

Disenfranchisement about Race and Class in the Post-Civil War United States

Haoyang Fu

The Experimental High School Attached to Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China

jason18911610910@gmail.com

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Abstract: This essay looks at the post-Civil War United States and how patterns of disenfranchisement developed. Besides the commonly acknowledged race-based discrimination, I argue that class rose to prominence as a second factor in “stripping the vote.” Together, class and race mutually reinforced each other in both the South and the North. Both Southern and Northern legislatures developed measures to bar both black and poor white voters. Not only were these immigrants racialized as “semi-whites,” there was a revival of strong criticism of the poor in general. The two trends in North and South met forces in ideological arguments against universal male suffrage, epitomized in Francis Parkman’s famous essay, that mirrored those seen at the nation’s founding. Understanding this rise of reactionary movements against progress is vital as a class, and race-based discrimination has not disappeared today.

1. Introduction

The focus of the fact that voting in the United States is normally on the fight of women, Black people, and Native Americans for the right to vote. Yet it is also a historical fact that the American poor, including poor whites and free Black people, are being kept from this valuable right. Besides race and gender, the class has also been an important factor in citizens’ access to the ballot since the first election in 1788. Many poor people have been unable to vote due to deliberate voting restrictions based on socioeconomic status. In part, this barrier was a product of property qualifications, which prevented landless people from the vote and only came to an end federally in 1857 when North Carolina formally overturned property requirements. North Carolina Democratic Governor David S. Reid, who would push through the nullification, argued that the ballot reform would enfranchise “fifty thousand of the patriotic and intelligent men of North Carolina [1],” providing an account of the scale of the disenfranchisement. Yet class as a standard did not end with property qualifications. Requirements that tax payments must be up-to-date in order to vote had existed as early as 1790. Moreover, states like Massachusetts used different forms of taxes to replace property qualifications [2]. These practices were greatly intensified after the Civil War in the South and continued in some states until the Twenty-fourth Amendment abolished these practices in 1962. Class-based disenfranchisement, therefore, has a long root and profound impact on American history.

Efforts to restrict both Black people and the poor from voting have been connected since the country's first elections, followed by independence. This remains the case even to the present day, resulting from state policies like Florida's laws that strip people of the vote through felony disenfranchisement. While legislators today provide the justification that those disenfranchised are criminals and therefore lose the right to vote, historically, legislators argued that these people were ignorant. At the same time, these legislators often associated ignorance with criminality. An estimate from 2020 shows that 2.3% of voting-age Americans are disenfranchised due to present or past felony convictions [3].

Black people have suffered from this law in particular, with “6.2 percent of the adult African American population” deprived of the ballot [3]. Comparable statistics are not easily available on the percentage of the poor who are disenfranchised in the United States. Prisoners are generally less well-off, with a median income of around \$19,000 in 2014, compared to the \$11,670 poverty line

(and the median income of \$26,731) the same year, with 36.21% of male and 53.24% of female prisoners receiving less than \$1,000 a month [4]. Not only are many felons and ex-felons in poverty, but this lack of income also affects their vote. In Florida, for example, ex-felons have to pay all fines and court fees in order to regain their right to vote. Such measures have been compared to the practice of a “‘poll tax’ that unfairly disenfranchises the poor [5]”. Similarly, some states like Georgia included requirements to pay all previous taxes owed to the State in order to vote. Swing states such as Florida that enforce such regulations maintain considerable influence over national politics. Political critics have often argued that the criminal justice system particularly targets Black people and the poor. Brittany Friedman, for example, claims, “These laws appear to be race and class blind in their writing, but when they’re implemented, they overwhelmingly target low-income people of color because that’s who is in contact with the criminal justice system the most and that’s who’s way more likely to pay the fines and fees and then be punished further when they cannot afford them [6].”

In the United States after the Civil War, the intimate relationship between race and class was even more pronounced. An analysis of this history will shed light on understanding the current disenfranchisement and the challenge to universal suffrage. While the focus of this essay will be primarily on restrictions to universal male suffrage sources generally ignore gender, I will also demonstrate that women were mentioned alongside the poor or Black people as similarly ineligible for voting. Prejudices centered on race and poverty mutually reinforced each other, which was especially prominent in the late 19th century. Discrimination against Black people led to the revival of arguments supporting the disenfranchisement of the poor, of which the newly freed Black people constituted the majority. In the North, poor conditions of new Europeans and immigrants prompted a racialized view of them as semi-whites, encouraging nativist perceptions of their supposed ‘inferiority’ leading to arguments that they should not receive the right to vote. Noticeably, two groups whereby race and class as factors of disenfranchisement intersected were Black people and immigrants, and they suffered severe discrimination. Yet general discrimination against the poor was also part of the story that should not be neglected. With the confluence of the two factors, the late nineteenth-century United States witnessed a resurgence of ideological arguments against the poor and against universal male suffrage that reiterated prior arguments during the nation’s founding.

