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An Assessment of Voting Rights Progress in Mississippi Executive Summary

By Edward Blum

Of all the states of the South and all of the states subject to Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act, Mississippi has had the longest journey from out of the darkness of segregation and racial subjugation. Early in the 1960s Mississippi had the lowest rates of black voter registration and participation maintained by the most unabashedly violent and vehement efforts to deny black suffrage.

By the beginning of the 21st century, proportionally more blacks than whites were registered to vote in Mississippi, and for two decades Mississippi blacks have registered to vote at higher rates than African-Americans outside the South. Until recently Mississippi whites voted at higher rates than blacks, though the difference between the races has largely been eliminated as of 1998. Mississippi blacks often turn out at rates higher than blacks in the rest of the country.

Mississippi has the highest proportion black population of the United States, though the state has fewer African Americans than in New York City. With approximately 900 officials, blacks hold more public office in the Magnolia State than elsewhere, and a black person is more likely to be represented by or to get to vote for a black officeholder in Mississippi than anywhere else in the US. Since 1987, an African-American has represented the majority-black Delta congressional district. Black representation is approaching proportionality in the state House of Representatives, though the black proportion in the state Senate still lags.

For statewide and congressional elections, voting divisions run along largely parallel partisan and racial lines. Frequently the divisions are in the neighborhood of 80-20 with blacks and Democrats facing off against whites and Republicans. These divisions are affected by incumbency more so than a candidate's race, and reflect the wholesale movement of the respective races into separate parties, and an increasing tendency to vote those party preferences up and down the ticket.

By every measurement, the Voting Rights Act has accomplished what it was designed to do in this state. Within two years of its implementation, black voter registration rates in Mississippi soared to nearly 60 percent, up from less than 7 percent prior to the act's passage.

An Assessment of Voting Rights Progress in Mississippi

Prepared for the Project on Fair Representation
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V.O. Key was but one of many observers of the Southern political scene who saw in Mississippi the politics of the region taken to extremes. The theme which Key enunciated throughout his classic study is that concerns of race determine the nature of the politics in the region. “In its grand outlines the politics of the South revolves around the position of the Negro...in the last analysis the major peculiarities of southern politics go back to the Negro. Whatever phase of the southern political process one seeks to understand, sooner or later the trail of inquiry leads to the Negro.”¹ Key goes on to note that, “It is the whites of the black belts who have the deepest and most immediate concern about the maintenance of white supremacy.”² Mississippi remained the last southern state in which African Americans constituted a majority of the population, making up 49.2 percent of the state’s residents as recently as 1940. Even as the state’s white population edged ahead of its black population, 60 of Mississippi’s 82 counties had black majorities in 1940.

Key introduces his chapter on Mississippi with the following. “On the surface at least, the beginning and end of Mississippi politics is the Negro. He has no hand in the voting, no part in the factional maneuvers, no seats in the legislature; nevertheless, he fixes the tone - - so far as the outside world is concerned - - of Mississippi politics.”³ As the state

¹ V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 5.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

with the largest black percentage in its population Mississippi more than its neighbors strove mightily to perpetuate white supremacy.⁴ Efforts to deny African Americans any semblance of equality extended to the brutal lynching 50 years ago of Emmett Till a young visitor from Chicago, who showed off to his Mississippi cousins by flirting with the wife of a white store owner.

Mississippi's leading political figures during much of the 20th century castigated the national government for seeking to interfere in the state's mistreatment of its black citizens. And while the Deep South as well as much of the rest of the region objected to federally-mandated school desegregation, Mississippi took its resistance further than other states. Alabama's George Wallace went through the charade of standing in the school house door to prevent integration at the University of Alabama but once the television cameras had been packed away, he stepped aside and allowed the school to be desegregated. In contrast, when desegregation came to Ole Miss, a night of rioting erupted that left two dead.⁵

The 1964 presidential election sledgehammered the Deep South states away from their moorings in what had been the solid Democratic South. Given the choice between native southern Lyndon Johnson, who had just pushed the 1964 Civil Rights Act through Congress, and Barry Goldwater, one of the handful of Republicans to oppose that legislation, the Deep South joined the Republican's native Arizona to provide the challenger's only Electoral College votes. Again, in this action, Mississippi proved more extreme than its neighbors. Although Mississippi cast fewer votes than any of the other states carried by Goldwater, it provided him with his largest margin of victory, 303,910. The 87.1 percent of the Mississippi vote going to Goldwater was 17 percentage points larger than his second most sweeping victory in Alabama. The explanation for why the state with the largest black population gave barely ten percent of its votes to the Democratic nominee is, of course, that on the eve of the Voting Rights Act the Magnolia State rarely permitted African Americans access to the ballot.

As a result of having a substantial black majority, as the 19th Century drew to a close Mississippi launched a series of initiatives to purge its registration rolls of blacks. The critical document was a new constitution adopted in 1890 that required voters to be able to read or if illiterate to be able to explain portions of the constitution when read to them. The 1890 Constitution also implemented a poll tax, came up with a list of crimes for which a voter could be disfranchised, and extended the residency requirement prerequisite to registering to vote. Kousser estimates that these new prerequisites for registering to vote reduced black turnout by more than two-thirds and white turnout by approximately one third.⁶

More than three generations later, Mississippi remained in the forefront of opponents of African-American political participation. Following the passage of the 1965 Voting

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 229-253.

⁵ See, for example, James W. Silver, *Mississippi: the Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963).

⁶ J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 241.

