

THE GEORGIA WAY

HOW TO WIN ELECTIONS



By:

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: Building on History	6
Chapter 2: Relational Organizing	10
Chapter 3: Organizing Mindsets	13
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Covid Forced Innovation• Focus Locally• Rural Organizing is Different• Empower Youths• Sublimate Egos	
Chapter 4: Inside Organizations	21
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set Goals, Create Plan• Use Data to Find Voters• Use Familiar Messaging Tools• Fact Check All Information• Recruit Your Team• Use Experienced Trainers• Give Volunteers Tasks They Want• Give Youths Responsibilities• Hire Locals, Including Youths• Coordinate, Don't Duplicate• Share Information Fast• Attend Others' Events• Do Whatever is Needed• Let Volunteers' Role Evolve• Trust Your Capable Staff• Take Care of Your Team	
Chapter 5: Effective Campaigning	30
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Events That Set a Tone• Keep Messaging Personal• Help People Plan to Vote• Target Older Voters	

- Target Young Voters
- Anticipate Voters' Concerns
- Use Your Best Way to Reach Voters
- Different Media for Different Generations
- Communicate and Coordinate

More on Tactics, Technologies, and Media 38

- Strategically Placed Billboards
- Motorcades for Excitement and Visibility
- Postcards to Every Voter
- Nimble Text and Phone Banking
- Use Best Message in All Media

Chapter 6: Challenges and Solutions 41

- Keeping Up as Pace Gets Faster
- Dealing With Too Much Information
- Dealing With Buggy Apps
- Feedback Between Frontlines and Technologists
- Trusting Unknown Volunteers
- Ensure Culturally Sensitive Scripts
- Fight Tedium
- Improvise When Necessary
- Delegate, Create Teams, Don't Panic
- Document Your Effort

Chapter 7: What's Next for 2021 and 2022 47

- Grassroots Groups Must Stay Active
- 2021 and 2022 Campaigns are Here
- Grassroots Groups Need Resources
- 2020: Persistence Paid Off

Biographies 52

About this Report and Acknowledgments 63

Introduction

By Ray McClendon

I am proud to introduce the Georgia Way: How to Win Elections, where we're chronicling the way that various grassroots groups and civic engagement organizations in Georgia came together in a relational organizing effort in the 2020 general election and the January 5, 2021 runoff elections. These organizations crisscrossed the state of Georgia in a coordinated effort and made a huge difference in both elections.

Some people might ask why is documenting this particular effort important? It is our hope that the content that we produced will not only chronicle what we've done in Georgia but also be a guidepost that other battleground states can utilize and expand upon in 2022 and beyond. Every battleground state has the same ingredients available: Divine Nine, NAACP, Prince Hall Masons and Eastern Stars, faith-based organizations, and grassroots activists.

Our efforts were marked by a commitment to:

Collaborate

We coordinated our GOTV networks and resources to maximize outreach effectiveness.

Communicate

We promoted each other's events and voter initiatives and debriefed partners on a weekly (and sometimes daily) basis.

Connect

We identified, embraced, and empowered trusted local messengers who empathized with the community rather than soliciting them.

The strategy required that we simplify our objectives while embracing multiple tactics to maximize buy-in from a variety of civic engagement organizations. That message was, "When we vote, we win"—whether on social justice, affordable housing, economic justice, or whatever hot button issue you have from city hall to the state capital to the White House. Whatever the issue, we emphasized that your vote is your most effective voice in a democracy.

The energy and frustrations from protests and marches were encouraged to be channeled into voting. The political parties and political action committees were pouring multi-millions into TV ads and other messaging that canceled each other out. In contrast, the grassroots organizations were working on shoestring budgets and investing time in listening and speaking to people. And it was amazing to see how that more personal messaging crystalized in the runoff elections, where almost 95 percent of Black voters in the general election returned to vote on January 5th.

It was no small achievement that we were able to set aside egos, appreciate each other's respective strengths, and support actions outside of our various organizational comfort zones with coordinated activities and messaging. That sounds elegantly simple but was pragmatically difficult. The existential threat to democracy that we perceived created a sense of urgency that superseded our differences. Our worst fears, of course, were borne out on January 6 at the U.S. Capitol, making the necessity of this document even more important if our democracy is to survive. Press coverage of the insurrection quickly eclipsed our historic achievement.

Black and brown people in Georgia put their collective thumbs in the dike to help save democracy in 2020-2021. We now know that Georgia is but one tributary on a groundswell to authoritarianism spreading across our nation. We must rise up in every battleground state to stop this assault. I pray that these writings will help stem the tide. It is also my fervent hope that the relational organizing efforts recounted here will also inspire a greater commitment to year-round investment in the grassroots actions that will be critical to sustaining voter engagement in 2022 and beyond. We need your help now!

One final note. What follows are chapters that describe the background, organizing mindsets, various phases of campaigning and messaging strategies, opportunities and challenges, and lessons for looking ahead. What follows are the excerpted words of organizers and activists who were interviewed during the summer of 2021. Those interviews were conducted on video, transcribed, and comments were occasionally edited for brevity. As you'll see, the Georgia Way was a determined effort by ordinary people who cared and worked together.



Chapter 1: Building on History

Editor's note: Georgia's 2020 election results were miraculous. They also were built on decades of community and social justice organizing. The 2018 election, where Democrat Stacey Abrams lost the governor's race, drew on these efforts, and brought them to new levels. But there were many other organizations of Black professionals, including university fraternities and sororities, that had networks and service missions. These various advocates and groups saw a common need and became threads in 2020's organizing tapestry. As many organizers said, the 2020 campaign rekindled the spirit and hopes of the 20th century's Civil Rights Movement.

Corey Shackelford, Sr.

Grand Master Prince Hall Grand Lodge Jurisdiction of Georgia

The history of Prince Hall Masonry goes back even before the United States of America was the United States of America. We're talking 1784. Prince Hall himself and 14 other Black men were made Masons. So, when you are talking about Prince Hall, you are talking about a drum major of peace, an activist, a civil rights icon. He was an abolitionist. He was an educator. He was boots on the ground for his people, for us African Americans, back then, and it hasn't stopped. We're blessed to have this rich history.

Prince Hall Masonry is ingrained in the fabric of our community. It's ingrained in the fabric of anything historically done. Prince Hall Masonry was involved from the underground railroad to the civil rights movement to whatever movement that moves this country. A lot of people know some of our notable members such as the late John Lewis, the late Mayor Maynard Jackson, Andrew Young, the late C. T. Martin, and the list goes on... It's a collaborative effort, with the brothers and the sisters (Order of the Eastern Star) working together as one to push an agenda if an agenda needs to be pushed. We're in those corners of the state, those rural areas, where others don't normally go. But we are there.

Shirley Sherrod

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education co-founder

[In the 1960s], we were organizing people in those [rural] counties, and they were being kicked off the farms by white people for participating [voting]. When it came to this year's elections, because we had been organizing so much—not just on voter issues, but on many issues around education, farming, land loss, and so forth through the years—it was just natural to be able to then take on this work... It was good to have young people on staff, who had been doing that organizing, who were ready to take on this challenge.

Jessica King

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education organizer

Last year [2020], and this year [2021] too, have been transformative in a lot of different ways. But to know that this work did not start last year and this year—but started way beyond that and beyond this election—is something that definitely has to be taken into account, especially when you think about the history of voting in the South. But then, also being a part of the Southwest Georgia Project during that time, I can tell you right now that that work started the moment that my little footsteps entered that office, and it ramped up as time went on. I think that the gubernatorial race in Georgia in 2018 [where Stacey Abrams drove up voter turnout but lost] definitely shaped our work. We gained a lot of valuable lessons.

Kaisha Alexander Johnson

Sigma Gamma Rho southeastern regional social action coordinator

I served as a member of the NPHC [National Pan Hellenic Council] of Atlanta... [In 2018,] we were able to meet at the NAACP office and talk about some voting initiatives and how can we get the word out about voting; how can we, and as you [interviewer and NAACP political action chairman Ray McClendon] often emphasize, how can we educate, mobilize, and register voters... Out of that meeting, we came up with this Voter Takeover event, and we collaborated with multiple organizations. I remember 100 Black Men were involved, along with other organizations, and we were able to bring maybe 50 to 100 different organizations together at that event to talk about strategies and how we can work together in a nonpartisan way to ensure that we reach people who we normally did not reach and get people engaged in voting.

Andrea Miller

Center for Common Ground founding board member

What got everything started was what we did in Virginia in 2016. I was doing civic engagement for the national NAACP. They hired 21 Civic Engagement coordinators and Virginia was the only one that basically won. One of the reasons we won was we were doing entirely digital work. There was no paper, [but] we could rapidly put phone banks together. We gave voters a lot of information and we recruited a lot of people to make calls. So, in 2017, I asked the NAACP, since I still had access, if I could work on Virginia? We did Virginia in 2017 and... from that, we started seeing the basics of what became Center for Common Ground. What a lot of people will find strange is that we do elections not as the 501c4 [a partisan organization], but as a 501c3 [a non-profit, nonpartisan organization], because we aren't supporting political parties. We're not supporting candidates. We are supporting voters with information.



Ray McClendon

Atlanta NAACP political action chairman

We use the term Pan-Hell, NPHC, and Divine Nine or D9, you know... that's the National Panhellenic Council. It is what we all belong to, as Black Greek organizations [fraternities and sororities]. The beautiful thing that I saw happen was our national leadership started telling us we need to come up with longer-term strategies, and we need to team up with other different groups. That's how this came together with the NAACP. We started a couple of years ago with something called Voter Takeover, which was a strategy that was passed down from our national D9 presidents in collaboration with the national NAACP. And the good thing in Georgia was we took that step and we kept going once we got to know each other, we said, "Hey, we need to be doing this on an ongoing basis." Because what would happen is we would go to a Walmart shopping center parking lot, and the Omegas would be at one corner, the Deltas would be in one corner of the parking lot, the NAACP will be in another corner, and the Urban League would be in another, all trying to get 15 different folks registered. We said this doesn't make sense. We need to coordinate our efforts. So, the Team Unity [the Divine Nine's Coordinating Committee] is one of those things that helped pull that together so that we didn't repeat actions. It improved our efficiency and our effectiveness.

Dr. Ben Williams

Omega Psi Phi pioneer and lifelong civil rights activist

All the members of the D9 historically have been involved in a common adventure. That common adventure has to do with our commitment to lift up the Black race... The power that existed when we came together, along with our partners from other organizations, was a beautiful assembly of folks. Now, more specifically, all of us were caught up in the pandemic. All of us had to use common sense and accept the fact that we must approach what we have been doing for over the years in a different way. That common denominator was getting involved in what I call the new virtual and digital reality... We attempted, for example, to connect with people using really sharpened data to know where to target our efforts. Our partners—having operating plans and specified target areas across this state, and aligning with our chapters in Omega [Psi Phi] across the state that work who have been charged historically to serve those areas—looked to do what? Collaborate, cooperate, coordinate, as opposed to spending time trying to invent or reinvent campaigns.

Kimberly King

National Panhellenic Council of Greater Atlanta former president

We wanted to come together. We noticed that after we made it through November that Georgia was really going to be on the map, and we needed to be connected statewide. A lot of times we all tend to operate locally because we think about what Tip O'Neill said that "all politics is local," right? But in the case of what we had to do for [the U.S. Senate runoffs in] January, we knew that was going to really require a different kind of effort.

So, literally after the November races, we just started calling some folks. We made some connections initially through the National Panhellenic Council chapters throughout the state. We pretty much opened up the invitation and said, "If there's somebody that you know that needs to be on this call, that can be an asset to help us move Georgia forward, just tell us their name and we'll send them a link to the Zoom call." And that's what happened.

Martin Raxton

Chairman of Kappa Alpha Psi political action committee

What we did, as far as the [Kappa Alpha Psi] fraternity, and the activities associated with the elections in November and January, we thought, "Let's get to the grassroots," "Let's talk with our students," "Let's work with them and their parents," and work with our Guide Right [program] in our Kappa League and have forums with them to talk about the importance of the election... Kappa Alpha Psi was very big on coming to the polls and working the polls, serving as poll monitors during the election... We also worked with our county election supervisors to make sure that no issues were occurring, and that if any individuals in the voting line saw issues and concerns, we pointed them out to the right individuals to get resolutions in those polling precincts.

Keith Reddings

Omega Psi Phi state representative

I've been involved in movements for quite a while. You get these waves where you're involved, you can be involved, [and then you pause and] sit back. But, being from Brunswick, the Ahmaud Arbery situation [where a 25-year-old Black jogger was targeted and murdered by three white men in February 2020], stirred us all up and got us all in activism mode. That really was the catalyst for me to make sure that I got out and made our voices heard.

Bobby Fuse

Lifelong civil rights activist organizer

My colleagues... mentioned various Democratic [Party] relationships. I want to stress that we have a duplicated leadership partnership. There's really three parts. First is that they are all friends. The second is that they work with the Democratic Party and democratic causes in the county as Democrats. [Third], we also have a vein where we work as nonpartisan grassroots organizations. Each of them has a county, concerned citizens groups, and so forth.

Let me hasten again to add that this [Georgia Way] was not necessarily a Georgia Democratic Party operation. So, without being offensive, I'd like to say that the majority of our funding and resources came from outside any political party, and it came directly from these nonpartisan grassroots organizations with whom we interacted, and boy, did we interact.

