

2023

Disenfranchisement Laws Affecting Voting Rights of Black Americans in Mississippi

April Masha Jones
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Law Commons](#), [Public Administration Commons](#), and the [Public Policy Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

April Masha Jones

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Mark Gordon, Committee Chairperson,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Linda Sundstrom, Committee Member,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2023

Abstract

Disenfranchisement Laws Affecting Voting Rights of Black Americans in Mississippi

by

April Masha Jones

MS, Everest University, 2008

MS, Alcorn State University, 1998

BS, Alcorn State University, 1997

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2023

Abstract

From Black individuals being enslaved and freed to being incarcerated in modern-day society more frequently than White individuals, the desire to have a voice in the decision-making process has been challenging. Black voters in Mississippi may be underrepresented because of felony disenfranchisement laws. The purpose of this general qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of Black Mississippians about felony disenfranchisement laws and voting rights. The first research question addressed perceptions of Black Americans in Mississippi regarding the felony disenfranchisement laws. The second research question addressed the experiences related to any political implications among the electorate in Mississippi. The social construction framework was identified as the framework for this study. Data were collected from face-to-face interviews with 11 previously incarcerated individuals and residents of Holmes County Mississippi, as well as political officials of Mississippi. The results revealed a profound lack of knowledge among Black citizens in Holmes County Mississippi regarding the Mississippi felony disenfranchisement law and its effects on the Black community. The study also revealed a lingering turmoil of voting rights for Black Americans. Results may be used to facilitate positive social change in Mississippi by challenging political officials and citizens to reexamine disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi and the precepts of the U.S. Constitution. This study may also inspire community leaders to address the ongoing criminal activities that affect the voting rights of individuals in the Black community.

Disenfranchisement Laws Affecting Voting Rights of Black Americans in Mississippi

by

April Masha Jones

MS, Everest University, 2008

MS, Alcorn State University, 1998

BS, Alcorn State University, 1997

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2023

Dedication

This research is dedicated to my mother, Joyce Norman Jones, and my father, James Earl Jones, of Pickens, Mississippi.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my mother, Joyce Norman Jones (deceased), and my father, James Earl Jones. They planted so many positive seeds that have flourished and will flourish. I would not be where I am today without their wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. I am truly honored to be their daughter. To my father, you are the truest person. Thanks, Dad, for being a real dad and for always reminding me to keep my seed in my pocket. I could not have done any of this without you allowing God to lead you as a father.

Though several people played a role that helped me complete my research, special thanks go to my sister, Tonya Jones-Cole, and my uncle, David Jerome Normal, for always challenging, encouraging, and supporting me throughout my life. Your examples of faith, perseverance, and strength helped reinforce the notion that I can do whatever I want on this life's journey. I am forever grateful to you both. To my partner, John Wesley Newton, my brother-in-law, Ronald Cole, and my best friends, Carla Annette Williams and Helen Scott McBride, thanks for always sending me words of affirmation and simply showing up when I need you most. John, thanks for your support, patience, and kindness throughout this process. Ronald, thanks for truly being my big brother. And to my girls, Carla and Helen, thanks for always sharing your strength, wisdom, and laughter with me.

But above all, I want to give thanks and acknowledge God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I learned on this journey that delays are simple reminders that God's timing is not always our timing. It is good to know that my prayers were not unanswered. I am Dr. April Masha Jones.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement	6
Purpose of the Study	7
Research Questions.....	8
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Nature of the Study	10
Definitions.....	11
Assumptions.....	12
Scope and Delimitations	12
Limitations	12
Significance.....	13
Summary	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	17
Literature Search Strategy.....	18
Theoretical Foundation	18
Literature Review.....	21
Being Black in America.....	22
Effects of Being Black in Mississippi.....	24
Voting Rights for Blacks in America.....	26

Power of the Black Vote and Its Effects in Mississippi.....	27
Effects of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws on Voting in the Black Community	28
Felony Disenfranchisement Laws Across the United States	32
Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in Mississippi	34
Techniques of Direct Disenfranchisement.....	35
Criminal Offenses of Blacks in Mississippi.....	36
Summary	38
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	41
Measure.....	42
Research Questions	42
Research Design and Rationale	43
Role of the Researcher	45
Methodology	45
Participants.....	46
Procedures.....	48
Data Collection	50
Data Analysis	51
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	54
Ethical Protection of Participants.....	57
Summary	58
Chapter 4: Results.....	62

Setting	62
Demographics	63
Data Collection	64
Data Analysis	65
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	68
Findings	70
Group 1: Holmes County Residents	71
Holmes County Residents’ Themes.....	81
Group 2: Holmes County Previously Incarcerated Individuals	83
Holmes County Previously Incarcerated Individuals’ Themes	86
Group 3: Mississippi Political Officials.....	89
Mississippi Political Officials’ Themes	95
Summary	98
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	100
Interpretation of the Findings.....	101
Limitations of the Study.....	104
Recommendations.....	106
Implications.....	107
Conclusion	108
References.....	116
Appendix A: Letters to Participants.....	128
Appendix B: Social Media and Newspaper Notice	131

Appendix C: Interview Protocol132
Appendix D: Holmes County Residents’ Themes136
Appendix E: Holmes County Previously Incarcerated Individuals’ Themes139
Appendix F: Mississippi Political Officials’ Themes141

List of Figures

Figure 1. Word Cloud That Includes the Word Frequencies of the Coded Data..... 98

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Since the development of the 14th and 15th Amendments of the United States Constitution in 1868 and 1870, the voting rights of citizens in the United States of America were protected (U.S. Department of Justice [DOJ], 2017b). However, the guarantees of citizenship to each person living within the U.S. borders were not granted easily to everyone (Mack et al., 2016). From Black individuals being enslaved and freed to being incarcerated in modern-day society more frequently than White individuals, the desire to have a voice in the decision-making process has been challenging. Though felony disenfranchisement laws are legal under the U.S. Constitution, the rooted intentions of felony disenfranchisement laws are inconsistent and do not reflect equality and social equity for all citizens (Douglas, 2014; Nunn, 2005; Tolson, 2012, 2014; Trahan-Liptak, 2014). Lawmakers created felony disenfranchisement laws as a neutral policy. Some Americans believe the laws are justifiable and voting is a privilege for individuals who do not commit crimes. However, Black communities' voting privileges have been affected more than White communities' voting privileges (Cresswell, 2014; Powell, 2017; Wilson et al., 2015). The lack of voting privileges for previously incarcerated Black individuals in Mississippi may leave Black communities underrepresented in the decision-making process (Chung, 2019).

The number of previously incarcerated Black individuals who have committed a felony continues to increase. However, the Mississippi Constitution limits the ability of formerly incarcerated individuals who have completed their sentencing to gain their voting rights (Cresswell, 2014). Mississippi is currently ranked second among states with

the highest felony disenfranchisement rate in America where African Americans are affected more vigorously than others (The Sentencing Project, 2017b). Felony disenfranchisement laws were created to minimize the decision-making privileges of Black individuals by limiting the voting rights of previously incarcerated individuals who committed felonies (Chen, 2014). However, there is limited literature on the topic of felony disenfranchisement laws' effect on Black communities in Mississippi. Also, there is little information about the experiences of political officials and residents of Mississippi. Therefore, the current study may lead to an understanding of the views and experiences of those subjects.

Background

The atmosphere of Mississippi still contains stains of racism and oppression of Blacks by White oppressors. However, Mississippi also has a history of successful movements to gain freedom, respect, and equality with each oppression. Voting rights after the abolishment of slavery were not an option for Black individuals, and they did not gain respect as legal residents of the United States of America. Voting is one representation of citizenship. The right to be a part of the outcomes that direct the United States is a demonstration of that citizenship.

The United States has executed laws that display impartiality, liberty, and justice but still allow states to create and implement laws such as the disenfranchisement laws that affect some previously incarcerated individuals who have completed sentencing. Despite the implementation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, states are allowed to implement felony disenfranchisement laws that prevent individuals who previously

committed a felony from voting (Blessett, 2015). There is an inconsistency in the U.S. Constitution and felony disenfranchisement laws as it relates to citizenship (Nunn, 2005). Though each citizen has a right to vote, a previously incarcerated individual who has committed a felony but completed sentencing may not be eligible to vote unless the governor reestablishes eligibility in Mississippi (Miss. Const. art. 12, § 253). Under the U.S. Constitution, the 14th Amendment gives states the authority to implement disenfranchisement laws that affect previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony despite completing their sentencing (U.S. Const. amend. XIV).

The Voting Rights Act (1965) gave Black citizens an official right to vote. The Voting Rights Act was the law signed by President Lyndon Johnson to provide Black Americans a right to voice opinions during the decision-making process (Voting Rights Act, 1965). Since that moment, nothing has collectively affected the voice of Black communities more than felony disenfranchisement laws. White supremacy has played an active role in minimizing the participation of Blacks in the decision-making process by implementing the felony disenfranchisement law (Guenther, 2016; Nelson, 2013). Disenfranchisement laws that affect previously incarcerated individuals were put in place to limit the voting rights of Blacks in the United States (Chen, 2014). Contrarily, some areas have counted incarcerated individuals who do not have a right to vote as residents, which increased the population in a particular district. Such routine procedure decreases the population of incarcerated individuals' native community (Ebenstein, 2018).

The felony disenfranchisement laws may place a permanent restriction on previously incarcerated individuals who have committed specific felony crimes despite

the completion of their sentencing (Cresswell, 2014; Daniels, 2017; Heath, 2017). Black individuals in Mississippi are a part of the decision-making process, but problems for Black communities still exist. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2022), Blacks make up 38% of the population in Mississippi. Though voter registration demographics are not documented in Mississippi, 11% of Mississippi's Black population is disenfranchised. The racial and ethnic disparity ratio for Black and White imprisonment is 2.6 to 1 in Mississippi (The Sentencing Project, 2023). This leaves the Black vote disproportioned in Mississippi and Black communities underrepresented (Chung, 2019). In Holmes County, Mississippi, Blacks make up approximately 83.1% of the county's population of 16,121 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The county is recorded as having the lowest income and highest poverty rate in Mississippi (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

Felony disenfranchisement laws were developed to minimize the right to vote for non-White individuals (Blessett, 2015; Guenther, 2016; Nelson, 2013). Though several states have eliminated or changed felony disenfranchisement laws, Mississippi has not. The state has 22 felony crimes under the felony disenfranchisement law. Felony crimes are committed by all races. However, Black individuals are more likely than Whites to be incarcerated and convicted of those crimes (The Sentencing Project, 2017a).

Several states have altered the disenfranchisement laws to allow previously incarcerated individuals to vote while incarcerated or immediately upon completing sentencing (Brennan Center for Justice, 2019). Documentation regarding why the change occurred is limited. However, the former governor of New York, Andrew M. Cuomo, has spoken openly about the purpose of an executive order he signed to restore voting rights

to previously incarcerated individuals. According to Governor Cuomo, the executive order would not only restore voting rights upon release from incarceration, but it would also promote civic participation that would reduce recidivism. Furthermore, restoring voting rights to a previously incarcerated individual will allow individuals to be a part of the decision-making process and improve public safety (Office of the Governor, 2018).

There is limited literature on the topic of felony disenfranchisement laws' effect on Black communities in Mississippi. Also, there is little information about the experiences of political officials and residents of Mississippi. However, the American Civil Liberties Union reported that denying voting rights to an entire class of citizens undermines democracy and makes the country exclusive. Furthermore, the organization reported that when a previously incarcerated individual participates in the decision-making process, recidivism decreases (Hoffman, 2019). Researching the felony disenfranchisement laws and voting rights of Black individuals in Mississippi may aid political officials with the formation of modern policies for previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony and completed sentencing. The additional issue may also hinge on the Mississippi governor's fair and equitable political and unbiased representation of all citizens. Also, the findings of this study may challenge political officials to observe the impact of the disenfranchisement laws on predominately Black communities, such as Holmes County, MS.

Taxation affects the lives of previously incarcerated individuals who have committed one of the felony crimes listed within the disenfranchisement law in Mississippi. The current study explored felony disenfranchisement laws and voting

within Black communities in Mississippi. The results of this study could facilitate social change within the state of Mississippi by challenging political officials and citizens to reexamine disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi and the precepts of the U.S. Constitution. Presenting information regarding the initial purpose of the felony disenfranchisement laws and their impact may also inspire all citizens to question the modern-day purpose of the laws that affect the voting privileges of those previously incarcerated for committing a felony under the Mississippi Constitution despite completing sentencing. The significance of exploring the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws and voting within Black communities in Mississippi may encourage legislatures to implement strategies to allow taxation with representation for previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony.

Problem Statement

The result of the Voting Rights Act (1965) was to eliminate lawful barriers that outlawed Black citizens from taking part in the decision-making process in the United States of America (Crotty, 2014; Voting Rights Act, 1965). However, felony disenfranchisement laws exclude certain community members from voting, which can impact political representation. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2022), Blacks make up 38% of the population in Mississippi. Though voter registration demographics are not documented in Mississippi, 11% of Mississippi's Black population is disenfranchised. The racial and ethnic disparity ratio for Black and White imprisonment is 2.6 to 1 in Mississippi (The Sentencing Project, 2023). Black voters in Mississippi may be underrepresented as a result of felony disenfranchisement laws in violation of the 14th

Amendment's Equal Protection Clause, which requires states to practice the protection of equality for individuals (U.S. Const. amend. XIV). Furthermore, Mississippi felony disenfranchisement laws may target offenses that are more likely to be committed by Black individuals than Whites individuals, which may impact voter representation in certain legislative or congressional districts in Mississippi (Chung, 2019).

Disenfranchisement laws are seemingly helpful to some political candidates and officials (King & Erickson, 2016). Even with the potential impacts associated with political representation, little is understood about how or whether social constructions held by policymakers and community members influence the use and equity of felony disenfranchisement in Mississippi.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to examine the perceptions regarding felony disenfranchisement laws and voting rights in the Black communities of Mississippi. Mississippi has 22 felony crimes under the felony disenfranchisement law. Though other races commit such crimes, Black individuals are more likely than Whites to be incarcerated and convicted of those crimes (Chung, 2019). The number of Blacks convicted of felony crimes leaves the Black vote disproportioned in Mississippi despite completing sentencing.

The study explored the felony disenfranchisement law and voting in the Black communities in Mississippi. The results of this study could facilitate social change within the state of Mississippi by challenging political officials and citizens to reexamine disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi and the precepts of the U.S. Constitution.

Presenting information regarding the initial purpose of the felony disenfranchisement laws and their impact may also inspire all citizens to question the modern-day purpose of the laws that affect the voting privileges of those previously incarcerated for committing a felony under the Mississippi Constitution despite completing sentencing. Currently, taxation without representation does not reflect the livelihood of an individual who has completed sentencing for the felony crime committed under the felony disenfranchisement law. A previously incarcerated individual who committed one of the felony crimes in Mississippi is presented with the reality that voting as a fundamental right is not easily granted to all citizens. The significance of exploring the effects of the felony disenfranchisement law and voting within Black communities in Mississippi may encourage legislatures to implement strategies to allow taxation with representation for previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony.

Research Questions

The following two research questions framed the study:

RQ1: What are the perceptions that exist of the felony disenfranchisement law by Black Americans in Mississippi?

RQ2: How do previously incarcerated Black Americans experience and characterize the impact of political disparity in Mississippi?

Theoretical Framework

Social construction framework (SCF) was identified as the framework for this research. This theory was developed by Schneider et al. (2014), and it seeks to illustrate how policies may not only shape the social construction of a targeted population but may

also shape the position of power. Furthermore, this theory illustrates how a policy design may affect democracy and political position. SCF focuses on certain groups of individuals who are affected negatively or positively. This effect may also be interpreted as a burden or a benefit to a certain population. Also, the theory is used to discover the results of the social construction of a selected community (Schneider et al., 2014). Under the U.S. Constitution, the 14th Amendment gives states the authority to implement disenfranchisement laws that affect previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony despite completing their sentencing (U.S. Const. amend. XIV). Under the SCF, personal reality is developed from a person's interpretation. The shared reality of a group of people creates rules and regulations, as well as other norms (Schneider & Sidney, 2009). The purpose of the disenfranchisement laws is to intentionally create and implement discrimination against Blacks and other non-White citizens (Blessett, 2015). Felony disenfranchisement laws target and have more of an impact on Black voters than White voters. Such laws significantly affect the Black communities' voting privileges more than the voting privileges in White communities (Ochs, 2006; Zaman, 2015).

One of the most detrimental effects and burdens of felony disenfranchisement laws is taxation without representation. Previously incarcerated individuals who completed sentencing are required to pay taxes, but they are not a part of the decision-making process. Black communities cannot gain effective representation as fewer individuals qualify as registered voters (Ochs, 2006; Zaman, 2015). However, when people stop acknowledging those shared realities and it diminishes, new policies are created and modification to laws occurs (Schneider & Sidney, 2009). Both Douglas

(2014) and Trahan-Liptak (2014) addressed the legal barriers of states and how they affect an individual's right to vote.

Felony disenfranchisement laws may place a permanent restriction on previously incarcerated individuals who have committed specific felony crimes despite the completion of their sentencing (Cresswell, 2014; Daniels, 2017; Heath, 2017). Though several states have eliminated or changed disenfranchisement laws, Mississippi has not. The current study explored the felony disenfranchisement law and voting within Black communities in Mississippi. SCF allowed me to examine the effects race and ethnicity have on policymakers as it relates to the development of felony disenfranchisement laws. The framework also allowed me to explore any burdens felony disenfranchisement law places on Mississippi's Black communities. Additional information regarding the theoretical framework is provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The qualitative methodological approach was used to focus on the behavior, emotional state, and attitudes of each participant in this study. This approach is used to study the consequences of events on individuals and social groups (Polit & Hungler, 2003, as cited in McGloin, 2008). As the researcher, I arranged interviews with Mississippi's political officials, residents, and previously incarcerated individuals regarding their experiences and thoughts regarding any effects felony disenfranchisement laws may have on voting rights in the Black communities. Participants were categorized using letters of the alphabet and numbers before data were verified. Data were analyzed using the inductive approach. This approach allowed data to be collected before

presenting codes. Additional information regarding research analysis is provided in Chapter 3.

Definitions

African American/Black individuals: Common language referring to citizens of African descent in the United States.

Black communities: Common language describing those of African descent and their communities.

Decision-making process: Common language referring to citizens' participation in voting for the person with shared views regarding the United States of America in local, state, and national political elections.

Felony disenfranchisement: Common term used to describe the exclusion from voting for previously incarcerated individuals who have committed disqualified crimes listed in the Mississippi State Constitution. Currently, 22 crimes disqualify previously incarcerated individuals from voting. These crimes include armed robbery, arson, bigamy, bribery, carjacking, embezzlement, extortion, felony bad check, felony shoplifting, forgery, larceny, larceny under lease or rental agreement, murder, obtaining money or goods under false pretenses, perjury, rape, receiving stolen property, robbery, statutory rape, theft, timber larceny, and unlawful taking of a motor vehicle.

Pardon: Common term used to describe forgiveness given by the governor for the felon committed by an individual.

Political officials: Individuals chosen to hold political positions in Mississippi through voting or special appointment by the governor.

Previously incarcerated individuals: Common language referring to a person who is no longer serving time in prison and has completed sentencing orders given by a judge.

Qualitative methodological approach: The method used to explore the experiences of Mississippi's political officials, residents, and previously incarcerated felons through face-to-face interviews.

Social construction framework (SCF): The theory used to explore the effects of social construction, such as felony disenfranchisement, on the Black community.

Voting rights: Allows an individual to be a part of the decision-making process in America.

Voting Rights Act of 1965: The federal law that banned racial bias in the decision-making process.

Assumptions

I assumed that participants would openly and honestly answer the interview questions presented.

Scope and Delimitations

This study targeted the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws on Black communities in Mississippi. Therefore, the population did not include the White communities in Mississippi.

Limitations

Access to political officials may have been difficult to establish. Political channels helped me coordinate the identification of political officials who had an interest in the

voting rights of previously incarcerated individuals. Barriers to identifying political officials may have impeded participant recruitment.

Political officials may have been reluctant to participate in the study. The willingness of political officials to share their personal experiences regarding voting and felony disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi may have been difficult to obtain. Therefore, the intention was to identify at least five willing participants.

Access to previously incarcerated individuals who had committed a felony and had an interest in voting may have been difficult to establish. Some previously incarcerated individuals may have chosen to remain silent due to their status within the community.

There was limited research regarding the effects of the disenfranchisement laws on voting in Mississippi's Black communities. I used qualitative methodology to address this research problem. Findings from this research are limited to interpretations based on the experiences of the participants.

Significance

Black individuals are more likely than Whites to be incarcerated and convicted. Individuals who previously committed a felony crime under Mississippi's disenfranchisement law are not granted the right to vote but are required to pay taxes. This leaves Black communities underrepresented in the decision-making process. The results of this study may be used to further research racial disparities in Mississippi's criminal justice system.

Several studies have been conducted regarding the implementation and effects of felony disenfranchisement laws on the lives of individuals who have committed a felony (Ewald, 2012; Guenther, 2016; Nelson, 2013; Whitt, 2017). Furthermore, studies addressing the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and any ongoing struggles for Black individuals in America have also been conducted (Crotty, 2014; Hayter, 2014). Studies have also addressed the legal barriers of state constitutions (Blessett, 2015; Douglas, 2014; Trahan-Liptak, 2014; Varnum, 2008). However, researchers have not explored the impact of disenfranchisement laws on voting rights in Mississippi's Black communities.

