

Answer Outline for Mid-term and Final Examinations.

Mid-term: Q, 1, 2, and 3

Finals: Q, 4, 5, 6, and 7

Question (1)

Critically discuss the various obstacles African Americans faced to gain meaningful access to the ballot box. (See especially chapter 1)

(See especially Chapter 1, Sonia Jarvis' article)

Introduction

Blacks (African Americans. Afro-Caribbeans. . . etc) have been struggling for civil as well as human rights since they arrived in North America. African Americans have continually sought equal access to economic resources and equal justice, in a society that has deemed them the under-class. Since Blacks did not have access to needed resources, they had no economic power and saw the need to improve their position in society. One of the main methods that minorities have chosen for achieving equality and power was gaining access to the political system. To increase political participation, Blacks had to first gain the ability to vote. However, there have been many impediments experienced by African Americans in their quest to gain access to the ballot box.

First and foremost, most African Americans came to 'the New World' under siege and remained in bondage upon arrival. Once established on this continent many policies were established, both legal and illegal, to insure that as Blacks positions changed in society they remained subordinate to White Americans. Some of these policies included:

- Property ownership provision
- Gender specifications
- Age limits
- Length of residency requirements (by state)
- Slave codes
- Slaves identified as property as opposed to humans
- State statutes/rights
- Nationality (or lack thereof)
- Obstructive registration procedures
- Other discriminatory practices

Selected History

The history of African Americans reveals that every effort Blacks made to exercise their right to fully participate in the economic, social, and political processes in America was met with great resistance. Black development, or more clearly underdevelopment, in America, reveals that it is this unrelenting resistance in the form of political oppression, economic exploitation, and social exclusion that has kept Blacks entrenched in poverty and isolation in America. Conditions of oppression, exploitation, and exclusion are evident in each developmental era of American History, including slavery, reconstruction, and the post World War II economy.

Agricultural South/Manufacturing North

Slavery and Black Poverty

Slavery was the foundation of poverty for African Americans. The elements of a rapidly expanding frontier, chronic white labor shortage, and lack of tools and technology, made indentured servitude and eventually slavery inevitable as a labor system.

As labor demands increased and intensified, it became impossible to simply complement indentured servitude with slavery. The expanding frontier and the growing rebelliousness of the slaves and indentured servants began to threaten the productive relations of capitalism. As white indentured servitude phased out, African slavery became the basic plantation labor system. The consequent identification of slavery for life with race and of race with inferiority set the conditions for the slaves to begin their development as a class and finally as people.

The economies of the New England states were not conducive to slavery. The abolition of slavery in these states created a community of free Blacks. This freedom was precarious and depended upon the abolition of slavery in the South.

However, the growth of chattel slavery as a cheap labor source for the Agrarian society of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries forced most Blacks into a role of perpetual servitude and deprived them of most human rights and all civil rights.

During the early, colonial period, Africans were brought to America to provide the cheap labor needed to insure the success of the agrarian economy. They replaced the labor of white indentured servants and Native Americans, because they were cheaper to obtain, and therefore, maximizing their profit. In addition, enslaved Africans were physically stronger than white indentured servants and Native Americans and more knowledgeable of agriculture.

The Constitution

African Americans in the beginning of their history in early America had the right to own property and exercise the franchise. This is because the first Africans brought to this country, specifically to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619, were not slaves but indentured servants. Initially, Blacks were able to work off their period of servitude like white indentured servants. As a result, free Blacks during this period had the right to own property and vote like other colonials. But as the number of Blacks increased as a result of demand for labor, especially in the South, the act of excluding Africans from their rights began.

The framers of the Constitution seriously hindered African Americans progress by the issues of representation and direct taxes. They compromised on the issue of apportionment in Article 1, Section two by including all free people (including servants), excluding Indians not taxed, and including three-fifths of all people (those enslaved). This three-fifths compromise was reached when the delegates agreed that slaves should be treated both as property and as people. This twisted logic satisfied the issue of apportionment, but failed miserably in settling the rights of Blacks, particularly those who were not enslaved, to vote. The issue of Black suffrage was then left to the states to resolve. By allowing the states to determine voting qualifications, the architects of the Constitution set in motion a pattern of exclusion from political process for African Americans and other minority groups. This policy of exclusion did not undergo any severe test until the Civil War and its aftermath.

