

Voting Viva Voce

UNLOCKING THE SOCIAL LOGIC OF PAST POLITICS

How the Other Half (plus) Voted: The Party Ticket States

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Public Voting

How the Other Half (plus) Voted: The Party Ticket States

by

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The alternative to oral voting was the party-produced ticket system that slowly came to dominate the American political landscape. In states not using *viva voce* voting, political parties produced their preferred list of candidates and made that list available to voters as a printed “ticket” distributed at each polling place on Election Day. Before Election Day, facsimiles of party tickets appeared in the party-run newspapers. Increasingly often, tickets were mailed to likely supporters to remind them of the party’s candidates and how to vote when they came to the polls.

The voter came forward from the throng and joined a line or ascended a platform where he was publicly and officially identified, just as in a *viva voce* election. But instead of reading or reciting a list of names he held out the party-produced

Cover and opposite


These three Republican Party tickets are from the years of the Civil War and reflect the Party’s rise in the states of the Old Northwest and the far West. All three tickets are brightly colored and are strongly associated with the preservation of the Union. Caleb T Fay’s candidacy for mayor of San Francisco was a measure of the Party’s rise in California: he was unsuccessful in 1860 and 1861, but won the mayoralty in 1862, the first Republican to do so. The “ticket” also listed the Party’s candidates for 18 other offices as well as a “yes” vote on the referenda issue of the city buying \$300,000 privately issued bonds of the San Francisco and San Jose RR Company—always a risky proposition.

The Ohio Republican Party of 1864 was distinctly patriotic in the trappings of its ticket for President Lincoln and his new vice-president, Andrew Johnson. Unlike the California ticket, this was a single-office ticket which listed Ohio’s 13 Republican electors who would ultimately vote for Lincoln as members of the Electoral College from Ohio.

The back of the ticket carried the title of one of the most popular songs of the North during the Civil War: “Rally ‘Round the Flag”, also known as the “Battle Cry of Freedom.” It was composed by George Frederic Root in 1862, but proved so popular that it was re-set by H L Schreiner and lyricist W H Barnes and, with a new set of words, was sung to rally the Confederacy. It served the Republican Party far longer, through the Civil War and far beyond. It was used as late as 1880 when James Garfield adopted it as one of his campaign songs. All of these visual cues made the sight of the ticket hard to miss at the polling place on Election Day.

San Francisco Municipal Administration Union Ticket, 10th District, eph_F28_C1851_2_front; National Union Ticket for Electors of President and Vice President Lincoln/Johnson, eph_F29_1864_3r; eph_F29_1864_3v. Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California

OHIO
Union Presidential Ticket.



FOR PRESIDENT,
ABRAHAM LINCOLN,
OF ILLINOIS.

FOR VICE-PRESIDENT,
ANDREW JOHNSON,
OF TENNESSEE.

ELECTORS.

	JOHN M. CONNELL,	} At Large.
	JOHN P. BIEHN,	

1st District.	JOHN K. GREEN.
2d "	STANLEY MATTHEWS.
3d "	LEWIS B. GUNCKEL.
4th "	STEPHEN JOHNSTON.
5th "	WILLIAM L. WALKER.
6th "	MILLS GARDNER.
7th "	HENRY W. SMITH.
8th "	OZIAS BOWEN.
9th "	JACOB SCROGGS.
10th "	WILLIAM SHEFFIELD.
11th "	GEORGE A. WALLER.
12th "	HENRY F. PAGE.
13th "	JAMES R. STANBERRY.
14th "	JOHN H. MCCOMBS.
15th "	FREDERICK W. WOOD.
16th "	LORENZO DANFORD.
17th "	JOHN MCCOOK.
18th "	SETH MARSHALL.
19th "	ABNER KELLOGG.



10th District.
ADMINISTRATION
UNION TICKET

For Mayor,
CALEB T. FAY

For County Judge,
THOS. W. FREELON

For District Attorney,
CHARLES H. PARKER

For County Clerk,
JOHN A. MONROE

For Sheriff,
THOMAS J. POULTERER

For Recorder, to fill the vacancy for the unexpired term of G. W. Ricks, resigned,
GEORGE B. REEVE

For County Recorder,
GEORGE B. REEVE

For City and County Treasurer,
ASA T. LAWTON

For City and County Assessor,
THOS. D. MATHEWSON

For City and County Surveyor,
REED BIGLER

For Coroner,
DR. R. A. SHELDON

For Harbor Master,
CAPT. N. PROCTOR SMITH

For Superintendent of Common Schools,
JOHN H. BREWER

For Supervisor.....**STEPHEN C. STORY**
For School Director.....**J. M. BETHINGTON**
Inspector of Election.....**J. R. F. DAVIS**
Judge of Election.....**J. M. KEARNEY**

FIFTH TOWNSHIP.
Justice of the Peace.....**GEO. T. BOULDEN**
Constable.....**PHINEAS HOWARD, Jr.**

"Subscription of Three Hundred Thousand Dollars, to the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad Company."
YES.