Voting as a fundamental right is not easily granted to all citizens. This study addressed a portion of the gap by exploring the impact of disenfranchisement laws on voting rights in Mississippi's Black communities. Taxation affects the lives of previously incarcerated individuals who have committed one of the felony crimes listed within the disenfranchisement law in Mississippi. The results of this study could facilitate social change within the state of Mississippi by challenging political officials and citizens to reexamine disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi and the precepts of the U.S. Constitution. Presenting information regarding the initial purpose of the felony disenfranchisement laws and their impact may also inspire all citizens to question the modern-day purpose of the laws that affect the voting privileges of those previously incarcerated for committing a felony under the Mississippi Constitution despite completing sentencing. The significance of exploring the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws and voting within Black communities in Mississippi may

encourage legislatures to implement strategies to allow taxation with representation for previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony.

Summary

Since the development of Amendments 14th and 15th of the United States Constitution in 1868 and 1870, voting rights for citizens of the United States of America have been protected. However, the right to vote has not been granted easily to everyone. For Blacks and non-Whites in the United States of America, voting is equivalent to being a citizen and having a voice in the decision-making process (Blessett, 2015). From Black individuals being enslaved and freed to those previously incarcerated in modern-day society, a desire to have a voice in the decision-making process has been challenging. Though felony disenfranchisement laws were written as a neutral policy, Black communities' voting privileges are affected more than White communities' voting privileges (Cresswell, 2014; Powell, 2017; Wilson et al., 2015). The lack of voting privileges in Black communities leaves them underrepresented in the decision-making process (Chung, 2019).

Felony disenfranchisement laws have been documented as legal law in the United States despite the implementation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Blessett, 2015). The effect is rooted in racism to marginalize groups and control the decision-making process (Guenther, 2016; Nelson, 2013). Research has also documented an inconsistency in the Constitution and felony disenfranchisement laws as it relates to citizenship (Douglas, 2014). Though each citizen has the right to vote, a previously incarcerated individual who has committed a felony despite completing sentencing may not be eligible to vote unless

the governor reestablishes eligibility in Mississippi (Miss. Const. art. 12, § 253). This study explored felony disenfranchisement laws and voting rights in Mississippi's Black communities, such as Holmes County, Mississippi. I used the qualitative methodological approach. Findings could facilitate social change in the state of Mississippi by challenging political officials and citizens to reexamine disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi and precepts of the U.S. Constitution. Presenting information regarding the initial purpose of the felony disenfranchisement laws and their impact may also inspire all citizens to question the modern-day purpose of the laws that affect the voting privileges of those previously incarcerated for committing a felony under the Mississippi Constitution despite completing sentencing. Currently, taxation without representation does not reflect the livelihood of an individual who has completed sentencing for the felony crime committed under the felony disenfranchisement law. The significance of exploring the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws and voting within Black communities in Mississippi may encourage legislatures to implement strategies to allow taxation with representation for previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony. This chapter is followed by the literature review in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The voting rights for Blacks have caused them to face turmoil and discomforts that Whites have not had to face. Trials and tribulations have often involved intimidation, threats, deaths, and voter suppression. Though the Constitution governs the legalities of the United States of America, it also allows states to have some governing power to implement laws. Black voters in Mississippi may be underrepresented because of felony disenfranchisement laws in violation of the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause, which requires states to practice the protection of equality for individuals (U.S. Const. amend. XIV). Furthermore, Mississippi felony disenfranchisement laws may target offenses that are more likely to be committed by Black individuals than White individuals, which may impact voter representation in certain legislative or congressional districts in Mississippi.

Previously incarcerated individuals in the state of Mississippi are not given all of the rights as citizens due to felony disenfranchisement restrictions. The Black population in Mississippi does not reflect potential voter turnout due to voter suppression and felony disenfranchisement laws (The Sentencing Project, 2017a). Studies dedicated to Mississippi's position and current purpose of felony disenfranchisement and its effects on the Black community are limited.

In Chapter 2, research strategies for the literature review to locate articles are presented. The additional content of the literature review includes the theoretical frameworks, as well as information targeting the effects of disenfranchisement laws on voting privileges for Black Americans. The review provides an understanding of the

history of Blacks in America and their right to vote as well as the initial purpose of disenfranchisement laws that affect previously incarcerated people who committed a felony in the United States of America. The review addresses the disenfranchisement laws and voting rights in Mississippi. Finally, the review addresses the effects of disenfranchisement laws on Blacks in Mississippi and their communities.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search for this study was conducted using numerous sources of information. ProQuest Central was used using the general search terms “felony disenfranchisement” and “voting rights” as the basis of all inquiries. Along with these search terms, other words used for the search included “history,” “Blacks,” and “Mississippi” to narrow the search. Additional resources that were not located through the general search were retrieved from articles found through the above search strategies. Also, LegalTrac, SAGE Premier 2017, LexisNexis Academic, and Political Science Complete were used to locate articles for the literature review. During the literature research, no literature was found that referred explicitly to disenfranchisement laws and voting rights in Mississippi. The information in this review is limited to the creation of felony disenfranchisement laws, as well as the impact of those laws on Blacks and voting privileges.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework for this study was used to gain insight into the policy processes used to implement the disenfranchisement law in Mississippi and its effects on Black communities. SCF has been identified as the leading theory to gain insight into the

policy process and how a particular population may impact change. The SCF theory was developed by Schneider et al. (2014). This theory seeks to illustrate how a policy may shape the social construction of a targeted population and the position of those in power. SCF also illustrates how policy design may affect democracy and political positions.

SCF focuses on certain groups of individuals who are affected negatively or positively. This effect may also be interpreted as a burden or a benefit to a certain population. Also, the theory is used to discover the results of the social construction of a selected community (Schneider, et al., 2014). Though the theory continues to receive criticism, scholars continue to use SCF for research.

Several researchers have used SCF for their studies. Two studies focused on the intentions of a target population and the effects on a particular population and democracy. Benson-Smith (2005) used SCF to examine the social construction of African American women in welfare policy. Benson-Smith explored race, gender, and sexuality and how it is used to develop welfare debates and state policies through symbolic and stereotypical language such as welfare queen. The study illustrated the perception of Black women on welfare by those in power and how those perceptions can influence policy. Boothe and Harrison (2009) explored the difference between political powers in Canada and the United States and focused on children's environmental health. Boothe and Harrison used the SCF to argue Canada's lack of effort to embrace children's environmental health policies or to redefine the meaning of environmental issues. The study illustrated the purpose and value of cross-national studies and political institutions' influence. Both

studies revealed diverse levels of perception that may exist in the hands of those in power.

The SCF theory does not work to solve a community's problems, nor does it promise to bring forth equality. However, it does identify the values of a particular group of people and their knowledge, as well as the impact of those values on people and their democracy. Under the U.S. Constitution and the 14th Amendment, states are allowed to legalize disenfranchisement laws that affect previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony (U.S. Const. amend. XIV). SCF theory allows personal reality to be developed from a person's interpretation. The shared reality of a group of people creates rules and regulations, as well as other norms. When people stop acknowledging those shared realities and they diminish, new policies are created and modifications to laws occur (Schneider & Sidney, 2009). I used SCF to force the conversation regarding the effects of race and ethnicity on policymakers as it relates to the development of the felony disenfranchisement law in Mississippi. The framework was also used to examine any burdens Mississippi's felony disenfranchisement law places on its Black communities.

There are legal practices used to ban citizens from voting due to their criminal convictions. In many cases, criminal disenfranchisement could range from temporary deprivation to lifetime denial. The justification for criminal disenfranchisement laws stems from two theories. The first theory developed from the Lockean theory asserts that criminals have broken the law under the social contract. However, the Republican theory argues that criminals are less honorable than other citizens. Despite assumptions, scholars

and judges believe voting is an essential right for all citizens, which affects all other civil rights. Also, Macdonald (2009) explored the international obligation of countries, including the United States, to protect the citizens' rights to vote.

Literature Review

From being enslaved to being free to be called American citizens, Blacks have faced many obstacles since they arrived in the United States. The right to be a part of the decision-making process in the United States continues to be a challenge in the Black community. Felony disenfranchisement laws have a detrimental effect on Black communities and were designed to hinder the voting rights of Blacks in the United States of America. One of the most detrimental effects of felony disenfranchisement laws is taxation without representation. Previously incarcerated individuals are required to pay taxes, but they are not a part of the decision-making process.

Though voting rights for Black Americans were enforced in 1965, legal barriers Blacks faced remain in effect. Conflicting myths exist regarding felony disenfranchisement laws and voting rights. Some individuals who may have committed a crime still have the right to vote. Not all crimes are listed as restrictive crimes under felony disenfranchisement laws (McCahon, 2016). Currently under the Mississippi Constitution, 22 felony crimes exclude an individual from voting in Mississippi (Miss. Const. Ann. Art. 12, § 253). Ochs (2006) revealed the differences between Black convictions and White convictions. The study found that White individuals commit as many crimes as Black individuals and other non-White races. However, Whites are not given the same punishment or convictions. Inequalities in the justice system have a

significant effect on Black communities. Misrepresentation in the criminal justice system creates a misrepresentation of citizens who are not White (Ochs, 2006; Zaman, 2015).

The following literature review provides insight into the chronicles of felony disenfranchisement laws and the effects it has on voting and Black communities.

Being Black in America

The existence of Blacks in America has been the subject of many books, articles, and studies. It is without question that America was not the origin of Blacks, but more so that country in which they were brought against their will. America is the country that became their home, and Mississippi was one of the places that owned them until the years of reconstruction. The rich history of Black habitation and the inequality of their ability to speak has been in effect since the early 1600s. Tracking the history of slaves in America from the beginning also reveals the stance of Christian Americans. The atmosphere of America reflected a desire to deplete any possibility of power in the hands of Blacks by continuously denying them the freedom to be regarded as not only citizens but also human beings (McDurmon, 2017).

Slaves were the moneymakers for the United States through the cotton market and not the decision makers. Slavery was the option America chose to dehumanize Blacks and to keep their voices mute within the decision-making process for political and monetary gains. The effect of slavery is ongoing in the minds of Black Americans. On the contrary, the effects of slavery on the United States of America were ruled beneficial. The labor of enslaved Blacks is what modernized the country and is the reason it initially became rich and powerful. However, all the forcible labor, service, and dedication to

their slave owners did not earn Blacks an immediate path to equality, justice, or the right to cast their vote. Until the end of slavery in America, Blacks were counted and purchased like animals (Graff, 2017).

President Abraham Lincoln took many steps to sign the Emancipation Proclamation, which ended slavery in America. Lincoln saw slavery as a vital asset but did not see it as a reason for the Civil War. Slavery was somewhat used as a pawn that backfired. Initially, the expectation was that a war would not last long and slavery would continue. Slavery lasted 200 years in America, but it would have continued if the Supreme Court had revoked Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln's thought was that the Supreme Court would revoke the proclamation once the Civil War ended. Lincoln's intentions for slavery were not to make life easier for Blacks who were enslaved. The president intended to preserve America and hinder the independence of the South (May, 2013; Schwartz, 2015). Though slavery ended, Blacks were not given the same opportunities afforded to Whites, and their lives were not of value to some of their White counterparts. As recorded in a documentary film by Duvernay (2016), when the Civil War ended, Blacks were massively arrested to rebuild the economy in the United States. Blacks earned titles of being difficult and a threat to White people and their way of life. During the 1970s, the era of mass incarceration began under President Richard Nixon's administration and continued until President Bill Clinton's administration. The War on Drugs was listed as a major crime, but there was not a real issue with drugs in the United States. Presidents Nixon, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton's approaches to addressing criminal justice harmed the Black communities in the United States. Criminal activities

involving crack cocaine were given more time than criminal activities involving powdered cocaine. More prisons have been built and more Black ex-felons exist who cannot vote (Duvernay, 2016).

Though John Ehrlichman, a Nixon Advisor, admitted Blacks were an enemy of the Nixon Administration, former President Clinton openly admitted his approach to mass incarceration was not the correct approach to address criminal justice in the United States. Being listed as an ex-felon not only affects an individual's right to vote in Mississippi, but it also affects the essentials to live a productive life as a citizen, which further affects the community. Currently, 1 in 3 Black men versus 1 in 17 White men are likely to be imprisoned. Black men make up approximately 6.5% of the population in the United States but make up approximately 40.2% of the prison population.

The New Jim Crow era is an era of mass incarceration and legal laws that hinder social equity or equality in the areas of education, employment, housing, jury service, public benefits, and voting for Blacks. Blacks and their communities are affected the most, which echoes the initial Jim Crow law that effectively hindered equality, justice, and social equity. Voting has not been an easy privilege for Black American citizens and still requires attention in the United States (Alexander, 2012).

Effects of Being Black in Mississippi

Towards the end of the 18th century, a debate over slavery, deportation, freedom, and African colonization was the conversation in Virginia, Maryland, and Tennessee. However, states such as Mississippi opposed the thought of ending slavery and acted to secure their way of life (Herron, 2015). Brave promoters and scholars, such as George

Washington Albright and Edward Burghardt Du Bois of Holly Springs, Mississippi, were among the first to educate Black Americans under conditions that were meant to hinder the progress of bringing power to a race that was thought to be powerless. Former slaves were behind the first schools that would begin the process toward social equity and financial support for education in Mississippi. However, the cost of educating Blacks and Whites in Mississippi's public but separate schools created racial tension. Blacks outnumbered Whites, and public schools were a necessity Blacks refused to neglect (B. S. Johnson, 2017).

There were many challenges faced by Blacks and people such as Governor William Winters who fought to right the wrongs of Mississippi. In the 1898 landmark case *Henry Williams v. Mississippi*, Williams desired to oust the Mississippi Constitution of 1890 as unconstitutional. However, the Supreme Court granted the laws that removed African Americans from the political process through literacy tests, poll taxes, and grandfather clauses as constitutional. This ruling gave Mississippi more stamina to remain in the state of terror for Blacks. Mississippi would be the state that granted acquittal for murders such as that of 14-year-old Emmett Till. The tragic murders of Andrew Goodman, James Chaney, Medgar Evers, Michael Schwerner, and many others were due to their desire to see social change and equality for Blacks. Mississippi was the one state Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. mentioned several times in his famous speech, "I Have a Dream" (Pickett, 2016).

During the Jim Crow era, Mississippi had a set of laws that were seemingly accepted by the United States of America. Blacks were to remain nonconfrontational.

However, the Freedom Riders during the 1960s challenged the legitimacy of the laws in the Deep South, which caused many in power to act against them. White Mississippians wanted to remain in power, and Freedom Riders threatened their stance in the Deep South. Therefore, President John F. Kennedy and the governor of Mississippi, Ross Barnett, reached an agreement to have the Freedom Riders arrested upon their arrival in Jackson, Mississippi. The riders were charged with breach of peace and sent to Parchman Penitentiary in Mississippi. Though the strategy was meant to deter the other Freedom Riders, it only fueled the minds of people to press harder for equality. More Freedom Riders traveled to Mississippi from across the United States to create social changes in Mississippi (Lüthi, 2016).

Voting Rights for Blacks in America

For Blacks in America, insinuated allegations of inequality or discrimination are often downgraded as the race defense. In America, some citizens believe the race defense or “playing the race card” should not exist if race isn’t mentioned as the reason behind inequality or discrimination (Jones, 2016). Blacks had to endure many obstacles to vote in the Deep South. People like Fannie Lou Hammer challenged the laws in Mississippi during the Jim Crow era through the Civil Rights Movement. Such efforts threaten the lives of anyone who rebels against the ways of the Deep South. The laws of Jim Crow supported the voting disenfranchisement for Black Americans, as well as lynching and murders of Blacks (Mack et.al., 2016).

As reported by the U. S. Department of Justice (2017b), in 1868 the ratified 14th Amendment granted citizenship to everyone who was born or individuals who were

accepted in America. Furthermore, in 1870 the 15th Amendment placed specific emphasis on the denial of voting rights based on a person's heritage, or origin. However, the state-level courts that broadly define the right to vote as described under the constitution protect the basic rights within our democracy. The state-level courts give a narrow definition of the right to vote which harms those basic rights within our democracy (Douglas, 2016). Mack et al., (2016) give an account of the struggle Blacks faced in the United States to gain the right to vote. The voter suppression and resistance throughout the southern states in the United States of America was a constant threat to the lives of Blacks and their supporters. Though the right to vote was granted to all citizens in 1868, rights were not enforced for Black Americans until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (B. A. Johnson, 2016; Voting Rights Act, 1965).

Power of the Black Vote and Its Effects in Mississippi

Though Blacks continue to strive for equality and social equity in the State of Mississippi, many changes have occurred in the United States of America after the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Elected officials in some areas were Black individuals who would not have had a political future had it not been for the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The change in society caused the curiosity of Whites to grow into skepticism and fear. President Lyndon Johnson's move towards equality removed barriers that had hindered Blacks from being a part of the decision-making process. Barriers included disenfranchisements such as poll tax, literacy tests, a voucher for a person's character, as well as disqualification for crimes that violated the accepted morals of the community (Hayter, 2014).

Studies have examined the success of the Black vote and whether Black politics in the United States could be achieved. President Barak Obama's win in the 2012 election against Mitt Romney demonstrated the power of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the modern influence of Blacks in the decision-making process. Most of the Black voters supported and voted for President Obama while Mitt Romney gained most of the White voters' support and vote. If the Black voters had not voted, Mitt Romney would have won the election (Crotty, 2014).

Throughout his presidency, former President Obama has encouraged citizens who wanted to see a change to vote. Though many Americans believe in the concept of the Black Lives Matter movement, former President Obama's thoughts were that supporters of the movement should act through an official process of electing officials. Voting would be more powerful and heard louder than physical screams without action (Jones, 2016).

Effects of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws on Voting in the Black Community

A felony is a crime that is more serious than a misdemeanor and may involve violence. Punishment for such crimes usually includes prison time or death. Some legalities allow states to apply felony disenfranchisement laws despite the implementation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Blessett, 2015). Felony disenfranchisement laws restrict voting rights for individuals who are convicted felons. Some researchers have described felony disenfranchisement as a rooted racialized issue that determines who will be allowed to vote (Nelson, 2013). Others suggest the main reason for felony disenfranchisement laws is to control perimeters of citizenship, to

develop a system of white supremacy, and to eliminate the possibility of a strong liberal democracy (Guenther, 2016). Some researchers believe felony disenfranchisement laws undermine our democracy in the United States by not including previously incarcerated individuals in the decision-making process. Instead of being citizens, they are “semi-citizens” (Whitt, 2017). But not all researchers believe felony disenfranchisement is entirely wrong for the United States. Some researchers believe states are fair in not establishing policies that allow felons to be a part of the decision-making process (López-Guerra, 2014).

There are 6.1 million American citizens who cannot vote. One in 13 Blacks who are of voting age is affected by felony disenfranchisement laws (Uggen et al., 2016). But former Attorney General Eric Holder supports the re-enfranchisement of previously incarcerated individuals. In 2014, former Attorney General Holder’s speech at the Georgetown University Law Center revealed findings that supported re-enfranchisement for previously incarcerated individuals. Individuals who regained their voting privileges were less likely to commit additional crimes. On the contrary, Holder also found that though a study exists that supports re-enfranchisement, previously incarcerated individuals are presented with more hurdles to regaining access to voting privileges. His thoughts during remarks at Georgetown University were that leaders of the criminal justice system should reconsider felony disenfranchisement laws for previously incarcerated individuals. He also offered the opinion that felony disenfranchisement laws were counterproductive, unnecessary, and unjust (DOJ, 2017a).

Political ideology has been a major contributor to the development of felony disenfranchisement laws in the United States (Ewald, 2012). The purpose of the disenfranchisement laws is to intentionally create and implement discrimination against Blacks and other non-white citizens. Felony disenfranchisement laws target and have more of an impact on Black voters than White voters. Such laws significantly affect the Black communities' voting privileges more than the voting privileges in the White communities. Black Americans can't gain effective representation as fewer individuals qualify as registered voters (Ochs, 2006; Zaman, 2015). Both Douglas (2014) and Trahan-Liptak (2014) address the legal barriers of states and how it affects an individual's right to vote. The Constitution has placed itself in a position to monitor the time, places, and how elections should be held. However, the structure of the United States Constitution is somewhat inconsistent as it allows states to qualify or disqualify voters (Douglas, 2014). States are not required to submit changes made to the voting laws for their state. The research concluded that such leniency could lead to additional disenfranchisement laws that include the exclusion of minorities (Trahan-Liptak, 2014).

