

Margaret Law Callott, The Negro in Maryland Politics, 1870-1912 [1969]

The border state of Maryland raises an exception to the general order of disenfranchisement and denial resulting for most southern blacks after Reconstruction throughout the south.

The promise of the 15th amendment was kept in Maryland and Blacks, who comprised about 20% of the state population, participated with relative freedom in the electoral process.

Moreover, blacks were actively participating in the voting process. . . The strength of the black vote was in in the southern and eastern counties of the state, where slavery had been concentrated and the number of Negroes greatest,

This unique history for blacks is attributed not to the generosity of the whites or a unique racial accord, but to the strength of a two party system. This vital two-party system existed in the state from 1870 to 1912. . . Maryland's Republican party was transformed into a viable opposition party by Negro enfranchisement. . . The strength of Maryland's political system was reflected in the triumph of the Republican party in 1895, when the racially mixed GOP won control over the state from the normally dominant Democracy. After a brief period of Republican rule, the lily-white Democrats returned to power. After this return to power the Democrats launched assault after assault at the blacks by disenfranchisement movement. . . . But ~~th~~ the movement failed because it was viewed by GOP whites as an attempt to destroy the Republican party.

But the fact that the blacks were an active voting element in Maryland politics did not prevent harsh treatment and roll back of other civil liberties and equal rights. Callott notes that this political participation did not stop the wave of segregationist measures in the 1890s. . . While disenfranchisement failed, the segregationists and exclusionist policies of the lily-white elements were successful in extending segregation from the school system and social welfare institutions to the public transportation system, residential housing and all public accommodations. . . These were the results of the 1900 Democratic party's comeback ~~pas~~ based on a blatant racist campaign of 1900. . .

The surprising thing, is that the blacks actively participating in the Maryland electoral process were generally from the lower economic orders of low occupational status and low education . . .

1. The enfranchisement of the Negro in Maryland. . . .

History was different because Maryland did not fall under the provisions of the emancipation proclamation . . . Blacks received the vote under the 15 th amendment. . .

Republicans in the state were quick to realize that their party could continue in politics only if the blacks were protected in their right to hold and use the franchise. . .

2. The Democratic Party and the Negro, 1870-1895

Although black enfranchisement established a solid base for the Republican party, the Democrats were in a dominant position in the state for the next 25 years. from 1870 until the election of a Republican governor in 1895, all major state offices and control of both houses remained Democratic. The state regularly voted Democratic in presidential elections, etc. . .

The Negro did not fair well under these democratic regimes. . . But he was secure in the hold on the vote because the Federal Government was willing to enforce the Federal Enforcement Acts . . . During the Democratic party's domination the election in the state were supervised by federal marshals and supervisors. . . The increasing inability to secure convictions against the violators of these acts in the deep south eroded away protection for black voters. . . But in Maryland the state's substantial Republican population performed jury duty, along with its other citizens, and the chances of drawing a jury that would disregard the gross violations of Negro voting rights were ~~to~~ not high in the border states. The combination of a strong indigenous GOP party and federal supervision of the electoral process proved to be an effective check on discrimination against Negro voters in Maryland. . .

4. The Negro in the Republican Party

Although the Negro gave the GOP in Maryland a new lease on life, the party never accorded the black man more than a menial place inside the organization. The Negro was expected to form the loyal rank and file, to vote often and always a straight party ticket, to be content with token party representation in party councils, to accept party programs handed down by white leaders, and never to doubt that the GOP was his chief benefactor and only protector. . .

Generally, Callcott concludes, the blacks accepted this status within the party largely because he had no alternative. He continued to provide the major part of GOP electoral support, and in the long run the ~~electoral policy~~ policy of undeviating support paid off. His steady support produced a party that was strong enough, and dependent enough upon him, that it could serve as his ~~champion~~ champion when the critical issue of his basic right to participate politically was questioned. . . .

5. Republicans in Power, 1895-1900

When the GOP took over in 1895 they promised a mildly reforming administration to the whites; and to the black man, nothing. Callcott notes that they fulfilled both promises

The Negro received little by way of special attention and advancement with the GOP victory in 1895. . . They fared best in the indirect program of free textbooks. The increase support in education helped the black schools more. . . The most important gain was the new GOP legislation providing that all counties maintain equal length school terms for whites and blacks. . . or forfeit all state monies. . .

Republican rule had been brief but instructive, . . . Then GOP gave the state a creditable administration. . . The Republicans learned that they could achieve power only with the Negroes in their voting ranks. . .

6. The Disenfranchisement Movement, 1900-1912

Describes how the Democrats attempted both formally and informally to cut away the black voters from the ballot box and reduce the state to a lily-white one-party system.

/. Why Disenfranchisement Failed

Callcott makes point that a lot of variables were present in answering this query.

(1) the size and distribution of the black population was important. The number of blacks compared to whites was only 22.5% This was regarded as a "tolerable" ratio. . . The whites were not really threatened by being over run by the blacks. . . Not could the Democrats make a successful case in their campaign . . .

(2) Maryland's Blacks were also responsible for their ability to be absorbed into the state's political structure. . . The intensity of black political activity and their tenacity in holding to their political guns were part of the story. . . Blacks in Maryland were generally more free than slave in terms of numbers. . . Half of the black population had substantial experience with social and economic independence and knew how to go about defending their positions. . . The number of blacks who enjoyed this economic and social independence gave strong impetus to the group's struggle for political survival/

(3) Maryland was spared the bitterness of political defeat and the "alien" rule from the North. . . The scars of Reconstruction were not visible in the state. . . Nor was the level of Negrophobia in this regard. . .

Finally, the existence and persistence of a two-party system contributed substantially to the defeat of the disenfranchisement movement in Maryland. The White Republicans fought--not for humanitarian or liberal reasons--but to remain alive as a party. The GOP in the state acted as a kind of firebreak when the flames of racial hysteria were whipped up by the Democrats. . . . The attack on the Negro was immediately perceived as an attack on the GOP. . . .