Chapter 2: Relational Organizing

Editor's note: "Relational organizing" became a buzzword in campaign circles in 2020. It means connecting with people at a personal level and drawing on common experiences and values as a basis for community building and organizing. In Georgia, like much of the country, these issues, struggles, and hoped-for solutions persist outside of the election cycle. Note how this shared understanding was expressed by various organizers and how they nurtured and drew on these relationships in the 2020 election.

Rhonda Briggins

VoteRunLead.org co-founder

I want to do a little history lesson... I have to pay homage to [Alabama's] Hank Sanders, who always talked about making soup. And so that's what we keep talking about: the ingredients. Every time he gets to talk about soup, he talks about his old lady in a village. She had a rock and some water, and she had the pot, and she was stirring the pot, and folks asked, "What are you doing?" She's going to make some soup. They said, "Well, you don't have anything but a rock in the water." She said, "I know." But she said, "What do you have to bring to the soup?" "Oh, you know, I got some potatoes." The next person said, "I got some carrots." The next person said, "I got a couple of onions." "I got a few little bits and pieces of meat." And by the end of the day, she has soup. She could feed her community. That's what we did in Georgia. We brought the soup together for the first time.

Dr. Gloria Tinubu

Applied economist, educator, former public official

Shirley [Sherrod, Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education co-founder], you didn't say all that you can say about yourself. So I'm going to say a little bit more about you... [She's a] James Beard Foundation Leadership Awardee. She's the former Georgia State Director for Rural Development for the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture], and the first African American to ever hold that position... Your work just didn't revolve around voting, but around other issues that people cared about, that mattered to them, and impacted their lives. So yes, that is really the crux of relational organizing; that you have a relationship with people outside of the formal voting process.

Helen Butler

Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda convener

While we have been doing voter registration, getting Black people engaged, and have always understood that public policy impacted every facet of our life, and we had to have people voting, we also incorporated issues that impacted the community: whether it was environmental justice, equitable education or transportation; how do we get our people from one point to the other, whether it was

health care, criminal justice reform, economic empowerment... What does it mean for our community to really be empowered?

Ray McClendon

Atlanta NAACP political action chairman

When we look at relational organizing, we really reflect on collaboration being one of the “three C’s” that go along with coordination and communication... We know that we need our leadership to commit in all our D9 organizations that they are not only going to collaborate but that they are going to commit to coordinate their communication with other D9 organizations, as well as other civic engagement organizations, and make that an intentional effort.

When you look at what relational organizing is all about, a critical part of it is communication. The communication that came out every week allowed us to not only talk to one another but to really know what each organization’s strategy was and where they were putting their emphasis. Then other folks could say, “Oh, okay great, the Omegas got that, so we don’t have to worry about that, we’ll go do something else.” “Okay, the Deltas are going to do this, then this group can go and do something else.” That made us all more effective.

Jessica King

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education

One of the things that South Georgia Project had been working on previously was building a pipeline of organizers called the 75 Strong, which was 75 organizers throughout southwest Georgia... Because of that previous organizing and because of that education and engagement, we were able to put a canvass coordinator in each one of the 14 counties that we were working in. This allowed them to do relational organizing, which means to select the people they felt were standout organizers who could be boots on the ground, which was very, very important especially in rural areas and hard-to-reach areas. They know more than anybody else where the crevices and crevices of those counties are, and how the community shifts and works and grows... We allowed them to really shake and move in their own communities and not be a force or organization that comes in [from afar] and just puts people in places that will oftentimes miss areas [and people], or because they feel like, “Oh well, nobody lives there...” Well, if you just went a couple yards ahead, you would see that there’s a house. The only people that would know that would be community members that live there.

Tiffany Carr

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education

I don’t think anyone was expecting the Senate runoffs... The way that we went about it was finding [field] coordinators and allowing them to find the people they wanted to work with in their communities who they trusted. It just made everything run a lot smoother. Because imagine us trying to find coordinators and volunteers. That would have just taken so much time. The goal is to always work smarter and not harder. It just makes more sense...

We had so many different people doing so many different things, from canvassing coordinators, phone bankers, postcard workers, poll watchers and everything, so if one thing didn't work [for someone] we always made sure that we had other options. If we didn't have other options at that moment, we would always tell them, "Okay, let me give you a call back, let me find a solution." And it seemed to work out for us.



Chapter 3: Organizing Mindsets

Editor's note: The COVID-19 pandemic created unforeseen challenges and opportunities in 2020. The following comments show the thinking of organizers in various communities as they adapted to the changing circumstances and found new ways of working. Organizing is complex and layered, but several key mindsets emerged that led to successful outreach.

Covid Forced Innovation

Jessica King

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education

Organizing is not the same as it was before, and COVID-19 has a lot to do with that. It pushed the rural South into a different era. Even for myself, there were times during the pandemic that we were like, "Oh my God," because relational organizing is very important and not being able to reach hard-to-reach areas was obviously something that saddened all of us. But having to come up with new and innovative ways to reach those communities is something that I never thought would happen. But [it did happen, and] then it taught me that as protective as I am about our people, and especially rural communities, they can stretch. They can move... We had to push a lot of people to get way outside of their comfort zones. A lot of people were scared, and understandably because they weren't afraid just because of the [political] issues... They were afraid for their lives, especially in the Deep South. There was a lack of resources when it came to attacking the pandemic and there was lack of information when thinking about how we could counteract and combat something that is real, especially when you look at racial health disparities in Georgia.

Penny Poole

Gwinnett County NAACP president

If you remember that people did go to vote in [the April presidential primary in] Milwaukee, [Wisconsin] and people in that line [waited for hours], they went back and they could pinpoint the cause and effect and the negativity that the coronavirus had on this election... People had to decide if they were going to put their life in their hands to cast that ballot. So... we had to get PPE [personal protective equipment], we had to get covering. Of course, our concern was the safety and well-being of the citizens, to make sure that people were taken care of. But those of us in the trenches who went out with PPE... It was harrowing, but that message [of being heard by voting] had to get through.

Dr. Gloria Tinubu

Applied economist, educator, former public official

COVID-19 prevented people from being able to go to church, people who would not normally use Zoom and texting and all those kinds of [technology-based] things were now thrown into that, whether they liked it or not. If they had a cellphone, they were pretty much using it to communicate because they couldn't do in-person communication or attend church in person.

Karen Rene

Atlanta NAACP second vice president and director

When the pandemic hit in March [2020], everything shut down, and we didn't know which direction to go. But we kept pushing through emails, we kept calling people and said, "You know, we were going to organize, give us an opportunity to figure it out." And then we made sure we had the CDC [U.S. Center for Disease Control] guidelines. We have friends over at the CDC, and they helped us stay abreast of what to do and how to do it. My background is I've been an elected official for over eight years [now East Point mayor pro-tem]... What we did was to make sure that we were doing things in a proper manner because voter registration was also one of our top priorities, and we didn't want to put people at risk. What we did was we looked at different ways of doing things, and then once they gave us permission to know that we could do things outdoors with the masks and everything, we went ahead.

Jessica King,

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education

We, as young people, naturally have pushed technology, and we like the use of technology, although sometimes it can be our worst enemy... I personally had to help my own home congregation adapt to the new virtual world of having worship service on a live stream. And even when we first left the office when COVID-19 first hit Albany hard, we sprang into action in doing a digital campaign that reminded people of Super Tuesday. It reminded people to get out to vote. So, that shift happened automatically and very fast.

Tiffany Carr

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education

COVID-19 really helped the younger generations to connect with the older generations. I know for myself and my family, my mom will always call on me and my brother and ask how do you work Zoom? How do I join this virtual meeting? How do I get on Facebook? How do I do this and how do I do that? So, it really opened the door for the older generation to learn more about technology and to see how convenient it is and how quickly you can reach a lot of people at one time. But it also allowed the younger generation to be that guide for them and to build those relationships, to strengthen those relationships in such a difficult time.

Kimberly King

National Panhellenic Council of Greater Atlanta former president

Having a statewide coalition gave us such a great opportunity to learn from one another... Every time we get on the call we're connected. I feel we all have a chance to learn from each other and it's just been invaluable. That we're able to sit around this big invisible conference table called Zoom and share information, and we all would never leave that table without having learned something that we can share from the largest community to the small communities. You may have to tweak it a little bit, but I've gotten lots of great ideas just listening to folks.

Keith Reddings

Omega Psi Phi state representative

Coming into the pandemic, we did have to be innovative because the old gathering, meeting, marching just was not safe at the time. So, different organizations, different groups came up with different strategies to get the word out. There were billboards. There were buses that went around from city to city with voter information. There was phone banking where brothers and sisters would get on the phone, and they would make call after call. There were email blasts. There were caravans, motorcades...

As soon as we [Omega Psi Phi] got a call to action it went out to every chapter in the state... We would share that information and as soon as the plan was put together, we put the chapters on notice: check your emails, check your voicemail and your text messages, frequently, because this stuff would be coming out constantly. I think that was one of the great things that helped us get through this effort. But the catalyst was unity.

Focus Locally

Buster Meadows

National Panhellenic Council greater Atlanta chapter president

We knew for us to win any elections statewide, it can't just be about Fulton County, Dekalb County, Gwinnett, Clayton. We had to look beyond Atlanta even though we were getting calls from people outside the state. And we were getting resources [made] available to us. It's not about us. It's about helping our brothers in need, down in the Brunswick area who didn't know that the funding was available, who didn't know about these grants that are out there, who didn't know about these people that are rolling in town from other states who wanted to help. We had enough help in Atlanta... These counties in South Georgia needed help, needed money, needed some people to assist... [Our response was], let's not just keep all these resources to ourselves but spread it out. And once we spread it out, we will also say [to our partners and supporters], "Hey, here's the money, this is what we're doing with it."

Marvin Nunnally

Masons Deputy Grand Master for Georgia

He [Grand Master Cory Shackelford of Georgia's Prince Hall Masons and member of Kappa Alpha Psi] charged me and others around the state of Georgia to get involved, get activated and encourage people; not only to register to vote, to participate in voting but also, more importantly, to take somebody else to the polls and bring some of these young folks in with us, as well, which is what we did. My specific area was the 20-county, northeast Georgia area and we registered people. What was important about this time was that we combined this by doing food drives; we fed over 50,000 people during that period. And in that process, every time we would give away food, we were doing voter registration as well. So, we were two-fold: getting folks registered to vote and feeding them as well.

Bobby Fuse

Lifelong civil rights activist organizer

A lot of this [outreach] came out of the natural food distributions that were taking place by the United States Department of Agriculture [earlier in 2020]. We had a food distribution [system], but at the same time, I believe we used those food distributions and the long lines to try to get people to respond to the census. That was a great success, as well as getting people to register to vote, and to check on their voter registration. Out of that came this idea of feeding people at Thanksgiving and encouraging them to come back out and vote in the runoff. Then came the "collard green caucus" centered around collard greens and food distribution, but we added some twists to it. See all of this about celebrating while we're in the midst of this thing... We're in the midst of COVID, we're in the midst of voter suppression taking us back to the '50s.

We got to have some way to have some celebration in the Black community and that's what we did, everywhere around. We had the collard green caucus and that focused on voting. But then someone said we need something for the runoff. Of course, with the runoff being on January 5 which comes right at about the same time as New Year's Eve, we said, what do we do on New Year's Eve? We eat collard greens and black-eyed peas. And so, Black Voters Matter paid for collard greens, in more than 30 some counties, and they did it so beautifully. All of the food was bought from Black farms. So that gave us a chance to help our farmers sell their greens and black grocers sell their Jiffy mix and black-eyed peas. But on top of the raw materials that we gave away on New Year's Eve, Friday, and Saturday in the black-eyed peas caucus, we also had hot food trucks available so people in different areas, depending upon what kind of truck you had, you might have had a seafood gumbo truck, or you might have had a hot dog, chili dog truck, or something of that nature. And that's the way we got our people involved. That's why we were able to reach them, talk to them. And we look forward to continuing that type of motivation, as we go forward with people.

Gerald Griggs

Atlanta NAACP first vice president

After we saw the results of the 2016 election, we started working toward 2018 mobilization and then of course 2020, to couple the energy that was on the ground to want to protest; to march to the polls; and continue that organizing. We partnered with groups like the Georgia Alliance for Social Justice, Black Voters Matter, New Georgia Project, of course, the Divine Nine and the Masons, and all of the fraternal organizations, 100 Black Men, to have a hub to mobilize the voters. And so, we had events. We had protests. We had marches to the polls, and we were just astounded by the turnout in all 19 counties, and I think that's what people are missing. This was happening around the state and the energy was palpable... And what made it so special was the use of technology, the use of social media to continue to get the message out directly and make sure people understood what the plan was and how to facilitate the goal.

Rural Organizing is Different

Shirley Sherrod

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education

As much as we think organizing is organizing, organizing in the rural area is different from organizing in the urban areas. Hopefully, one day, people will understand that. There are many more challenges in the rural areas, but they are challenges that we can work to deal with, and we show that it can be done... In our meetings on Wednesday nights, I would say, "No we don't need a bus [for visibility] coming in!" I know the most effective thing was to have neighbors pushing neighbors to do the right thing for this election.

People are not always living just right next to each other. Sometimes there's more than a mile between houses. I know, when you look at the Census, they'll send people in from other areas [regional coordinators] and our folks don't get counted. They're looking at a dirt road and they are saying, "Oh, no one lives there," and then those people are not included. We didn't want that happening as we work to get this rural vote out. People in the rural areas, they trust, but they do a better job of trusting people they know. You must understand that as you work with them. If I'm canvassing, I'm going to mention the name of someone who lives in the county, or lives down the road, or goes to church with them. It makes it so much easier to break the ice and pull people together to do what they need to do, whether it's organizing a cooperative, or working on getting out the vote during an election.



