

The Mudcat

The Online Mississippi History Newsletter for Students

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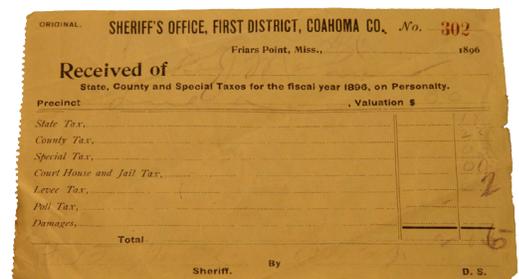
Voting Rights in the 1960s

Although enslaved African Americans were freed after the Civil War, they were denied the same **civil rights** enjoyed by whites, including the right to vote. In Mississippi and many other states, African Americans faced barriers to voting such as **poll taxes** and **literacy tests**. The cost of the poll tax and **discrimination** tactics practiced by the white voter registrars often made it impossible for African Americans to register to vote.

In 1964, civil rights

workers began a campaign called the Mississippi Summer Project, better known as Freedom Summer. One of the project's goals was to increase African American voter registration. The Freedom workers went door to door, talking to black Mississippians and encouraging them to visit their local courthouse to register to vote. This was often not only difficult but also dangerous, and many civil rights workers were injured and sometimes killed.

In September 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed segregation in public places such as bus stations and restaurants. One year later, in 1965, President Johnson passed the Voting Rights Act, which outlawed discriminatory voting practices and literacy tests.



Top: A poll tax receipt from 1896. Bottom: A civil rights voting button from the 1960s. MDAH.

Rights for the Disabled

In 1990, the U.S. Congress passed the Americans with **Disabilities Act** (ADA), which was modeled after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This was the country's first civil rights law that helped prevent discrimination against disabled people in jobs, services, and in public accommodations. The law

ensured that people with disabilities would be given equal opportunities and be able to participate fully in mainstream American life. This is perhaps most visible in the presence of handicapped facilities in public places, such as wheelchair ramps, handicapped parking spaces, and wheelchair accessible

restrooms.

The ADA also helped ensure that disabled people be given "reasonable accommodations" within the workplace, meaning an employer must be willing to provide special equipment, additional training, and modified work schedules to allow their disabled employees do their job.

While work still needs to be done to ensure equal opportunity for disabled people, the ADA has had a major impact on how Americans view people with disabilities and has succeeded in helping this section of the population become more connected with their local communities.

Civil Rights for Women

One group of Americans who has fought for equal rights throughout U.S. history has been women. In the mid-1800s, the call for women's right to vote began to gain public support. Leaders of the woman **suffrage** movement include well-known women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Yet Mississippi women have also fought hard for women's rights.

In the 1890s, Nellie Nugent Somerville of Greenville became president of the Mississippi Woman Suffrage Asso-

ciation. In 1906, Belle Kearney of Madison County joined Somerville as a leader in the woman suffrage movement. These women, along with many others, worked hard to convince Mississippi lawmakers (all of whom were white men) to give women the right to vote. When this failed, the suffragettes worked to pass an **amendment** to the U.S. Constitution. This happened in August 1920, when Tennessee became the thirty-sixth and final state to **ratify** the Nineteenth Amendment. The new law went into effect



Nellie Nugent Somerville and Belle Kearney. MDAH.

immediately, despite continued opposition in Mississippi.

Somerville and Kearney were elected to the Mississippi state legislature in 1922 but it would be sixty-two years before

the Mississippi legislature finally ratified the Nineteenth Amendment on March 22, 1984—it was the last state to do so.

Rights for African American Women

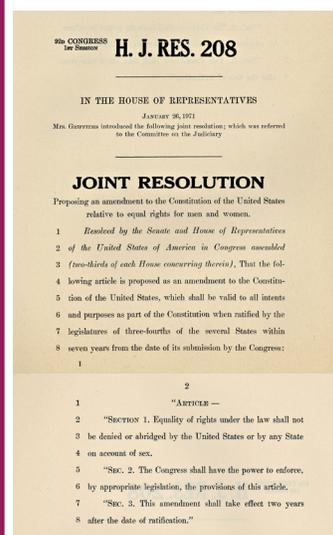


IDA B. WELLS.

Ida B. Wells, head-and-shoulders portrait, facing slightly right. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA LC-USZ62-107756. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/93505758/>. Accessed February 19, 2015.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett was born a slave in Holly Springs. She later went to local Rust College and became a teacher. She also owned a newspaper called *Free Speech and Headlight* in Memphis, Tennessee. An activist for African American civil rights, Wells-Barnett was also a leader in the woman suffrage movement and founded the first African American suffrage organization in Chicago in 1913.

From the Nineteenth Amendment to Title IX



On June 23, 1972, President Richard Nixon signed Title IX (Title Nine) of the Education Amendments of 1972, which This law prohibited gender discrimination in all federally-funded educational programs and activities. Title IX has made it easier for girls to participate in school sports programs.

