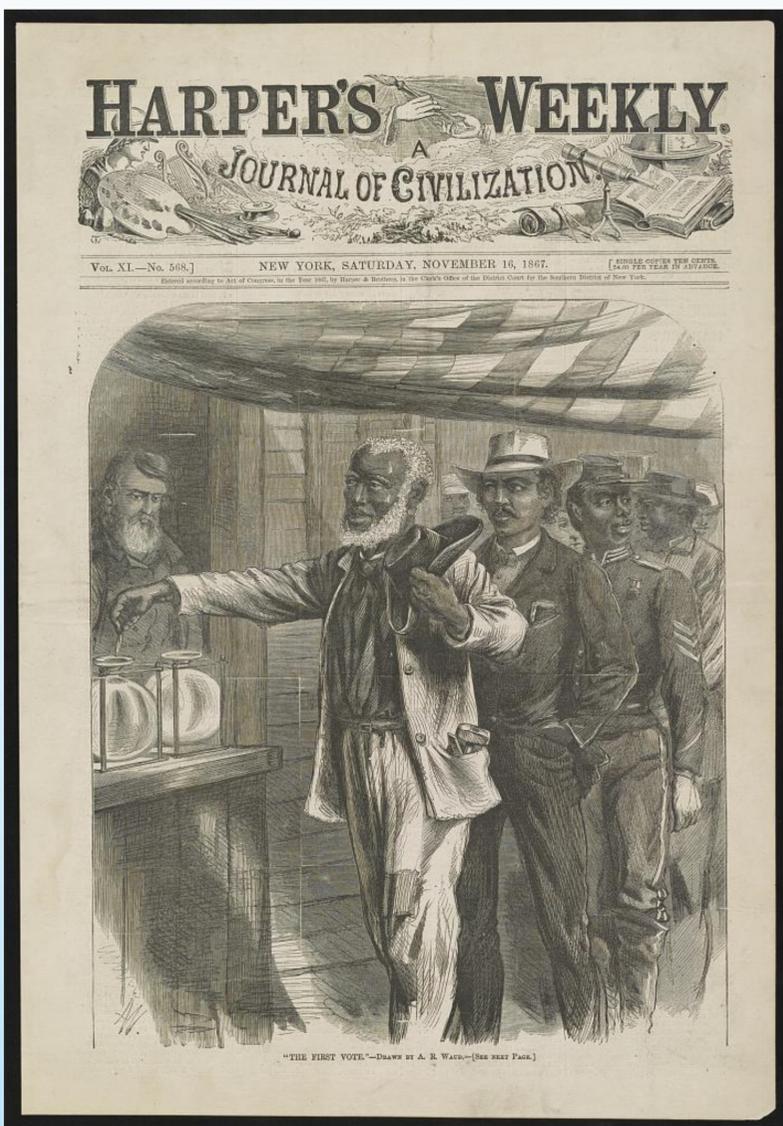


# African American Men Gain the Vote

After the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment freed all enslaved persons and legalized their citizenship, African American men expressed their rights as citizens by going to the polls. The 15<sup>th</sup> amendment of 1870 protected this right, and African Americans in many Southern states outnumbered whites and became an important voting bloc.

**13th Amendment:** The Thirteenth Amendment was ratified by December 6, 1865 and provides that “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” This amendment provided an official, constitutional end to slavery throughout the United States.



**15th Amendment:** The Fifteenth Amendment was ratified on February 3, 1870 and extended voting rights to all citizens. “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.” However, it was still only men who could vote, and without enforcement of the law, African Americans continued to be denied suffrage.

November 16, 1867 Harper's Weekly. *Courtesy of Library of Congress.*

# African American Men Hold Office

African American men were voted into positions of power. They held seats in state and federal legislatures, served on states' Constitutional Conventions, and held positions in local government that included attorneys general, postmasters, and collectors of customs. The federal positions of Counsel General to Haiti, Recorder of Deeds, and U.S. Marshall were held by Frederick Douglass.



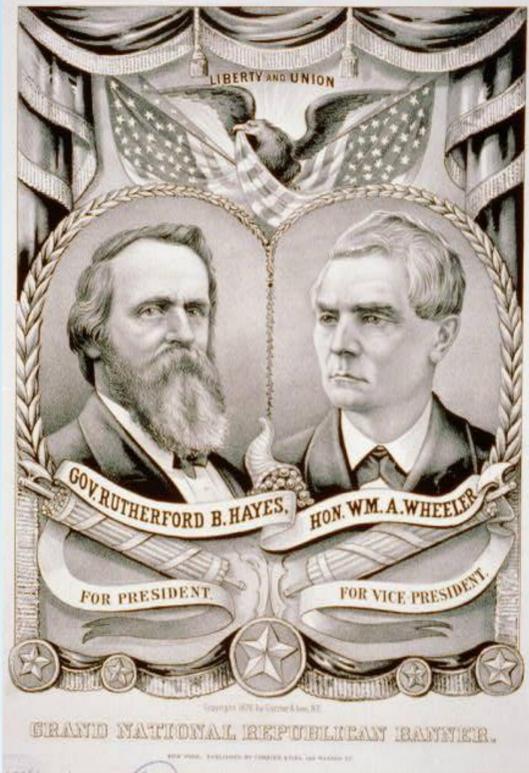
Reverend Henry McNeal Turner, state legislator in Georgia. *Courtesy of The Library of Congress.*



Tunis Campbell, a politician who settled in Georgia and was elected to the constitutional convention. *Courtesy of Hotel Keepers, Head Waiters, and Housekeepers' Guide (1848).*

About 2,000 African American men were public officials during reconstruction (1866-1877). Sixty-nine Georgian African American men attended the constitutional convention (1867-68) or sat in the state legislature (1867-1872). Henry McNeal Turner, Tunis Campbell, and Aaron A. Bradley were all African Americans who served in the convention and legislature.

