Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative 2021 Volume III: Democracy and Inequality: Challenges and Possible Solutions

Jim Crow 2.0: Voter Suppression in the 21st Century

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Introduction

A high school student spends their senior year in their government course learning about the ins and outs of our government and the democratic process. After high school, this student is now eligible to participate in their very first national election. They do their due diligence and register to vote before the deadline, and receive the location of their polling station, which is nowhere near their home. It will be a 30-minute drive to this assigned polling station, and that is without traffic. This student shows up to the voting poll, and there is a long line outside the building that stretches for several blocks. After what seems like hours in the scorching heat, the student finally makes it to the building entrance. At the entrance, a poll worker vigorously questions the student on whether they are qualified to vote and have all the proper documentation to prove their voting status. Then the student begins to wonder and second-guess if they are even eligible to vote. Thankfully they were prepared and brought their driver's license, passport, and birth certificate. The student goes into the voting booth and casts their vote, feeling a sense of accomplishment knowing they did their civic duty. That night the student turns on the news to find out the outcome of the election, and it is reported that several thousand votes will be tossed out due to 'irregularities. After all that work and effort, the student's vote may not even count! Unfortunately for most Americans, they do not even make it through this entire voting process. With fewer voting stations, polls, and booths, this causes longer lines, discouraging people from leaving their homes and engaging in the voting process. For those who waited in lines, if their registration did not precisely match the state's database, many were turned away. This does not include the deluge of fake news and propaganda that voters are inundated with before election day that might result in people being turned off to politics and deterring them from voting.

The 2020 Presidential Election dramatically changed the way Americans voted. Amid a global pandemic, it also exposed the underlying crisis of inequity and inequality of American democracy. While we witnessed a 12% increase in voter turnout, there were also increasing galvanizing tactics to suppress voters, particularly voters in a communities of color. The COVID crisis led to a shortage of poll workers and fewer in-person polling stations, leading to long times which discouraged people from voting. Because of the pandemic, more people had access to early voting and absentee voting. However, not everyone is on board with these alternative voting options. With over 300 lawsuits in 44 states concerning how absentee votes are counted and the possibility of the overworked post office not delivering in time, people are skeptical about casting their vote by mail.

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There were reports of people waiting for several hours just to cast their ballot during early voting and on voting day in many states. Many Americans have had to travel further distances to reach an in-person polling station with fewer voting polling stations. Even if they made it through all of those obstacles, 35 states have voter I.D. laws requiring voters to show some I.D. In one instance, on October 21, 2020, armed security guards were reported outside a voting poll in St. Petersburg, Florida.¹ According to the local media, the armed people reported that Donald Trump's campaign hired them. This amounts to voter intimidation as the sight of armed people might make people feel uncomfortable and frighten voters away from the voting sites.

Since the Presidential Election of 2020, more than twenty laws have been enacted across multiple states that restrict ballot access for many disenfranchised groups, primarily affecting the poor, the working class, immigrants, and people of color.

Rationale

William C. Overfelt High School is located in the heart of Silicon Valley. East San Jose is home to many low-income families. Long working hours and income disparities make it difficult for its residents to vote. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, 47% of Latinos are likely to vote than 54% of Asian Americans, 54% Blacks, and 65% non-Hispanic Whites.² Over 80% of the 1450 Overfelt students identify as Hispanic or Latino. Less than 15% identify as Asian and about 2% Black. Over 85 % of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Poverty rate is high amongst our student population, and their family, so participating in the following local, state, or federal elections is far from their minds. While San Jose and the rest of the country experienced record-breaking turnout to the pools, East San Jose did not see an increase in voter turnout, with only 51% turnout, compared to 61% in West San Jose.³ Through this curriculum unit, my goal is to help increase voter turnout in East San Jose.

