Rights Act by the federal Department of Justice had succeeded in eliminating racist practices in local election administration. Congressman John Lewis, who had led those peaceful marchers on Bloody Sunday to meet the force of police batons, tear gas and whips, disagreed. He called the Supreme Court’s decision “a dagger in the heart of voting access.”

It is true that the Voting Rights Act was born of specific historic circumstances of the systematic effort to deny people of color their constitutional right to vote. But it is hard to argue that at least some vestige of the denial of rights does not remain. For example, immediately after the Shelby case, some of the very same states that were required to pre-clear changes in their election laws under the Voting Rights Act immediately attempted passage of new laws, potentially just as discriminatory as poll taxes were in the past, such as onerous voter ID requirements and proof of citizenship in order to vote. Cases challenging these new laws are before the courts today.

Our charge as we mark this 50th anniversary since the enactment of the Voting Rights Act is to never forget the violence that met peace in 1965. We simply cannot take voting rights for granted or assume that once we have won a great victory for civil or human rights that the fight



President Lyndon B. Johnson moves to shake hands with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. after signing the Voting Rights act of 1965 into law.

*Photograph courtesy of the LBJ Presidential Library.*

is over and settled. We must be forever vigilant and prevent systemic discrimination of any kind in our voting system.

Elections are the means by which we Americans govern ourselves. Those of us in public service—and all citizens—should be doing everything we can to ensure that every citizen who is eligible to vote is able to cast a ballot. Ultimately, it is up to each of us to preserve the right to vote; to remember the darkest parts of our past; and to carry on the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., Congressman John Lewis, President Lyndon Johnson and the many thousands of others who sacrificed so much so that all Americans could enjoy the constitutional right to vote unfettered. As President Johnson charged us in the spring of 1965, “Let each of us look within our own hearts and our own communities, and let each of us put our shoulder to the wheel to root out injustice wherever it exists.”<sup>5</sup>

It is for those leaders and many others and with the spirit of the continued expansion of voting rights that I gratefully dedicate the 2015 State Register and Manual. We forever owe our predecessors in the civil rights movement a sincere debt of gratitude, and we must always be vigilant to protect those rights and freedoms for which so many fought and died on our behalf. May the Voting Rights Act continue to be strengthened for the next 50 years and beyond by the American Congress and judicial system, and may it be a beacon of freedom and the power of the people to change their circumstances for generations to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denise W. Merrill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Denise W. Merrill  
Secretary of the State

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<sup>5</sup> Johnson Congressional Address.





UConn women's team, coaches, and staff join President Barack Obama at the White House for a recognition of their team's national basketball title on September 15, 2015.

*Photograph courtesy of UConn Athletics.*

## **Another Championship Closer to Legendary Status**

In the history of collegiate athletics, there was only one. They called him “the Wizard of Westwood” for his unparalleled string of NCAA basketball championships in the 1960s and 1970s while head coach of the UCLA men’s basketball program. John Wooden was his name, and he coached a series of basketball legends in their own right such as Lew Alcindor (later Kareem Abdul Jabbar), Bill Walton, and Larry Brown, just to name a few. In all, John Wooden’s UCLA men’s basketball teams won 10 NCAA championships, and no one had ever done that since—until, that is, 2015, when another coach tied that record. That coach is Geno Auriemma of the University of Connecticut.

On April 7<sup>th</sup> of this year, Coach Auriemma led his team to a 10<sup>th</sup> NCAA basketball championship with a 63-53 win over the University of Notre Dame, tying Wooden’s record, once thought to be unbreakable. Of course, Coach Geno didn’t do this himself. It took many tireless hours of practice and key, sustained standout performances by players such as Breanna Stewart (named the NCAA tournament outstanding player of the year three years in a row), leadership and management from point guard Moriah Jefferson, clutch shooting from senior Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis and assists from bench players like freshman Kia Nurse.

To coach one women’s Division I NCAA basketball team to one championship is an amazing accomplishment. And it is a group accomplishment: the coach sets the tone and expectations, the players integrate the coach’s winning formula and do the hard work of preparing for games and executing the plan during 40 minutes of play on the court for every game. Veteran players who were coached by such basketball greats as Geno Auriemma, Pat Summit, John Wooden, Phil Jackson, Larry Brown or KC Jones, will tell you—every one of them—that it was not just that the coach was great or inspiring in combination with the players’ talent that created success. Those great coaches—and many others—introduced an entire system of understanding the game, the players’ role in it, and how the flow of the team and the game stem from understanding that program. Often times the players who go on to greatness credit these coaches with helping to give them an organizing principle to their entire lives because they were able to master their system for understanding the game of basketball.

