The Black Voting Rights Issue in Pennsylvania, 1780-1900

During the nineteenth century most blacks viewed the voting franchise as a panacea for solving their problems. What they failed to realize was that their success or failure in achieving the goal of equal rights was dependent upon many variables operating in American society. Pennsylvania, a state where during the nineteenth century blacks encountered the determined opposition of prejudiced whites, offers an excellent example of the potential for improving their conditions and the problems which voting rights presented to northern blacks.

The Pennsylvania Abolition Act of 1780 provided for the gradual abolition of slavery but made no comment as to the political status of free blacks. The question as to whether blacks could legally exercise the right to vote depended upon the interpretation of the state's Constitution of 1776 which extended the franchise to "every freeman of the full age of twenty-one years, having resided in this State for one whole year before the day of election for Representatives and paid public taxes during that time. . . ." The key word in this passage was freeman. Many white officials considered this term to exclude blacks due to their past status. Without a revision in the language of the Constitution or a ruling by the courts, the status of black voters remained ambiguous and was left to the discretion of local officials.

An opportunity to clarify the wording of the Constitution developed in 1789 when the citizens of Pennsylvania called for a constitutional convention to revise that document. When the suffrage article was brought up for consideration, several antiblack
delegates attempted to insert a clause limiting the right to vote to adult white males. Nearly fifty years later, Albert Gallatin, one of the leaders of the convention, noted that the proposal was defeated because of the fear that the language might be construed to disenfranchise dark skinned Caucasians such as himself. 3

Since the Constitution of 1790 retained the suffrage qualifications of the 1776 Constitution, and since the legislature avoided dealing with the issue of black voters, the decision as to whether they could vote remained with local authorities. As a result of this situation, voting policies varied from county to county. Blacks voted in Bucks, York, Dauphin, Cumberland, Juniata, Westmoreland and Allegheny Counties, while in Philadelphia, the county with the largest black population, the officials refused to assess blacks for the purpose of taxation, thereby denying them the right to vote. The political discrimination in Pennsylvania that blacks experienced did not differ from that in most other northern states. At that time only Massachusetts intentionally omitted the color bar from its suffrage requirements, while New Jersey and Ohio specifically excluded blacks from exercising the franchise. 4

The lack of a definitive policy concerning black voting rights led some Pennsylvanians, both pro- and antiblack, to press for clarification of the issue. Shortly after the ratification of the Constitution of 1790 a case regarding the legality of the matter came before a Philadelphia County court. The court ruled that free blacks had all the rights of citizenship; however, this decision did not alter the situation in the Philadelphia area. In 1796 several residents of Huntingdon County attempted to prod the legislature to act. They petitioned the state Senate to provide financial aid for the education of black servants in order that these individuals would be prepared to assume the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship. This proposal was ignored and the question of blacks voting was left to the whim of local officials. 5

3 Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to Propose Amendments to the Constitution, Commenced and Held at Harrisburg on the Second Day of May, 1837 (Harrisburg, 1837–1839), X, 45, hereinafter referred to as Proceedings and Debates.
4 Emil Olbrich, The Development of Sentiment on Negro Suffrage to 1860 (Madison, Wis., 1912), 22–24, 51.
5 Ibid., 160.
During the first three decades of the nineteenth century no major effort was made to alter the situation; however, in the 1830s the question took on major importance as hostility to blacks increased. Efforts to deprive them of their voting rights became widespread after the 1837 election in Bucks County, where the Whig candidates for county commissioner and auditor narrowly defeated the Democratic candidates. The Democrats contested the election when they learned that blacks had voted at several places. Since blacks usually voted for Whig candidates, the Democrats hoped to reverse the results by having those votes declared illegal. They claimed that black voters arrived at the polling places armed with guns, and that one man threatened to shoot anyone who attempted to prevent him from exercising his rights. Democratic leaders predicted that, if whites tolerated this type of behavior, the streets would soon be filled with the blood of white men. Their accusations, however, did not provide all the details of the incident. Benjamin Lundy, an antislavery publisher, noted that voting day was also the first day of the hunting season and that many voters, both black and white, had come to the polls armed with guns. Moreover, Lundy asserted that the alleged threat to shoot anyone who interfered with black voters was made in jest and later exploited for political reasons.