2. The Historiography of Restricting Voting

Extensive studies have been carried out on the history of efforts to restrict voting in the United States after the Civil War. Noticeably, the South and its disenfranchisement of Black people have been repeatedly studied. Frank B. Williams, Jr. is one of the earlier scholars focusing on poll taxes in several Southern states, detailing their causes and motivations [7]. In his perspective, there was not a clear motivation to restrict the votes of poor whites [7]. J. Morgan Koussar insightfully analyzed the use of poll taxes and literacy tests in Southern states and noted their motivations to disenfranchise both Black people and poor whites [8]. His study demonstrates that race and class both influenced disenfranchisement in the South. Studies of the North, as seen in books by Alexander Keyssar and Michael Waldman, have also revealed the discriminatory attitudes towards immigrants and disenfranchisement of the poor [9].

Despite their important contributions, these works have not explicitly linked the two factors of race and class and analyzed their interrelationship and confluence. Furthermore, they do not provide discussions linking the North and South by studying these interrelations. Donna Gabaccia, however, has successfully connected race and class in her study on the perception of Chinese and Italian immigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries [10]. She explains that the similar economic statuses of Chinese and Italian immigrants, who often performed similar manual labor, led to racialization as not fully white, particularly when they were competing with northern Europeans for labor [10]. Thus, labor competition led directly to racial perceptions.

3. Ideological Arguments: Property Qualification

At the nation's founding, many leading figures believed that property should be a qualification for voting, including founding fathers and presidents such as James Madison and John Adams, who believed that voting was a privilege rather than a right. For example, John Adams claimed, "Such is the Frailty of the Human Heart, that very few Men, who have no Property, have any Judgement of their own. They talk and vote as they are directed by Some Man of Property, who has attached their Minds to his Interest [11]." By equating property with intellectual capacity and independence of judgment, he believed that propertyless men would easily be swayed to vote in a certain way by those offering them benefits. He attributes this lack of capacity to the detachment from the community, arguing those without property were "too little acquainted with public Affairs to form a Right Judgment [11]". James Madison, while agreeing with Adams's point on dependence, proposed a more radical view that propertyless people would infringe upon the republican principle of property:

In future times a great majority of the people will not only be without land but any other sort of property. These will either combine under the influence of their common situation: in which case, the rights of property & public liberty will not be secure in their hands: or which is more probable, they will become the tools of opulence & ambition, in which case there will be an equal danger on another side [12].

Madison expanded on Adams to argue that poor voters would even harm the interests of the public, which equated to the interests of the property owners. Their opinions offer an apt description of the two main arguments in support of property qualification: the first was the lack of judgment of the propertyless and thus their dependence on the rich; the second was the detachment from the community and the potential to harm the interests of the public, especially the property of the rich.

It is important to note that there have always been those who have defended universal suffrage – at least for white males – since independence. Liberal thinkers like Thomas Paine voiced their dissent, "Personal rights, of which the right of voting for representatives is one, are a species of property of the most sacred kind [13]." Paine emphasized the importance of rights, including the right to vote, which individuals equally possess [13]. Contrary to Adams, he saw voting as a right, not a privilege. "The rich have no more right to exclude the poor from the right of voting, or of electing and being elected than the poor have to exclude the rich [13]." He valued personal rights over property, arguing against property qualification through two scenarios. A considerable sum of property as a standard would "exclude a majority of the people and unite them in a common interest against the government [13]." Unlike Madison, who was willing to exclude the future majority to safeguard property, Paine saw the power of the majority. Overall, he characterized property qualification as "dangerous and impolitic, sometimes ridiculous, and always unjust [13]."

Even if contested, property qualifications were adopted in many states barring the landless from the vote. This pattern has repeated itself until the present: there have always been eloquent voices for universal suffrage, but, in reality, those who believe in restrictions on the right to vote have always had legislative success.

