

## Excavating Atlanta, Episode 5- Voting Rights

Below the producer has curated some materials that serve to supplement some of the concepts introduced in the discussion. There are time stamps to help you navigate which part of the discussion the materials pertain to.

### 1:50 Passage of the 15th Amendment

This Amendment to the Constitution was the third passed in the Reconstruction period after the Civil War. The 13th abolished slavery. The 14th barred states from denying “equal protection of the laws.” The 15th established that you could not be denied the right to vote on the basis of race. Keep in mind that this amendment only gave the franchise to black men. It was not until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that women of color were given the right to vote.

Almost 2,000 African-American men were elected to office during this period. In 1890, Southern states began to adopt laws that would make it more difficult for African-Americans to vote.

### 2:25 Atlanta University

In his book, [Legend of the Black Mecca](#), Professor Maurice Hobson talks elaborates on the importance of Atlanta University for the economic success of the African-American community:

*Atlanta University was founded in 1865; Morehouse College, initially located in Augusta and named the Augusta Bible College, moved to Atlanta as the Atlanta Bible College, opening its doors in 1867; Clark College was founded in 1869. Other black institutions founded after Reconstruction were Spelman College and Morris Brown College, both founded in 1881, and the Gammon Theological Seminary founded in 1886. No force in the city had more political, social, cultural, and historical significance for blacks than the founding of these institutions of higher education....Yet, the most meaningful contribution of Atlanta University was the preparation of leaders, businessmen, and educators it sent to Atlanta's black communities. Atlanta became home to one of the most successful black business communities in the country, resulting in a powerful black economic bloc. Furthermore, one of the first committees on race relations organized in the South and one of the first in the country emerged through the influence of the university in 1918.*

Hobson, Maurice J. (2017-10-03). *The Legend of the Black Mecca: Politics and Class in the Making of Modern Atlanta* (p. 15-18). The University of North Carolina Press. Kindle Edition.

### 3:40 Violence Discouraging Voting

The KKK has its origins in the Reconstruction era. It was started in 1866 in Tennessee. Klan violence quickly spread to Georgia, however. It is estimated that, "Between 1888 and 1903, 241 blacks were lynched in Georgia, making it second only to Mississippi (294) in the number of deaths caused by mob violence." p. 16

*On 22 September 1906, racial hostility reached a fever pitch with the Atlanta race riot, a four-day nightmare during which mobs shot, stabbed, and dragged black people from vehicles while looting and burning black neighborhoods. By the end of the riot, twenty-five blacks and two whites had been killed, and at least seventy blacks had been injured. 15 Characteristically, the spark for the riot was economic competition between blacks and whites, even as its perpetrators claimed they*

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The new National Memorial to Peace and Justice in Montgomery Alabama names, and memorializes over 4,000 lynching victims in the American South between 1877 and 1950. Bryan Stevenson of the [Equal Justice Initiative](#) says,

*"If I asked the question, "Name one African American lynched between 1877 and 1950," Stevenson said, most people can't name one person. "Thousands of black people were lynched. Can't name one. Why?"*

*"Because we haven't talked about it," he said. "And there are names that we can call from history for all of these other things. But not that."*

*The National Memorial for Peace and Justice is a solemn site, where the naming, claiming — and, Stevenson hopes — healing can begin. His ultimate goal is truth first, and then reconciliation, the kind of processes undertaken after the Holocaust in Germany, the genocide in Rwanda and apartheid in South Africa.*

*"I hope it will be sobering but ultimately, inspiring," Stevenson said. "I hope people will feel like they've been deceived a little by the history they've been taught and that they need to recover from that. Truth and reconciliation work is always hard. It's challenging, but if we have the courage to tell the truth and to hear the truth, things happen."*

-[CNN travel](#), Nia-Malika Henderson

**4:50 County Unit System**

This system, instituted formally in Georgia by the Niell Primary Act, established a unit system (like the national Electoral College) that would help determine party primaries. Rural counties got 2 units, town counties got four, and urban counties got six units. Under this system, rural county votes could easily negate the vote of more populous counties like Fulton. In 1960, rural counties accounted for 32 percent of the state population, but had 59% of the unit votes. This system was eventually overturned by Gray v. Sanders in 1962.