Rights Act when it became clear that federal power would be used to promote black access to the ballot box, Mississippi adopted a series of stratagems intended to minimize the influence of a recently expanded black electorate. The state enacted legislation that allowed counties to make the county school superintendent an appointed rather than elected office. Counties could also shift from single-member districts to at-large elections for county commissioners. A third statute substantially increased the number of signatures to get on the ballot as an independent candidate. Civil rights attorneys filed challenges to each of these changes arguing that they should not be allowed to take effect until approved by federal authorities pursuant to Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act. When the U.S. Supreme Court reviewed these new statutes, it expanded the scope of Section 5 by broadly interpreting congressional intent. Attorneys for the state of Mississippi had argued that Section 5 applied only to legislation dealing specifically with registering to vote. A majority of the Supreme Court, in an opinion written by Chief Justice Earl Warren, ruled that, “We must reject a narrow construction that appellees would give to Section 5. The Voting Rights Act was aimed at the subtle as well as the obvious state regulations that have the effect of denying citizens of their right to vote because of their race.”⁷ As a consequence, all matters relating to the conducting of elections that take place in states subject to Section 5, including redistricting, must be submitted for review either to the Attorney General of the United States or the district court in the District of Columbia.

Black Turnout and Registration

Incomplete estimates reported by the Commission on Civil Rights are that in 1964, Mississippi had only 28,500 registered black voters compared with 525,000 whites on its registration rolls.⁸ The Commission on Civil Rights provided figures for fewer than half of the Mississippi counties. Of those counties for which figures are available, Warren County with 22.7 percent had the highest percentage of the adult black population registered to vote before enactment of the new law. Only four other counties had as much as 10 percent of their black adults registered. At one, extreme, in Humphreys County, where black adults outnumbered whites by a margin of almost two to one, none of the 5,561 adult African Americans were on the voting rolls. In Holmes County with blacks making up more than 60 percent of the adult population, 20 of 8,757 adult blacks had managed to register. In Claiborne where blacks made up more than two-thirds of the population, 26 of 3,969 African Americans had gotten on to the registration rolls. In Tunica County, the nation’s poorest until casinos were built in this county just south of Memphis, 1,407 of 2,011 adult whites but only 38 of 5,822 blacks had signed up to vote.

As in the rest of the South, implementation of the Voting Rights Act spurred black registration. Two years following enactment, the share of the black voting age population registered to vote in Mississippi burgeoned from 6.7 to 59.8 percent.⁹ Of the 181,233

⁷ *Allen v. State Board of Elections*, 393 U.S. 544 (1969).

⁸ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Political Participation* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), pp. 244-247.

⁹ *Ibid.*

blacks who signed up to vote, almost a third had been added to the rolls by federal examiners dispatched to the Magnolia State under the authority of the Voting Rights Act. Within the first two years, federal examiners signed up voters in 31 of the state's 82 counties. In Hinds County where Jackson is located, more than 10,000 black voters registered with federal examiners. In some counties, most of the blacks on the registration rolls signed up with the federal officials. For example, in LaFlore, of 7,526 blacks who were registered in 1967, 7,230 had signed up with federal examiners. In Madison County federal officials enrolled 6,586 of the 7,037 black registrants

Figures reported by the Commission on Civil Rights indicate that by the fall of 1967, ten Mississippi counties had more black than white voters registered although in some of these counties, the number of voters for whom race was not given might mean that more whites than blacks were actually on the registration list. In at least some of these counties, blacks had gone from having virtually no one registered to dominating the registration rolls. For example, in Claiborne County, prior to the Voting Rights Act, only 26 blacks were registered to vote but by 1967 the number had swelled to 3,092 so that African-Americans constituted more than 60 percent of the registrants.

The U.S. Bureau of the Census provides more recent estimates of registration by race. It conducts surveys to determine the rates at which the voting age population registers and turns out in the biennial federal elections. While these self-reported figures tend to overestimate levels of participation, they are the most reliable figures available in most states and can be used for making comparisons over time and across jurisdictions on the assumption that the inflation is of similar magnitude across time and space. Since 1980 the Census Bureau has provided figures on a state-by-states basis. These surveys provided the basis for the kinds of estimates that the Census Bureau used in determining whether jurisdictions had such low registration or turnout rates as to make them subject to the trigger mechanisms included in the 1965, 1970 and 1975 Voting Rights Acts.

Table 1 reports the Census Bureau estimates for registration in Mississippi from 1980 through the 2004 presidential election. With four exceptions, whites report registering at higher rates than blacks in Mississippi. The greatest disparity comes in 1980 when 85.2 percent of the voting age whites compared with only 72.2 percent of blacks reported registering. Disparities have narrowed and in the four most recent elections, the differences have never reached four percentage points. Two of the four instances in which black turnout exceeds that for whites came in the two most recent presidential elections. In 2004 76.1 percent of blacks compared with 72.3 percent of whites had registered reversing the 1998 pattern when 75.2 percent of whites and 71.3 percent of blacks had registered.

(See Table 1)

Materials in the bottom half of Table 1 permit comparisons between the registration rates in Mississippi and the non-South. Throughout the quarter century reviewed in Table 1, African-American registration has been greater in Mississippi than in the rest of the nation. In all but two year (1988 and 1996), Mississippi's black registration ran at least

ten points above that for the non-South. Not only has the reported rate of registration of Mississippi African Americans exceeded that for blacks elsewhere, it has exceeded non-southern white registration for every year except for 1996. The evidence in Table 1 suggests that racial disparities in Mississippi registration rates have largely been eliminated and that black Mississippians are more likely to be registered than citizens in other parts of the country.

Self-reported turnout rates estimated by the Census Bureau appear in Table 2. In all but two years, white Mississippians report voting at higher rates than African Americans. The rate at which white participation exceeds that for blacks varies with an upper range of 11.4 points in 1980 and 10.5 points in 1996. The difference is less than 4 percentage points in 1982, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1998, 2000 and 2002. The only two years in which blacks report voting at higher rates than whites are 1984 when the difference is negligible 0.4 points and the most recent presidential election when two-thirds of Mississippi's African Americans but fewer than 60 percent of the whites went to the polls. According to Census Bureau estimates, since 1998 the disparities in turnout have largely been eliminated.

