

# JEFFERSON

EDUCATIONAL SOCIETY

---

## TRUTH IN LOVE

### Life Without Voice:

### *Constitution and Amendments[1]*

### *Did Not Change White Minds or Hearts*

By Parris J. Baker

August 2024

*Last in a Series*

---

With the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the end of the Civil War in 1865 came the hope of freedom and the pursuit of equality for Black people. Unfortunately, many Black people soon discovered that proclaimed emancipation was not a guarantee for a lived freedom in the United States. This new freedom required major paradigm shifts by both the oppressor as well as the oppressed. White supremacists refused to change their minds or hearts and continued to perceive Black people as inferior and undeserving of citizenship rights. The wanton rage of former Confederate soldiers went unchecked, thereby creating

space for the formation of insurgent militias. The disdain for Black people was palpable.

During the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877), the contempt of white Southerners for former enslaved Black people was so heinous and brutal that they murdered Black men, women, and children regardless of age or gender. This vigilante groups terrorized and coerced Black people into submission, subservience, and subjugation. These lawless actions reinforced white superiority in America and to dissuade Black people from participating in the political process of voting.

Lawlessness was so rampant that southern segregationists ignored federal and state constitutional amendments with impunity. Black Codes and Jim Crow Laws, such as demanding poll taxes, implementation of literacy tests, property ownership requirements, and the enactment of the grandfather clause (legacy clause – a person could not vote if their grandfather did not vote) were some of the barriers used to prevent black people from voting. And what state legislation and Jim Crow disenfranchisement could not accomplish, overt and unconcealed violence and intimidation more than made up the difference.[1]

Historically, white supremacist groups have effectively used violence as a high-octane vehicle to promote voter suppression, intimidation, and inhibition. The massacre of African Americans in Colfax, Louisiana, the Vicksburg Riot, and the development and implementation of the Mississippi Plan (aka – The Shotgun Plan) are representative of numerous strategies to eliminate or limit voting by Black people.



Known as the Colfax Massacre or Colfax Riot, approximately 300 white segregationists, infuriated by their defeat in the Louisiana gubernatorial race, attacked and killed approximately 150 Black people who were defending the Grant Parish Courthouse. Federal troopers arrested nearly one-third of the angry mob (97). However, in the case of *United States v. Cruikshank*, 92 U.S.542 (1875),<sup>[2]</sup> the Supreme Court of the United States reversed the criminal convictions of murderers ruling that the 14th Amendment limited the power of state governments but not of individuals. This legal precedent emboldened white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (1865), the Knights of the White Camellia (1867), the White League (1874), and the Red Shirts (1875) to use intimidation, terrorism, and murder to dissuade Black people from voting. Their reign of terror would exist, unabated in the South, for almost 100 years.

The Vicksburg Riot in 1874 was another example of enraged white men wilding,<sup>[3]</sup> incensed by the ascension of Black men into prominent political positions in local and state government. Angered and armed, white men forcibly took control of the county courthouse and removed County Sheriff Peter Crosby and other Black leaders from city and county government. Twenty-nine Black people and two white men were killed when supporters of the Black leaders attempted to restore order and reclaim the courthouse.

### **The Mississippi Plan**

Resolute and defiant in their racist posture that, “No negro is fit to make laws for white people,” white conservatives designed the Mississippi Plan. The goal of the plan was for white Democrats to regain political power through the disenfranchisement of Black people throughout the state. The Compromise of 1877 was instrumental in reestablishing illegitimate and fraudulent methods to ensure (or rig) election outcomes.

In the disputed presidential election between Democrat Samuel Tilden and Republican Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876, conditional concessions were extended to award the necessary electoral votes to Hayes if Southern states could regain control of local and state governments. The first concession was the removal of all federal troops from Southern states. Second, President Hayes would direct federal subsidies to Southern states to fund industrialization. Under these conditions, white supremacist groups grew and prospered, unrestrained until the Civil Rights Movement almost a century later.

### **Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the H.R. 14, SB 4.**

### **John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021**

The process and price of procuring the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness have both been unreasonably excessive, perversely deceitful, and mercilessly exploitative of Black people. Like predatory lending institutions, the procedures always benefit the lender and make slaves of the borrower. The unquestioned rights of citizenship, built into America’s democracy have posed an age-old question for former enslaved Black people since 1619. When will we realize the promise of freedom, justice, and equality?

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 has been considered “the most significant statutory change between the federal and state governments in the area of voting since the Reconstruction period. ...”<sup>[4]</sup> Over 250,000 African Americans were registered to vote by the end of 1965 and, during the election cycles of 1966 in most of the southern states (9-of-13), the voter registration rate for African Americans was over 50%.



