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Course: ACR 150

## Option 5


Today in America you have to be 18 and up to vote, So everyone who is 18 and a citizen is allowed to vote. However, after the American civil war, many states required that in order for African Americans to have the right to vote they had to pass a literacy test. These tests have often been used as a barrier to prevent certain people from exercising their rights as a citizen. Through Jim Crow Laws 1870s - 1960s many states enforced segregation where they required citizens to take tests to vote. These tests are unreasonable since many blacks were illiterate, these tests denied them from voting. These tests were used as a politico device to prevent black people from voting. I will particularly focus on the Louisiana test 1964 where they show you the person has to be smart enough to vote.

The purpose of these tests is to fail black voters even educated people also failed these tests. So to let their voice heard in the politico system they have to know how to read. The Louisiana test consisted of 30 questions, which was very hard to answer, especially the very last page and they only had 10 minutes to complete the test. Passing these tests is nearly impossible because you can't fail one of them. People who don't know how to read will definitely fail these tests. In 1965 Martin Luther King Junior led voter registration drives in Selma Alabama. At that time the black population was a little bit higher than the white population. During these times thousands of people got arrested. It was complete chaos. Applicants stood in line for hours, a




group of protesters confronted by hundreds of police officers as a result it created some headlines. For that President Johnson signed the voting act 1965. This act prohibited the further use of literacy tests to vote. Many think this was unreasonable like five friends of mine after taking the test. They think the Louisiana literacy test was unfair to prevent African Americans from exercising their rights as citizens in the United States.

All five people who I made take the test said it was unfair. Back in the day a lot of black people never passed the 4th grade , and this was a great strategy to block them from voting. Post-civil war blacks were still slaves in some states. One of my friends thinks this process was biased and the laws and government were meant to benefit white people. She thinks this was insane because these tests require patience and to be very focused. She feels at that time an animal was more protected by the laws than a black person. Another friend said, for example, today as a black person living in the U.S. we don't have to take a literacy test to vote but many of the Republicans passed a bill to cut things like mail-in voting. Also, they close a lot of voting places. People have to drive hours to a voting place. It's like black people's vote doesn't count. Another one says the former president didn't win the popular vote but he still won by getting all the white folks to vote. And when blacks were able to vote they only accounted for  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a person. I read that in the 1890s the whites feared the votes of poor blacks and whites thus causing the establishment of poll taxes and literacy tests which decreased the black vote by 62 percent and the white by 26 percent only. All of these are to intimidate African Americans from exercising their right as a citizen.



At that time white men discriminated against black men. White people would blackmail black people who work for them by threatening to fire them from their jobs if they try to register to vote. For example, if they go to sign their names they are fired as soon as they come back to their house. Many black families were provided on the white men cotton field so many of them were afraid to enroll to vote. Many of them were uncomfortable just by looking at the white men in the eyes because they were so used to putting their heads down in the white man's presence. This is a form of slavery many of them get beaten every time they go to register to vote. According to one of my friends, who took the test, she said the Grandfather Clause's rule allowed people from the South to vote even if they were unable to read and write if their grandfathers had voted in the past. However, all blacks were slaves they didn't have any of their grandfathers who can vote so they were excluded from this rule. And none of them were educated enough to pass the state's literacy test to vote. There is no such test as of now. Such a test in the nineteenth century was discriminatory against the black population but black people still fall behind in literacy. John F. Szwed's article "The Ethnography of Literacy" explains the importance of the power to read and write. He says it is important that everyone learns to read and write because without the knowledge of how to read and write people sometimes can't exceed their rights. As you can see in 1965 they introduced a law that would prevent black people from voting by using a literacy test, and the Louisiana literacy test was biased the way it was structured. It was controlled by the white administration, they used this method to reject African Americans by testing their ability to read and write.

As I compare all the people who took the Louisiana literacy test, they believe today black people still have to struggle for their rights in the United States and literacy is still an issue.



According to week three on open Lab “Some Literacy issues in the U.S,” we can see many black kids still struggle in literacy. Many black students struggle in school. The education system favors white students. African Americans still need to fight for better education. Literacy is a big weapon as back then the owner as to keep their slaves illiterate to prevent them to do many things like voting. They believe the skill and knowledge can be improved through literacy. If you don’t have skill and knowledge you will be placed at a major disadvantage.

At last, each of my friend failed the Louisiana literacy test but we all understand each other about different challenges African Americans had to face about discrimination, prejudice, racism, and stereotypes in the United States. Black people were treated unfairly but still won many fights. For example, many African Americans took the courage to register to vote in the 1960s. Many of them lost their lives battling for the right to vote by 1970 the literacy tests were abolished from every state. It was a symbolic fight in 1964 The Fight for a Right. A year ago many black people went to vote for their rights, they stood in long lines to vote again. It shows there was a movement where African American won again. African Americans are strong when they work together and fight for what is right there's no fight they can't win.



### Works Cited

- <https://allthatsinteresting.com/voting-literacy-test>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOX36uYgMys>
- <https://comphacker.org/pdfs/632/Szwed.pdf>