(See Table 2)

The lower half of Table 2 provides comparative data for the non-South. In most years black turnout in Mississippi exceeds that for the rest of the country. In every presidential year except 1996, Mississippi blacks reported voting at higher rates than non-southern blacks. In 1992 the difference is eight percentage points while in 1984 it exceeds ten percentage points. In mid-term elections African-American turnout in Mississippi exceeds that in other parts of country half the time. The figures are higher in Mississippi in 1982, 1994 and 2002 and the figures are identical in 1998 although in the mid-term years in which turnout is higher in Mississippi the differences are modest. In 1986 and 1990 when turnout is higher among non-southern blacks than Mississippians, the differences are between four and six percentage points.

When the voting rate for Mississippi blacks is compared with whites outside the South, Mississippi African Americans come close to equaling the turnout rate for non-southern whites in presidential years except in 1996 and actually exceed the white rate outside the South in 1984 and 2000. The Mississippi black turnout rate of 66.8 percent in 2004 exceeds white voting outside of the South for any year in Table 2. In mid-term elections, non-southern whites invariably go to the polls at higher rates than do Mississippi blacks.

The data presented in Tables 1 and 2 demonstrate that African-American participation in Mississippi has come to rival that for whites and frequently exceeds that for blacks or whites outside of the South. This constitutes a remarkable turnaround given the extraordinarily low levels of black participation permitted by the dominant white society 40 years ago. One interpretation of the subsequent enthusiastic participation of African-Americans is that once having finally broken through the decades-old barriers of participation, Mississippi blacks treasured the franchise more than citizens elsewhere.

African American Officeholding

In 1969 in the first tabulation of African-American elected officials, blacks held 67 offices in Mississippi. Many of these served in virtually all-black communities. For example Mound Bayou had an African-American mayor and ten members of its council. Fayette also had an African-American mayor, five council members, a constable, two justices of the peace, and two election commissioners. Winstonville had a black major and five council members.¹⁰

With the extension of the franchise, black Mississippians began winning offices in communities other than those in which their race was concentrated. By the early 1980s, as Table 3 shows, more than 400 African Americans held public office at the state. In the mid-1980s, the number exceeded 500 and in the early 1990s, they passed the 700 mark. In the most recent enumeration done by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, almost 900 African Americans held office in the Magnolia State. Blacks hold almost 200 county posts with approximately 100 of the state's 410 county commission seats. In addition, there are more than 400 African American municipal officers in Mississippi and well over 100 school board members. Mississippi leads the nation in its number of African American elected officers.

(See Table 3)

African Americans in Congress

Historically, one of Mississippi's congressional districts included the Delta - - the rich bottom land along the Mississippi River extending from the northwestern corner of the state south to Vicksburg. After the 1960 Census when the state lost a congressional district because of slow population growth what had been the Delta district expanded eastward to pick up some of the hill country, counties in which the bulk of the population was white. Following the *Wesberry v. Sanders*¹¹ demand that congressional districts have equal populations, the state made further adjustments. In the plan adopted in 1966, portions of the old Delta district ended up in three districts that now ran east and west across the state.¹² Civil rights lawyer Frank Parker characterized the new Second District as a "phantom majority-black district." The Second District which ran across the northern part of the state, was 51 percent black in its total population but the voting age population was only 44 percent black. Moreover, whites constituted a majority of the registered voters.

¹⁰ *National Roster of Black Elected Officials* (Washington, D.C: Metropolitan Applied Research Center, 1969).

¹¹ *Wesberry v. Sanders*, 366, U.S. 1 (1964).

¹² For a discussion of the politics and motivations behind the changes in the Mississippi congressional plans, see Frank R. Parker, *Black Votes Count* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), pp. 41-51.

Following the 1980 census, the Second District was redrawn to have a 54 percent black population that translated into a 48 percent black voting age population. Estimates placed the share of the registered voters who were African American at 40 percent.¹³ Robert Clark, who had broken the color line in the Mississippi House, won the Democratic nomination but lost the open congressional seat in the general election by fewer than 3,000 votes.

After a mid-decade adjustment of congressional boundaries in response to a voting rights challenge, the Second District became blacker with African American constituting 58 percent of the total population and 53 percent of the voting age population. This new configuration sent Mike Espy, the first African American to represent Mississippi since 1883, to Congress with 52 percent of the vote. Espy also became the first African American to represent a predominately rural congressional district in the post-civil rights era. The critical nature of the redistricting is pointed up by Barone and Ujifusa who observe that had Robert Clark competed in the district that Espy won, an African American would have been chosen in 1982.¹⁴

Espy continued to represent the district until tapped by President Bill Clinton to serve as Secretary of Agriculture. In the special election to replace Espy, Benny Thompson won in a runoff with 55 percent of the vote. Thompson led a field with multiple Democrats including Espy's older brother. In the runoff, Thompson consolidated the African-American vote in what was now a 63 percent black district to defeat primary frontrunner, white Republican Hayes Dent. Unlike Espy, Thompson did not make overtures for white votes in his initial election. Given the smaller proportion black in the district that first elected Espy, for him to ignore white concerns and not to try to expand his support from the white community would have left him in a precarious position. But by the time that Thompson won the special election, the district had been reconfigured to make it substantially blacker. Thompson's initial election fits with the theoretical understanding offered by David Canon¹⁵ who hypothesized that in an election that involves a white opposing multiple blacks in a majority-black district, the black nominee will probably be radical as opposed to moderate. This is because white voters will have rallied to the white candidate. In districts in which only African Americans compete, the white vote will usually fall in behind a moderate so that the more radical candidate is defeated by a biracial coalition.