Most Pennsylvanians were content to accept the superficial story provided by the Democrats. Party leaders, therefore, decided to use the situation to gain support for their goal of disenfranchising blacks. They quickly moved to increase the emotional involvement of whites by holding a series of public meetings. They also tried to get immediate legal action by initiating a court case and by preparing memorials urging delegates to the constitutional convention, which was then in session, to add a provision to the Constitution disenfranchising blacks.

The Democrats achieved success in both of these aims. The case of the contested election came before the Bucks County Court of Quarter Sessions presided over by Judge John Fox during the

6 York Gazette, Jan. 30, 1838.
7 Bedford Gazette, Nov. 17, 1837.
8 National Inquirer and Constitutional Advocate of Universal Liberty, Nov. 23, 1837, hereinafter referred to as the National Inquirer.
9 Ibid., Jan. 4, 1838.
December term of 1837. After hearing arguments concerning the legality of blacks voting, Fox ruled that since the state's Constitution granted voting rights to freemen who met property and residency requirements and since he did not consider the status of freemen extended to blacks, they did not have the right to vote. Fox based this opinion upon his interpretation of the rights of blacks found in Penn's Charter of Privileges of 1701, the Constitutions of 1776 and 1790, the United States Constitution, and several acts of the colonial Assembly. He concluded that blacks were not considered to be freemen in colonial times and that neither the Pennsylvania Constitution nor the United States Constitution altered their status.10

Democratic leaders were pleased with Fox's decision, but, since it did not settle the question of blacks voting throughout the commonwealth, the antiblack forces took the issue to the state Supreme Court by appealing the decision of a Luzerne County court which upheld the right of black men to vote. The case of Hobbs v. Fogg was argued before the Supreme Court in July, 1837, but the justices deliberately withheld their decision until the delegates to the constitutional convention decided to amend the suffrage article to prohibit blacks from voting. This was done to keep the court out of the controversy. When Chief Justice John B. Gibson finally presented the court's opinion, he followed the precedent established by Fox in reviewing the legal status of blacks in order to determine if they were freemen. Gibson reached the same conclusion as Fox, black men held a status inferior to that of freemen and, therefore, were ineligible to vote.11

The court's decision was anticlimactic since the Constitution had already been amended. When this convention had originally convened at Harrisburg on May 2, 1837, the exclusion of blacks from voting was not one of the issues. Later, when the committee assigned to consider article three, the suffrage article, presented its report to the convention with no mention of blacks, John B. Sterigere, a Democrat from Montgomery County, proposed adding a clause to section one of the article limiting suffrage to white male

11 Hobbs v. Fogg, 46 Pennsylvania Supreme Court Reports, 553-560 (1837).
citizens over the age of twenty-one. However, due to the lack of public concern and the opposition of the coalition of Whigs and Anti-Masons, who controlled the convention, the antiblack forces decided to drop the matter during the spring session of the convention.12

When the delegates met again after their summer recess on October 17, 1837, the situation had changed because of the extensive publicity given to the Bucks County election. Memorials on both sides were received from all parts of the state,13 and the press began to take emotional editorial stands.14 The Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery distributed copies of its report, The Present State and Condition of the Free People of Color of the City of Philadelphia and Adjoining Districts, among the delegates in the hope of altering attitudes based upon racial stereotypes.15 Public uproar thus forced the delegates to deal with the issue.