There is no judicial approach to felony disenfranchisement laws or voter denial claims. However, if courts would interfere in any claims of voter denial, the rights of the states to enforce their voter qualification laws according to the United States Constitution could be violated (Varnum, 2008). Disenfranchisement laws in the United States exclude voting privileges for previously incarcerated individuals. Studies also reflect the purpose of felony disenfranchisement laws as it relates to Blacks and minorities. Due to the felony disenfranchisement laws, previously incarcerated people are noncitizens under the United

States policy (Nunn, 2005). Though the felony disenfranchisement laws were presented as a race-neutral policy, it affects more Blacks and other minorities than Whites (Cresswell, 2014; Powell, 2017; Wilson et al., 2015). Furthermore, the removal of the felony disenfranchisement laws was unacceptable for those who held racial resentment towards Blacks and other minorities. Many Americans believed that previously incarcerated people should have their rights restored. However, Americans feel as though the nature of the crime should be considered (Wilson et al., 2015). More policies and laws are needed to protect the rights of citizens to vote. Removing barriers placed on previously incarcerated individuals of color would assist with reentry and benefit the community (Purnell, 2013).

The elite and certain classes and races do not have any difficulties voting. However, due to the ethical issues displayed within voting rights, voting is skewed and not beneficial for convicted felons, the homeless, and immigrants (Ruth et al., 2017). There has not been a correlation between felony disenfranchisement laws and the reduction in crime rates (Ziegler, 2011). However, such laws have also been beneficial to political officials. State-level reports are often used to predict Black voter turnout based on the number of individuals disenfranchised (King & Erickson, 2016). Studies show that racial status, mass incarceration, and legal felony disenfranchisement are used to impact election outcomes (Fosten, 2016). Felony disenfranchisement laws have impacted Black communities directly. Black individuals are highly likely to be arrested and convicted of felony crimes than Whites individuals (King & Erickson, 2016).

Felony Disenfranchisement Laws Across the United States

Felony disenfranchisement laws have at some point existed in each state across the United States. Today, laws in several states have changed, with only a few states remaining the same. Some lawmakers have taken a stand against felony disenfranchisement laws that hinder people who have completed their sentencing from voting. For example, Governor Cuomo of New York issued an executive order providing parolees with voting privileges. The governor's thoughts were that denying voting privileges to citizens who completed their sentencing was immoral. Issuing the order was meant to decrease the effects of disenfranchisement and the fairness of democracy by restoring voting rights privileges (Office of the Governor, 2018). The American Civil Liberties Union reports that denying voting rights to an entire class of citizens undermines democracy and makes our country exclusive. Furthermore, the organization reports that when a previously incarcerated individual participates in the decision-making process, recidivism decreases (Hoffman, 2019).

States, such as West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas, Wisconsin, Minnesota, South Dakota, Kansas, Texas, New Mexico, Idaho, Washington, and New Jersey, also restore voting rights when defendants complete sentencing, which includes prison, parole, and probation (Brennan Center for Justice, 2019). In Connecticut and California, voting rights are restored automatically after defendants are released from prison and discharged from parole. However, people on probation may vote. Louisiana allows voting rights to be restored for people on probation or parole who have sustained from being reincarceration for the last 5 years. Nebraska's

laws allow defendants to vote 2 years after completing sentencing. However, treason convictions will disenfranchise a person until their civil rights are restored individually. Oklahoma will restore the voting rights of a previously incarcerated individual who has completed sentencing, which includes prison, parole, and probation. However, the disenfranchisement of these individuals will last until the period of the original sentence is complete (Brennan Center for Justice, 2019).

Voting rights are restored automatically after individuals are released from prison in the following states: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, North Dakota, Montana, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. Though Ohio's laws restore voting rights automatically after individuals are released from sentencing, a person who has violated the election laws more than once will permanently face disenfranchisement (Brennan Center for Justice, 2019).

Previously, Florida laws permanently disenfranchised particular individuals with criminal convictions, unless restoration was given by the governor. The laws were amended to restore the voting rights of a previously incarcerated individual automatically upon the completion of sentencing, which includes probation and parole but excludes murder or felony sexual offense convictions. However, in April of 2019, Florida amended the Voting Rights Restoration Bill, HB 7089, which now requires previously incarcerated individuals who committed felons to pay all fees and fines to the courts before regaining the right to vote. This could be the new poll tax used to continue eliminating the Black votes (The Sentencing Project, 2019). There are no

disenfranchisement laws for previously incarcerated individuals with criminal convictions in Vermont and Maine. Individuals in both states never lose their voting privileges, even if they are incarcerated (Lewis, 2019).

Currently, eight states permanently disenfranchise citizens with criminal convictions, unless the governor approves restoration of their rights. These states are Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Missouri, Maryland, Delaware, Wyoming, and Arizona. Kentucky and Iowa disenfranchise individuals for all felony convictions unless the governor approves the restoration of their rights (Brennan Center for Justice, 2019). The European Convention on Human Rights acknowledges felony disenfranchisement laws in the United States as a violation of its policies which guarantees freedom and fair elections (Chung, 2019).

Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in Mississippi

Felony disenfranchisement laws may place a permanent restriction on previously incarcerated individuals who have committed specific felony crimes despite the completion of their sentencing (Cresswell, 2014; Daniels, 2017; Heath, 2017). The Mississippi Constitution states that felony disenfranchisement is a lifelong consequence for those who have committed one of the felons listed in the law despite completing their sentencing. However, the governor may pardon those previously incarcerated for committing a felony. Legislatures may also grant reinstatement to previously incarcerated citizens (Miss. Const. Art. 12, § 253). Disenfranchisement laws have overshadowed federal power due to Section 2 of the 14th Amendment. Congress still has a right to appropriately utilize the Voter Rights Act of 1965 and eliminate state power (Tolson,

2012). The preclearance of electoral changes was required and falls in line with Congress's broad authority to honor the rights of citizens to vote and to equally honor elections under the United States Constitution. However, the Supreme Court's decision in the *Shelby County vs Holder* case did rule in favor of preclearance (Tolson, 2014).

The Sentencing Project, "Felony Disenfranchisement Rate" (2017b) shows Mississippi as having the 2nd highest felony disenfranchisement rate in the United States. Furthermore, according to The Sentencing Project, "Criminal Justice Facts" (2017a), based on the men born in the United States of America in 2001, the likelihood of incarceration for Blacks is 1 in 3 Blacks versus 1 in 17 Whites in the United States of America. In the state of Mississippi, racial disparity in the incarceration rate for Black and White individuals is 3 Black individuals for every 1 White individual. Mississippi officials created felony disenfranchisement laws to minimize the Black vote. The *New Jim Crow* is also referenced in the study. The book entitled "The New Jim Crow" by Michelle Alexander, references mass incarceration as the legalized racial oppression in the United States (Chen, 2014).

Techniques of Direct Disenfranchisement

Voting suppression included poll taxes, literacy tests, and voter intimidation. To deter Black voters, White Primaries were held, and the poll was operated by White poll workers who illegally denied voter participation to Blacks (Mack et al., 2016). Black voters also faced ballot box laws which required guessing in which box to place a ballot. Furthermore, White supremacists terrorized Black male voters with intimidation and violence (Berry, 2014).

Modern-day voter suppression includes voter ID laws which are not uniform across the states. Republicans' defense of such laws is garnished with a safeguard against fraud while Democrats describe such stance as another form of voter suppression. Some researchers believe the restrictive voter ID laws are a way to maintain Republican support while diminishing Democratic gains (Hicks et al., 2015). Others believe such tactics are used to burden and frustrate prospective voters (Yablon, 2017).

Criminal Offenses of Blacks in Mississippi

Some studies have challenged the purpose of the U.S. Constitution as it relates to citizenship and involuntary servitude. Disenfranchisement laws could contradict the U.S. Constitution if states and the federal government can subject citizens to involuntary servitude for crimes while the 15th Amendment bans disenfranchisement due to status (Ziegler, 2011). On the contrary, though voting is a fundamental right for citizens in the United States as ruled in *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, the Supreme Court has ruled that felony disenfranchisement laws are legal under the Constitution if it is not developed based on racial discrimination (Ewald, 2009; Sigler, 2014). Seemingly, the Supreme Court continues to ignore or deny the millions of Americans who have a limited chance of ever regaining the right to vote despite completing their sentencing (Heath, 2017; Ispahani, 2006).

In the 21st Century, it is difficult for a person who has committed a felony to have all their fundamental rights as a citizen in Mississippi. Being labeled as a previously incarcerated person who has committed a felony will strip a person's voting rights. There

have been several cases filed in the Supreme Court hearings to overturn laws that hindered the voices of people who have committed a felony but have served their time.

Johnson v. Governor of the State of Florida brought forth the questions of whether it was discriminatory to deny previously incarcerated individuals the right to vote under the 14th and 15th Amendments, and whether the denial violated Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Under Section 2, codified at 42 U.S.C. § 1973, it is illegal to create or redesign election districts in ways that improperly diminish the voting power of minorities (Voting Rights Act, 1965). The plaintiff's argument included cases such as *Hunter v. Underwood* to insinuate Florida's intent for creating disenfranchisement was discriminatory. *Cotton v. Fordice* was also utilized to argue against the plaintiff's notion that Florida did not breach the principles of the 14th and 15th Amendments, or the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Supreme Court ruled in favor of the defense citing that disenfranchisement did not violate the Equal Protection.

Hunter v. Underwood allowed the Supreme Court to review the equal protection challenge regarding a criminal disenfranchisement provision in Alabama. The results were that Alabama's provision to criminal disenfranchisement did violate the Equal Protection Clause because it was implemented in 1901 to reduce the political authority of Blacks. Alabama never altered nor reenacted the provision to exclude racial biases.

In *Johnson vs Governor of the State of Florida*, the defendant's argument utilized *Cotton v. Fordice* to eliminate the plaintiff's stance regarding *Hunter v. Underwood*. The defendant's stance revealed there were amendments to the disenfranchisement provisions between 1890 and 1968 that were not acknowledged in the *Hunter v. Underwood* case.

Though initial provisions to the disenfranchisement laws were made with discriminatory intent, they argued that over the years there were crimes added and removed. However, the plaintiff acknowledged that those changes still purposely affected Blacks.

Cotton v. Fordice challenged the disenfranchisement laws and voting rights in Mississippi. The court ruled in favor of the defendants because of the amendments made to the Mississippi Constitution in 1950 and 1968. Each amendment outweighs the previous revision. Therefore, discrimination wasn't a factor and could not be a cause to rule in favor of the plaintiffs.

The rights of previously incarcerated individuals are limited. In *Hayden v. Pataki*, the Supreme Court ruled that Congress did not intend to expand the rights to vote for felons under the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Also, in *Simmons v. Galvin*, the Court rejected the Voting Rights Act Section 2 challenge against the state statute to disenfranchise incarcerated felons.

Summary

The literature review offers strategies used to locate articles for future research. Contents of the literature review present information that explores the theoretical framework, as well as information that targets the effects of disenfranchisement laws on the voting privileges of Blacks in America. It also provides an understanding of the history of Black in America and the right to vote as well as the initial purpose of disenfranchisement laws that now affect previously incarcerated individuals in the United States of America.

The voting rights for Blacks Americans have caused them to face turmoil and discomforts that Whites have not had to face. Trials and tribulations have often involved intimidation, threats, deaths, and voter suppression. Though the Constitution governs the legalities of the United States of America, it also allows states to have some governing power to implement laws. Previously incarcerated individuals in the state of Mississippi are not given all the rights as citizens due to felony disenfranchisement restrictions. The Black population in Mississippi does not reflect potential voter turnout due to voter suppression and felony disenfranchisement laws.

SCF will be used to gain insight into the policy processes used to implement the disenfranchisement law in Mississippi and its effects on Black communities. The history of Blacks in America began with slavery and continues to include oppression camouflaged by incarceration and disenfranchisement laws. The literature review presents the progress states have made to ensure ex-felons can take part in the decision-making process. Mississippi has not eliminated or altered its felony disenfranchisement laws which leave communities underrepresented in the decision-making process. The review gives a reflection on disenfranchisement law and voting rights in Mississippi and its effects on Mississippi's Black communities. The review further acknowledges techniques used to enforce direct disenfranchisement, as well as the cases brought before the U.S. Supreme Court to eliminate the felony disenfranchisement law that prevents an individual or previously incarcerated individual from voting despite completing their sentencing.

The literature research for this study was conducted using numerous sources of information. However, no literature was found that referred explicitly to disenfranchisement laws and voting rights in Mississippi. Unfortunately, studies dedicated to Mississippi's position and current purpose of felony disenfranchisement and its effects on the Black community are limited. The information for this literature review is limited to the creation of felony disenfranchisement laws, as well as the impact of those laws on Blacks and voting privileges. The research hopes to provide readers with information concerning disenfranchisement laws affecting the voting rights of Blacks in Mississippi. Details of how this research gap was filled are presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Chapters 1 and 2 introduced felony disenfranchisement and its effect on voting rights in the United States of America. What has not been explored are the thoughts of Black Mississippians. There is a long history of voting restrictions placed on Blacks, and the felony disenfranchisement laws seem to be a modern-day restriction. The purpose of this general qualitative study was to examine the perceptions regarding felony disenfranchisement laws and voting rights in the Black communities of Mississippi. Mississippi has 22 felony crimes under the felony disenfranchisement law. Though other races commit such crimes, Blacks are more likely than Whites to be incarcerated and convicted of those crimes (Chung, 2019). The number of Blacks in prison leaves the Black vote disproportioned in Mississippi.

The current study explored felony disenfranchisement laws and voting rights in Mississippi's Black communities. The results of this study could facilitate social change in the state of Mississippi by challenging political officials and citizens to reexamine disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi and the precepts of the U.S. Constitution. Presenting information regarding the initial purpose of the felony disenfranchisement laws and their impact may also inspire all citizens to question the modern-day purpose of the laws that affect the voting privileges of those previously incarcerated for committing a felony under the Mississippi Constitution despite completing sentencing. Currently, taxation without representation does not reflect the livelihood of an individual who has completed sentencing for the felony crime committed under the felony disenfranchisement law. A previously incarcerated individual who committed one of the

felonies in Mississippi is presented with the reality that voting as a fundamental right is not easily granted to all citizens. The significance of exploring the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws and voting in Black communities in Mississippi may encourage legislatures to implement strategies to allow taxation with representation for previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony.

Chapter 3 gives detailed information regarding the qualitative method used to support the understanding of participants' experiences. Participants for this study included Mississippi's political officials, residents, and previously incarcerated individuals who had committed a felony under the felony disenfranchisement law but had completed sentencing. Each participant assisted me in examining the purpose and effects of Mississippi's felony disenfranchisement law on Black communities.

Measure

This research explored the purpose of disenfranchisement laws and current views regarding the felony disenfranchisement laws' effects on voting in Mississippi's Black communities. Exploring the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi may give additional insight that may enlighten political officials and citizens in the state. This study also highlighted the perspectives of political officials and Black citizens. Research questions used to explore and gain an understanding of participants' experiences were as follows:

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the perceptions that exist of the felony disenfranchisement law by Black Americans in Mississippi?

RQ2: How do previously incarcerated African Americans experience and characterize the impact of political disparity in Mississippi?

Research Design and Rationale

The general qualitative design was chosen to examine the experiences of participants. SCF was selected as the framework for this research. This theory focuses on specific groups of individuals who are affected negatively or positively. The effects may also be interpreted as a burden or a benefit to a defined population. The SCF theory identifies the results of social construction in a certain community (Schneider et al., 2014). The U.S. Constitution, under the 14th Amendment, allows states to legalize disenfranchisement laws that affect previously incarcerated individuals (U.S. Const. amend. XIV). Under the SCF theory, personal reality is developed from a person's interpretation. The shared reality of a group of people creates rules and regulations, as well as other norms. The purpose of disenfranchisement laws is to intentionally create and implement discrimination against Blacks and other non-White citizens. Felony disenfranchisement laws target and have more of an impact on Black voters than White voters. Such laws significantly affect Black communities' voting privileges more than voting privileges in White communities (Ochs, 2006; Zaman, 2015).

One of the most detrimental effects and burdens of felony disenfranchisement laws is taxation without representation. Previously incarcerated individuals who completed sentencing are required to pay taxes, but they are not a part of the decision-making process. Black communities cannot gain effective representation because fewer individuals qualify as registered voters (Ochs, 2006; Zaman, 2015). However, when

people stop acknowledging those shared realities and it diminishes, new policies are created and modifications to laws occur (Schneider & Sidney, 2009). Both Douglas (2014) and Trahan-Liptak (2014) addressed the legal barriers of states and how they affect an individual's right to vote.

Felony disenfranchisement laws may place a permanent restriction on previously incarcerated individuals who have committed specific felony crimes despite the completion of their sentencing (Cresswell, 2014; Daniels, 2017; Heath, 2017). Though several states have eliminated or changed disenfranchisement laws (Porter, 2016), Mississippi has not. The current study explored felony disenfranchisement laws and voting in the Black communities in Mississippi.

SCF will allow social construction to justify the benefits and burdens associated with the policy, which has effects on democracy (Schneider et al., 2014). This framework allowed me to explore any effects race and ethnicity have on policymakers and communities as they relate to the development of felony disenfranchisement laws. Furthermore, SCF was used to examine the experiences of Mississippi's political officials, residents, and previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony as it pertains to voting and felony disenfranchisement laws. Examining such experiences allowed me to explore any burdens felony disenfranchisement laws place on Mississippi's Black communities. The study has the potential to create social changes that may allow previously convicted felons who have completed sentencing to vote and be a part of the decision-making process in Mississippi. This social change may allow

taxation with representation for all citizens and social equity to exist throughout Mississippi.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher was to remain neutral and unbiased, respect all participants, and keep notes throughout the research process. All personal and professional relationships with participants were revealed within the study. Each participant's identification was continuously protected by me. If this study elicited mental anxieties of participants, they were directed to a counselor for support. Having an in-depth conversation with each participant allowed me to explore their experiences and relay their perspectives to the readers of this study. Furthermore, having a relational approach required me to listen to thoughts that may be different from my own (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Such practice assisted in eliminating biases.

Methodology

Qualitative methodology was chosen to gain more information on a topic that had not been fully explored. Qualitative research is exploratory, and the theoretical lens' role will be used to conduct the research. With the theoretical lens of qualitative research, researchers look beyond a participant's experiences to examine key components that affect an individual. According to Erickson (2011), qualitative researchers look to understand the decision-making process of individuals and their lived experiences. Qualitative methodology is used to identify a group of people involved in the research. Participants for the current study included Mississippi's residents, political officials, and previously incarcerated individuals who completed sentencing. Each category was

essential to explore the disenfranchisement laws affecting the voting rights of Blacks in Mississippi.

Mississippi residents have the fundamental right to be a part of the decision-making process by electing officials who closely represent their views. The political officials are the governing body elected by residents who have the right to vote. Political officials not only make decisions based on personal life experiences, but they also make decisions based on their supporters. Previously incarcerated individuals who have committed a crime under the felony disenfranchisement law in Mississippi do not have voting rights and do not have an opportunity to hold a political position.

Participants

The participants included Mississippians categorized as political officials, residents, and previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony. The data source included in-depth face-to-face interviews. Race, educational background, employment status, voting status, and political affiliations were important components of this study and were identified in each category. All participants in this study were identified by their passports, driver's licenses, or legal identification card.

Mississippi political officials were required to have state- or district-level status and must have been in office for at least 5 years. They must not have been charged or convicted of any crimes. Their political affiliation was verified through the Mississippi State Election Office. Political officials must have been registered voters for at least 10 years. The Mississippi State Elections Office and the Secretary of State Department

verified the political officials. The Circuit Clerk's Office was used to verify voter registration.

Mississippi residents included active voters and nonvoters who had not been charged or convicted of any crimes. Participants for this category must have been at least 21 years of age and eligible to register to vote in Mississippi. Residential participants must have been Mississippi residents for at least 10 years and must have resided in Holmes County, Mississippi for at least 5 years.

Previously incarcerated individuals must have committed one of the crimes listed under the felony disenfranchisement law in Mississippi. Participants must have been Mississippi residents for at least 10 years and must have resided in Holmes County, Mississippi for at least 5 years. Individuals must not have been eligible to vote due to Mississippi's felony disenfranchisement law. Also, previously incarcerated individuals must have served and completed sentencing in Mississippi. Proof of their sentencing completion was provided by the Mississippi Department of Correction.

From being enslaved to being free to be called American citizens, Blacks have faced many obstacles since they arrived in the United States. The right to be a part of the decision-making process in the United States continues to be a challenge in the Black community. Felony disenfranchisement laws have a detrimental effect on Black communities and were designed to hinder the voting rights of Blacks in the United States of America. One of the most detrimental effects of felony disenfranchisement laws is taxation without representation.

The voting rights for Black Americans have caused them to face turmoil and discomforts that Whites have not had to face. Trials and tribulations have often involved intimidation, threats, deaths, and voter suppression. The level of knowledge surrounding the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws on voting rights in Mississippi's Black communities and how much new information may be presented in this study was unknown at the time of the study. Nonetheless, I believe that many of Mississippi's citizens are aware of the rich history of racism against the Black community and the struggles for a Black individual to vote.

The sample size for this research was intended to include at least 15 participants divided equally among the categories. The categories were identified as Mississippi's political officials, Mississippi's residents, and Mississippi's previously incarcerated individuals. Though each category was intended to include at least five participants, lack of data saturation may have caused me to include additional participants to satisfy the research efforts. A letter was sent to prospective participants (see Appendix A), and ads were placed in local newspapers and on social media (see Appendix B).

Procedures

The following steps were taken to ensure quality participants were recruited and informed. Steps were also taken to collect and review data and validate findings in this study:

1. Contact the chairperson of the both the Democratic and Republican Party
2. Send a letter detailing the purpose of the study to each party affiliate and request assistance to inform and recruit political officials. Also send a letter to

Holmes County, MS residents and previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony and completed sentencing.