4. Situations in the South

While Black people were disproportionately disenfranchised in the South through measures like literacy tests and poll tax, in particular, a class-based pattern of stripping the vote also took. The Reconstruction Amendments theoretically ensured the right to vote for Black people. The Fourteenth Amendment granted full citizenship to all who are born in the United States (U.S. Const. amend. XIV. Sec. 1). The Fifteenth Amendment stated that the right to vote should not be restricted "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude (U.S. Const. amend. XV. Sec. 1)." Yet, payment of poll taxes became a prerequisite for voting, previously they simply were capitation taxes and were not linked with the voting [7]. Legal restrictions designed explicitly with the aim to restrict Black voting started in 1890 when Mississippi imposed a \$2 poll tax and a literacy test [7]. By 1902, every state formally constituting the Confederacy imposed a poll tax [7]. Though not a

considerable amount by today's standard, it was a huge burden, especially for the new freedmen, as 75.9% of the Black population were tenants or sharecroppers without disposable incomes [14]. This was especially acute since these agricultural workers sometimes received payments in supplies instead of cash [15]. The impact is best seen by comparing Georgia and Florida in the 1880s, as explained by Kousser. The former adopted a poll tax in 1866, the latter in 1889 [9]. While the two were "both Deep South states and both 47 percent Negro in 1880," in the three elections of 1880, 1884, and 1888, the turnout rate of Black people in Florida was more than twice compared to that of Black people in Georgia.

Another form of exclusion took form in the literacy test, which required potential voters to read sections of the constitution. North Carolina, for example, required that "every person presenting himself for registration shall be able to read and write any section of the Constitution in the English language [16]." White men could theoretically get around the requirement through the "understanding clause" in some states. The clause stipulated that a white man can demonstrate proof of his understanding of the constitution to a registrar, who might judge their voting capabilities arbitrarily. The Mississippi constitution of 1890 ruled that potential voters shall "be able to read any section of the constitution of this State, or he shall be able to understand the same when read to him, or give a reasonable interpretation thereof [17]." Another means was to use the so-called "grandfather clause," which protected those who could vote before 1867 or their descendants from the literacy test. Both measures appeared in some, but not all, Southern states. Therefore, Black people were discriminately disenfranchised by measures of poll taxes and literacy tests.

Meanwhile, the poor had been disenfranchised as well. Prior to the Civil War, the United States was characterized as a racial democracy—one where barriers to universal white male suffrage were gradually taken down while Black people lost their votes. Only five states allowed Black people to vote. Many British thinkers at this time believed that keeping the poor from voting was the best way to avoid Black voting without having a racial democracy [18]. And the United States moved in this direction after 1865, with race and class intertwining in patterns of disenfranchisement.

Many poor people, including poor whites, were also barred from voting due to these restrictions. Similar to their impact on the Black population, the poll tax barred those without sufficient money, and the literacy test barred the illiterate. Since illiteracy was a problem across the lower class, especially in a time when the illiteracy rate was 13.3% for all and 56.8% for Black people, the combined influence of both measures disenfranchised primarily the poor of all racial groups [19]. In Alabama, 23.6% of whites were disenfranchised as a result of the poll tax [8]. In Georgia, "between 24 percent and 34 percent fewer white Georgians voted in presidential contests during the 1880s than their Florida counterparts" due to this tax [8]. While the understanding clause as a means of exemption for whites should have favored them and prevented Black people from registering the votes, The "understanding clause" did not in practice protect poor voters. The Mississippi newspaper "The Daily Clarion" collected registration data for the 1892 presidential election and found that only 1084 whites and 1058 Black people registered [20]. Only around 1.5% of white voters became eligible as a result of the "understanding clause." Though Black people were subject to extreme discrimination, poor whites were clearly disenfranchised in large numbers as well, although less severely. The voting system intentionally created this historical disenfranchisement for black voters. Although many legislators were aware that measures such as poll taxes and educational qualifications would also disfranchise whites, they nevertheless consented. In the Virginia Constitutional Convention from 1901–1902, Mr. Wysor from Pulaski warned in a debate that some whites would be inevitably affected by the voting restrictions placed upon Black people. "If a man comes into this Convention, or anywhere else, and says that he intends to disfranchise 146,000 negroes and to disfranchise no white man, he has undertaken an impossibility... [21]" Mr. Wysor, in fact, opposed the measure for this reason. The fact that he raised such arguments in the debate shows that legislators were fully aware of the consequences of their measures restricting poor white voters. A believer in white supremacy, Mr. Wysor argued that he would have upheld manhood suffrage were all electorates comprised of whites. Yet as the electorate was expanded with Black people, he argued that "I want to put reasonable and fair restrictions on suffrage and

