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## **IN-CLASS ACTIVITY - Document Analysis of the Voting Rights Act of 1965**

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IN-CLASS ACTIVITY

# Document Analysis of the Voting Rights Act of 1965

**Teacher Scholar Fellow:** Patricia Brake Rutenberg, PhD

**Course:** The City as History: Introduction to Public History

**Possible Course Adaptations:** History, Political Science

## OBJECTIVES

1. To learn and understand how historians build their interpretations of the past, using primary documents.
2. To understand the importance of context in interpreting a primary document.
3. To utilize a primary document to provide evidence for historical arguments.
4. To understand the importance of the intended audience of a primary document.
5. To understand bias in a historical document.
6. To understand bias in the interpretation of a document.
7. To enhance students' abilities to analyze and synthesize primary documents.

## Assignment

How do historians build their interpretations of the past? Primary documents provide important evidence for historical arguments. Depending on their own past, their own interpretations, their own biases, and their own areas of emphasis and engagement, historians read a primary document in different ways.

This assignment is designed to teach you how to work with a primary document with a focus on how it might be used as evidence to support a claim about the past.

Please carefully read the **Voting Rights Act of 1965** (link below) and respond to the prompts to build your document analysis.

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/voting-rights-act>

Your analysis will consist of the following prompts (please answer all prompts and write in complete sentences):

1. Based only on the source itself, identify when the original document was created, by whom, and for what purposes.
2. Briefly describe the content of the document (based solely on the document itself).
3. Place this particular document within the context (time/place/concurrent events) of the broader topic.
4. Discuss the ways in which the document relates to broader themes such as civil rights, civic engagement, voting rights.
5. What do you think are the overall strengths of this document as a historical source?
6. What do you think are the overall limitations of this document as a historical source?
7. What kinds of questions can the document help to answer?
8. In what ways is the source biased?
9. Who is the audience?
10. After reading this document, make a claim about the past, using this document as evidence for that claim. Give three examples of how this document supports your claim.

Be prepared to compare, contrast, and defend your claims in class, noting that historians read and react to the same primary document in different ways.