

**KNOW YOUR GOVERNMENT**

**GEORGIA'S  
VOTER REGISTRATION  
AND  
ELECTION LAWS**



**Voter Education Project, Inc.**

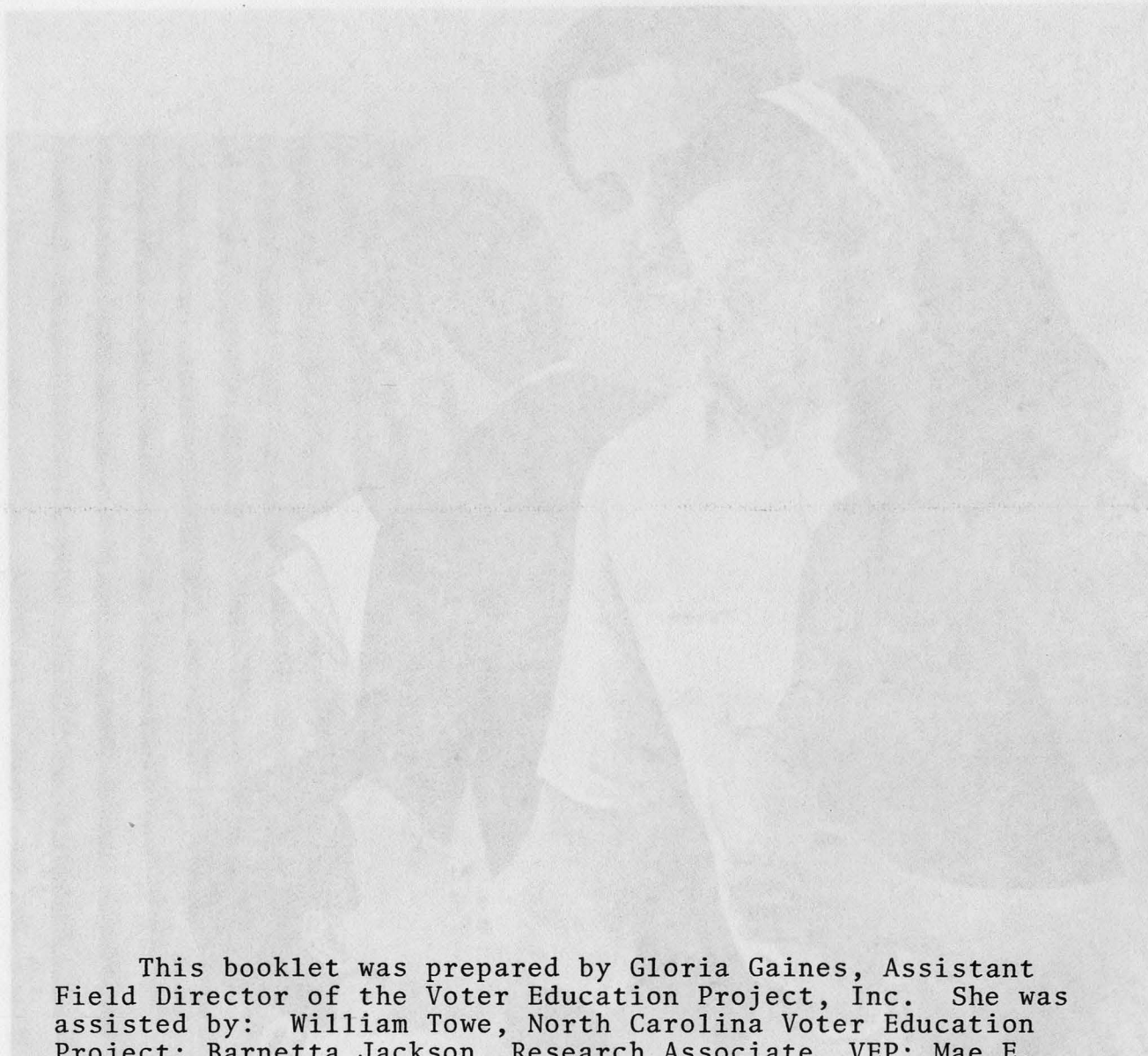
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## Introduction

This booklet tells you some important things you need to know about registering to vote and what you can do to make it easier for people to register. This booklet also tells you some important things you need to know about using your vote correctly, your rights as a voter on election day, and how to get out the vote.

Below are the explanations of some words used in this booklet whose meaning may not be clear to you.

1. Election District - Counties are divided into voting districts which are called election districts or precincts. In each district there is a place where you vote. It is called the polling place. All the people who live in the precinct must vote at this polling place. When you register you are assigned an election district according to where you live.
2. Primary and General Elections - A primary is an election held by a political party. In the primary people vote to decide who will be their party's candidates in the general election. In the general election, the people vote to decide which of the candidates will be put into office. In Georgia, party candidates are chosen sometimes in a party convention or mass meeting, in which case no primary election is held.

If a primary is held, of course, you can vote only in the primary of one party in each primary. In the next primary, you can vote in another party's primary if you want to.

Primary elections are held in August, and general elections are held in November.

3. County Board of Registrars - Each county has a three-member board of registrars. The job of this board is to run voter registration system in each county. The members of this board are appointed by the judge of the Superior Court of each county from a list of names given him by the grand jury if the county has less than 500,000 people. In counties with more than 500,000 people the board members are appointed by the County Commissioners.
4. Ordinary - In addition to being the chief record keeper of important papers, the ordinary also has the job of making sure that the elections are run fairly and that the election laws are obeyed. The ordinary appoints the managers of elections for each district. Often they are called poll officers. The managers of elections run the polling place on election day. Of course, the ordinary is a public official who is elected. Political parties may recommend to the ordinary persons to serve as poll officers.

## You Can Register To Vote If:

1. You are 18 years of age, or will be 18 by the next primary or general elections. If you are now 17, you can register provided that in 6 months you will be 18. But you must be 18 before you can vote.

2. You now consider Georgia and the county in which you wish to register your home.

3. You have not been convicted of a felony. A felony is a serious crime like murder or robbery. If a person has been convicted of a felony and has finished his sentence or been pardoned, he can get the right to vote back.