While Blacks and other minorities were still required to pay taxes and other obligations of citizenship, they were being denied the right to political participation, which rendered them powerless to change their situation of life. Most especially, the political powerlessness prevented them from challenging the system of white male supremacy that ruled the social and economic aspects of their lives.

The Civil War

There was a growing debate between the southern and the New England colonies. In the South, slavers were in high demand as a source of agriculture related labor, but in the northern colonies the interest was in slaves as a commodity of commerce rather than as laborers. Both regions of 'the New World' were dependent on slavery to maintain economic growth. Southern colonies had a direct need for slave labor to support their growing economic system while the needs of the northern colonies were more indirect. With the colonies' different level of dependence on slaves came a different set of master/slave relationships between the South and North. For example, while slaves living in northern colonies were taught to read, write and work with their owners, in the South it was against the law to teach a slave to read and/or write. Even though the northern slaves were treated less inhumanely than were those in the South, slavery was still not tolerable as a way of life. Thus, the northern slaves began to retaliate by plotting methods for abolishing slavery.

In the nineteenth century, the New England colonies began the long process of ending the institution of slavery and a significant rift was developed between the North and South. The northern colonies began to further develop their manufacturing capabilities with wage labor, but southern region continued to foster the agricultural economy with slave labor.

In essence, undergirding these two economic contradictions was the issue of slavery. The South endeavored to control the North and, thereby, the entire country on the basis of its slave economy, and the North sought to harness the Southern agricultural economy as a resource for northern industry. Recognizing the South's reserve of slave manpower, the North realized that it could not defeat the South unless slavery was abolished.

Thus, slavery was the real element that precipitated America's Civil War and the ensuing Emancipation Proclamation. Hence, the real motive to end slavery was not based solely upon some moral decision, but rather to achieve a more cohesive and functional economic system. Thus, tensions between the North and South increased and resulted in the Civil War. However, after two years of a bloody Civil War, on January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed and issued the Emancipation Proclamation that stated "all persons held as slaves are, and henceforward shall be free." Two years later, on December 18, 1865 the thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution formally abolished slavery. Even though the wording of these documents (Emancipation Proclamation and Thirteenth Amendment) suggested that slavery be abolished immediately, the ending of slavery was limited. First and foremost, the Proclamation was only applied to those states that "...seceded from the Union, leaving slavery untouched in the loyal Border States."

Legal protectionists added amendments to the American Constitution that established citizenship for Blacks, gave them the right to vote and equal protection of laws, protected them against slavery and provided due process and access to public offices. It was now time for the Nation to establish its method for dealing with freedom. One method of dealing with freedom was the development of the Freedman's bureau that assisted Blacks in obtaining capital, establishing schools and getting land.

Reconstruction

The Role of Government

During Reconstruction, the federal government played a prominent role in passing legislation designed to assure racial equality. The thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to Blacks, and the Fifteenth Amendment guaranteed the right to vote for Black males. These government acts did little to bring economic prosperity to former slaves.

Blacks throughout the South- armed with the Reconstruction Act of 1867, the Fifteenth Amendment, and new state constitutions- make discernible gains in the political arena. Elections under the watchful eye of federal troops bring to office a significant number of Blacks-ex-slaves and antebellum free Blacks- in local, state, and federal positions. Among their ranks are two U.S. senators (both from Mississippi), twenty U.S. Congressmen, five lieutenant governors- including P.B.S Pinchback who served as Louisiana's acting governor for more than a month, as well as several secretaries of state, state treasurers, and superintendents of education.

