

Resource Sheet #3

“What Are You Voting on Mister, Campaign Issues or Party Labels?”
Ralph Matthews

Read the following newspaper article that pertains to the 1936 presidential election and list the reasons provided for African Americans to vote for the Democrats or for the Republicans. Record your answers in section two of Resource Sheet 2.

“Well, I suppose I’ll just vote the old party ticket!” That is about the depth of the average citizen’s discussion of politics I have found as I go up and down the country.

But that is rubber stamp voting and this is no time for rubber stamp thinking.

... Is urging his followers to vote the Democratic ticket symbolized by the Roosevelt idea of democracy and social security...

...A Democratic party which promotes Jim crow cars, segregation, disenfranchisement, and inequalities in education, lynching, civil oppression, exploitation and peonage...

...Is fighting for a Democratic president who has given colored citizens the highest positions they have ever held in government, who has made it possible for millions of youths and adults to enjoy the benefits of education, without regard to race or color, a Democrat who has condemned lawlessness and has inaugurated many new social security laws which...will go a long way toward eradicating the exploitation of the laboring classes and deal a death blow to peonage...

...The biggest millstone around the neck of America’s most forward looking leader is the ugly record of the Democratic Party of the past, which stands as an insurmountable barrier over which many conscientious colored voters find it almost impossible to pass when they are called upon to help reelect the man they admit is fitted for the job. That is the gravest danger in voting party labels—they are confusing and unjust.

...There is a distinct difference between being a Democrat in Georgia and being a Democrat in New York, and that difference is reflected in the basic nature of the two localities. One representing bigotry and social backwardness and the other represents intelligence and progress. Roosevelt comes from the later stock...

Mr. Simmons [campaigning for Republican candidate Alf Landon], now as always. Informs his listeners that their poor old grandmammies who felt the lash of slavery, would turn over in their graves if they thought their children would vote a Democratic ticket.

“I would rather vote for a dog on the Republican ticket than the best Democrat who ever lived,” he roars, because “any black man who votes for a Democrat is placing a curse on the soul of Abraham Lincoln whose Emancipation Proclamation which cased the fetters to drop from our limbs, transformed us from chattel slaves into men, lead our weary feet into the promised land of citizenship, let us lie down beside the still waters of civil justice, graze in the green pastures of economic freedom and bask in the sunlight of education. He put a ballot in our hands and song in our souls and bade us to march on forever singing praises to the honor and glory of the Republican Party...”

...Just for the sake of the record, let us peek under the tent where the G.O.P. Jumbo is kept and see whom we find financing the greatest show on earth.

We find in the ticket box the J.P. Morgan, who sold America short during the World War that is responsible for that gold star that hung in your window. We find the DuPonts who, as makers of ammunition, are anxious to see another war so they will have a market for their products of destruction.

We find the big capitalists, who took upon the bulk of American humanity as mere fuel to be burned on the alter of their great industries, creating massive fortunes for a few while the array of toilers are dumped like cinders on the heap when overproduction causes the doors to close. They call it depression and ask you to starve until it is over.

Underneath we also find the international bankers, dangling the pugnacious dictators of Europe on a string. The Hitler's, the Mussolini's, the Stalin's are all ready to cast the world into another conflagration, but they need America to finance the show. Under Roosevelt the bankers are hamstrung, they must get him out and their own man in."

Matthews, Ralph. "What Are You Voting on Mister, Campaign Issues or Party Labels?" *Afro American* (Baltimore). 17 October 1936, p. 9.