[Read more](#)

### **7:15 Preclearance Provision**

The [provision of the Voting Rights Act of 1965](#) ensured that selected jurisdictions (mostly Southern States) had to have any new voting laws reviewed and approved by the Department of Justice. This was to prevent disenfranchisement of people of color, which we have seen can happen in subversive ways.

In 2013, [Shelby County v. Holder](#) went to the Supreme Court and this section of the Voting Rights Act was overturned. The Supreme Court did not declare that the preclearance provision itself was Unconstitutional--only that the [specific jurisdictions](#) mentioned in Section 5 were outdated. Georgia no longer falls under any preclearance provision. The [ACLU of Georgia](#) does a fantastic job monitoring legislation in the Georgia General Assembly that would restrict voting rights.

### **8:15 Andrew Young**

Here's some [Fast Facts](#) about Andrew Young!

### **10:10 Minority Vote Dilution**

The ACLU of GA has a great [handout](#) all about Redistricting practices (gerrymandering) that negatively affect minority populations. Purposeful minority vote dilution was rendered Unconstitutional by the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

### **12:15 The New Jim Crow**

The [book](#) by this name was published by Michelle Alexander in 2010. It details the systematic incarceration of black men in America since the Civil Rights Movement. Georgia actually has one of the lowest rates of incarceration in the country, but it has one of the highest racial disparities in its prison population. Over 62% of Georgia's prison population is black, while only 30% of the state's population is black. 1 in 8 black men in Georgia have a felony conviction. Despite Georgia's low incarceration, Georgia has the highest state supervision rate in the country. There are over **half a million** people under state supervision in Georgia (either in prison or on probation). In some states, it was previously illegal for a

felon to vote, even after the sentence has been served. 283,607 Georgians have lost their right to vote due to a felony conviction, and are likely not aware that they are eligible to vote, once their sentence has been served.

More resources: [The Sentencing Project](#), [Prison Policy Institute](#), [The 13th Documentary](#), [Get Your Vote Back: ACLU](#)

### **13:05 Ballot Initiative in Florida**

In Florida, a felony conviction still disenfranchises someone for the rest of their life. However, citizens submitted a [ballot initiative](#) that will be voted on this year to overturn this law.

### **14:00 Tuesday Voting**

The United States' history of Tuesday voting goes back to when only white men had the right to vote. In largely agrarian societies, Tuesday voting was necessary, because it did not interfere with the Christian Sabbath or market day (Wednesday). This outdated norm makes it incredibly difficult for some people to vote in today's society--particularly poor people, who cannot take off work or do not have easy transportation to their polling station.

[NPR](#) does a great tidbit on this history.

### **18:00 Exact Match in Georgia**

*Since 2010, Georgia required all of the letters and numbers in the applicant's name, date of birth, driver's license number or last four digits of the Social Security number to exactly match the information in the state's Department of Drivers Service (DDS) or Social Security Administration (SSA) databases. If even a single letter, number, hyphen, space, or apostrophe did not exactly match the database information, and the applicant failed to correct the mismatch within 40 days, the application was automatically rejected and the applicant was not placed on the registration rolls – even if they were eligible to vote.*

*This flawed process led to the cancellation of tens of thousands of applications from eligible applicants, with African American, Latino, and Asian American applicants being rejected at rates significantly higher than White applicants. For example, of the approximately 34,874 voter registration applicants whose applications were cancelled between July 2013 and July 15, 2016, approximately 22,189 (63.6 percent) identified as Black, 2,752 (7.9 percent) identified as Latino, 1,665 (4.8 percent) identified as Asian-American, and 4,748 (13.6 percent) identified as White.*

[Read More](#): Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

## **26:20 The Poor People's Campaign**

In December 1967, five months before his assassination, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. announced a new campaign message--to united poor people across the country, regardless of race, recognizing that the poverty affects people of many races in America, and it ultimately infringes upon their Constitutional rights to liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. 50 years after King's assassination, the [Poor People's Campaign](#) lives on and even has developed articulated demands. You too, can join the movement.

There are others pursuing this work in the legacy of Dr. King's Poor People's Campaign. [Love Beyond Walls](#) is an Atlanta-based non-profit working on the problem of homelessness and working to raise awareness on the continued systemic problem of poverty through the annual March Against Poverty.

## **[28:50 Beloved Community](#)**