3. Post a newspaper ad and social media ad to gain interest from previously incarcerated individuals and general Mississippi residents.
4. Send a request to interested participants to schedule a face-to-face interview with me. Send a follow-up letter or phone call if participants have not responded within 1 week.
5. Schedule phone conference calls with potential participants. The calls will allow me to explain the study to the potential participants and answer any questions.
6. Include at least 15 participants in face-to-face interviews. The participants will be categorized as Mississippi political officials, residents, and previously incarcerated individuals. Participants will be divided equally among the categories.
7. Transcribed and analyzed audiotapes accurately.
8. Ask two graduate students from Walden University to assist with the verification of data and validation of themes. The course professor will recommend two students who can handle the validation procedure. Students will follow the rules and regulations regarding the ethical protection of participants.

Data Collection

Obtaining data using in-depth face-to-face interviews would allow me to accurately explore the research topic from several perspectives. Furthermore, this type of interview would allow me to obtain detailed information. Individual interviews were tailored to accommodate the truth of each interviewee, not me. Each interview opens the door to a researcher's understanding of the topic through each interviewee's experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In-depth face-to-face interviews for the current study were intended to include at least 15 participants. The participants included political officials, general citizens of Mississippi, and previously incarcerated individuals who had committed a felony. Each category included at least five participants.

Each interview will be conducted in a quiet and private secure location in Pickens, MS. The day of the week for interviews will be Saturday until each participant is interviewed. However, the location and time may be altered to accommodate a participant's needs. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Written notes will be taken to record nonverbal communication. Such notes will also provide details regarding the atmosphere of the interview. Files will be created to organize the transcribed interviews. All documents, discovery, transcripts, and equipment will be stored securely in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home for at least 7 years. When the data has been reviewed and transcribed, participants from the face-to-face interviews will review their information. Following the review, the researcher will begin analyzing the information. Only the researcher and those directly associated with the study will have access to transcripts. The identity of each participant will be removed and replaced with letters and

numbers before the data is verified. However, those directly associated with the study will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Data Analysis

Coding in research gives meaning to data. Therefore, codes may be one word or phrase that describes data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). There are two approaches I may take to coding, inductive and deductive. Both processes bring attention to the methods and findings. However, the approach to take for this is inductive. The method that will work moving forward will be to collect the data before presenting codes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Categories in a study are used to break down the codes without reducing the perception or theoretical framework of the researcher (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Several categories may produce an unproductive assessment of the data (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004). From my work, the potential codes may be categorized by age, gender, or race. Though themes do not emerge from the data, they do represent the concept of the data. Therefore, several themes may be developed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). According to Noble and Smith (2014), identifying recurring and significant themes is a major skill in undertaking qualitative data analysis.

The study will explore the purpose of disenfranchisement laws and current views regarding felony disenfranchisement laws' effects on voting in Mississippi's Black communities. The face-to-face interviews will focus on the research questions. The first research question pertains to the perceptions of Black Americans in Mississippi regarding the felony disenfranchisement laws. Voting as a fundamental right for all citizens is not granted to a previously incarcerated individual who committed a felony despite

completing their sentencing in Mississippi (Miss. Const. Ann. Art. 12, § 253). Though other races commit crimes, Black individuals are more likely than White individuals to be incarcerated and convicted (Chung, 2019). Therefore, felony disenfranchisement law affects the qualities of citizenship of more Black individuals than White individuals. As the researcher, I would explore each participant's thoughts and experiences regarding citizenship and Mississippi's felony disenfranchisement law. Therefore, the themes for the first research question may be "Citizens' Perspective of Previously Incarcerated Black Americans" and "Citizens' Perspective of Citizenship."

The second research question addresses the experiences of previously incarcerated Black Americans as it relates to the political gap in Mississippi. Lawmakers created felony disenfranchisement laws as a neutral policy. However, Black communities voting privileges are affected more than White communities' voting privileges (Wilson, Owens & Davis, 2015; Cresswell, 2014; Powell, 2017). The lack of voting privileges for previously incarcerated Black individuals in Mississippi may leave Black communities underrepresented in the decision-making process (Chung, 2019). Currently, taxation without representation does not reflect the livelihood of an individual who has completed sentencing for the felony crime committed under the felony disenfranchisement law. A previously incarcerated individual who committed one of the felony crimes in Mississippi is presented with the reality that voting as a fundamental right is not easily granted to all citizens. The significance of exploring the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws and voting in Black communities in Mississippi may encourage legislatures to implement strategies to allow taxation with representation for previously incarcerated individuals

who committed a felony. Therefore, themes for this research may be “Previously Incarcerated Blacks’ Perspective on Voting in Mississippi” and “Political Officials’ Perspective on Political Gaps in Mississippi.” Additional themes may be “Political Officials’ Perspective on Voting Rights,” “Residents’ Perspective on Voting Rights,” “Political Officials’ Perspective on Felony Disenfranchisement,” “Residents’ Perspective on Felony Disenfranchisement”, and “Political Officials’ Perspective on the Black Communities.”

Though the codes will develop from the data collected, themes for my qualitative research are evolving. Voting rights for Black individuals have caused them to face turmoil and discomforts that White individuals have not had to face. Trials and tribulations have often involved intimidation, threats, deaths, and voter suppression. Though the Constitution governs the legalities of the United States of America, it also allows states to have some governing power to implement laws. Though the Voting Rights Act of 1965 granted Black Americans the right to vote in the United States, Black voters in Mississippi may be underrepresented as a result of felony disenfranchisement laws in violation of the 14th Amendment’s Equal Protection Clause which requires states to practice the protection of equality for individuals (Voting Rights Act of 1965, Pub. L. 89-110, 79 Stat. 437; U.S. Const. amend. XIV). Furthermore, Mississippi felony disenfranchisement laws may target offenses that are more likely to be committed by Black individuals than Whites individuals which may impact voter representation in certain legislative or congressional districts in Mississippi. Additional themes may be “Citizen Perspective of Voting” and “Generational Views of Civil Rights” to reflect the

age and race category, as well as “Power Sources of Voting” to reflect the gender category and “Racial Understanding of Voting” to reflect the racial category.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Validity deals with what is measured and how well it is measured (Mohajan, 2017). The data source will include in-depth face-to-face interviews. The sampling size for this research will include at least 15 participants divided equally among the categories. The categories will be identified as Mississippi’s political officials, Mississippi’s residents, and Mississippi’s previously incarcerated individuals. Though each category will include at least five participants, saturation may cause the researcher to include additional participants to satisfy research efforts.

All participants in this study may be identified by their passports, driver’s licenses, or legal identification card. Race, educational background, employment status, voting status, and political affiliations are important components of this study and must be identified in each category. Two fellow graduate students at Walden University who understand qualitative inquiry will perform the peer review. Peers will consist of one male and one female reviewer to provide gender balance. The peer-review process in qualitative inquiry is similar to that of “inter-rater reliability in the quantitative inquiry” (Creswell, 1998).

Transferability is established by providing readers with evidence that the research study’s findings could apply to future studies (Gill, Gill, & Roulet, 2018). The database for this study will include Mississippi’s political officials, residents, and previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony but completed their sentencing. As the

researcher, providing the database will make transferability possible for further research if applicable.

Mississippi political officials may have state or district-level status and must have been in office for at least 5 years. Participants must not have been charged or convicted of any crimes. The political affiliation will be verified through the Mississippi State Election Office. Political officials must have been registered voters for at least 10 years. The Mississippi State Elections Office and the Secretary of State Department will verify political officials. The Circuit Clerk's Office will be used to verify voter registration.

Mississippi residents will include active voters and nonvoters who have not been charged or convicted of any crimes. Participants for this category must be at least 21 years of age and be eligible to register to vote in Mississippi. Residential participants must have been Mississippi residents for at least 10 years and must have resided in Holmes County, Mississippi for at least 5 years.

Previously incarcerated individuals must have committed one of the crimes listed under the felony disenfranchisement law in Mississippi. Participants must have been a Mississippi resident for at least 10 years and must have resided in Holmes County, Mississippi for at least 5 years. Individuals must not be eligible to vote due to Mississippi's felony disenfranchisement law. Also, previously incarcerated individuals must have served and completed sentencing in Mississippi. Proof of their sentencing completion will be provided by the Mississippi Department of Correction.

Reliability deals with the confidence readers can have in the data collected (Mohajan, 2017). Each interview will be conducted in a quiet and private secure location

in Pickens, MS. The day of the week for interviews will be Saturday until each participant is interviewed. However, the location and time may be altered to accommodate a participant's needs. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Written notes will be taken to record nonverbal communication. Such notes will also provide details regarding the atmosphere of the interview. Files will be created to organize the transcribed interviews. All documents, discovery, transcripts, and equipment will be stored securely in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home for at least 7 years. When the data has been reviewed and transcribed, participants from the face-to-face interviews will review their information. Following the review, the researcher will begin analyzing the information. Only the researcher and those directly associated with the study will have access to transcripts. The identity of each participant will be removed and replaced with letters and numbers before the data is verified. However, those directly associated with the study will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Duplicates of the original transcript will be provided to the students. Also, copies of the research findings will be provided. Research findings will contain information regarding the participant's structural description, as well as a description of the group in its entirety.

Confirmability is the researchers' efforts to recognize possible expectations or preferences in the results of the study through the findings of their study through open-mindedness and unbiased interpretation of the data (Gill, Gill, & Roulet, 2018). An explanation of researcher bias is imperative in the proposed study.

The researcher in the proposed study is a single black female. Previously, the researcher worked as a Victim Assistance Coordinator and Pretrial Diversion Supervisor

with a District Attorney's Office in Mississippi. She also served as the Democratic Precinct Chairperson and was an elected Board of Education member for her district. During the 2016 Presidential Election, the researcher was instrumental in a voter registration rally to motivate citizens to activate their right to vote. This is where she learned that low voter turnouts in Mississippi were not due solely to the lack of interest of some citizens in the Black community, but due to the felony disenfranchisement laws. This researcher has lived in Mississippi most of her life and voting has always been a priority. The researcher is aware of her experiences and will bracket them accordingly.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Participants for this research will be adult males and females who choose to volunteer as participants. Each participant will complete a consent form to participate in this study. The Institutional Approval Board number for this study is 11-19-19-0197221. Also, the confidentiality of each participant will be protected, and all documents, equipment, discovery, and transcripts associated with this study will be stored securely at the researcher's home in a locked cabinet for at least 7 years. Only the researcher and those directly associated with the study will have access to transcripts. The identity of each participant will be removed and replaced with letters and numbers before the data is verified. Mississippi's political officials will be identified as MO#, Holmes County, MS residents will be identified as HR#, and Holmes County, MS previously incarcerated individuals will be identified as HI#. Therefore, no known harm to participants' character or status among their peers will exist.

Summary

The previous chapters introduced felony disenfranchisement and its effect on voting rights in the United States of America. What has not been explored are the thoughts of Mississippians. The proposed research will explore felony disenfranchisement laws and voting rights in Mississippi's Black communities. Details of this study could facilitate social change in the state of Mississippi by inspiring political officials and citizens to reexamine disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi and the precepts of the U.S. Constitution. Presenting information regarding the initial purpose of the felony disenfranchisement laws and their impact may also inspire all citizens to question the modern-day purpose of the laws that affect the voting privileges of those previously incarcerated for committing a felony under the Mississippi Constitution despite completing sentencing. Currently, taxation without representation does not reflect the livelihood of an individual who has completed sentencing for the felony crime committed under the felony disenfranchisement law. The significance of exploring the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws and voting within Black communities in Mississippi may encourage legislatures to implement strategies to allow taxation with representation for previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony.

A qualitative methodology was chosen to gain more information on a topic that has not been fully explored. The study will utilize at least 15 of Mississippi's residents, political officials, and previously incarcerated individuals who completed sentencing. Having an in-depth conversation with each participant will allow the researcher to explore experiences and relay their perspectives to the readers of the study. Therefore, the

role of the researcher will be to protect the identity of each participant, remain neutral and unbiased, respect all participants, and keep notes throughout the research process. The researcher will also direct participants to a counselor for support if this study opens the door to mental anxieties.

Social construction framework (SCF) has been identified as the framework for this research. This theory focuses on specific groups of individuals who are affected negatively or positively. The effects may also be interpreted as a burden or a benefit to a defined population. SCF will allow the researcher to explore any effects race and ethnicity have on policymakers and communities as it relates to the development of felony disenfranchisement laws. Furthermore, it examines the experiences of Mississippi's political officials, residents, and previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony as it pertains to voting and felony disenfranchisement laws. Examining such experience will allow the researcher to explore any burdens felony disenfranchisement laws place on Mississippi's Black communities.

Race, educational background, employment status, voting status, and political affiliations are important factors for all participants and must be identified. Residential and previously incarcerated individuals must have been Mississippi residents for at least 10 years and must have resided in Holmes County, Mississippi for at least 5 years. Participants of this study must be at least 21 years of age. Participants will be identified by their passports, driver's licenses, or legal identification card. Political officials will be verified through the Mississippi State Election Office.

Participants for this research will be adult males and females who choose to volunteer as participants. Each participant will complete a consent form to participate in this study. The confidentiality of each participant will be protected, and all documents, equipment, discovery, and transcripts associated with this study will be stored securely at the researcher's home in a locked cabinet for at least 7 years. The identity of each participant will be removed and replaced with letters and numbers before the data is verified. Those directly associated with the study will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Letters, newspaper ads, and social media ads will be used to gain interest from participants as demonstrated in Appendix A: Letters to Participants and Appendix B: Social Media and Newspaper Notice. Obtaining data using in-depth face-to-face interviews would allow a researcher to accurately perceive the research topic from several perspectives. Furthermore, this type of interview allows researchers to obtain detailed information. Each interview will be conducted in a quiet and private secure location in Pickens, MS. However, the time and location may be altered to accommodate a participant's needs.

Coding in research gives meaning to data. The approach that will be taken for this study is inductive which will allow the researcher to collect the data before presenting codes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The interview will focus on the research questions. Two fellow graduate students at Walden University who understand qualitative inquiry will perform the peer review. Research findings will contain information regarding the participant's structural description, as well as a description of the group in its entirety.

An explanation of researcher bias is imperative in the proposed study. The researcher in the proposed study is a single black female. Previously, the researcher worked as a Victim Assistance Coordinator and Pretrial Diversion Supervisor with a District Attorney's Office in Mississippi. She also served as the Democratic Precinct Chairperson and was an elected Board of Education member for her district. During the 2016 Presidential Election, the researcher was instrumental in a voter registration rally to motivate citizens to activate their right to vote. This is where she learned that low voter turnouts in Mississippi were not due solely to the lack of interest of some citizens in the Black community, but due to the felony disenfranchisement laws. This researcher has lived in Mississippi most of her life and voting has always been a priority. The researcher is aware of her experiences and will bracket them accordingly.

Chapter 4: Results

Mississippi has 22 felony crimes under the felony disenfranchisement law that affect more Black individuals than White individuals. This qualitative research explored the purpose of disenfranchisement laws and current views regarding the felony disenfranchisement laws' effects on voting in Mississippi's Black communities. This study examined the perceptions regarding felony disenfranchisement laws and voting rights in the Black communities of Mississippi. Research questions explored participants' experiences and views of voting rights and disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi. Each participant assisted me in examining the purpose and effects of Mississippi's felony disenfranchisement law on Black communities. In this chapter, I provide detailed information regarding the qualitative method used to support the researchers' understanding of participants' experiences. I also present the results of the study.

Setting

Black individuals in Mississippi are a part of the decision-making process, but problems for Black communities persist. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2022), Blacks make up 38% of the population in Mississippi. Though voter registration demographics are not documented in Mississippi, 11% of Mississippi's Black population is disenfranchised. The racial and ethnic disparity ratio for Black and White imprisonment is 2.6 to 1 in Mississippi (The Sentencing Project, 2023). This leaves the Black vote disproportioned in Mississippi and Black communities underrepresented (Chung, 2019). In Holmes County, Mississippi, Blacks make up 83.1% of the county's population of 16,121 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). However, the county is recorded as

having the lowest income and highest poverty rate in Mississippi (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

Demographics

Participants for this study included Mississippi's political officials, residents, and previously incarcerated individuals who had committed a felony under the felony disenfranchisement law but completed sentencing. Race, educational background, employment status, voting status, and political affiliations were important factors for all participants and were properly identified by the participants. Residential and previously incarcerated individuals had been Mississippi residents for at least 10 years and had resided in Holmes County, Mississippi for at least 5 years. Participants were at least 21 years of age. Participants were identified by their passports, driver's licenses, or legal identification card. Political officials were verified through the Mississippi State Election Office.

Mississippi political officials may have had state- or district-level status and must have been in office for at least 5 years. They must not have been charged or convicted of any crimes. Their political affiliation was verified through the Mississippi State Election Office. Political officials must have been registered voters for at least 10 years. The Mississippi State Elections Office and the Secretary of State Department verified political officials. The Circuit Clerk's Office was used to verify voter registration.

Mississippi residents included active voters and nonvoters who had not been charged or convicted of any crimes. Participants in this category must have been at least 21 years of age and eligible to register to vote in Mississippi. Residential participants

must have been Mississippi residents for at least 10 years and must have resided in Holmes County, Mississippi for at least 5 years.

Previously incarcerated individuals must have committed one of the crimes listed under the felony disenfranchisement law in Mississippi. Participants must have been a Mississippi resident for at least 10 years and must have resided in Holmes County, Mississippi for at least 5 years. Individuals must not have been eligible to vote due to Mississippi's felony disenfranchisement law. Also, previously incarcerated individuals must have served and completed sentencing in Mississippi. Proof of their sentencing completion was provided by the Mississippi Department of Correction.

Data Collection

My target was at least 15 participants. Each category was supposed to include at least five participants. However, the COVID-19 pandemic was an unusual circumstance that caused a pause in the study and hindered participation. Therefore, the final sample included five residents, three political officials, and three previously incarcerated individuals. Each interview was tailored to accommodate the truth of each interviewee, not me. The participants included political officials, residents of Holmes County, and previously incarcerated individuals who had committed a felony. Each interview improved my understanding of the topic through each interviewee's experience (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

I accommodated each participant's needs and schedule. Interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants or settings chosen by the participants. The average duration for the interviews was 20 minutes. The recorded interviews were

transcribed using Microsoft Word dictation. All documents, discovery, transcripts, and equipment were stored securely in a locked cabinet at my home and will remain secure for at least 7 years. Participants from the face-to-face interviews reviewed their information. In reviewing the transcribed interviews, the verbiage and language dialect of some participants caused some delays in analyzing the information. Only I had access to the transcripts. The name of each participant was removed and replaced with letters and numbers before the data were verified.

Data Analysis

Coding in research gives meaning to data. Therefore, codes may be one word or one phrase that describes the data. The approaches that could have been used for current study were inductive and deductive. Both processes bring attention to the methods and findings. However, an inductive approach was used for this study. The data were collected before the codes were identified. Categories in a study are used to break down the codes without reducing the perception or theoretical framework of the researcher. Though themes do not emerge from the data, they do represent the concept of the data. Therefore, several themes were developed (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Several categories may produce an unproductive assessment of the data (Sipe & Ghiso, 2004). According to Noble and Smith (2014), identifying recurring and significant themes is a major skill in undertaking qualitative data analysis.

This study explored the purpose of disenfranchisement laws and current views regarding felony disenfranchisement laws' effects on voting in Mississippi's Black communities. The face-to-face interviews focused on the research questions. The first

research question pertained to the perceptions of Black Americans in Mississippi regarding the felony disenfranchisement law. Voting as a fundamental right for all citizens is not granted to a previously incarcerated individual who committed a felony despite completing their sentencing in Mississippi (Miss. Const. Ann. Art. 12, § 253). Though other races commit crimes, Black individuals are more likely than White individuals to be incarcerated and convicted (Chung, 2019). Therefore, felony disenfranchisement law affects the quality of citizenship more for Black Americans than for White Americans. As the researcher, I explored each participant's thoughts and experiences regarding citizenship and Mississippi's felony disenfranchisement law. The first research question was answered using the following themes: citizenship from residents' perspective, felony disenfranchisement laws and their existence from residents' perspectives, voting rights for previously incarcerated black Americans from residents' perspective, and taxation without representation and voting from residents' perspective. Additional themes may be found in Appendices D, E, and F.

The second research question addressed the experiences of previously incarcerated Black Americans as they relate to the political gap in Mississippi. Lawmakers created felony disenfranchisement laws as a neutral policy. However, Black communities' voting privileges are affected more than White communities' voting privileges (Cresswell, 2014; Powell, 2017; Wilson et al., 2015). The lack of voting privileges for previously incarcerated Black Americans in Mississippi may leave Black communities underrepresented in the decision-making process (Chung, 2019).

Currently, taxation without representation does not reflect the livelihood of an individual who has completed sentencing for a felony crime committed under the felony disenfranchisement law. A previously incarcerated individual who committed one of the felony crimes in Mississippi is presented with the reality that voting as a fundamental right is not easily granted to all citizens. The significance of exploring the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws and voting within Black communities in Mississippi may encourage legislatures to implement strategies to allow taxation with representation for previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony. Themes that addressed the second research question were previously incarcerated blacks' perspective on voting in Mississippi, previously incarcerated blacks' perspective on citizenship, and previously incarcerated blacks' perspective on felony disenfranchisement law. Additional themes were political officials' perspective on citizenship, political officials' perspective on felony disenfranchisement laws and their existence, political officials' perspective on voting rights for previously incarcerated individuals, and political officials' perspective on taxation without representation and voting. Additional themes may be found in Appendices D, E, and F.

