

The Negro Vote in Northern Cities

Urbanization, growing class-consciousness, unemployment relief, all play part in the shift of Negro vote to the Democratic party.

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BEFORE the 1940 presidential election there was a good deal of speculation as to how Negroes in northern cities would vote. Various estimates were made as to the size of this vote. Usually the figure was over two million. All of the more or less established straw polls indicated that for the first time since 1916 the election was going to be a close one. Here was a situation where the Negro vote might have swung the result one way or the other.

In the north and border states the Negro vote was found largely in the metropolitan centers of the following eight states: New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Maryland, Indiana, and Missouri. With the exception of Maryland these were states where the vote was very close and a relatively small switch might have changed the result. Two of these states were carried by Willkie—Michigan and Indiana. If he had carried the other six he would have received 153 more votes in the electoral college or nearly enough to have defeated Roosevelt.

What were some of the speculations regarding the voting behavior of Negroes in 1940? In the October issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* Lawrence Sullivan made a number of guesses regarding the Negro vote which were 100 per cent wrong. On the basis of a misinterpretation of

certain erroneous figures regarding voting behavior in Chicago he laid down the following fallacious propositions:

1. That the Negro vote would not be decisive in any state in 1940, even Illinois;
2. That the 1940 election would mark a large return of Negro voters to the Republican fold;
3. That three-fifths of the Negro vote in the city of Chicago which was typical of the national Negro vote would be for Roosevelt.
4. That the Negro vote was influenced chiefly by relief in the past but now the Negroes were getting tired of relief.

What about Sullivan's first proposition? In presidential elections the Negro vote in Chicago used to be almost four-fifths Republican. In 1940 it was about one-half Republican. About one-third of the voters in the South Side had shifted their vote. According to estimates which I have made this would be about 50,000 votes for the city. The shift from 1928 and 1932 was sufficient to carry the state for Roosevelt.

The second proposition may be put in the form: Why didn't the vote shift? In Chicago there was no shift of the South Side back to the Republican party. Contrary to city-wide trends, its Democratic vote was 3 per cent higher in 1940 than in 1936. The city as a whole shifted away from Roosevelt, but the Black

Belt continued its swing toward Roosevelt at a slackened pace. There was a shift toward the Republican party in state affairs, however, corresponding to the shift that took place in the state as a whole.

So far as Chicago was concerned Sullivan greatly overestimated the strength of the Democratic party among Negro voters. It has not been possible to obtain 1940 figures regarding the behavior of Negro voters in other cities but it is clear that they are more Democratic in New York and less Democratic in Cincinnati.

Relief Situation

Sullivan's last proposition was that the Negro vote was influenced chiefly by the relief situation. There is no question that this is an important consideration with unemployed citizens, white or colored. Studies which I have made in California, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Pennsylvania bring this out very clearly. Public opinion polls have presented corroborative evidence. It is doubtful, however, whether it is a chief consideration.

Since the 1940 election returns have just recently become available and since the 1936 election so closely resembles the 1940 election, I will have to draw upon an analysis made by one of my students, Elmer Henderson, who studied the Negro vote in the 1935, 1936, 1938, and 1939 elections.

Henderson found that in 1936 the relationship between the Roosevelt vote and the percentage of persons on relief by census tracts was a posi-

tive one but not close. Putting it in technical form, about 16 per cent of the variation in the Negro vote as between census tracts could be explained by variations in the ratios of those on relief. Since in 1940 about 60 per cent of the Negroes in Chicago were on relief, and the Negro vote was only 50 per cent Democratic, it is obvious that there were at least 10 per cent of those on relief who voted Republican. I am inclined to the view that a much larger proportion of the Negroes on relief actually voted Republican.

