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House of Representatives
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March 27, 2013

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Maanasa Nathan
10401 Tularosa Pass
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Dear Mrs. Nathan,

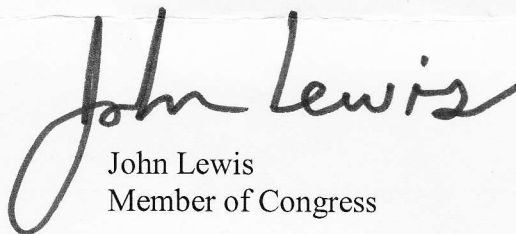
Thank you for reaching out to me with your questions about the Voting Rights Act. I am always pleased to help students with such impressive projects. The answers to your questions are below. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me again if I can be of further assistance in the future.

1. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was, and still is, effective because for the first time the Federal Government took a strong stand against state and local governments who were denying citizens their constitutional right to vote. In addition to effective oversight mechanisms, the Act sent a symbolic message that the Federal Government will ensure the voting rights of every American regardless of their race or where they live. The pieces of civil rights legislation up to that point, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had not specifically dealt with voting rights. Although the 15th Amendment to the Constitution was passed in 1870, for nearly a century it was circumvented by some states and Congress was unwilling use its power of enforcement.
2. Yes, the Voting Rights Act was a turning point in history because it was the first time the Federal Government took a stand to say that it would ensure the voting rights of all eligible citizens.
3. There are both similarities and differences between the periods that saw the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 and 15th Amendment in 1870. Both landmarks were passed after more than a decade of intense struggle for increased civil rights in our country. The 1860s of course saw the end of slavery, and the 13th and 14th Amendments to the US Constitution. Likewise, the decade prior to the Voting Rights Act saw great strides toward civil rights through integration of public facilities and the end of Jim Crow laws. In both cases hundreds and thousands of Americans joined in the struggle for equality and justice.

The difference was the 1860's made a promise Black Americans through equal standing in the eyes of our Constitution, while the Civil Rights Movement of the 20th Century was about keeping that promise by redeeming the soul of America. We marched because we had to dramatize to the nation and the world the need for equal rights and that could not have gotten out without mass media tools like radios and televisions.

4. I dream of a day when the Voting Rights Act is no longer needed to ensure voting rights for all Americans. Unfortunately, we are not there yet. We have come a long way but there are still forces out there that want to take us back to another time. Voting should be an easy and accessible right for every eligible American, but we still see laws which are making it harder for people to vote. We still need federal protection of voting rights.
5. The voting rights act empowered Black Americans to have a voice in our democracy. Fair representation at all levels of our government has resulted in political, economic, and social empowerment of the black community. I am convinced that without the Voting Rights Act, there would be no President Barack Obama today.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

John Lewis
Member of Congress