

## Voting Literacy Test (1965)

*In order to deny African Americans access to the polls following the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, southern governments adopted increasingly complex barriers to voting. States implemented poll taxes, literacy tests, "moral character requirements," and other tactics designed specifically to evade implementation of the amendment. Below is a sample section of a test that required potential voters to read and interpret a section of the U.S. Constitution. Though officially color-blind, these tests were administered by white officials who almost always passed white candidates and failed black applicants. They remained prevalent throughout the South until the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s pushed President Lyndon Johnson into action, resulting in the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Passage of this law was a major step toward ending these discriminatory examinations, nearly a century after they were instituted.*

### EXCERPTS FROM THE CONSTITUTION

Part 1. In case of the removal of the president from office, or of his death, resignation or inability to discharge the powers and duties of the said office, the same shall devolve on the vice-president, and the congress may by law provide for the case of removal, death, resignation or inability, both of the president and vice-president, declaring what officer shall then act as president, and such officer shall act accordingly, until the disability be removed, or a president shall be elected.

Part 2. In all cases affecting ambassadors, other public ministers and consuls, and those in which a state shall be a party, the supreme court shall have original jurisdiction.

Part 3. In all the other cases before mentioned, the supreme court shall have appellate jurisdiction both as to law and fact, with such exceptions, and under such regulations as the congress shall make.

Part 4. 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.

### INSTRUCTION "C"

(After applicant has read, not aloud, the foregoing excerpts from the Constitution, he will answer the following questions in writing and without assistance:)

1. In case the president is unable to perform the duties of his office, who assumes them? \_\_\_\_\_
2. "Involuntary servitude" is permitted in the United States upon conviction of a crime. (True or False) \_\_\_\_\_
3. If a state is a party to a case, the Constitution provides that original jurisdiction shall be in \_\_\_\_\_

4. Congress passes laws regulating cases which are included in those over which the United States Supreme Court has \_\_\_\_\_ jurisdiction.

I hereby certify that I have received no assistance in the completion of this citizenship and literacy test, that I was allowed the time I desired to complete it, and that I waive any right existing to demand a copy of same. (If for any reason the applicant does not wish to sign this, he must discuss the matter with the board of registrars.)

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

(Applicant)

### **Document Analysis**

1. Take the test yourself. How difficult is it?
2. What is the significance of the final paragraph, which begins "I hereby certify"? What recourse did an applicant have if he or she disagreed with the policy?
3. Read the text of the Fifteenth Amendment. How was it possible for literacy tests to exist under the Constitution?