The debate which ensued was vigorous, emotional, and lengthy, with the Democrats taking a strong stand. Their argument began with legal points. They used the opinion of Judge Fox extensively to support the assertion that blacks were not freemen under the state or federal Constitutions. They also maintained that the right of suffrage was never granted to all people. Women and minors, for example, were not permitted to vote, but they still had the protection of the law guaranteed to individuals by the Constitution. Finally, in order to support the legality of this type of action, the Democrats noted that seventeen or eighteen other states denied blacks the right to vote.16

The Democrats also effectively used arguments which played upon prejudices. They noted that if blacks had the right to vote they would be eligible to hold public office, and asserted that white citizens would never accept blacks in these positions. They further contended that blacks were mentally inferior to whites and that

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12 *Proceedings and Debates*, I, 233, 472.
15 The Present State and Condition of the Free People of Color of the City of Philadelphia and Adjoining Districts (Philadelphia, 1838), 22.
allowing inferior individuals to vote would debase the political system. Ultimately, they predicted, granting political equality to blacks would invite an influx of poor southern blacks who would expect equal treatment. The Democrats charged that a great migration of poor people would only add to problems allegedly created by the black poor and that assumptions of equality eventually would lead to racial amalgamation. 17

Those who favored black voting rights noted that there were black citizens who were well educated and wealthy and who had a vested interest in the affairs of the government, and urged that individuals of this caliber should not lose the franchise, especially when the right to vote was being extended to poor uneducated whites. The problack delegates believed that withholding the basic right of citizenship from an entire class of people for no other reason than color was both immoral and unjust. They asserted that if the delegates arbitrarily denied blacks their right to vote, the government could take away other rights of blacks at any time. They also observed that without the franchise blacks would be faced with political slavery and that there was little difference between political slavery and personal servitude. 18

As the debate moved toward a conclusion, the climate of the convention became tense. The few delegates who maintained cool heads were unable to calm the antagonists. The emotional state became obvious when Thomas Jefferson Becket, the doorkeeper who was directed to maintain order, acted overzealously and ejected John P. Barr, Thomas Butler, and James Forten, Jr., three respected black men, from the gallery. 19

When finally a vote was taken the restrictive addition to the suffrage article was approved by a count of seventy-seven to forty-five. 20 This victory was the result of Democratic unity and the defection of nineteen conservatives from the majority coalition of Whigs and Anti-Masons. The weakness in the solidarity of the coalition was partially due to the absence of Thaddeus Stevens, a

17 Ibid., II, 477-478; III, 82-85.
18 Ibid., II, 476; IX, 331-345.
19 National Inquirer, Jan. 25, 1838; (Pittsburgh) Gazette, Jan. 25, 1838.
20 Proceedings and Debates, X, 106.
leader in holding the coalition together, who had returned to his duties at the legislature.\textsuperscript{21}

Black Pennsylvanians were naturally disturbed. They found disenfranchisement particularly galling inasmuch as it came during a period when the right to vote was granted to many poor and uneducated whites, thereby adding to the electorate a group which for the most part resisted the efforts of blacks to improve their condition. They believed that with the loss of the vote they also lost an opportunity for uprooting slavery and bringing about a state of equal justice.\textsuperscript{22}

Although blacks were thus naturally despondent, they refused to accept the decision of the delegates quietly. Since the law required that the voters of the state had to ratify the proposed constitutional amendments, blacks quickly took action. On March 14, 1838, one month after the convention accepted the discriminatory suffrage article, numerous black Philadelphians met in the Presbyterian Church on Seventh Street. The participants appointed a committee consisting of Robert Purvis, James Cornish, J. C. Bowers, Robert B. Forten, J. J. G. Bias, James Needham and John P. Barr to prepare an appeal to the voters.\textsuperscript{23}

The committee produced a pamphlet, \textit{Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens Threatened with Disfranchisement to the People of Pennsylvania}, which urged the voters to reject the amendments to the Constitution, and warned that if blacks were deprived of the franchise a dangerous precedent would be established for all. The \textit{Appeal} charged that when an individual was deprived of the right to vote “you have made the government in regard to him, a mere despotism; and you have taken a step toward making it a despotism to all.”\textsuperscript{24}

The pamphlet also reviewed the legal background of black suffrage. It examined the Constitution of 1790 and the records of