Individual and environmental factors also play a role in low voter turnout for Latinos. As first-generation immigrants, many of my students might have parents and grandparents who have never voted. Additionally, as a teacher, it saddens me to hear my students say, "What is the point of voting if it makes no difference?" Instead of being discouraged, our youth needs to be more conscious of the historical background and systematic nature of voter suppression to equip them with the knowledge to combat it. The 18-25 year old demographic typically has the lowest voter turnout in every level of election both locally and nationally. If we were to educate and provide them the tools to combat injustice, think of their impact on future policies. Developing a strong historical awareness of the injustice of voter suppression that has taken place and by being better equipped with knowledge of the law, my students can transform and uplift their communities. Voting is such an integral part of democracy, and no one should be denied the right to vote.

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Content Objective

This unit will be taught in my 12th grade government class and can be adapted for U.S. History and AP US History courses. This curriculum unit will span several weeks and address multiple content standards. The unit will briefly review the Jim Crow laws during the Reconstruction Era in my government course but will spend more time on this content in US History courses. The use of Jim Crow Laws to suppress black voters continued until the Civil Rights Movement. Through this quick study, students will recognize a continual pattern of voter suppression.

Voter Suppression during the 19th and early 20th Centuries

Following the American Civil War, the United States entered the era of Reconstruction. On February 3, 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified, which prohibited the federal government and each state from denying a citizen the right to vote based on that citizen's race, color, or previous condition of servitude.⁴ With the ratification of the 15th Amendment, African American men were granted the right to vote. However, through poll taxes, literacy tests, and other means, Southern states could effectively disenfranchise African Americans from voting. Jim Crow laws also emerged in response to the 15th Amendment to disenfranchise and remove political and economic gains made by African Americans during the Reconstruction period. Jim Crow laws mandated racial segregation in all public facilities in Southern states, upheld in the Plessy vs. Ferguson Supreme Court case. This court decision established that "separate but equal" facilities were legal. This institutionalized economic, educational, and social disadvantages for many African Americans living in the United States.⁵ White Democrats used extensive voter suppression methods to intimidate black voters and suppress their votes.⁶ By 1910, new state constitutions or amendments were passed that effectively disenfranchised black voters through a combination of poll taxes, literacy tests, and residency requirements. As a result, voter turnout amongst black voters dropped drastically.

One of the most common types of voter suppression is voter intimidation. The goal of voter intimidation is to deter a person away from voting for their ideal candidate, and it can come in many different forms. During the Reconstruction era, the Ku Klux Klan emerged as a white supremacy vigilante group that targeted white northern leaders, southern sympathizers, and politically active blacks.⁷

Supreme Court's interpretation of the 15th Amendment

United States v. Reese⁸ - The Enforcement Act of 1870 was passed shortly after the passage of the 15th Amendment that protected African Americans' right to vote, hold office, serve on juries, and receive equal protection of the law.⁹ With the growing influence of the Ku Klux Klan and their violent means to intimidate and prevent blacks from voting, the Enforcement Act was aimed at protecting the freedmen's right to vote.¹⁰ Shortly following the passing of the 15th Amendment, the United States Supreme Court denied the voting rights of William Garner, an African American, in a municipal election in Lexington, Kentucky. The rationale behind Garner's denial of voting was his failure to pay a tax of \$1.50. When Garner attempted to pay his tax, it was refused by the tax collector. Hiram Reese and Matthew Foushee, the two election inspectors, were charged with violating the Enforcement Act-however, the District of Kentucky cited that the Enforcement was too broad and dismissed the indictments on Reese and Foushee on the violation of the Enforcement Act and the 15th Amendment.¹¹ As a result of the ruling, states began to adopt measures designed to exclude blacks

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from voting including poll taxes, literacy tests, and grandfather clauses.

Giles v. Harris¹² (1903) - Jackson W. Giles argued that the Alabama State constitution prevented blacks from registering to vote. In Alabama, anyone registered to vote before January 1, 1903, would be registered for life, a type of grandfather clause. At the time, many blacks were not registered to vote due to many voter suppression tactics such as a civics exam. This exam was conducted in a matter that resulted in many whites being approved to register while many blacks were rejected. Did the federal courts have the authority to hear a case brought against a state government based on the assertion that those officials were part of a statewide conspiracy to deprive blacks of the right to vote? While the Supreme court ruled that the entire registration system was unconstitutional, the federal court had no authority to issue an order to the state.