Jessica King

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education

Broadband in rural communities is a top tier issue, especially when you realize that these communities that don't have broadband access or internet can't access information. So, they're basically secluded from the world and what's happening. Tiffany [Carr] and I had to quickly jump into action to create other avenues of having meetings, which is to not only have Zoom meetings but to also have conference calls, and then sometimes have multiple calls a day. I know even for me, personally, when we first jumped into this, this virtual world we live in, in Albany, which is considered a city, also can have connectivity problems. I have two hotspots. I have a central home internet that is run by satellite, and then also two additional hotspots so if one's not working, I'm able to jump to another one or use another device, but that isn't realistic for most homes... When you look at communities of color directly impacted by poverty, the invisible line, that ultimately becomes a wealth line, decides who receives correct and right information.

Empower Youth

Deiadra Wilson

Grand Worthy Matron Prince Hall Grand Chapter, Order of the Eastern Star Jurisdiction of Georgia

We have over 50 youth groups across the state of Georgia. We decided to reach out to our graduates, so when we reached out to our students to make sure that they were voting in this election, we had a chance to talk with them, and to meet with them, and just stay connected to them. Making that connection for the election allowed us to talk about what was going on in the country. We found that this millennial group has a totally different mindset from our generation.

It was very interesting hearing how George Floyd affected their lives in comparison to how it was affecting our lives and being able to tie all that together. Fortunately, we work with the HBCU schools [historically Black colleges and universities]. We also had a chance to go on the campuses and actually communicate with the students; not as much as we would like to because of the pandemic, but it was very impactful and very enlightening for us to hear and listen to their anger about everything that was going on in the country. I think it truly helped us to help them and it definitely raised their knowledge as to how important it is to cast your vote.

Antonio Lewis

Atlanta organizer, candidate

I knew that the presidential election was coming. I also knew that the community we live in, if the participants were to come out, we could actually win this election. I reached out to Tyrese [Miller, Student Government Association President of South Atlanta High School]. We set up a program here in this community. We rented a community space, and we began organizing in the community before the election happened...

We were preparing for it. I want to thank you, Dr. [Gloria] Tinubu [economist and politician], for helping us secure some funds so that we could keep Tyrese [Miller] paid, so he didn't have to work at McDonalds, like a couple of his other classmates, and keeping Wendy [Nevarez-Sanchez, another star student] paid throughout this process.

Tyrese Miller

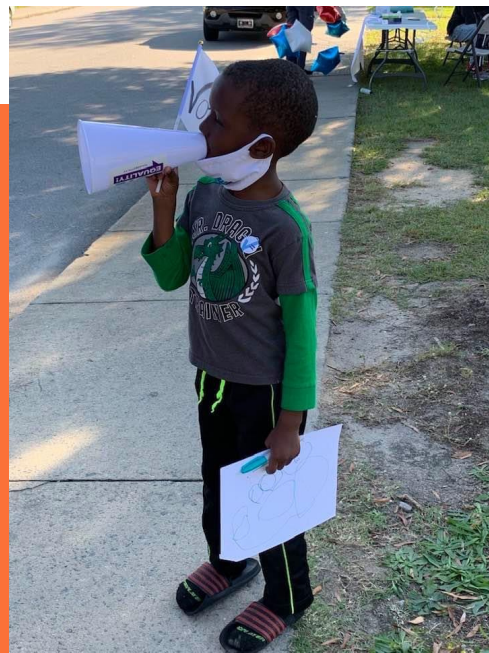
Young Mobilizers president

To piggyback off of what Antonio [Lewis, Atlanta organizer and candidate] said... He guided me. He always says he wants to move a few rocks out of my way. And he's moved a lot by just giving me and my friends the space and opportunity to work on a presidential campaign. A lot of us complained about the previous president being elected, but we didn't know how we could impact it. I always knew that in one day we would impact it by voting, but being able to canvas, talk to people and motivate people to vote was just an amazing experience...Antonio [Lewis] is truly someone I look up to and he motivates me on a daily basis... The way Wendy [Nevarez-Sanchez] fits into this equation is when we started the Young Mobilizers and Organize to Mobilize, I brought all my friends in. It was 10 to 15 students who came along, and Antonio blessed us all with things that we needed to be successful. We have people who are photographers and videographers, people who are brand directors and have their own clothing lines, or people like me and Wendy who just simply consult.

Wendy Nevarez-Sanchez

Young Mobilizers vice-president

Antonio [Lewis] presented the opportunity. He said, "Hey guys, you can canvas and work behind the scenes for such campaigns." At first, I think we didn't realize the seriousness, and not only that, but the weight that such a role had. Initially we just thought we're just teenagers, and we're just knocking on doors, and this is for fun, and then once we actually saw the numbers [results]... We were all hanging by a thread and wondering what the numbers would say. When those results finally came in, we were excited and thrilled. It is such an inspiration to feel like I can make a change.



Sublimate Egos

Helen Butler

Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda convener

Dr. [Joseph] Lowery's vision [for the Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda] was to have a statewide organization where all community groups work together. Even though he was a nonviolent person, he always gave me a violent analogy. As one organization, I can be a finger. I can poke to try to make a difference. But if all of the organizations come together collectively, we form a fist... If we agree on certain policies, we can come together and work on those policies together. But the ones we don't agree on, we leave them outside of the organization and try to find ways to work on those later.

Dr. Ben Williams

Omega Psi Phi pioneer and lifelong civil rights activist

This collaboration thing really meant for me to disengage from being selfish, quote-unquote, to being more concerned about the larger picture... Those of us who in fact had easier access to time, talent, and resources, we pushed that... [to] the target communities, and they were not necessarily our own little islands that we had sat on for years.

Jamal Grooms

National Panhellenic Council greater Atlanta chapter president

The thing that made it [the campaign] so heartwarming was the fact that everyone seemingly subordinated their egos... There were Bishops on the [organizing] call, there were mayors, there were senators on the call, there were congressmen, and then they were presidents of the Divine Nine, the Delta Sigma Theta organization, the Alpha Psi Alpha organization... It just made me feel great to know that everyone aligned because they realize the seriousness of what this vote meant.

Shirley Sherrod

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education

I just want to say as an elder in this work, I found my role needed to be to step back and let young people lead this, and when they ran into issues they needed to discuss with me or were trying to figure out how to deal with something, to come and talk. I would give my perspective on it, but I really allowed them to take this program and just go and it worked. I hope it was a great experience for them. But it really was for me...to be able to sit back and not feel I had to, because I was older, lead this. The young people led this. The young people made it happen.

Chapter 4: Inside Organizations

Editor's note: Like all campaigns, the vision had to be turned into strategies and specifics that could be well-executed. The comments that follow trace how the vision emerged, evolved, and coalesced into focused outreach and messaging. There were several key elements of 2020's organizing, from finding and using accurate and effective information and technologies at high-levels inside organizations, to equipping their staff and volunteers to coordinate with allied groups and engage with communities.

Set Goals, Create Plan

Kimberly King

National Panhellenic Council of Greater Atlanta former president

We had this idea that I really wish we could get folks together... We really have a strong message, but NPHC, just the way it's set up, doesn't really have a lot of bureaucracy, but all of our organizations have state folks and regional folks and things like that... I think back to something that the NAACP was talking about: the power of data. They reminded us that there were 19 counties that contained over in more than 70 percent of Georgia's non-white population... Let's figure this out, really understand our power in numbers.

Richard Rose

Atlanta NAACP president

In the 2016 presidential election, we had such visible results and fragmentation of efforts. Only 47 percent of Black men registered to vote, and actually voted, which was very low. And so, I started to try to understand what we needed to do going forward. What I did know was that people were willing to help. Young people were willing to give up their time. Members of various fraternities, sororities and the Masons were willing to help, but it was fragmented...

Georgia has 159 counties. I would watch the voter registration numbers every month. They would be released from the Secretary of State's office. I decided to sort the counties, by the number of Black voters, and obviously Fulton County was number one. My first realization was that 17 counties contained 75 percent of the Black voters; 17 counties out of 159. And as I would look every month, I noticed sometimes that the county that was number 17 for one month would be county number 18 for the next month. I settled on 19 counties that contained 77 percent of the Black voters. That would be our focus. I reached out to the 19, actually 18 NAACP branches. Because one, one branch has two counties, Douglas and Paulding, and I said, "Hey let's get together. Let's start. We have to get together because if we put our effort out in all of these counties, neighboring counties will be affected. But we will also be focused on where a majority of these Black voters live and we can get to 77 percent going forward, then we think it will kind of spread. It'll have a viral effect."

Use Data to Find Voters

Andrea Miller

Center for Common Ground founding board member

I know where the Black Belts are in all the Southern states. They're very, very, very easy to find. Just look at the voter file. Look at the counties, and then run a cross tabulation on where those communities of color and most specifically, the Black voters are, and that will lead you directly to the Black Belt. (So, for people who have managed not to learn their American history, the Black Belt in the South is, A), where the richest soil was, and B), that's where the plantations were, and C), that meant that's where the slaves were. When slavery ended not all of the freed slaves left the South. As a matter of fact, many people believe you're better off with the devil that you know than the devil that you don't know. So, they stayed right around that plantation where they had spent, for a lot of people, most of their lives. And now, six or seven generations later, they are still there.

Ray McClendon

Atlanta NAACP political action chairman

That level of [voter and voting] analytics that you [the Center for Common Ground] have, and doing it on a digital basis, was something that was really fascinating to us at the Atlanta NAACP. We were so fortunate to be able to partner with you and gain a great deal of additional infrastructure and an ability to reach out to people based upon the platform that you developed. It cannot go unsaid how extraordinary that was and helped to get information out and to connect with the right set of voters. And I know in your digital platform, you've got the ability to do texting, phone banking, and you have a postcard program.

Andrea Miller

Center for Common Ground founding board member

There are some really amazing things that went on with texting. Not only are we basically a civil rights organization, and we do voter turnout and election strategy, but we are also, courtesy of our board members, a technology house. The texting program that we used for the primary then the general election and then the runoff was our own program called Text Percent. I designed it and Deepak Puri [a board member] built it. And one of the things that was unique about Text Percent since Georgia had early voting is that I wanted him [Deepak] to design a system that was based on the voters' county and the voters' zip code. We looked to tell them where their closest early voting location was, so we were able to do that. And then when we realized very early on in the primaries that not all of the early voting locations were open on the same date, and at the same time, we sent that information to the voters as well.

Use Familiar Messaging Tools

Celestine Levanne

Sigma Gamma Rho southeastern region regional director

The effective use of social media helped to get that messaging out because we were able to reach people in a medium that they were most comfortable and familiar with. With any of the activities that either Penny [Poole, Gwinnett County NAACP president] or Kaisha [Alexander Johnson, Sigma Gamma Rho southeastern regional social action coordinator] talked about, we invited our undergraduates, and we pushed that information out to them. We made sure their collegiate advisors were aware and that they were part of those conversations and on those calls. We didn't leave anybody of voting age out of this conversation, from our 18-year-olds to our 100-year-olds, everyone got that information and if for some reason they couldn't vote, they had that information to give to a relative or church member so again it was about making sure they understood their rights.

Kaisha Alexander Johnson

Sigma Gamma Rho southeastern regional social action coordinator

When we had the opportunity to participate in voter engagement activities for the Georgia runoff, we collaborated again with NAACP to participate in phone banking. We sponsored a statewide webinar regarding voter registration and get-out-the-vote strategies. Again, we used When We All Vote resources [whenweallvote.org was created by Michelle Obama]. We created printed informational flyers, utilized social media blasts. We wanted to focus on young people, we wanted to make sure that they were encouraged to vote...

We did a lot of different things. We provided dates for Georgia early voting days and deadlines to the public, we made sure that we pushed it out on social media. We also gave out information about absentee ballots and how people could request their ballots and just information about when they had to be received and so forth.



Fact-Check All Information

Andrea Miller

Center for Common Ground founding board member

There are two attorneys... I use them to call the board of elections when the boards are not doing what I need them to do [i.e., announce early voting schedules]. We also have researchers. There is not a phone number that we put on a postcard or on a phone bank until one of our researchers has called that number, and we know this number is going directly into the Board of Elections, not some commissioner of revenue, or some other office, which just happens to be the number they stuck on the website. There is a tremendous attention to detail.

Recruit Your Team

Dr. Fern Clarke

Zeta Phi Beta sorority Georgia social action coordinator

We [Zeta Phi Beta Sorority and Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity] had blue boots on the ground... Every chapter was challenged to do something that was different to come out to be involved in the community, to reach their community and engage their community. We had yard signs. We were passing out yard signs in front of different stores. We were collaborating with the NAACP. We were doing voter registration. We had billboards put up across the entire state. We were at voting polls. We were passing out snacks. We were passing out hot beverages on the cold days. We were passing out water on the hot days because we wanted to make sure that no one was deterred by the long lines at polls and just left. We wanted to make sure that they stayed until they voted because we wanted every vote to count.

Use Experienced Trainers

Kaisha Alexander Johnson

Sigma Gamma Rho southeastern regional social action coordinator

We participated in voter canvassing. We also participated in voter phone banks. All of our social action chairs within the Southeastern region of the United States had the opportunity, and most of them received training from the NAACP on its Voter Action Network. That enabled us to organize our efforts and to reach people who may historically have been ignored and to encourage them to register and vote. We also canvassed with the Atlanta metropolitan branch of the NAACP to register people to vote in

nursing homes and college campuses, we provided voter registration training for all our members if they wanted to and if they were not able to come to Atlanta for the training.