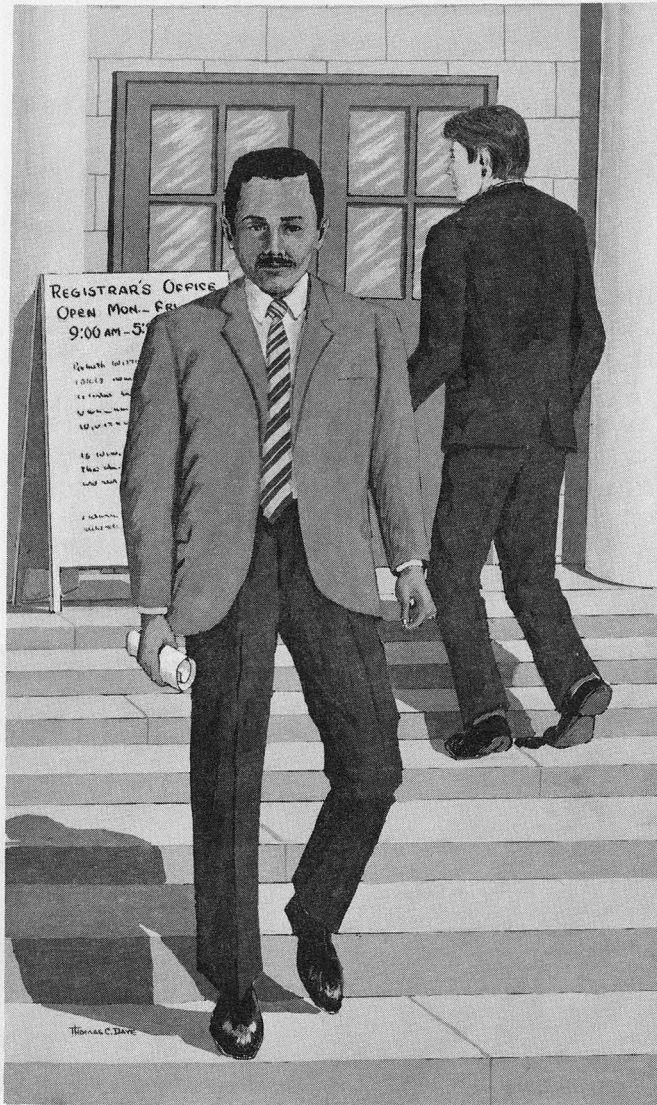
People can register to vote in all the counties in Georgia even if they cannot read or write, or if they have trouble reading and writing. The registrar cannot give anyone a reading or writing test. If a person has trouble filling in an application (name, age, where you live, where you were born and so on), the registrar must fill in the application for him. This is a United States Law. The law is the Voting's Right Act. It will expire in 1975 unless Congress renews it.

If the registrar refuses to register you, you should write the Board of Registrars. Tell the Board why you think you should be registered and that you want your case tried in court. Be sure to write within 10 days of the refusal.

After the Board receives your letter they must notify the clerk of your county's Superior Court. You cannot register until your case has been heard and the judge has said that you are qualified.



## Where And When You Register To Vote



The main registration office is usually in the county courthouse. Sometimes it may be in some other public building in the county seat. If you do not know where the main registration office is located, call or go to the county courthouse and ask for the office of the Board of Registrars. Also check to see if there are other places to register in your county.

It is the main job of the chief registrar to keep this office open daily, Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Also, in Georgia, each principal or assistant principal of public or private high schools and each director of vocational schools can register qualified students enrolled in his school.

You must register 50 days before a primary or general election in order to vote in the upcoming election.

## It Is Very Easy To Register



Tell the registrar that you want to register. Then, fill out the form. On the form you must tell:

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Your name           | 5. Name of your mother before she was married |
| 2. Age                 | 6. Father's name                              |
| 3. Mailing address     | 7. Race, weight, and height                   |
| 4. Where you were born | 8. Social security number if you have one     |

After the form has been filled out, sign the form with your name or mark.

Remember, if you have trouble filling out the form tell the registrar. The registrar must read the form to you. Tell the registrar the answers so he can fill in the form. If a person cannot read or write, the registrar must fill in the form.



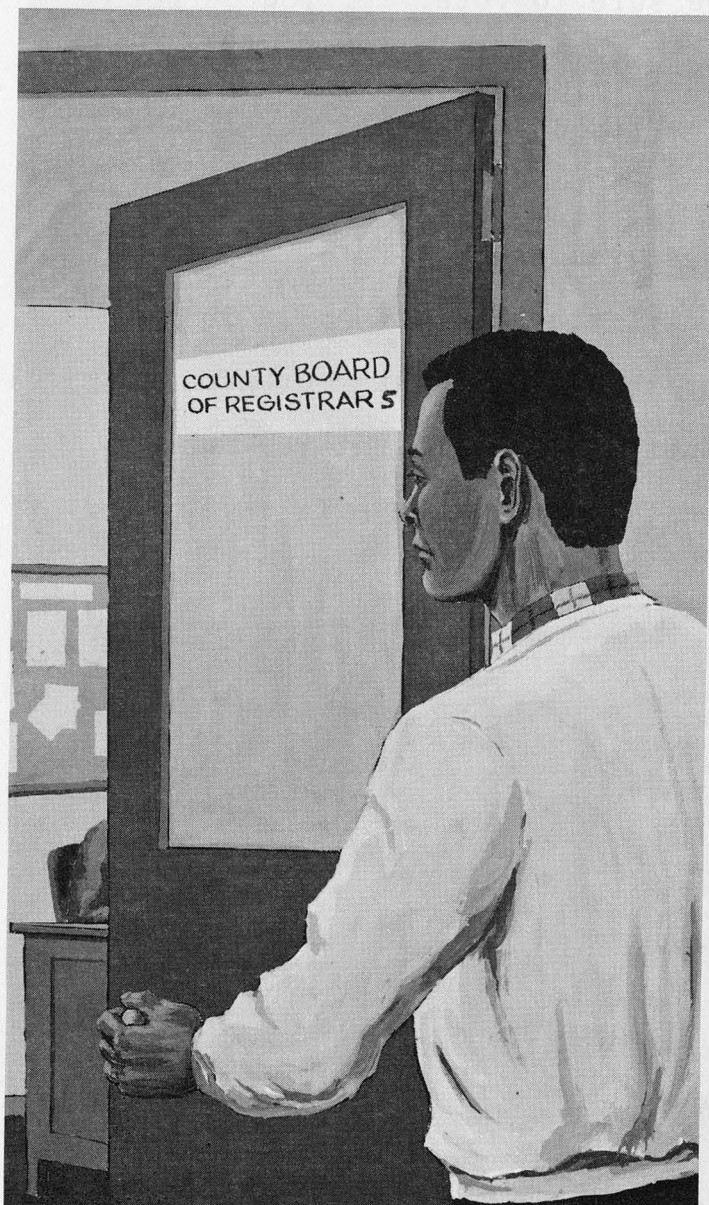
## If You Don't Vote Your Name May Be Taken Off The Registration Books