Thompson, who holds one of only two Democratic seats in the Mississippi congressional delegation, has compiled a liberal voting record. He has consistently voted with the Democratic leadership in the House, a stand that would probably defeat a southerner with a less heavily minority constituency. As an outspoken representative of black concerns,

¹³ Allen Ehrenhalt, editor, *Politics in America, 1984* (Washington, DC: *Congressional Quarterly*, 1983), p. 835.

¹⁴ Michael Barone and Grant Ujifusa, *The Almanac of American Politics 1988* (Washington, DC: *National Journal*, 1987) p. 655.

¹⁵ David T. Canon, *Race, Redistricting and Representation*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 93-142

Thompson was slow to reach out to white voters and consequently although now in his seventh term, a black Republican nominee has managed more than 40 percent of the vote in each of the last two elections in what is now a 63.2 percent black district.¹⁶

African American State Legislators

The first African American to benefit from the Civil Rights Movement and enter the Mississippi legislature joined the House in 1967. Eight years passed before a second African American took a House seat. On through the 1970s, as Mississippi conducted a lengthy courtroom battle to maintain its traditional districting practices, black representation remained miniscule.¹⁷ Finally, with the adoption of a racially fairer plan, black representation almost quadrupled to 15 House members as shown in Table 4. During the 1980s, black representation in the House increased gradually and then under a new districting plan drawn to accommodate population shifts during the 1980s the number of African-American House members increased by more than 50 percent to 31. Again, black representatives increased gradually during the 1990s so that by the turn of the new century, African Americans held almost 30 percent of the House seats. This figure almost exactly equals the proportion of the Mississippi voting age population that is African American.

(See Table 4)

The first African American to reach the Senate did so only once the long running legal challenge was resolved. Throughout the 1980s, the 52-member upper chamber had a pair of African-American members. That number rose to ten, as shown in Table 4, with a new districting plan in 1993. As a consequence, African Americans held 19 percent of the seats in the Senate during the 1990s. With the new century and a new redistricting plan, an eleventh African-American senator won office boosting the share of seats held by blacks above 20 percent.

Frank Parker, a civil rights attorney who litigated voting challenges in Mississippi for many years, argued that in order for African Americans to win legislative seats in the Magnolia State, districts needed to be a least 65 percent black. Parker reasoned that this proportion black in total population was needed to offset racial differences in age, registration and turnout rates.¹⁸ Writing a decade after Parker, Orey continued to support the notion that the election of black legislators in Mississippi often requires districts to be almost two-thirds black in total population.¹⁹

¹⁶ Michael Barone with Richard E. Cohen, *The Almanac of American Politics*, 2006 (Washington, D.C.: National Journal, 2005), pp. 950-952.

¹⁷ Parker, *op.cit.* in Chapter 4 describes the legal battle that preceded a districting plan that opened the way for the big jump in blacks serving in the House.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Byron D'Andra Orey, "Black Legislative Politics in Mississippi," *Journal of Black Studies* 30 (July 2000), p. 802.

Requiring that high a concentration of African Americans indicates an inability of black candidates to attract much of the white vote. If almost two-thirds of a district's population needs to be black for an African American to be elected, it restricts the number of seats which might elect black legislators. If there is indeed a necessity of maintaining such high concentrations of African Americans—and that question is open to debate—then the Mississippi situation is quite unlike that in Georgia where the Legislative Black Caucus willingly reduced black voting age population percentages to near 50 percent in the course of the 2001 redistricting.

African Americans in Statewide Office

No African-American has won a statewide constitutional office in Mississippi. In the 2003 election, two African Americans represented the Democratic Party. Barbara Blackmon was the Democratic nominee for lieutenant governor and Gary Anderson carried the Democratic banner forward in the race for treasurer. Anderson lost by five percentage points as reported in Table 5. Blackmon, who challenged Amy Tuck, the incumbent who had initially been elected lieutenant governor as a Democrat before changing parties, managed only 37 percent of the vote.

(See Table 5)

The 2003 elections were good to the Republican Party as it won half of the eight statewide contests. Democrats did not even put forward a candidate to challenge auditor Phil Bryant. On the other hand, Democrats re-elected the secretary of state, insurance commissioner and agriculture commissioner and won the post of attorney general, taking more than 60 percent of the vote in each of those contests. While Blackmon had the weakest showing for the seven Democratic nominees, Anderson got a slightly larger share of the vote than repudiated incumbent Governor Ronnie Musgrove.

While no African American managed to win election to a state office in 2003, the nomination of two blacks by the Democratic Party marked an advance for black political ambitions. In 1999, the one African American to seek statewide office ran a poor second in the Democratic primary when challenging incumbent Agriculture Commissioner Lester Spell.

Mississippi elects its Supreme Court justices from districts. Currently the nine person Supreme Court has one African-American. The first black to serve on the court, Reuben Anderson, who ascended to the bench in 1985, was the first African-American graduate of the University of Mississippi law school.

Racial Voting Patterns

Mississippi does not maintain registration data by race. Therefore efforts to use statistical techniques to estimate racial voting patterns must match precinct returns with precinct-level data showing the voting age population by race.

Historically, Mississippi elections have been highly polarized. Estimates of voting behavior by race in some heavily black counties such as Bolivar and Madison, show that during the 1970s and until the mid-1980s, only infrequently could a black candidate attract as much as 10 percent of the white vote while getting substantial majorities among African American voters.²⁰

While Allan Lichtman provides an extensive racial polarization analysis for selected counties and for numerous judicial contests, the elections of greatest interest to us are two congressional elections and a Supreme Court contest. Table 6 reproduces the results from the ecological regression for those contests contained in a report prepared by Lichtman. For the two congressional elections, the electorate was highly polarized. The Democratic nominees, Robert Clark in 1984 and Mike Espy in 1986, each got almost all of the black vote. The Republican member of Congress Webb Franklin got approximately 90 percent of the white vote in each contest.