James v. Bowman¹³ (1903) - In December of 1900, Henry Bowman was indicted for preventing several blacks from voting in Kentucky. The argument was that black men were prevented from exercising their lawful right to vote at certain elections through bribery and unlawful and felonious intimidation. The court case ruling stated if there is a hinderance or intimidation that prevents the exercise of the 15th Amendment, that action must be made by the United State or by any states. It does not constitute when an individual act. This ruling opened up the possibilities of individuals to prevent blacks from voting.

Smith v. Allwright¹⁴ (1944) - The 1923 Texas Democratic Party's primary election excluded all voters of color. A black voter, Lonnie Smith, sued the county election officials for denying his right to vote in the primaries. In this case, Smith won with the Court by reasoning that the rules restricting primary voters to only whites violated the Fourteenth Amendment and was discriminatory in practice, which was unconstitutional.

Gomillion v. Lightfoot¹⁵ (1960) - Alabama legislatures decided to redraw the electoral district boundaries in Tuskegee. Redrawing the lines excluded most blacks from the city limits of Tuskegee and placed them in another district with almost no white population. The Supreme court ruled that redrawing of the line violated the fifteenth Amendment as it was drawn to deny equal representation to African Americans as there was no other function the redrawing of the line served, except to deprive blacks of political power in the Tuskegee district.

Shelby County v. Holder¹⁶ (2013) After the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was enacted, it prohibited any other laws and procedures that prevented disenfranchised groups from voting. Two parts of the Voting Rights Act came into question. Section 5 required certain states and local governments to obtain federal preclearance before implementing any changes to their voting laws of practice. Section 4(b) determines which jurisdictions are subject to preclearance based on their histories of discrimination in voting.¹⁷ [Getting rid of provision of civil rights in states with a long history of racism.]

Examples of modern-day voter suppression

GA SB 202¹8 - Also known as the Election Integrity Act of 2021, this senate bill was enacted in Georgia shortly following the Presidential Election of 2020. It requires voter identification on absentee ballots and limits the use of ballot drop boxes. It also explains early in-person voting, reduces the amount of time people have to request absentee ballot request forms, and criminalizes any outside groups from giving food or water to voters waiting in line. When this law was first introduced, President Joe Biden labeled this bill the "Jim Crow in the 21st Century."¹9

IA SF 41320 - Iowa recently passed this bill concerning the conduct of elections. This bill will limit absentee

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voting for many in lowa. It reduces the state's early voting period as one of the shortest in the country to just 18 days. It also reduces the period of time people can request an absentee ballot and severely restricts anyone other than the individual from returning an absentee ballot. Voting polls would close an hour earlier than currently and reduces the number of times employers must allow employees time off work to vote from three hours to two hours.

Moreover, this bill grants the government the right to purge voters if they have missed a few elections, and in a time where it is difficult to find volunteers to work the voting polls, election workers and volunteers can also be changed with a "D" class felony for failure to follow or implement election guidelines. The ACLU has condemned this law as creating barriers to voting for the elderly, people with disabilities, or people with lack of access to transportation and child care, as well as for wage workers who cannot afford to take time off from work

AR HB 1112²¹ - House Bill 1112 will amend the Arkansas Constitution's ballot procedures that are concerning. This bill will aim to tighten the limits on the process for provisional ballots. According to the bill, a voter without a valid I.D. will no longer be allowed to complete a sworn statement at the polling site that they are registered to vote and cast a provisional ballot. While the Governor of Arkansas argued that anyone who does not have an I.D. is provided the opportunity to receive one free of charge, voters fear that it will still disenfranchise voters and suppress voter turnout as it would reduce absentee voting. The elderly, communities of color, and low income communities would be greatly affected by this law.

AR HB 1244²² - establishes that I.D.s without a photo are no longer valid for voter identification in Arkansas. This law contradicts a previous bill, AR HB 1112, which allowed people with religious objections to obtain an I.D. card without a photo.

