

SUFFRAGE AND CIVIL RIGHTS

TEXT SUMMARY

In 1870 the 15th Amendment established that the right to vote may not be denied because of race. The amendment was ignored in some southern States, where tactics such as violence, threats, literacy testing, and gerrymandering were used to

keep African Americans from voting. **Gerrymandering** is the drawing of electoral district lines in a way that limits a particular group's voting strength.

The civil rights movement pressured Congress to ensure African American voting rights. The Civil Rights Act of 1957 set up the Civil Rights Commission to investigate voter discrimination claims. The Civil Rights Act of 1960 called for federal referees to help all eligible people to register and vote in federal elections.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 emphasized the use of **injunctions**, or orders from the courts to do or stop doing something, to ensure that eligible citizens were not kept from voting.

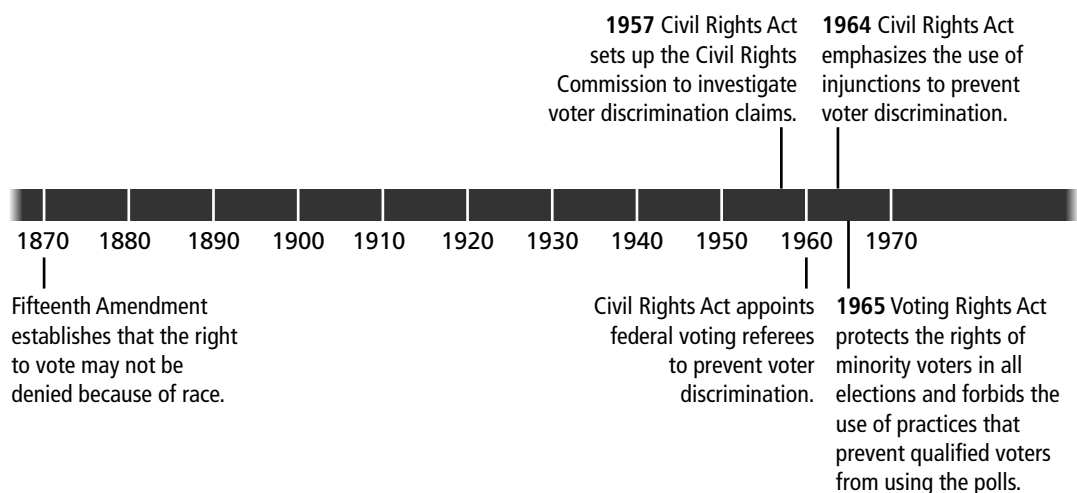
The Voting Rights Act of 1965 made the 15th Amendment truly effective by applying it to all elections—local, State, and federal. It forbade practices that prevented qualified voters from using the polls. Additionally, in those States where a majority of the electorate did not vote in 1964, this act gave the Department of Justice **preclearance**, or the right to approve new election laws, to prevent these laws from weakening minority voting rights. The act was to stay in effect for five years, but it has been extended three times and is now scheduled to expire in 2007.

THE BIG IDEA

Civil rights laws came about to protect Americans from being disenfranchised because of race.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: Implementing the 15th Amendment over Time

Not until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 did the 15th Amendment become fully effective.



REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How were injunctions used in the civil rights movement?
2. **Time Line Skills** When were minority voting rights ensured for *all* elections?