restrictions that will reach more of them than of whites [21].” Wysor was clearly a racist, and he understood the consequences that some whites had to be disenfranchised [21]. At the same time, the eventual legislation still disenfranchised a considerable number of poor whites that obviously went beyond Wysor’s expectations. He was dissatisfied with the result and expressed his dissent in the minority report:

The industrial class is not only required to pay the poll tax but is subjected to a drastic understanding clause. They must stand critical examinations before boards of commissioners and be able to give a reasonable explanation of the general nature of the duties of the various officers for whom they may at any time be entitled to vote. Why should the industrial class, constituting as it does the great mass of our citizens, be required to understand more than the soldiers or the man who owns, or whose wife owns, property of the value of two hundred and fifty dollars? It is evident that this understanding clause if honestly administered, will not only disfranchise thousands of negroes, but also thousands of white men and largely establish a property qualification of two hundred and fifty dollars for the right of suffrage [21].

Wysor saw the result as disproportionately discriminating against the poorer classes. The new constitution granted three alternatives to the poll tax: veterans, property holders, and the understanding clause, which required a certain literacy level [21]. The poor, many of them illiterate, were certainly barred from the vote. In his phrasing, “thousands of” Black people and whites were disenfranchised. He clearly believed more could be done to enable more poor whites to vote. It is much easier to find sources arguing against measures that would have disenfranchised whites. Legislators, being wary of losing votes in the white community, were often unwilling to argue directly in favor of restricting poor white voters.

Indeed, not only were legislators conscious of their practices, but they also made explicitly negative comments about the poor. In debates, many legislators argued that poor people were ignorant, along with Black people. Wise of Shreveport, quoted in *The Times-Picayune* from Louisiana, said that “the main purpose of the poll tax prerequisite was to exclude not only the illiterate negro, but also the unworthy white elements who had been the curse to large cities [22].” By stressing the disenfranchisement of Black people first, it shows the importance of race in the South; yet by juxtaposing “negro” and “white elements,” the sentence establishes a standard of class that transcends race. His argument that the poll tax could block the votes of the “illiterate” corroborates how most people without literacy skills came from the lower class and were also unable to pay the tax. Discrimination against the poor was also seen in the general public. For example, *The Times-Picayune* declares, “The Picayune is most desirous of excluding from the suffrage franchise every unworthy negro, and it is just as desirous of shutting out every unworthy white man [23].” The recurrence of the juxtaposition of Black people and poor whites shows that discrimination against the poor and illiterate existed alongside extreme racist motives. And as a result, racism itself led to a revival of arguments against broad universal suffrage for the poor.

Arguing for the disenfranchisement of the poor, including poor whites, was not simply a means for the legislators to discourage Black voters from circumventing the constitutional protection against disenfranchisement based solely on race. It actually led to a revival of the belief that poor people should not vote. The lack of law exemptions, as shown in Wysor’s arguments, is proof of the deliberate belief in the inferiority of the poor. Many states used measures that excluded poor whites, even though the Jim Crow “toolbox” contained measures that could be more focused on Black people. The legislators could have employed more exemption methods, such as the grandfather clauses that were not unconstitutional, but they did not. The poll tax was especially stringent on poor whites, with no legal advantages given to whites in most states. Even though the escape measures of literacy tests did not produce the expected results, as argued before, exemptions in the poll tax were even fewer in number. In the Suffrage and Elections section of the State Constitution of Louisiana (1898), which is often cited as an example of how grandfather clauses targeted explicitly Black people, whites were shielded from literacy tests, but in the section following this clause, the poll tax was demanded as an additional requirement applied to all:

No person less than sixty years of age shall be permitted to vote at any election in the State who

shall not, in addition to the qualifications above prescribed, have paid on or before the 31st day of December, of each year, for the two years preceding the year in which he offers to vote, a poll tax of one dollar per annum, to be used exclusively in aid of the public schools of the parish in which such tax shall have been collected [24].