UT HB 12²³ also known as the Deceased Voter Amendment, aims to remove a voter's name from the official register of voters upon the voter's death. One of the biggest concerns with this law is that it will make faulty purges of names more likely as it requires county clerks in Utah to cross-reference all death certificates against voter registration within ten days of death. No stipulation in the law will notify voters if their names have been removed, and there is no system of auditing the process to ensure accuracy.

TX SB 7²⁴ is considered the most compressive restrictive bill, which would implement a wide range of restrictions on voting access in the state of Texas. State and local election officials cannot send out unsolicited mail ballot applications to voters. It also limits early voting hours, which would result in long lines on Election Day. It also threatens many voters from being purged since many local election officials can be financially penalized for not purging voters. It limits curbside voting, which disenfranchises disabled voters and voters who need assistance. Those who do have a disability must provide written documentation of their disability. One of the more controversial aspects of this bill is the reduction of protections against voter intimidation.

Besides laws, there are many other ways legislation has suppressed voters. Gerrymandering is the act of redrawing the lines of districts. The ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) deemed gerrymandering a form of voter suppression as the "lines that are drawn manipulates the boundaries to predetermine the outcome of elections, hindering voters from voicing their interests through their votes." The use of primaries and caucus as also a form of voter suppression. Those voters who are on the fringes of the parties tend to turn out to primaries and caucus more so than general elections. By then, candidates have already been chosen, which causes many voters to become disinterested if the candidate of their choice is no longer in the running.

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Arlie Hochschild explains this phenomenon where the poor, specifically in Louisiana, believe that all the efforts to 'democratize' have led to line-cutting. Actions like Affirmative Action (i gotta revisit her book to get the exact point) Also, primaries and caucus serve as gatekeepers in presidential contests.²⁶

According to Pew Research, following the 2016 election, many questioned whether to scrap the electoral college or continue as is. Our Founding Fathers created the Electoral College as a compromise between electing the president through a vote in Congress only directly by popular vote.²⁷ This was also a safeguard against uninformed or uneducated voters from making the final decision in electing the president.²⁸ It also ensures that the vote would be distributed to multiple regions of the country instead of heavily populated regions.²⁹ However, since the 2020 Presidential elections, 61% of Americans believe that the Electoral College should be abolished.³⁰ With the electoral college in place, many voters feel like their votes do not matter or count. For example, in a heavily Democratic state like California, a Republican might feel like their votes will not make much of a difference.

Before 1800, most states had established restrictions on voting rights to white men who were property owners or paying certain taxes. By mid 1800s, many states had eliminated property requirements. With the growth of voting rights, many elites were concerned about allowing "undesirables" to participate in democracy, among those category of undesirable voters were former criminal offenders.³¹ Between 1840 and 1865, 16 states adopted felon disenfranchisement measures.³² Today, the United States have millions of convicted felons who are no longer in prison, yet they are denied the right to vote. Individual states establish their own eligibility for convicted criminals on voting rights. But one factor that seems to be common across all 50 states is the issue of race.³³ There is racial disparities in men's imprisonment with black men having a higher rate of incarceration than white men across all age group.³⁴

For many convicted felons, their voting rights are usually restored once they finish their sentences, but this is not always the case in many states. In 16 states, felons lose their voting rights during incarceration and for some time after, typically while on parole or probation. Some may be required to pay any outstanding fines or fees before their voting rights are restored. There are 11 states where convicted felons lose their voting rights indefinitely unless they receive a pardon from the governor or other actions are taken to restore their voting rights.³⁵ While progress is being made towards restoring rights to citizens who have been convicted, over 50% of the states do not, and it is still a long road in fully restoring voting rights for all citizens who have been convicted.

In my State of California, there are several measures that contribute to voter suppression. Assembly Bill No 1461 automatically registers voters at the DMV when initially receiving or renewing their driver's license and state I.D. However, this disenfranchises those who cannot afford to pay the fees to receive/renew their licenses. There are also Inconsistencies with voter I.D. laws where some locations require it while others do not. According to a USC Center for Inclusive Democracy study, voter registration between 18 to 24-year-olds are 30% less than that of 25 to 34-year-olds.