Though the codes were developed from the data collected, themes for my qualitative study evolved. Voting rights for Black Americans have caused them to face turmoil and discomforts that White Americans have not had to face. Trials and tribulations have often involved intimidation, threats, deaths, and voter suppression. Though the Constitution governs the legalities of the United States of America, it also allows states to have some governing power to implement laws.

The Voting Rights Act (1965) granted Black citizens the right to vote in the United States. However Black voters in Mississippi may be underrepresented because of felony disenfranchisement laws in violation of the 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause, which requires states to practice the protection of equality for individuals (U.S. Const. amend. XIV; Voting Rights Act, 1965). Furthermore, Mississippi felony disenfranchisement laws may target offenses that are more likely to be committed by Black individuals than Whites individuals, which may impact voter representation in certain legislative or congressional districts in Mississippi. Participants expressed their lived experiences and their thoughts regarding felony disenfranchisement laws. Additional themes were developed from participants' face-to-face interviews and may be found in Appendices D, E, and F.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Validity refers to what is measured and how well it is measured (Mohajan, 2017). The data source was in-depth face-to-face interviews. The intended sample size for this study was at least 15 participants divided equally among the categories. The categories were identified as Mississippi's political officials, Holmes County Mississippi's residents, and Holmes County Mississippi's previously incarcerated individuals. Though each category was to initially include at least five participants, data collection barriers caused me to alter expectations.

All participants in this study were identified by their passports, driver's licenses, or legal identification cards. Race, educational background, employment status, voting status, and political affiliation were important components of this study and were

identified within each category. The sample population for this study included Mississippi's political officials, residents, and previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony but completed their sentence. Providing a clear description of the sample makes transferability possible for further research if applicable.

Mississippi political officials who participated in the study had state and district status and had been in office for at least 5 years. These individuals had never been charged or convicted of any crimes. Each political official had been a registered voter for at least 10 years. Political officials were verified through the Mississippi State Elections Office and the Secretary of State Department. The Circuit Clerk's Office was used to verify voter registration.

The participants who were categorized as Holmes County residents were all active voters. However, I solicited participation from both nonvoters and active voters. Participants in this category were at least 21 years of age and eligible to register to vote in Mississippi. Residential participants for this study had been Mississippi residents for at least 10 years and had resided in Holmes County, Mississippi for at least 5 years.

Reliability refers to the confidence readers can have in the data collected (Mohajan, 2017). Each interview was conducted in a location chosen by the participant. Also, the face-to-face interviews accommodated the participants' schedules. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The name of each participant was removed and replaced with letters and numbers before the data were verified. Files were created to organize the transcribed interviews, which were uploaded to ATLAS.ti to analyze the information. Research findings contain information regarding each participant's structural description,

as well as a description of the group in its entirety. All documents, discovery, transcripts, and equipment were stored securely at my home and will be in a locked cabinet for at least 7 years.

An explanation of researcher bias was imperative in the study. I disclosed in the study that I was a single Black female. During much of the data collection process, I was a victim assistance coordinator and pretrial diversion supervisor with a District Attorney's Office in Mississippi. In addition, I had previously served as the Democratic precinct chairperson and as an elected Board of Education member for my district.

During the 2016 Presidential Election, I was instrumental in a voter registration rally to motivate citizens to register to vote and participate in the political process. This is where I learned that low voter turnouts in Mississippi were not due solely to the lack of interest of some citizens in the Black community, but due to felony disenfranchisement laws. I have lived in Mississippi most of my life, and voting has always been a priority. I was aware of my experiences and monitored them accordingly. At the time of the study, I was the risk reduction manager of the American National Red Cross-Community Adaptation Program-Yazoo County, MS.

Findings

This qualitative research explored the purpose of disenfranchisement laws and current views regarding the felony disenfranchisement laws' effects on voting in Mississippi's Black communities. Mississippi has 22 felony crimes under the felony disenfranchisement law that affect more Black individuals than White individuals. This study examined the perceptions regarding felony disenfranchisement laws and voting

rights in the Black communities of Mississippi. Participants engaged in face-to-face interviews to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions that exist of the felony disenfranchisement law by Black Americans in Mississippi?

RQ2: How do previously incarcerated Black Americans experience and characterize the impact of political disparity in Mississippi?

Research questions explored participants' experiences and views of voting rights and disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi. Participants included Holmes County Mississippi's residents, Holmes County Mississippi's previously incarcerated individuals, and Mississippi's political officials. The role of each participant assisted me in examining the purpose and effects of Mississippi's felony disenfranchisement law on Black communities. The results of the data collection were summarized for each participant. This section also includes the theme summaries from the individual participants. Each theme was developed from codes used during my data analysis and captured the perspectives of each participant.

Group 1: Holmes County Residents

This section includes a description based on questions and statements given during face-to-face interviews with Holmes County Residents. Questions for Group 1 may be found in Appendix C: Face-to-Face Interviews. The information from the interview was transcribed and coded. This portion of the study includes statements from five residents. During the interview process, all participants were identified as HR and a number. Several themes were developed to highlight the perspectives of Holmes County

Residents. However, this section of the research will only present themes related to the research questions. Additional themes developed from Group 1 participants' face-to-face interviews may be found in Appendix E. Appendix E displays the themes and summarized perspectives of Group 1 participants.

Participant 1

Participant 1 shared that their family background included voting. This participant reflected on a passage from a poem their mother wrote about voting. According to the participant, the passage went as follows. "Today is election day that I wish that could vote for we really want Charles Evers who is willing to help the folks." Though the participant was not old enough to vote at that time, Participant 1 understood the importance of voting. From the participants' perspective, people were proud and glad to be able to vote when the voting day came.

Participant 1 believes that if a person has completed their sentencing that they should be able to vote. Citizenship means everything to this participant. The participant further expressed that previously incarcerated individuals should be in the clear when they are released and should be able to vote when they are free. However, this participant also believes it depends on the level of the crime.

As a citizen and resident of Mississippi, participant 1 expressed that if Black Americans would get out and vote that there's nothing they can't accomplish. This participant recalled moments of racism and acknowledge the social inequities their parent faced. For 100 pounds of cotton, workers were paid a dollar a day. Though the participant wasn't familiar with the felony disenfranchisement laws, Participant 1 goes along with

the law. On the contrary, the participant feels as though previously incarcerated individuals who are eligible to vote should be informed of their voting rights. Some people feel because they were incarcerated that they cannot vote. This participant would not change the felony disenfranchisement laws without reviewing the crime that was committed by an individual. If the previously incarcerated individual is a habitual offender, then Participant 1 believes the person would have to deal with the consequences of the law.

Participant 1 views on racism are that it still exists, and it is not going to change. However, this participant feels racism is not as openly expressed. In addition, this participant addressed taxation without representation. If they could not vote but were still required to pay taxes, this participant feels it would be a hard blow and it would be impossible to deal with. Participant 1 further expressed that such notions closely resemble the way things used to be when Black Americans didn't have any rights.

Participant 2

Participant 2 shared that their family background included voting. This participant believes voting should occur no matter what or where the person is located. After a previously incarcerated individual has served their time with no additional offenses, they should be able to vote. The Holmes County resident feels Black ancestors put in a lot for us to vote and previously incarcerated individuals should not be denied voting rights. Therefore, citizenship means a lot to this participant.

During the interview Participant 2 shared their perspective on citizenship. They believe that being a citizen means that Black Americans are an integral part of the

country's foundation. According to this participant, it was the hard work of slaves that earned Black Americans the right to become citizens of the United States, and no other group can claim that same path. Furthermore, they expressed that Black Americans played a significant role in building the country from the very beginning. Lastly, Participant 2 stated that Christopher Columbus cannot be credited with discovering America as it was already inhabited by indigenous people.

As a resident of Mississippi, this participant's upbringing was sheltered. Participant 2 grew up in a household where one parent was paid weekly. However, this participant witnessed others grow up on farms where the means of income was sharecropping, which was often unpredictable. Due to life experiences, the impression of Mississippi has changed for this participant. From Participant 2 perspective, Mississippi is a "White Republican State," and they are on the receiving end. On the other hand, Black Americans are denied a lot of their rights. Republicans only care about what they want.

Participant 2 also expressed their views on Black history. According to this participant, Black history is one of the greatest and it is one of the great educational points in Mississippi. Black history is also deeper than anyone could ever imagine. Therefore, it is important to share it and not hide it. This participant's views were that White Americans are not for Black Americans. They are only for their "fat pockets" rather than Black Americans who have pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters.

This Holmes County resident believes previously incarcerated individuals should have the right to vote if they have served their time and if their offense was not extreme.

Also, if the parole board has decided they were model citizens, they should be allowed to vote. This participant recalled speaking to someone who does not have voting rights due to a crime committed during their youth. According to Participant 2, the person now is a model citizen, and they believe this individual should be allowed to vote. If allowed to change the felony disenfranchisement law, this participant would eliminate the law. In addition, Participant 2 expressed that if a previously incarcerated individual can travel to any state, they should be able to vote.

Participant 2 further expressed their view regarding racism and inequality. For Black communities in Mississippi, inequality and racism exist. This participant would feel less than a citizen if they had to pay taxes but could not vote. Participant 2 also compared this concept and lived experience to the Mexican men and women who are trying to get to the United States. The concept is wrong, and the participants expressed that they would feel as though they aren't a citizen. Participant 2 feels there's not much to say about the laws being made, they can sit back and watch. The effects of the laws are not better than being a slave.

Participant 3

Participant 3 shared that their family origin was mixed race, and voting was essential. This participant can't recall ever missing an election. Absentee ballots were used by the participant if they anticipated not being available on election day. This participant further expressed thoughts regarding previously incarcerated individuals and voting. Participant 3 doesn't see a reason why they shouldn't be allowed to vote or be able to work in a position of any choice. Previously incarcerated individuals already paid

the penalty for what they did. This Holmes County resident doesn't understand why they continue to be punished.

For this resident, citizenship means freedom. As a citizen of the United States, people are supposed to be free to partake in anything legal. However, stipulations are placed on Black Americans and other people of color. As a resident of Mississippi, this participant has had a positive experience. However, this resident of Holmes County has been teased by Black residents for moving into a previously predominantly White neighborhood.

The history of Black Americans in Mississippi was a struggle, but people have come a long way. However, Participant 3 feels they still have a long way to go. As this participant reflected on the past, they recalled the days of Emmitt Till and the civil rights worker who were killed in Philadelphia, MS. Participant 3 believes young people should realize that they are here now but didn't get here overnight. Therefore, they should continue to study and try to improve themselves.

Participant 3 believes that previously incarcerated individuals should be able to vote. They have already done their time and should not be stigmatized as felons. This participant believes the only job that is available for previously incarcerated individuals is dishwashing, cooking, and restaurants. This participant believes such stigmatism pushes previously incarcerated individuals back into the system, which does not help much. Therefore, this resident questioned the reasons for the constant stigmas.

This participant believes laws that say a felon cannot do a particular job or cannot vote should be removed. Previously incarcerated individuals have already paid the

penalty once they served their time. This participant believes there's still room for improvement in race and equality. Participant 3 feels it would be unfair to have to pay taxes but not have the right to vote.

Participant 4

Participant 4 reflected on the family background, voting perspective, and previously incarcerated individuals. This participant's parents were big supporters of voting. They taught their children the meaning of voting by bringing them along. Voting is important and every vote counts. Previously incarcerated individuals should have the right to vote. They are a part of this society and are still citizens despite being previously incarcerated.

This resident's perspective of citizenship is tied to the First Amendment. Knowing that they have rights is tied to freedom. Life for this participant in Mississippi has been fine. There have not been disheartening events. As for the Black history in Mississippi, they believe it is important and is thankful for the Black history museum in Jackson, MS. Though Participant 4 didn't face any of the things their parents did, the history of what Black Americans previously endured was shared within the home.

Participant 4 feels that previously incarcerated individuals should be allowed to vote. They have a voice, experiences, and an opinion that could make a difference. This participant didn't know the felony disenfranchisement law existed or why. However, the Holmes County resident believes it is a discrimination issue or a race issue. According to this Holmes County resident, the image that is displayed is that because an individual was incarcerated, they should not vote. In addition, it sends the message that previously

incarcerated individuals don't matter. If given the opportunity, Participant 4 would work closely with individuals to change the felony disenfranchisement law. This participant strongly believes it is not a fair law.

This participant has noticed there is a difference when it comes to racism and equality for Black communities in Mississippi. Participant 4 feels as though Black Americans are moving backward instead of moving forward. The resident further expressed lived experiences as it relates to equal pay and employment. White Americans are often paid more than Black Americans. This participant believes Black Americans could have the same level of education or more education but are still not given the same opportunities. As the participants observed the felony disenfranchisement law, the more flustered they appeared. Participant 4 stated they would be mad if they had to pay taxes but couldn't vote. This participant continued to proclaim the lack of fairness towards the end of the interview. Participant 4 final views were that the felony disenfranchisement laws are not fair. Previously incarcerated individuals should have a right to vote or not vote.

Participant 5

Participant 5 reflected on the family background, voting perspective, and previously incarcerated individuals. This participant's family were sharecroppers and grew about 95% of their food. Amid the family background was the importance of voting. Participant 5 reflected on the many moments their mother encouraged them to get registered to vote. This participant believes voting changes things a lot of the time. The participant believes that voting is both important and a responsibility. However, as a

resident of Holmes County, they also have strong religious beliefs that provide them with peace if their chosen candidate is not elected.

This resident of Holmes County believes there are a lot of people who want what they have. From their perspective, citizenship is a privilege. However, it should be given to individuals who want to be a part of the United States. Living in Mississippi has not always been comfortable for this participant. Participant 5 experienced racism, but it was not constant. As a child, the participant knew there were places they couldn't go to and things they couldn't do, but it didn't bother them. The family structure for this resident was tightly knitted with relatives and family routines. All the racial discomforts were slightly diminished and unnoticed.

Participant 5 is bothered by suggestions to diminish how Black history is acknowledged within the educational system. Though this participant didn't experience a lot of the historical racial challenges, Participant 5 acknowledge that it all happened. Black history should be preserved and children, Black or White, should know what happened. History should not be erased. People are trying to erase what took place years ago, but still adding to the racial challenges. This participant feels Black Americans are not on the same level as their White counterparts.

According to this resident of Holmes County, previously incarcerated individuals may have mistakenly committed a crime or intentionally committed a crime. However, everyone deserves a second chance. Therefore, individuals who have served their time should be allowed to vote. The felony disenfranchisement laws reflect the lack of changes made in Mississippi. Although racism has taken on different forms, it is still present in

society today. This is evident in the election process where White Americans hold a majority of the voting power. Participant 5 holds the belief that Black Americans are still oppressed in a way similar to slavery. However, they also believe that despite the existence of racism and inequality, Black Americans have a responsibility to seize opportunities and not use these obstacles as an excuse to avoid striving for success.

Participant 5 was not sure of the details surrounding the felony disenfranchisement law in Mississippi. However, the participant believes they would change the law. Previously incarcerated individuals who have turned their lives around should be given an opportunity. When someone changes their lives and is ignored as though they are still criminals, that places a burden on that individual. This participant believes the lack of opportunity could cause a previously incarcerated individual to backslide. This Holmes County resident further expressed the importance of love and kindness.

Though the image of historical slavery is nonexistent, this participant believes racism still exists. It is a topic that is experienced and discussed among their relatives. According to Participant 5, Blacks pay more for essentials, such as utility bills, than Whites. In addition, Blacks must wait longer for medical procedures, such as heart transplants, than Whites. In closing, as the Holmes County resident reflected on the felony disenfranchisement law. If this participant could not vote but had to still pay taxes, they would be furious. Voting gives an individual the opportunity to change things and to select people who may do the job. If the political official does not, an individual with voting rights can vote them out.

Holmes County Residents' Themes

The themes identified for Group 1 capture the perspective of Holmes County residents. The participants' perspectives reflect the lived experiences of 5 residents who live in Holmes County, MS. Holmes County residents included active voters who have not been charged or convicted of any crimes. Participants for this category were at least 21 years of age and eligible voters in Mississippi. Residential participants have been Mississippi residents for at least 10 years and have resided in Holmes County, Mississippi for at least five years.

Residents of Holmes County, MS are aware of Mississippi's rich history of racism and inequality. From their perspective, racism still exists and is just as powerful as it was during the Jim Crow era. Though residents were not knowledgeable of the list of crimes under the felony disenfranchisement laws, they believe racism is the purpose of the law that hinders voting. In addition, residents compared taxation without representation to the days when Blacks could not vote and didn't have any rights.

Positive views for this category include voting rights for everyone and reflections on citizenship. From Holmes County residents' perspective, voting is important, and it is our right as citizens. And with citizenship, there's freedom and privileges as Americans. Previously incarcerated individuals are a part of society and should be allowed to vote. Several themes were developed to highlight the perspectives of Holmes County's residents. However, this section of the research will only present themes related to the research questions. Additional themes developed from participants' face-to-face

interviews may be found in Appendix E. Appendix E displays the themes and summarized perspectives of Group 1 participants.

Citizenship From Residents' Perspective

Citizenship means everything to Holmes County residents. They feel as though citizenship is freedom and it is a privilege to be an American. In addition, participants believe citizenship is their voice. Participants acknowledged slavery in America and their Black ancestors. They believe citizenship for Black Americans was earned through slavery. Slaves were a part of the structure of the United States of America.

Felony Disenfranchisement Laws and Their Existence From Residents' Perspectives

Some residents in Group 2 shared that they did know the felony disenfranchisement law existed or why it existed. Participants believed the law worked well for the Jim Crow era. Residents of Holmes County believe the law pushes people back into the criminal justice system. In addition, it reiterates to previously incarcerated individuals that they do not matter. Participants further shared that they felt the law was used to keep White Americans in control. Some participants in Group 2 feel as though this law reflects the fact that racism still exists, and things still haven't changed.

Voting Rights for Previously Incarcerated Black Americans From Residents' Perspective

Holmes County Residents believe if previously incarcerated individuals have served their time that they should be allowed to vote. Participants in Group 2 repeatedly express their disagreement with the lack of voting privileges for previously incarcerated

individuals. But they also shared thoughts that restored voting privileges should be dependent on the crime and criminal history.

Taxation Without Representation and Voting From Residents' Perspective

Holmes County Residents believe voting is their right and it is important. A person should vote no matter where they are. Participants in Group 2 believe if they were denied the voting privileges but required to pay taxes that they would feel less than a citizen. If they were in that predicament, it would be no better than being a slave. Participants feel they would be angry. This form of denial reminded participants of a time when Black Americans were denied voting privileges or any rights at all.

Group 2: Holmes County Previously Incarcerated Individuals

This section includes a description based on questions and statements given during face-to-face interviews. Holmes County Previously incarcerated individuals. Questions for Group 2 may be found in Appendix C: Face-to-Face Interviews. The information from the interview was transcribed and coded. This portion of the study includes statements from three previously incarcerated individuals. During the interview process, all participants were identified as HI and a number. Several themes were developed to highlight the perspectives of Holmes County Previously incarcerated individuals. However, this section of the research will only present themes related to the research questions. Additional themes developed from Group 2 participants' face-to-face interviews may be found in Appendix F. Appendix F displays the themes and summarized perspectives of Group 2 participants.

Participant 1

Participant 1 made remarks regarding their desire to vote. This participant committed a crime as a teenager and lost voting privileges. Additional crimes were committed but as an adult maturity made this individual understand firsthand challenges. Participant 1 also expressed the hardships of being in prison. According to this participant, prison was terrible, and citizenship doesn't mean too much to them. This previously incarcerated individual stated that they felt like a slave and felt as though they were always being judged.

For this participant, life in Mississippi is not progressive and they feel stuck. They would rather move somewhere else; however, they would make the best of it. This participant feels as though previously incarcerated individuals have completed their sentencing and should be allowed to vote like other citizens. In addition, they also feel as though the disenfranchisement laws are used to hold Black people back and that the poor are always going to be poor and stuck.

In closing, Participant 1 shared changes they would make if given the opportunity. This participant would give everyone their right to vote back. This participant reflects on the one time they did vote. Participant 1 states that they felt joy and were happy that his vote counted. If allowed to vote again, this participant would feel a little freedom and like a citizen.

Participant 2

Participant 2 made remarks regarding their family background. At least one of their parents voted. The participant also expressed a love for voting. Though the

participant does not have the right to vote due to the disenfranchisement laws, they have been very involved with the election process. This participant feels as though previously incarcerated individuals have served their appointed time in jail or prison and should have the same rights as everyone. They also expressed that previously incarcerated individuals are human. Committing a crime should not have anything to do with voting.

Participant 2 further expressed remarks regarding citizenship, voting, and the disenfranchisement laws. Citizenship means everything to this partnership and living in Mississippi has been wonderful. However, this participant feels as though the disenfranchisement laws are a “white man” law and such laws place a toll on a person who can’t vote. Though this participant feels racism still exists and will never change. Participant 2 also expressed their beliefs that not all White Americans are racist.