H.J.Res. 208, Proposing the Equal Rights Amendment, January 26, 1971, RG 233, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, National Archives. <http://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/griffiths/>. Accessed February 18, 2015.

Investigate More

There are lots of ways to learn more about civil rights in Mississippi.

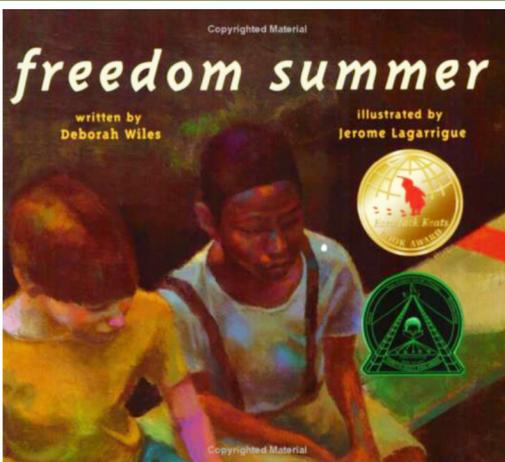


Visit Mississippi's State Capitol, meet your local government officials, and work to improve the civil rights of all Mississippians. Prepare to meet your government officials by learning more about them and the laws they support by visiting the Mississippi Legislature website at <http://www.legislature.ms.gov>. Then plan your visit at <http://www.mdah.ms.gov/new/visit/mississippi-state-capitol/>.

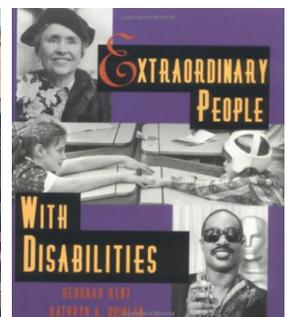
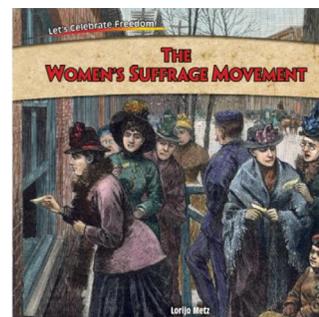
See the entire Civil Rights Act of 1964 online on the National Archives website at <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/civil-rights-act/#documents>.

Could you have passed a literacy test? Visit the Civil Rights Movement Veterans website at <http://www.crmvet.org/info/ms-test.htm> to see a Mississippi literacy test from 1955.

Visit the Ida B. Wells-Barnett Museum in Holly Springs. Located in her hometown, the purpose of the museum is to “inspire and enrich the lives of Mississippians” by sharing the historical, artistic, and cultural contributions of African Americans. Plan your visit at http://www.ibwfoundation.org/Wells-Barnett_Museum.html.



Learn more about civil rights by visiting your local library and checking out a book such as *Freedom Summer* by Deborah Wiles, *The Women's Suffrage Movement* by Lorijo Metz, or *Extraordinary People with Disabilities* by Deborah Kent and Kathryn A. Quinian.



All images on this page courtesy of MDAH.

Show What You Know!

Vocabulary

amendment: a change or addition made to a bill or constitution.

civil rights: personal rights that provide for equality between all citizens.

disabilities: a physical or mental handicap that puts someone at a disadvantage.

discrimination: the act of treating others differently based on the race, class, or other category to which they belong.

literacy test: a test to determine whether a person could read or write before being allowed to vote.

poll tax: a tax that had to be paid before a person could vote.

ratify: to approve.

segregation: the act of separation, such as separating groups of people within one society.

suffrage: the right to vote.

Check Your Reading

- ✓ Name one Mississippi woman who was a leader in the woman suffrage movement.
- ✓ What was the hometown of civil rights activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett?
- ✓ What did people have to pay in order to vote?
- ✓ What does ADA stand for?

Word Jumble

Can you unscramble the vocabulary words below?

G R F U E F S A _____

O M I D I R I N T I N C A S _____

E N M D A T M E N _____

T Y T E L C E A S I R T _____

L H V R T I C I G I S _____

Create a Catfish Competition

How **would you like to see a catfish of your own creation on the cover** of the *Mudcat*? If you're an artist—or even if you're not—**craft a cool catfish graphic**, send it in to the *Mudcat*, and **YOUR catfish could win a coveted spot on the cover** of the next issue! Send all entries via mail or email to:

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Phone: 601-576-6997
outreachprograms@mdah.ms.gov

Congratulations to
Claire G. of Jackson for
their winning Mudcat
cover art!

ANSWER KEY
Check Your Reading: Nellie
Nugent Somerville and
Belle Kearney; Holly Springs,
Mississippi; Poll Tax; Americans
with Disabilities Act
Word Jumble: Suffrage;
Discrimination; Amendment;
Literacy Test; Civil Rights