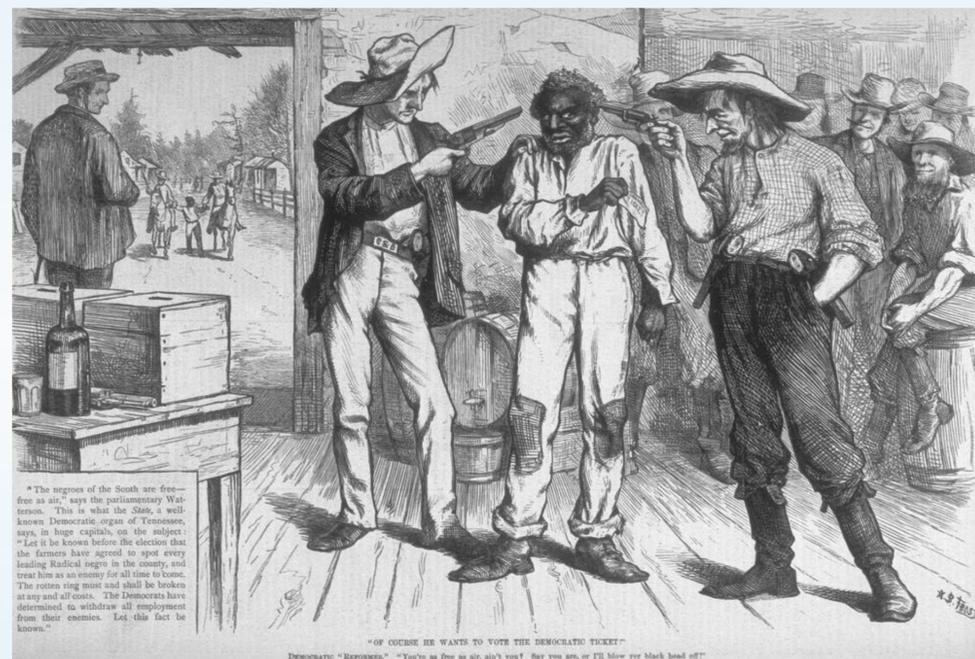
# The End of Reconstruction



1876 Republican campaign banner done by Currier and Ives. Shows the Hayes-Wheeler ticket. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

Reconstruction ended in 1877, not because there were stable systems in place to support and protect African Americans, but because of the disputed presidential election. Accusations of electoral fraud, intimidation, and bribing caused Congress to form an electoral commission to settle the election.

In the Compromise of 1877, Rutherford B. Hayes election to president was brokered by Republican and Democratic Congressmen. The democratic congressmen agreed to elect Hayes if federal troops were withdrawn from the South. Hayes was elected on March 2, 1877, and within two months withdrew federal troops.



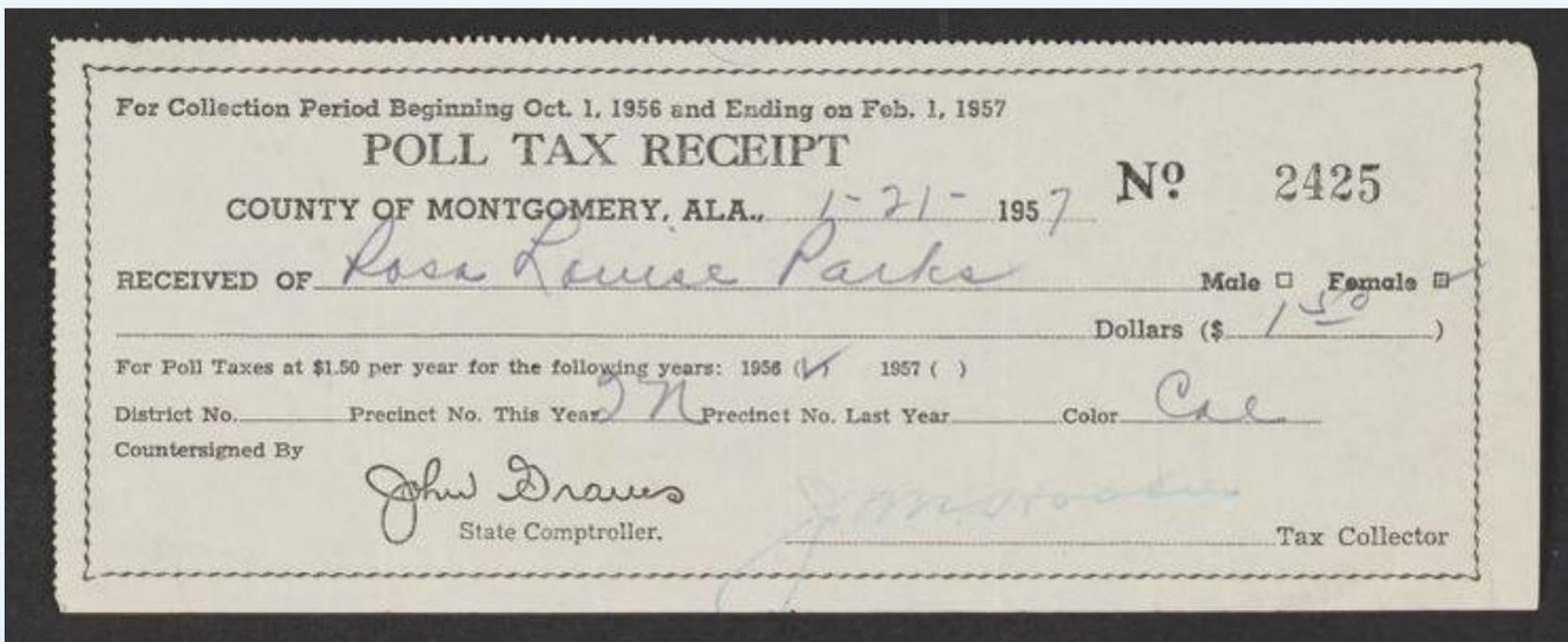
“Of Course He Wants to Vote Democratic” a political cartoon featured in Harper’s Weekly illustrating violence at the polls. *Courtesy of Indiana University Library.*

After winning legislative majorities, Democrats rewrote their new constitutions to remove the legal protections African Americans had under Reconstruction. African Americans were legally disenfranchised in 1908, but threats of violence from organized groups (like the KKK) and members of their communities disenfranchised African Americans before the 20th century.