After you are registered, be sure to vote. If you do not vote in at least one primary or general election for three years in a row, the registrar will purge (take off) your name from the registration books.

If your name is purged because you did not vote in the last three years, the registrar must mail you a notice early in the year. If you write the registrar requesting that your name be kept on the books, your name cannot be purged. But you must write before April 1. If you don't, you will have to reregister before you can vote.



## If You Move, There Are Certain Things You Should Do



If you move from one county to another county in Georgia, you do not have to register again. Go to the registrar of the county to which you have moved and fill out a transfer of registration form. After your new registrar receives a certificate of registration from your old county, your name will be placed on the books. Then you can vote in your new county.

If you move from one precinct to another precinct in the same county, you should go to the registrar's office and fill out a change of address form.

Even if you move within the same precinct it is best to let the registrar know your new address.



## **If You Know The Voter Registration Laws You Can Make It Easier For People To Register**

There are two major problems to Georgia's voter registration system which makes it difficult for some people to register, particularly for people who have a hard time getting off from work and poor people. The two major problems are:

1. The registration office is open only during the week from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is very hard for many people to get off from work when the office is open.
2. In counties with less than 100,000 people, there is usually only one place to register, the registrar's office at the county courthouse. People who live some distance from the courthouse often have a hard time getting there to register.

If you know the registration laws, you can make it easier for people to register. The Board of Registrars in all counties may order the main registration office to stay open longer. For example, the Board of Registrars may order that the office in the courthouse to stay open for so many nights and on Saturdays. This will make it easier for people to register who have a hard time getting off from work.

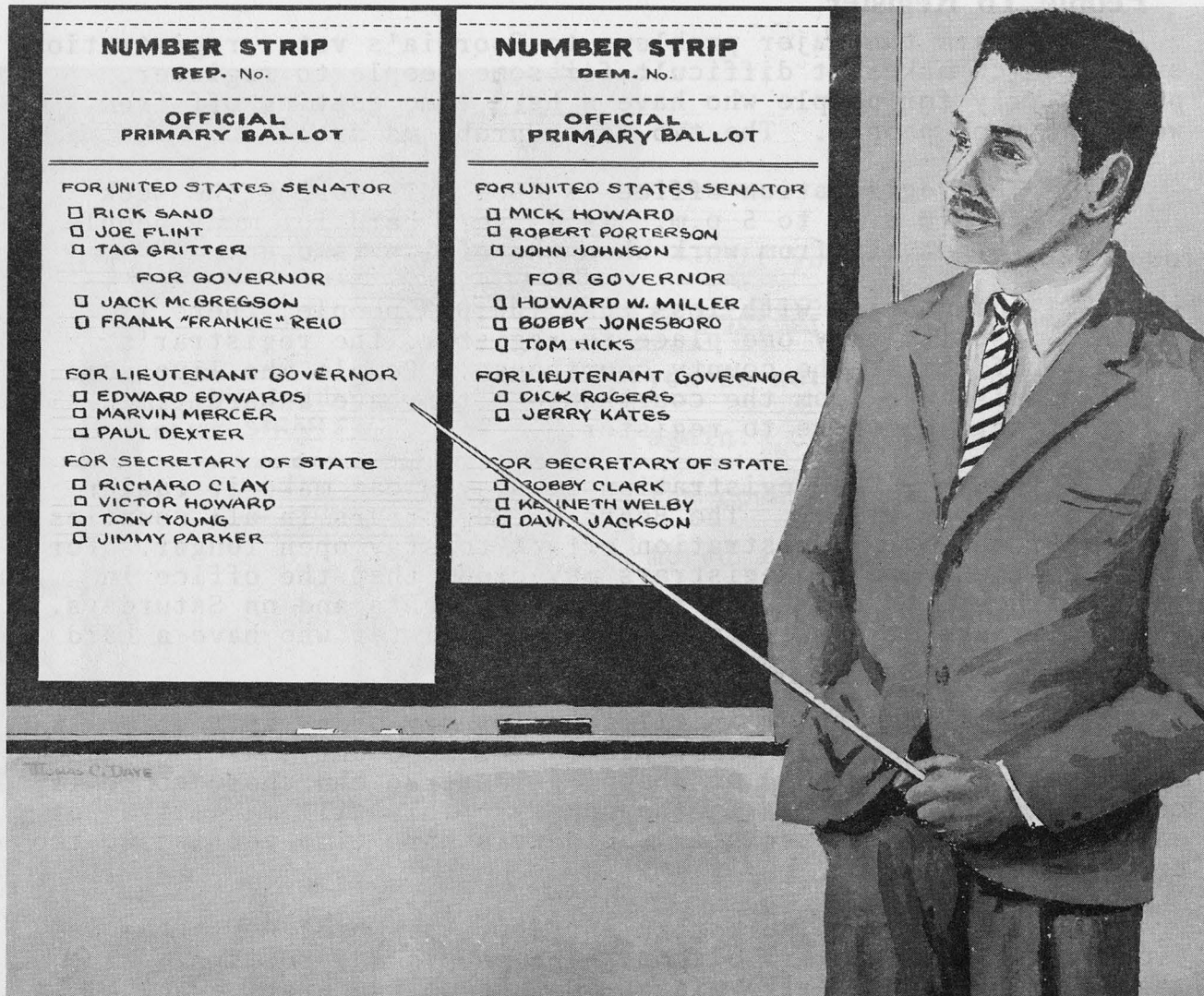
The Chief Registrar in all counties may order that voter registration be held in other places in the county. For example, registration may be held at shopping centers, churches, community centers and other places in the county. This will make it a lot easier for people to register who have a hard time getting to the courthouse.

