

Ellen Birkett Lindeen on

Georgia on My Mind

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Special Edition



Photo by Michael Scott Milner

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Georgia on My Mind

By Ellen Birkett Linden

On January 5, Georgia voters will cast ballots for their two new Senators and decide on the balance of power in the United States Senate and thus, Congress.

As of the 2020 election and Democrats gaining one

seat Republican Mitch McConnell controls the Senate with 50 Republicans and 48 Democrats (which includes two who vote with the Democrats).

Thus the votes in Georgia will either give McConnell continuing control or, if Georgia elects two Democrats in their runoff, the power will shift to the Democrats in the Senate because the new Vice-President following the January 20 inauguration, Kamala Harris, is a Democrat and will cast any tie-breaking votes.

McConnell not only can

control whether a bill passes or not, he can prevent a vote from even coming to the floor. He has done this in many cases.

McConnell prevented a vote from even occurring on Merrick Garland's nomination for more than nine months.

In February 2020, he admitted there were 395 House bills sitting on his desk; he said, "We're not going to pass those."

Most recently, on December 30, he said that Congress had given enough money to help people during the pandemic, and he would not bring the



GEORGIA

UNITED STATES SENATE RUNOFF ELECTION



bill for \$2,000 payments to the floor.

In other words, one man who was elected in Kentucky is controlling whether all elected members of the Senate can do the people's work and vote on policy.

Georgia's elections are for two senators: Reverend Raphael Warnock (D) or Kelly Loeffler (R) and Jon Ossoff

(D) vs. David Perdue (R).

In the race of Reverend Warnock vs. Kelly Loeffler, consider these facts. Rev. Warnock is pastor of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church where Rev. Martin Luther King preached. He grew up in public housing and has advocated for both the expansion of health care and racial justice. Selected to give

the unity prayer at President Obama's second inauguration, Warnock was also the spiritual leader called to conduct Senator John Lewis' funeral. President Jimmy Carter's grandson, Jason Carter, is a parishioner at Warnock's church and counts him as a friend. Former President Jimmy Carter has endorsed Warnock.

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Loeffler has only been a Senator for a year, since Jan. 6, 2020, when she was appointed by Governor Brian Kemp. This governor's office has cancelled more than 1.4 million voter registrations since 2012, and during the 2018 election, Kemp held up more than 53,000 voter registration applications, with nearly 70 percent of those

attempted voter registrations belonging to African Americans. In a December 11 campaign event, Loeffler is seen posing with Chester Doles, a former Ku Klux Klan leader and member of the neo-Nazi National Alliance who was sentenced to prison in the 1990s for assaulting a Black man in Maryland. She says she did not know this about

him when she agreed to pose for a photo, but what kind of people is she attracting to her rallies? Insider trading allegations came after she sold stocks before the 2020 stock market crash using knowledge that she received in a closed Senate meeting. After she was reviewed by her fellow Republican majority Senators, she was not





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charged. She opposes Black Lives Matter.

In the other race, Jon Ossoff faces incumbent David Perdue.

Jon Ossoff is a former small business owner and currently an investigative journalist and media executive. He supports the New Civil Rights Act that strengthens civil rights and criminal justice reform. He backs marriage equality and clean energy. He is against jail for nonviolent drug offenses and the death penalty. He will work for fast and direct emergency economic relief in a crisis. His wife is an OB/GYN doctor at a metro Atlanta hospital who has survived COVID-19.

Perdue, who has been a Senator since 2015, made most of his money by outsourcing jobs to Asia while he says he supports American manufacturing. He was also linked to the 2020 Congressional insider trading scandal. Like Loeffler, he has also been implicated in the insider trading scandal, and similarly not charged by his fellow Senate colleagues.

The choice is yours, Georgians. We are counting on you.

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bonsee Community College where she taught Peace Studies & Conflict Resolution and Human Rights & Social Justice.

Civil Rights Groups Fight Back Against Georgia's Voter Purges

By Marjorie Cohn

The importance of the January 5 Senate runoff elections in Georgia cannot be overestimated. They will determine which party controls the Senate, with vast ramifications for economic policy, climate change, workers' rights, immigrants' rights, judicial nominees, and much more. The purging of nearly 200,000 registered voters from the voting rolls in Georgia could spell the difference between a Republican or a Democratic majority in the Senate.

In October 2019, Geor-

gia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger purged 313,243 people from the voter rolls, claiming they had moved from their registration residence, which is a ground for removal under the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA). But five top expert firms hired by the Palast Investigative Fund (PIF) determined that 198,351 of those Georgia voters had not moved at all and were therefore illegally purged from the rolls.