# Voter Suppression Buzzwords

**Property requirements** meant that to be eligible to vote, a man had to own a certain amount of property. While some African Americans were able to buy property after Reconstruction, many were not, or did not own the required amount.

**Poll taxes** required voters to pay, generally \$1 or \$2, before they could vote. These seem like small sums, but agricultural workers, including African Americans and whites, dealt in credit, and were not paid in cash. Some states required voters to pay outstanding taxes and fees before they could vote.



Receipt from a poll tax Rosa Parks paid to vote in 1957. The tax was \$1.50.  
*Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

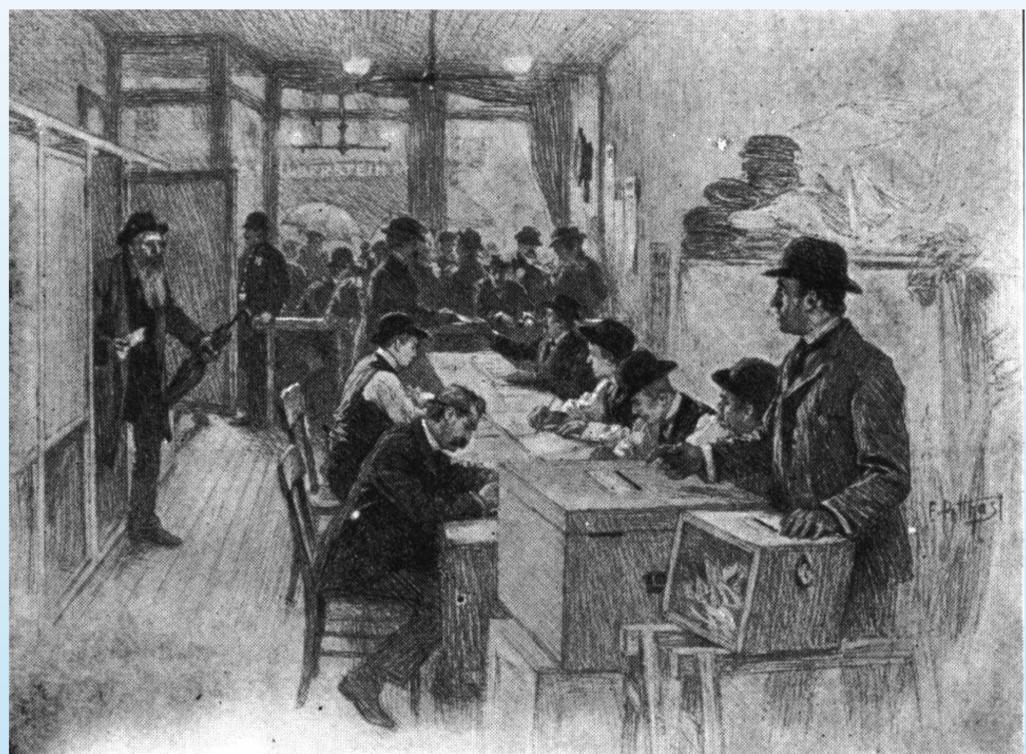
**Literacy requirements** required potential voters to read passages aloud (normally from the Bible or Constitution, but could have been anything the voting clerk chose) before they were deemed eligible to vote. These requirements effectively blocked African Americans from the polls because general illiteracy was higher, it was more difficult for African Americans to access education, and clerks were biased.

# Voter Suppression Buzzwords

**Secret ballots** were introduced in the north because voters were threatened at polls by political candidates and party members. At the time, voting was done by the raising of hands, or casting of stones, or taking a ballot from a candidate that was already filled out along party lines. A lack of anonymity caused intimidation.

The secret ballot was presented as the solution because voters filled out a ballot in the polling place. However, secret ballots cut the illiterate population out of the voting process, because they required voters to read the ballot (a list of names generally without party affiliation) and cast their vote unassisted.

**Grandfather clauses** were used to protect poor and illiterate whites from all of these policies that targeted them alongside African Americans. If one could prove their grandfather had been registered to vote before 1867 (the last year before African American men were enfranchised) then one was eligible to vote without the need for poll taxes, or property and literacy requirements. Even so, illiterate white voters would not have understood the secret ballots.