(See Table 6)

The primary for the Supreme Court position is one of the few which is not racially polarized. The black candidate Reuben Anderson got an overwhelming share of the black vote but also polled a majority of the white vote. This is one of the few instances in the dozens of contests analyzed by Lichtman in which a black candidate was the choice of most white voters.

Polling data in Table 7 further illustrate the intense party divisions between blacks and whites in Mississippi. In statewide exit polls from 1992 through 2004, the white and black preferences have differed. The black vote is in lock-step for Democrats, ranging from 86 percent to 100 percent of all respondents saying they voted for Democrats. The white vote, meanwhile, is always majority Republican, though the exit poll responses vary from 50.6 percent of white respondents voting Republican for the US House in 1992 to 88.7 percent reporting ballots for incumbent US Senator Thad Cochran in 1996.²¹ In the two most recent major statewide contests for which there are exit polls – governor in 2003 and president in 2004 – whites voted 77 percent and 83 percent Republican while blacks voted 94 percent and almost 93 percent Democratic in the respective contests

(See Table 7)

Ordinary least squares regression estimates of black and white support for congressional candidates between 2000 and 2004, as reported in Table 8, reveal racially-structured preferences when candidates run from both major parties. However, white Democratic incumbents derive substantially more of the white vote than other Democratic candidates, regardless of race. In nine of the thirteen congressional races examined, the Republican

²⁰ Allan J. Lichtman, “Racial Bloc Voting In Mississippi Elections: Methodology and Results,” prepared for *Martin v. Allain*, SAJ 84-0708 (W), February 1987.

²¹ The 2002 white vote for Sen. Thad Cochran reached 89.2 percent but no Democrat faced him. His sole opponent, who represented the Reform Party, managed only 15.4 percent of the vote.

candidate received at least 78 percent of the white vote. In four cases, which involved white Democratic incumbents Ronnie Shows (MS-4, 2000) and Gene Taylor (MS-5, 2000; MS-4, 2002, 2004), the Democrat received at least 40 percent of the white vote, and Taylor always received over 60 percent of the white vote. Black incumbent Bennie Thompson (MS-2) received an estimated 17.1 percent, 18.3 percent, and 11.4 percent of the white vote in three winning efforts in his majority-black Delta district. Thompson's showing is in line with that of white Democrats who have challenged Republican incumbents. Among Democrats, even incumbent Ronnie Shows got only 10.5 percent of the vote when he had to face fellow incumbent Chip Pickering in 2002 when the two incumbents were thrown together as a result of the state losing a congressional district. Only the eight-termed Gene Taylor with his moderate voting record has managed to attract majority support from white voters in recent years.²²

(See Table 8)

Black ballots go overwhelmingly for the Democratic candidate, when one appears on the ballot. Roger Wicker (MS-1) in 2002 is the only Republican with a Democratic opponent in Table 8, to attract more than 30 percent of the black vote. In the absence of the party voting cue, however, black congressional voters are less cohesive. In 2004 Wicker pulled 53 percent of the black vote in a reelection bid with only a Reform Party opponent, and in congressional District 3, Chip Pickering secured 47.1 percent of a fractured black vote against two Independents. But, in the presence of two-party competition and in the absence of Democratic incumbents, white and black voters have sharply different congressional preferences.

Recent Mississippi statewide elections exhibit the same stark, racial/party/incumbency structure. Of seven contested statewide offices from 2003 analyzed in Table 9, three exhibited pronounced party preferences by race. Republican candidates for governor, lieutenant governor, and treasurer captured 70.3 percent, 83.6 percent, and 67.7 percent of the estimated white vote, but just 18.8 percent, 18.3 percent, and 17.1 percent of the black vote. All three candidates prevailed, and the candidates for lieutenant governor and treasurer bested black, Democratic opponents. Contests for secretary of state, insurance commissioner, and agriculture commissioner featured white, Democratic incumbents who won the majority of white ballots and most black ballots. The attorney general contest to succeed popular incumbent Mike Moore was won by a white Democrat (Hood) who carried 54 percent of the white vote. Hood's success and Governor Ronnie Musgrove's failure stand in contrast to the general pattern of incumbent/ racial/ party structure.

(See Table 9)

The pattern observed in the three races where Republicans won had previously been evident in the 2000 general election. George Bush and Trent Lott, running for President and US Senator, respectively, commanded similar levels of white and black support as

²² In 2005, Taylor had the most conservative voting record of any House Democrat and was the only Democrat who voted conservatively more often than liberally. "The Centrists." *National Journal* 38 (February 25, 2006), pp. 28-29.

was observed in 2003 contests for governor, treasurer, and lieutenant-governor. The same pattern is also present in the 2001 state flag referendum, which pitted a flag featuring a Confederate battle flag against a new flag that eliminated St. Andrew's Cross.

Table 10 reports party identification by race for the period 1981 through 2004. These figures come from surveys of Mississippi voters conducted by the polling operation at the Mississippi State University. The figures in Table 10 show a relative consistency in the party identification of black Mississippians. Over the generation of polling results, the range in Democratic Party identifiers among blacks is from 77.2 percent in 2002 to 90.4 percent in 2000. For all but two years, more than 80 percent of the African Americans identify with the Democratic Party. Never did more than 13.4 percent of the African Americans identify themselves as Republicans and in six of the 14 years, fewer than one in ten blacks was a Republican. The drop in Democratic identifiers in 2002 is attributable to a record high incidence of Independents (10.4 percent). This strong African-American loyalty to the Democratic Party is reflected in the exit poll and regression estimates presented in Tables 7-9.

