Power on Paper

Motives and consequences of Alabama's 1901 constitution

SS24.US1.19b "Summarize political and social motives that influenced the writing of the Constitution of Alabama of 1901, and explain its effect on politics and economics in Alabama."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two reasons delegates wanted a new constitution. Circle rules that put those goals into action, then number one political effect and one economic effect.

Who Held Power in Alabama?

1. In 1901, delegates met in Montgomery to replace Alabama's 1875 constitution. During Reconstruction, Black men had gained the right to vote, and some later formed political alliances with poor white farmers. In the 1890s, Populist challenges worried Democratic leaders who controlled state government. Many delegates wanted to protect that control by shrinking the electorate, especially the number of Black voters. Convention president John B. Knox openly described establishing white supremacy as a goal. This was more than a contest between parties: it was an effort to preserve a racial and social order in which white elites held power.

2. The new constitution used a poll tax, literacy requirements, and complex registration rules to restrict voting. Registrars had broad power to judge applicants, which enabled discrimination against Black citizens. These barriers also excluded many poor white men, although temporary exemptions helped some white applicants register. Delegates also wrote separate schools for Black and white children into the constitution, strengthening segregation. By reducing who could vote, the document made it harder for excluded communities to influence elections or demand equal treatment. Alabama remained governed largely by the political leaders who had backed the new rules.

3. The constitution also imposed strict limits on property taxes and on local governments' power to raise revenue. Wealthy landowners and business interests favored limits that kept taxes low. Yet counties and towns needed money for schools, roads, and other services. Tax limits made those services harder to fund, especially in poorer communities. The state retained tight control over many local decisions, so communities often needed state approval to change their policies. Disfranchisement deepened the problem: people shut out of elections had less power to press lawmakers for better services. Political exclusion and limited public spending shaped Alabama's economy for decades.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did political challenges and the goal of white supremacy both motivate delegates to change the constitution?

2. Explain how two voting rules in the constitution changed who could influence Alabama's elections.

3. What social goal did the school provision advance, and how did it affect public life?

4. How could tax limits and restricted voting work together to affect Alabama's economy?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five- or six-sentence museum label for an exhibit showing a 1902 voter registration form and a county school budget page. Connect two motives behind the constitution to one political effect and one economic effect, and explain how the effects reinforced each other.

ANSWER KEY # Power on Paper

GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.19b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two reasons delegates wanted a new constitution. Circle rules that put those goals into action, then number one political effect and one economic effect. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did political challenges and the goal of white supremacy both motivate delegates to change the constitution?	**Populist challenges threatened Democratic leaders' control, while delegates sought to preserve white elite power by reducing Black voting.**
2	Explain how two voting rules in the constitution changed who could influence Alabama's elections.	**Poll taxes and literacy requirements restricted voting, reducing the political influence of Black citizens and many poor white men.**
3	What social goal did the school provision advance, and how did it affect public life?	**The provision strengthened segregation by requiring separate schools for Black and white children.**
4	How could tax limits and restricted voting work together to affect Alabama's economy?	**Tax limits made schools, roads, and services harder to fund. People excluded from voting had less power to press lawmakers to improve those services.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The registration form represents delegates' aim to secure white elite rule after challenges from Black voters and poor white farmers. Poll taxes and registration rules reduced those groups' political influence. The school budget page points to another motive: protecting property owners from higher taxes. Limits on local revenue made it harder to pay for schools and roads. Because many residents could not vote, they had less power to demand more spending. Together, restricted voting and restricted funding helped preserve the power of those already in control.

Accept other accurate links between the stated motives, voting restrictions, segregation, tax limits, and reduced local services. Students should explain effects rather than merely list constitutional rules.