In counties with more than 100,000, the Chief Registrar is required to set up extra places where people may register. The law says that these extra places must be set up every even-numbered year (1974, 1976, and so on), and that these extra places must start registering people at least six months before the books close for the November general election.

To do the things to make it easier for people to register the Chief Registrar will need some extra help. The Chief Registrar may appoint deputy (assistant) registrars and clerks to help do the paper work.

Go to the Chief Registrar and Board of Registrars and ask them to do the things that you believe should be done to make it easier for people to register. If they tell you they don't have the money, tell them that they should try to get the Board of County Commissioners to provide more money so your county can have a good registration system. Also tell them that until they can get more money to hire deputy registrars that the law says that deputy registrars can work without pay. Then give them a list of people who are qualified and are willing to work without pay as deputy registrars. Deputy registrars must be registered voters who live in the county and can read and write.

## It Is Important To Teach People How To Correctly Mark Their Ballots



The county ordinary can provide sample ballots, but he is not required by law to do so. You should find out if he is providing sample ballots. If he is not, you have the right to print copies of sample ballots that have been published in the newspaper. Be sure that the sample ballots are printed on colored paper that are larger or smaller than the official ballot, and are marked "Sample Ballots".

The sample ballots can be used to teach people how to mark correctly paper ballots and how to vote correctly on voting machines or vote recorders.

In counties using voting machines, the ordinary is required to put in public places one or more voting machines so people can practice using them. Also ask to see if your county is providing printed instructions on how to use voting machines.

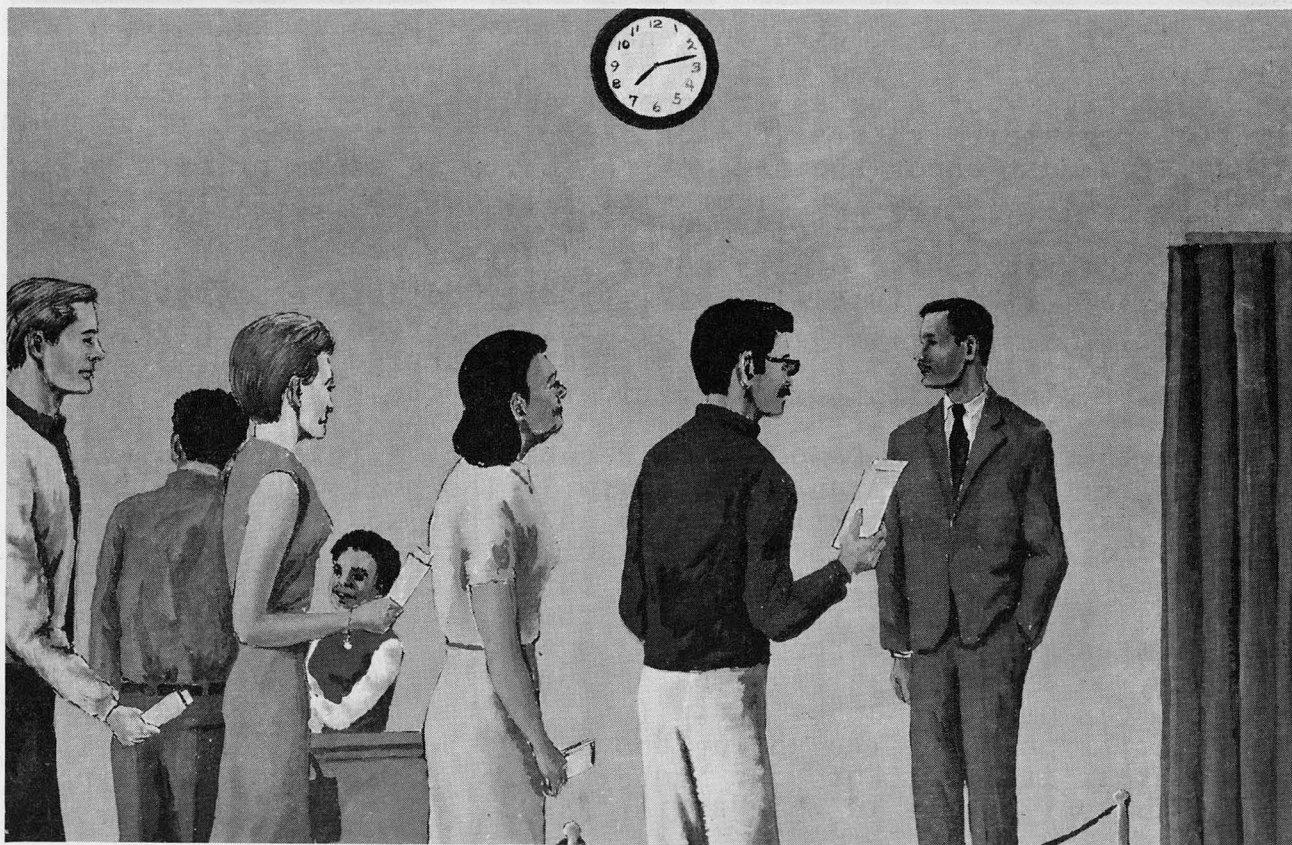
It may be a good idea to write the Secretary of State in Atlanta and ask for copies of the pamphlets that explain to people how to vote on a voting machine, vote recorder, or how to vote a paper ballot.