(See Table 10)

In the first two years in Table 10, most whites joined the vast majority of blacks in identifying with the Democratic Party. However after 1990, fewer than 40 percent of white Mississippians thought of themselves as Democrats. In the two most recent polls, Democratic identifiers dropped below 30 percent and in 2004, only 22.2 percent of the white sample identified as Democrats. As the Democratic identifiers have decreased, Republican Party members have risen. In 1982, a third of the whites saw themselves as Republicans but a decade later, the Republicans could claim the loyalty of 56 percent of white Mississippians. For the remainder of that decade, the percentage of Republicans hovered around 55 percent but then in 2002 it leapt to almost two-thirds of the sample where it remained in 2004.

With two-thirds of the whites now identifying with the GOP, it is in good position to win statewide contests. As in most of the South, the white vote began delivering the state to Republicans in presidential elections. Mississippi has cast its Electoral College votes for a Democrat only once since 1956 and that one time came more than a generation ago when it helped elect Jimmy Carter president in 1976. Carter's Mississippi win was his narrowest in the South, a 14,463 vote plurality.

As the Republican strength has grown among white voters, the GOP has added high profile offices to its list of successes. In 1978, Thad Cochran won a Senate seat, the first Republican statewide victory other than a presidential election. A decade later, Republicans took Mississippi's other Senate seat. They scored their first gubernatorial victory in 1991 when Kirk Fordice defeated incumbent Ray Mabus by 51-48 percent margin.

According to Census Bureau estimates, African Americans cast 36 percent of the votes in the 2004 presidential election. If 85 percent of that black vote goes to a Democrat, then

the Republican nominee needs approximately 70 percent of the white vote to win. If 90 percent of the black vote goes to the Democrat a Republican would need at least 72 percent of the white vote for victory and with 95 percent black cohesion, almost three-fourths of the white vote would be needed for a GOP victory.²³ Democratic incumbents, especially those for less visible statewide offices as well as legislative candidates can often secure a sufficient minority of white votes to win. Although we do not have estimates of the vote split in the 1999 gubernatorial election, it demonstrates a situation in which the Democratic nominee eked out barely enough white votes to win.²⁴ The more common pattern, however, as revealed in Table 7-9, is for the Republican to attract more than three-fourths of the white vote and to claim victory.

Once one removes incumbency, it is difficult to distinguish an election in Mississippi that is structured by a racial issue from an election that is structured by a racial candidate, from an election that is structured by partisanship. White voters are so overwhelmingly Republican, and black voters so overwhelmingly Democratic, that any statewide or congressional election assumes a racial/partisan structure once one controls for incumbency.

Although an analysis of state legislative voting is not part of this report, it is likely that the reason for the continued Democratic control of both chambers hinges at least in part on the power of Democratic incumbents. While Democrats linked to the national party have increasingly been unable to find favor with Mississippi's white voters, enough voters remain satisfied with the Democratic state legislator whom they know and whose policy positions are more in line with those of white voters in the state even if they may be at variance with the policy positions taken by national Democrats. While white congressional Democrats from the state struggle to maintain credibility with both their electorate and their colleagues in the Congress, Democratic state legislators do not face that kind of conflict. White Democrats in the Mississippi legislature can stake out moderate positions like Gene Taylor has done in Congress or position themselves even further to the right without fear of displeasing their party's leadership and by so doing, these local Democrats continue to win elections. Consequently the Mississippi legislature continues to be dominated by a biracial coalition of Democrats. After the 2003 election, the Mississippi House had 36 black Democrats, 40 white Democrats and 46 white Republicans. The state Senate had 11 black Democrats, 18 white Democrats and 23 white Republicans.

Conclusion

²³ A useful table that demonstrates the relative shares of black and white votes needed appears in Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), p. 30.

²⁴ Because of the presence of a third party candidate, Ronnie Musgrove secured a 9,000 vote advantage but failed to win the majority that is required under Mississippi law. As a consequence, the actual decision of who would be the state's new governor was made by the state House, which with its overwhelming Democratic majority, fell in line behind its party nominee. Had the state representatives voted as their districts did, the election would have remained a standoff since Musgrove and the Republican Mike Parker each carried 61 House districts.

Mississippi has had the longest journey from out of the darkness of segregation and racial subjugation. Mississippi started the 1960s with the lowest rates of black voter registration and participation, and the most unabashedly violent and vehement efforts to deny black suffrage.

By the beginning of the 21st century, proportionally more blacks than whites registered to vote in Mississippi, and Mississippi blacks have registered to vote and turned out at rates well-ahead of African Americans outside the South for two decades. Once implementation of the Voting Rights Act knocked down the racial barriers to the ballot, African Americans in Mississippi enthusiastically embraced political activism.²⁵ White Mississippians often vote at higher rates than blacks, though the difference between the races in terms of self-reported turnout is typically less than five points and in the most recent election, blacks actually voted at higher rates than whites.

Mississippi has the highest proportion black population of the United States, though the number of African-Americans in the state is fewer than in New York City. More blacks hold public office in the Magnolia state (nearly 900), and a black person is more likely to be represented by or to get to vote for a black officeholder in Mississippi than anywhere else in the US. Since 1986, an African-American has been elected from the majority-black Delta 2nd congressional district. Black representation is approaching proportionality in the state House of Representatives, though the black proportion in the state Senate still lags.

Party voting is starkly divided along racial lines, with statewide and congressional elections often featuring 80-20 divisions of both races in opposition to each other's preferences. However, these divisions are affected more by incumbency than by candidate race, and are reflective of the wholesale movement of the respective races into separate parties, and an increasing tendency to vote those party preferences up and down the ticket.