Georgia claimed that thousands of voters submitted postal change-of-address forms, but the U.S. Postal Service said they did not. In addition, Georgia allegedly violated the NVRA by employing an unlicensed contractor who used an incorrect list.

The PIF experts performed a name-by-name analysis of the addresses, using Advanced Address List Hygiene. John Lenser, an address hygiene consultant and CEO of American Fifth Act, testified that this is the industry standard for residential address verification. The experts called on more than 240 data sources. They found a 63.3 percent error rate. That doesn't even include tens of thousands of other voters purged for moving within their neighborhoods or apartment buildings, which constitutes a violation of the NVRA.

“Georgia’s officials have been exposed using a horrendously inaccurate list of voters whom they claim had filled out postal change-of-address forms,” investigative reporter Greg Palast told *Truthout*. “The Postal Service itself says they did not fill them out. They did not move. Yet, the political hacks that run Georgia’s elections have chosen this rotten trick to stop tens of thousands of citizens from voting.” The cancellations primarily impact young voters, lower income voters and people of color.

In a prior case, Georgia’s secretary of state admitted that voters could be restored to the rolls within 24 to 48 hours if necessary. Why, then, does Raffensperger refuse to reinstate those voters? “It is a cold, racially poisonous game, brazenly backed by the Republican National Committee lawyers desperate to bend the upcoming Senate runoff,” Palast said.

The voter registrations were cancelled because, the secretary of state alleged, (1) they had filed a change of address form with the National Change of Address (NCOA) registry; (2) election officials had received returned mail; and (3) Georgia law in effect at the time of the cancellations allowed removal if, after three years of no con-

tact, the voter did not return a confirmation postcard and then did not vote in the next two general elections; this is known as “use it or lose it.”

Four civil rights organizations, including Black Voters Matter and Rainbow PUSH Coalition, filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia (Atlanta) on December 2. The suit was based on the expert reporting of PIF and the official report of the ACLU of Georgia that was published on September 1. Those experts determined that 199,908 voters can still receive mail at their address of registration so it is not likely they have moved.

Plaintiffs are asking that the nearly 200,000 names allegedly wrongfully removed from the voter rolls be restored in time for the critical runoff election on January 5. In the alternative, they seek the appointment of a “special master” — an expert who would review the work of the PIF experts and the secretary of state’s list maintenance experts to decide which voters were wrongfully removed from the rolls and reinstate them.

The NVRA, which Congress enacted in 1993, declares that voting is a fundamental right. It requires that federal, state and local governments promote the exer-

cise of the right to vote. And it says:

Discriminatory and unfair registration laws and procedures can have a direct and damaging effect on voter participation in elections for Federal office and disproportionately harm voter participation by various groups, including racial minorities.

Georgia’s “use it or lose it” rule violates the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, the lawsuit claims, because it creates incorrect distinctions, thereby disenfranchising infrequent voters.

On December 16, the district court judge denied the plaintiffs’ request for an injunction for noncompliance with the NVRA’s 90-day notice requirement. But the judge said there were discrepancies and told the parties to sit down and try to settle the case.

On December 28, the plaintiffs filed a motion for reconsideration and a request to add the Palast Investigative Fund as a plaintiff in the case. A letter the plaintiffs’ attorney sent to Raffensperger on September 22 on behalf of PIF would then satisfy the 90-day notice period, which expired on December 23.

The plaintiffs are also asking the judge to order the secretary of state to count the provisional ballots of voters



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**BLACK
VOTERS
MATTER**

BlackVotersMatterFund.org



Drive-in rally for Georgia Senate candidate Rev. Raphael Warnock (Democrat)

Photo by Michael Scott Milner/Shutterstock.com

who try to vote but whose registrations were cancelled for moving when they didn't move, as documented by the plaintiffs' experts.

Although the secretary of state is willing to put people back on the voter rolls, there is no indication that will be accomplished before the January 5 runoff elections. The conservative Raffensperger is feeling the heat, having come under fire from Donald Trump, who called him "the enemy of the people" for refusing to join Trump's conspiracy to steal the presidential election from Joe Biden. They recounted the votes three times in Georgia and got the same result each time.

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit have assembled a legal team of committed attorneys, including C.K. Hoffler, president of the National Bar Association; Gerald Griggs, known as the "Justice Fighter"; iconic civil rights attorney Fred Gray; and Jeanne Mirer from New York.