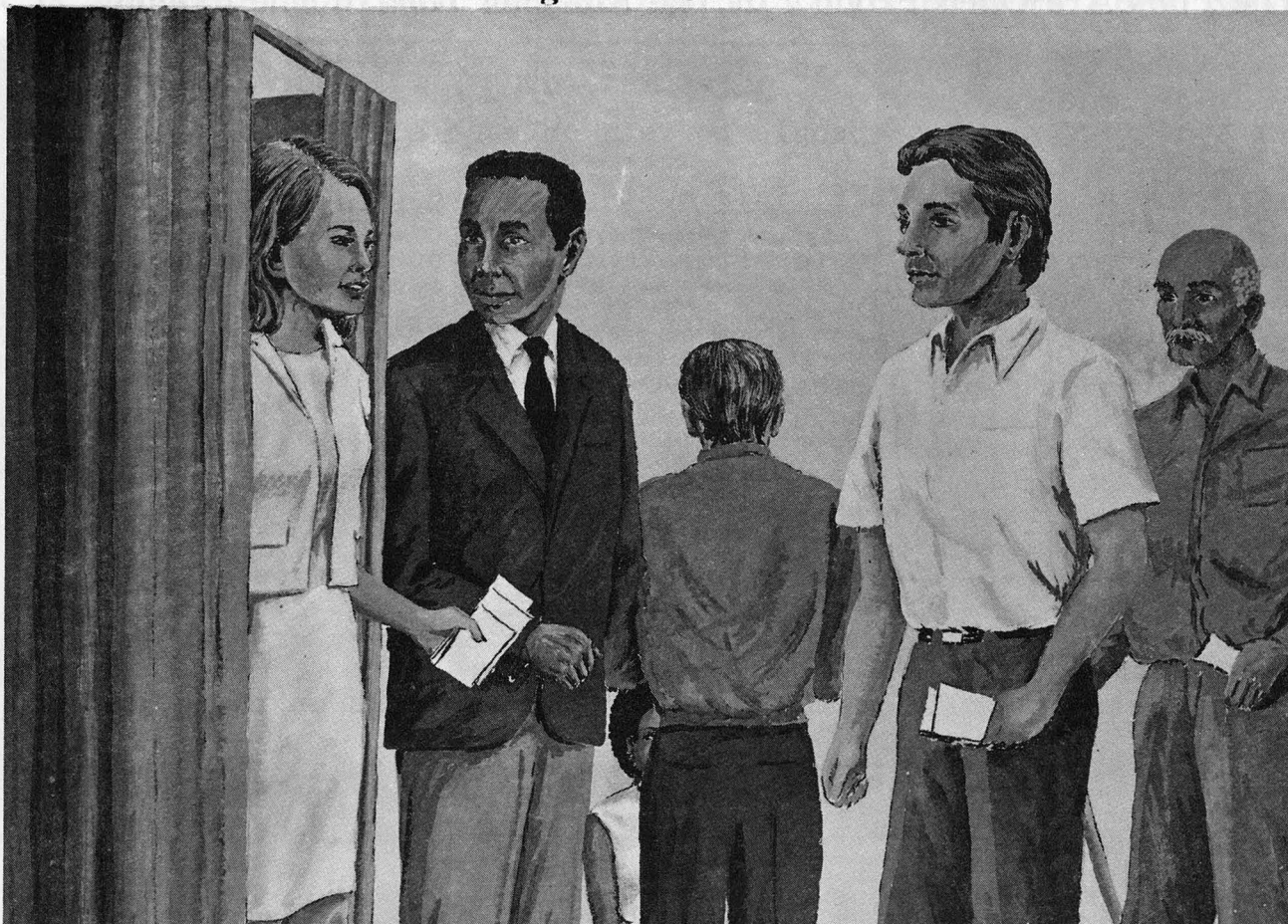
## The Polls Are Open From 7 In The Morning To 7 In The Evening

The polling place in each election district is open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. for people to vote on each election day. At 7 p.m. the election officials must close the polling place. You will be permitted to vote after 7 p.m. if you are inside the polling place or even if you are in line outside the polling place when the polls close.

The county ordinary selects the polling place within each election district, either on his own or on petition of ten registered voters of the district. The polling places are usually schools, city and county buildings. The ordinary can change the polling place. If he does, he must post notices on the polling place and in three other places near the polling place that is being changed. The ordinary must give 10 days notice of the change except in case of emergency.



## There Are Certain Things You Should Do When You Vote



In all elections, give your name and address to one of the election officials. You will be given a voter's certificate and you must sign your name as it appears on the voter's list (a list of registered voters in each district). In primary elections, you must check the name of the party in whose primary you wish to vote. The poll officer will fill out the certificate for you if you need assistance. Take your voter's certificate to the poll officer in charge of the voter's list.

In some places this list will be divided into alphabetical sections such as A-F, G-L, etc. If this has been done, give your voter's certificate to the poll officer in charge of your section. In primary elections, the poll officer will check your name off the voter's list and write either "D" or "R" beside your name to show whether you vote Democrat or Republican. (This record will be used if there is a run-off primary.) The poll officer will initial your voter's certificate to show that you are eligible to vote and direct you to the proper table. Present your voter's certificate to the poll officer and the officer will give you a paper ballot or permit you to enter the enclosed area where the voting machine or vote recorder is located.

If you are using a paper ballot or a vote recorder, be sure not to tear off the Number Strip (part at the bottom of the ballot) until you leave the voting booth and the poll officer tells you to tear it off. Put your Number Strip in the "Number Strip Box" and your ballot in the "Ballot Box".



## Be Sure To Vote Correctly

To help from getting confused, you may take a sample ballot into the voting booth. You can mark on this sample ballot how you plan to vote.

If you are using a paper ballot, put a cross (x) or check (✓) mark in the square opposite the name of the candidate for whom you want to vote. On voting machines, push down the voting pointers (the little lever) above or beside the name of the candidates for whom you want to vote. After you push down the voting pointer, an "x" will show. On a vote recorder, you must punch straight down with the stylus (a small stick) through the holes beside the names of the candidates for whom you want to vote.

In a primary you must vote for the candidate or candidates for each office. The ballot labels will have only the names of those candidates running in the primary of the party which you have checked on your voter's certificate.

