

Memorandum

To: Dr. Robert James, President, Mississippi State Chapter, NAACP

From: Kareem Crayton, JD/PhD, Manager, Crimcard Consulting Services

Re: Political Activity in Mississippi Congressional District 2 (CD2)

Date: February 22, 2022

You have requested an expert report from Crimcard Consulting that provides analysis of the demographic profile of voting communities in the State of Mississippi, focusing on counties that include the current and recently adopted versions of Mississippi's Second Congressional District (CD2).

Executive Summary

The findings contained herein discuss the significant ways in which the recent changes to the map appear to incorporate areas with significant differences from the Delta-based geography that CD2 has traditionally covered.

In multiple ways, the four counties in the southwest portion of the state appear to be a distinct community of interest from the remainder of the district. They tend to have more in common with the proximate counties lying to the east rather than those farther north. This factor should prove a significant consideration in the fashioning of a district that provides an opportunity for black voters to elect candidates of choice.

Introduction & Background

By way of background, The State of Mississippi has recently enacted adjustments in the boundaries of CD2 following the 2020 U.S. Census to comply with the Equal Population Standard interpreted as part of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.¹ The approved boundary changes for CD2 included adding four new counties in the southwest region of the state – Adams, Franklin, Wilkinson, and Amite. This change expanded the footprint of the congressional district significantly, with the adjusted district's boundaries now running almost the entirety of the state's western river border. The land mass of the district, which was already the largest in

¹ See Mississippi Redistricting Bill, H.B. 384, found at <https://www.distance-cities.com/distance-natchez-ms-to-jackson-ms>. See also, *Baker v. Carr* 369 U.S. 186 (1962).

the state has grown even larger in the newly adopted map.² The state's new configuration of districts is illustrated below in Figure 1:

FIGURE 1: 2022 MISSISSIPPI APPROVED CONGRESSIONAL PLAN



In refashioning the CD2, the State also chose to carve out select portions of Hinds County (in northeast Jackson) and Madison County (the southwest portion of the county) from CD2 and left in CD3; these two geographic areas appear to include significant African American populations. Several of the tracts that were placed in CD3 contain Black populations that exceed 40% of the block's total population. There does not appear to be an obvious policy or legal reason on the record for carving out these particular segments from Mississippi counties that are in large portion already contained within the boundaries of CD2.

Figure 2 (for Hinds) and Figure 3 (for Madison) illustrate the particular Census blocks within each jurisdiction that have significant concentrations of Black population. The shaded areas with colors tending from peach to deep red indicate those areas where the higher Black concentrations located in the county. One can note several of the blocks found in the northeast of Hinds County and the southwest portion of Madison County tend to fall in group of shaded

² The U.S. Census reports that during the 2010-2020 redistricting era, Mississippi's Second Congressional District was approximately 15,553 square miles. The state's next largest congressional district (District 3) covered 3,000 fewer square miles. Found at <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/50000US2803-congressional-district-3-ms/>.

areas, meaning that CD3 has included more than a few areas with significant Black concentration that might otherwise be placed with CD2:

FIGURE 2: African American Concentrations in Hinds County Census Block Groups

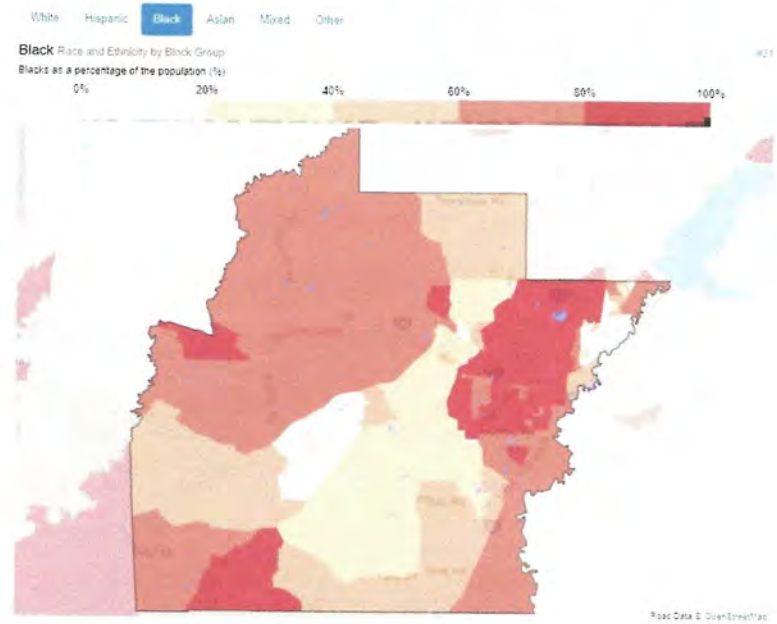
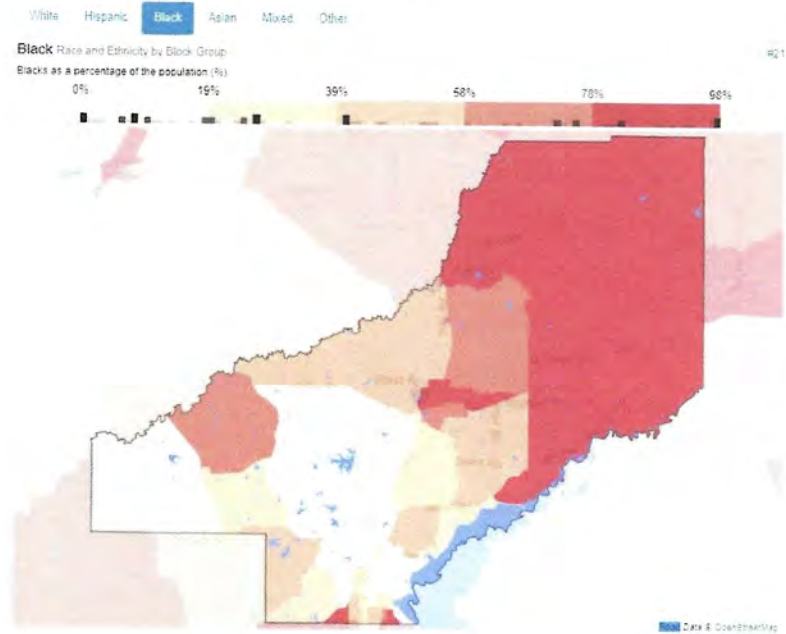


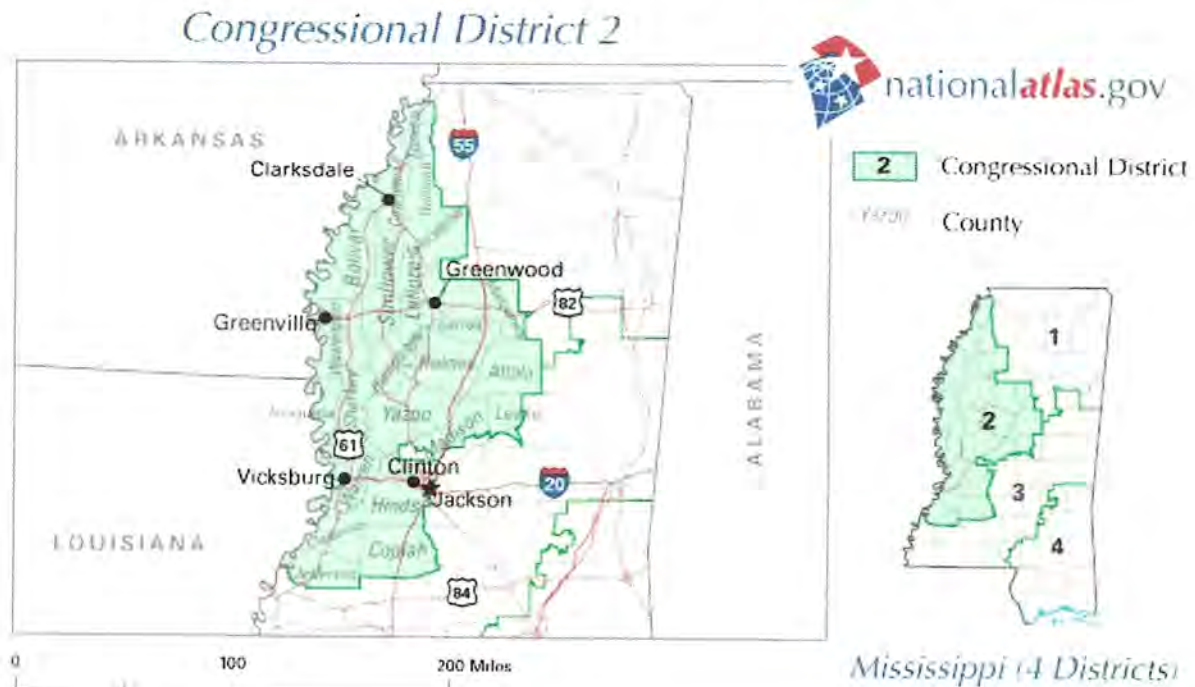
FIGURE 3: African American Concentrations in Madison County Census Block Groups