\textsuperscript{23} Robert Purvis, \textit{Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens Threatened with Disfranchisement to the People of Pennsylvania} (Philadelphia, 1838), 2.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 1-2.
the constitutional convention of 1789–1790 in order to show that there was no barrier to blacks voting in that document and that the men who wrote the document specifically prohibited the addition of the word white to the requirements for suffrage. The United States Articles of Confederation and the United States Constitution were also reviewed to prove that the federal government imposed no restrictions upon free blacks. The committee discovered only one legal obstruction, the decision of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in the case of *Hobbs v. Fogg*. However, the committee expected that the court would reverse its decision in the event that the voters rejected the amendments.\(^{25}\)

The *Appeal* concluded with attacks upon the stereotypes which many delegates had presented at the convention. The claim that blacks were poor, disorderly, and a disruptive element within society was countered with a brief survey of the economic and social condition of Philadelphia's black community, which revealed that blacks were assets to the city and state. The charge that political equality would lead to racial amalgamation was refuted. The pamphlet charged that experience showed this contention to be ridiculous. Blacks noted that if racial mixture came to pass it would be, as it had always been, the fault of whites because blacks had no desire to go where they were not welcome.\(^{26}\)

Distributed among the voters, the *Appeal* went in vain. On October 9, 1838, the constitutional changes were approved by a vote of 113,971 to 112,759.\(^{27}\) Blacks, however, did not immediately lose hope. They continued to keep the suffrage issue alive through conventions and public meetings, where the participants drew up petitions seeking redress of grievances and sent them to the legislature. At the first state-wide convention of black Pennsylvanians held in Pittsburgh's A.M.E. Church during August, 1841, the delegates directed resolutions to the state's political leaders praying for an elimination of the discriminatory suffrage requirements.\(^{28}\) When the General Assembly failed to act upon these demands, blacks

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 3–6.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 10–15.

\(^{27}\) Proceedings and Debates, XIV, 260–261.

besieged the legislature with a steady stream of petitions requesting the return of their voting rights. Some, believing that more than petitions were required, established the Citizens' Union of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to use all means available to regain the franchise. Unfortunately, these efforts were fruitless. A few problack legislators introduced bills to enfranchise blacks in 1845 and 1855, but their endeavors were futile. The majority of the legislators refused their support, probably on account of the widely held fear that political equality would lead to social equality.

The indifference of Pennsylvania's legislators to their demands caused black Philadelphians to take the unusual step of sending a petition to Congress. The *Memorial of Thirty Thousand Disfranchised Citizens of Philadelphia* stated that if the nation expected the allegiance of black people it would have to provide them with protection and equal rights. Asserting that neither the Articles of Confederation nor the Constitution made a color distinction in requirements for citizenship, the petitionerers urged Congress to require state law to be consistent with federal law. The *Memorial* concluded with a request for immediate action to bring social justice to America. This appeal, like those sent to the Pennsylvania legislature, was met with indifference.

The lack of response from the state and national legislatures brought about a feeling of discouragement among the protestors. Interest in public meetings called to keep the issue alive declined to the extent that two assemblies held in Philadelphia during the winter of 1856-1857 each drew only about forty persons. Some blacks, such as Jacob C. White, Jr., refused to succumb to despair. White took a long-range view of the situation. Speaking at a reception for Governor James Pollock at the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia on May 24, 1855, White stressed the point that blacks should not give up. Instead they should prepare for the

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29 Numerous mentions of these petitions are to be found in the *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* and in the *Journal of the Senate*.
31 *Journal of the Senate*, 1845, I, 178; 1855, 147; *Journal of the House of Representatives*, 1855, 106.
future when citizenship would be based upon manhood instead of color.\textsuperscript{33}

The Civil War presented blacks with an opportunity. After President Lincoln in the autumn of 1862 reversed his policy of refusing to enlist black men as soldiers, many joined the army and fought with great courage. Their actions became the foundation for arguments of those who demanded the enfranchisement of blacks. Black orators constantly questioned the ironic situation of brave soldiers who defended their nation being denied the full rights of citizens.\textsuperscript{34}