Toll—Brick Building westerly side of Third, between Fulton and Harrison streets.



Scene at the Polls, New York City—Boxes for the Distribution of Tickets—Everybody Busy

Printing election tickets was the job of the local party. This was a costly and difficult responsibility that became more so with the proliferation of offices on the ticket and the wish to bring bright colors and distinctive designs to the production of the tickets. Early nineteenth century tickets were relatively straightforward: few colors, few designs, simple imagery. But with new printing methods, the party ticket by mid-century became a highly competitive art form. The increased visual distinctiveness of the ticket allowed voters to identify at least the party for whom they were voting and, perhaps more importantly, gave the party a far surer way to identify its voters. This drawing from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* newspaper shows the arrangement of ticket booths for the November, 1856 presidential election: three booths with a party official in each, ready to hand to voters their vote—their ticket. The choices were John C. Fremont (candidate of the newly formed Republican Party), James Buchanan (Democrat, who won the election), and Millard Fremont (candidate of the Know Nothing Party, a failed attempt to succeed the collapsing Whig Party). There was nothing private, much less secret, about the process of obtaining a ticket: it was a public act, which all parties fully intended to be public. The voter then carried his ticket to the voting station where, once identified as a qualified voter, he deposited the ticket in a glass jar or wooden box in full view of all other voters and those crowded around the polling place.

Frank Leslie's Illustrated newspaper, volume 2, issue 49 (November 15, 1856), p. 353. Courtesy of the Library of Congress

ticket, often brightly colored and distinctively marked, which contained those names. The “ticket box” was often a glass jar with a narrow neck; sometimes there were different receptacles for different groupings of the many offices being contested; and in the largest cities voters came before a voting window through which they deposited their ticket. But always, the sight of the ticket, like the sound of the voiced vote, was the focus of nineteenth century Election Day’s drama.

In almost every election in almost every ticket state an interested observer could deduce the political choices of almost every voter by noting the colorations and markings of his ticket. Sometimes voters waved their ticket above their heads, or wore it in their hatband as if a badge, to make their declaration especially visible. And sometimes party operatives, functioning as “poll watchers,” would recognize the voters or hear their names announced, and record this political intelligence in a systematic way, creating a political database by listing the identity of citizens and their party preferences. In other cases, the electoral officials receiving the tickets marked a code next to each voter’s name indicating which ticket he had deposited.

The political intelligence gained from the poll book, the list compiled by the poll watcher, or names gained from voters’ lists secretly coded by election officials, formed the basis of the canvass book for the next election. The intelligence about individual partisan proclivities was, then as now, a powerful tool for the recruitment and mobilization of voters at subsequent elections and for mailings of party platforms or speeches of prominent leaders on current issues.

It is not easy to determine whether the revealing of individual political choices of individuals voting in ticket states was as great as in the *viva voce* states. But we can say for certain that in the latter case, the revelation was total: every choice of every voter was written down in publically available poll books housed at the county court house. But equally, in the ticket states, no voter could ever know who was watching and recording the “color of his ticket.” Always, however, it is important to remember that, in this political era of visible voting, few thought the individual’s vote should be hidden.

In most places voting was understood to be identifiable and was accepted as such. When questioned by a British parliamentarian in 1835 about voting secrecy in America, DeTocqueville replied that “there has been too little



A Polling Place Among "the Lower 20"

The rowdy circumstances surrounding the distribution of party tickets in the 1864 presidential election for Abraham Lincoln and his Democratic opponent, General George B McClellan, is captured in this wood engraving which appeared in the *Illustrated London News*. Reflecting the British preoccupation with class, the paper included also presented the distribution of tickets in the "upper ten" wards where upper class and proper behavior prevailed. But in the "lower 20" wards of New York City (e.g. lower Manhattan, where the East River and Hudson River meet) alcohol was never too far away from these combustible situations. Middle class propriety, on the other hand, was far away. It is very unlikely there were many secrets about the ticket chosen, so distinctively marked and differentiated as they were, by voters in either the upper or lower reaches of Manhattan. They made that choice public when they picked up their ticket from a party booth and again when they deposited it in public, before their compatriots.