As the illustration of the earlier version of CD2 shown in Figure 4 below confirms, both divided counties were situated in large part within CD2's boundaries at least from its configuration in 2003 through the era of map drawing in Mississippi that followed the 2010 U.S. Census. Notably, the change was after Mississippi's delegation lost a congressional seat.

While they were divided in previous decades of the Congressional District, the counties do appear to be an obvious area where one might have expanded the borders of CD2 to address concerns of population balancing. This is particularly true where the matter of compliance with the anti-discrimination provisions of the Voting Rights Act and the 14th Amendment to the Constitution are concerned.

FIGURE 4: PREVIOUS MISSISSIPPI PLAN FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 2



Demographic Features

The four focus counties in southwest Mississippi offer a distinct portrait and landscape that is evident in its demographics, both in comparison to the rest of the state and the other segments of CD2. Below is a chart (Table 1) that summarizes key statistics that place the demographic and economic profile of the focus counties in greater context. With the exception of the column

representing the earlier version of CD2 (which comes from the 2019 American Communities Survey), the socio-economic data is compiled in the latest report from the U.S. Census:

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC MEASURES FOR FOCUS COUNTIES						
Measure	Adams County	Amite County	Franklin County	Wilkinson County	CD 2 (2019) ³	Mississippi
Population	29,538	12,720	7,675	8,587	692,452	2,962,275
Black Population (%)	56.8%	40.0%	34.5%	70.6%	67.0%	36.6%
Employment Rate	41.1%	42.5%	45.6%	33.6%	48.7%	52.6%
Poverty Rate	31.5%	26.7%	15.1%	34.7%	25.9%	19.6%
College Educated	17.4%	12.6%	12.0%	13.7%	19.0%	22.3%
Median Income	\$29,936	\$33,981	\$40,219	\$27,313	\$37,372	\$45,792
Median Age	41.4	47.1	42.5	37.8	37.4	38.3

Adams County, home to Natchez, is the most urbanized of the four counties with more than 30,000 total people. By contrast, the smallest (and the most economically well-positioned) of the group, Franklin County, has only about 7,600 people. Similarly, there is significant variation among the counties related to their differing levels of racial diversity. Two of the four counties have majority Black populations (Adams and Wilkinson), while the other pair of counties feature significant Black population sizes that are quite comparable to Mississippi's overall Black population of 37%.

The population profiles within these counties all feature similar percentages of college-educated residents that fall below the state average of 22.3% and are below the average for CD2's 19% rate. The median age figures for the counties are generally higher than both CD2 (at 37.4) and the state's median age of 38.3 years; only the median age in Franklin County's population is slightly younger the state median age. Further, the 2020 U.S. Census reports that all four of the counties have experienced population decline during the last decade.