It is useless to deny that the relief situation is not important in explaining the shift of the Negro vote from the Republican to the Democratic party in the past eight years. There are many other influences, however, which are just as important. Henderson has listed the following:

1. Urbanization produces social and psychological changes in individuals and groups which tend to break down stereotyped and traditional allegiances;
2. Growing dissatisfaction with the Republican party because it did not grant gains to the group commensurate with the support given;
3. Changing attitude of the Democratic party—the Roosevelt administration was more liberal in its attitude toward Negroes than previous Democratic administrations;
4. Growing class-consciousness among Negroes—the increasing exposure of Negroes to the labor movement and radical propaganda.

In addition to these I would add:

5. As local administrations became Democratic, it was necessary for the Negro underworld to swing

behind the Democratic machines or go out of business.

Consider how applicable these considerations are to the 1940 campaign.

The proposition regarding urbanization is not particularly related to the depression and its effects. We would expect it to operate regardless of economic conditions. Those Negroes who migrated from rural to urban communities some time ago would be expected to be the most emancipated from the traditional view toward the Republican party. We would expect, then, other things being equal, that the oldest Negro communities in northern cities would show the most pronounced tendency to support the Democratic party. Harlem is one of the older communities and it is the most sophisticated. It fits the pattern. One of my former research assistants, Miss Frances Williams, who has been living in New York City, told me how impressed she was with the contrast when she came to Chicago for a few days in liams, who has been living in New York City, told me how impressed she was with the contrast when she came to Chicago for a few days in October. The so-called Republican fixation is much stronger there than in New York City. On the other hand, the Negro community in Cincinnati is an old one. It has not swung to the New Deal as Negro communities have in other northern cities. Some of the reasons for this will be discussed presently. Other things are not equal in Cincinnati.

There is no doubt that there was considerable dissatisfaction with the Republican party in the period immediately preceding the advent of the New Deal. So far as the Chicago situation is concerned, I have developed the earlier phases in my

*Negro Politicians.*¹ We are concerned here with the question: Were the Negroes dissatisfied with Willkie and with the Republican campaign which was put on in 1940? It does not seem that Willkie was a particularly strong candidate so far as the Negro group was concerned. His home town of Elwood had a reputation for being rabidly anti-Negro, a typical small town community in the state that produced the strongest Ku Klux Klan movement in the north in the years following 1918.

"Seeing Is Believing"

Willkie was a novice in politics and he had no previous contacts with Negro politicians. All that he could do was promise. Somehow his promises were less tangible than Roosevelt's record. The Republicans tried to exploit Joe Louis' Willkie stand and they also tried to make something out of the Steve Early incident in New York City. Great crowds came to hear Joe Louis but not much was and they also tried to make something out of the Steve Early incident in New York City. Great crowds came to hear Joe Louis but not much was made of the Early incident in Chicago. The local Republicans had more money than in recent years and the prospects of a state victory looked good, but these considerations were not sufficient to swing the vote back into the Republican fold.

Did the Democratic campaign win votes? When we consider that the party held its own in the Black Belt although it was losing out elsewhere we must conclude that the Democratic campaign was effective. Roosevelt ran well ahead of all other Democratic candidates in the wards

¹University of Chicago Press, 1935.

*Percentage of Negro and White Vote Democratic
and Percentage of Negro Vote Democratic by Selected Wards
Chicago, 1932-1940**

Election	City		Negro percentage by Wards								
	White	Negro	1	2	3	4	5	6	19	20	28
Roosevelt, 1932 Congressman	59.2	23.4	63.3	21.7	19.8	18.1	21.4	19.4	—	35.6	28.4
at-Large, 1934	64.0	41.8	73.0	31.0	44.3	48.6	44.1	27.1	—	—	—
Kelly, 1935	82.7	80.5	98.2	78.8	79.6	87.1	83.9	54.9	—	94.0	77.2
Roosevelt, 1936 Congressman	66.9	48.9	77.8	46.3	49.3	51.3	52.0	41.1	—	46.9	47.5
at-Large, 1938	60.8	51.9	84.5	43.9	56.1	58.6	56.1	36.7	—	52.5	54.4
Kelly, 1939	56.1 ^b	59.5	90.0	55.4	58.4	60.1	62.2	43.9	—	88.5	62.3
Roosevelt, 1940	58.4	52.0	61.8	50.4	54.0	55.2	53.3	45.0	46.0	51.8	46.1

*Figures for period 1932-1939 from E. Henderson, "Negro Political Changes in Chicago," The University of Chicago, Master's Dissertation, 1939.