²⁵In keeping with the theme introduced earlier in this report that suggested that Mississippi presents the extreme example of "southernness," some of the findings reported by a 1960s study help explain the higher levels of black participation in the Magnolia State. Matthews and Prothro reported that, "If southern Negroes could translate their existing level of political interest in participation in the same fashion as whites do, there would be a 19-20 percentage-point increase in the proportion of Negroes who vote or participate beyond voting!" (pp. 268-269). Moreover, Matthews and Prothro study found that for a third of the African Americans who had registered to vote, an the important motivation was to "be a citizen" or "to be a man." This consideration motivated only 13 percent of the white voters. We would expect that these factors cited by Matthews and Prothro would have a greater impact in Mississippi than elsewhere in the South. Donald R. Matthews and James Prothro, *Negroes in the New Southern Politics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966).

TABLE 1

REPORTED REGISTRATION BY RACE IN MISSISSIPPI AND OUTSIDE THE SOUTH, 1980-2004

	1980	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
Mississippi													
Black	72.2	75.8	85.6	75.9	74.2	71.4	78.5	69.9	67.4	71.3	73.7	67.9	76.1
White	85.2	76.9	81.4	77.3	80.5	70.8	80.2	74.6	75.0	75.2	72.2	70.7	72.3
Non-South													
Black	60.6	61.7	67.2	63.1	65.9	58.4	63.0	58.3	62.0	58.5	61.7	57.0	NA
White	69.3	66.7	70.5	66.2	68.5	64.4	70.9	65.6	68.1	63.9	65.9	63.0	NA
Source:	Various post-election reports by the U.S. Bureau of the Census												

TABLE 2

REPORTED TURNOUT BY RACE IN MISSISSIPPI AND OUTSIDE THE SOUTH, 1980-2004

	1980	1982	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
Mississippi													
Black	59.5	50.8	69.6	40.2	60.3	32.5	61.9	41.7	48.8	40.4	58.5	40.2	66.8
White	70.9	52.4	69.2	45.8	64.2	35.8	69.4	46.2	59.3	40.7	61.2	43.6	58.9
Non-South													
Black	52.8	48.5	58.9	44.2	55.6	38.4	53.8	40.2	51.4	40.4	53.1	39.3	NA
White	62.4	53.1	63.0	48.7	60.4	48.2	64.9	49.3	57.4	44.7	57.5	44.7	NA

Source: Various post-election reports by the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

TABLE 3
 NUMBERS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN ELECTED OFFICIALS
 IN MISSISSIPPI, 1969-2001

Year	Total	County	Municipal	School Board
1969	67	4	26	6
1970	81	22	35	5
1971	95	21	33	20
1972	129	27	40	20
1973	152	27	51	31
1974	191	26	91	30
1975	192	29	82	37
1976	210	35	69	46
1977	295	37	138	60
1978	303	38	145	57
1980	387	54	164	67
1981	436	68	188	80
1984	430	64	190	79
1985	444	74	189	79
1987	548	99	230	103
1989	646	123	310	107
1991	691	125	337	112
1993	751	158	337	119
1995	----- No report from the Joint Center in 1995 -----			
1997	803	169	350	134
1999	850	167	408	126
2001	897	191	416	124

Source: Various volumes of the *National Roster of Black Elected Officials* (Washington, D.C.: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies).

TABLE 4
 RACIAL MAKE UP OF THE MISSISSIPPI LEGISLATURE
 1965-2005

		% Black in		% Black in
Year	Senate	Senate	House	House
1965	0	0	0	0
1967	0	0	1	0.82
1969	0	0	1	0.82
1971	0	0	1	0.82
1973	0	0	1	0.82
1975	0	0	2	1.64
1977	0	0	4	3.28
1979	0	0	4	3.28
1981	2	3.85	15	12.30
1983	2	3.85	15	12.30
1985	2	3.85	18	14.75
1987	2	3.85	18	14.75
1989	2	3.85	20	16.39
1991	4	7.69	20	16.39
1993	10	19.23	31	25.41
1995	10	19.23	31	25.41
1997	10	19.23	35	28.69
1999	10	19.23	35	28.69
2001	10	19.23	35	28.69
2003	11	21.15	36	29.51
2005	11	21.15	36	29.51

TABLE 5

Results of Mississippi Statewide Elections, 2003

Office	Republican	Vote	percent	Democrat	Vote	percent
Governor	Haley Barbour	470,404	52.6	Ronnie Musgrove*	409,787	45.8
Lt. Governor	Amy Tuck*	542,129	61.0	Barbara Blackmon	329,454	37.1
Secretary of State	Julio Del Castillo	201,765	23.5	Eric Clark*	610,461	71.0
Attorney General	Scott Newton	325,942	37.3	Jim Hood	548,046	62.7
Treasurer	Tate Reeves	447,860	51.8	Gary Anderson	403,307	46.6
Auditor	Phil Bryant*	587,212	76.3	No Candidate		
Insurance Commissioner	Aaron DuPuy	211,859	24.8	George Dale*	610,341	71.4
Agriculture Commissioner	Max Phillips	274,097	32.1	Lester Spell*	564,283	66.1

* Incumbent

Source: Mississippi Secretary of State

TABLE 6

RACIAL VOTING PATTERNS FOR SELECTED RACES

		Candidate Choice of Blacks		Candidate Choice of Whites	
		Black	White	Black	White
2 nd Congressional District, General Election					
1984	Franklin v. Clark	95	5	7	93
1986	Franklin v. Espy	97	3	12	88
Supreme Court, Primary					
1986	Anderson v. Barrett	85	15	58	42

Results are for nine judicial circuit districts and not, in the case of the Supreme Court primary, for the entire state.

Source: Allan J. Lichtman, "Racial Bloc Voting in Mississippi Elections: Methodology and Results," prepared for *Martin v. Allain*, CAJ 84-0708 (W), February 1987.

