

Cokie Roberts

The Voting Rights Act of 1965

Detailed account of Louisiana Representative Hale Boggs' decision to speak on behalf of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

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My father was really was an orator and now we don't talk about orators anymore. But in that era people enjoyed listening to a really good speaker. And, of course, the House and Senate weren't on television or radio so the word would have to spread, you know. %Boggs is up.+And people would come to the gallery to listen to him because he was a fine speaker. The night before the debate on the Voting Rights Act of 1965 we were at home . it was summertime. And, I had graduated from college the year before and was living at home and I think my sister was around as well. And, we were having dinner and we started needling my father about speaking on the Voting Rights Bill. He was Whip at the time. And, we said, %You know, you're a leader. You need to, you need to get up and speak on this.+And he kept saying, %Stop giving me grief. I am going to vote for it. It's going to cause me un-shirted difficulty to vote for it because of representing New Orleans and neighboring parishes in Louisiana. And I am going to do that but I'm not going to speak for it. That's political suicide. I'm not going to do it.+And, we just kept at him and finally he said, %Enough.+And so we finally were quiet. And so we didn't come to Congress the next day because we didn't expect him to speak. But he was on the floor and heard a fellow Louisianian get up and give a speech that saying that there was no discrimination in the state and that blacks could vote in Louisiana as easily as whites. And he just couldn't stand it so, and he got up and made really what many people think was the best speech of his life for voting rights. And, it was quite a moment because of course that piece of legislation was really the signal piece of legislation in the whole civil rights movement- having more effect really than any other piece of legislation.