We also encouraged them to receive training from their local Supervisor of Elections Office and their local NAACP office... At the Supervisor of Elections Office, we asked sorors to become deputy registrars to receive that training to become deputy registrars in their county.

Give Volunteers Tasks They Want

Jessica King

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education

One of the things that we ended up doing was we made sure that nobody could get away from us or get away from our GOTV [Get Out the Vote] work. We had young people and old people in it, across generational lines. So, if you were an older person that preferred not to do in-person work, we had you on the phones. We had our young people texting. We canvassed heavily even throughout the holidays, which was extremely different for us, and for many people, but it was very successful.

Hire Locals, Including Youth

Antonio Lewis

Atlanta organizer, candidate

I was happy because I figured out a way to hire the folks who could hit the doors, [young people] who were from the community. They weren't afraid to walk through the communities and not afraid to walk through the apartments. And they cared enough about it, too, because they care about their future. They were running based off, "I don't like Trump, and this is my way to help." So, we had 16-year-olds who couldn't vote, but I had one 16-year-old who talked to 10,000 folks. So, I know what they're thinking and I'm excited about that.

We were able to hire 93 folks and some of them were folks who I know had never had a job before in their life and would never dream of having another job. They knew that their money was going to be right. They knew that the employer was going to respect them. They knew they're working for something that mattered. And so, the numbers were high, only because the people cared about it.

Wendy Nevarez-Sanchez

Young Mobilizers vice-president

Like Antonio [Lewis] mentioned, we were all high school students. For a lot of us, that was either our first job, or we had never had such a high paying job. That was another really good thing about Antonio and

the organization is that they paid us really well enough to where we could financially support ourselves or even our families, especially during a pandemic.

Coordinate, Don't Duplicate

Ray McClendon

Atlanta NAACP political action chairman

We were in an unprecedented situation, and that just made it even more important that we have this kind of constant, ongoing communication. Collaboration absolutely was key. Communication was critical... and we coordinated, because different organizations have different skill sets, and they had different objectives and different restrictions... by knowing what each organization was doing, we could say, "Okay great, we might not do that, but we know somebody else will so we can make sure we cover another area."

Share Information Fast

Penny Poole

Gwinnett County NAACP president

We made it an important part of our organization to reach out to everyone, to make sure that this word went out far and wide, and the information was changing so quickly. It was sometimes difficult to do, but information was coming and going. Now in the Gwinnett area we have one of the most diverse populations in the Southeast... All of these organizations locally in Gwinnett collaborated to make sure that we had a consensus, so that the different demographics areas of the community were covered.

Attend Others' Events

James Bruin

Divine Nine outgoing president

One of the things we've all been adamant about is making sure to go out and support each other. So it's no thing if, let's say, me and some brothers get in the car, and we all ride to South Georgia to go to that march; or it's no thing for them to come up and we all say well we're going to go over here to Augusta, and let's support them for what they got going on there, their voter registration; or let's support them with making sure we get the information out, so people know about where to vote, and who to vote for, as far as, not necessarily endorsing a candidate per se, but making sure all the information is out there so people can make a decision for themselves.

Do Whatever is Needed

Jessica King

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education

We were thrown smack dab into the runoff election. The general election was already hard, and you could see the mental and physical exhaustion of voters, and of workers. So, to be thrown into the runoff election was something that I think most of Georgia was not actually prepared for but was ready. And I will say that that work that we did in 2018, and up until this point, prepared us for it. And the only thing that we did and could do was to use everything that we had done before and ramp it up 10 times more and be successful... We were not prepared, but we were ready.

Jamal Grooms

National Panhellenic Council greater Atlanta chapter president

We started these meetings with literally all the Divine Nine organizations across the state. We had the Urban League. We were aligned with NAACP. I mean, it was funny to me that the current president of the NAACP, who is also our frat Brother, Brother Rose, he had me on speed dial, and he was calling me for all kinds of things. It was funny one weekend he called me and said he needed a grill. And I said, a grill? He said, yeah, a grill. I said, do you need somebody to cook? He said, no, I need a grill. I went and borrowed my mother's truck because she has a truck. And I put the grill in the truck. I brought the grill to the site... never had I witnessed people come together like they came together for this cause. I got that grill out there and the Masons cooked the meat.

Let Volunteers' Roles Evolve

Andrea Miller

Center for Common Ground founding board member

Well, we're dealing with a lot to tease apart what made this [Georgia Way] so successful... I think in some ways, the pandemic drove more people to phone bank. The abundance of postcards and the success of that program drove more people to phone bank. We kind of jokingly called it [postcards] the "gateway drug" throughout. A lot of folks don't want to immediately and directly interact with people. They're fine writing cards. They're fine clicking the Send button repeatedly and sending 2,000 texts a day, but as soon as you actually get on the phone with someone, especially someone from a geographical region that's completely different from yours, it's awkward. I totally understand. I'm a natural introvert. There's kind of a ramp.

There's a ramp up to phone banking. I think that because of the success of our postcard program, we could then say this type of contacting voters is even more effective, you know, and, and also physical

canvassing isn't an option right now. This is all we got. There were a lot of reasons why we got so many people phone banking. There were so many factors outside of our control and our responsibility became how do we keep these people phone banking, because now they've already broken through the comfort barrier.

Trust Your Capable Staff

Gabriel Wheaton

Center for Common Ground phone bank manager

A lot of the reason why we could be so responsive is because Andrea [Miller] gave us a mandate to correct scripts and other things. She gave us a lot of power to move quickly and to fix things without kind of being bogged down by an administrative approval process. This ramped up slowly but once there was an understanding there, that was a huge part. She really deserves a lot of credit as the leader of this organization for knowing when things required her supervision and what things did not.

Take Care of Your Team

Wendy Nevarez-Sanchez

Young Mobilizers vice-president

We would ride around in vans and we would drop each other off on streets to hit all these doors. We made sure we have the phone number of the driver who would come and pick us up. So, the drivers were always assigned to drive around areas that they dropped everyone off, and to make sure, for safety purposes, as far as the ladies were concerned, that we didn't feel unsafe in particular communities. We would even partner up and definitely strategize about unique ways to reach voters. They were definitely some fun times and some very unique ways that we managed it. But what also motivated us, even more, was having each other.

Antonio Lewis

Atlanta organizer, candidate

We had vans and the students just laughed and talked about being in the vans. But I knew how important the vans were because part of the reason why folks couldn't get hired in Atlanta was a transportation problem... I stood [firm] on the fact that when I signed any contract with any organization to do business in my community, they would have to provide transportation...

People laughed at me and would say, "Hey man, why are you spending your money on breakfast? Why are you calling folks to make sure they got food when you pay them?" I know some folks used that money to pay rent at home or help out with rent. And that's a part of it... It's part of where we live, and we can't

even complain about that. We've got to try to offer social mobility and take people from where they are and move them forward.



Chapter 5: Effective Campaigning

Editor's note: One remarkable dimension of the 2020 campaign were the insights into what activities and messaging would be welcomed by voters. The following comments underscore how grassroots organizers knew what would resonate in their communities and met people where they were in their lives, which, in turn, translated into prompting people to vote.

Events that Set a Tone

Karen Rene

Atlanta NAACP second vice-president and director

We looked at different ways of doing things, and then once they [public health officials] gave us permission to know that we could do things outdoors with the masks and everything, we started blasting out our events. We even brought in DTLR, which is an urban clothing store. And we approached them to say, "Hey you know one of the goals is to register a lot of young people." We started with DTLR and they loved the project so much that they incorporated it in all of the other states around the country, partnering with other NAACP [chapters] and also in the 19 counties that Richard [Rose, Atlanta NAACP president] had targeted and started cultivating all of those relationships. So that's one example of how we attacked the challenge of attracting our youth and how we went ahead. And we had DJ parties right in front of the stores. And to make sure that our people were safe, we made sure that people came on their lunch breaks.

We created food parties and barbecues, [with the message to] make sure you had an opportunity to vote; you know, you can vote today, but grab a sandwich on your way back. That kind of thing. This year [2020] has been really challenging. A lot of people started losing their jobs. The NAACP took a look at that. We partnered with the city of East Point [where Rene is mayor] and started a food bank... We made sure that all of our volunteers are there to help, to make sure that the families who are in need are receiving food boxes every day, if they need one. That was also critical for us because what happens is, we couldn't get people to register [to vote] if they were hungry or worried about how they're going to put food on the table.

Ray McClendon

Atlanta NAACP political action chairman

There were celebrations that were occurring, because our culture is relational, is about coming together, and food is shared and music is shared, and so we had those kinds of celebrations.

Jamal Grooms

National Panhellenic Council greater Atlanta chapter president

I was involved in a lot of the rallies. It was cool to have the mix of the different organizations present... There was always music and there was always a lot of food; I mean a lot. It seemed like the food would not run out, which was a good thing because it created a warm atmosphere for those people going to vote early. There was some sentiment that had been placed in the atmosphere, about people being out, if you will, and going to vote. The rallies put people at ease and allowed them to walk to the polls feeling comfortable and confident that they wouldn't have any challenge or any charge, and they could handle their civic duty. Between the music and the food, and all the giveaways, people really got involved.

Marvin Nunnally

Masons deputy grand master for Georgia

We had to be intentional about setting the atmosphere. So yeah, we like our music. We like our food. Okay, that's a given. And we targeted the specific areas in and around Athens, Georgia, and it set the tone for us. They [communities] knew that when our group said we were coming into this week, because they had heard about what we did last week. Bam, they were there. And when we said we're going to be over here in two weeks, bam, they were there... We built momentum, we kept building and building the audience, but more importantly, what we kept doing was working on their minds. And that was the beauty of all this moving around the food, the music, the motorcycles. Everything else, it all, it all played a role.

Dravian McGill

Crisp County Democratic Committee

It's one thing for us to go out as [Democratic Party county] chair people and district people and say, "Hey, vote," but they [the voters] need to see the candidate. They need to get involved directly, hands on, even if it's for 15 minutes... to come down and see what this candidate looks like just to feel a part of it. It started with us getting Miss Stacey Abrams, who was able to come down. We're always glad to see Congressman Sanford Bishop who has been a friend of ours... when we got involved with Black Voter Matters and they brought the [campaign] buses down, it started this transition for everybody wanting to come out just to be a part of this thing."

Keep Messaging Personal

Nse Ufot

New Georgia Project executive officer

It is our job, our responsibility to go out into communities and to listen, because people will tell you what their hopes are, what their fears are for themselves and for their families and for their communities...

When I think about the runoff election, for example, we were talking about COVID-19 because that was the biggest issue on the minds of most Georgians for most of the year. But when it got to the runoff time, we're talking about Thanksgiving and Christmas and Hanukkah and Kwanzaa and New Year's right, and people are thinking about how they are going to buy gifts for themselves and their families? How are they going to meet their financial obligations at the end of the year? What's going to happen with my job? So, you know what people wanted to talk about, they didn't want to talk about COVID, because we've been talking about it all year. They wanted to talk about their stimulus checks [if the Democrats won].

Helen Butler

Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda convener

I think people really understand now the connection between what voting can bring to you versus where it really was before COVID-19... Whether I got my stimulus check, right? Whether I have rental assistance. It's their tax dollars. They now understand that you've got to have the right people that can empathize with what is happening on the ground, and your personal life, to be able to really develop policies that will make life better for everyone, not for a select few, but for everyone so I think they're motivated.

They stood in line. When we had these new [voting] machines. We had long lines, we had poll workers not showing up. They stood in line for hours, some people didn't stop voting until 11 [pm] and 12 at midnight; you know, in a line. They saw it, how important it was, and of course the runoff really brought it home because they did get their stimulus checks, after they had a representative body that would vote in favor of doing something that would help the least of these people, not just the people at the top, but people in every spectrum of life.

Gerald Griggs

NAACP Atlanta first vice-president

It was difficult in the middle of a pandemic. So, we hosted, you know, contactless canvassing where we would knock on the door and step back six feet and have conversations with people in a lot of the communities. This was the first time anybody had ever canvassed or knocked on their door. We let them know what's going on electorally in their community and also promised candidate accountability. And so, we did a lot of that, once we realized that, you know, this was the penultimate election of our lifetime. We did it with Morehouse College. We did it with a lot of HBCUs [historically Black colleges and universities]. We did it around the state, with NACA every single day and [NACA] had the buses out and we partnered with them. NACA is the Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America that came into Georgia to do this [work]. So they brought the buses. They brought the volunteers. We had rallies all over the metro Atlanta area, and we stretched it out to the entire state. So, every single day they [the canvassers] had walk sheets where they were knocking doors, and we were knocking doors with them and making that personal connection, socially distanced, but making that personal connection. I think that helped to put us over because when you actually go and talk with the voters, and listen to their concerns, and let them know that there will be candidate accountability, it really motivated them to get out and vote. It was a phenomenal experience to be able to have that level of voter engagement.

Richard Rose

Atlanta NAACP president

We knew that we could not go into 2020 by only focusing on the presidential level. We had to focus on local elections that people could touch and feel—like the law enforcement, the sheriff, justice of the peace. And so that's what we did: focus on local races that they knew. They know the sheriff, and we actually downplayed the national election. We think that was significant, you know the June [2020] primary was out of bounds in terms of voter turnout, but people waited. Some people waited hours in line to vote. And that was because I believe that our focus was on judges, on the local election of the sheriff. It made a difference where people could feel it and they felt more connected to the process. We had to have a connection to the process.