California passed legislation in 2016 that designated a "High School Voter Education Week" where high schools are supposed to teach about the voting process and help students to register to vote.³⁶ Unfortunately, with no funding, schools have not put this legislation into practice. Year after year, California legislatures have voted not to fund programs to reach and encourage voter registration amongst our youth.W.C. Overfelt High School has college week in October of every year, promoting a college-going culture. However, nothing is done about educating our youth on the importance of voting.

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Unit Objectives

The purpose of this lesson is for students to learn about the varied historical and contemporary voter suppression tactics used to exclude, silence, and intimidate potential voters, predominantly for black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities. The main objective of this unit will be to examine what barriers Americans face in voting and why it matters. For many of my students, they will be voting for the first time in the next presidential election in 2024, and they have legitimate concerns and worries about the challenges they might encounter. Their fears are amplified by the widespread misinformation about voter fraud and election malpractices. This curriculum unit aims to provide students the tools to dispel any myths, overcome any fears, and address any voting misconceptions they might have. This will provide students with the opportunity to influence future policies by participating in their democratic duty to vote. Through their influence, I also hope to influence their parents, family members, and surrounding communities.

Teaching Strategies

Part One

Students will be introduced to the curriculum unit by being asked to reflect on their own connection to voting: assessing their prior knowledge or a lack of knowledge of voting and assessing their family's knowledge and participation with voting. They will be given an opportunity to survey their family members and to share data with the class the next day, first with a pair-share and then voluntarily share with the whole class. Since most of my students have family members from Mexico, I would also provide a brief context into the type of voting procedure in place in Mexico and some of the other countries like the Philippines and Vietnam, where our next largest group of students and their families are from. Through this family background knowledge on voting, students will be able to connect with what is written in the Constitution of their country of origin to their family's experience with voting.

Next, my students will be guided by the essential question of: is voting important? Why or why not? As first and second-generation immigrants, for many of my students, this will be the first time they will be voting in local, state, and federal elections. In my government class, they will already have learned about the Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement during their junior year. During this time, they will be given direct instruction to review the passage of the reconstruction amendment and subsequently the Jim Crow laws that emerged to suppress black voters.

Part Two

This next phase will be split into two parts; analyzing supreme court cases and analyzing current bills. Students will be given excerpts of Supreme Court cases that deal with the interpretation of the 15th Amendment. Without relying on the internet, students will work in pairs and/or small groups to arrange the cases in chronological order using clues within the case and the progression of voter suppression from each case. Once the students have familiarized themselves with the cases, we will engage in a fishbowl discussion examining how the court system was used to create a system of voter suppression that continued to impact voters today. Unlike a Socratic seminar where everyone participates, a fishbowl discussion consists of an

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inner circle and an outer circle. The students in the inner circle will be participating in the discussion. This gives the students who wish to speak the opportunity to do so, while those who do not wish to speak can opt out of participate in a class discussion, and instead will learn to listen. If those in the outer circle wish to participate, they need to tap out another student in the inner circle. Those students who experience extreme social anxiety but wish to contribute can write notes and pass it off to someone in the inner circle. Through this method, students are engaging in an authentic and organic discussions that foster a learning environment that meets everyone's learning needs.

Students will research laws and policies such as voter I.D. laws, proof of citizenship requirements, voter registration policies and analyze how these regulations impede democratic participation. Students will then be divided into groups of their choosing, where each group will be given a recent law passed. They will research and then present their findings. After each group presentation, I will lead the class to discuss whether this law is a form of voter suppression and to what extent.

Part Three

Many of the recent laws that have been in headline news regarding voter suppression are geographically located in the South and Midwest. When my students think of voter suppression, they think it happens elsewhere and not in California. This next phase of the unit entails introducing several legislations that were passed in California over the last few years and have students engage in an open discussion about how these laws protect voters or suppress voters. One of that legislation is The California Education Code that was passed that would designate the last two weeks in April and September to be High School Voter Education Weeks.³⁷ This is the time for high schoolers to connect with county elections officials, promote civic education and participation on campus, ultimately cultivating an environment that will result in lifelong voters and active citizens. In the 16 years I have taught in the East Side High School District, there has never been a High School Voter Education Week.

