

The Origins of Jim Crow Laws

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From our friends at the Charleston Voice.

1898 Wilmington Race Riot, The Origins of "Jim Crow" Laws, *"One of the strangest things about the career of Jim Crow was that the system was born in the North and reached an advanced age before moving South in force."* ~~ C. Vann Woodward, **The Strange Career of Jim Crow**

The "Jim Crow" system is erroneously blamed on the Southern States, as well as erroneously claimed to have begun in 1898. This excerpt is from "The Real Lincoln, A New Look at Abraham Lincoln, Thomas J. DiLorenzo, Forum Books, 2002, pp. 25-28:

(In the early to mid-1800's) "The overwhelming majority of white Northerners cared little about the welfare of the slaves, and treated blacks who lived among them with contempt, ridicule, discrimination and sometimes violence. As Eugene Berwanger wrote in North of Slavery, as of 1860,

"In virtually every phase of existence (in the North), Negroes found themselves systematically separated from whites. They were either excluded from railway cars, omnibuses, stagecoaches and steamboats, or assigned to special "Jim Crow" sections; they sat, when permitted, in secluded and remote corners of theatres and lecture halls; they could not enter most hotels, restaurants and resorts, except as servants; they prayed in "Negro pews" in the white churches, and if partaking of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, they waited until the whites had been served the bread and wine. Moreover, they were educated in segregated schools, punished in segregated prisons, nursed in segregated hospitals, and buried in segregated cemeteries....

In Democracy in America, Toqueville wrote that "the prejudice of race appears to be stronger in the States that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists; and nowhere is it so intolerant as in those States where servitude has never been known." Toqueville found that in the North, if laws did not discriminate against blacks in virtually every area of their existence, "popular prejudices" did.

...Discriminatory laws were common in virtually every Northern State as of 1860. In 1847 Ohioans prohibited the settlement of the 518 emancipated slaves of the Virginia statesman John Randolph. An Ohio congressman threatened that if any blacks tried to cross the border into Ohio, "the banks fo the Ohio River...would be lined with men with muskets on their shoulders to keep off the emancipated slaves."

The only Northern States where blacks were permitted to vote were Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine; and even there they were intimidated out of showing up at the polls. Only 6% of all the "free" blacks in the North lived in these States, however; 94% of all Northern blacks did not

enjoy the right to vote as of 1860.

New Jersey and Connecticut actually amended their constitutions in the 1840's to prohibit black suffrage; no such distinctions were made in their original constitutions.

Illinois Senator Lyman Trumbull explained that "there is a great aversion in the West---I know it to be so in my State---against having free Negroes come among us. *Our people want nothing to do with the Negro.*"

"Negro Domination" In New York:

The effect of the black "swing vote" was felt early in the nineteenth century in New York, and the Democrat Party (no relation to the 1898 North Carolina Conservatives) there took effective steps to ensure their victory in later elections. While the 1898 conflict's aftermath saw an adjustment in voting qualifications in North Carolina, we can see it was not the first such reaction to black voting habits in this country.

"In 1800 the vote of a single black-dominated ward had won control of New York City for the Federalists, and again in 1813 the votes of three hundred free blacks in New York City swept the Federalists into power, and gave them control of the State legislature. The Democrats took their revenge in 1821, when the new State constitution effectively disenfranchised almost every black voter in New York by requiring that they prove that they owned at least two hundred fifty dollars' worth of property, a restriction not imposed on whites. In 1821 the triumphant Democrats changed the New York State constitution to enfranchise all white males, while erecting barriers to black male voters, so that by 1825 fewer than three hundred blacks out of a total State population of almost thirty thousand, and only sixteen of New York City's more than twelve thousand blacks could actually vote."

(Bound For Canaan, Fergus M. Bordewich, HarperCollins, 2005, page 149.)

Reviewing The Origins:

(The term "Jim Crow" applied to Negroes is lost in obscurity. Thomas D. Rice wrote a song and dance called "Jim Crow" in 1832, and the term became an adjective by 1838. The first example of "Jim Crow law" listed by the Dictionary of American English is dated 1904.)

"Although the Northern and Midwestern States had sent their sons to shed blood to preserve the union and to end slavery, many of them had their own State laws that prohibited blacks from voting or severely qualified their right to do so.

These were not old laws that Northern legislatures had forgotten to repeal; on the same day that (Robert E.) Lee was sworn in as president of Washington College (in September, 1865), Connecticut voters cast their ballots to reject a measure that would have given the vote to the two thousand blacks living within their State. A month later, Michigan did the same thing."

Nearly two years after (the) beginning of the Reconstruction Committee's hearings, when Thaddeus Stevens was having his way and seven hundred thousand blacks were registered to vote throughout the South, twelve Northern and Midwestern States would still sharply limit or prohibit voting among their small black populations.

The (congressional) subcommittee appointed to inquire into the loyalty and suitability for readmission into the union of Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina, was headed by Republican Senator Jacob M. Howard of Michigan. Although many of his fellow Radicals believed in black suffrage as a matter of principle, Howard, whose own State had just rejected a vote for the blacks, felt that the black vote in the South was desirable chiefly for the strength it would add to the Republican Party."

(Lee, *The Last Years*, Charles B. Flood, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981, pp. 117-118)

An Abolitionist's Observations in 1878:

Be sure to read this considering that the date was 1878, and General Wade Hampton had become governor of South Carolina after federal troops were finally removed at the beginning of the Hayes Administration in Washington.

"Suspensions of the South's intentions toward the freedmen after the withdrawal of federal troops were naturally rife in the North. In 1878, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson went South to investigate for himself. The report of his findings, published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, is of particular interest in view of the Colonel's background...(as) one of the most militant abolitionists.

In Virginia, South Carolina and Florida, the States he visited in 1878, he found "a condition of outward peace" and wondered immediately if there did not lurk beneath it "some covert plan for crushing and re-enslaving the colored race." If so, he decided, it would "show itself in some personal ill usage of the blacks, in the withdrawal of privileges, in legislation endangering their rights." But, he reported, "I can assert that carrying with me the eyes of a tolerably suspicious abolitionist, I saw none of these indications." He had expected to be affronted by contemptuous or abusive treatment of Negroes. "During this trip," however, he wrote, "I had absolutely no occasion for any such attitude." Nor was this due to "any cringing demeanor on the part of the blacks, for they show much more manhood than they once did."

He compared the tolerance and acceptance of the Negro in the South on trains and streetcars, at the polls, in the courts and legislatures, in the police force and militia, with attitudes in his native New England and decided that the South came off rather better in the comparison.

"How can we ask more of the States formerly in rebellion," he demanded, "than that they should be abreast of New England in granting rights and privileges to the colored race?" Six years later (1884),

in a review of the situation in the South, Higginson found no reason to change his estimate of 1878."

(The Strange Career of Jim Crow, C. Vann Woodward, Oxford University Press, 1966, pp. 35-36)

Before discussing the advent of "Jim Crow" laws, which many erroneously ascribe to the American South, it is necessary to review the experience of black persons in the Northern States in antebellum times. As the Northern colonies pioneered the slave trade in North America, a perceptive observer has noted that the North in 1860 should be referred to as the slave-trading States; and the South the slave-holding States. The following is drawn from www.slavenorth.com, a website worth visiting for more information on slavery north of Mason and Dixon's line...

Source: <http://deovindice.org/1/post/2013/05/origins-of-jim-crow-laws.html>