Gerald Griggs

Atlanta NAACP first vice president

In Southeast Georgia, most [national campaign] people didn't go down there. And so, once we heard about what happened with my dear brother Ahmaud Arbery, we went there multiple times and we took a motorcade to the six surrounding counties. We started to build relationships with the actual grassroots organizers that lived down there. We got to know them on a first-name basis. We ate at their houses. We came down, and one of the great things that we did in the protests for messaging was we started to incorporate the [voter turnout] messaging so you would see the signs at the protests, and so now people can connect. When I'm upset and outraged, how do I manifest that passion into purpose? When you take it to the polls, and you hold elected officials accountable.

Like Richard [Rose, NAACP Atlanta president] said, we weren't so much focused on the top of the ticket. We were focused on the middle and the bottom of the ticket. That's why you saw district attorney races turn, you saw Sheriff races turn, you saw all over the state people that were at the levers of power in the criminal justice system start getting replaced in Southeast Georgia, and then we brought that to Middle Georgia so when we were passing out material in Waycross, we would stop in Macon, we would pass materials out to the grassroots organizers who had 20 and 30 years' experience in that community. So, you didn't just have a flyover like most of the big organizations do; you penetrate it down to the roots. We knew that the votes were there. We just had to mobilize the votes, and we could replicate that. I think that's what's important. We talked about relationship building—relational organization. We have built a system that can be replicated. When people were saying, "Oh, November was a surprise" [that Joe Biden won], we said, "Okay well let's do it again in January, and then we'll do it again this November. [2021]." People need to understand that once you build that, and everybody has the same message, you can repeat that message and it takes hold.



Help People Plan to Vote

Andrea Miller

Center for Common Ground founding board member

We asked voters, "What is your voting plan?" and if they said they were going to vote by mail, Then, we, of course, had the conversation. Do you have your vote by mail ballot? "Yeah." Okay, find that, fill it out, put it in the envelope, sign it... and then we would text them drop box locations because Deepak Puri had built a map for us with all of the drop box locations. So, it is our belief that if we want marginalized voters to be able to vote, we have to be prepared to give them information, and we can't just say, "Oh, early voting has started, go vote." They will say, "Where? Where do I go? When is it open?" We had to be prepared to answer all those questions... We had probably close to 600 people that were texting for Georgia at various points.

Target Older Voters

Celestine Levanne

Sigma Gamma Rho southeastern region regional director

Our sorority partnered with Oprah Winfrey and the OWN network to get voters registered and voter turnout in Georgia... We also collaborated with Black Voters Matter to provide absentee voter webinar information. And so each of the states each of the five states in our region had a representative from Black Voters Matter and they talked about as Penny [Poole, Gwinnett County NAACP president] just said, being up to date on voter registration laws that were constantly changing, so that all of our members, including our friends, we call them and anyone in our community that was invited, knew real time information on absentee voting, and any kind of legislation that was on the table that could disenfranchise voters.

Target Young Voters

Martin Raxton

Chairman of Kappa Alpha Psi political action committee

We wanted to ensure that our young people that were voting age, and voting eligible, knew to go register and to go and vote. And we wanted to ensure that they would not be excluded, and that the high schools knew that these teens needed to be registered and needed to go vote. They needed to pull them into a meeting where we can talk about the political process, and talk to them about the importance of this election and why these two Senate seats matter, and have them bring their family members and relatives

and friends, and start from the grassroots... We did a video called “Stomp to the Polls” that Kappa Alpha Psi was featured in. We made sure to show that video and to ensure that our youth saw us in action, and that we were not on the sidelines and that when that time and that call was, “What did we do?” We had evidence that we’re involved in the political arena.

Anticipate Voters Concerns

Ray McClendon

Atlanta NAACP political action chairman

We got to a chaotic point [in mid-summer]. We had a pandemic. We had [Postmaster General Louis] DeJoy, literally, physically dismantling the Postal Service. People were getting real time feedback that people were concerned about whether their ballots would get in. We started making a strategic decision to let folks know if you have concerns, here are your options. You can either take it directly to a drop box and drop it, you can take it to the registrar’s office, or you can take it in, have it canceled and vote early in person.

Andrea Miller

Center for Common Ground founding board member

Our heart is always in the rural Black Belt. In areas where they got a postcard but maybe not a phone call, and maybe not a text, they had a billboard. They had a sentinel standing there 24X7, saying, “On January 5th, we’re going to need you to vote.” We were one of the few organizations that included voting for public service commissioner [also on the ballot] because we know how important that position is [for rural areas]. So, we had the postcards. We had the billboards. We had the phone banks. We had the texting... We also added a number that people could call, and then they would get a call back and someone would schedule them for their free ride to the polls. It doesn’t do you any good having voters willing to vote for you who don’t have the ability to get there. So, we made sure that voters could get there.

Use Your Best Way to Reach Voters

Bobby Jenkins

Randolph County Democratic Committee

What we learned during the senatorial runoff was how effective canvassing door to door was and getting people energized. We took what we learned there to help people get vaccinated against COVID-19. In our area, the health department was advertising that you could go online and sign up and get the shot. Well, there’s a problem. A lot of people, especially 65-plus, either didn’t have internet connectivity, or they

didn't have the technological skills to navigate that... We've done that and we're still looking for ways to improve all the conditions in our area.

Dr. Fern Clarke

Zeta Phi Beta sorority Georgia social action coordinator

One of the things that we did was we started working with the organization I worked with, the Department of Juvenile Justice to see how we can get those who are detained in the facilities registered to vote and make sure that they are voting, even if it's with absentee ballots; making sure that we have that collaboration so that we can get those members who are usually a forgotten population but making sure that we didn't forget any part of our population.

We had the run-off and that was another opportunity for us to embark on another voter registration opportunity where we have individuals who weren't 18 at the time of the national election, but who would have been 18 for the runoff. I was just trying to be strategic and find those areas in which we could increase community involvement... We had a couple of forums in which we educated the community on the importance of voting, and the importance of not only voting because a lot of members of our community, if you look at the statistics, you will see more people turn out and vote for national elections than for a runoff election.

Different Media for Different Generations

Marvin Nunnally

Masons deputy grand master for Georgia

What worked out well was we were able to get on the radio. We have a black-owned radio station, WXAG here in Athens, Georgia owned by Michael Thurmond. We were able to work with the radio station... Some people like to listen to the radio station, and we had these young people who like to do the texting and everything else that young people do. We had people who were intentionally doing social media for us, posting, "Hey, they're going to be over on Broad Street this week with the music and the food." That set the tone for what we were able to do, what we're able to accomplish. And when you can see little old folks coming out at the public housing centers where we were at, sometimes they'd say, "I'm so happy you're here." ...You must be intentional, set the tone, set the atmosphere.

Vicki Pearson

Zeta Phi Beta sorority Georgia State Director

One of the things that I think Zeta [Phi Beta] has been really good with our members is coaching them on the importance of local political involvement, and how that translates into impacting your everyday life, and then us going out and showing that to our community. I'll just mention quickly that one of the things we did with the runoff was to film some PSAs. And in those PSAs, we talked about how your US Senator impacts your everyday life and making the connection between who you have as your representative for

the senate can impact you. It can impact how much your stimulus check is going to be; making those connections to the public about how the government impacts them at every level.

Communicate and Coordinate

Karen Rene

Atlanta NAACP second vice-president and director

If we were not on the Zoom meeting, we were on a Microsoft Team meeting. What we were trying our best to do in the collaboration process was to make sure that there was at least twice a week, or sometimes three times a week [check-ins], and a coordinated effort with Gerald [Griggs, Atlanta NAACP first vice-president] being in the streets and with Richard [Rose, Atlanta NAACP president] with talking with [various organization] leaderships and management across the state. It helped us kind of formulate a cohesive group that, when we pick up the phone, other people will also say, "Hey I need to add this group [to the calls] as well." It was really effective.

When we started off with voter registration, we involved a lot of Walmart stores because we knew a lot of people shopped at Walmart. So, Richard [Rose] was able to talk with some of the top management in Walmart, and we were able to do that all across the state of Georgia, and especially in the 19 Counties that we had identified as a lot of the Black voters. We were doing those voter registrations, at least three times a week, out in parking lots, so what does that mean? It means that we have to have organizations, or the NAACP, the Prince Hall Masons and NACA, and even some of the Color Change people also came out to help us coordinate... to make sure that we put flyers on everybody's doors in the communities. It was really critical for us to make sure that we had trust in the community to let them know, "Hey, we'll be in your community this weekend. Give us a shout out or just come over and register to vote." And then Richard also came up with a great idea. He hired [electronic billboard] trucks to go around in the community, especially [neighborhoods] with low propensity voters, because we wanted everybody. We wanted to make sure, even with the Poor People's Campaign, we were working with them to make sure that, "Hey, let's get a lot of your people out," because like Gerald [Griggs, NAACP Atlanta first vice-president] said, some people said that nobody has ever knocked on their doors. Those grassroots efforts are the ones that really made the difference."

More on Tactics, Technologies, and Media

Editor's note: What became notable was how many different ways voters were reached. Voters, especially in areas where statewide and national campaigns rarely reached out, were repeatedly reminded about planning to vote and voting—in ways that made sense in those communities. These various efforts, collectively, reinforced each other.

Strategically Place Billboards

Kaisha Alexander Johnson

Sigma Gamma Rho southeastern regional social action coordinator

We placed billboards around Georgia in rural areas as well as in the Atlanta area to remind people to vote. And over time, we displayed the billboards from December 21 through January 5, and over 9 million people were able to see all these different billboards because they were strategically placed so that was awesome as well.

We wanted to make sure that we reached members of the community who have historically been ignored. Even in consideration of where we were going to place the digital billboards... because we knew Atlanta. "Yeah, we're going to have a bunch of things in Atlanta, but we wanted to make sure we had a win, and we wanted to make sure that we had billboards in other areas across the state..." They could take that information and go with it into their communities and touch those members of the communities who normally had been disenfranchised or may have been just they may not know a lot of information, especially with the Senate run-off.

Motorcades for Excitement and Visibility

Marvin Nunnally

Masons deputy grand master for Georgia

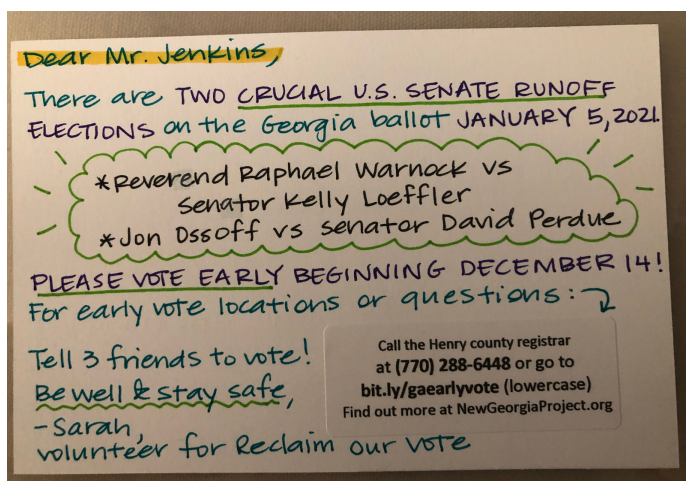
We were working with the motorcycle crew. They were able to just go to different cities and particularly those outlying areas. They said we want to go to the outlying areas, which was very successful to Toccoa to Gainesville to Dahlonega and exciting. The folks got the kids to say, "Wow, look at those motorcycles!" But now there were those motorcycles, there are those fancy cars there, but it would give out literature. They were feeding you. I'd say, "Check this out, young man, check this out. Make sure Mom has this." They were buying it.

Postcards to Every Voter

Andrea Miller

Center for Common Ground founding board member

The [Center's] post carding program and the texting program were both new. We had never sent a postcard prior to the special election in North Carolina in 2019. We were working in a very rural district. Realistically, we weren't going to be able to door knock it. And we had a lot of bad phone numbers. The voters that we had called, unfortunately, haven't really been called by anybody. They haven't been called by candidates. They haven't been called by political parties. So, they've stopped voting, which really means they're not going to be called by candidates, political parties. We started running into those bad phone numbers. I thought, "Well, we do have addresses. Let's see if we can reach voters that we have bad phone numbers for by postcards..." In Onslow County, North Carolina, a very rural county, we sent 309 postcards. And that was because we had 309 bad phone numbers. Now, normally in Onslow County, they average three new voter registrations a month. We were contacting voters that were no longer registered. In the six weeks after we sent those postcards, 79 new people registered... We sent 3,518,381 postcards to voters in Georgia in 2020.



Nimble Texting & Phone Banking

Gabriel Wheaton

Center for Common Ground phone bank manager

A lot of the strengths from our phone banking came from the fact that there were a lot of new things about it, such as the fact that we didn't have a history of phone banking. We got started because we saw, "Oh look, we have 40,000 volunteers, and many of them are willing to go and phone bank." That was kind of a good thing in making the phone banks more effective because there wasn't this institutional history of having a way that things were done. It was more of we have all these volunteers right here, let's make banks as good and responsive as possible. I think initially part of the reason why a lot of volunteers kept using our phone banks is that we were able to respond to the feedback of volunteers on a day-to-day basis.