Systems of free, integrated public education were instituted in several southern states under the terms of the Reconstruction state governments. In addition, the Freedmen's Bureau and the churches establish a network of schools for all levels and types of education – from primary to professional. Under Reconstruction governments, the Black and white masses also gain some measure of tax, relief, credit, freedom of movement, and employment in a variety of trades.

After the Civil War, Reconstruction acts were made to disenfranchise former Confederate leaders and soldiers and by that it allowed Blacks to participate in state conventions. Reconstruction enabled the military authorities to register over 800,000 blacks to vote, which exceeded the number of southern whites then registered. Thus, a situation came, for a brief time, that blacks could be politically dominant over their former masters. Southern whites resorted to violence and intimidation against blacks through such formations of secret societies as the Ku Klux Klan. Congress responded with the 15th Amendment, which explicitly provided that the right to vote to not be denied on account of race, color, or previous conditions of servitude.

Blacks first gained access to the ballot after the Civil War when ratification of the 15th Amendment forbade states from denying the right to vote on the basis of race. For about two decades during Reconstruction in the late 1800s, blacks actively participated in state and local politics, voting regularly and electing some African Americans to public office. Although blacks gained the right to vote, they were treated as pawns in the aftermath of the Civil War. The Black vote was exploited by Republicans who wanted to radicalize and punish the South, as well as take advantage of the South's cheap labor.

Southern white leaders again sought to reestablish dominance over their former slaves through disenfranchisement and they imposed "Jim Crow" segregation laws. Whites used segregation to maintain a system of control over blacks, thus preventing any significant social, economic, or political development. In the mid-1880s through the 1890s, they also used voting regulations such as the "grandfather clause", poll taxes,

literacy tests, through electoral procedures (such as white primary), and all too often through acts of white terrorism acted against African American voters to systematically remove them from electoral politics. These southern white leaders (segregationists and southern white Democrats) were assisted in their control over blacks by the indifference of the North to the plight of blacks and the neglect to enforce the postwar Civil Rights acts of the US Supreme court. Even with all the legal barriers placed on the Black vote, some blacks did vote after the Reconstruction period, but only when the white dominant faction needed them in order to win.

The Aftermath of the Civil War

Post-Civil War freedom for the former slave was illusive for several reasons:

(a) the increasing demand from ex-slaves and, poor whites for land redistribution was ignored, (b) the joining forces of the Southern and Northern elites that resulted in re-enslaving Blacks into the harsh and unrewarding system of sharecropping and (c) the low level of technology existing in agricultural production which necessitated the use of Black labor for the plantation economy. All of these factors were responsible for enslaving Black freedmen into a system of sharecropping.

At the heart of America's economy is the question of who owns land, labor, and the tools of industry. It was abundantly clear, that freed Blacks owned none of these resources before or after the Civil War. Blacks, freed by the emancipation, found themselves landless and desperate for work. In the capitalistic system, individuals must have something to offer in order to receive anything in return. Without land, employment, and access to the ballot box, the freedmen became more deeply entrenched into economic wage slavery and political slavery.

When Blacks were emancipated, there was no scarcity of land. Plenty of abandoned and vacant land was available, but the Northern and Southern elites joined forces to keep the freedmen and poor whites landless. America essentially reneged on its promise for 40 acres and a mule. Although the Freedmen's Bureau and the Southern Homestead Act of 1866 were established to facilitate the transition of land to poor whites and Blacks, these two entities were actually created to divert the freedmen from forcibly taking land from the politically defeated Southern planters. The result of these actions contributed to Blacks' landlessness even until today. Unlike whites, Blacks had no land to pass on to their offspring, which contributed to a perpetual Black landless class whose only hopes were in one day owning the land that consumed their toil of sharecropping.

It was not in the interest of the North to aid freed Blacks in acquiring land. Northerners needed the freedmen to help them keep the South in its place. Thus, the Northern elite joined forces with the Southern aristocracy in returning Blacks to a new form of slavery-sharecropping. Forming an alliance with the South was in the best interest of the North. Many Northern investors put a lot of money into Southern agriculture and were not willing to relinquish this capital over to emancipation. Providing land to Black farmers would upset the slave-like system and bring an end to planters as a class. Additionally, widespread ownership of goods-producing property would have democratized the South, posing an additional threat to the industrial oligarchy in the North.

