

that any property or educational qualifications would keep many white as well as black people from voting. Still others said a new constitution might arouse Northern opinion and bring about federal intervention in Mississippi elections.

Governor Robert Lowry had vetoed a constitutional convention call in 1888, but the new governor, John M. Stone, favored a new constitution. In 1890 the legislature called for a constitutional convention to meet in Jackson.

The Constitutional Convention of 1890

Of the 134 delegates in the 1890 Constitutional Convention, 130 were Democrats. Isaiah T. Montgomery of Bolivar County was the only black delegate. S. S. Calhoun, a Hinds County planter and lawyer, was elected president of the convention.

The first problem considered by the important Committee on Elective Franchise, Apportionment, and Elections was apportionment. White counties were being outvoted by whites in black counties. J. Z. George's reapportionment plan was adopted. It increased the number of representatives in the House by thirteen, with all thirteen going to white counties.

This action did not effectively cut the Delta's power, however. After 1890, there were still 69 representatives from black counties and 64 from white counties. Not until the 1920s did the white counties achieve a majority position in state government.

"The Commoner"

Coming home from Washington, D.C., to play the leading role in the 1890 Constitutional Convention was United States Senator James Z. George. A native of Georgia, George was raised in Carroll County, Mississippi, and became a self-taught lawyer. He served as a private in the Mexican War, was later elected to the 1861 Secession Convention, and served on L. Q. C. Lamar's committee to draft the Ordinance of Secession. When fighting broke out, he joined the Confederate army. He was captured and held as a prisoner of war for 25 months.

George played a leading role in the "Revolution of 1875" in Mississippi. As chairman of the state-wide Democratic Executive Committee, he met with Governor Ames two weeks before the election to arrange a truce. His leadership in restoring white supremacy won him great popularity among white Democratic voters within the state and guaranteed his political future.

The constitution drawn up at this convention still governs Mississippi today.

Apportionment: dividing the state into voting districts.

George was instrumental in chartering Mississippi A & M (now Mississippi State University) in 1878. The next year he was chosen chief justice of the Mississippi Supreme Court. In 1881 he resigned to accept the position of United States senator, remaining in the Senate until his death in 1897.

In the Senate he served on a number of important committees. He was considered the "Father of the Department of Agriculture," and he co-authored the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890, which opposed business monopolies.

George spent much of his time defending the South's policies after Reconstruction. His first Senate speech defended the campaign tactics of Mississippi Democrats in the election of 1875. In a major speech in 1882, he spoke in favor of Chinese exclusion. On December 31, 1890, he addressed the Senate for four and a half hours defending the new Mississippi Constitution.

Although as a lawyer he usually defended corporations and railroads, his speech was simple and his dress was plain. His supporters called him "The Commoner." After his death, he was honored as one of Mississippi's major leaders. In 1931 Mississippi presented, as its contribution to the Hall of Fame in Washington, D.C., statues of Jefferson Davis and J. Z. George.

Voting Restrictions

Various schemes for restricting the black vote were discussed. Delta leaders wanted to limit the black vote without sacrificing their political power. They supported educational and property qualifications. Hill-county leaders opposed these restrictions because they might keep poor, illiterate whites from the polls.

Finally, the franchise committee presented its report. It first gave the vote to all adult males except idiots, the insane, and Indians. Then it began taking it away:

Residence of two years in the state and one year in the election district was required. A voter must have been registered at least four months prior to the election and must not have committed certain crimes, such as burglary, theft, arson, perjury, forgery, murder, or bigamy. A poll tax of \$2 must be paid, due two years in advance by February 1 of the election year. A voter had to produce his poll tax receipt at the time he wished to vote.

The most controversial section was 244, which said that after January 1, 1896, every voter must be able to read any section of the state constitution or, as an alternative, be able to "understand" it when read to him or to give a "reasonable interpretation" of it.

Illiterate:
unable to read
or write.

How would this
provision affect
black education?
(See page 192.)