Throughout the face-to-face interview, this participant expressed the importance of voting. If Participant 2 was allowed to make changes to the disenfranchisement laws, this participant would speak with state leaders to share their perspective. In addition, Participant 2 stated that if they could vote it would mean the world.

Participant 3

Participant 3 made remarks regarding his family background. At least one of their parents voted, and the participant grew up knowing voting was a right. Therefore, this participant has a love for voting and believes everyone’s vote counts. This participant feels that previously incarcerated individuals deserve a second chance and should have the right to vote. This participant also expressed that it wasn’t right to see other family members vote but they cannot.

This previously incarcerated individual also expressed remarks regarding citizenship, voting, and the disenfranchisement laws. Citizenship means a lot to this participant. Living in Mississippi is okay, but the participant expressed that it is hard to obtain a job. Participant 3 feels racism still exists, but it is a whole lot better. Throughout the face-to-face interview, this participant expressed that previously incarcerated individuals should have the right to vote. If Participant 3 was allowed to make changes to the disenfranchisement laws, this participant stated if they would have the right to vote. It would mean the world to these participants if they could vote.

Holmes County Previously Incarcerated Individuals' Themes

The themes identified for Group 2 capture the perspective of Holmes County's previously incarcerated individuals. The participants' perspectives reflect the lived experiences of 3 previously incarcerated individuals who completed sentencing. The previously incarcerated individuals committed one of the crimes listed under the felony disenfranchisement law in Mississippi. In addition, the participants have been Mississippi residents for at least 10 years and have resided in Holmes County, Mississippi for at least five years. The participants in this research were not eligible to vote due to Mississippi's felony disenfranchisement law. Also, previously incarcerated individuals served and completed sentencing in Mississippi.

All participants in this category have a desire to regain voting privileges. They did not want their previous criminal activity to continue to keep hindering their voting rights. Furthermore, these previously incarcerated individuals were adamant about second chances. To them, a second chance means they would no longer be labeled as a criminal.

The mistakes of their past would not hinder them from being looked upon as a citizen of the United States of America.

Participants' negative views display unrest that represents the historical views of Mississippi and the United States. There's still a strong belief that racism still exists and that laws such as the felony disenfranchisement law was created to hold Black people back. Not having a more documented second chance leaves previously incarcerated individuals feeling like a slave. Due to their background, previously incarcerated Black Americans feel as though they are being judged and treated differently. Therefore, citizenship doesn't mean too much. Not being able to vote puts a toll on an individual, especially when they are accustomed to voting.

Participants are neutral and positive views display optimism. Though Group 2 participants believe racism exists and things will not change, they do not believe all White Americans are racist. If they had the opportunity to vote, Group 2 participants would feel like citizens. In addition, participants believe everyone's votes count. Therefore, if allowed to make changes to the felony disenfranchisement laws, Group 2 participants would give everyone their right to vote.

Participants believe previously incarcerated individuals have served their time and should be given the right to vote. However, the lack of voting privileges does not keep participants from participating in the election process by assisting political candidates. Several themes were developed to highlight perspectives of Holmes County's Previously Incarcerated Individuals. However, this section of the research will only present themes closely related to the research questions. Additional themes developed from participants'

face-to-face interviews may be found in Appendix F. Appendix F displays the themes and summarized perspectives of Group 2 participants.

Previously Incarcerated Blacks' Perspective on Citizenship

The face-to-face interview allowed participants to share their feelings regarding citizenship in America. Citizenship for Black Americans has been met with constant racism. Participants in the study feel as though racism still exists everywhere. Citizenship doesn't mean too much to some previously incarcerated individuals. On the contrary, citizenship means everything to other previously incarcerated individuals.

Life in prison was hard and rough for some participants in Group 2. Participants feel they served the awarded time and should be able to vote like citizens. In addition, some citizens in Group 1 feel no one should lose their right to vote, whether incarcerated or previously incarcerated. Previously incarcerated individuals said they would feel like citizens if lawmakers eliminated the disenfranchisement laws.

Previously Incarcerated Black Americans' Perspective on Felony Disenfranchisement Law

Participants in Group 1 believe that the felony disenfranchisement law is a "white man's law." Some participants believe some White Americans are trying to hold Black Americans back. If possible, participants would plead to legislatures to allow previously incarcerated individuals and those incarcerated to vote. Participants in Group 1 believe the law in Mississippi should be eliminated. Participants would feel like citizens if the disenfranchisement laws were eliminated.

Previously Incarcerated Black Americans' Perspective on Voting in Mississippi

Participants in Group 1 feel that they have served their time and should have the right to vote no matter the crime. It makes them feel bad that they don't have a say in this country. Previously incarcerated individuals felt less than a citizen because they can't vote. One of the participants made the statement that previously incarcerated individuals are human just like everyone else. Everyone deserves a second chance. Participants would feel like citizens if the disenfranchisement laws were eliminated. It would mean the world to them if they could vote.

Group 3: Mississippi Political Officials

This section includes a description based on questions and statements given during face-to-face interviews with Mississippi political officials. Questions for Group 3 may be found in Appendix C: Face-to-Face Interviews. The information from the interview was transcribed and coded. This portion of the study includes statements from three political officials. During the interview, all participants were identified as MO and a number. Appendix G contains the raw data and additional themes for each group. Appendix G displays the themes and summarized perspectives of Group 3 participants.

Participant 1

Participant 1 reflected on the family background, voting perspective, and previously incarcerated individuals. This participant's family descended from Africa to Alabama to Mississippi and were voters. In addition, the family participated in the procedures that led to the Civil Rights Act. Voting was taken very seriously and is very important to Participant 1. The participant was educated in the public school system,

attended college, and never had an issue with the law. As a citizen of Mississippi, Participant 1 feels as though they have done quite well.

During the face-to-face interview, a political official shared their views on citizenship and the origin of Black Americans. The official mentioned how Africans were forcefully brought to the United States and acknowledged the unjustifiable fate that Black Americans have had to endure. Participant 1 expressed concerns that Black history is not being taught in schools but believes it is the responsibility of churches and families to educate on this topic. The participant also noted that in the past, history was not heavily emphasized in schools and that families played a key role in sharing important historical information.

Participant 1 believes that individuals who were previously incarcerated should not be denied their voting rights. They should have their rights restored just like any other citizen. However, there are concerns that some may use their felony as an excuse to be unproductive. This official also believes that laws targeting drug activity were created to appease Southern politicians, resulting in the arrest and sentencing of individuals for small amounts of drugs. This has contributed to mass incarceration and the development of private prisons. The felony disenfranchisement law has not been helpful, as some people strive to have their rights restored while others use it as an excuse to avoid finding employment or acquiring new skills.

This participant strongly believes that it's unfair to be taxed without having a say in how the government operates. They would not pay taxes if they could not vote. They argue that everyone should have the right to speak up if they are being taxed.

Additionally, the participant believes that systemic racism and inequality are prevalent in Black communities, particularly in Mississippi where low-income areas are not receiving enough funding. The participant thinks that previously incarcerated individuals should be allowed to reintegrate into society and be allowed to vote and exercise their citizenship.

Participant 2

Participant 2 reflected on the family background, voting perspective, and previously incarcerated individuals. This participant's family origin is African American. Holmes County is the birthplace and home of this participant. The family background consisted of voting. It was often taught that people died for them to have the right to vote. Therefore, no matter the election, it is important to vote.

Participant 2 grew up during odd racial times when it was common for Black Americans to utilize the back door of White American establishments and homes. In addition, Black Americans couldn't ride in the front seat of White Americans. This participant's perspective believes Black history is not truthfully told. It is not hard to be truthful. Black history needs to be in the school system. It is not in Black American homes because parents are younger. Participant 2 feels they are equally a part of the problem because history was not continuously told. History needs to be foretold more than during the shortest month of the year. Black Americans were not always afforded the rights they have now and that must be told. Perhaps if the younger Black Americans knew the history of Black Americans, they would be more appreciative.

This Mississippi political official's view on voting for previously incarcerated individuals is that they should be able to vote. However, it depends on the crime.

Participant 2 also expressed views regarding sentencing. People who go to jail for minor incidents such as marijuana, rights should not be taken away. If you are a person of color, your rights are taken away and you are treated as a hardened criminal and given a bunch of time. Participant 2 believes serial killers or rapists should not be given their rights until they are proven to be rehabilitated.

This participant's perspective regarding felony disenfranchisement laws reflects the views of government officials. The disenfranchisement laws should be rewritten. If there are laws that were written a while back, they exist because the government officials in charge like what it does. This political official's thoughts regarding previously incarcerated individuals involve them having a second chance. Nevertheless, Participant 2 believes that second chances depend on the crime. Additional views made by this participant included fair sentencing. Justice does not always swing fair for people of color.

This Mississippi political official believes racism is still alive and well today. Those constitutional laws are constitutional for Black Americans. Racism holds the laws. This participant further expressed beliefs that Whites are given their rights back when they are released from prison. This political official believes the benefits of felony disenfranchisement laws are harsh. People that have been previously incarcerated may feel they are nothing because they have no rights. Participant 2 sees the racism and governmental officials like what it still does. As it relates to making changes to felony disenfranchisement laws, this participant would have to read the laws but is sure they would make changes.

Participant 2 thoughts regarding racism reflect a lack of confidence in the future of equality in Mississippi. This political official feels racism is worse today. Black Americans are further back than they were in the 60s due to the lack of votes and money. In addition, Black Americans are still looked upon as second-class citizens and it hurts so bad. However, this participant believes there are still responsibilities Black Americans must take. They should regain a sense of family and learn to trust each other. Racism does not look the same, it is different. Racist individuals are no longer wearing hoods, they are hiding. It could be a lawyer, doctor, psychiatrist, or whomever.

This Mississippi political official expressed their feelings regarding taxation without representation. Participant 2 would fight for the right to vote. History shows that when people rallied together to gain the right to vote they were successful. This participant believes as a citizen that if they could not vote they would fight. In closing, this political official feels that the vote is all they have, and they do not want that taken away.

Participant 3

This political official immediately expressed their thoughts and passion regarding previously incarcerated individuals. In many cases, Participant 3 has witnessed misinformation regarding felony disenfranchisement laws. Some previously incarcerated individuals can vote. According to this participant, they believe the parole officers and other officials are not sharing the correct information. This participant also expresses the lack of concern from other leaders to ensure the messaging is consistently shared.

Citizenship to this political official means that they have a voice. It also means that a person is an active participant in all laws unless there's documentation stating otherwise. Participant 3's experience as a resident of Mississippi has been good and voting was always encouraged. Since the age of 17, this participant never missed an election. Participant 3 strongly believes voting is a right and they refuse to let anyone take their voice.

This Mississippi political official believes Black history should be modernized. Every year there are programs where the struggle and achievement of Black forefathers are shared. Today, Black history should target young people by showing them how they paved the way for others. This participant further believes young Black people should incorporate standards surrounding their appearance and lifestyle.

Participant 3 views are that the felony disenfranchisement law exists because it is a way to silence young Black American men. By silencing them, they would never be able to be an active participant in the workforce or be a husband or father to their children. Without gainful employment, how previously incarcerated individuals take care of their families is questionable. Participant 3 used terms such as enslavement to describe the expressed frustrations with the treatment of previously incarcerated individuals. Additionally, this participant feels educating young Black people on how to keep their voice is important. The felony disenfranchisement laws only hurt the African American young men. According to this political official, under the felony disenfranchisement laws, we still have taxation without representation. Participant 3 believes individuals should not be taxed if they can't vote.

Mississippi Political Officials' Themes

The themes identified for Group 3 capture the perspective of the participants who were serving as political officials in Mississippi. The participants' perspectives reflect the lived experiences of 3 residents who live in Mississippi and serve as political officials. Mississippi political officials held state or district-level status and have been in office for at least five years. In addition, the political officials have been registered voters for at least 10 years.

The Mississippi political officials' views of the felony disenfranchisement laws closely resembled the reflections of the Jim Crow era. The history of Mississippi's politics is one in which White Americans reaped prosperity while Black Americans did not. There is an ongoing agitation among political officials regarding systematic racism. However, political officials expressed positive views regarding citizenship in America and its meaning. Several themes were developed to highlight the perspectives of Mississippi's political officials. However, this section of the research will only present themes related to the research questions. Additional themes developed from Group 3 participants' face-to-face interviews may be found in Appendix G. Appendix G displays the themes and summarized perspectives of Group 3 participants.

Political Officials' Perspectives on Citizenship

Participants in Group 3 believe Blacks were brought to America unwillingly. But, since they are here, they will make the best of it. Political officials believe that citizenship means being a part of the United States of America and having all the rights according to

the United States Constitution. Participants in this group believe citizenship means a person has a voice and is an active participant in any laws.

Political Officials' Perspectives on Felony Disenfranchisement Laws and Their Existence

Some political officials believe the felony disenfranchisement laws have not been beneficial to the Black community and they see the racism in the law. Participants in Group 3 believe the government officials in charge like what the law does. The felony disenfranchisement law is harsh, and it makes previously incarcerated individuals feel they are nothing because they have no rights. Political officials believe the felony disenfranchisement laws are a way to silence Black American young men so they would not be active participants in society. Participants believe the felony disenfranchisement laws take away the rights of previously incarcerated individuals.

Political Officials' Perspectives on Voting Rights for Previously Incarcerated Individuals

Participants in Group 3 believe previously incarcerated individuals should be disenfranchised. Voting rights should be restored upon their release from prison. However, political officials also believe voting privileges should depend on the crime.

Political Officials' Perspectives on Taxation Without Representation and Voting

Mississippi Political Officials believe voting is their right and it is important. However, they also believe people should be educated on voting. Each vote counts and elections are won by one vote. Participants in Group 3 believe if they were denied voting privileges but required to pay taxes that they would fight for their right to vote. Some

participants would refuse to pay taxes. From their perspective, paying taxes and voting work together. If they were in that predicament, it would be no better than being a slave. Participants feel they would be angry. This form of denial reminded participants of a time when Black Americans were denied voting privileges or any rights at all.

Figure 1 displays the words most frequently used by participants. This Word Cloud was developed through ATLAS.ti to determine the word frequencies among participants for this study. This study allowed participants to share their thoughts regarding the past, present, and future. The participants in this study most frequently used words such as Black, people, time, right, and Mississippi. Each participant's choice of words displayed their lived experience in Mississippi from their perspective. In addition, the lived experiences of the participants are a display of repeated oppression embedded in the conversations of Black Americans. Mississippi's history is not a love story of peace and equality for Black Americans. The history of Mississippi continues to affect the future of equality, citizenship, and the criminal justice system.

Figure 1

Word Cloud That Includes the Word Frequencies of the Coded Data



Summary

In Chapter 4 of this research, three groups were interviewed: previously incarcerated individuals from Holmes County (Group 1), Holmes County residents (Group 2), and Mississippi political officials (Group 3). The participants provided detailed narratives from their perspectives, and the interpretation of each category was shared. Several themes were last developed to highlight the participants' perspectives, but only the themes related to the research questions are presented in this section. Additional themes from each group can be found in Appendix G. Appendices D, E, and F summarize the themes and perspectives of each group's participants. Chapter 5 will conclude the discussion and provide conclusions and recommendations for each focus group,

contributing to the research on the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws on Black communities in Mississippi.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Since the development of the 14th and 15th Amendments of the United States Constitution in 1868 and 1870, the voting rights of citizens in the United States of America have been protected (DOJ, 2017b). However, the guarantees of citizenship to each person living in the United States' borders are not granted easily to everyone (Mack et al., 2016). From Black individuals being enslaved and freed to being incarcerated in modern-day society more frequently than White individuals, the desire to have a voice in the decision-making process has been challenging.

The felony disenfranchisement laws are legitimate under the U.S. Constitution. However, the rooted intentions of felony disenfranchisement laws are questionable and inconsistent. These laws have not been viewed as a reflection of equality and social equity for all citizens (Douglas, 2014; Nun, 2005; Tolson, 2012, 2014; Trahan-Liptak, 2014). Neutrality was the initial purpose of the felony disenfranchisement policy. Some citizens in the United States believe the law is justifiable and voting is a privilege for individuals who do not participate in criminal activity. However, Black communities' voting privileges have been affected more than White communities' voting privileges (Cresswell, 2014; Powell, 2017; Wilson et al., 2015). The lack of voting privileges for previously incarcerated Black individuals in Mississippi may leave Black communities underrepresented in the decision-making process (Chung, 2019).

This study explored felony disenfranchisement laws affecting the voting rights of Black Americans in Mississippi. The results of this study could facilitate social change in Mississippi by challenging political officials and citizens to reexamine

disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi and the precepts of the U.S. Constitution. Presenting information regarding the initial purpose of the felony disenfranchisement laws and their impact may also inspire all citizens to question the modern-day purpose of the laws that affect the voting privileges of those previously incarcerated for committing a felony under the Mississippi Constitution despite completing sentencing.

Currently, taxation without representation does not reflect the livelihood of an individual who has completed sentencing for the felony crime committed under the felony disenfranchisement law. A previously incarcerated individual who committed one of the felonies in Mississippi is presented with the reality that voting as a fundamental right is not easily granted to all citizens. The significance of exploring the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws and voting in Black communities in Mississippi may encourage legislatures to implement strategies to allow taxation with representation for previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony.

Interpretation of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to use the qualitative method to understand the perceptions of Holmes County Mississippi citizens and political officials. This section presents an interpretation of my findings. In Chapter 4, I presented themes and summarized descriptions developed from participants' face-to-face interviews. Several themes were developed to highlight the perspectives of participants and may be found in Appendices D, E, and F. Each appendix displays the themes and summarized perspectives of participants.

Participants included Holmes County Mississippi residents, Holmes County Mississippi previously incarcerated individuals, and Holmes County Mississippi political officials. Participants engaged in face-to-face interviews to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions that exist of the felony disenfranchisement law by Black Americans in Mississippi?

RQ2: How do previously incarcerated Black Americans experience and characterize the impact of political disparity in Mississippi?

The first research question was developed to understand the purpose of the felony disenfranchisement law from the perspectives of Black Americans in Mississippi. As I analyzed the data from my research, I learned that some citizens do not know the felony disenfranchisement law in Mississippi exists. However, Mississippians who are knowledgeable of the law are not in agreement with its existence. This law sways closely to the rules of the Jim Crow era. Taxation without representation was one of the effects of that era. If the laws were created to diminish the voting rights of Black Americans, it is accomplishing its goals by silencing the voice of previously incarcerated individuals.

The voting rights of Black Americans are in jeopardy. There are more Black Americans than White Americans in jail for crimes that will eliminate their voting rights in Mississippi. The felony disenfranchisement law still exists because of the benefits it offers to Mississippi's rich history of racism, inequality, and social inequity. This law resembles a time when Black Americans were seen as less than White Americans. However, in modern-day society, the felony disenfranchisement law can be classed as

systematic racism embedded in society with permission from the United States Constitution.

This study does not overlook the responsibility of the previously incarcerated individual. My data analysis revealed the importance of previously incarcerated individuals serving their time and living as a model citizen. Findings also revealed the perception of citizenship and rehabilitation of previously incarcerated individuals in the United States of America. If previously incarcerated individuals commit a crime and complete their sentencing, they should not continue to pay for the crime after they have been released from the Mississippi Department of Corrections. Second chances are not readily available for previously incarcerated Black Americans in Mississippi. Society continues to label these individuals as criminals. In addition, some previously incarcerated individuals do not take citizenship seriously when they do not have a voice in U.S. society.

The second research question was developed to understand the previously incarcerated Black Americans' experience and how they characterize the impact of political disparity in Mississippi. My research findings revealed the longing of previously incarcerated individuals to be a part of the United States of America despite already being American. Some previously incarcerated individuals had a difficult time in prison and are having a difficult time as citizens who are no longer incarcerated. Though the second chance notion is often stated, it is not shown.

Some previously incarcerated individuals can find jobs and do well in life after prison. However, some cannot live a productive life according to society. Some

previously incarcerated individuals are harshly affected by the felony disenfranchisement law. Each time they are unable to cast their vote, they are denied a fundamental right as a citizen in the United States of America. Mississippi developed the felony disenfranchisement law with no intention of altering the law for the sake of rehabilitation, equality, and social equity.

Holmes County Mississippi citizens and political officials can do more than be disgruntled about the felony disenfranchisement law. Citizens of Mississippi can implement plans to advocate against the felony disenfranchisement law in Mississippi and create educational programs to deter criminal activities. The felony disenfranchisement law should be eliminated or altered to at least exclude nonviolent crimes. Rehabilitation should include the restoration of rights and privileges as a citizen of the United States.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of the research was to bring clarity and transparency regarding the participants' experiences. Some circumstances could not be controlled by me. Black Americans are more likely than White Americans to be incarcerated and convicted. Individuals who previously committed a felony crime under Mississippi's disenfranchisement law are not granted the right to vote but are required to pay taxes. This leaves Black communities underrepresented in the decision-making process. This study targeted the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws on Black communities in Mississippi. Therefore, the population did not include the White communities in Mississippi. Limitations for this study included the recruitment of participants.

I intended to recruit at least five willing participants for each category. This goal was not accomplished for two categories: political officials and previously incarcerated individuals. In addition, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic hindered the progress of this study. Another limitation of this study was the interpretation based on the experience of the participants. Participants' lived experiences and educational backgrounds played a role in this research. The results of this study were based on the participants' open and honest answers to the interview questions presented.