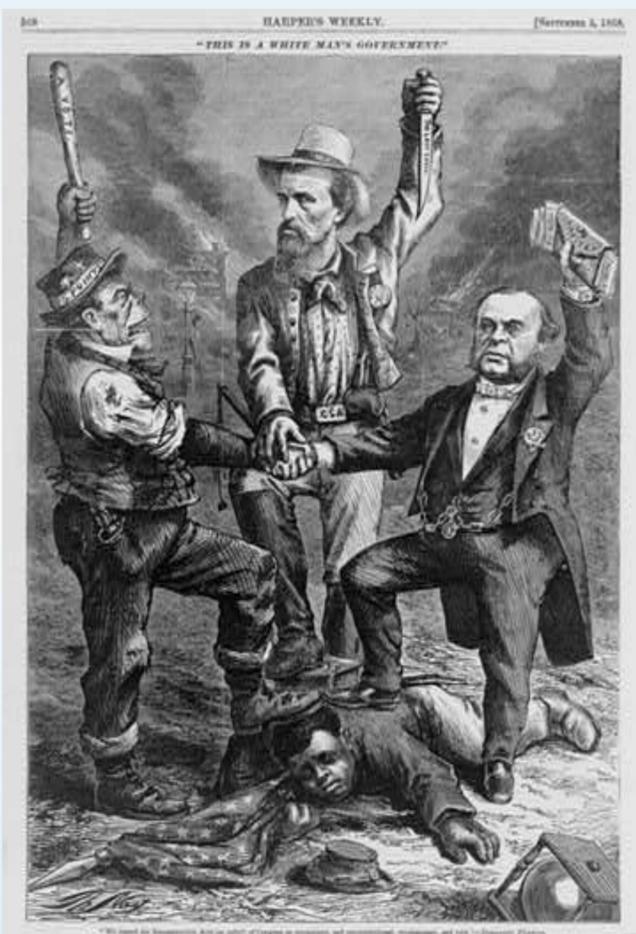


Drawing depicting the secret ballot, circa 1900. *Courtesy of History of the United States vol. V by E. Benjamin Andrews.*

# The Vote Suppressed

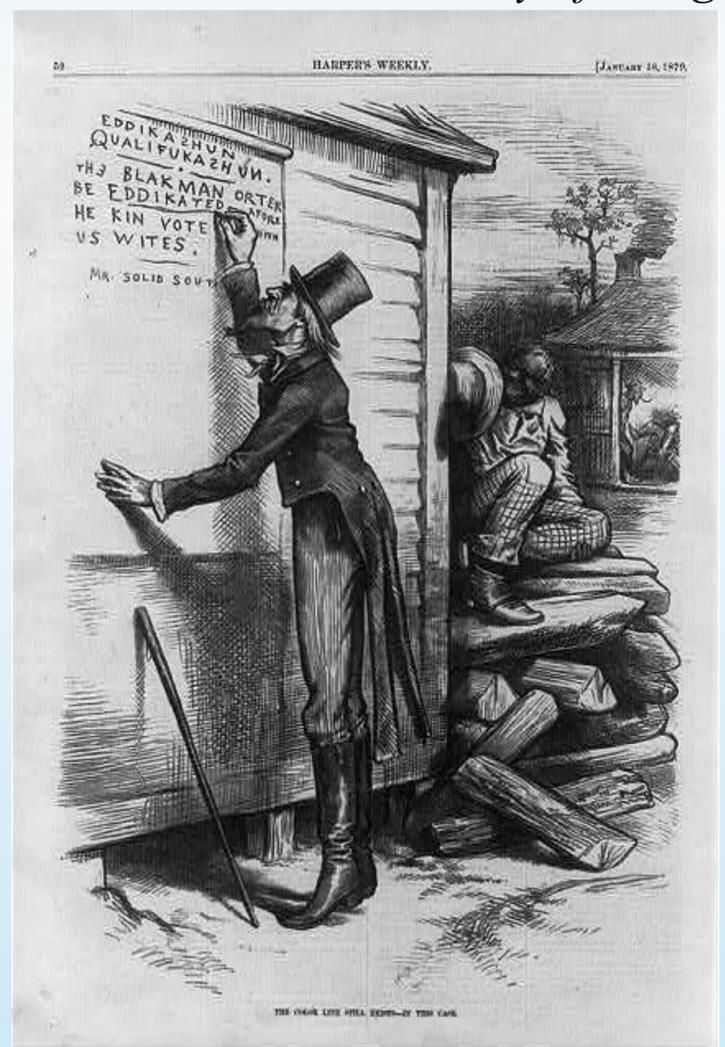
In the South, African Americans were legally disenfranchised after the 1877 end of Reconstruction. Northern states' methods to restrict immigrant voting (reregistration, literacy tests, property requirements, and secret ballots) were used. Clearing voting rolls and starting registration over forced the new requirements on voters and disenfranchised tens of thousands.

In 1902 Alabama voting rolls were cleared and African Americans registered to vote fell to less than 3,000. Literacy, property requirements, and secret ballots (that made it nearly impossible for illiterate people to vote), affected 40,000 white men who were also deemed unable to vote under the new requirements.



Harper's Weekly cartoon entitled "This is a White Man's Government" in which representations of of the U.S. trample an African American soldier. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

Harper's Weekly cartoon "The Colored Line Still Exists -in this Case" depicting a literacy test. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

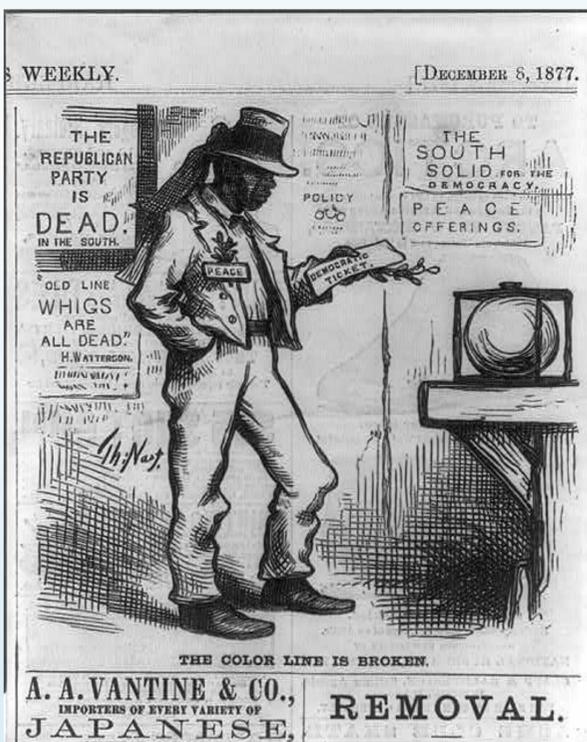


In 1867, 93,457 eligible African American men were registered to vote in Georgia. By 1900, residency requirements for voting eligibility were doubled, targeting transient rural laborers. This along with poll taxes and literacy requirements were overwhelmingly effective; in 1910 four percent of African American men in Georgia were registered to vote.