Illustrated London News, December 3, 1864 (p. 560). Courtesy of the New York Public Library.

danger in a man making his vote public to create any great desire to conceal it”.^{*} One suspects this remained largely true in most places and for most voters, whether voting by ticket or by voice.

In some states, particularly Massachusetts and California, there were efforts to increase the secrecy of ticket voting. Massachusetts, in the 1850s as the secret ballot was being developed in Australia, was experimenting with more and more opportunities for voter anonymity, though less comprehensively—and without legislation to close bars on Election Day. In the 1870s, California came even closer and by 1871 state law was stipulating a standard for party tickets, first prohibiting the use of colors and designs, then requiring similar paper and then stipulating that each party number its candidates for each office in precisely the same order. By 1876 party tickets were required to be printed on paper of standard size (12” by 5”) purchased from the Secretary of State “or upon paper in every respect precisely like such paper.” The voter was to fold the ticket of his choice “crosswise from the center four times” before being deposited in such a way that no sign of the ballot’s content was visible to any observer.^{**} And all bars were to be closed while the polls were open.

Did California essentially reinvent the Australian ballot in the United States in the 1870s? In many ways, the answer is yes. As in Massachusetts, reformers in California were responding to local reform agendas to create something close to the secret ballot, especially in terms of ensuring greater individual anonymity. But there remained critical differences:

- Parties still printed their own tickets
- Elections were still conducted out of doors in a public place before “bystanders” from whose presence the ballot box could not be removed until the close of the poll
- The judge of the election deposited the voter’s chosen ticket in the ballot box, announcing “in an audible tone of voice” that

^{*}Alexis De Tocqueville, “Statement at the Select Committee on Bribery at Elections, August, 1835,” *Parliamentary Papers*, 1835, volume 8, p. 240.

^{**}Political Code, Chapter VIII, “Election Tickets and Ballots;” Chapter IX, “Voting and Challenges,” Volume 1, Theodore H. Hittell (comp): *Codes and Statutes of the State of California, 1876* (San Francisco: A L Bancroft, 1876): 195-8; 198-201.

voter's name and recording in "a poll list" his precise residence or his number in a registration book with addresses.

- A voter could reveal his ticket if he were careless or inclined to do so.

(It is worth noting that, as practiced in Australia, the UK and Canada, the secret ballot required voters to state in an audible voice their place of residence and some jurisdictions attached a "counterfoil" number to each voter's ballot so that, just as in the *viva voce* poll book, the election result could be adjusted in case of demonstrated fraud.)

California and Massachusetts were the leaders of reform in the United States. But most states did not regulate party tickets as these reform-minded states attempted to do: voter choices in most places continued to be readily identified "by the color of their ticket." The ticket system remained a voting form associated with identification, providing another justification for the party's expense in printing tickets.

Not every insight into past politics derived from the poll books of the *viva voce* states can be said to apply equally to the ticket states. But it is equally true that those insights cannot be dismissed as irrelevant for the wider history of voting in America: for most of that history, in ticket states and in *viva voce* states, there was a good prospect that individual political choices were known, for certainly they were knowable. Only the adoption of the Australian secret ballot changed that, and in so doing, altered in a fundamental way both elections and voting. ■

The First Vote, November 16, 1867

An African American voter, in a line of black voters, deposits his ticket in a glass jar under the very watch-full eye of the election official. *Harper's Weekly*, the *Illustrated London News*, and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* newspaper were the mass circulation media of their day. The sketches and paintings that defined them carried powerful messages. This famous *Harper's Weekly* cover by Alfred Rudolph Wurd presented a tableau of new voters—African American men. They are presented in laudable fashion: a craftsman with his hammer and chisel in his pocket, a well-attired businessman, and a decorated sergeant in the Union Army. Few readers would have ever seen black voters even if the voting process would have been familiar to millions of readers. The Fifteenth Amendment that enfranchised adult African American men was not ratified until February, 1870. This election was part of the military reconstruction of Virginia and the Union commander in Virginia ordered that African-American men be given the right to vote for delegates to the state's constitutional convention. Turnout was high: 93,145 men, most recently freed slaves, voted, of the 105,832 registered. Secrecy in voting did not arrive in Virginia until the passage of the Walton act in 1894; by then almost all African-Americans had been disenfranchised.