Louisiana had ample provisions for restricting Black voting that did not apply to whites, but they also chose to have a poll tax that did apply to poor whites and therefore did restrict poor white voting. Moreover, the assumed ubiquity of the grandfather clause is also historically inaccurate. Yet Louisiana did not exempt the whites from the poll tax. We cannot be sure of the exact numbers restricted in the end, and of course, there were exemption methods and extra-legal measures that meant the impact would have been greater on black people. Nevertheless, the argument here is that there was a clear intention to disenfranchise some of the black people, as seen from legislators' action of not adopting more escape measures when there was room.

Many people, including journalists and politicians, did argue directly that the poor should be disqualified. This was especially the case amongst those not running for an elected office since they were at less risk of offending a portion of their white electorate. The views outside those of legislators could prove a genuine belief in the necessity of restricting the poor. For this reason, newspaper sources often offer the clearest arguments in favor of restricting the poor from voting. For example, The Charlotte Observer wrote in 1900 that "The struggle of the white people of North Carolina to rid themselves of the danger of the rule of negroes and the lower class of whites is being watched with interest outside the State [25]." They would more presumably only mention excluding Black people. In the 1901 Alabama convention, ex-governor Oates claimed:

The gentleman knew when he made that statement that it was not true and that I was as much in favor of disfranchising, or as he said of "eliminating from the electorate, ignorant, incompetent and vicious negroes" as he was, but the difference between us was, and is now, that I desired also to eliminate from the electorate "the ignorant, incompetent and vicious" white men as well as such negroes, and contended that such a course was necessary to elevate the electorate [26].

He openly and deliberately expressed his urge to disenfranchise certain white men and upheld the criterion for voting on capacity or, more generally, class, not merely race. Of course, racism was present; he argued that "It would, of course, disfranchise some unfit white men who are less worthy of being trusted with the ballot than a negro of intelligence and good character." He believed that white men were inherently superior to Black people, by juxtaposing "unfit" whites and Black people "of intelligence and good character [26]." Yet, for him, the class seemed even more important than race. The weakening of race as a standard was further supported by the claim that "My contention has been and is that substantially the same test, or standard of qualification and fitness should be applied to white and black alike [26]". By promoting that a similar criterion is applied to Black people and whites, he clearly saw class as a more important factor of consideration. By equating class and race, he highlights a status quo that applied different voting rules for Black and white people. Nevertheless, he, as a white legislator, was actively asking to equate the standards. This inference is supported by his argument that "His motion proposing the adoption of the same standards would constitute an honest basis and probably disqualify as many negroes as would the plan adopted by this Convention, and do it honestly, conscientiously and fairly [26]."

Holding class as a barrier was further upheld by arguments that mention blocking certain white voters without mentioning them alongside Black voters. R.L. Gordon, in the Virginia Constitutional Convention, claimed, "I am in? Mr. Chairman, of the capitation tax, and I do not hesitate to say so, because I believe it will disqualify some white men in Virginia who ought to be disqualified [27]." He saw the poll tax as potentially a good tool to restrict poor whites' voting because many of them were supposedly 'inferior' and were to be kept out of the ballot. Racism was also mentioned in the next sentence, where he says poll tax does not work "as a proposition to strike at the race that we are seeking to disqualify that ought to be disqualified." In his view, he did not believe it could keep Black people from the vote. It is highly possible that Gordon genuinely favored white disenfranchisement for certain voters. Thus, many sources outside current officeholders, as well as those from some legislators, saw the poor, including poor whites and a significant number of Black

people, as a danger to politics. This adds the class dimension to the common racial narrative, proving the intersection. Black voters, at the center of the intersection, were discriminated against with the most stringent measures that challenged the 15th Amendment; at the same time, poor whites also suffered, although to a lesser extent.

5. Situations in the North

In the North, this intersection of race and class became connected to immigration. Immigrants' situations were congruent but not entirely comparable, given the distinct black experience of Black people. Mia Bay, for example, noted that the antebellum railroad featured cars that paupers, immigrants, and Black people used together. Historically, there had been a long tradition of class-based disenfranchisement and discrimination against immigrants. However, it was after the Civil War that the situation became heightened, marking a historical moment in which there was even more discrimination against this group. The poor conditions of new European immigrants prompted a racialized view of them as semi-whites, encouraging perceptions of their inferiority and arguments that they should be disenfranchised like Black people. Meanwhile, this racialized view of immigrants enhanced discrimination against the poor. Class and race, acting together, promoted the notion of suffrage as a privilege that became widely accepted in the late 19th century North.