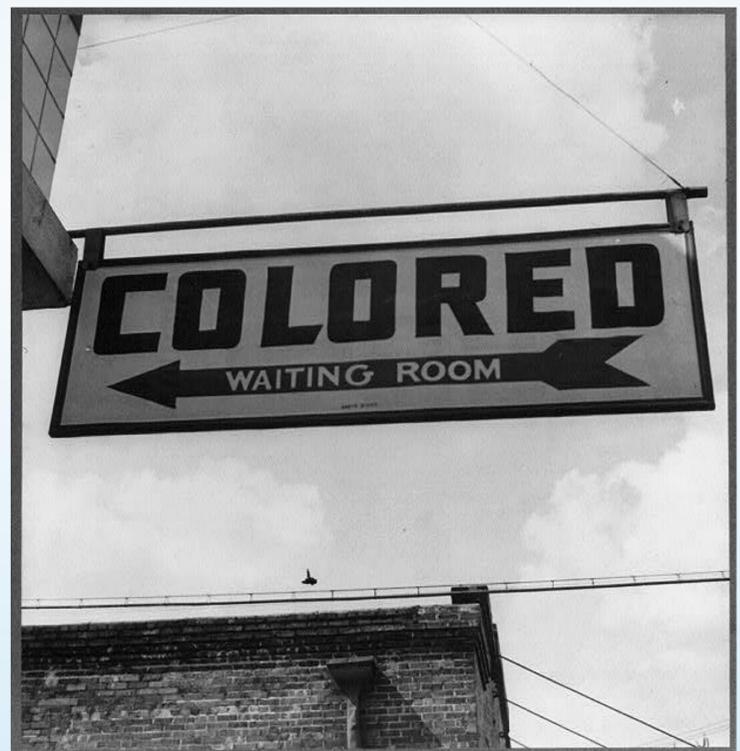
# The Disappearance of African American Representatives

African American representatives faced real danger, both while they were in office and after. According to the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, a quarter of Georgian African American legislators were threatened, beaten, jailed, or killed. The last African American legislator in Georgia of the reconstruction period was W. H. Rogers from McIntosh County, elected in 1906.

Without representation or the ability to vote, African Americans could not stop the legalization of Jim Crow segregation. Some African Americans managed to keep positions in government until 1913. When President Woodrow Wilson assumed office, he rigidly segregated all federal offices in Washington D.C., removing the last African American officials.



Thomas Nast cartoon for Harper's Weekly. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*



Segregated bus station sign in Rome, GA. Photographer Esther Bubley, 1943. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

In the north, where some African Americans migrated towards industrial jobs in cities, the next wave of African American representative would come in the 1920s and 30s. In the south, it was after the Civil Rights Act (1964) that African American representatives were elected in the Reconstruction states.

# Civil Rights and Voting

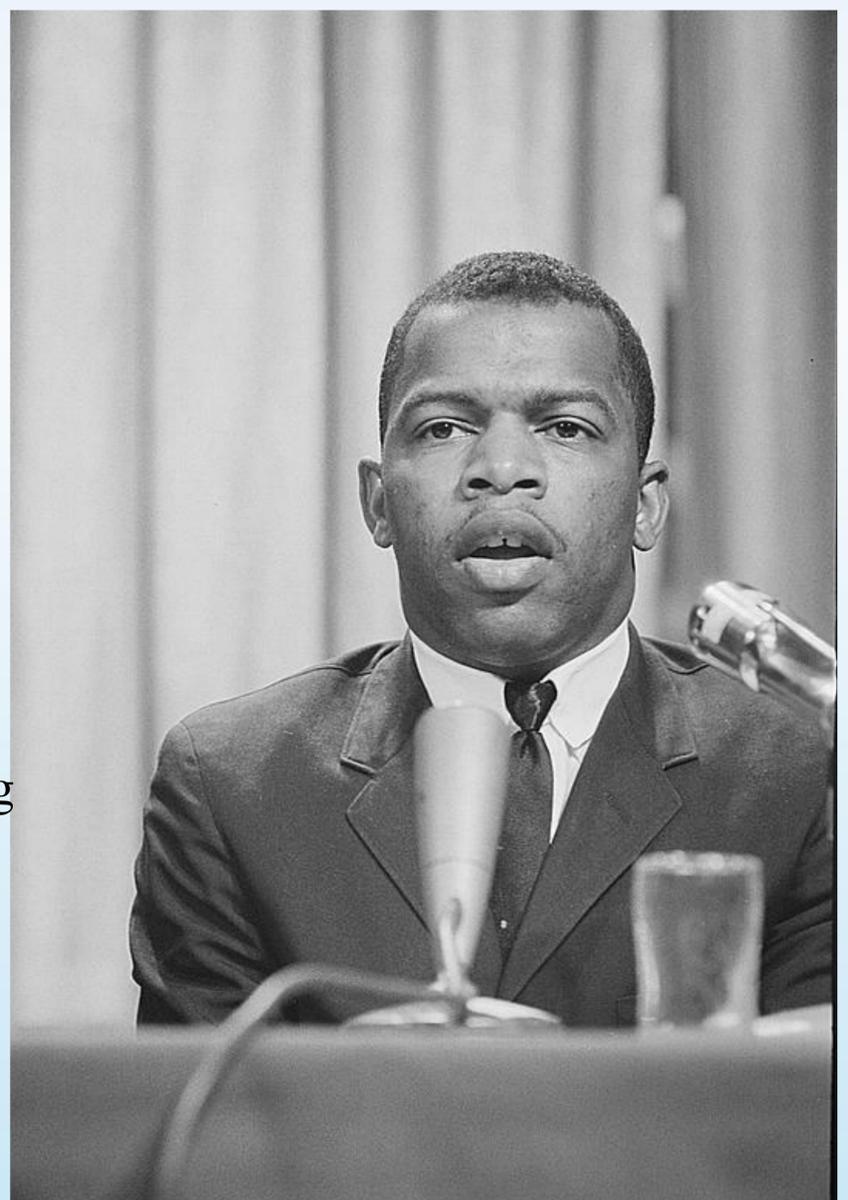


Marchers at the March on Washington demanding voting rights. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

States outside this category could change their voting laws, and often did so in ways that targeted economic minorities. Strategies include the movement of polling places, which is both confusing and can sometimes mean necessitating more time off work, something that people with low incomes cannot afford to do.