Use Best Messages in All Media

Andrea Miller

Center for Common Ground founding board member

We designed our own line of postcards because we realized right from the first moment that a voter encounters us, we want the voter experience to be, "Oh, right. I like the way this looks. This could represent me," and we predominantly use this theme of vote your power. So, and telling marginalized voters, wait a minute, they marginalize you because they don't want you to understand how much power you have. So, you're not voting for your lives, we want you to vote your power. So, we had designers who understood that they wanted to design something we needed, something that would be eye-catching, that would be attractive, that would be culturally sensitive, and that would on its own, make a statement. We then took that image from the postcard and blew it up so that it became an image on billboards. We had billboards throughout the state of Georgia. We had the standing billboard, we had mobile billboards that moved around so that we were going into the neighborhoods, so that if somehow you would miss that. "What do you mean there's an election in January?"



Chapter 6: Challenges and Solutions

Editor's note: From the start of the campaign to its race to the finish line of casting ballots that would count, the organizers faced challenges and found solutions. In all high-stakes elections, tensions flare as the pressure mounts. But what was new and notable with Georgia's 2020 elections was the reliance on new technologies and managing an unprecedented voter information and outreach operation.

Keeping Up as Pace Gets Faster

Kaisha Alexander Johnson

Sigma Gamma Rho southeastern regional social action coordinator

We, the different organizations including the NPHC organizations, began to have monthly meetings which turned into bi-weekly meetings which turned into weekly meetings on how to get out the vote—literally for the past two years, and it continues.

Ray McClendon

Atlanta NAACP political action chairman

We got to a point where we were meeting every week. And then we would have NAACP meetings every week as well, with about 20 chapters around the state. We get information coming out of that meeting. Then we would take it to the D9 meeting, and then it would be disseminated to our other civic engagement partners, so we were constantly up to the minute addressing real-time issues with real-time tactics.

Dealing with Too Much Information

Penny Poole

Gwinnett County NAACP president

It was our job to keep people motivated and educated because voting and mobilization is jurisdictional... The materials that were in abundance. People just did not have time to read it. We had flyers, local flyers that gave those the breakdown of the information. We wanted people to have hand-on information... We made sure they kept seeing it, day and night, knowing what was going on, what the next move was, what we had to do, what our objectives were, and we had challenging situations.

When it came time to get the absentee ballots in, many people were confused on the deadline, because if we waited to send in absentee ballots, the last day that they were available, they would have never

arrived in the mail. We made sure that they [the sisters of Sigma Gamma Rho] had the data, to send it in time to get to the post office, to get [ballots] disseminated and to reach its destination [to be counted].

Dealing with Buggy Apps

Wendy Nevarez-Sanchez

Young Mobilizers vice-president

Something that didn't [always] work, more on the technical side, was the [Democratic Party's] minivan app. We had a very lot of difficulties with that. I have coding experience prior to canvassing and so I've worked in app development and stuff like that... So because the app itself had a lot of glitches, a lot of times the app would not refresh properly. So sometimes it will say doors weren't not knocked—when they really were. There'd be times where in the system, it would say that doors weren't knocked but we would walk by the door and there's already a piece of literature there.

Andrea Miller

Center for Common Ground founding board member

We respect technology, and we have no problem switching technologies if something is going to be better. We looked at using a power dialer [for phone banks] ... We rapidly abandoned it because we couldn't leave messages. And one of the things that we know is from looking at our own statistics, there is no difference in turnout between voters that we spoke to, and voters where we left messages, because our messages had so much detail. We realized we can't use a system if we can't leave a message.

Feedback Between Frontlines and Technologists

Ray McClendon

Atlanta NAACP political action chairman

It's critical that when we have people on the ground, grassroots level folks on the ground, that we can give you [technologists] granular-level intelligence that you can then incorporate into the strategy of reaching folks. What it did for us then was bring us all these assets [together]... They're going to be speaking from one voice, as if they were on the ground locally. It won't be some kind of bland generic phone bank, but it would be tailored. That was one of the great things I loved about working with you [The Center for Common Ground]. We would collaborate from day to day. "Okay, let's change this message." "Let's do this." "Let's work with them."

The other thing that was great, from our standpoint and working with you was that when you have legacy systems [like many established groups], you kind of have to rely on legacy systems. That means when somebody new comes in like you, you can leapfrog us, because you're not burdened with something that's been invested in over the years. It was great to have this additional backup that you brought, which was fresh eyes, fresh ideas and a fresh system with phone numbers and things. Many of us still had some old [and outdated] data. It allowed us to be much more effective. From that standpoint, we really appreciated the partnership. I know it made us more effective in the outreach that we were able to do through the Atlanta NAACP and our relationships with other civic engagement organizations around the state.

Trusting Unknown Volunteers

Nancy Goodban

Center for Common Ground operations manager

After the pandemic, we switched everything to Zoom. It's been more of a challenge for us organizers to really know who we're working with. All the people I met in the last year have been on Zoom or by email. We send out a weekly email to our own volunteers in our own area. That's what I do and that helps them with postcards. We explain the postcard campaign; that the Georgia runoff had 2.4 million postcard addresses... On my porch, because I counted the numbers, I sent 18,000 postcards off my porch in a month. But honestly, I didn't meet many people. They request [materials] by email. I package it up. Or they'd run up to my door with their mask, grab their package and run away. That's just how it's been.

Ensure Culturally Sensitive Scripts

Andrea Miller

Center for Common Ground founding board member

When we started out, we weren't really doing relational organizing. What we do is—we're remote. We've got 44,000 volunteers, and very few of our volunteers are in Georgia. Our volunteers are mostly in Northern California, Washington state, Oregon, and New York. So, in other words, our volunteers are in blue, blue, blue, blue states where they are not needed to volunteer and work on (their local) electoral campaigns. And this is something that I started back in 2016. I started to talk to friends and people that I knew in California, saying that if progressives really wanted to begin moving their agenda, they were going to have to start working in places to make them more blue, and they were going to need to look very hard at the South because of the incredibly large community of color population that was there.

Carey Wheaton

Center for Common Ground postcard team leader

We really follow Andrea [Miller] as our chief strategist on all of this. My interface is more with the volunteers and trying to make sure that the [card] scripts are culturally sensitive... Before we had our special postcards, people would come up with postcards, and a lot of times I had to write tricky diplomatic emails to people saying, "You know, that could be offensive." "We're not going to use that; you know, we're not going to use American flags, dogs, or things associated with trauma." I think after the U.S. Capitol invasion this year, people might understand that even more than I did. It was my challenge or my role and that was more about working with white liberal volunteers who didn't have a clue about the South, who didn't have a clue about these voters and what they're facing and what they're living with in their history, except the little bit that people have learned. I would work with Andrea and show her an email and say what do you think of this, and she would approve it before I would write a sensitive email. I feel we're very humble about what we bring. We bring our skills, but speaking personally, I've never been to Georgia. I'm just going as a human being who cares about other human beings that also has a lot to learn. We're always humble about it.

Fight Tedium

Jamal Grooms

National Panhellenic Council greater Atlanta chapter president

Once we started those weekly meetings, they were tedious because we were covering a lot of information. We would have Valdosta on the phone, we had Waycross, Georgia, on the phone, we had Savannah on the phone, we had Statesboro on the phone, we had Macon and Warner Robins and we had Griffin. We were hitting all these areas... It was truly a labor, I would say a labor of love, to participate in such a situation where you knew what mattered. And you would be in [the thick of] it, to try to ensure that the best outcome would be yielded for a people that is mostly underserved.

Wendy Nevarez-Sanchez

Young Mobilizers vice-president

There was a lot of time wasted when it comes to [canvas] shift changes... It was like, "Okay how are we going to get students from point A and point B students to point B, and make sure you know, they're all good and well?" That was another issue that we had.

Improvise When Necessary

Tyrese Miller

Young Mobilizers president

The lights being off [in the campaign office] was a challenge, but it wasn't as challenging as other things... You have to find a way to figure it out. So, we had [WiFi] hotspots. We have flashlights. Antonio [Lewis] went and bought these lights that stick on the wall and light up. So, I like to think of it like it's not about the product, but it's about the process. It was learning the process it took to get us where we are.

Some other challenges were not being able to get through gates [in housing complexes]. But we wanted to win so bad that we were going into the rental offices saying hey, we're canvassing, can you let us through the gate? They would say, "You can't put these on the doors." We'd say, "That's fine, we'll just knock on doors and talk to people." We were going to figure it out. It was just having those opportunities to have those conversations and build those relationships.

Delegate, Create Teams, Don't Panic

Tiffany Carr

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education

What worked was having teams. That way nobody was ever by themselves, and nobody really felt like they were out here just doing this work all alone without the support of anyone else around them. Also canvassing worked... educating and connecting the dots for people to show them how casting their vote also impacts what goes on in their communities. And just making it simple for them. I would say what did not work was stressing, overreacting, panicking... that did not work. Trying to have one plan that fits all, [that] wasn't going to work.

Document Your Effort

Wendy Nevarez-Sanchez

Young Mobilizers vice-president

We actually documented a lot of our experiences. One of the questions that Antonio [Lewis, Atlanta organizer and candidate] asked us was, "Why, as young people, do we feel like this is important... the whole canvassing thing?" I felt like one of the main things was ensuring that people realize their rights, because there's a lot of misinformation in our communities, when it comes to what they can do. I remember when we were canvassing, there was a young gentleman who said, can I vote? I was like, "Well, if you're registered, yes." And he said, "Well, I've served this amount of time and I'm currently on

probation.” Me and the other girl looked at each other like we didn’t know ourselves. There’s a lot of information we need to share when it comes to our communities.



Chapter 7: What's Next?

Editor's note: Georgia's activists want to build on their 2020 accomplishments and believe that their efforts could be replicated in other states—especially across the South. In 2021, they are looking to Georgia's municipal elections, where communities of color are underrepresented in many governments, on school boards, in law enforcement. They are also working to maintain the relationships nurtured in 2020 to help people overcome the partisan barriers that Georgia's Republicans have instituted in response to the 2020 election's outcomes. They also hope that grassroots groups will have the necessary funding to continue their work.

Grassroots Groups Need to Stay Active

Keith Reddings

Omega Psi Phi state representative

Here in Brunswick, we are in a never-ending cycle. We've got a mayoral race coming up here this year. We're motivating our people to stay engaged and stay involved not only in the big-time national elections, but we've got to take care of the local stuff. That's where it all starts. That really affects us more than what's going on in national politics. So once again we're keeping the voter registration going. We're mobilizing people that didn't engage in voting. We're trying to get them to see the importance and talking about the Georgia Way of how we got together and made our voices heard and changed the whole landscape of the election. So those people who thought that my vote doesn't count. Now, there's a chance that they now say, "Well, I guess if I joined this group my vote can count so," so we're pushing in that direction.

Buster Meadows

National Panhellenic Council greater Atlanta chapter president

We're doing the same thing. I remember a conversation, a prior meeting we had, as far as technology and stuff. And one of the apps that was talked about was staying aware of what's going on. So, from an IT perspective myself, I've learned that the voter turnout, and what we did in this Georgia Way everybody has been calling a short-term accomplishment. But there's long-term aspects to it. We have projects that are short term, but we also have day-to-day, ongoing tasks that need to be handled. So, in an Omega we have what's called the "VREM" committee—voter registration, engagement, and mobilization. What we're trying to do from a council and statewide perspective is that we want to get ahead of the curve.

We want to stay in touch with our partners, our community leaders, the Greeks that are in these positions, whether the city council or in elected positions. Be aware of the bills that are coming out. Look at those bills, how they affect us, what we can do about SB 202? How can we get around these, what are the loopholes in this law, what can we do? ...It's not a time to say, "Hey, the election is over," or "Hey,

these voting bills have passed.” What do we do now? How do we keep going? What are the impacts of these bills coming out? How do we counteract it?

Dravian McGill

Crisp County Democratic Committee

What we’re doing now, even though we’re in a nonpartisan municipal year, we have been stressing with the municipal candidates that this is a dry run for 2022. We need everybody to stay involved in getting voter turnout, getting quality candidates to run. So, we’re preparing ourselves for the big race, not that the local races are not big, but we have a gubernatorial race that we’re preparing everybody for. That’s our push here in Crisp County... to get everybody on board in the municipal races. If you turn out for those races, then we know that you’re automatically already registered to vote for next year.

Vicki Pearson

Zeta Phi Beta sorority Georgia State Director

We coach our members about participating in their local government. So, attending those school board meetings, attending those municipal or county meetings, getting to know the players involved, and having them get to know you and establishing those relationships. Because in those meetings you could be looking at your future state representatives. We feel that it’s really very important for us to start where we live with our political advocacy... so that their communities are aware of what’s going on with them locally, and how it directly impacts them, and how that feeds up into all levels of government from their local politician, up to their national politicians.

Tyrese Miller

Young Mobilizers president

One thing that I’ve noticed now is that we’re much more aware about voting... and how things are supposed to operate. We’re going to hold people accountable. I think that’s one thing that we pride ourselves in, and that’s holding people accountable. I think that’s my last message to America to anybody who decides to take any seats; we’re going to hold you accountable.

2021 and 2022 Campaigns Are Here

Nse Ufot

New Georgia Project executive officer

I want people to know that we have almost 1,600 municipal elections in Georgia in 2021. So, city council, mayor, school board, that’s how we build a pipeline. That’s how we build the leadership that we need in state government and in the federal government as families are thinking about returning to traditional learning settings in the fall when school opens back up. We’re looking at school boards, all across the

state of Georgia with the youngest person on the school board, graduated 30 years ago, right, and so what do you know about how we're going to address this last year of learning, right, and what students need in order to come back to traditional learning settings and try to close the gap or hit the ground running.