Wealth had long been upheld in the Northern states as a standard for voting. For example, Massachusetts adopted a poll tax in 1821; similarly, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island all retained the practice of poll tax after the Civil War [9]. The impact of such restrictions was similarly considerable in each state. Ex-congressman Moody Boynton from Massachusetts claimed in 1887 that the state "deliberately disfranchised 100,000 citizens," approximately one-third of the state population. Meanwhile, opposition to such measures paled in comparison to support for poll taxes. Almost every year, the Boston Daily Globe included multiple arguments against the tax, yet the tax was only abolished in 1891 after a two-thirds majority was finally reached in the state legislature. Lobbying for an end to poll taxes in other Northern states was even less successful than in Massachusetts, providing a sense of the extensive impact and entrenchment of class-based disenfranchisement.

The first wave of immigrants was subject to rising discrimination in some Northern states, with an emphasis on religion, although class became increasingly important. The massive influx of immigrants, many of whom were Germans or Irish, started around the 1840s and primarily affected the industrial North. By 1860, immigrants made up almost half of the residents in New York City and one-third of the Wisconsin population [28]. Several Protestant states like Massachusetts and Connecticut witnessed rising nativist sentiments against Catholic Irish. This was expressed by Samuel F.B. Morse as early as 1835; he claimed, "This country, on the contrary, opens to the foreigner, without another check than an oath, that he has resided five years in the country, a direct influence on its Political affairs [29]." He believed that the naturalization process was too loose and voiced his distrust towards the danger immigrants, even naturalized ones, posed to the country. He mentioned how "limited suffrage in that country operates as a check on any abuse of this privilege" by naturalized immigrants [29]. In his view, even naturalized immigrants should not have been allowed to participate in politics, as in other countries, and limiting suffrage was an important means to achieve this goal. A particular discriminatory message was conveyed toward the Irish. He sarcastically argued, "O there is no danger to the Democracy; for those most devoted to the Pope, the Roman Catholics, especially the Irish Catholics, are all on the side of Democracy [29]." Here nativist sentiment was connected with anti-Catholicism, alongside the commonplace allegation that Catholics remained subject to the power of the Pope. This exclusive ideology dominated by biases in religion became fuel for disenfranchisement campaigns. It was exemplified by the Know-Nothings, a national nativist political party that was extremely influential in the North. In the 1854 state elections, they won 63% of the vote in Massachusetts and earned 376 out of 378 state congress seats [30]. Around 121 members supported by the Know-Nothings were elected to Congress [30]. In printed words, they mentioned their support of protecting Americans from "Foreign Pauper Labor" and believed foreigners should have 21 years of residence before being enfranchised [30]. It

was not just their Catholic identity but also their poor status that caused an alarming response to the immigration influx from nativists. This culminated in the imposition of literacy tests before the Civil War in Massachusetts and Connecticut. The Massachusetts amendment in 1857 ruled the following:

No person shall be eligible to office under the constitution of this commonwealth, who shall not be able to read the constitution in the English language, and write his name: -- provided, however, that the provisions of this amendment shall not apply to any person prevented by a physical disability from complying with its requisitions, nor to any person who now has the right to vote, nor to any persons who shall be sixty years of age or upwards at the time this amendment shall take effect (Mass. Const. amend. art. XX).

The significance of this legislation was that it was non-specific, though immigrants were the primary targets. The discrimination against immigrants was extended to all poor since illiteracy was a systemic problem across the lower class.

Western states, however, often attempted to be welcoming to immigrants due to labor shortages. This difference underlines the importance of class as a factor. Mr. Hovey, from the Indiana Constitutional Convention of 1850-1851, argued, “it should be the policy of our legislators, to increase our numbers by every honorable means; and I regard the offer of equality to those who flee from the oppressions of other lands to be one of the surest means that can be used to bring about that desirable result [31].” Western regions began to be settled in the early 19th century and were in need of people and, specifically, labor for their posterity. With this specific aim in mind, immigrants were welcomed and their suffrage rights were supported by many legislators. Include first name Hovey praised immigrants as “generally patriotic and devoted to our institutions [31].” Mr. Edmonston issued his grievance: “The moment the foreigner lands here, you require from him all the support, which taxation affords, the same as from any citizen; but when he comes to the ballot-box, you tell him to stand back for five years [31].” Similarly, Hovey supported the proposed legislation of giving immigrants more rights regarding the vote, which extended suffrage to declarant foreigners residing one year in the United States. He alluded to Illinois, which “has permitted aliens to exercise the elective franchise before naturalization [31].” However, all of the positive comments were conditional in their efforts to bring about the “desirable result” of increasing settlers. Once the Western regions were filled with sufficient population, the attitude would gradually shift towards that of the Northeastern states. Class became a vital consideration for Northerners, whether it was the label of “Foreign Pauper Labor” or the welcoming of immigrants due to their labor in the West; however, there was not yet a racial dimension.