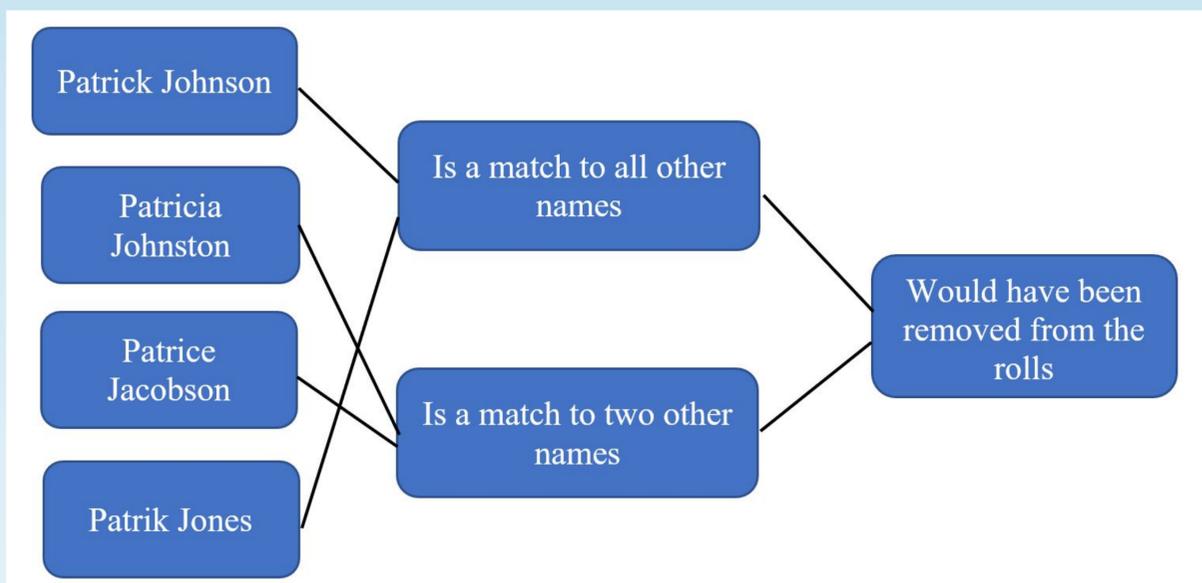
John Lewis, civil and voting rights activist and congressman speaking at a meeting of American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1964. *Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

During the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans protested and advocated for equal rights of citizenship. The 1965 Voting Rights Act legalized equality in voting and protection from racial discrimination. States and local governments who had proven racially motivated voting laws needed preclearance from the federal government before making future changes.



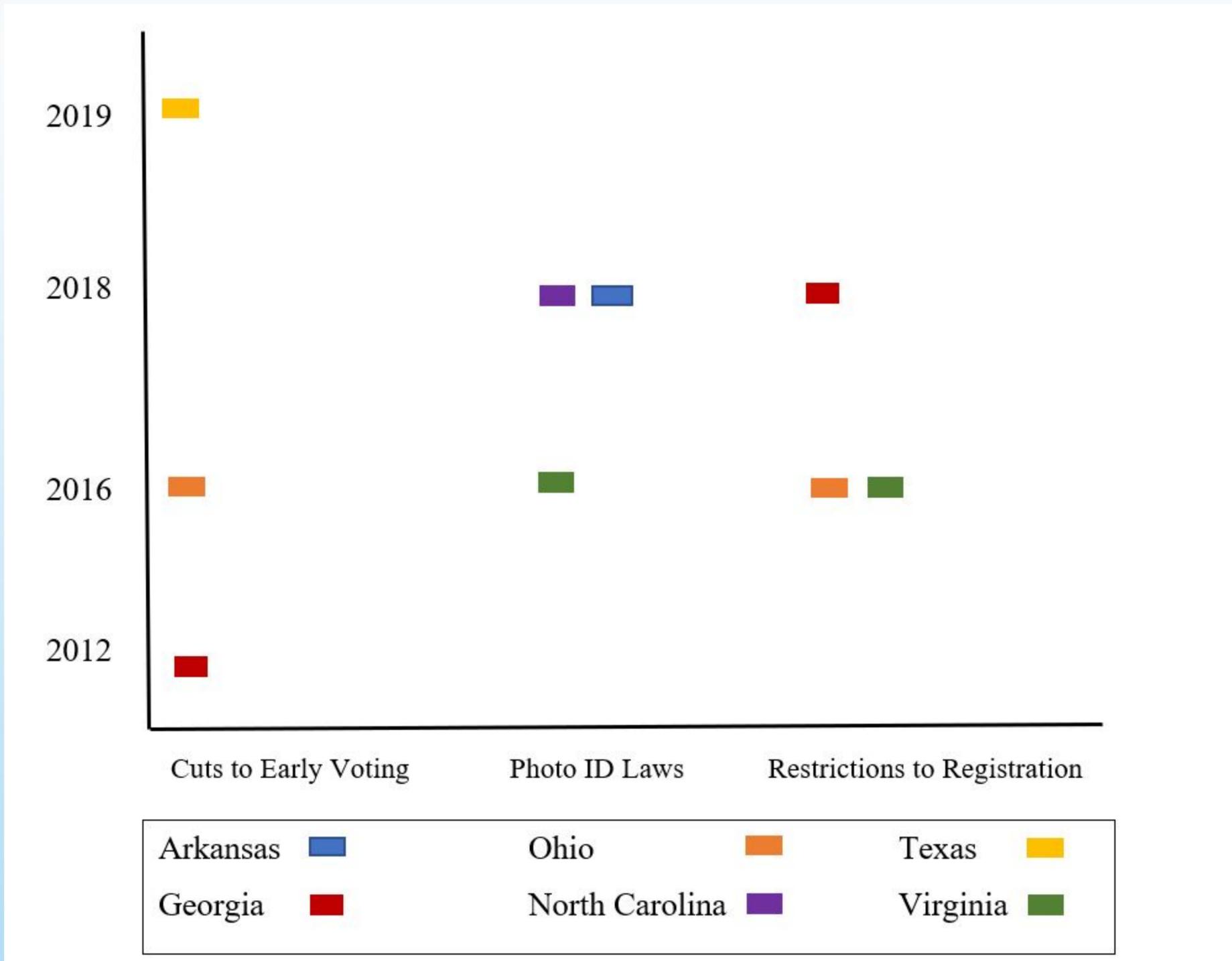
Voter roll purging was also used to ostensibly keep registration rolls up to date by removing any deceased or ineligible voters. But the techniques used to do this were imperfect, people with the same names could be erroneously removed, including individuals with the same names and birthdates.