Nancy Goodban

Center for Common Ground operations manager

We're postcarding for energy equity, a community-based grassroots group called We the Plug Tho, which has been part of the Partnership for Southern Equity. They were created last year when the Public Service Commission in Georgia ended the moratorium on shut offs and started turning people's electricity off during the pandemic because they couldn't pay their bills, because they didn't have a job. This group of grassroots people got together and said we're going to hold those commissioners accountable. They're looking at the Public Service Commission. They're looking at rural electric cooperatives, and this year they're looking at municipal-owned utilities. They did a set of listening tours in April in the five regions of the state, and they asked us if we could phone bank and postcard for them. We sent postcards to utility customers, basically saying We the Plug Tho is having a listening tour. If you have concerns about your utility bill, come to this Zoom. You don't have to leave your home, and they also were able to offer a \$50 stipend for people who attended.

Andrea Miller

Center for Common Ground founding board member

Democracy Centers are our latest initiative... We've got one in Hawkinsville, where there's food insecurity. The Newberry Foundation, once a month, was feeding people. We opened the doors on December 21st (2020) of the Democracy Center. Between December 24th and January 5th, they knocked on 2,100 doors and had 1,700 conversations. Because once people connected that, "It's the Newberry Foundation, the place where we go for the food," people were more than willing to talk to them. The Newberry Foundation has space, and they are opening a food pantry because the county isn't any less food insecure than it was before, but probably more so. So that is what democracy centers do. They work to alleviate pain points in the community.

Grassroots Groups Need Resources

Shirley Sherrod

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education

We have the [grassroots] groups out there. We just haven't been able to keep them engaged just as we had them during the election. It's just unfortunate to not have the funds to be able to work in the way that we really need to. Probably most of our work, other groups, national and statewide, got the credit for it. Funds are flowing into them for this work, but they are not flowing into us. We are at a disadvantage

already when it comes to organizing for that because we must deal with so many different issues, you know, having to work on land loss issues, trying to build a food hub, trying to do so much more. We don't have the funds nor the staff to be able to do a full campaign as we would love to do and keep people engaged in between elections... You need to pay local people to do this work.

Dr. Fern Clarke

Zeta Phi Beta sorority Georgia social action coordinator

It starts with being familiar with the [post-2020] laws, being familiar with the changes that have been made and how those changes are likely to impact us, because we can't advocate, if we don't know how to advocate... A lot of times when we hear about the changes, we hear a little snippet from someone or just a social media post but being able to have those forums where the community can actually come in and get their questions answered, is critical.

Inviting some of our legislative members from the municipal level right up to the national level to come out and speak with the community and educate them on the changes and how they're going to be impacted and how their participation as voters can still make an impact. As much as we know that the drive to suppress our vote is very much alive, we have to start thinking of ways in which we can go around that. So, I think it's going to require using strategies like we see what we did in 2020, we see what we can do when we do come out and perform. Just because we're not getting a snack in the lines or a hot beverage that shouldn't stop us from turning out because we know that when we do come out and vote we see what happens.

Tyrese Miller

Young Mobilizers president

One thing I would like people to know is that the work can be done. I think one thing that we realized is that we didn't know how we could assist but now that we know. Like Antonio [Lewis] said, we know how we can assist. We know what we can do. If you need it done, come invest in us, the people who live here, and we'll get it done.

2020: Persistence Paid Off

Dr. Ben Williams

Omega Psi Phi pioneer and lifelong civil rights activist

What we're trying to do here [recounting the Georgia Way], is help others who may not have been as closely involved as us, really get a sense of the investment of time, talent and resources that came as a result of us coming together as the fist, rather than remaining as single fingers on a hand... We want to try to encourage others in the world to look at what it is we were able to accomplish and invite them to join us in thinking and working in a similar way... Team Unity showed how you can make the best better.

And that's something that we all derived; a great sense of pride... When our minds, hearts, are in sync, we make the best better.

Tiffany Carr

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education

Sometimes the journey is hard and sometimes it's long, but if you stay persistent, it's always going to be worth it, and it's always going to work out. Next, I will say, for those who feel as though their voice and their votes do not matter and it doesn't count, I think that this election really shows us all that is not true, and we have to start kind of questioning the thoughts that we have surrounding our voice and really start to ask ourselves like, who said that? And what facts do I have to support that? ...With us facing COVID-19 and two elections, not having access to the internet and all kinds of things, I would say people in the rural south really persevered and they really showed up. So, if anything, I hope that they are able to hold on to that, hold on to the experience, hold on to the result of them using their voice.

Wendy Nevarez-Sanchez

Young Mobilizers vice-president

There's been a long history of distrust between black and brown communities and city officials or even our city, or even our government officials. I feel like this experience [showed]... that young students or young people could get civically engaged... We've had multiple conversations with a lot of the homeowners, or residents and they would say, "why would I vote if my vote doesn't matter anyway?" And we would tell them, "You know, your vote does matter. It does..." Trust us. Invest in our black and brown communities. The work can be done.

Gerald Griggs

Atlanta NAACP first vice president

I think the lesson is to talk to the voters... and invest in grassroots organizing that can touch the universe of voters: not just television commercials, not just radio ads. Those [ads] are great, but when you actually touch the voters, and get a flavor of what's actually happening on the ground, you'll be amazed at the response. Most voters don't really hear from their elected officials, and they want to hear from elected officials, and they want to have a relationship. Once you start building that relationship and it is reciprocal, you will learn how to organize and mobilize out of any regressive system because Georgia is not really blue anyway. It's actually brown and black. And once you understand that you start speaking to those individuals that are most disenfranchised, most oppressed in the system, and start giving them the tools to remove their oppression, they will respond. I'm excited about 2021, 2022 in Georgia, I think we witnessed the birth of a new Georgia.

Biographies

Rhonda F. Briggins

J.D., Co-Chair National Social Action Commission, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

Rhonda Briggins is a change agent leader dedicated to justice and empowerment for black people. She currently serves as Co-Chair of the National Social Action Commission for Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Co-Founder of VoterRunLead, along with serving on the board of other organizations. During the 2020 elections, Briggins played a key role in educating, mobilizing, and getting out the vote.

James Bruin

Jr. Divine Nine outgoing president

I am the vice basileus, currently, of the [Omega Psi Phi] chapter. I'm also the outgoing president of the Divine 9 [the nine fraternities and sororities at historically Black colleges and universities] ...What brought me into activism, to be frank with you; it's in my blood. My mother is a retired teacher. And my father, you know, even though he didn't go to college, he always was very knowledgeable about life and encouraged my siblings to be involved in the community. And it was one of those things where you don't just sit back and twiddle your thumbs. If you got something you want to do and you want to make it happen, you do it. Malcolm X, one of my favorite quotes is, "If a person doesn't stand for something, they'll fall for anything."

Helen Butler

Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda convener

I've been doing a lot of civic engagement work for decades now. I came to this as the executive director of the Georgia Coalition for the People's Agenda. I started my civic engagement work with the NAACP voter fund. I was there for a number of years, doing the state of Georgia's work, getting people working with the branches, and the college collegiate chapters of the NAACP, to be engaged in electoral politics. But then I met some phenomenal leaders that I thought I'd never meet. When I was at UGA, the University of Georgia, I did get to see Hosea Williams because he came on campus, and we were protesting as a part of the Black Student Union there. I was one of the founding members of my sorority there, so it was just awesome to get to meet all of the civil rights leaders.

Tiffany Carr

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education organizer

I am Tiffany Carr. I am 26 years old. I am originally from Atlanta, Georgia, but I currently live in Albany, as I serve as the Outreach Specialist for the Southwest Georgia Project here with Mrs. [Shirley] Sherrod. I got into organizing. I feel like I kind of fell into it, because coming in, it was something that I had never done before. But I do like to think that I was born this way; it was born in me. I do feel as though anybody that does this work was born with a special fire within them to be able to carry out the work.

Dr. Fern Clarke

Zeta Phi Beta sorority Georgia social action coordinator

I wouldn't necessarily say that I started out with a background in activism, but more of a background in advocacy. I currently work for the Department of Juvenile Justice where I started out as a probation officer, right up to the point where I'm a case officer where I advocate for the kids and make sure that they get the right services they need so that they can be reintegrated back into the community and be successful... I saw the postings for the position to be the Social Action Coordinator for the state, under the Zeta Phi Beta sorority, I decided to apply for it because I thought this would be another area for me to advocate. I'm not so much advocating for juveniles but making sure that I advocate for my community.

Bobby Fuse

Lifelong civil rights activist organizer

I became involved in this work somewhere around 1968 when Lyndon Baines Johnson was running for president. Phil Merritt and I were about in six or seventh grade and we went into the Windsor Hotel and asked for some leaflets and stickers and things of that nature to pass out. We were the young men that passed out leaflets during the Civil rights Movement of '65 and '66... I have been involved in that throughout my life: throughout my high school career as a school integrationist; throughout my college career and training for my profession as a teacher and school system administrator; and as a church person. And now in retirement, as a consultant and a strategist still on the same battlefield.

Nancy Goodban

Center for Common Ground National Team Volunteer

I live in Northern California in the San Francisco Bay area in a very progressive community. Our volunteers tend to be quite affluent, many of them retired women, that's our typical volunteer. I have been around working and helping Andrea [Miller, Center for Common Ground founding board member] since probably about 2018. One of the things we've built over the last year, we went from about 3,500 volunteers in early 2020 to about 44,000 volunteers in late 2020, and to do that we had to also build a group of regional organizers... (23:54) Reaching out to voters of color in voter suppression states is a moral issue for a lot of us, a social justice issue. Our Unitarian Universalist Church has taken on Reclaim Our Vote and the Center for Common Ground, as a moral, spiritual, and racial justice issue. For a lot of people, it's personal.

Gerald Griggs

Atlanta NAACP first vice president

I've been a member of the NAACP since 2015 when I met [NAACP Atlanta] President [Richard] Rose at a police brutality rally and teach-in at Morehouse College. And he pulled me to the side, he said, "Young fella you want to get in some good trouble?" I didn't quite understand what he meant by that. But soon afterward I learned very quickly. What I brought to the movement here is activism on the ground in the streets. We've been part of the biggest marches in Georgia history, mainly organized by the Atlanta NAACP: whether it was 2016 Black Lives Matter, whether that's the Women's March, whether that's all of the activism that led up after the Women's March, and it was just bringing all communities together to mobilize to change political power.

Jamal Grooms

National Panhellenic Council greater Atlanta chapter president

I currently serve as president of the Greater Atlanta chapter of the NPHC, National Panhellenic Council... It was hard to grow up in the ATL, or Atlanta, and not [have activism] touch you. At nine years old, the first black mayor, Maynard Jackson, touched my spirit. I never met the man. My sister worked for him when he was the mayor, but I was inspired by him. My father was a part of SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, so that's where the Spirit was born... There's always been a sense of understanding our goal and the goal has always just been to serve.

Bobby Jenkins

Randolph County Democratic Committee

I've known Mr. [Bobby] Fuse for a while because he worked in this county when I was superintendent. But in 2014, we established the Randolph County Democratic committee. There was no such committee in the community. There were some groups that were active politically, but that was just so much apathy, people were not concerned about voting. They weren't worried about registration, so we started that organization, with the goal of getting people more involved, getting people more excited about voting, and understanding the power of that vote.

Kaisha Alexander Johnson

Sigma Gamma Rho sorority southeastern regional social action coordinator

I'm the southeastern regional social action coordinator for Sigma Gamma Rho... I say I was an NAACP baby. Both of my parents were very involved with the NAACP as I grew up, I grew up, you know, attending meetings and so forth. And my parents were involved in a lot of issues within the community. That is how I was brought up. That is how I was raised. That is part of our value system in our family.

Jessica King

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education organizer

I was born and raised in Albany, Georgia. I had the pleasure of working with Mrs. [Shirley] Sherrod in the Southwest Georgia Project for about three years and it was a phenomenal three years. I still cannot believe the shift that took place during this past election. It was unreal, especially because it was during a global pandemic. It is an experience that I will never ever forget. I learned an awful lot about organizing and about people, especially in rural areas.

Kimberly King

National Panhellenic Council of Greater Atlanta former president

Kimberly King is the current president of the National Panhellenic Council of Greater Atlanta, a collaborative organization of chapters of the nine historically Black Greek Lettered fraternities and sororities. In addition to promoting professional success, the NPHC sponsors numerous civic engagement projects and initiatives.

Dr. Celestine LaVan

Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated- Regional Director, Southeastern Region

I am the Regional Director for the Southeastern Region of Sigma Gamma Rho... As an educator my job every day is to empower young people to make sure that they understand what their rights are and understand the importance of civic engagement. I've been an advocate for young people my entire career, especially those who are marginalized. It is a natural segue to come into a leadership role where I can help make that impact, not only in Georgia but across the Southeastern Region.

Antonio Lewis

Atlanta organizer, candidate

I am a fourth generation Atlantan, fourth generation of the 29% of poverty of Atlanta. I'm the first generation to be a part of the 4%. Here in Atlanta, we have 29% of the black folk below the poverty level.

Only 4% make it out... I was raised here by my grandmother. My mom was murdered when I was three. My father, he's still in prison now. I take care of him to this day. And part of my goal is to learn more about his health. Learn more about his history because I'm more like him than my mother. To understand that his parents were all college grads, to understand that my grandfather was on the Freedom Rides, has been a tremendous learning experience over this time period. [Antonio Lewis is a 2021 candidate for Atlanta City Council.]

