

Jeffrey Oshins

The VRA Signing Ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda

Former Page Jeffrey Oshins describes the historic moment when President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law.

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Well, the fact that it was in the Rotunda was pretty amazing. Just—the Rotunda of the Capitol, is one of the great temples in the country, if not, you know, certainly a political temple in the country, you know. The frescoes on the ceilings, and the statues, and everything. And, and it's a great hollow sound in there. So, and all these chairs were arrayed all around there in a semi-circle, around the, where Lyndon Johnson came and spoke, and, and signed the Voting Rights Act. Again, I don't remember, ever remember anything—I, I don't know if there's been a ceremony like that before or since. It was awe-inspiring.

And I don't remember actually any, anything that was said, it was just more of a, just—although I'm sure it was a fine speech, and it was a historic moment. And everybody there knew it was a historic moment, but I think, I look back at it—I think one of the ideas of it was to—they wanted that, to make that impression on the whole country that this was, this was something that both houses were fully supporting and it wasn't a political thing. It was—at that time, you know, you just—people would cross political lines to work on things that they believed in. And they would form alliances, and this was a, this was a physical demonstration of the breadth of support for the Voting Rights Act. Plus just having that, the prominence of the African-American leaders there in front and center, and sitting with you know, the elected, you know the all-white male power establishment. Just the visual of that, I'm sure, was, was important. Although that wasn't something I was particularly aware of at the time.