



Name _____

Date _____ Class _____

BACKGROUND: 1901 Amendment Regarding Suffrage



"Don't Be Tempted by the Devil," *News & Observer*, Oct. 26, 1898. This newspaper cartoon portrayed the Fusionist movement as the devil. Most Black men voted Republican.

Disenfranchisement of African Americans

The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution became law in 1870, declaring that all men could vote, regardless of race. Once the Democratic Party regained control of the legislature, it passed laws to suppress Black men's right to vote. At the local level, bribery, intimidation, and fraud also suppressed African American voting.

Hope grew for Black voters when the Populist Party emerged from farmers' organizations and formed an alliance with the Republican Party, termed "Fusionist." In 1894, this alliance won majorities in the General Assembly and the state supreme court and two years later elected Governor Daniel Russell of Brunswick County. Some in the Democratic Party reacted with terrorist tactics and violence, and by 1898, Democrats had regained control of government.

The Suffrage Amendment of 1901 required voters to pay poll taxes and pass literacy tests. The way the amendment was written made it seem like it applied to all races equally and complied with the 15th Amendment. However, Democratic legislators acknowledged the amendment's purpose to disenfranchise African Americans. During this time, nearly 30% of White people were illiterate. But the amendment included a "grandfather clause," allowing men to vote if their ancestors had voted before 1867. This meant illiterate White voters could usually avoid the literacy tests. When Black men tried to vote, White officials often chose the hardest passages of the constitution for them to read and write.

The effect of the amendment on elections statewide was severe. By 1902, Black voter turnout was low and did not improve until the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965.



The Red Shirt Terror



White supremacists inflicted violence on Black communities as they worked to pass laws to disenfranchise African Americans in most southern states. A terrorist group calling themselves “the Red Shirts” held rallies with guns in North Carolina’s Southeast and Piedmont regions. Just after the 1898 election in Wilmington, Red Shirts and others led a massacre that killed 60-300 African Americans and caused many others to flee the city. Leaders of the Democratic Party then forced local officials from the Populist and Republican Parties out of office. Political unrest over voting rights also occurred in other southern states including Louisiana and Virginia.

The Red Shirts used intimidation and violence in support of the Democratic Party during the 1890s, uniforms, 1898-1890, N.C. Museum of History collection, H.19XX.330.32.

Quick Fact Check

1. What was a result of the “grandfather clause?”
2. The Populist Party was formed from an organization of _____.
3. When did the effects from the anti-suffrage amendment finally begin to subside in North Carolina?
4. What is another name for the Populist Party?