In general elections you can vote a split ticket or straight ticket. To vote a split ticket means that you vote for candidates who are members of different parties. On a split ticket you can also vote for independents (a candidate who is not a member of a political party) and you can write in the name of a candidate, or candidates, you prefer if his or her name is not on the ballot.

Write-in votes are only allowed in general elections. You cannot cast a write-in vote in primary elections. If you are voting on a paper ballot and want to vote for a person whose name is not on the ballot, write his or her name and the office in the "write-in column" on the ballot. If you are using a voting machine or a vote recorder and are not sure how to cast a write-in vote, ask one of the election officials.

To vote a straight ticket means that you vote for all the candidates of one party. When you vote a straight ticket do not vote for the different candidates but only for the party. To vote a straight ticket on a paper ballot, put a cross (x) or check (✓) mark in the square opposite the name of the party of your choice. On voting machines, push down the voting pointer beside or above the party of your choice. On a vote recorder, punch down through the hole beside the party of your choice.

If you mark the wrong candidate on a paper ballot, do not try to erase it. Take the ballot to an election official and get a new ballot. If you are using a vote recorder and punch the wrong hole, take the card out of the vote recorder and get a new one.

If you push a voting pointer on a voting machine and then realize you have voted for the wrong candidate, push the voting pointer back up. Then push down the voting pointer for the candidate you intended to vote for. No votes are recorded until you push the big red handle that opens the curtain to the voting booth - the same handle that you pulled to close the curtain.

## Be Sure That You Vote For Each Office And The Correct Number of Candidates For Each Office

You can vote for only one candidate to be President (usually you vote for several electors, but cast only one vote), U.S. Senator, U.S. Congressman, Governor, Lt. Governor, State Superintendent of Schools, County Ordinary, Mayor and so on. Read your ballot carefully and make sure that you vote for candidates for each office listed on the ballot.

For some offices, such as County Commissioners, County School Boards, City Councilmen (or Aldermen), and in many districts for State Representatives and State Senators, you usually vote for more than one candidate to fill the office. Read your ballot. For example, if the ballot says, "City Councilmen-Vote for 3", you cannot vote for more than three candidates. If you vote for more candidates than the ballot says, this part of your ballot will not be counted.

While you cannot vote for more candidates than the ballot says, you can vote for less candidates. For example, if the ballot says, "City Councilmen- Vote for 3", you may vote for only one (or two) candidates if you want to. This is called "bullet voting".