With respect to the economic landscape in these counties, the trend largely trails both CD2 and the state's economic performance. Three of the four counties have a higher-than-average poverty rate compared to the rest of the state by at least five percentage points (the lone exception to the trend is Franklin County, where the rate is below the state average at 15.1%).

³ Note: The prior version of CD2 is compared here to offer a general comparison of the demographics in counties that were part of CD 2 before the recent changes and the four southwest counties added. See Census Reporter for CD 2, found at <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/50000US2802-congressional-district-2-ms/>.

The rate of employment ranges between seven and twenty percentage points below the Mississippi average of 52.6% (the closest is Franklin County at 45.6%). And the median household income in each these counties tends to trail both CD2 and the state average; tiny Franklin County again rates the closest with a median income level that is approximately \$5,000 less than the statewide figure.

Communities of Interest play a significant role in shaping the political and cultural identity of a county. While the four counties themselves share a common bond of geography in the southwest, there are important contrasts to note about their position vis a vis the rest of the Second Congressional District. As noted earlier, the origins of the congressional district are rooted farther north in the consolidated rural counties in the Delta, and the population center for that district was the Jackson metro area.

The Natchez and McComb population anchors in the southwestern portion of the state have a culturally particular profile that has yielded a distinct political identity in the region. Adams County, home to Natchez, heralds itself as home to Mississippi's first city and McComb's Pike County identifies itself as an outer hub for the Gulf-oriented communities in the state and its neighbors.⁴ The influences established in this region during Spanish then French colonial eras continue to define social and cultural traditions here today. Both these cities feature Mardi Gras celebrations that liken to its larger neighboring cities in the Gulf Coast region like Biloxi, New Orleans, and Mobile.⁵

Additionally, the identity of these counties of the southwest as a distinct government and economic community of interest from the rest of CD2 is evident in the way that Mississippi has organized its government and quasi government entities. For example, both the state and federal court systems in Mississippi both have placed these four southwest counties in groupings that extend east-west rather than north-south. The U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi followed a decision to close the Meridian courthouse with a reorganization with the four counties in a division that links Natchez with McComb rather than with Jackson (which is grouped with counties farther north).⁶ Similarly, the Supreme Court of Mississippi organizes its

⁴ See Official City websites, which provide descriptions of historical linkages; City of Natchez, found at <https://www.natchez.ms.us/> and City of McComb, found at <http://www.mccomb-ms.gov/>.

⁵ Natchez has a Mardi Gras parade featuring the Krewe of Phoenix, see Official Announcement & Schedule, found at <https://www.natcheztracetravel.com/festivals-events/event/65-natchez-mardi-gras.html>; similarly, McComb now hosts its own official Mardi Gras parade, see City Application, found at: <https://cms2files.revize.com/mccomb/docs/CITY%20OF%20MCCOMB%20MARDI%20GRAS%20PARADE%20UPDATE.pdf>.

⁶According to the District Court, the following county grouping serves as the division centered in Natchez: Pike, Lincoln, Amite, Franklin, Wilkinson, Adams, Jefferson, and Claiborne. Only Jefferson and Claiborne have been part of CD2 prior to 2022. See Divisional List for the Southern District of Mississippi, found at <https://www.mssd.uscourts.gov/divisional-county-listings>.

own elections into three divisions: a Southern, Middle and Northern District. The southern division extends eastward from the four counties and does not cover a single county in CD2.⁷

The pattern is also confirmed in state educational institutions. Southwest Mississippi Community College serves three out of the four counties in this study (the exception, Adams County, features Copiah-Lincoln Community College and a campus of Alcorn State University).⁸ The Mississippi Forestry Commission, a state agency charged with protecting wooded areas from wildfire, also distinguishes its southern region (Region 4) from other parts of the state. In fact, the four focus counties of this study are served by a single area officer.⁹ The southwest area is also home to a planning and development district that includes the four counties along with Claiborne, Jefferson, Lawrence, Lincoln, Pike, and Walthall Counties.¹⁰ According to its description of the development district, the entity interacts with local and county governments to encourage business expansion and create regional solutions to address economic issues like tourism and solid waste management.