Importantly, America lacked the tools to replace Black labor. The growing demand for tobacco and cotton at home and abroad required a continuing supply of cheap

agricultural labor. Former slaves had no means at their disposal to acquire land. They, therefore, became more firmly entrenched in the economic imperatives of the plantation system as sharecroppers. Through this system, Blacks sank deeper into poverty. They were forced to buy on credit during the months before harvest and suffered from the landowners' manipulation of credit records, marked up prices and exorbitant interest rates. They ended up owing the landowner more than their share of what the crop was worth. Thus, sharecropping perpetuated the landowners' stranglehold on Blacks, placing blacks in greater poverty.

The Civil Rights Act

Securing the Black voting rights in the South was one of the principal goals of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Through mass protests, voter registration drives, congressional lobbying, and suits in federal courts, civil rights activists fought to eliminate electoral practices that were discriminatory to Black political participation and to secure federal protection of Black political rights.

The Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and 1964 began the long overdue process of providing direct federal intervention in state registration practices. And of course, the crowning achievement was the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which outlawed unfair electoral procedures and required the Justice Department to supervise southern elections. Unlike the Reconstruction period, these Civil Rights Acts were supported by Supreme Court decisions. The Civil Rights Movement resulted in the enfranchisement of millions of blacks, particularly in the South. The Acts were extended in 1970, suspending the use of literacy tests nationwide. Registration of Southern blacks alone increased by two million during the decade of the passage of the Civil Rights Acts.

African American's struggles for the right to vote positively benefited all Americans. So many of the rights now taken for granted – the right to vote, the right to privacy, the prohibition against discrimination – would have had no foundation without the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution. The Voting Rights Act has gone a long way toward reducing the gap between Black and white electoral participation and it has improved Black representation in the political arena.

This history shows that at every turn that blacks did gain some type of assistance in their fight for inclusion to the political process that then another type of resistance was placed in their path. When the Constitution was finally amended to enfranchise blacks following the Civil War, they were then prevented from exercising the franchise through violence, intimidation, and discriminatory registration practices. Blacks demanded the right to vote one hundred years later and received the Voting Right Act. Unfortunately, resistance is still being enacted by the use of gerrymandering and vote-dilution tactics.

Question (2)

What was and is the role of African American organizations in mobilizing African American voters? (See especially chapter 2)

(See especially Chapter 2, Dianne Pinderhughes' article)

When Blacks were disenfranchised there were many organizations that began to actively demonstrate for Black to utilize the ballot box. Black organizations, especially the church, were instrumental in encouraging African-Americans to exercise their right to vote. During the three years before the civil war, the church became one of the strongest proponents of the Abolitionist Movement. In addition to the church, there were many other organizations that helped to mobilize the Black vote such as: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Leadership Council on Civil Rights (LCCR), the National Urban League (NUL), Women's Movement, student organizations, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Voter Education Project (VEP), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). In this essay, an explanation of the involvement of the aforementioned and other related organizations and individuals in the mobilization of the Black vote is provided.

The Black Church

The Black church, from the beginning, took from Christianity a dual and contradictory, message: submission to slavery and the equality before God of the human soul. The whites, in offering blacks their faith, emphasized the virtues of the former. The blacks, in accepting it, dwelled upon the implications of the latter.

During the decades of slavery the Black church, shunned by whites, acquired increasing autonomy, and drew further from the influence of the masters. The Negro church in American history served as the incubator and transmitter of and indigenous Black culture, and the mainstay of the concept of Black dignity. By the nineteenth century, Black Christianity possessed a clear political character, which whites hardly noticed.

But whatever its role, the church created leaders. "The preacher," wrote W.E.B. DuBois in the Souls of Black Folk, "is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on the American soil. A leader, a politician, an orator, a 'boss,' an intriguer, an idealist—all these he is, and ever, too, the centre of a group of men, now twenty, now a thousand in number." The church was the only training ground that blacks had.