The willingness of political officials to share their personal experiences regarding voting and felony disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi was difficult to obtain. In addition, access to state political officials was also difficult. Though political channels helped me identify political officials who had an interest in the voting rights of previously incarcerated individuals, barriers existed. Some political officials were too busy to schedule a time to meet with me. In other cases, political officials did not want to officially record their discussion on the felony disenfranchisement laws. Despite having the confidentiality documentation, some political officials did not seem willing to take a chance on being documented.

Another limitation of this study was accessing previously incarcerated individuals who had committed a felony and had an interest in voting. Though I am well-known across Holmes County Mississippi as a community leader, I was faced with unforeseen barriers. Some previously incarcerated individuals choose to remain silent due to their current status in the community. In addition, the small-town environment of the county

created an atmosphere of secrecy and privacy. Some previously incarcerated citizens did not want anyone to know they were disenfranchised due to a previous felony conviction.

Recommendations

There is limited research regarding the effects of the disenfranchisement laws on voting in Mississippi's Black communities. Felony disenfranchisement laws were implemented by White supremacists to minimize the participation of Blacks in the decision-making process (Guenther, 2016; Nelson, 2013). Disenfranchisement laws that affect previously incarcerated individuals were put in place to limit the voting rights of Blacks in the United States (Chen, 2014). Contrarily, some areas have counted incarcerated individuals who do not have a right to vote as residents, which increased the population in a particular district. Such routine procedures decrease the population of incarcerated individuals' native community (Ebenstein, 2018). I recommend further research to measure whether Mississippi citizens care about the growing effects of the disenfranchisement law in Mississippi.

The current study highlighted the facts regarding the racial and ethnic disparity ratio for Black and White imprisonment in Mississippi. There are more Blacks imprisoned than Whites. Furthermore, taxation without representation affects the lives of previously incarcerated individuals who have committed one of the felony crimes listed in the disenfranchisement law in Mississippi. The results of this study can be used to further research racial disparities in Mississippi's criminal justice system. This study also highlighted the participants' perspectives regarding Black history, racism, inequality, and

social inequities. The results of this study may be used to further research the ongoing effects of racism in Mississippi Black communities.

Implications

Conclusions developed from the results of this study will be important to promote social change in Mississippi. Though the conversation regarding voting rights in America is ongoing, there is limited literature on the topic of felony disenfranchisement laws' effect on Black communities in Mississippi. In addition, there is limited information on the experiences of political officials and residents of Mississippi. The current study can be used to help political officials develop modern-day policies to address the felony disenfranchisement laws that affect previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony and completed sentencing. In addition, this study may challenge government officials to reexamine their political stance and their unbiased representation of all citizens. Also, the findings of this study may promote a closer observation of felony disenfranchisement laws' impact on predominately Black communities such as Holmes County Mississippi.

Taxation affects the lives of previously incarcerated individuals who have committed one of the felony crimes listed in the disenfranchisement law in Mississippi. The value placed on citizenship is questioned when a person does not have the right to vote. This qualitative study explored felony disenfranchisement laws and voting in Black communities in Mississippi. The results of this study may facilitate social change in Mississippi by challenging political officials and citizens to reexamine disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi and the precepts of the U.S. Constitution.

Citizens need to know the laws that exist and understand the effects of the laws. Not knowing the law exists does not remove its effects on an individual or community. Presenting information regarding the initial purpose of the felony disenfranchisement laws and their impact can be used to inspire all citizens to question the modern-day purpose of the laws that affect the voting privileges of previously incarcerated individuals. Exploring the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws and voting in Black communities in Mississippi can be used to encourage legislatures to implement strategies to allow taxation with representation for previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony.

This study shows the importance of knowing the laws that govern the United States of America and Mississippi. In addition, this study shows the ongoing efforts to silence the voices of Black Americans. I desire to help create social change that will promote equality, justice, and social equity for everyone, but there must be efforts made by everyone. The current study may lead community leaders to address the ongoing criminal activities that affect the voting rights of individuals in the Black community.

Conclusion

Since the development of Amendments 14th and 15th of the United States Constitution in 1868 and 1870, voting rights for citizens in the United States of America have been protected. However, the right to vote has not been granted easily to everyone. For Blacks and non-Whites in the United States of America, voting is equivalent to being a citizen and having a voice in the decision-making process (Blessett, 2015). From Black individuals being enslaved and freed to those previously incarcerated in modern-day

society, a desire to have a voice in the decision-making process has been challenging. Though felony disenfranchisement laws were written as a neutral policy, Black communities' voting privileges are affected more than White communities' voting privileges (Cresswell, 2014; Powell, 2017; Wilson et al., 2015). The lack of voting privileges in Black communities leaves them underrepresented in the decision-making process (Chung, 2019).

Felony disenfranchisement laws have been documented as legal law in the United States despite the implementation of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Blessett, 2015). The effect of its existence is rooted in racism to marginalize democracy and control the decision-making process (Nelson, 2013; Guenther, 2016). Research has also documented an inconsistency in the Constitution and felony disenfranchisement laws as it relates to citizenship (Douglas, 2014). Though each citizen has the right to vote, a previously incarcerated individual who has committed a felony despite completing sentencing may not be eligible to vote unless the governor reestablishes eligibility in Mississippi (Miss. Const. Ann. Art. 12, § 253).

The literature review offers strategies used to locate articles for future research. Contents of the literature review present information that explores the theoretical framework, as well as information that targets the effects of disenfranchisement laws on the voting privileges of Blacks in America. It also provides an understanding of the history of Black in America and the right to vote as well as the initial purpose of disenfranchisement laws that now affect previously incarcerated individuals in the United States of America.

The voting rights for Black Americans have caused them to face turmoil and discomforts that Whites have not had to face. Trials and tribulations have often involved intimidation, threats, deaths, and voter suppression. Though the Constitution governs the legalities of the United States of America, it also allows states to have some governing power to implement laws. Previously incarcerated individuals in the state of Mississippi are not given all the rights as citizens due to felony disenfranchisement restrictions. The Black population in Mississippi does not reflect potential voter turnout due to voter suppression and felony disenfranchisement laws.

The history of Blacks in America began with slavery and continues to include oppression camouflaged by incarceration and disenfranchisement laws. The literature review presents the progress states have made to ensure ex-felons can take part in the decision-making process. Mississippi has not eliminated or altered its felony disenfranchisement laws which leave communities underrepresented in the decision-making process. The review gives a reflection on disenfranchisement law and voting rights in Mississippi and its effects on Mississippi's Black communities. The review further acknowledges techniques used to enforce direct disenfranchisement, as well as the cases brought before the U.S. Supreme Court to eliminate the felony disenfranchisement law that prevents an individual or previously incarcerated individual from voting despite completing their sentencing.

The literature research for this study was conducted using numerous sources of information. However, no literature was found that referred explicitly to disenfranchisement laws and voting rights in Mississippi. Unfortunately, studies

dedicated to Mississippi's position and current purpose of felony disenfranchisement and its effects on the Black community are limited. The information for this literature review is limited to the creation of felony disenfranchisement laws, as well as the impact of those laws on Black Americans and voting privileges. The research hopes to provide readers with information concerning disenfranchisement laws affecting the voting rights of Blacks in Mississippi. Details of how this research gap was filled are presented in Chapter 3.

The previous chapters introduced felony disenfranchisement and its effect on voting rights in the United States of America. What has now been explored are the thoughts of Mississippians. This study explored the felony disenfranchisement laws and voting rights in Mississippi's Black communities. Details of this study could facilitate social change within the state of Mississippi by inspiring political officials and citizens to reexamine disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi and the precepts of the U.S. Constitution. Presenting information regarding the initial purpose of the felony disenfranchisement laws and their impact may also inspire all citizens to question the modern-day purpose of the laws that affect the voting privileges of those previously incarcerated for committing a felony under the Mississippi Constitution despite completing sentencing. Currently, taxation without representation does not reflect the livelihood of an individual who has completed sentencing for the felony crime committed under the felony disenfranchisement law. The significance of exploring the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws and voting within Black communities in Mississippi may

encourage legislatures to implement strategies to allow taxation with representation for previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony.

A qualitative methodology was chosen to gain more information on a topic that has not been fully explored. The study utilized the perspectives of 11 Mississippi residents, political officials, and previously incarcerated individuals who completed sentencing. Having an in-depth conversation with each participant allowed me to explore experiences and relay their perspectives to the readers of the study. Therefore, my role was to protect the identity of each participant, remain neutral and unbiased, respect all participants, and keep notes throughout the research process. Participants were directed to a counselor for support if this study opened the door to mental anxieties.

Social construction framework (SCF) has been identified as the framework for this research. This theory focuses on specific groups of individuals who are affected negatively or positively. The effects may also be interpreted as a burden or a benefit to a defined population. This framework was used to gain insight into the policy processes used to implement the disenfranchisement law in Mississippi and its effects on Black communities. SCF also allowed me to explore any effects race and ethnicity have on policymakers and communities as it relates to the development of felony disenfranchisement laws. Furthermore, this framework examined the experiences of Mississippi's political officials, residents, and previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony as it pertains to voting and felony disenfranchisement laws. Examining such experience will allow the researcher to explore any burdens felony disenfranchisement laws place on Mississippi's Black communities.

In this study, I considered several important factors, including race, educational background, employment status, voting status, and political affiliations. All participants were thoroughly verified. We specifically recruited adult males and females who willingly volunteered to participate. To be eligible, individuals had to have been residents of Mississippi for at least 10 years, and they must have lived in Holmes County, Mississippi for at least 5 years. Additionally, all participants were required to be at least 21 years old and were identified through their passports, driver's licenses, or legal identification cards. Political officials were confirmed through the Mississippi State Election Office. Before participating, each individual completed a consent form, and their confidentiality will be protected throughout the study. All documents, equipment, discoveries, and transcripts will remain confidential for at least 7 years.

Letters, newspaper ads, and social media ads will be used to gain interest from participants as demonstrated in Appendix A: Letters to Participants and Appendix B: Social Media and Newspaper Notice. Conducting in-depth face-to-face interviews provided me with multiple perspectives and an accurate understanding of the research topic. Furthermore, this type of interview allowed me to obtain detailed information. Each interview was conducted in a quiet and private secure location in Holmes County, MS. However, the time and location were altered to accommodate a participant's needs.

In this study, it was important to discuss bias. I am a black woman who used to work as a Victim Assistance Coordinator and Pretrial Diversion Supervisor for a District Attorney's Office in Mississippi. Additionally, I was a Democratic Precinct Chairperson and an elected Board of Education member for my district. During the 2016 Presidential

Election, I organized a voter registration rally to encourage citizens to exercise their right to vote. It was at this point that I discovered low voter turnout in Mississippi was not solely due to disinterest amongst Black community members, but also due to the restrictions on convicted felons' voting rights. Voting has always been a significant priority for me. I am mindful of my past experiences and managed them appropriately.

Research findings contained information regarding the participant's structural description, as well as a description of the group in its entirety. Chapter 4 provided detailed narratives for Holmes County previously incarcerated individuals (Group 1), Holmes County residents (Group 2), and Mississippi political officials (Group 3) who participated in a face-to-face interview. This detailed information contains the perspective of the participants. Coding in research helped give meaning to data. The inductive approach allowed me to collect the data before presenting codes. The interview focused on research questions. In addition, the themes established for this study were used to address the key points for each group category. Appendices D, E, and F contain the raw data and additional themes for each group. The interpretation of each category was shared in Chapter 4 to help address the research questions for this study.

This study provided perspectives of previously incarcerated individuals and residents of Holmes County, MS, and political officials of Mississippi. The description for each code gives an overall perspective of each category. The clear and concise breakdown gives a comparative view of this qualitative study. The findings contribute to social changes that affect society and the Mississippi State Constitution. The conclusions

and recommendations for each focus group will contribute to the research surrounding the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws on Black communities in Mississippi.

As a result of this study, there are perspectives from people who feel they are directly and indirectly affected by the felony disenfranchisement law in Mississippi. The result of the study can promote the reexamination of the felony disenfranchisement law and its intentions. The perspectives of each participant were comparably similar for certain themes. With this study, people will gain knowledge about Mississippi felony disenfranchisement law and its overall effects on the Black community in Holmes County, MS through the lens of Mississippi political officials and the people in Holmes County, MS.

References

- Alexander, M. (2012). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. The New Press.
- Benson-Smith, D. (2005). Jezebels, matriarchs, and welfare queens: The Moynihan report of 1965 and the social construction of African American women in welfare policy. *Deserving and entitled: Social constructions and public policy*, (pp. 243-259). State University of New York Press
- Berry, M. F. (2014). Demanding democracy: The continuing struggle for the right to vote. *Reviews in American History*, 42(3), 541–546.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/rah.2014.0064>
- Blessett, B. (2015). Disenfranchisement: Historical underpinnings and contemporary manifestations. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 39(1), 3-50.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24372042>
- Boothe K. & Harrison K. (2009) The Influence of Institutions on Issue Definition: Children's Environmental Health Policy in the United States and Canada, *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 11:3, 287-307. DOI: 10.1080/13876980903220736
- Brennan Center for Justice. (2019). *Criminal disenfranchisement laws across the United States*. <https://www.brennancenter.org/criminal-disenfranchisement-laws-across-united-states>
- Chen, E. J. (2014). Restoring rights for reproductive justice. *American University Journal of Gender, Social Policy, and the Law*, 22(2), 281.

Chung, J. (2019). *Felony disenfranchisement: A primer*. The Sentencing Project.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/591efd8ec534a5abb5117718/t/5aba9a1daa4a99d1acfbdbb3/1522178621662/Felony-Disenfranchisement-Primer.pdf>

Cresswell, S. (2014). Disfranchisement laws in Mississippi. *Salem Press Encyclopedia*.

Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. SAGE Publications.

Crotty, W. J. (2014, August 28-31). *Black representation in the south: The voting rights act and the supreme court*. 2014 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D. C. United States

<https://ssrn.com/abstract=2454978>

Daniels, A. (2017). Felon disenfranchisement: The scarlet label and its deep roots in facilitating vote dilution in America. *Charleston Law Review*, 11 (4), 525.

Douglas, J. A. (2014). The right to vote under state constitutions. *Vanderbilt Law Review*, 67(1), 89–149. <https://vanderbiltlawreview.org/lawreview/2014/01/the-right-to-vote-under-state-constitutions/>

Douglas, J. A. (2016). State judges and the right to vote. *Ohio State Law Journal*, 77(1),

1. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2495078>

Duvernay, A. (Director). (2016). *13TH* (Film). Kandoo Films.

Ebenstein, J. A. (2018). The geography of mass incarceration: Prison gerrymandering and the dilution of prisoners' political representation. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*,

45(2), 323. <https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/ulj/vol45/iss2/2>

- Erickson, F. (2011). Chapter 3: A history of qualitative inquiry in social and educational research. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 43-58). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ewald, A. C. (2009). Criminal disenfranchisement and the challenge of American federalism. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 39(3), 527–556.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/publius/pjp009>
- Ewald, A. C. (2012). ‘Civil death’: The ideological paradox of criminal disenfranchisement law in the United States. *Wisconsin Law Review*, 1045–1132.
<https://ssrn.com/abstract=2028335>
- Fosten, G. K. (2016). Perspectives on social inequality, criminal justice, and race in the United States: A critical analysis. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 9(9), 122–141.
<http://jpanafrican.org/docs/vol9no9/9.9-Nov-9-Fosten.pdf>
- Gill, M. J., Gill, D. J., & Roulet, T. J. (2018). Constructing trustworthy historical narratives: Criteria, principles and techniques. *British Journal of Management*, 29(1), 191. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12262>
- Graff, G. (2017). The intergenerational trauma of slavery and its aftereffects: The question of reparations. *The Journal of Psychohistory*, 44(4), 256–268.
- Guenther, L. (2016). The productive failure of felon disenfranchisement: Dilts’ punishment and inclusion. *Theory & Event*, 19(3).
<https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/623996>
- Hayden v. Pataki, 449 F.3d 305 (2d Cir. 2006). <https://casetext.com/case/hayden-v-pataki>

- Hayter, J. M. (2014). From intent to effect: Richmond, Virginia, and the protracted struggle for voting rights, 1965-1977. *Journal of Policy History: JPH*, 26(4), 534-567. [dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0898030614000256](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030614000256)
- Heath, A. (2017). Cruel and unusual punishment: Denying ex-felons the right to vote after serving their sentences. *American University Journal of Gender, Social Policy, And the Law*, 25 (3), 327.
<https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1691&context=jgspl>
- Herron, P. E. (2015). Slavery and freedom in American state constitutional development. *Journal of Policy History*, 27(2), 301–336. doi:10.1017/S0898030615000056
- Hicks, W. D., McKee, S. C., Sellers, M. D., & Smith, D. A. (2015). A principle or a strategy? Voter identification laws and partisan competition in the American states. *Political Research Quarterly*, 68(1), 18–33.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912914554039>
- Hoffman, B. (2019, April 26). Voting is a right that shouldn't be taken away.
<https://www.aclu.org/blog/voting-rights/voting-right-shouldnt-be-taken-away>
- Hunter v. Underwood, 105 S. Ct. 1916, 1919 (1985).
<https://www.oyez.org/cases/1984/84-76>
- Johnson, B. A. (2016). Voting rights and the history of institutionalized racism: Criminal disenfranchisement in the United States and South Africa. *Georgia Journal of International & Comparative Law*, 44(2), 401.
<https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/gjicl/vol44/iss2/6>

- Johnson, B. S. (2017). From cotton field to schoolhouse: African American education in Mississippi. *American Educational History Journal*, 44(1), 125-129.
- Johnson v. Governor of the State of Fla., 405 F. 3d 1214, 1227 (11th Cir. 2005).
<https://casetext.com/case/johnson-v-governor-of-state-of-florida>
- Jones, B. P. (2016). Black lives matter and the struggle for freedom. *Monthly Review*, 68(4), 1-8. <https://monthlyreview.org/2016/09/01/black-lives-matter-and-the-struggle-for-freedom/>
- King, B. A. & Erickson, L. (2016). Disenfranchising the enfranchised: Exploring the relationship between felony disenfranchisement and African American voter turnout. *Journal of Black Studies*. doi:10.1177/0021934716659195
- Ispahani, L. (2006). *Out of Step with the World: An Analysis of Felony Disenfranchisement in the U.S. and Other Democracies*, ACLU.ORG 11 (May 2006) [PDF file].
https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/votingrights/outofstep_20060525.pdf
- Lewis, Nicole. (2019, June 11) “*In Just Two States, All Prisoners Can Vote. Here’s Why Few Do.*” The Marshall Project.
<https://www.themarshallproject.org/2019/06/11/in-just-two-states-all-prisoners-can-vote-here-s-why-few-do>
- López-Guerra, C. (2014). *Democracy and disenfranchisement: The morality of electoral exclusion*. Oxford University Press.

- Lüthi, B. (2016). "You don't have to ride Jim Crow": The freedom riders of 1961 and the dilemma of mobility. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 29(4), 383-401. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-016-9238-2>
- Macdonald, M. (2009). Disproportionate punishment: The legality of criminal disenfranchisement under the international covenant on civil and political rights. *The George Washington International Law Review*, 40(4), 1375-1408.
- Mack, L. R., Perry-Mitchell, T., Thompson-Rogers, K., & Foster-Pierre, D. (2016). Sick and tired of being sick and tired: Challenges to the voting rights act of 1965 & why we must continue to march. *Making Connections: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cultural Diversity*, 16(2), 18-32.
- May, G. (2013). *Bending toward justice: The voting rights act and the transformation of American democracy*. Basic Books.
- McCahon, D. S. (2016). Combating misinformation in the ex-felon population. *Probation Journal*, 63(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0264550515620690>
- McDurmon, J. (2017). *The problem of slavery in Christian America*. American Vision Press.
- McGloin, S. (2008). The trustworthiness of case study methodology. *Nurse Researcher*, 16(1), 45-55.
- Miss. Const. Ann. Art. 12, § 253. (1890).
- Mohajan, H. K. (2017). Two criteria for good measurements in research: Validity and reliability. *Annals of Spiru Haret University Economic Series*, 17(4), 59. <https://doi.org/10.26458/1746>

- Nelson, J. S. (2013). The first amendment, equal protection, and felon disenfranchisement: A new viewpoint. *Florida Law Review*, 65(1), 111. <https://scholarship.law.ufl.edu/flr/vol65/iss1/3>
- Noble, H., & Smith, J. (2014). Qualitative data analysis: a practical example. *Evidence-Based Nursing*, 17(1), 2–3. <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2013-101603>
- Nunn, R. L. (2005). Lock them up and throw away the vote. *Chicago Journal of International Law*, 5(2), 763-784. <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cjil/vol5/iss2/20>
- Ochs, H. L. (2006). “Colorblind” policy in black and white: racial consequences of disenfranchisement policy. *Policy Studies Journal*, 34(1), 81–93. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2006.00146.x>
- Office of the Governor. (2018, April 24). Governor Cuomo signs executive order to restore voting rights to New Yorkers on parole. <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-signs-executive-order-restore-voting-rights-new-yorkers-parole>
- Pickett, O. W. (2016). “We were all prisoners of the system”: William Winter, Susan Glisson, and the founding of the William Winter institute for racial reconciliation. *Southern Quarterly*, 54(1), 150-169. <https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/643248>.
- Porter, N. D. (2016) *State Advances in Criminal Justice Reform*, The Sentencing Project, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/policy-brief/state-advances-in-criminal-justice-reform-2016/>

- Powell, L. L. (2017). Concealed motives: Rethinking fourteenth amendment and voting rights challenges to felon disenfranchisement. *Michigan Journal of Race & Law*, 22(2), 383–410. <https://doi.org/10.36643/mjrl.22.2.concealed>
- Purnell, D. (2013). Examining disparate impact discrimination on ex-offenders of color across voting, government policy and aid receipt, employment, and housing. *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy*, 1-15.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. Sage Publications.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Ruth, T., Matusitz, J., & Simi, D. (2017). Ethics of disenfranchisement and voting rights in the US: Convicted felons, the homeless, and immigrants. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 42(1), 56–68. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-016-9346-6>
- Schneider, A. L., Ingram, H., & DeLeon, P. (2014). Democratic policy design: social construction of target populations. In P. A. Sabatier, & C. M. Weible (Eds.), *Theories of the policy process (3rd ed.)* (pp. 151-182). Westview Press.
- Schneider, A., & Sidney, M. (2009). What is next for policy design and social construction theory? *Policy Studies Journal*, 37(1), 103–119. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2008.00298.x>
- Schwartz, B. (2015). The emancipation proclamation: Lincoln’s many second thoughts. *Society*, 52(6), 590–603. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-015-9954-7>

Shelby County v. Holder, 570 U.S. 529 (2013).

