



Victory: Supreme Court Overturns White Primaries, Fight for Voting Rights Triumphs

In 1940, Lonnie Smith, a Black Dentist from Houston attempted to vote in the Democratic primary for Harris County. The Democratic Party refused to allow him to vote because the rules of the party required its voters to be white. With the support of the NAACP, Smith sued S.E. Allwright, the precinct election judge in 1942.

It would take two years and multiple trials before the case made it to the Supreme Court. Thurgood Marshall, future Supreme Court Justice, argued that the government had delegated some of its election authority to the Democratic Party, so, despite it being a private organization, it was still bound by the 14th amendment. The Court found in Smith's favor, 8-1, striking down a 1935 ruling that had allowed white primaries. The number of African Americans registered to vote in Texas skyrocketed, from 30,000 in 1940 to 100,000 in 1947.