Of the salve revolts in American history, most were led by preachers, but more often preachers kept the flame of freedom alive more discreetly, within the church's walls. After the Civil War, preachers became the political chiefs of the emancipated slaves but, like Black political power generally, they went into eclipse near the end of the century. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the many Black preachers who followed along with him, represented not a new phenomenon in leading Black resistance to white oppression, but the reemergence of an old one.

The Black Church served as an organization of organizations. The Black Church served as a community center, an educational center, and as an assembly hall for protest meetings. The Church became the center of a network of organizations for Black

communities. The churches were involved in issues such as the rights of their members to own themselves, the right to defend themselves against unfair charges or violations of the law, the right to seek employment and to practice a trade, and the right to worship in the manner of their own choosing.

The Black Church and the Abolitionist Movement

Those supporting the abolition of slavery realized that prejudices related to slavery were a problem of national proportion. Since religious activities were accepted by the majority of Blacks and were acceptable for enslaved people, all churches were potential allies of the Abolitionist Movement. Prior to the passing of the Emancipation Proclamation and with the enactment of the Abolitionist Movement, slave owners became wary of religious activities. To reduce the probability of the abolitionists reaching the slave population via church, plantation owners attempted to outlaw Black preachers in most states. Despite the efforts of the plantation owners to minimize or eliminate the churches involvement in the abolition of slavery, the church became the core of the network of organizations developed for and in the Black community. Many groups created relationships with church organizations, because they needed meeting spaces. In addition to a meeting place, Black churches acted as centers of education, community service and assembly halls for various types of meetings including protests. The church also produced much of the leadership in the Black community that fought for equality for blacks. Since laws forbidding Black associations were developed after the slave rebellions of the 19th century, legislation was used to control religious and secular activity. So, preachers were not allowed to preach and could not hold meetings for slaves. Nonetheless, Blacks continued to meet and organize their struggle for equality in secret. Ultimately, the church was the institutional center of the Civil Rights Movement. Gomes and Williams state that the church provided the organized base of the movement. This base consisted of clergymen who were skilled at managing people and resources and were economically independent. In addition to the movement's human resource base, the church helped to develop the financial base needed for the movement to be successful.

The Black church in contemporary American society is more directed toward immediate social changes and alterations in relations between blacks and whites in ways, which, in the view of ministers and parishioners alike, reflect the broad view of the community. In this sense, functions performed by the Black church of the 21st century are consistent with the kinds of community functions attributed to Warren and outlined earlier in Chapter 1.

At least seven functions of the contemporary Black church may be identified at this point:

1. It provides a cohesive institutional structure within the Black community.
2. It is an instrument for the development of Black leadership.
3. It is a base for citizenship training and community social action.
4. It performs major educative and social roles.
5. It acts as a charitable institution.
6. It is an agency for the development of Black business structures or ventures.
7. It serves as an index of social class.

In addition to the church, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Leadership Council of Civil Rights (LCCR), and the National Urban League (NUL) had the goal of obtaining justice through litigation, eliminating discrimination and segregation, and socializing blacks respectively. The NAACP focused on litigations that were not inherently discriminatory. A major accomplishment of the NAACP was the elimination of a grandfather clause established in 1910 in Oklahoma. The clause excluded individuals and their descendents who were entitled to vote in 1866 from all literacy tests. This clause did not identify blacks as the subject, but it definitely blocked them from registering. On the other hand, the LCCR emerged out of the civil rights mobilizations that were unsuccessful. Their focus was on literacy tests and intimidation tactics that were barriers to voting. They found these issues to be far more damaging than poll taxes. The NAACP and LCCR focused on voting barriers that were external to Blacks while the NUL took a slightly different approach. They focused on the socialization of blacks in big cities because blacks had to make significant social adjustments to survive in a city. In addition to providing social support to blacks in urban settings, the NUL encouraged blacks to vote and assisted them in the registration process.