<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/570/529/>

Sigler, M. (2014). Defensible disenfranchisement. *Iowa Law Review*, 99(4), 1725-1744.

<https://ilr.law.uiowa.edu/print/volume-99-issue-4/defensible-disenfranchisement>

Simmons v. Galvin, 575 F.3d 24 (1st Cir. 2009). [https://casetext.com/case/simmons-v-](https://casetext.com/case/simmons-v-galvin-2)

[galvin-2](https://casetext.com/case/simmons-v-galvin-2)

Sipe, L. R., & Ghiso, M. P. (2004). Developing conceptual categories in classroom descriptive research: some problems and possibilities. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 35(4), 472–485. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2004.35.4.472>

The Sentencing Project. (2017a). *Criminal justice facts*. Retrieved September 30, 2017, from <http://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>.

The Sentencing Project. (2017b). *Felony disenfranchisement rate*. Retrieved August 18, 2019 from <http://www.sentencingproject.org/the-facts/#rankings?dataset-option=FDR>

The Sentencing Project. (2019). *Disenfranchisement News: Florida lawmakers pass new “poll tax” for voting rights restoration*. Retrieved from <https://www.sentencingproject.org/news/disenfranchisement-news-florida-lawmakers-pass-new-poll-tax-voting-rights-restoration/>

The Sentencing Project. (2023). *Detailed data tool*. Retrieved May 3, 2023, from <https://www.sentencingproject.org/research/detailed-state-data-tool/>

Tolson, F. (2012). Reinventing sovereignty? Federalism as a constraint on the voting rights act. *Vanderbilt Law Review*, 65(4), 1195.

<https://scholarship.law.vanderbilt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1346&context=vlr>

Tolson, F. (2014). The constitutional structure of voting rights enforcement. *Washington Law Review*, 89(2), 413. <https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/wlr/vol89/iss2/5>

Trahan-Liptak, H. (2014). Prohibiting barriers to the booth: The case for limited nationwide preclearance under a modified Voting Rights Act. *Boston College Journal of Law and Social Justice*, 34(1), 151.

<https://lira.bc.edu/files/pdf?fileid=01f06b4e-1654-461e-9aea-5303cad1d83d>

Uggen, C., Larson, R., Shannon, S. (2016, October 6). *6 Million Lost Voters: State-Level Estimates of Felony Disenfranchisement, 2016*. The Sentencing Project.

<https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2022/08/6-Million-Lost-Voters.pdf>

U.S. Census Bureau. (2022, July 1). *QuickFacts*.

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/holmescountymississippi,MS/PST045222>

U.S. Census Bureau. (2018, December 06). *Median household income, poverty rates and computer and internet use*. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2018/2013-2017-acs-5year.html>

U.S. Const. amend. XIV.

U.S. Department of Justice. (2017a). *Attorney General Eric Holder Delivers Remarks on Criminal Justice Reform at Georgetown University Law Center*.

<https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-eric-holder-delivers-remarkson-criminal-justice-reform-georgetown>

U.S. Department of Justice. (2017b). *Before the Voting Rights Act*.

<https://www.justice.gov/crt/introduction-federal-voting-rights-laws>

Varnum, T. G. (2008). Let's not jump to conclusions: Approaching felon disenfranchisement challenges under the voting rights act. *Michigan Journal of Race & Law*, 14(1), 109-142. <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mjrl/vol14/iss1/3/>

Voting Rights Act of 1965, Pub. L. 89-110, 79 Stat. 437 (1965).

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-350/pdf/COMPS-350.pdf>

Whitt, M. S. (2017). Felon disenfranchisement and democratic legitimacy. *Social Theory & Practice*, 43(2), 283–311. <https://doi.org/10.5840/soctheorpract20172145>

Wilson, D. C., Owens, M. L., & Davis, D. W. (2015). How racial attitudes and ideology affect political rights for felons. *Du Bois Review-Social Science Research On Race*, 12(1), 73–93. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X14000332>

Yablon, R. (2017). Voting, spending, and the right to participate. *Northwestern University Law Review*, 111(3), 655–714.

<https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/nulr/vol111/iss3/2>

Yick Wo v. Hopkins, 118 US 356 (1886).

<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/118/356/>

Zaman, S. (2015). Violence and exclusion: Felon disenfranchisement as a badge of slavery. *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*, 46(2), 233–277.

<https://ssrn.com/abstract=2612620>

Ziegler, R. (2011). Legal outlier, again? U.S. felon suffrage: Comparative and international human rights perspectives. *Boston University International Law Journal*, 29, 197. <https://www.bu.edu/ilj/files/2014/05/Ziegler-finalpdf.pdf>

Appendix A: Letters to Participants

Letter to the Head of the Republican and Democratic Party

Date:

Name of PAO
Address

Dear (Name),

My name is April Masha Jones, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research to explore the disenfranchisement laws affecting the voting rights of blacks in Mississippi. There are a number of studies that have been conducted regarding the origin of felony disenfranchisement and its effects on the Black community. What has not been explored are the thoughts of Mississippians. This study will explore the purpose of the felony disenfranchisement laws and current views regarding the relationship between the felony disenfranchisement laws and the voting rights within the Black communities of Mississippi. Exploring the impact of the felony disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi will give additional insight that may enlighten the political officials and citizens in the state.

Your support in conducting this much needed research is imperative. If you are willing to assist, I need for you to identify political officials who are familiar with the felony disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi. Identification of these political officials in Mississippi will provide a clear understanding of lawmakers and their modern-day views for research purposes. Once identified, I would like to meet with them to discuss the nature of this study. The participants of this study must be current lawmakers (Congress, Senator, or Representative), have been a registered voter for at least 10 years, and have a college degree. The participants are volunteers. Therefore, each participant may choose to participate. However, volunteers can discontinue participation at any time. Information discussed or provided for this study by participants is confidential.

Please feel free to contact me to discuss any concerns you may have, as well as your role in identifying participant for this research. You may reach me at (xxx)xxx-xxxx.

Sincerely,

April Masha Jones
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Letter to Participant

Date:

Name of Participant
Address

Dear (Name),

My name is April Masha Jones, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research to explore the disenfranchisement laws affecting the voting rights of blacks in Mississippi. There are a number of studies that have been conducted regarding the origin of felony disenfranchisement and its effects on the Black community. What has not been explored are the thoughts of Mississippians. This study will explore the purpose of the felony disenfranchisement laws and current views regarding the relationship between the felony disenfranchisement laws and the voting rights within the Black communities of Mississippi. Exploring the impact of the felony disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi will give additional insight that may enlighten the political officials and citizens in the state.

I understand that your time is important to you, and I appreciate your consideration to participate in this study. To fully understand the modern-day thoughts of Mississippians, face-to-face interviews will be conducted. Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes. All meetings will be held at a secure location in Pickens, MS and will not require you to do anything you don't feel comfortable doing. The day of the week for interviews will be Saturday until each participant is interviewed. However, the location and time may be altered to accommodate a participant's needs. The meetings are designed to get to know you and learn about your experience of being a citizen of Mississippi and your thoughts regarding felony disenfranchisement and voting rights. All information gathered during our meetings will be kept strictly confidential.

Please feel free to contact me to discuss any concerns you may have, as well as your role in identifying participant for this research. You may reach me at (xxx)xxx-xxxx.

April Masha Jones
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University
Name of Participant
Address

Letter to Previously Incarcerated Individuals

Dear (Name),

My name is April Masha Jones, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research to explore the disenfranchisement laws affecting the voting rights of blacks in Mississippi. There are a number of studies that have been conducted regarding the origin of felony disenfranchisement and its effects on the Black community. What has not been explored are the thoughts of Mississippians. This study will explore the purpose of the felony disenfranchisement laws and current views regarding the relationship between the felony disenfranchisement laws and the voting rights within the Black communities of Mississippi. Exploring the impact of the felony disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi will give additional insight that may enlighten the political officials and citizens in the state.

I understand that your time is important to you, and I appreciate your consideration to participate in this study. To fully understand the modern-day thoughts of Mississippians, face-to-face interviews will be conducted. Each interview will last approximately 30 minutes. All meetings will be held at a secure location in Pickens, MS and will not require you to do anything you don't feel comfortable doing. The day of the week for interviews will be Saturday until each participant is interviewed. However, the location and time may be altered to accommodate a participant's needs. The meetings are designed to get to know you as previously incarcerated person who committed a felony and completed sentencing. Also, the interviews are designed to learn about your experience of being citizen of Mississippi and your thoughts regarding felony disenfranchisement and voting rights. All information gathered during our meetings will be kept strictly confidential.

Please feel free to contact me to discuss any concerns you may have, as well as your role in identifying participant for this research. You may reach me at (xxx)xxx-xxxx.

April Masha Jones
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix B: Social Media and Newspaper Notice

Dear Citizens of Holmes County, Mississippi:

My name is April Masha Jones, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research to explore the disenfranchisement laws affecting the voting rights of blacks in Mississippi. There are a number of studies that have been conducted regarding the origin of felony disenfranchisement and its effects on the Black community. What has not been explored are the thoughts of Mississippians. This study will explore the purpose of the felony disenfranchisement laws and current views regarding the relationship between the felony disenfranchisement laws and the voting rights within the Black communities of Mississippi. Exploring the impact of the felony disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi will give additional insight that may enlighten the political officials and citizens in the state.

I understand that your time is important to you, and I appreciate your consideration to participate in this study. In order to fully understand the modern-day thoughts of Mississippians, face-to-face interviews will be conducted. Each session will last approximately 30 minutes. Following the completion of the face-to-face interviews, a follow-up interview may exist. All meetings will be held at a secure location in Pickens, MS and will not require you to do anything you don't feel comfortable doing. The day of the week for interviews will be Saturday until each participant is interviewed. However, the location and time may be altered to accommodate a participant's needs. The meetings are designed to simply get to know you and learn about your experience of being a citizen of Mississippi and your thoughts regarding felony disenfranchisement and voting rights. This study will include previously incarcerated individuals who committed a felony and completed sentencing, as well as citizens who have never committed a crime. All information gathered during our meetings will be kept strictly confidential.

Please contact me as soon as possible to schedule a date and time that we can meet. My telephone number is (XXX) XXX-XXXX. I look forward to hearing from you.

April Masha Jones
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview Identification: Holmes County, MS Residents

Date: _____ Location: _____

Name of Interviewer: __April Masha Jones_____

Name of Interviewee: _____HR-#_____ Gender: _____

Political Affiliation: _____ Level of Education: _____

Race: _____ Religion: _____ Age: _____

1. Please tell me how would you describe your family of origin and how they view or viewed voting.
2. As an adult, what are your thoughts about voting?
3. What are your thoughts regarding previously incarcerated individuals?
4. What does citizenship in the United States mean to you?
5. What has been your experience as a citizen and resident of Mississippi?
6. What are your thoughts regarding Black History in Mississippi?
7. What are your thoughts regarding the voting rights of previously incarcerated individuals?
8. Why do you think the felony disenfranchisement laws still exist?
9. If you were given the opportunity, what changes, if any, would you make to the felony disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi?
10. How would you describe race relations and equality for Black communities in Mississippi?
11. How would you feel if you did not have a right to vote but still required to pay taxes?

Interview Identification: Mississippi Political Officials

Date: _____ Location: _____

Name of Interviewer: __April Masha Jones_____

Name of Interviewee: _____MO-#_____ Gender: _____

Political Affiliation: _____ Level of Education: _____

Race: _____ Religion: _____ Age: _____

1. Please tell me how would you describe your family of origin and how they view or viewed voting.
2. As an adult, what are your thoughts about voting?
3. What are your thoughts regarding previously incarcerated individuals?
4. What does citizenship in the United States mean to you?
5. What has been your experience as a citizen and resident of Mississippi?
6. What are your thoughts regarding Black History in Mississippi?
7. What are your thoughts regarding the voting rights of previously incarcerated individuals?
8. Why do you think the felony disenfranchisement laws still exist?
9. As a political official, what are the effects of felony disenfranchisement laws on voting rights for Black communities in Mississippi?
10. As a political official, how beneficial have the felony disenfranchisement laws been for Mississippi?
11. If you were given the opportunity, what changes, if any, would you make to the felony disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi?
12. How would you describe race relations and equality for Black communities in Mississippi?
13. How would you feel if you did not have a right to vote but still required to pay taxes?

Interview Identification: Holmes County, MS Previously Incarcerated Individuals

Date: _____ Location: _____

Name of Interviewer: __April Masha Jones_____

Name of Interviewee: _____HI-#_____ Gender: _____

Political Affiliation: _____ Level of Education: _____

Race: _____ Religion: _____ Age: _____

1. Please tell me how would you describe your family of origin and how they view or viewed voting.
2. As an adult, what are your thoughts about voting?
3. What are your thoughts regarding previously incarcerated individuals?
4. What does citizenship in the United States mean to you?
5. What has been your experience as a citizen and resident of Mississippi?
6. What are your thought regarding Black History in Mississippi?
7. What are your thoughts regarding the voting rights of previously incarcerated individuals?
8. Why do you think the felony disenfranchisement laws still exist?
9. How do you think lawmakers in Mississippi should address the felony disenfranchisement laws and the voting rights for previously incarcerated individuals who have completed sentencing?
10. As a previously incarcerated individual, how does knowing you cannot vote affect you and your rehabilitation?
11. If you were given the opportunity, what changes, if any, would you make to the felony disenfranchisement laws in Mississippi?
12. How would you describe race relations and equality for Black communities in Mississippi?

13. If you have ever voted, explain your first experience activating your right to vote?
14. If given the opportunity, what would casting your vote today mean to you?

Appendix D: Holmes County Residents' Themes

Themes	Descriptions
Residents' perspective on Black History in Mississippi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black History in Mississippi is deep and important. • Black people struggled to make ends meet. • Participants are bothered that some people want to eliminate the truth about Black History in America.
Residents' perspective of citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizenship means everything. • It means freedom and it is a privilege to be an American. • Citizenship for Blacks means it was earned through slavery.
Residents' perspective on felony disenfranchisement and its existence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participants were not sure why it existed. Others believe it was good for the Jim Crow era. • It pushes people back into the system and to reiterate that they do not matter. • Used to keep whites in control.
Residents' lived experiences in MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participants have had a positive experience, but others have not. • There are things people experienced others did not. • Racism in Mississippi was once on a large scale, but not it is not so visible. • However, family connection plays a major role on the living experience in Mississippi.
Family Background of Black Citizens in Holmes County, MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families voted all the time. • Voting was essential. Family told us it was important to vote. • Participants were directed to get registered to vote at 18.
Residents' perspective on taxation without representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants would feel angry. • It is not better than being a slave. • People would feel less than a citizen.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was would just like it was when Black could not vote and didn't have any rights.
Residents' perspective of voting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voting is our right. • Voting is important. • A person should vote not matter where they are. • Some participants never missed voting.
Changes to the Felony Disenfranchisement Laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participants are willing to go along with the law. • Other participants would get rid of the laws. • If previously incarcerated individuals have served their time and turned their life around, they should be given the opportunity to vote. • If a previously incarcerated individual can travel and can walk any town, individuals should be able to vote.
Views on racism and equality in Mississippi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racism still exists, but it is not as open as it was back in the day. It still exists and is just as powerful. • There's still room for improvement between the races and equality. • There's a difference between the treatment of people base on race in the workforce.
Residents' perspective of previously incarcerated Black Americans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If they have served their time, they should be able to vote. • They should not be denied the right to vote. • They have already paid the penalty for what they did. • There's no need to keep punishing them. • Everyone deserves a second chance

Residents' perspective on voting rights for previously incarcerated individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants believes it depends on the crime.• If the defense wasn't so great, they should be able to vote.• Previously incarcerated individuals should be able to vote once they serve their time.• They should be given as chance to vote again.
---	--

Appendix E: Holmes County Previously Incarcerated Individuals' Themes

Themes	Descriptions
Previously incarcerated Blacks' perspective on citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizenship doesn't mean too much. • Citizenship means a lot. • Citizenship is everything.
Previously incarcerated Blacks' perspective on felony disenfranchisement law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Felony Disenfranchisement Law is a white man's law. • White people are trying to hold Black people back. • People should still have a right to vote. • If laws could be change, participants would restore voting privileges to those previously incarcerated and those incarcerated.
Previously incarcerated Blacks' perspective on voting in Mississippi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant felt joy. • Voting does count. • Voting means a whole lot. • Voters can vote the way they want.
Previously incarcerated Blacks' response to lawmakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant feels they did their time and should be able to vote like citizens. • People like us should be allowed to vote. • Despite being previously incarcerated, people should still be allowed to vote.
Effects of not being able to vote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants feel as though they don't have a say. • Participants feel they should have a right to vote but can't. • It is a bad feeling. It is not right.
Benefits of eliminating the felony disenfranchisement laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant would feel like a citizen. • It would mean the world if voting rights were restored.

Views on Previously Incarcerated individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants don't want to be locked up anymore.• Prison was hard and rough.• Individual should have a right just like everyone else.• They are human.
Views on racism and equality in Mississippi	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participants feels poor and badly stuck.• Racism still exists and it will not change.• There will be racism everywhere.
perspective on voting rights for previously incarcerated individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Everyone deserves to vote not matter how hard the crime.• They should have their right to vote.

Appendix F: Mississippi Political Officials' Themes

Themes	Descriptions
Effects of the disenfranchisement laws on previously incarcerated individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has not been beneficial to the Black community. • Participants see the racism in the law. • The government officials in charge like what the law does. The law is harsh and makes previously incarcerated individuals feel they are nothing because they have no rights. • Previously incarcerated individuals' rights have been taken away. • The law is a way to silence Black young men so they would not be active participants in the workforce or family life.
Political officials' perspective on Black communities and its history	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black history is not being taught or told truthfully. • Participant views reflect weariness regarding the repetitious • Black history programs that only talk about forefathers' successes and losses. • Youth in the community should be taught how they can pave the way.
Political Officials' perspective of citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blacks were brought to the United States unwillingly. They are here to take and will make the best of it. • Citizenship means being a part of the great U.S.A and having all the rights according to the constitution. • Citizenship means you have a voice.
Effects of the disenfranchisement laws on previously incarcerated individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has not been beneficial to the Black community. • Participants see the racism in the law.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government officials in charge like what the law does. The law is harsh and makes previously incarcerated individuals feel they are nothing because they have no rights. • Previously incarcerated individuals' rights have been taken away. • The law is a way to silence Black young men so they would not be active participants in the workforce or family life been taken away. There's a stigma on people have served time in jail. it was a way to silence Black young men so they would not be an active participant in the workforce or family life.
Political officials' perspective on felony disenfranchisement law existence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black votes would be a push for the minority. The minority would be the majority. • Racism is still alive, and the law is a way to silence a young Black man
Political Officials' perspective on Taxation without representation in Mississippi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants would fight for the right to vote. • Participants would refuse to pay taxes. • Paying taxes and voting work together.
Political officials' perspective on voting rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voting is important. • People should be educated on voting. • Each vote counts and elections are won by one vote.
Political officials' perspective on racism and equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racism is systematic. • Most Black communities are not prospering. • Racism appears worse. • Participants feel Blacks are further back than they were in the 60s

Political officials' perspective on previously incarcerated individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Everyone should be given a second chance.• Previously incarcerated individuals are labeled when they committed a crime and served time in prison.• There should not be a label on a previously incarcerated individual if they have served their time in prison.• If a previously incarcerated individual has served their time in prison, they should be awarded a second chance by society.
Political officials' perspective on voting rights for previously incarcerated individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Previously incarcerated individuals should not be disenfranchised.• Voting rights should be restored.• Dependent on the crime, previously incarcerated individuals should be allowed to vote.