^bCity totals including Negro.

inhabited largely by Negroes, although he was not the top man in other parts of the city. The party could point to many concrete achievements such as the Ida Wells housing project, the NYA program, the social security program, and the appointment by Roosevelt of many Chicago Negroes to important federal positions. Mayor Kelly had appointed a Negro to the Board of Education, a sign of recognition which even Mayor Thompson was unwilling to make. There were many county institutions which had not discriminated against Negroes under Democratic administrations. Among the Negro leaders of the Democratic party were to be found young men with professional training who were group conscious and socially minded.

There has certainly never been a Democratic candidate for President who was so appealing to the group as Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt is also an asset. Bishop Wright mentioned the fact that the Roosevelts always hired colored domestic help. This "black mammy"

argument is not particularly popular in many parts of the South Side but the Marian Anderson episode showed that the Roosevelts were genuinely interested in fair treatment. Of course, the Southern Democrats are hard to handle, but the Roosevelts have done more to hold them in check than any other Democratic administration has.

An element in the Democratic swing which was not developed by Henderson is alliance with the underworld. Probably the richest men in the Black Belt are the policy gambling kings. This year one syndicate had 1,500 policy writers on the streets canvassing for the Democratic ticket. One of the leaders of this syndicate recently made a settlement with the federal government of \$500,000 for his back income taxes in 1938. A rival syndicate that sponsored a Willkie meeting was raided and practically closed down. The police have this element of the Negro community well under control.

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The point of this whole matter is that the remedy for unjustifiable removals is not to be found in the arbitrary action of an independent agency authorized to reinstate the employee or to prevent unjustifiable removals from occurring. This can be done by the use of intelligent management and employment management which shall of the operating head. In other words, every possible adjustment of personnel should be made before any drastic action is taken.

The average operating head of a department cannot give his own time and attention to personnel matters. He needs a full-time personnel director and, if it is a small department, such a personnel director needs an adequate staff to help him to do justice to the many questions which are coming in any government agency. The existing provisions of merit systems laws which lead employees who are subjected to disciplinary action to a hearing board with an appeal, with the result that the operating head of the department concerned is placed on trial, has done more damage to the service as a whole than ever was done to the service by unjustifiable dismissals.

ant influence upon the voting behavior of Negroes in northern cities. We might state it as a generalization that where the Negroes have had an opportunity to join the industrial proletariat they have swung more rapidly to the Democratic fold than in those sections where they have been confined largely to the field of domestic employment. An examination of the occupation statistics for Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, Cincinnati, and St. Louis shows that there are proportionately more Negroes employed in industry in Detroit and Pittsburgh than in Cincinnati and Philadelphia. The switch to the Democratic party took place more rapidly in Detroit and Pittsburgh than it did in Cincinnati and the Quaker City. The CIO unions in the steel, packing, and automotive industries have in general been more sympathetic toward admitting Negroes than the old line unions under the A. F. of L.

The behavior of northern Negro voters is more typical of the country as a whole than it was eight years ago but there is still a time lag. Among the well-to-do Negroes and among those whose livelihood is in no way connected with politics, the Republican tradition is still strong. On the other hand, the unionized and industrialized elements, the underprivileged who are dependent upon governmental aid, those connected with the underworld, and a growing number of young realists support the Democratic party.

THE NEGRO VOTE IN NORTHERN CITIES

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The 1940 elections were a further illustration that economic conditions are having a more and more import-