### SAMPLE BALLOT JONES COUNTY GENERAL ELECTION

#### FOR BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS (VOTE FOR THREE)

- ☒ BILL LEWISTER
- ☐ ANDY JONES
- ☐ JACK PORT
- ☒ ROBERT MUNDER
- ☒ J.C. "SKIPPER" HARDY
- ☐ TONY MACK

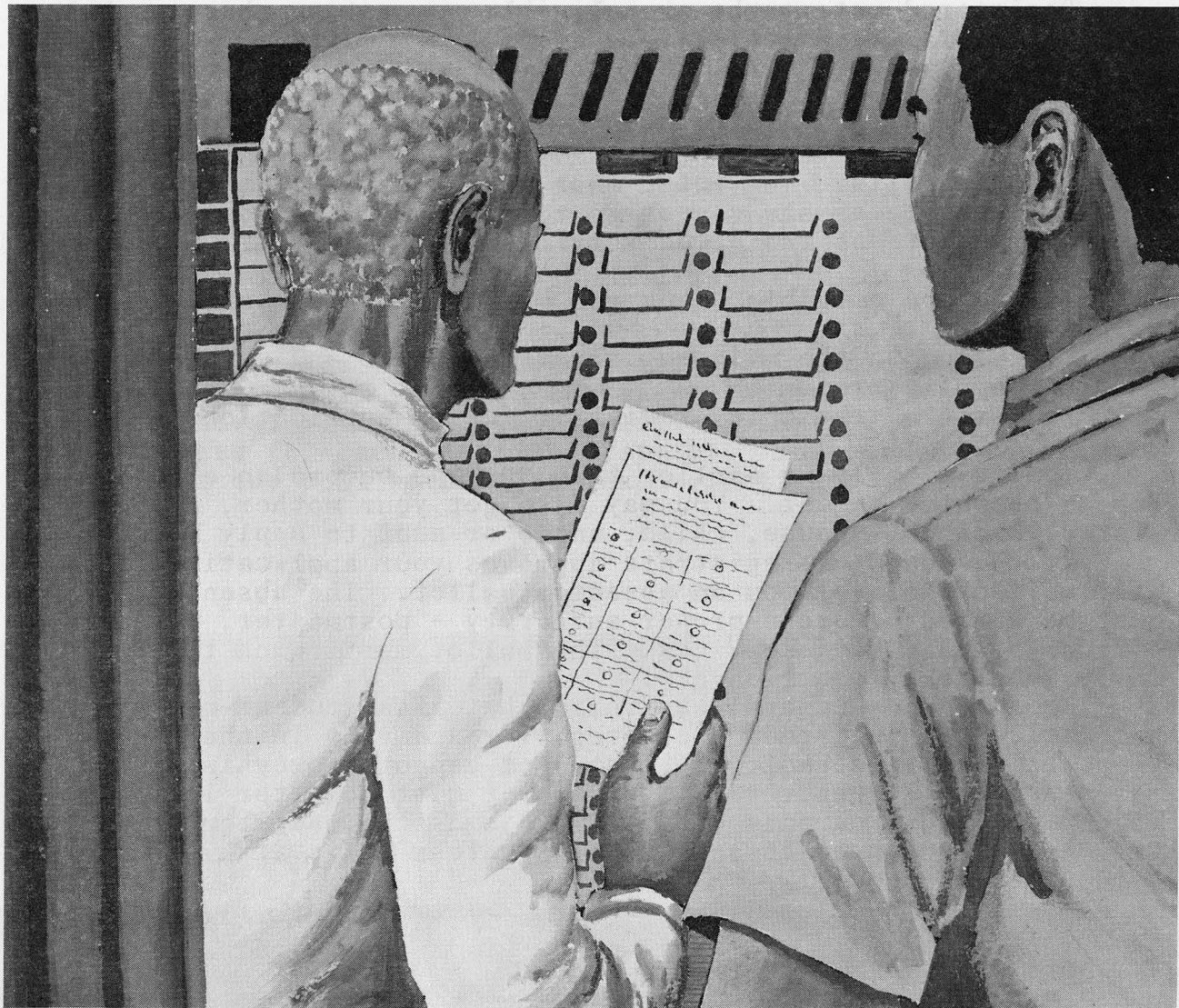
### SAMPLE BALLOT CITY OF JONESVILLE

#### FOR CITY COUNCILMEN (VOTE FOR THREE)

- ☐ RANDY PARKS
- ☐ TOMMY BULLOCK
- ☒ JOE JONES
- ☐ BOBBY HILL
- ☐ JOHN WILSON
- ☐ ART BRECKER



## People Can Get Help When They Vote



People who cannot read or cannot see, can get someone to vote for them. Also people who cannot vote because they are physically handicapped in some way can get someone to vote for them.

If a person needs help, he should tell the poll officer (an election officer). The poll officer will give the person an oath. Then the person must pick a person to vote for him. The person picked must be either a registered voter from the election district or the person's mother, father, sister, brother, spouse (husband or wife) or child. A registered voter can help only ten people vote.

Any voter who is not clear about how to operate a voting machine, a vote recorder, or is not sure about the correct way to mark a paper ballot, may get the poll officer to instruct him or her. The poll officer cannot tell you for whom to vote and he cannot vote for you. The poll officer can only instruct you on the correct way to vote, and he must leave the booth before you vote.

## You Should Vote An Absentee Ballot If You Will Be Away On Election Day

Registered voters who are eligible to cast an absentee ballot in Georgia for all elections are:

1. Any voter who will be out of the county on election day - away on business, vacation, at school in another county and so on.
2. Any voter who is physically disabled and cannot go to the polls. The voter must have a certificate showing that he or she cannot go to the polls.
3. Members of the armed services.

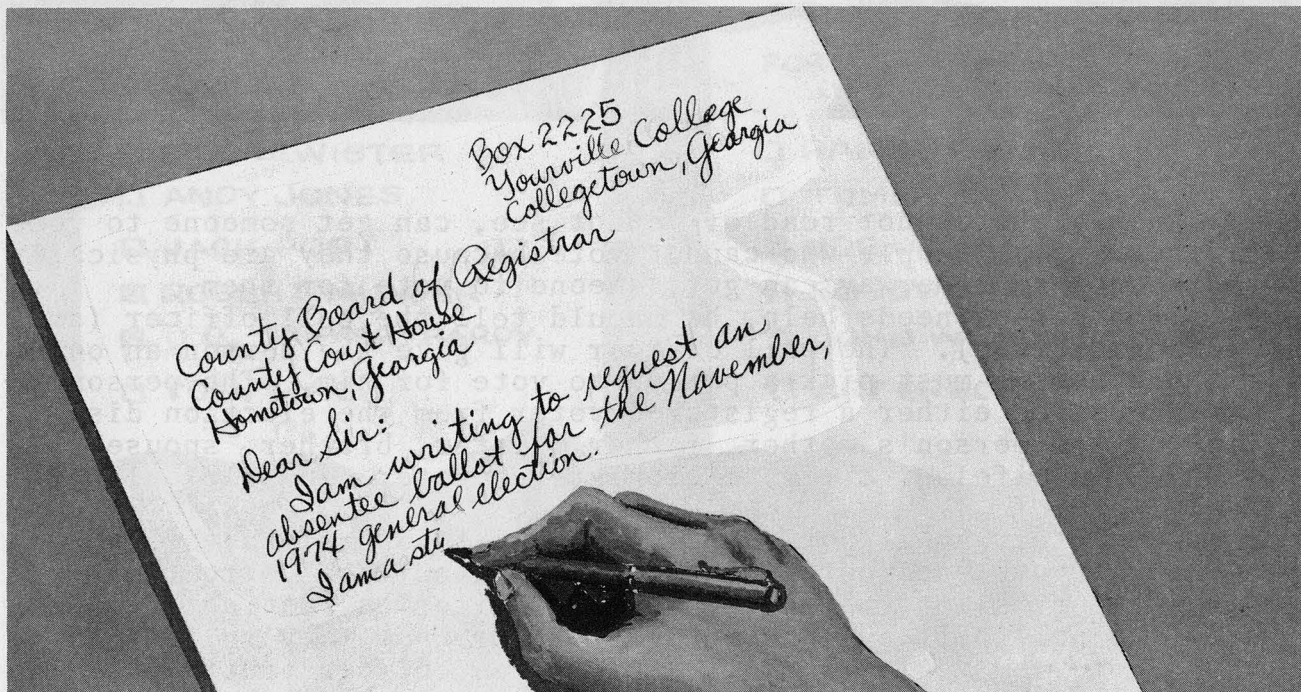
If you are eligible, then you may apply for an absentee ballot by:

1. Going to the main registration office and completing the application.
2. Writing the chief registrar for an application.

You must apply no earlier than 90 days before an election for an absentee ballot. You may also get your mother, father, sister, brother, spouse, child, uncle or aunt to apply for you.

If the Board of Registrars approves your application, they will mail or deliver you an absentee ballot. The absentee ballot must be marked before a proper authority - postmaster, registrar, officer of the armed services. The ballot must reach the Board of Registrars by election day.

The Attorney General has ruled that if a student can prove his residence, the student can register and vote in the county where he goes to school. If a student cannot prove his or her residence to the registrar, the student must register in the county where his parents live. If this is the case the student will have to cast an absentee ballot unless he is at his parents' home on election day.





## Poll Watchers Have A Very Important Job

The job of a poll watcher is to make sure that the managers of elections (poll officers) in each election district obey the election laws. To do their job they can go inside the voting place and watch the election officials while people are voting and watch the votes being counted. If the poll watcher thinks that the election laws are not being obeyed, they should report this to the ordinary.