Intellectual arguments rose against immigrants, racializing them by denying a common white identity and seeing immigrants as separate people. Charles Francis Adams Jr., the great-grandson of John Adams, who supported property qualifications, wrote in 1869, “Universal Suffrage can only mean in plain English the government of ignorance and vice: —it means a European, and especially Celtic, proletariat on the Atlantic coast; an African proletariat on the shores of the Gulf, and a Chinese proletariat on the Pacific [32].” He adds immigrants to Black people and links them with the “proletariat” in a stereotypical way that deems them as ignorant. Moreover, in discriminating against European immigrants along with the “Chinese” and “African,” Adams clearly saw these white immigrants as another race that was opposed to American whites. This demonstrates the racializing process whereby the low economic status of immigrants encouraged not only broad racism but also a change of perception in racial status. The confluence of their foreign identity, perceived in a racialized way, and their low economic status contributed to massive nativist discrimination against immigrants. Strict measures were taken increasingly to exclude immigrants, many of which specifically targeted the immigrants, aside from the literacy tests in the 1850s that also targeted other groups. While voting as an exclusive right to citizens may seem the norm today, immigrant voting was a common phenomenon in the 19th century: noncitizens voting in federal elections was not fully banned in the U.S. until the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. Suffrage for non-naturalized immigrants was gradually curtailed in all states; the process included requiring naturalization papers for registration and literacy tests for

citizenship. Both measures were frequently proposed though never formally passed in Congress [9]. Therefore, in the North, there was an intersection of class and race in which low-class status caused the racialization of immigrants, leading to discrimination and actions to bar them from the vote.

Besides the effect of poor economic status driving an alienated identification of immigrants, the new discrimination against poor immigrants also encouraged derogative comments towards the general poor. Charles Francis Adams Jr. opposed suffrage as “a free gift to all comers” and, besides immigrants, spoke about class in that “starving men and women care very little for abstract questions of the general good [32].” In this text, he upholds voting as a privilege rather than a right and condemns the poor for not contributing to the national community due to their sale of votes in exchange for money. Massachusetts’s House representative Alfred Stamm Pinkerton of Worcester argued against abolishing the poll tax:

There exists between a State and its citizen’s certain rights and duties. A man who is not willing to contribute to the support of the State has no right to govern those who are. I am here to cast my vote for whatever I think is best for the country, and I am going to vote to keep away from the polls a class that is such a disgrace. Don’t talk of public morals when you are favoring a bill to let such a class the dregs of humanity have the rights of the ballot [33].

By upholding the poll tax in Massachusetts, which barred the poor from the vote, Pinkerton opposed universal suffrage. Like Adams Jr., he also believed that the poor were detached from the state and thus should be deprived of the vote. He goes further in regarding the poor as inferior, calling them “the dregs of humanity,” exhibiting the prevalent discrimination in class. In an article in *The Nation*, the turbulent development of the suffrage scheme in Washington D.C. was described, and universal suffrage was mocked and critiqued. The universal suffrage in the city attracted “newly-emancipated and very ignorant freedmen,” and the author satires this situation:

There is probably no sweeter experience in the world than that of a penniless laborer in a city like this when he learns that by casting his vote in the right way he can strip the rich merchant or shipowner of a portion of his gains and convert it into easy work for the poor man under the superintendence of a kindly “boss” from among his own friends [34].