The accomplishments of all of the women who have learned and mastered Coach Auriemma's basketball system are nothing short of breathtaking. Stretching back 20 years from the days of Rebecca Lobo and Jen Rizzotti to Swin Cash, Diana Taurasi, Tina Charles, Maya Moore and so many others, the UConn Women's basketball program has now inspired an entire generation of fans and aspiring young women players. It is the sustained excellence of the Women Huskies and rivalries with squads at Tennessee, Stanford, Notre Dame and other schools that really gave rise to the popularity of women's basketball across the country. You could even say that the wonderful play on the court of the UConn Women's teams and others created the demand for the WNBA alternative and a women's professional league. Twenty years ago it would have been impossible to imagine women's professional leagues in Europe, South America or Asia, yet today such leagues are thriving.

So now, the UConn Huskies women's basketball team stands on the precipice of unique greatness: by winning one more championship under coach Geno Auriemma they will do what no American college basketball program has ever done—win 11 NCAA Division I championships. I will say again what I have said before—we never take it for granted, and it never gets old. Thank you to all the UConn Women Husky champions for yet another national title, thank you to Coach Auriemma for 20 years of inspiration and greatness, and thank you all for allowing us to dream and have our dreams come true. We are so proud of you and we will always appreciate everything you have done for UConn, for Connecticut, and for all of us. I will always be a big fan. GO HUSKIES!!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denise W. Merrill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Denise W. Merrill  
Secretary of the State

**In Memory of  
Service Members from Connecticut  
Lost in Afghanistan and Iraq**

**March 2002 – September 2004**

*(Memorialized in the 2004 edition  
of the State Register and Manual)*

John A. Chapman

Phillip A. Jordan

Kemaphoom Ahn Chanawongse

Wilfredo Perez, Jr.

Richard Selden Eaton, Jr.

David Travis Friedrich

Anthony D'Agostino

Phillip R. Albert

Jeffrey Braun

Eric Thomas Paliwoda

Benjamin Gilman

Tyanna Avery-Felder

Felix Delgreco

Nathan B. Bruckenthal

Melissa Hobart

Jacob D. Martir

**October 2004 – October 2005**

*(Memorialized in the 2005 edition  
of the State Register and Manual)*

William Brennan

Kevin J. Dempsey

Joseph Michael Nolan

Michael J. McMahon

Henry E. Irizarry

Robert Hoyt

Thomas E. Vitagliano

Lawrence R. Philippon

John T. Schmidt, III

Christopher Hoskins

Steve Reich

David Coullard

**November 2005 – September 2006**

*(Memorialized in the 2006 edition  
of the State Register and Manual)*

Brian S. Letendre

Stephen Bixler

Jordan C. Pierson

Philip A. Johnson

Nicholas A. Madaras

**November 2006 – May 2007**

*(Memorialized in the 2007 edition  
of the State Register and Manual)*

Jason Hamill

Joseph E. Phaneuf, II

Richard L. Ford

Stephen K. Richardson

Orlando E. Gonzalez\*

Keith Heidtman

**June 2007 – April 2008**

*(Memorialized in the 2008 edition  
of the State Register and Manual)*

Andre Craig, Jr.

Jason D. Lewis

Jason Lantieri

**May 2008 – May 2009**

*(Memorialized in the 2009 edition  
of the State Register and Manual)*

Christian S. Cotner

Thomas J. Brown

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\* The memorial for Orlando E. Gonzalez appears in the 2012 edition of the *Connecticut State Register and Manual*.

**June 2009 – May 2010**

*(Memorialized in the 2010 edition  
of the State Register and Manual)*

Edward C. Kramer

Dennis J. Pratt\*

Benjamin A. Sklaver

Xhacob LaTorre

Ronald J. Spino

Tyler O. Griffin

Edwin Rivera

**June 2010 – May 2011**

*(Memorialized in the 2011 edition  
of the State Register and Manual)*

Steven J. DeLuzio

Gebrah P. Noonan

David R. Fahey, Jr.

Dae Han Park

Frank E. Adamski, III

Raymond G. Estelle, II

Richard C. Emmons, III

Eric D. Soufrine

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\* The memorial for Dennis J. Pratt appears in the 2012 edition of the *Connecticut State Register and Manual*.

**June 2011 – August 2012**

*(Memorialized in the 2012 edition  
of the State Register and Manual)*

Brian R. Bill

Edward J. Frank, II

Ari R. Cullers

Philip C.S. Schiller

**September 2012 – June 2013**

*(Memorialized in the 2013 edition  
of the State Register and Manual)*

Andrew M. Pedersen-Keel

**June 2013 – December 2014**

*(Memorialized in the 2014 edition  
of the State Register and Manual)*

Todd J. Lobraico, Jr.