"This case is the first of its kind to provide evidence that nearly two-thirds of the people that the state removed from the voter rolls for having moved, have not done so," Mirer told *Truthout*. "Despite losing the injunction, we will continue to fight to get these voters back on the rolls and to have their votes count in the Senatorial runoff."

LaTosha Brown, co-founder of Black Voters Matter Fund, said the removal of voters from the Georgia rolls is not an issue of voter fraud, but one of "[m]assive scale voter suppression."

Mirer said, "In addition to the efforts at voter suppression, which purging voter rolls represents, we need to think about the lesson from this last election. If the barriers to voting are eliminated, if the states make the franchise accessible, then people will vote." She noted, "That lesson is not lost on the Republicans, who believe they can only win if the vote is suppressed."

"The easing of restrictions



and expansion of access to voting during COVID will be targeted by Republicans starting at the beginning of the year,” Mirer predicts. “All voting rights groups need to get together and come up with a proactive strategy to protect and expand access to voting.” She cited the NAACP, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the League of Women Voters, Common Cause, the Brennan Center for Justice, the National Lawyers Guild, Latinx and Asian American groups, and labor unions as some of the organizations “laboring for years to protect the right to vote against all attacks.”

The voting rights groups have not joined together to

develop “a proactive strategy to expand voting rights given the amount of defense they have had to play,” Mirer said. She thinks it is more important than ever for progressive groups to work in coalition to combat the Republican efforts in 2021 and 2022 “to shut the doors to easing access to voting that COVID-19 opened.” Expect “an onslaught of moves to constrict access to the ballot.”

Meanwhile, Mirer’s legal team will continue the struggle to reinstate the purged Georgia voters to the rolls in time for the Senate runoff elections. Biden beat Trump in Georgia by 12,000 votes. The purged voters could de-

cide who wins on January 5.

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A small-town voter drive reveals low voter turnout

By Steven

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Michael Scott
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how decades of inequality shad- in rural Georgia

Rosenfeld



Commerce Street, once the heart of downtown Hawkinsville, Georgia, is easily overlooked. A visitor following state highways through the Pulaski County seat would glance at a row of faded brick buildings, awning-covered storefronts and dusty windows. Parking and getting out feels like stepping into an old postcard. In the sunlight's glare and morning quiet, you might not know that Black businesses were once barred from the street. Or that the Ku Klux Klan held some of its largest rallies in America nearby. Or the street's cluster of Black-owned businesses as a small-town triumph.

But quick assessments are out of sync with the rhythm of life and pace of change here. Below buildings painted in pastels, antique-style streetlamps and blue banners labeling Hawkinsville as a "Historic River Town" are two barbershops, a Southern bar and grill, a Caribbean takeout restaurant, clothes and gift shops, a small accounting firm, and a tobacco vape store. Most intriguing of all is what lies below the street's largest sign, "The Newberry Foundation."

The Hawkinsville African American Heritage Center is a Black history museum with a faded pine board saying "COLORED ENTRANCE" above its door. Next to it is the Plough and the Pew Reading Room, a ballroom-size space with a dozen large tables and shelves of leather-bound books. Its volumes range from *Jet* magazine, to the *Journal of Negro Education*, to *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. A block away is the county courthouse and its large Confederate monument.

On a recent Saturday before the December 7 registration deadline and the December 14 start of early voting, this crossroad of past and

present rural Georgia was the setting for a voter registration drive for the upcoming Senate runoffs on January 5. That contest will determine which political party holds the Senate's majority and with it, the fate of legislation proposed by President-elect Joe Biden. While the biggest concentrations of Democratic voters surround Atlanta, voting rights groups believe that rural communities of color could tip the balance or cement Democratic wins, if they voted.

A small colorful caravan drove to the center of Pulaski County, where the early unofficial results showed that 4,081 of its 5,687 registered voters cast ballots in the November 3 election. Most were white voters backing Republicans. Like the 1960s' Freedom Riders, whose buses crossed the South to register voters, the registration drive had a similar task: engage and turn out voters.

The drive was led by Fenika Miller, a calm and focused activist who has been working for decades to empower nearby communities of color and women. Miller runs Black Voters Matter's middle-Georgia office, whose colorful van was parked in front of the museum. Its eye-catching red, green and black exterior announced the We Got the Power tour, with the words "Black Voters Matter" and "Love" printed on the side of the van. Parked behind them was a purple Winnebago from Vote Equality, a group that promotes the Equal Rights Amendment. It had come from Virginia to boost the drive's visibility.