In an effort to obtain equal political rights, which most black people agreed were required to achieve the broad goal of equal opportunity, blacks formed organizations such as the National Equal Rights League. Black Pennsylvanians provided these organizations with extensive support. The Pennsylvania State Equal Rights League, an affiliate of the national league with fifty-one chapters throughout the commonwealth in 1867, continued to press for legislation or constitutional amendments to obtain redress of grievances and investigated the possibility of initiating legal proceedings.\textsuperscript{35}

In spite of these actions and the justice of the cause, most whites, including Republicans who supposedly were allies of blacks, opposed black suffrage in the North. Most northern Republicans were willing to impose black suffrage on the South through the Fourteenth Amendment, but not upon their own states. The hypocrisy of Pennsylvania's Republicans became evident during the legislative session of 1868 when John Hickman, a maverick Republican assemblyman, introduced a resolution proposing amendments to the state Constitution to remove racial discrimination. Most Republi-


\textsuperscript{34} Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the National Equal Rights League Held in Cleveland, Ohio October 19th, 20th, and 21st, 1865 (Philadelphia, 1865), 38-54.

\textsuperscript{35} Minutes of the Meetings of the Executive Board of the Pennsylvania State Equal Rights League, Meetings of Apr. 4, 1866, July 4, 1866, Dec. 4, 1866, Nov. 14 and 19, 1867; Memorial, "To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress Assembled"; Memorial, "To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Pennsylvania in General Assembly Met," 1865, all in Leon Gardiner Collection.
cans joined with the Democrats in defeating Hickman's proposal. Hickman received the support of only twelve Republicans in his fight for justice.\(^\text{36}\)

Blacks and some leading Republicans responded to Hickman's defeat with anger. William D. Kelley, a radical Pennsylvania congressman, criticized his fellow Republicans for violating the basic principles of the party.\(^\text{37}\) The Pennsylvania State Equal Rights League echoed Kelley's thoughts in a public statement.\(^\text{38}\) Some blacks wrote to their representatives in Congress urging them to initiate national action. Although a few Republicans were receptive to these pleas, blacks were generally treated coldly by Republicans who feared for their political future.\(^\text{39}\)

This situation was not unique to Pennsylvania. By 1869 every postwar referendum to extend the franchise to northern blacks, except those in Iowa and Minnesota, had been defeated. However, during the winter of 1868–1869 the national Republican leadership decided to alter this position and to support a constitutional amendment guaranteeing blacks the right to vote. This decision was based upon political not humanitarian concerns. Republicans wanted to ensure their domination of Congress by protecting black voters in the South. Furthermore, the amendment would enfranchise northern blacks who were expected to vote Republican, thereby improving the chances of Republicans controlling Connecticut, Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania, where Democratic and Republican voters were almost evenly divided. It would also give the Republicans at least a chance to take Delaware, New Jersey, and Maryland.\(^\text{40}\)

Fearing that the party could not maintain control of three-fourths of the state legislatures much longer, the Republican-dominated Congress adopted a moderate voting rights amendment which was acceptable to all factions of the party and sent it to the

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\(^\text{38}\) Memorial, "For the People of Color," 1868, Leon Gardiner Collection.

\(^\text{39}\) W. D. Kelley to J. C. White, Dec. 7, 1868, ibid.

states for ratification. Governor John W. Geary and other Republican leaders in Pennsylvania recommended its immediate approval. Unlike the previous year, when they had opposed Hickman's resolution, Republican legislators now lined up in support of black voting rights. They felt obligated to act promptly since the national party leadership was pushing the proposal.\textsuperscript{41} The Democrats, on the other hand, vainly hoped to delay consideration in order to provide time to organize popular opposition.\textsuperscript{42}

During the limited debate the Democrats criticized the Republicans for repudiating their 1868 platform which promised that the issue of black suffrage in the North would be left to the states. They also charged that the Republicans, who controlled the legislature, were hypocrites whose concern was for their political position, not for black people, and denounced them for failing to allow the people of the state time to make their wishes known.\textsuperscript{43}