Harper's Weekly, Volume 11, November 16, 1867, cover. Courtesy of the Library of Congress

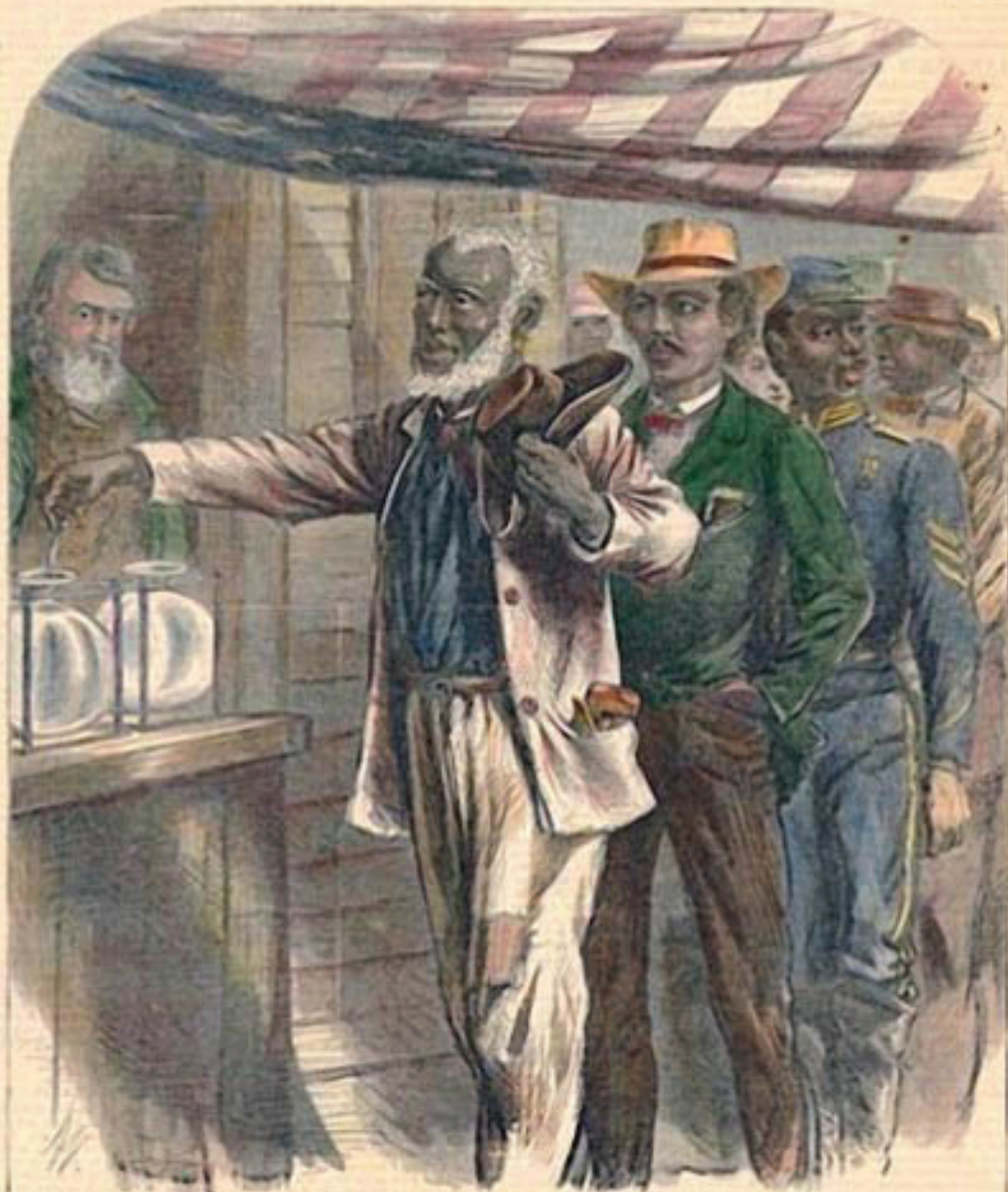
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"THE FIRST VOTE."—Drawing by A. B. Watson. (See page 100.)

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Two mid-nineteenth century cities—Alexandria, Virginia and Newport, Kentucky—shared a common voting arrangement: both states required all votes in all elections to be cast in public by voice (viva voce). The poll books provided an official written record of every voter's spoken declaration. Professor Don DeBats presents and analyses this data on the website.

Public Voting. This project reveals the world of American politics at a time when every citizen's vote was public knowledge, and how social identity influenced votes.

Alexandria, Virginia | 1850s. On the Potomac just opposite Washington DC, Alexandria was a thriving commercial city based on slave labor in the late 1850's as the secession crisis loomed.

Newport, Kentucky | 1870. On the Ohio just opposite Cincinnati, Newport was, as the Panic of 1873 crashed down, a thriving industrial city based on immigrant labor.

Colophon

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