Both teams, mostly women, set up tables and chairs on a brick sidewalk. They laid out registration forms, flyers, and cards with voting information. They had gifts, such as T-shirts and other items saying, "Black Voters Matter," "It's About Us" and "Vote Equality!" to give to anyone registering or who pledged to talk to friends and family about voting. Then they waited. Mid-morning on a Saturday was not Commerce Street's busiest hour.



I have a dream

BLACK
VOTES
MATTER



BLACK
LYNCHING
MUST
GO.

LEFT TURN
YIELD
ON FLASHING
YELLOW
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VOT



SPECIAL EDITION

A deputy sheriff arrived and pretended to be irked that he did not know about this event. He was happy to stick around. A few Black women quietly found seats in the shade below the awnings. They knew each other, were active locally and supported the cause. Within 15 minutes, a tall, broad, affable middle-aged man with a professorial manner brought a tray of McDonald's coffee and introduced himself. He was Julius Johnson, the Newberry Foundation's founder, museum's creator, reading room curator and former U.S. State Department worker. He returned from overseas with his family to Hawkinsville, his ancestral hometown, after his father died.

When I spoke with Johnson, he lit up when I said I had come to town to see people working on voter outreach for the runoffs and not just report on it via Zoom. "You know, we have 159 counties in Georgia," he said. "And each county has different population numbers. And if you look at the results of the last election, it will tell you a story in terms of voter participation, and that might be a starting point."

Miller chose Hawkinsville because of Pulaski County's turnout numbers, she explained while setting up. "I caught that 1,026 Black people... [were eligible to vote] in this town, but over 800 still did not," she said, referring to the presidential election. "We have a lot of work to do here, in small towns."

Other organizers eyeing the Senate runoffs reached similar conclusions. But they believed that overlooked rural voters of color could be an unexpected force in the runoffs, which are historically low-turnout races. Johnson, who briefly introduced himself after serving coffee, did not mention that he had just run for Georgia's state senate. He received 31,000 votes but did not win. Johnson listened to a summary of this runoff strategy.

"There's not a lot of time," he replied, cutting to the heart of the matter. "How do you activate those voters? One of the keys is to

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IF YOU'RE
NOT LIVID
YOU'RE NOT
LISTENING

YOU MAY
SHOOT ME
WITH YOUR
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YOU MAY
CUT ME WITH
YOUR EYES,
YOU MAY
KILL ME WITH
YOUR HATEFUL-
ULNESS
BUT STILL,
LIKE AIR,
I'LL RISE!

lean on the existing stimuli, like the churches, or this [drive], or other efforts.”

The challenge is turning out historically marginalized voters, he said. It was too late for a big registration drive, especially as pastors and ministers were delivering Sunday sermons online in response to the pandemic. That meant that fewer people would hear announcements about voting. Johnson said that he had invited some parents to bring their children to register and had urged younger people to bring older relatives. That strategy seemed like scratching the surface. Was that going to work? He looked up.

“In rural Georgia, cultural norms and things are pretty entrenched,” he said. “When you get down to these smaller counties, they are less subjected to the influences of the national sort of influencers. They still have community. They’re getting their information on their porches. They get their information from their pastors, from neighbors at the supermarket, from the clubs they belong to. They pretty much know the way they’re going to vote.”

What Johnson was saying was important to understand, especially for Americans who want to help in the runoffs. Rural Georgians, especially voters of color, were unlikely to trust people outside their circle of family, friends and faith leaders. Distrust of outsiders is real. He patiently answered more questions, responding with unusual candor and detail in a state where it could be hard to get past congenial conversation or curt talk when the subject turned to politics. I asked to see his museum, which led to a conversation that unexpectedly revealed what many Black residents thought, but would not say aloud, about voting, race and power in middle Georgia.

Unlocking the Unspoken

Johnson walked into the museum. Displays of local history stood next to recreations of

iconic moments in the civil rights struggle. He created the museum and the reading room because he was a collector and historian, he said, adding that he was working on a PhD from Howard University. There was a need to preserve Black local history, create educational settings and have safe civic spaces “for events like this,” the voter drive.

“We want to be a model for other rural communities because in the rural South there aren’t many spaces for civic interaction and engagement,” Johnson explained. “It’s not like in Washington, D.C., or Massachusetts where you have coffee shops and bookstores. In the rural South, the only public space where people talk is primarily at church or in their homes. If they go to a restaurant, it’s really just to eat—they aren’t there for analytical reasoning or anything like that.”

