



Felony Disenfranchisement

Wornie Reed, PhD

Race and Social Policy Research Center
Virginia Tech

April 23, 2016




Felony Disenfranchisement Terms

- Felony Disenfranchisement:
 - the act of barring those who have been convicted of a critical offense from being able to vote
- Restoration of Rights:
 - restores the rights to vote, to run for and hold public office, and to serve on juries



Uses of Felony Disenfranchisement

- The automatic loss of voting rights for persons with felony convictions who have completed their sentences is unique to the United States among major democracies in the world.
 - The disenfranchisement of felons has a long history in the U.S. as a means of restricting voting rights of African Americans, outlasting such other restrictions of black voting rights like poll taxes and literacy tests.
- 



Disenfranchisement Statistics, U.S.

- 5.85 million Americans have lost rights because of a felony conviction.
- Race:
 - 7.7 % of African American adults (2.2 million)
 - 1.8% others
- Why the racial disparity?
 - The disproportionate rates of arrest and conviction of African Americans;
 - Black men are 6 times more likely to be incarcerated than white men.



Virginia

- In U.S.
 - 1 in 13 African Americans are disenfranchised.
- In Virginia
 - 450,000 adult residents in VA are disenfranchised.
 - More than 1 in 5 African Americans are disenfranchised.
 - = 200,000 (nearly half) of the state total



Virginia History

- ▶ Virginia was the first new American state to pass a law preventing persons with felony convictions from voting.
- ▶ “This plan [which included felony disenfranchisement laws] will eliminate the darkey as a political factor in this State in less than 5 years, so that in no single county...will there be the least concern felt for the complete supremacy of the white race in the affairs of government.”
 - Carter Glass, Delegate – Virginia Constitutional Convention 1901-02



Virginia Law

- As of April 2014, non-violent offenders are eligible to *apply for restoration* of rights if they meet the following conditions:
 - Have completed terms of incarceration and all probation or parole;
 - Have paid all court costs, fines, and any restitution; and
 - Have no pending penalty charges
- Ex-felons convicted of violent crimes must wait three years before they can *apply for restoration* of rights.
- Virginia is one of the nation's most restrictive states.