



The year 2020 is a landmark year for African American voting rights, commemorating two major events in Black history, and therefore United States history. First, we mark the 150th anniversary (sesquicentennial) of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which gave African American men the right to vote. Ratified on February 3, 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment declared that “the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

This year we also mark 100 years (centennial) since the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which provided women in the US -- including African American women -- the right to vote, thereby culminating the women’s suffrage movement. The Amendment was ratified on August 18, 1920.

Despite these milestone events, African Americans continued to fight for their voting rights to be recognized. Over the course of decades, poll taxes, literacy tests, grandfather clauses, whites-only primaries, and other measures were instituted to intentionally disqualify African Americans from voting. The result was that, by the early 20th century, nearly all African Americans were disfranchised. By the early 1960s, voter registration rates among African Americans were negligible in much of the Deep South and well below those of whites elsewhere in the country.

In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed, and the Twenty-fourth Amendment, abolishing poll taxes for voting in national elections, was ratified. The following year, the Voting Rights Act, which was comprehensive federal legislation to protect voting rights, was ratified. The Voting Rights Act suspended literacy tests, provided for federal approval of proposed changes to voting laws or procedures in jurisdictions that had previously used tests to determine voter eligibility, and directed the attorney general of the United States to challenge the use of poll taxes for state and local elections.

Next November, Americans will vote in the U.S. Presidential election. In honor of and respect for the long, hard fight for African Americans to secure and employ voting rights, let us all exercise this privilege and VOTE.

Sources: www.britannica.com and www.Asalh.org