In the few restaurants that were open on nearby streets, a handful of white diners were being served by Black employees. Miller said her canvassers went out in pairs—never alone. Johnson said that many people did not go out after dark. “There isn’t protection.” The resistance to change was present and lingering.

Inside the museum, Johnson passed a large basket of cotton and stopped before a memorial on a mantelpiece. He said that his full name was Julius Johnson Newberry and that this relic was his most prized possession. It was a tombstone eight inches wide and eight inches high that did not have a name on it. Its base read, “Mr. Charley Newberry, 1818-1880.” This was his grandfather, seven generations ago. Near the tombstone’s base were two dashes symbolizing chains from slavery. At the top were two stars above a line of dashes and dots, signifying broken chains and that he died a free man. In the 1870s, the Newberry family bought land from their former owners. “The worst 300 acres,” Johnson said. They cleared the stony soil and grew cotton. White families with 19th-century roots in Hawkins-



ville knew the Newberrys.

“It’s very complicated,” Johnson said, referring to how the past shadows the present in this town and rural Georgia. “It’s very complicated because there is a lot of trauma. There’s a lot of terror. And in many respects, there’s love, too, among some large groups in the rural South. I’m speaking of African Americans... But we also have a growing Spanish-speaking population here. They’ve been terrorized [by current authorities] and stay hidden.”

Johnson spoke of legacies that outsiders would not know or recognize: The town’s separate cemeteries for white people and Black people; family stories of how Black people who moved to the North were not permitted to unload their cars on Hawkinsville’s streets into the 1960s, lest the local Black residents see their relative poverty; that Black people were whipped on nearby farms as late as the 1970s and 1980s; the reason why many Black people still don’t swim in the nearby Ocmulgee River, as skeletons periodically surface or are dredged up.

“There’s a lot of trauma here, and people in these rural towns have not accessed the local power structure effectively to represent their interests,” Johnson said, returning to politics and elections. “They’ve been outsmarted by every trick in the book. And while people are resilient, they’re fatigued. And people have adjusted to a lot of the inequality that exists.”

Johnson’s work for the State Department included trying to sway “hearts and minds” in Afghanistan. Inequality could still be seen locally, he said, as most of the leadership posts in county government, law enforcement and education were held by white people. Illiteracy was a real issue, he said, citing Vietnam veterans who could not fill out benefit forms. So was race-based intimidation. Those cultural currents and a rural economy with limited opportunities left many people of color contained, cautious and wary of outsiders. Many

people of color stayed in their lane and kept quiet.

“It’s like once you’re identified to do something here, especially if a white person gives you an opportunity, you stick with it,” Johnson said. “And to stick with it means you stay in your place and don’t get involved in things that will jeopardize your income because jobs are hard to come by.”

Johnson broke out of this mold. His roots, higher education, federal service and efforts to redevelop Hawkinsville’s former commercial center were not openly criticized in a small county 25 miles from the interstate highway. He confided that he did not have many close local friends. The conversation continued in his office in Hawkinsville’s first two-story brick building, where white lawyers, realtors and businessmen once worked. He and the other Commerce Street merchants were underwriting the voter drive and had invited people. He didn’t expect many to show up. But word would get around.

“Most people have things to do on Saturday,” Johnson said. “To ask them to come downtown for something like this is unusual. We have reached out to a cross-section of people and we’ll see who turns up. There’s a saying down here, ‘Every shut eye ain’t asleep.’ So, although you don’t see the numbers, [that] doesn’t mean the numbers aren’t seeing you.”

Johnson’s openness and insights were surprising. He explained what was widely understood but not often spoken in middle Georgia—and especially not spoken of to out-of-town journalists. His dissection of the culture had a direct bearing on how rural voters of color could—or should not—be reached for the Senate runoffs. His clear takeaway was that only known groups and people, relying on local volunteers or paying local people a small wage, would likely be effective messengers to motivate people who didn’t plan to vote.



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As Johnson showed his visitors the rest of his building that he hoped would become a democracy center—a hub readymade for organizers—a younger man ran up the staircase and said, “Mr. Way is outside and wants to see you.” Johnson smiled and quickly headed down to Commerce Street.

The Way Forward

Sam Way, age 95, wore a flannel shirt, pressed jeans, and a surgical mask and walked with a cane. His Hawkinsville roots went back to pre-Civil War days. His family founded nearby banks that were still open and owned vast tracts of farmland and forests. Mr. Way, who is white, knew many leading Georgia politicians when Southern Democrats controlled the state, such as Jimmy Carter when he was governor and president. And Georgia’s politicians knew him.