Not only was this claim racist, but by portraying the “penniless laborer”, it also largely discriminates against the poor. This was made clearer in its discussion that universal suffrage would lead to a government characterized as “communism tempered by indictment [34].” The reference to communism, like Adam Jr.’s reference to the “proletariat,” exhibits a strong class concern. The author argues that the poor would constitute a danger to the rich and propertied class, mirroring the arguments of Madison, although this was now framed in the new class-based language of the late 19th century. The easy exploitation of the poor by bosses, essentially the argument of John Adams, was also made. The article soon recounted the dangers of Tweed and the Shepherd, the boss of this city. These two arguments are furthered in the following claim that “unfortunate property-holders” are put “under the yoke of universal suffrage and its Boss [34].” Therefore, the two common claims of the time were: first, that the poor lack concern for the public good while they are easily influenced by party Bosses, and second, that the poor would bring about a communist revolution that would harm the property owners. These two arguments show great resemblance to those at the founding of the nation, although exacerbated now by fears of communism. It would be important to note an inherent inconsistency in these two beliefs, one saying the poor lacked individual judgment and easily fell under politicians, the other claiming they were intent on bringing communism. The post-Civil War era was thus permeated with stereotypes that were not elaborately logical when placed together, yet nativists were too indulged in hatred to notice the inconsistencies.

6. Revival of Arguments against Universal Suffrage

As the two factors—race and class—intertwined with each other in restricting the votes, there also came a strong revival of theoretical arguments against universal male suffrage. Many writers were still predominantly concerned about class, yet they differed in directly attacking the notion of “universal suffrage.” Interestingly, many comments mirrored those made at the founding of the United States. Thus, not only were class and race mutually reinforcing, but they also combined to

create a larger momentum against the democratization of voting.

An especially influential work of the time regarding universal suffrage was Francis Parkman's "The Failure of Universal Suffrage," which focused primarily on class. It was widely read and instigated responses from both sides. The New York Times, for example, featured a critical article in the same year regarding Parkman, in which the author characterized him as "distrustful of the power of the people [35]." The prevailing arguments in support of property qualification at the nation's founding could find their counterparts in Parkman's essay. Parkman looks back to the earliest New England as somewhere universal suffrage could have worked, but claims:

Now that the village has grown into a populous city, with its factories and workshops, its acres of tenement-houses, and thousands and ten thousand of restless workmen, foreigners for the most part, to whom liberty means to license and politics means plunder, to whom the public good is nothing and their own most trivial interests everything [36].

He characterizes the poor in general as self-interested and destructive to the common good. Parkman not only sees the poor as lacking education but also as inferior to the wealthier. "Bad voter's defect, however, is not merely intellectual. It consists also in the want of the feeling that his own interests are connected with those of the community, and in the weakness or absence of the sense of moral and political duty [36]." He sees this almost as something inherent that is ingrained in the poor, like John Adams, who claimed lack of judgment to be inherent in those without property. Parkman opposes voting as an "inalienable right," because "it gives power to the communistic attack on the property [36]." For Parkman, voting is a sacred privilege that must be kept in the hands of those who are concerned about the public good instead of extending it to the poor, who are naturally inferior and destructive.

With all his attacks on the poor/lower classes, Parkman justifies his critique of the alleged principles of universal suffrage itself. He claims: "Universal suffrage is applicable only to those peoples, if such there are, who by character and training are prepared for it [36]." As poor people were naturally unfit in his eyes, universal suffrage as a principle only "reduces itself to absurdity [36]."

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, race and class acted as two factors that contributed to voter disenfranchisement and intersected in both the South and the North. Racism in the South caused legislators to view Black people as inferior in intellectual capacity, and in the process of disenfranchising them, such a belief also came to be held towards poor whites, establishing a class line. In the North, immigrants already suffered from discrimination due to their poor status before the Civil War, which influenced the general poor. They were subject to even more severe discrimination after the war, as their low level of income caused them to be racialized, building a strong racial line. The mutually reinforcing intersection also revived theoretical arguments against universal suffrage that mirrored some of the founding fathers' beliefs one hundred years earlier.

Ideological arguments against the expansion of suffrage were not a peculiar phenomenon in the United States but also took place in Britain. The lines of reasoning also showed great similarities. Further research could be conducted on how reactions against universal suffrage shared intellectual arguments across the globe. Another area of focus could be on the role of race as a factor in global patterns of disenfranchisement. The transition from racial democracy to one disguised by property and education qualifications was also universal, witnessed in the United States and in British settler colonies like South Africa.

The legacy of class- and race-based disenfranchisement continues to affect the present day, as demonstrated in the loss of felons' and ex-felons' votes in many states. Such actions still require unrelenting efforts to fight for voting rights, to forsake partisan interests, and to make voting a right for the eligible, not a privilege.

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