Through an internet scavenger hunt, students will discover their local elected officials. They need to know who the decision-makers of our district are and their background. Do these elected officials come from the community they are serving? My students are the next generation of people who will have the potential to have a powerful voice in elections. However, only if they get involved and make voting a habit. Next, they will examine local poll data in the most recent elections, both local and national elections. Students will see that Hispanics have the lowest turnout in elections amongst all the demographic groups compared to Asian Americans and African Americans. The 18-25 age group also ranks among the lowest turnout. Students will then compile a list of obstacles that might prevent young people, people of color, and low-income backgrounds from voting in their communities. Then they can discuss and suggest ways to overcome some of these barriers.

As a culminating assignment, we will implement the High School Voter Education Weeks, where students will put into action their suggestions for increasing voter participation during the last two weeks of April. Students will have the creative freedom to develop a project to increase voter registration within the student body and their immediate communities. These can take on the form of hosting voter registration drives on campus, creating pamphlets in their native languages to help dispel any myths and misconceptions of voting for their communities or record a podcast to disseminate information to targeted groups. At the High School Voter Education Weeks conclusion, students will write a reflective essay to reflect on the lessons learned from the curriculum unit.

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Appendix on Implementing District Standards

College Board Standards: The readings students will do for this unit and the research will satisfy the AP U.S. Government and Politics project requirement where students must show students being engaged in exploring how they can affect, and are affected by the government and politics throughout their lives.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6 Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8 Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

California State Content Standards

- 11.10.6 Analyze the passage and effects of civil rights and voting rights legislation (e.g., 1964 Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act of 1965) and the Twenty-Fourth Amendment, with an emphasis on equality of access to education and to the political process.
- 12.6.4 Describe the means that citizens use to participate in the political process (e.g., voting, campaigning, lobbying, filing a legal challenge, demonstrating, petitioning, picketing, running for political office).
- 12.6.6 Analyze trends in voter turnout; the causes and effects of reapportionment and redistricting, with special attention to spatial districting and the rights of minorities; and the function of the Electoral College.
- 12.8.1 Discuss the meaning and importance of a free and responsible press
- 12.8.2 Describe the roles of broadcast, print, and electronic media, including the internet, as means of communication in American politics.
- 12.8.3 Explain how public officials use the media to communicate with the citizenry and to share public opinion.
- 12.10 Students formulate questions about and defend their analyses of tensions within our constitutional democracy and the importance of maintaining a balance between the following concepts: majority rule and individual rights; liberty and equality; state and national authority in a federal system; civil disobedience and

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the rule of law; freedom of the press and the right to a fair trial; the relationship of religion and government.

Notes

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- ⁴ U.S. Constitution. Amendment 15.
- ⁵ Perdue, Theda, "Legacy of Jim Crow for Southern Native American." C-SSPAN. Accessed July 17, 2021. https://www.c-span.org/video/?302379-1/legacy-jim-crow-southern-native-americans
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- ⁷ Martinez, J. Michael. *Carpetbaggers, Cavalry, and the Ku Klux Klan: Exposing the Invisible Empire During Reconstruction*, 24. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007.
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- ⁹ "The Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871." U.S. Senate: The Enforcement Acts of 1870 and 1871, June 5, 2020. Accessed July 20, 2021.

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- ¹² "Giles v. Harris, 189 U.S. 475 (1903)." Justia Law. Accessed July 17, 2021. https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/189/475/

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- ¹⁴ "Smith v. Allwright, 321 U.S. 649 (1944)." Justia Law. Accessed July 17, 2021. https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/321/649/
- ¹⁵ "Gomillion v. Lightfoot, 364 U.S. 339 (1960)." Justia Law. Accessed July 17, 2021. https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/364/339/
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