The few Republicans who spoke urged Pennsylvanians to rise above prejudice and to stand by the basic principles of the Declaration of Independence. They claimed that their action was based upon a true concern for justice and morality.\textsuperscript{44} While the Democrats were correct in charging that many Republicans were hypocritical in using this type of argument, there were a few individuals, such as Senator Morrow B. Lowry, who supported the amendment because of a sincere belief in equality and justice.\textsuperscript{45}

After the restricted discussion of the amendment, the Pennsylvania Senate quickly approved it by a partisan vote on March 11, 1869. Two weeks later the House followed suit. Governor Geary immediately signed the resolution ratifying the amendment, making Pennsylvania the fourteenth state to approve it.\textsuperscript{46} A year later the amendment received the sanction of three-fourths of the states, and on March 30, 1870, Secretary of State Hamilton Fish declared it to be part of the Constitution.

Blacks received the news of the ratification of the Fifteenth
Amendment with rejoicing. William Nesbit, president of the Pennsylvania State Equal Rights League, declared April 26, 1870, to be a day for prayer and thanksgiving. Black people in communities throughout the state followed Nesbit's suggestion by holding religious services and parades.

The reaction of whites was hostile. Immediately after the Pennsylvania legislature approved the amendment, the lawmakers received over 100 petitions objecting to their action. Some people resorted to violence. In April, 1870, a group of white rowdies in Philadelphia stoned peaceful black families who were returning from a celebration of their newly acquired rights.

When black Pennsylvanians had the opportunity to exercise their franchise in the autumn of 1870, fewer of them came to the polls than expected. Several factors contributed to this situation. Black men found it difficult to register. For example, in the seventh ward of Philadelphia voting officials required blacks to have two white citizens vouch for their qualifications before they were permitted to register. Furthermore, the Republican Party did not make any major effort to organize the new voters, since in this election there were no important state or national offices in contention and since they feared that action of this nature might prove to be counterproductive.

In spite of problems and threats, some black men went to the polls and voted with little difficulty. Only one incident was reported. That was in the fifth ward of Philadelphia. United States Marshal E. M. Gregory ordered Marines into the area after blacks, who had been waiting to vote since dawn, protested that voting officials refused to permit them to vote until all whites had an opportunity to do so. The blacks also charged that voting officials and city policemen mistreated them. Gregory's action was taken over the objection of the city's Democratic mayor, Daniel Fox,
because the Marshal recognized that the potential for serious violence was present, and because he felt that city officials were not providing blacks with adequate protection.52

Fortunately, the fifth ward situation was not the rule. In most areas blacks were properly registered and voted without harassment. Despite charges to the contrary, there were only a few cases of fraudulent voting. In one instance a Philadelphia alderman ordered several Republican canvassers held for trial for registering unqualified blacks. Several black men from Baltimore pleaded guilty to charges of accepting payment to come to Philadelphia to vote illegally. Although the Democratic press exaggerated these incidents, blacks were not involved in widespread election fraud.53

Considering the tense political situation and the deep-seated prejudice of many whites, it is surprising that the 1870 elections passed without serious incident. In fact, most Pennsylvanians, both black and white, felt that since the initial year of blacks voting had passed without major problems the worst problems were over. Even though black voting was not popular among whites, it appeared that they had accepted the fait accompli. Unfortunately, the 1871 elections revealed this optimism to be unfounded.

The elections of that year evoked as little state-wide attention as those of the previous year, despite the fact that two state offices, attorney general and surveyor general, were in contention. In Philadelphia, however, there was a desperate struggle between the two major parties which led the Republicans to make an all-out attempt to get the newly enfranchised voters to the polls. The Democrats tried to counter this strategy by appealing to the basest prejudices of whites.54

On election day the tension thus generated erupted in riots in the city's fourth, fifth, seventh, sixteenth, and seventeenth wards. Problems first developed in the eleventh division of the fifth ward, where black voters charged the police with intimidation. Shortly thereafter fights broke out in the seventh ward after a black man was refused the right to vote. Disorder quickly spread to other

