

Campaigning for the African American vote in Georgia, 1894

Introduction

In the gubernatorial and local elections of 1894, the Democrats and the newly formed People's Party or Populist Party vied for black votes in Georgia. Neither the Democrats nor the Populists called for racial equality in their platforms. Georgia's Populist Party, led by Tom Watson, however, invited two black delegates from the Colored Farmers' Alliance to their convention in 1892, and in 1894 appointed an African American to the state campaign committee in an attempt to garner support. The "third party" even called for an end to the state's convict lease system, which kept African American convicts in bondage. The incumbent Democrats fought back by showcasing their record of "supporting" education for African Americans, as shown in this broadside.

The broadside is an account of the school and poll taxes levied on citizens as well as the amounts given to schools. Although poll taxes, or voting fees, existed sporadically throughout American history, in 1877 Georgia had been the first state to enact a "poll tax" to effectively disenfranchise many poor black voters. A grandfather clause allowed anyone who could vote prior to the Civil War (white men) to retain their right to vote regardless of literacy tests, poll taxes, or other mechanisms.

The Democrats attempted to demonstrate, using the statistics in the broadside, that the system of taxation benefited the education of African American children. In this view, taxes collected from African American Georgians paid for approximately 25 percent of the salaries for black teachers while money collected from white Georgians paid for the other 75 percent. The document ends with the assertion that "the negro received more than three times as much money, as he pays in to the Public Treasurer from all sources." Democrats wanted to convince African Americans with voting eligibility that their schools had been and would continue to be funded if they only voted for the Democratic candidates.

Questions for Discussion

Read the introduction, examine the information on the broadside, and then apply your knowledge of American history to answer the following questions:

1. Identify the Populist / People's Party; poll tax; grandfather clause.
2. What data was presented in the broadside by the Democratic Party to influence African American ("colored" or "negro") voters? What were the Democrats attempting to accomplish?

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3. Defenders of the poll tax claimed that it was equally enforced. What information could you provide to counter that argument (use evidence from the broadside)?
4. From what you know about many southern states in the late 1800s, what argument could be made that the broadside ignored the inequality of education provided to the races?

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Image

COLORED VOTERS READ

Here is one instance of the treatment the Colored People of Georgia receive at the hands of the State Democratic Party.

What Evidence have the Negroes of this State that Schools will be provided for their Children in case the Third Party gets into Power?

School Fund derived from Taxes, Direct and Specific	\$1,063,657 81
School Fund derived from Poll Tax, approximate	190,000 00
Total of School Fund for 1893.....	\$1,253,657 81
Of the School Fund raised by Direct and Specific Taxes, the white property of the State paid (School Tax)	
The Colored property paid (School Tax).....	36,164 36
Total of School Fund by Direct and Specific Taxes	\$1,063,657 81
Of the Poll Tax the Whites paid	
The Negroes paid.....	76,000 00
Total Common Schools from Poll Tax	\$190,000 00
On the Distribution of the School Fund for 1893 the total amount paid to White Teachers was.....	
The total paid to Colored Teachers was	443,780 24
Total amount paid into School Fund by whites, including polls in 1893 was	\$1,141,493 45
Total paid in by negroes, including polls	112,164 36

Total amount of taxes paid by negroes in 1893 for all purposes and from all sources was \$144,968.71, showing that in the matter of schools alone the negro received more than three times as much money, as he pays in to the Public Treasurer from all sources.

Democratic Party campaign broadside aimed at winning African American voters in Georgia, 1894. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09000)