# Barriers to Voting in the U.S.



In 2000, software in Florida removed people from voting rolls if the first four letters in their first name matched and 80 percent of the letters in the last name matched.

This graph shows the years some states enacted restrictive voting laws including reducing early voting, adding photo ID laws, and increasing the restrictions on registering to vote.



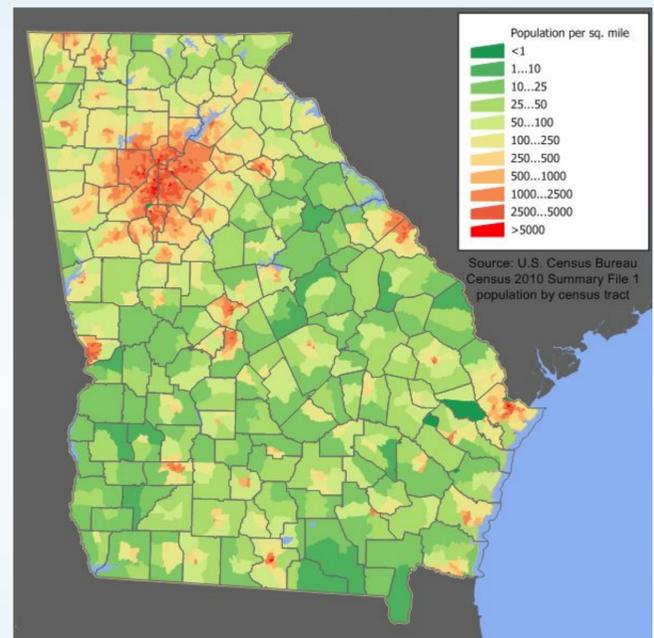
# Redistricting and Gerrymandering

Redistricting has also been used throughout history as a voter suppression tool. Redistricting is required to ensure that a county's representation in the legislature equals the proportion of the state's population that the county has. Redistricting happens after censuses but allows for the possibility of gerrymandering, redrawing districts to benefit a political party.

In a majority-minority district, the minority voters can elect representatives they believe will support their values. However, because minority populations are pulled from other districts to create the majority-minority, critics say the result is reduced representation of minorities across the state.



Map of Georgia showing the 2020 Congressional districts. The districts are meant to be configured so each district has an equal population to all others. *Courtesy of the Atlanta Constitution-Journal.*



Map of Georgia's population, 2010. *Courtesy of Wikimedia commons.*

Gerrymandering is a common redistricting tactic used to weaken minorities' and political parties' voices by dividing their population across multiple districts so that their voting power is unable to challenge the majorities'. Majority-minority districts are a response in which a district is created with a majority of minority voters.

Technology makes gerrymandering easier, because records of affiliation allow the people who draw districts to create more districts in a state that favor one political party. This results in uncompetitive elections, in which incumbents are almost guaranteed reelection. In 2016 eighty-one percent of elections for Georgia legislative seats were uncontested.

# Voter Fraud Concerns

Concern about fraud is what many voting requirements supposedly address. But studies from the Brennan Center for Justice (out of NYU Law School) and Demos (a think tank) show that actual cases of voter fraud (not unintentional voter error, human error at the polling places, or machine error) are much lower than politicians claim, individual states generally total under one percent.

The Heritage Foundation, a think tank that claims fraud as a threat to U.S. democracy, reported 1,071 proven cases of fraud over the last two decades (and one case from the 1980s).

Even if all cases of fraud took place in one year – they did not – the percent of fraudulent votes from the electorate (using the number of counted votes from the 2016 presidential election) would be 0.00083%.

Given that the fraudulent votes were actually spread out over several years, the overall incidences of fraud were even smaller.