52 Public Ledger, Oct. 12, 1870; Philadelphia Inquirer, Oct. 12, 1870.
53 Public Ledger, Oct. 8 and 11, 1870; Patriot and Union, Oct. 10, 1870; Democratic Watchman, Oct. 21, 1870.
54 McClure, II, 283–288.
areas and mobs of whites began attacking blacks. The police dispersed the mobs, but white men gathered in small roving bands and continued their attacks. White terrorists killed three men, including Octavius V. Catto, the highly respected principal of the Male Department of the Institute for Colored Youth; forty others were hospitalized.\(^{55}\)

The election day riots produced charges that Mayor Fox had failed to provide the city's black citizens with proper protection and that Governor Geary had contributed to the spread of violence by refusing to permit federal troops to be used to maintain order. Geary apparently was reacting to the criticism which he faced after Marines were sent into Philadelphia in 1870. Black Philadelphians also claimed that the city's leading Democrats paid ruffians to harass them in an attempt to prevent their voting.\(^{56}\)

The official reaction to the riots was to hold a coroner's inquest to identify those responsible for the election day murders. Although the coroner's jury ascertained the identity of those guilty, law enforcement officers failed to apprehend the suspects, even though Mayor Fox offered a $1,000 reward for their capture. On the other hand, a preliminary hearing held to examine charges of police interference in the election resulted in several policemen being held for trial. Leading white Philadelphians attended a public meeting held to condemn the hideous crimes in the hope of showing blacks that they deplored violence and that they considered the death of Catto to be a great loss for whites as well as blacks.\(^{57}\)

These token displays of public concern did not satisfy blacks who were demoralized and bitter. They perceived that even though aristocratic whites had come out in mass to honor Catto in death, they did nothing to protect living blacks. Charging that for years they had tried to be good citizens and had tried to improve themselves, they complained that hostile whites used any means deemed necessary without fear of punishment to prevent them from achieving equality and their full rights as citizens.\(^{58}\)

The 1871 elections did have one favorable result, it made the Republicans aware of the power of the black vote in their election

\(^{55}\) Public Ledger, Oct. 11 and 14, 1871; Philadelphia Inquirer, Oct. 11, 1871; New National Era, Oct. 19, 1871.

\(^{56}\) New National Era, Oct. 19 and 26, 1871.

\(^{57}\) Public Ledger, Oct. 14, 1871.

victory. Politicians of both parties recognized that black voters held the balance of power in Pennsylvania, and Republicans acted to ensure their retention of that support.\footnote{Reading}  

The GOP had little difficulty along that line. While many black leaders were aware of the shortcomings of the party, they believed that the Republicans deserved their backing because of the victories achieved for them and because the best hope for the future seemed to be with the Republican Party.\footnote{Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored Men of America Held in Washington, D. C. on January 13, 14, 15, and 16, 1869 (Washington, 1869), 20.} Republicans made contributions to black institutions, most notably churches, and appointed blacks to token patronage positions to ensure continued support. Most black men accepted these traditional political rewards and remained free from corruption, but there was a small minority of poor blacks who were willing to sell their votes to the highest bidder. Republican ward leaders kept this group in line by making direct cash payments and by establishing black political clubs which became centers for gambling and prostitution. They also provided loyal blacks with immunity from arrest on these minor charges.\footnote{W. E. B. DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study (New York, 1967), 372-373, 378-382.} 

Middle-class blacks gathered in more respectable political clubs, such as Philadelphia’s Citizens Republican Club which produced such black political leaders as Gilbert Bell, Stephen Gibson, Charles Ferret and Christopher Perry. The only organization which rivaled the clubs in the political sphere was the church. The churches were centers for political meetings and black clergymen had strong influence, which is why the Republicans subsidized their churches. These organizations were of major importance in getting loyal black voters to the polls.\footnote{Richard R. Wright, Jr., The Negro in Pennsylvania: A Study in Economic History (New York, 1969), 117; James Bryce, The American Commonwealth (New York, 1941), II, 38.} 

