



For the Freedom of Her Race: Black Women and Electoral Politics in Illinois, 1877-1932

Lisa G. Materson

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Focusing on Chicago and downstate Illinois politics during the incredibly oppressive decades between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932—a period that is often described as the nadir of black life in America—Lisa Materson demonstrates the impact that migrating southern black women had on midwestern and national politics, first in the Republican Party and later in the Democratic Party.

Materson shows that as African American women migrated beyond the reach of southern white supremacists, they became active voters, canvassers, suffragists, campaigners, and lobbyists, mobilizing to elect representatives who would push for the enforcement of the Reconstruction Amendments in the South. In so doing, black women kept alive a very distinct strain of Republican Party ideology that favored using federal power to protect black citizenship rights. Materson also examines the Republican failure to enact antilynching legislation, which began the move of black women toward the Democrats, and she discusses women's embrace of the Democratic Party with the election of FDR in 1932.

For the Freedom of Her Race is an important contribution to the story of African American women's role in electoral politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, illuminating questions about voting rights, electoral organization, and the struggles for racial and gender equality in the United States.

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