Transatlantica

Revue d'études américaines. American Studies Journal

1 | 2005

Couleurs d'Amérique

Laughlin McDonald. *A Voting Rights Odyssey. Black Enfranchisement in Georgia.*

Cambridge, New York : Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry

Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/825>

DOI : 10.4000/transatlantica.825

ISSN : 1765-2766

Éditeur

AFEA

Référence électronique

Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry, « Laughlin McDonald. *A Voting Rights Odyssey. Black Enfranchisement in Georgia.* », *Transatlantica* [En ligne], 1 | 2005, mis en ligne le 22 avril 2006, consulté le 29 avril 2021.

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/825> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.825>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 29 avril 2021.

Transatlantica – Revue d'études américaines est mis à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

Laughlin McDonald. *A Voting Rights Odyssey. Black Enfranchisement in Georgia.*

Cambridge, New York : Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Hélène Le Dantec-Lowry

- 1 Using a variety of primary sources, including an impressive array of court cases, Laughlin McDonald, Director of the Southern Regional Office of the American Civil Liberties Union in Atlanta since 1972, provides a detailed history of the quest for equal voting rights in Georgia from Reconstruction to the 1990s.
- 2 Choosing Georgia, a state where the author has tried many voting cases over the years, as an example, McDonald vividly shows that race has clearly been part of the political process in the South and notes that it is still a social and political reality in that region. He argues that Blacks in Georgia faced discrimination in voting similar to that in other states but that barriers were more systematic and thorough there in limiting or denying the vote and the holding of office to African Americans.
- 3 The author gives a step-by-step account of various cases that prove the reluctance of Georgian Whites to accept Black political empowerment, from the refusal to abide by the 14th and 15th amendments after the Civil War to the numerous tactics used to counter the provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 or contemporary redistricting. Through violence, fraud and court cases, Whites are shown as reluctant—at best—to accept giving African-Americans their rightful political power. McDonald is very convincing in showing that race, indeed, is still a major aspect of political life in the South. The climax of the book relates the hope provided by the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the ensuing fight by Georgians either to repeal it or extend special provisions (the years 1975 and 1982 are good examples) to the act.
- 4 Logically, when looking at the author's background, the study is particularly good when examining court cases. Every time African Americans (civil rights activists, lawyers and organizations, or simple citizens) have argued in favor of actions to increase or improve the Black franchise, some Whites opposed them. McDonald takes a

clearly partisan approach when condemning some recent court decisions (e.g. the *Shaw* or *Miller* cases of 1993 and 1994) or when defending majority-minority districts.

- 5 The regular references to specific court cases may bother some readers at first but, in fact, McDonald's style usually flows nicely and he offers a narrative that will be appreciated not only by law students but by anyone interested in State politics, the interplay between State and Federal decisions, and African-American history in general. Moreover, he exploits sources that are rarely analyzed and that will prove useful to all.
- 6 McDonald's point about the persisting importance of race in Georgian politics is well taken and convincingly conveyed. He also claims that he wants to give voice to the "hundreds of relatively obscure, courageous, and determined men and women in remote places" who waged the struggle for equal voting rights. However, they seem somewhat under-represented and the arguments of lay citizens are evoked only in chapters 7 and 8 and in the last chapter (18) in which McDonald relates the fascinating story of the residents of Keysville and their fight to be recognized as fully participatory citizens. The author is thus perhaps less convincing at showing the specifics of how black Georgians became involved in changing the election process. Still, the work done by lawyers acting in their defense is well rendered.
- 7 The book includes several photographs, which are usually well chosen and add another human dimension to the crusade for equal voting rights in Georgia. There are also clear footnotes and a useful index. McDonald chose to focus on the legal aspect of this fight, which explains the limited use, unfortunate here and there, of secondary sources.
- 8 As a whole, this thoughtful book should be recommended to all who study Southern politics in particular and US political life in general. It will prove extremely useful to anyone—students as well as scholars—interested in race relations in the United States and in the persistent ways in which Whites still oppose total equality while African Americans keep on fighting to have their rights respected, dismantling, little by little, discriminatory practices. 'Race' indeed still matters.

INDEX

Thèmes : Recensions

AUTEUR

HÉLÈNE LE DANTEC-LOWRY

Université Paris 3 — Sorbonne Nouvelle