

The Association of Black Psychologists Response to the Supreme Court Decision on the Voting Rights Act

The 1965 Voting Rights Act (Act) was intended to correct the systematic exclusion of racial and ethnic minorities in the voting process. The Act made it illegal for states to adopt laws or rules that denied the right to vote based on race. One provision of the Act, Section 4, targeted the blatant discrimination that plagued nine states and several counties in other states. These areas were termed "covered jurisdictions" and the provision required the covered jurisdictions to obtain approval from the Justice Department or a federal court before changing their voting laws. In 2006, in a near unanimous vote, Congress extended the law for 25 years.

In June of 2013, the Supreme Court struck down Section 4 the "covered jurisdictions" provision citing that the data the provision was based upon was over 40 years old and thus outdated and irrelevant. Numerous Civil rights activists and civil rights organizations have criticized this decision. President Barack Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder Jr. issued a statement referring to the decision as "...invalidating one of its core provisions [which] upsets decades of well-established practices that help make sure voting is fair, especially in places where voting discrimination has been historically prevalent." President Obama has called on Congress to, "...pass legislation to ensure every American has equal access to the polls."

ABPsi stands with numerous organizations and the President in calling for Congress to pass legislation that restores the original intent of Section 4 of the Act. As psychologists whose work centers on ending the enduring psychological effects of racism and systematic oppression, and whose organization was founded in 1968 in the shade of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, we recognize this horrible decision for what it is: an attempt politically to reinstitute the insidious mechanisms by which members of racial and ethnic groups are systematically removed from the voting population, and an attempt psychologically to re-inscribe notions of inferiority and oppression as psychological norms through tacit forms of intimidation. In effect, this is the gradual re-introduction of Jim Crow.

As an association founded upon and committed to the liberation of the African mind and spirit from the psychological chains and images of slavery, we stand in solidarity with the President, the Attorney General and other organizations committed to social justice in continuing to ensure that all Americans are guaranteed equal protection under the law.