

GEOGRAPHY WORKSHEET 40

Region _____

African Americans Register to Vote

Directions: Read the paragraphs below and study the chart. Then answer the questions that follow.

Black males gained the right to vote upon ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870. However, the failure of Reconstruction in the South combined with a return to white supremacy attitudes effectively disenfranchised these new voters after 1876.

Most states in the South used many tactics to discourage African Americans from registering. Literacy tests were legal but were often unfairly written. Poll taxes were required in some places. Outright terrorism by white citizens' councils and the Ku Klux Klan was also an effective means of preventing African Americans from exercising their constitutional rights.

Voter registration became one of the chief goals of the civil rights movement in the 1950's and 1960's. In the summer of 1964, several thousand college students—both black and white—volunteered to go to Mississippi to help register that state's voters. Before the summer was over, three volunteers were murdered, three more were shot, eighty were beaten, more than one thousand were arrested, and dozens of homes and churches were bombed or burned.

In January 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., launched a drive to register black American voters in Alabama. In

March a prospective voter was murdered near Selma, Alabama. King and his followers began a protest march from Selma to the state capital, Montgomery. State troopers and police used tear gas, dogs, clubs, and bullwhips to break up the march. Two weeks later, King led a second march, this one including ministers, priests, and rabbis from across the country. The marchers numbered about 3,200 when they left Selma. When they arrived at Montgomery four days later, their ranks had swelled to 25,000.

Though protected by the Alabama National Guard, United States marshals, and two army battalions, the Selma march ended violently. A white woman from Detroit was killed by Klansmen, and two clergymen from the East were gunned down.

That same month, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The law eliminated literacy tests and required that federal, rather than state, examiners must register qualified voters. The law also gave the Attorney General the right to file suits against the use of the poll tax in state elections. In 1966 the Supreme Court ruled that poll taxes were unconstitutional.

Black Voter Registration Before and After the Voting Rights Act of 1965

State	1960	1966	Increase	Percentage of Increase over 1960
Alabama	66,000	250,000	184,000	278.8
Arkansas	73,000	115,000	42,000	57.5
Florida	183,000	303,000	120,000	65.6
Georgia	180,000	300,000	120,000	65.6
Louisiana	159,000	243,000	84,000	52.8
Mississippi	22,000	175,000	153,000	695.4
North Carolina	210,000	282,000	72,000	34.3
South Carolina	58,000	191,000	133,000	229.3
Tennessee	185,000	225,000	40,000	21.6
Texas	227,000	400,000	173,000	76.2
Virginia	100,000	205,000	105,000	105.0

Source: Compiled from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States.

Understanding Main Ideas

1. How did Southern states keep African Americans from exercising their right to vote?

2. What tactics did the civil rights movement use to increase black voter registration in the South?

3. How did the South respond to this political activity?

4. How did the Voting Rights Act of 1965 enable more African Americans to register to vote?

Extending Graphic Skills

5. In 1960, how many African Americans were registered to vote in Alabama? in Mississippi? in South Carolina?

6. By what percentage did each of these states increase its black registration by 1966?

Making Inferences

7. Why was the percentage increase so much larger in these states than in the others?

Making Judgments

8. Both Florida and Georgia had an increase of 120,000 in registered black voters from 1960 to 1966, only slightly less than the increase in South Carolina of 133,000. However, the percentage increase in the first two states was about 66 percent, compared with 229 percent in South Carolina. How do you explain this?
