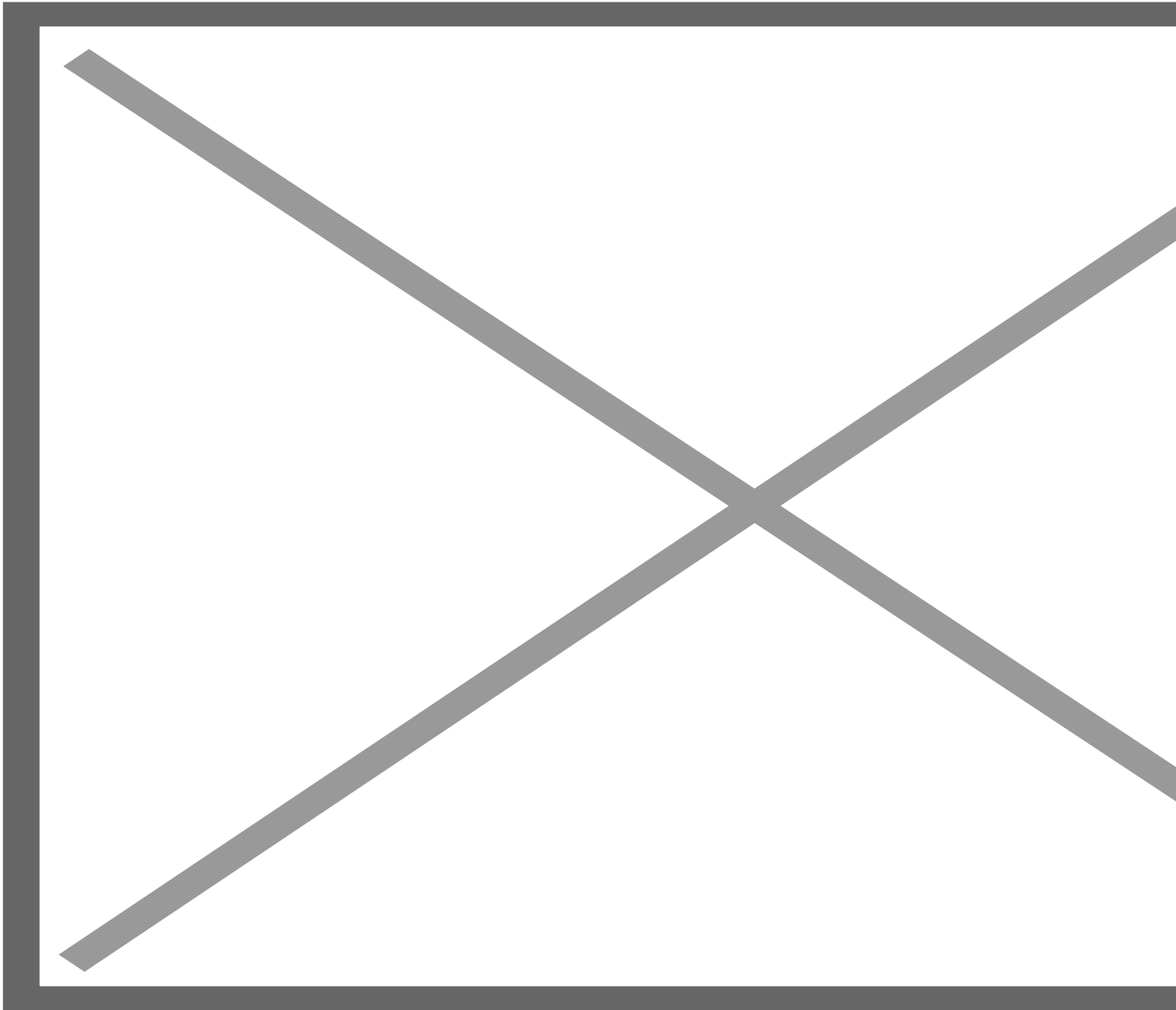


I'm mourning the end of the Voting Rights Act

Why shred this law when Congress is still disproportionately White and segregation is still endemic?

by [Peter W. Marty](#) in the [July 2026](#) issue
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Century illustration (Source images: US National Archives and Getty)

At a quiet intersection in an unincorporated rural area of Holmes County, Mississippi, a roadside marker honors the life of Robert G. Clark Jr. (1928–2025). Elected to the state legislature in 1967, Clark was the first African American to hold statewide office in Mississippi since Reconstruction. The historical marker stands just a half mile from where Clark grew up on the very land where his grandfather, William Clark, was born a slave and forced to work the cotton fields.

The 1965 Voting Rights Act helped create a majority Black legislative district in Mississippi, opening the door for Clark’s successful run for office. While 41 percent of the state’s population was Black, before the VRA outlawed discriminatory voting practices only 7 percent of eligible Black voters were registered. True democracy is a relatively recent phenomenon in places like Mississippi. (The state didn’t officially ratify the 13th Amendment, abolishing slavery and involuntary servitude, until 1995.)

Despite decades of exemplary service, Clark endured countless insults over the years. For eight of them, he sat alone at a two-person desk in a House chamber in which every other legislator refused to sit with their lone Black colleague. In a 2013 interview, he recounted his early years when he was cut off and prevented from gaining the floor every time he rose to speak. For years, Clark was forced to eat alone whenever the legislators held group dinners. “Nobody would sit with me,” he said later in life, recalling the ignominy of sitting by himself at tables set for six or eight.

In its recent *Louisiana v. Callais* decision, the US Supreme Court restricted the practice of states designing district maps to ensure racial representation in Congress, all but shredding Section 2 of the VRA (see “[Cutting the vote](#)” by the editors). Justice Samuel Alito, writing for the majority, suggested that the court was simply bringing Section 2 up to date since “vast social change has occurred throughout the country.” Critics immediately decried the notion that racial discrimination is a relic of the past—Georgia senator Raphael Warnock called the SCOTUS decision “Jim Crow in new clothes”—arguing that a true multiracial democracy requires fair representation, not just the right to vote.

I’m saddened by this decision and its prospect for shrinking the racial and ethnic diversity of Congress, a body that’s already disproportionately White compared to the country overall. To be clear, all gerrymandering troubles me deeply. Democrats and Republicans both know how to protect or entrench their political power through partisan gerrymandering. And racial gerrymandering that promotes Black or Brown voting power is not a permanent solution; after all, demographic and social conditions change. I yearn for the day when all congressional maps might be drawn compactly and sensibly by nonpartisan or bipartisan commissions—an admittedly distant dream.

There’s another reason why I’m grieving. The majority in *Callais* never seems to acknowledge the pervasive and endemic residential segregation that is such a stubborn part of American life. People of color are overrepresented in zip codes lacking essential resources and burdened by high poverty rates. This situation isn’t just a result of market forces and free choice; it’s due rather to countless unjust practices and policies that targeted mostly Black people for generations—redlining, loan denial, zoning policies, racially restrictive covenants, and more. We’ve locked people of color in disinvested neighborhoods and have never embarked on a national commitment to unlock this harmful sorting based on race. In other words, there’s never been an equivalent to *Brown v. Board of Education* that has reckoned with the wicked truth of intentional residential segregation.

I wish the Court would have seen fit to recognize the reality that large swaths of our nation’s map are not and never were populated by entirely free people. Had they respected this truth, they might have appreciated why allowing racial vote dilution is so cruel.