The Republican machine also rewarded supporters with jobs, a logical way to repay blacks since discrimination prevented them from obtaining decent employment. The positions to which they were appointed were generally of the lowest order, such as messengers or janitors, due to the fear that if they were given more responsible jobs prejudiced whites would be alienated. This situation

\footnote{Reading} Eagle, Oct. 12, 1871; Democratic Watchman, Oct. 20, 1871; New National Era, Oct. 12, 1871; McClure, II, 285. 
\footnote{Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored Men of America Held in Washington, D. C. on January 13, 14, 15, and 16, 1869 (Washington, 1869), 20.} 
began to change as the number of black voters grew rapidly during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, thereby increasing their importance and forcing the Republicans to grant them a higher percentage of the patronage jobs and to improve the caliber of those positions. By 1905 there were almost two hundred black postal workers, sixty-five black policemen, thirty black teachers, and thirteen black clerks in Philadelphia. The situation was similar in other cities. Pittsburgh had twenty-seven black police officers and most other large cities in the state had at least one black man in a responsible appointive position.\(^63\)

Not all blacks were satisfied with such jobs. They wanted the opportunity to run for offices that would provide them with policy-making power which could be used to gain improvements for black citizens. Republican bosses responded to these desires by nominating some of them to powerless positions, such as that of presidential elector. However, Republicans could no longer wholly ignore the demands of black politicians for positions commensurate with their political power in the face of black leaders, such as William Still, who were urging blacks to reconsider their support of the Republican Party. They, therefore, began to place black candidates on the ballot in areas which were predominantly black. In 1884 Jacob Purness became the first black to be elected to the common council of Philadelphia. From that time until 1915, when the city charter was amended to provide for a unicameral council, at least one representative of the seventh ward was black. Blacks were also elected to positions as school directors. Prior to 1910, however, no black Pennsylvanian was elected to a state or national office. In this respect Pennsylvania lagged behind other states, such as Massachusetts, Ohio, and Illinois, where blacks were elected to the legislature in the 1860s and 1870s.\(^64\)

A few blacks, recognizing that their votes held the balance of power in Pennsylvania politics, urged blacks to vote independent, favoring politicians who would support their goals. During the 1880s William Still and Robert Purvis became active in the Colored Independent Party. In 1881 black newspapers endorsed the Demo-

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\(^64\) DuBois, "The Black Vote," 34; William Still, *An Address on Voting and Laboring, Delivered at Concert Hall Tuesday Evening, March 10th, 1874* (Philadelphia, 1874), 1-16.
cratic candidate for District Attorney in Wilkes-Barre. During the 1890s a few blacks, including Still and Dr. Nathan F. Mossell, rebelled against the Republican machine in Philadelphia. These actions were the exception rather than the rule. Most blacks, fearing the loss of political favors, continued blindly to vote Republican.66

Their political experience in the nineteenth century in light of high expectations was generally disappointing. Several factors contributed to their lack of success. First, blacks lacked the support of whites in their drive for political equality. Many whites who had supported this goal died or were too old to have any influence. Moreover, many white abolitionists, believing that emancipation had solved the problem, became involved with other reforms. Actually, most whites had little or no sympathy for the problems of black people. Second, blacks were unable to exploit their unique political position in states such as Pennsylvania due to the diverse social structure and varied class interests. Finally, northern black politicians relied upon national support and, therefore, had to concentrate on southern-oriented issues rather than recognizing their own unique urban character and focusing on local issues.66

Black Pennsylvanians who had seen the franchise as a panacea became frustrated when they found the road to equality blocked by discrimination. The frustration caused many of them to stop voting. However, the situation was not completely bleak. The bias against black voting began to lessen when whites realized that political equality would not lead to racial amalgamation. By the turn of the century, blacks who voted did so without hindrance. Moreover, their political power influenced the members of the General Assembly in their support of the 1881 law which prohibited segregation in the public schools and the 1887 law requiring public places to accommodate blacks.67 The franchise was a useful tool for them to use in improving their condition, but it was not a panacea.

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