However, events such as Bloody Sunday<sup>[5]</sup> are a blunt reminder of the resolve and insidious treachery of white supremacist groups that desperately crave keeping or regaining political power. On March 7, 1965, 600 protesters planned to walk 54 miles, from Selma to Montgomery, to protest the murder of Jimmie Johnson and to register Black voters. Before the protest march, only 2 percent of Selma's eligible Black voters had registered. Led by activists John Lewis and Hosea Williams, the protesters attempted to cross the Edmund Pettis Bridge. However, with the authorization of Gov. George Wallace, Alabama state troopers viciously assaulted the marchers. Pictures of Bloody Sunday were broadcast around the world.



Passed on Aug. 6, 1965, the Voting Rights Act was legislation that banned discriminatory voting practices such as literacy tests and poll taxes and to reinforce the 15th Amendment.

In 2013, the Supreme Court of the United States, in a 5-4 decision, ruled in *Shelby County v. Holder*,<sup>[6]</sup> 133 S. Ct. 2612 (2013) that states no longer needed to seek preclearance for new voting changes. Preclearance required states and municipalities with a history of discriminatory voting practices to gain approval from the U.S. Department of Justice for any changes in electoral policies, laws, and electoral redistricting. This court ruling made the Voting Rights Act impotent and returned legislative power back into the hands of election vigilantes, who within 10 years, reinstated many former voting discriminatory policies.

H.R. 14, SB 4. the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021, when passed, would reinstate preclearance, and establish voter dilution, voter denial, and retrogression practices. The procedures of voter dilution, voter, voter denial, and retrogression allow discriminated voters to bring federal action against states and localities that intentionally make it more difficult for minority candidates to win an election or more difficult for minority group members than non-minority group members to vote. The status of the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2021 is that the bill was reintroduced to the U.S. House of Representatives on Sept. 19, 2023, and has yet to be reintroduced in the U.S. Senate.

---

## References

[1] Carol Anderson, *One Person, No Vote: How Voter Suppression is Destroying Our Democracy*. (2018). New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.

[2] Cornell Law School. Legal Information Institute. [Here](#)

[3] Wilding – gang violence that indiscriminately targeted members of a chosen group to commit acts of violence, sexual assault, and, if necessary, murder. Though a contemporary colloquialism, the term has been associated with the colonial racist's perception of Black

males as overly aggressive, hypersexual beasts who were primitive, given to impulsivity and uncontrolled violence.

[4] National Archives. Milestone Documents. Voting Rights Act of 1965. Retrieved on April 17, 2024. [Here](#)

[5] Referred to as Bloody Sunday, on March 7, 1965, Alabama State Police maliciously beat six hundred peaceful protesters who were attempting to cross the Edmund Pettis Bridge. The Selma to Montgomery, AL march was to protest the murder of black civil rights activist Jimmie Lee Johnson by a white police officer and to encourage state legislators to enforce the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Section 1: 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.

[6] Shelby County v. Holder. (n.d.). *Oyez*. Retrieved April 16, 2024, from [Here](#)

---

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Parris J. Baker is an Associate Professor at Gannon University, where he is the Social Work, Mortuary Science and Gerontology Program Director. An alumnus of Gannon, Baker received his graduate degree from Case Western Reserve University, Jack, Joseph, & Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences and his doctorate from the University of Pittsburgh, School of Social Work. Presently, Baker serves as the Senior Pastor of Believers International Worship Center, Inc. He is married and has five children.



Dr. Baker can be reached at: [baker002@gannon.edu](mailto:baker002@gannon.edu).

---

Subscribe to JES Publications  
Mailing List!

Support JES | Donate

---

## In Case You Missed It

[Too Many Erie Infants, Toddlers Lack Child Care: Profound Opportunity Awaits in Solving Enduring Problem](#) written by **Michelle Harkins**

[The Wider World | Venezuela's Meltdown](#) written by President of DC Analytics **Diane Chido**

[Truth in Love | Life Without Voice: The Role of Voting in America's Democracy](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. Parris J. Baker**

[Be Well | Close Call in the Red Sea](#) written by health and wellness expert **Debbie DeAngelo**

[Book Notes #182 | Women's Suffrage \(Part Two\): Pioneer Women](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. Andrew Roth**

[On the Waterfront | What Were They Thinking? St. Lawrence Seaway Was Big News in 1950s](#) written by Jefferson Scholar-in-Residence **Dr. David Frew**