Women's participation in the mobilization of Black votes was crucial from many perspectives. Women were involved in most of the organizations developed in the community and they also developed women's organizations that spent great amounts of energy mobilizing voters. In the movement with its male-oriented perspective, women provided a solid and reliable foundation. Their numbers dominated mass demonstrations, sit-ins, and voter registration drives. Furthermore, sororities and other women's clubs were key in developing the foundation of mobilization efforts. Educated women involved in such organizations as Delta Sigma Theta, the National Council of Negro Women, and the National Association of Colored Women, to name a few, attempted to bring order to the racist American society. These women's organizations developed programs that addressed political interests, health, economics, literacy, and education. After the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was passed, the League of Women Voters was established to help to register women to vote. There were many well-known women who focused their energies on improving the Black community's knowledge of voting and their rights. For instance, Joan Gibson Robinson and Ida Barnett-Wells spent much energy in mobilizing the African American vote. Ella Baker was involved in a significant literacy campaign. These and many other women were very instrumental in the women's movement and ultimately in mobilizing the Black vote.

In addition to women's college-based sororities, other student organizations were formed to increase the number of blacks that were registered to vote and attend the polls. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed by four Black students who were denied service in 1960 at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. The students attended North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College. After gaining notoriety for their student-organized sit-ins, SNCC specialized in providing assistance to people in areas that were deemed dangerous. Since it was founded in a Judaic-Christian tradition of non-violence, often times its members suffered abuse while providing no retaliation of any kind. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) field workers trained the SNCC students in non-violent techniques.

CORE was responsible for organizing "freedom rides" along southern roads. These rides were attempts to desegregate travel facilities found along interstates. Rides began to take place in early 1960 and focused on hostile environments such as rural South Carolina and northern Louisiana. Another organization that was developed to motivate blacks to register to vote was the Voter Education Project (VEP). Its aim was to investigate the reasons for disenfranchisement as well as to increase voter registration.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) under the guise of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., was instrumental in encouraging and managing the campaign of non-violent action directed at ending segregation and increasing the number of registered voters. Reverend King believed that with the south's voting victory, blacks would obtain the tools necessary to reverse the injustices being experienced. One of the major cities that King focused on was Birmingham, Alabama. In 1965, one hundred years after the passing of the Emancipation Proclamation, the SCLC and King initiated a desegregation demonstration. Birmingham was stated to be one of the most segregated cities in the United States. It was determined by King that a successful demonstration in Birmingham might positively impact the southern United States. In addition to Birmingham, King organized marches, sit-ins, and other forms of protest in many southern cities, including the Selma, Alabama March of 1965 that stimulated the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Question (3) What barriers and or electoral structures still hamper African American political progress? (See especially chapter 4)

(See especially Chapter 4, Frank Parker's article)

When the Voting Rights Act was passed in 1965, Southern state political leaders knew that they could no longer deny Blacks the right to register and vote. They switched strategies from vote denial to vote dilution and introduced a second generation of disenfranchising devices to negate the newly gained Black vote. Southern legislators enacted a series of resistance that became models for post-1965 Black disenfranchisement throughout the South.

Even though Black political and community organizations have been successful in mobilizing African Americans to register to vote, many barriers still exist that impede the progress that African-Americans have made in the political arena. Many of these barriers are covert attempts to weaken the impact of the Black vote. Some of these barriers include redistricting and gerrymandering.

Racial gerrymandering consists of diluting the Black vote by manipulating the district to divide the Black vote across multiple districts. In so doing, the minority vote is decreased in individual districts. Gerrymandering is utilized at that city and state levels. There are two main gerrymandering techniques employed in the United States: cracking and stacking. Due to the heavy concentration of African Americans, the focus of these forms of vote dilution was the southern part of the country.

Cracking is when minority votes are cancelled out by breaking up a minority population large enough for separate representation by district lines. Blacks then, are dispersed throughout multiple districts with white majorities. Furthermore, cracking also occurs when a majority Black county that was previously joined in a legislative district, is