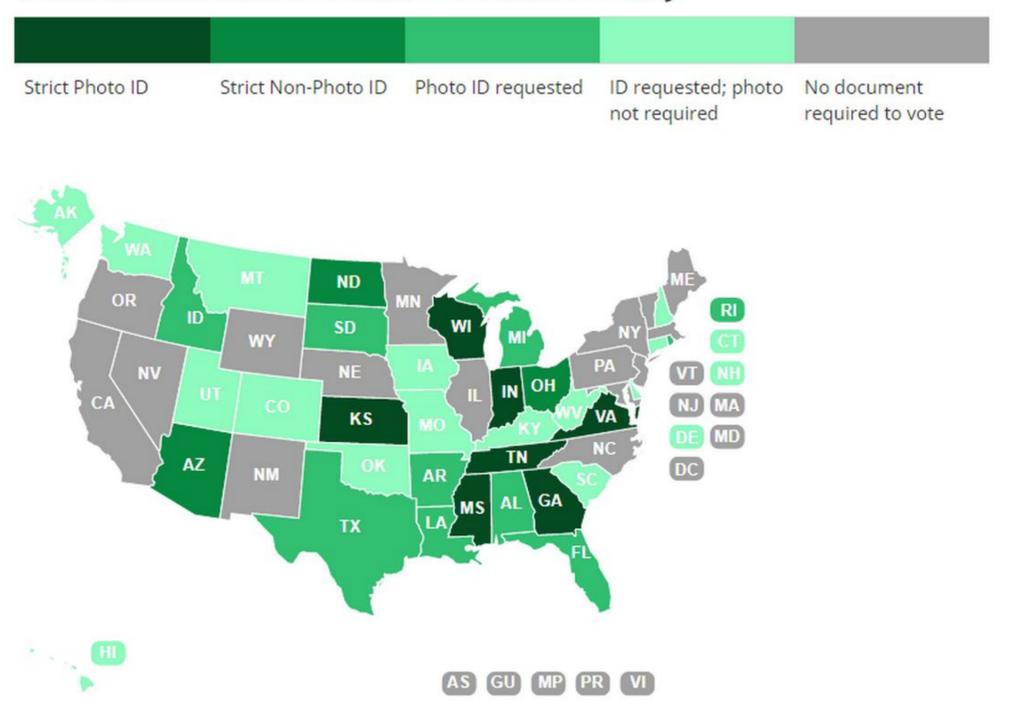
Protest for voting rights in Manhattan, 2011. *Courtesy of Michael Fleshman/Flicker.*

# Suppression from Fraud Checks

The limited fraud that does occur is not based on identity theft, however that is what voter requirements like ID laws are intended to stop. The most common fraud is voting in two polling places, which could happen if a person moves and is registered in two places. If this fraud occurred, the ID requirement would not catch the fraud, because the person is assuming their own identity, not someone else's when they vote twice.

The other main source of voting fraud is voting by disenfranchised felons. Again, in this case the person is not assuming someone else's identity, but is using their own when they have not had the right to vote restored. A photo ID cannot catch this instance of fraud. Photo ID requirements are ineffective against most common types of fraud, and they disenfranchise people who do not have photo IDs or the access to get one.

Voter Identification Laws in Effect in 2019



Map of states based on the ID requirements for voting registration. *Courtesy of the National Conference of State Legislatures.*

While voter fraud is a valid concern, the current system does not suffer from widespread fraud. However, after the 2013 *Shelby v Holder* supreme court decision lifted the federal approval of new voting laws in Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia, and in certain counties in California, Florida, New York, North Carolina, South Dakota, and Michigan, disenfranchisement became endemic.

# Voting in Georgia

In 2017, Georgia's removal of 560,000 voters from the rolls constituted the then-largest purge in the country. 87,000 voters, or sixteen percent, reregistered after they were informed of their ineligibility. Questions were raised about their removal during a process meant to identify deceased voters, felons, and voters who moved out-of-state.

However, this law has the effect of disenfranchising voters who previously chose not to vote but now wish to. *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, documented that this law erroneously removed a man who had not moved, voted in the 2016 election before the purge, and worked at a polling precinct in 2016.



Georgia citizens waiting to vote in 2016. *Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.*

Georgia's 'use it or lose it' law, which removes registered voters if they do not interact with election officials for five years, was a source of the removals. (For more information please visit: <https://law.justia.com/codes/georgia/2018/title-21/chapter-2/article-6/section-21-2-234/>) The law is meant to identify voters who move out of state but stay registered.

These voting roll purges continue in states throughout the country, leading to confusion on election days and the disenfranchisement of eligible voters. While intentions are to protect the efficacy of elections, the results are the suppression of citizens' rights to vote.

# Further Resources

- NPR Podcast Code Switch: 'Your Body Being Used': Where Prisoners Who Can't Vote Fill Voting Districts
- *Suppressed: the right to Vote*, a documentary on Georgia's 2016 election available for free on YouTube
- *Rigged: The Voter Suppression Playbook*, a documentary available on Amazon Prime
- *The Hidden History of the War on Voting: Who Stole Your Vote and How to Get It Back* by Thom Hartmann
- *CAPITOL MEN: The Epic Story of Reconstruction Through the Lives of the First Black Congressmen* by Philip Dray
- *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* by WEB DuBois
- *Sufferings of the Rev. T. G. Campbell and His Family, in Georgia* by Tunis Campbell
- Brennan Center for Justice, <https://www.brennancenter.org/>
- Demos think tank, <https://www.demos.org/our-issues/democratic-reform>
- Library of Congress's online exhibit: The Civil Rights Act of 1964: A Long Struggle for Freedom  
<https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/civil-rights-act/segregation-era.html>
- The Atlanta History Center's Traveling Exhibit *Black Citizenship in the Age of Jim Crow* (up through February 28, 2021) and permanent exhibit *Gatheround: Stories of Atlanta*
- Black Americans in Congress on History, Art & Archives, United States House of Representatives  
<https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Black-Americans-in-Congress/>
- Atlanta Journal-Constitution article on Voter Purges  
<https://www.ajc.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/many-eligible-georgia-voters-were-canceled-nation-largest-purge/jRlixHpVs0I9wVQYdDjxvM/>
- *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia 1940-1980* by Stephen Tuck
- How to Vote in Every State - YouTube Channel