Ray McClendon

Political action director of Atlanta NAACP

Longtime political action director of Atlanta NAACP, Ray is a co-author of this e-book and conducted many of the interviews... I have tried to make a difference in my community for decades, as an activist, entrepreneur and community leader. [Ray McClendon is a co-author of this e-book and conducted many of its interviews.]

Dravian McGill

Crisp County Democratic Committee

I really got involved in community work with the Al Gore campaign. I was in grad school in Tennessee. I went to UTC and got involved with it through working with Donna Brazile when she was Al Gore's campaign manager [in 2000]. And ever since then, I brought that back down to Georgia. When I moved back down and started working with Mr. Fuse and got involved in a lot of the local elections to make sure that there was transparency. We just saw a lot of things that were wrong. We were still suffering. We were in the 2000s, but we were still suffering from a lot of Jim Crow rules that were going on, continuing to go on throughout the state... After meeting Mr. Fuse, I became the Democratic Party committee chair for Crisp County. And now we assist in setting up other neighboring counties to get them involved.

Buster Meadows

National Panhellenic Council greater Atlanta chapter president

I became active in [Omega Psi Phi] fraternity because of mentorships. I had teachers... Something that fell naturally to me was working on the Panhellenic Council. Right now, I'm serving as the vice president for the Great Atlanta Council. In that role, I started working with the guys from the NAACP.

Andrea Miller

Center for Common Ground founding board member

I have very extensive knowledge of politics and political strategies. I was born into a political family in Chicago, so I grew up with elections. And I can remember, I had two uncles that were Aldermen in the Daly machine. And I remember both of my uncles talking about winning and saying, "If you want to win, it really isn't about who believes what; it's about who gets their voters out. It is about the numbers." When doing outreach to rural areas, billboards are important because they spread the message 24/7; we specifically used digital billboards because we knew the message was going to change from Early Voting to Election Day voting. It is also critical to express the need for Rides to the Polls when dealing with older voters who potentially no longer drive. At Center for Common Ground, we understand our voters and their needs and work hard to make sure we meet them.

Tyrese Miller

Young Mobilizers president

I am Tyrese Miller. I guess I still currently serve as the SGA [Student Government Association] president of South Atlanta High School and as the Chair of the Public Schools Student Body. I'm the GHSA athletic representative for the State of Georgia. I'm the only representative inside of 285. I'm now the president of the Young Mobilizers [a political group he co-founded].

Ella Mobley

District Worthy Matron of Millen District No. 16, Order of the Eastern Star

Ella has been an Eastern Star for 20 years. Ella is the Assistant Secretary of her church and she was a foster parent for 25 years. Ella is married to Cedric Rhodes and they have 8 children, 20 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren.

Wendy Nevarez-Sanchez

Young Mobilizers vice-president

I am Wendy Nevarez-Sanchez, valedictorian, star student, Georgia scholar, and Miss South Atlanta High School. I'm also the Vice President of Young Mobilizers.

Marvin Nunnally

Masons deputy grand master for Georgia

I was surrounded by a lot of local people that I looked up to who were engaged in activism from childbirth on up. But more importantly upon going to school and having the opportunity to get an internship with state senator Julian Bond... I've had the pleasure of working behind the scenes or managing campaigns with a gubernatorial candidate, Andrew Young. But more importantly, going, looking forward to this campaign and what we did. And my role here in Athens, Georgia, not only with the Athens alumnae Panhellenic Council, but I serve as District Deputy Grand Master for Prince Hall (Masons) Jurisdiction of Georgia.

Vicki Pearson

Zeta Phi Beta sorority Georgia State Director

I am the Georgia State Director for Zeta Phi Beta sorority. I'm originally from Virginia, but I've lived here in Georgia for almost 30 years. And so, I have seen all of the different ways that Georgia has slowly but surely changed over the years. I'm very grateful for the outcome of the past election. I came to activism, naturally through my parents. They instilled in us the importance of voting, and then also once I became a member of Zeta Phi Beta, we specifically have an initiative around social action that we call Get Engaged.

Penny Poole

Gwinnett County NAACP president

I am a South Carolina low-country Geechee. And you know when you come from there, you have to fight. I am the great granddaughter of a slave. I have touched slavery, so when I moved to Metro Atlanta, just being involved in active was ingrained. I had been a scout leader, a Cub Scout leader for over 25 years. That's where my activism personally started, and then it grew into support for single mothers and children... Right now, I'm the current president for the Gwinnett NAACP.

Martin Raxton

Chairman of Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity political action committee...

Professionally, I am a Senior PMO Manager with experience working in the financial, hospitality, energy and insurance industries. I have obtained many professional certifications in my field to include PMP, CSM, SAFe Agilist and PMI-ACP. I have over 25 years of experience serving in key leadership roles: President and CEO, Krimson Political Action Council; Chairman, Southeastern Province Political Action Committee for Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.; Chairman of Kappa Day at the Georgia State Capitol; Co-Chairman of Georgia Team Unity Day at the Georgia State Capitol; Member, Douglas County Georgia Board of Assessors; Past Chairman, Douglas County Georgia Democratic Party and Past Chairman, City of Douglasville Planning & Zoning Board.

Keith Reddings

Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. Georgia State Representative

I am the 18th, Georgia State Representative for the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. I live in Brunswick, Georgia, where justice for Ahmaud Arbery is constantly on our minds. Living in Brunswick, I'm far away from the metro [areas], and I realized that the metro areas weren't going to be able to pull this off by themselves. I felt that every part of the state had to play a role. So that was one of the driving forces with me getting involved. One of my goals was to make sure that the entire state was covered. Being the leader of an organization with over 46 chapters spread out throughout the state. I knew we had the ability to canvas the entire state, and I found it very important to include each of our chapters in this effort.

Karen Rene

Atlanta NAACP second vice president and director

Karen Rene was first elected to the East Point City Council in 2014 and was re-elected in 2018 and serves as Mayor Pro Tem of the Atlanta-area city. She is a lawyer and has worked with young adults at the Atlanta Jobs Corps Center and currently serves as the second vice president of the NAACP's Atlanta/Fulton County branch.

Richard Rose

Atlanta NAACP president

I started with the NAACP as a teenager in Memphis, Tennessee. I had the good fortune that one of my mom's first cousins was also a founder of SCLC with Dr. King. I had those influences early on and coming into the Atlanta NAACP presidency in 2015, I started right away with voter registration, of course. And so, rolling into. We also took a busload of students to Ferguson, MO, to focus on voter registration and getting people out to vote. I am an accountant by profession, so I looked at the voting numbers. The 2016 presidential margin of victory in Georgia was only 211,000 votes with poor Black voter turnout, especially among Black males. I knew that the changing demographics meant that Black voters could swing Georgia to electoral victory if we increased turnout. That's when I devised the effort to target 18 counties in Georgia that represented 77% of the Black vote. This was the impetus for forming our state-wide collaborative.

Corey D. Shackleford, Sr.

18th Most Worshipful Grand Master Prince Hall Grand Lodge Jurisdiction of Georgia

Corey Shackleford, Sr. is a native of Carrollton, GA. He is a member of Foundation Lodge No. 592 in Smyrna, GA where he served as the chartering Worshipful Master upon the lodge inception from 2003 - 2004. During his tenure, he approached the Craft with a unique leadership style of excluding the "I, Me, and My" mentality and including a "We, Us, and Our" philosophy.

Shackleford enjoys implementing innovative ideas while encouraging and motivating others to move to the next level. He is an advocate of progressive change, community service, and is active in seeking ways to assist those who are less fortunate. He became a member of the Prince Hall Masonry in August of 1990 while serving in the Armed Forces (Army) in Western Europe and was raised in Thurgood Marshall Military Lodge No. 131.

Shirley Sherrod

Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education co-founder

My husband [Charles Sherrod] was one of the founding members of SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee]. His reason for coming to southwest Georgia, back in 1961, was due to a lawsuit the Justice Department had filed against Terrell County, Georgia. They were a county that's about 80% Black and, and nearly 3000 white people registered to vote and only 56 black people. So that work started way back then, working on organizing not only the Albany movement, but the movements here in southwest Georgia and Baker County and Terrell. You name the counties and we've done voter registration work in those counties dating back to 1961, for me, from 1965 forward. I became involved after my father was murdered by a white farmer who was not prosecuted. The voter registration and the organizing that we've done dates to 1961. And we've worked in these counties throughout all those years. [A James Beard Foundation Leadership Awardee, Mrs. Sherrod is the former Georgia State Director for Rural Development for the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture], and the first African American to ever hold that position].

Dr. Gloria Bromell Tinubu

Applied economist, educator, and former public official

With over 40 years of experience in community economics, Dr. Tinubu was tenured professor and chair of the Economics Department at Spelman College. She formerly served as college president, member of the Georgia General Assembly, member of the Georgia Board of Education, and a member of the Atlanta City Council. In 2012, she was the first African American woman in South Carolina to run for and win a congressional nomination for her party. She is a member of the Southeastern Collaborative for the UN Decade co-chaired by Wendell Paris and Heather Gray. Dr. Tinubu is a co-author of this e-book and conducted many of its interviews.

Nse Ufot

New Georgia Project Chief Executive Officer

Nse Ufot is the Chief Executive Officer of the New Georgia Project (NGP) and its affiliate, New Georgia Project Action Fund (NGP AF). Nse leads both organizations with a data-informed approach and a commitment to developing tools that leverage technology to make it easier for every voter to engage in every election. Nse and her team develop Georgia's home-grown talent by training and organizing local activists across the state. She has dedicated her life and career to working on civil, human and workers' rights issues and leads two organizations whose complementary aim is to strengthen Georgia's democracy by building community and power within Georgia's new majority of Black, Latino, AAPI, and young people. Under Nse's leadership, NGP has registered over 500K Georgians to vote.

Deiadra Wilson

16th Grand Worthy Matron Prince Hall Grand Chapter, Order of the Eastern Star Jurisdiction of Georgia

Sister Wilson is passionate about the Order of the Eastern Star, becoming a member on April 23, 1986. She served as Worthy Matron of Carrollton Chapter No. 28 from 1994-1996, Atlanta District Matron from 2000- 2002, currently serving the Jurisdiction of Georgia as the Grand Worthy Matron.

Employed by the Carroll County Board of Education for 32 years, where she was a teacher for sixteen years and coach for ten years. She was an administrator for sixteen years of elementary, high school, and alternative principal. She retired on December 31, 2016. She serves as a Zoning Commissioner on the Carroll County Zoning Board, member of Carroll County NAACP where she works with ACT-SO and serves on the Executive Committee.

Jonathan White

Grand Senior Warden for the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Georgia

Born and raised in Brooklyn, NY and relocated to Atlanta, Ga in 1987 after being honorably discharged from the United States Marine Corps. Jonathan currently serves as the chairman of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Georgia's voter initiative projects and is an active member of the NAACP.

Carey Wheaton

Center for Common Ground postcard team leader

I'm a social worker or an activist. I ran into Andrea Miller [Center for Common Ground founding board member] in September 2017. For years, I've hosted phone banks in my home and I love hosting and I love people and I just began to get involved in postcards on the side with an operation going in Sonoma County, California... What drew me to Andrea, out of all the different activism I was doing—I had become a Democratic Party delegate after Trump--was my husband and I felt we had to do something more.

Gabriel Wheaton

Center for Common Ground phone bank manager

I had no experience with leading and organizing the [Center for Common Ground's] grassroots [phone-based] campaign[s]. That just forced me to listen to everyone, including our volunteers who had script ideas... We were also very happy about our partnership with the Atlanta NAACP, too, because when I'm communicating with volunteers over Zoom who are wondering "Why should I phone bank for you guys?" "Why should they phone bank or text?" When you respond we're working with the Atlanta NAACP, and we're taking leadership from them, we're targeting the districts that they have determined are the best districts to target... this is the real deal. That partnership is our strength, for us as well as you.

Dr. Ben Williams

Omega Psi Phi fraternity pioneer and lifelong civil rights activist

My activism started over 60 years ago, as I was inducted into activism. As a member, a youth member of the NAACP, where I was really mentored, and trained in the process of influencing change through a non-violent or what we call constructive engagement... When I relocated here, I became a member of Dr. King's organization started in 1957, and during the height of the Civil Rights Movement was one of the top-tier organizations involved with pursuing social change and social justice. If we'd reflect what that looked like, you will see NAACP, SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference], Urban League, Congress of Racial Equality, the Black Panther Party, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, known as SNCC, and some others that would have been at that table... That worked together to get the doors of Omega Psi Phi to open for us.

About This Report

This report was produced by a team committed to telling the story of how Georgia voters defied expectations and saw majorities vote for Democratic candidates for president and U.S. Senate in 2020. Ray McClendon conceived of the report and coordinated its production. He and Gloria Tinubu conducted the interviews. Mike Hersh videotaped the interviews and posted them on YouTube. Steven Rosenfeld excerpted and edited the interview transcripts and organized the content with input from Ray and Gloria.

Ray McClendon is the longtime political action director of the **Atlanta NAACP**.

Dr. Gloria Tinubu is an economist, former Atlanta office holder and political organizer.

Mike Hersh is national communications coordinator for **Progressive Democrats of America**.

Steven Rosenfeld is a national political reporter covering election administration and voting rights for the **Independent Media Institute's Voting Booth** project.

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