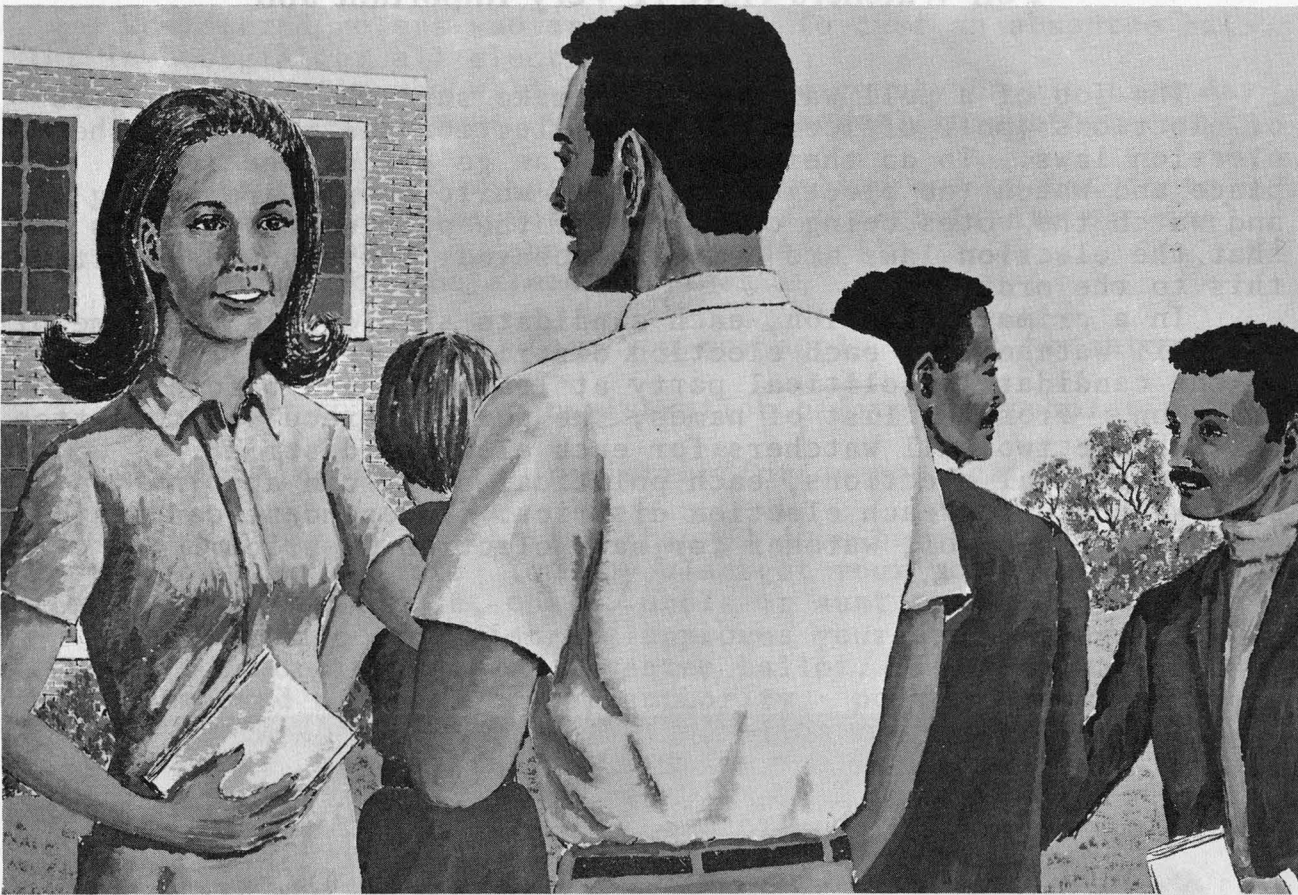
In a primary election, each candidate should give the name of one poll watcher for each election district to the chair person of the candidate's political party at least 10 days before the election. From the list of names, the party's executive committee will choose two poll watchers for each election district.

In general elections, each political party can appoint two poll watchers for each election district. Independent candidates can appoint one poll watcher for each election district.





## Anyone Can Work At The Voting Place As A Poll Worker



The job of a poll worker is to work for a candidate or candidates on election day. A candidate usually tries to have one or more poll workers at each election district. (Do not confuse poll officers and poll watchers with poll workers. Poll officers or managers of elections are appointed by the ordinary and their job is to run the polling place- check to see if people are registered, count the vote and so on. Poll watchers go inside the voting place; poll workers stay outside the voting place.)

A poll worker may give out sample ballots marked for the candidate(s) he or she supports. (People may take the sample ballots into the voting booth.) A poll worker can give out campaign literature and answer questions people have about voting and the candidates.

Another important job of poll workers is to get the people to vote. A good poll worker has a list of all the voters in his district and checks off the names of people as they vote. (You may get a list of all the registered voters in your precinct and county from the county board of registrars. These are public records.) In mid-afternoon, the poll worker looks at the list to see who has not voted. The poll worker then has his co-workers to call or go get these people who he believes will vote for the candidate(s) he is working for.

But all poll workers must obey certain laws. They must remain at least 250 feet from the polling places and cannot post any posters and other material within 250 feet of the polling places.



## It Is Important To Watch The Votes Being Counted



Besides poll watchers and candidates, any interested citizen can watch the managers of the elections count and add up the vote.

The ballot boxes must be opened and the ballots counted so that all persons can see what is going on. On voting machines and vote recorders people should be able to see the vote counter and watch the managers record the vote.

After the ballots are counted, the election officials must:

1. put the ballots back into the correct ballot box;
2. lock and seal each ballot box (or voting machine or vote recorder); and
3. the chief manager of elections and an assistant manager shall immediately deliver the ballot boxes to the ordinary.

## Conclusion

This booklet may not tell you all the things that you need to know about Georgia's voter registration and election laws. If you would like more information or more copies of this booklet, you should write the Voter Education Project (VEP).

If you are interested in organizing a voter registration drive or a citizenship education program to teach people more about the registration and election laws, you should write VEP. Say what you plan to do, and VEP may be able to make a small grant of money to help you run your program.

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