

The downfall of the Democrats began in Baltimore City where the work of the Baltimore Reform League finally achieved some electoral success in the 1894 city judicial elections.<sup>6</sup> The reformers, originally a small group of business and professional men,<sup>7</sup> focused on fraudulent election practices, corruption and incompetence in government and the destructive role of "party bosses." By manipulating the state nominating convention for Governor in 1895 the Gorman-Rasin machine played into the hands of the reformers as the disgruntled Democrats refused to support the choice of the bosses.<sup>8</sup> The Republican gubernatorial candidate, Lloyd G. Lowndes, a wealthy banker from Cumberland in Allegany County, rode the resurgent strength of his party, the disaffection of many Democrats and the vigilant watch on election practices to the first Republican gubernatorial victory in Maryland.<sup>9</sup> The loss of the governor's office was less significant and threatening than the loss of control over the state legislature as additional reform measures pertaining to election practices and registration were passed.<sup>10</sup> The Republican legislature denied the Democratic boss, Arthur Gorman, a fourth consecutive term in the U.S. Senate replacing him with Louis E. McComas in 1899. Although the indomitable Gorman would see the Democrats regain the state legislature and return him to a U.S. Senate seat in 1903, the Democratic party rule by bossism was severely damaged.

The right to a safe and secure vote and voter suffrage in general were prominent issues in the "progressive era" although Maryland was not always on the side of progress. The reform league members through careful research and diligent work gathered the evidence necessary to convince lawmakers to pass provisions for use of the "Australian secret ballot" and to obtain changes in the Boards of Supervisors of Elections.<sup>11</sup> Within the Democratic party itself dissatisfaction over fixed conventions assisted in the creation of primary election laws.<sup>12</sup> However, the greatest challenge came in rebuffing the three attempts by a Democratic controlled, and Gorman influenced, state legislature to disfranchise the state's black population by constitutional amendments and ballot laws.

The Democrats since the Civil War had been running as the "white man's party" and it took little political wisdom to observe that the over 50,000 black voters were a key to the Republican successes at the polls.<sup>13</sup> As a reaction to electoral defeat, the Democrats sought a cure in the eradication of the black vote. The first proposal, called the "Poe Amendment," would have restricted voting to adult males who were entitled to vote on January 1, 1869, a descendant of such persons who reached 21 by 1906, a person who could read and give a "reasonable explanation" of any part of the Maryland Constitution or a person who could not read but who could understand and explain a section of the Constitution read to him.<sup>14</sup> The first two categories would qualify most white Marylanders and leave to the discretion of election judges the qualifications of all other voters. This attempt at disfranchisement was plainly seen as the naked political move that it was and the Maryland voters strongly rejected its adoption in statewide balloting on November 7, 1905 not only because of the dilution of the black vote but also because of the fear it would adversely affect recently naturalized citizens.<sup>15</sup> The Democratic legislature endeavored to eliminate the objections of the immigrant population in another proposed amendment passed in