The handful of Black people sitting in chairs on the sidewalk stood to greet Way: Mary Colson, the only Black Board of Elections member; Bernice Banks, who moved back to town five years ago and this fall became the deputy chair of a newly revived county Democratic Party; and Black Voters Matter’s Miller and her team.

Johnson greeted Way, who was surveying the colorful Black Voters Matter van and registration table and Vote Equality’s RV and its table. “We could use more of this,” Way said, pressing a folded \$100 bill into Johnson’s hand.

Johnson introduced Way to the Vote Equality crew as “one of the founders of this town.” The women at the Vote Equality table said that they had come from Virginia to help the voter drive. Miller quickly organized a group photograph. Afterward, Way was asked what people could do to help efforts like this voter drive.

“The main thing you can do is identify people who live in this town who are not registered. And then follow it up and make sure they get to the polls on Election Day,” he said. “It’s that simple.”

“Was that hard to do around here?” he was asked.

“It’s not hard, if somebody is dedicated to get out there and work with it,” he replied. “Just like Stacey [Abrams] has done. She’s just gotten everybody to organize in Atlanta. Because 70 percent of the vote on November 3 was white in this county. Only 30 percent [of the vote] was Black. And yet the population is about 50-50. So that’s the challenge.”

After Way left, the registration drive continued. Miller felt that the trickle of people stopping by justified shifting to canvassing nearby streets. But Johnson’s assessment had been spot on. Not one of the dozen people who showed up to register to vote shared their full name or said much more than voting was “a good thing.”

Across the street inside Bryant’s Barber Shop, people felt a bit freer to talk. It was a safer space, especially after Johnson’s introductions. He praised Elgin Bryant as a “quiet guy who touches everybody’s head in this town.” Bryant’s ancestors had also been slaves in Hawkinsville. He was retired from work at a nearby military base and cut hair at his father’s old barbershop on weekends.

Bryant said he was pleased that Joe Biden had picked Kamala Harris as his running mate. He was pleased that Georgia’s voters chose Biden. People were paying attention, he said, especially younger people.

“It’s a great thing. I think it’s going to make people realize we need to get out and vote,” he said, cautiously optimistic. “I think the younger generation’s really getting it. The older generation, they kind of thought it didn’t matter... Over a period of years, you know, a lot of Black people have gotten less [than

whites]. It's time now. This needs to change.”

Shawn Nelson, a younger man and a truck driver in Bryant's seat, was eager to talk. He seemed genuinely excited about the runoffs.

“The outcome of the January 5 election is going to have an impact on the United States for years,” he said. “We need to get those two Democrats in and start making a change. For health care, education...”

Nelson, too, wanted to believe that Biden's victory meant change could come.

“That's big progress for Georgia,” he said. “I'm 40 years old and as far as I can remember, Georgia has been known as a racist state. Even though it still probably is, I think with these Democrats that are getting in office, I think we can look forward to seeing some change.”

But back outside, the foot traffic had slowed as mid-afternoon approached. Elizabeth Small, who was sitting in a chair by the Black Voters Matter table and ready to help anyone register, seemed flustered. She was 79, and still a poll worker. She was not pleased with the Black turnout on November 3 and wanted to see more people show up for the registration drive.

“As you can see, there are not enough Blacks here for the event that's coming up that's so important,” she said. “Blacks need to participate more. They are not here. I don't know where they are. Because they should participate... But we don't often get asked to participate.”

Small admitted that she was frustrated. “Everything that you want to have happen takes too long,” she said. “And the ones that you see today are the ones [that] are always present, for whatever, especially for the voter registration. It's always the same few people. Right? Always the same few.”

By 3 p.m. the registration drive was over. The local newspaper did not show up. The Black Voters Matter crew drove back to

Warner Robins, a small city nearby. The Vote Equality crew followed Johnson to his house. The January 5 runoffs were more than a month away. Voter registration would close on December 7. Early voting would start on December 14.

While the national media has been concentrating on suburban Atlanta's Biden voters who “tore down political fences,” there are thousands and thousands of voters of color in rural Georgia who could play an outsized role—if they vote. At first glance, Hawkinsville looks like it has barely changed in decades. But its once-white business center is now filled with Black-owned businesses. Looking toward January 5, there is an election where its long-suppressed voices—like others across Georgia—could ring from coast to coast.

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This article was produced by Voting Booth, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

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