

Examining Primary Sources:
Voting Rights Speech before Congress
Lyndon B. Johnson
March 15, 1965

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...There is no Negro problem. There is no Southern problem. There is no Northern problem. There is only an American problem. And we are met here tonight as Americans—not as Democrats or Republicans—we are met here as Americans to solve that problem....

Many of the issues of civil rights are very complex and most difficult. But about this there can and should be no argument. Every American citizen must have an equal right to vote.

Yet the harsh fact is that in many places in this country men and women are kept from voting simply because they are Negroes....

Wednesday I will send to Congress a law designed to eliminate illegal barriers to the right to vote....

But even if we pass this bill, the battle will not be over. What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and State of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life.

Their cause must be our cause too. Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.

And we shall overcome....

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1. Why did Johnson describe voting rights as an overall “American problem”?

2. What do you think Johnson meant by “the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice”?

3. The Voting Rights Act was passed into law. Listening to Johnson deliver this speech, would you have been persuaded to support this legislation? Why or why not? Reference the events which were occurring at this time.