One also sees reflection of a distinct community in the way state politics have defined the region in contrast to areas farther north. As with the neighboring states that border the Gulf of Mexico, Mississippi's Gulf counties have always stood apart from the rest of the state with its own political community. The political representation in U.S. House of Representatives has also maintained separation from areas located farther north in Mississippi. In the modern era of redistricting, for example, the Natchez region has not been combined with the City of Jackson in a single congressional district.

Finally, the geographic proximity of these counties to Louisiana shape identity in ways that make it distinct. The closest state capital to Natchez, in fact, is Baton Rouge, Louisiana – not Jackson.¹¹ Similarly, the media markets serving the southwest area largely are based in Louisiana (Baton Rouge and New Orleans). This point carries a practical concern for elections and representation in the newly configured district. Campaigning in this refashioned congressional district would now require a more expansive (and expensive) strategy with attention to outlets in the Delta (served partly by Memphis) and Jackson areas.¹² Taken together, the defining characteristics

⁷ See BIPEC Summary of Mississippi Supreme Court Elections (which includes a map of the court's election districts), found at <http://www.bipec.org/2020-mississippi-supreme-court-elections/>.

⁸ See Southwest Mississippi Community College Website (including the list of counties in its regional area), found at <https://www.smcc.edu/>.

⁹ See Mississippi Forestry Commission Regional offices, found at <https://www.mfc.ms.gov/contact/mfc-directory/regional-offices/>.

¹⁰ See Southwest Mississippi Planning and Development District Official Website (listing service area), found at <http://swmpdd.com/>.

¹¹ Jackson lies 26 miles farther away than Baton Rouge does from the City of Natchez, according to conventional atlas measures. Distance from Baton Rouge to Natchez, found at <https://www.distance-cities.com/distance-natchez-ms-to-baton-rouge-la>; Distance from Jackson to Natchez, found at <https://www.distance-cities.com/distance-natchez-ms-to-jackson-ms>.

¹² Mounting an expensive campaign would be an especially steep challenge in a congressional district that is among the nation's poorest. Scholars have noted that Black political candidates face this hurdle in ways that many of their White counterparts (including those running in other districts) do not.

that shape how life is lived among southwest residents point heavily away from the more northerly counties of Congressional District 2 and provide a strong basis for regarding this area as a community with its neighboring counties lying more to the east than to the north.¹³

Conclusion

This report has provided a profile of the four southwest Mississippi counties that have been incorporated into CD2 after the 2020 U.S. Census. Key features of the political, cultural, and economic circumstances of these counties tend to distinguish them from other parts of the state. Evidence is available to make the case that this region of Mississippi represents a different community of interest compared to the areas located to the north that are in CD2. This point is confirmed by the different ways that government (federal and state) along with private entities organize their services to the people who live in this area.

Compared to the segments of counties that are already located in CD2 (Hinds and Madison), there are good reasons (and in my opinion, better reasons) to have focused on this more proximate area to expand CD2 for compliance with the equal population standard. The decision would have maintained the Jackson area in a single district, for example. And it would unify an African American population that is both geographically proximate and is affected by many of the same local community issues.

Without some important reasons for dividing this area that is not evident from the information and record reviewed here, the decision to expand CD2 into a third major region of the state is not an obvious one, and it poses special practical challenges for political candidates and voters to organize and communicate in the district that are not present for other districts in the state.

¹³ See, e.g., Smith, Terry (2006) "White Dollars, Black Candidates: Inequality and Agency in Campaign Finance Law," South Carolina Law Review: Vol. 57 : Iss. 4 , Article 5.