TABLE 7
RACIAL PREFERENCES FROM EXIT POLL DATA FOR MISSISSIPPI, SELECT
RACES, 1992-2004

Year	Office	Party	Black	White
2004	President	D	92.9	15.9
		R	6.1	83.3
2003	Governor	D	94.0	23.0
		R	6.0	77.0
2002	US Senate	D	---	1.3
		R	---	89.2
2002	US House	D	---	27.9
		R	---	66.3
2000	President	D	95.7	17.4
		R	3.0	81.3
2000	US Senate	D	86.5	9.0
		R	11.2	87.9
1996	President	D	94.9	23.0
		R	4.4	71.2
1996	US Senate	D	69.2	10.5
		R	25.8	88.7
1996	US House	D	86.4	12.7
		R	13.6	87.3
1994	US Senate	D	98.0	---
		R	2.0	---
1994	US House	D	100.0	---
		R	0.0	---
1992	President	D	92.7	27.7
		R	4.7	58.9
1992	US House	D	88.9	49.4
		R	11.1	50.6

Sources: All sources for exit poll data are the VNS and the National Elections Pool (for after 2002).

TABLE 8
OLS ESTIMATES OF RACIAL PREFERENCES FOR CONGRESS IN MISSISSIPPI,
2000-2004

Year	District	Candidate/Party	Black	White
2000	1	Wicker-R*	18.6	82.9
		Grist-D	81.4	17.1
	2	Thompson-D*	>100.0	17.1
		Caraway-R	<0.0	82.9
	3	Pickering-R*	15.7	95.8
		Thrash-D	84.3	4.2
	4	Shows-D*	>100.0	41.4
		Lampton-R	<0.0	58.6
	5	Taylor-D*	97.5	78.7
		McConnell-R	2.5	21.3
2002	1	Wicker-R*	39.6	83.6
		Weathers-D	60.4	16.4
	2	Thompson-D*	88.5	18.3
		LeSueur-R	11.5	81.7
	3	Pickering-R*	23.2	89.5
		Shows-D*	76.8	10.5
	4	Taylor-D*	80.6	76.7
		Mertz-R	19.4	23.3
2004	1	Wicker-R*	53.0	95.7
		Washer-Ref.	47.0	4.3
	2	Thompson-D*	91.6	11.4
		LeSueur-R	8.4	88.6
	3	Pickering-R*	47.1	96.3
		Giles-I	34.5	3.4
		Magee-I	18.4	0.3
	4	Taylor-D*	71.6	63.1
		Lott-R	28.4	36.9

* Incumbent.

TABLE 9

OLS ESTIMATES OF RACIAL PREFERENCES FOR SELECT STATEWIDE
OFFICES IN MISSISSIPPI, 2000-2003, AND CONFEDERATE FLAG
REFERENDUM, 2001

Year	Office	Candidate/Party	Black	White
2000	President	Bush-R	3.7	82.2
		Gore-D	96.3	17.8
2000	US Senate	Lott-R*	15.4	94.4
		Brown-D	84.6	5.6
2001	Flag Referendum	Old Flag	8.5	89.5
		New Flag	91.5	10.5
2003	Governor	Barbour-R	18.8	70.3
		Musgrove-D*	81.2	29.7
	Lt. Governor	Tuck-R*	18.3	83.6
		Blackmon-D	81.7	16.4
	Sec'y State	Clark-D*	87.1	66.2
		<i>Del Castillo-R</i>	5.2	28.4
		Blackburn-I	7.6	5.4
	Att'y General	Hood-D	85.8	54.0
		Newton-R	14.2	46.0
	Treasurer	Anderson-D	82.9	32.3
		Reeves-R	17.1	67.7
	Insurance Comm.	Dale-D*	97.7	65.7
		DuPuy-R	2.3	34.3
	Ag. Commissioner	Spell-D*	95.9	56.7
		Phillips-R	4.1	43.3

* Incumbent

TABLE 10
 PARTY IDENTIFICATION OF ADULT MISSISSIPPIANS,
 WHITE AND BLACKS, 1981-2004

Year	Whites				Blacks			
	Dem	Indep	Rep	N	Dem	Indep	Rep	N
1981	51.0%	9.0%	40.0%	(420)	87.8%	1.2%	11.0%	(164)
1982	53.0	13.3	33.7	(570)	89.0	2.0	8.9	(246)
1984	46.2	14.3	39.4	(398)	82.6	7.6	9.8	(184)
1986	42.4	9.1	48.5	(396)	82.1	6.6	11.2	(196)
1988	43.9	10.5	45.6	(419)	82.2	5.6	12.2	(180)
1990	45.2	5.6	49.2	(394)	84.8	2.9	12.3	(171)
1992	36.9	7.1	56.0	(352)	84.1	2.4	13.4	(164)
1994	29.0	13.4	57.7	(411)	88.4	4.2	7.4	(189)
1996	31.1	11.9	57.0	(386)	82.7	8.4	8.9	(179)
1998	31.0	11.7	57.3	(393)	79.2	8.7	12.0	(183)
1999	34.5	12.5	53.0	(417)	84.2	7.1	8.7	(196)
2000	35.4	8.4	56.1	(367)	90.4	1.7	7.9	(178)
2002	28.1	6.3	65.7	(367)	77.2	10.4	12.4	(193)
2004	22.2	12.9	65.0	(311)	81.8	6.9	11.3	(159)

Source: David A. Breaux, Stephen D. Shaffer and Hilary B. Gresham. "MS: Emergence of a Modern Two Party State," Charles S. Bullock, III and Mark Rozell, editors, *The New Politics of the Old South*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006). The authors take their data from the Mississippi Poll Project, Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University.