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## The American Negro as a Political Factor

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# The Political Capacity

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## of The Negro

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BY

*Prof. KELLY MILLER*

Howard University  
Washington, D. C.



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¶ "The most remarkable article in the Nineteenth Century this month is that on "The American Negro as a Political Factor." It is written by Professor Kelly Miller, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Howard University, Washington. It is the most intrepid, thorough-going defence of the political capacity of the Negro that I have yet seen. Prof. Miller's fervid plea for the African ought to produce the same impression upon the educated men as Johnson's victory at Reno produced on the mean whites everywhere. Give the Negro a fair chance and he may be able to hold his own with the best of us."—*London Review of Reviews*, W. T. Stead, Editor.

¶ "A remarkable article."—*Birmingham (England) Daily Mail*.

¶ "A vigorous, courageous defense of the political capacity of the black man."—*American Review of Reviews*.

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## The American Negro as a Political Factor.

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PROFESSOR E. A. FREEMAN once defined politics as present history, and history as past politics. With a greater proneness for picturesque language, John J. Ingalls described politics as 'the metaphysics of force,' in which none but the strenuous may expect to play a part. According to Webster's Standard Dictionary, politics is 'that part of ethics which has to do with the regulation and government of a nation or State, the defence of its existence and rights against foreign control and conquest, the augmentation of its strength and resources, and the protection of its citizens in their rights, with the preservation and improvement of their morals.' According to this conception, it will be seen that politics is the chief concern of man in his associated relations, and conditions all other modes of activity, whether economic, industrial, educational, or social.

The derivative or secondary meaning of the word 'politics' is the management of a political party and the advancement of candidates to office. Throughout our discussion it will be well to keep sharply in mind the distinction between politics as the science of government and politics as the art of partisan policy and manipulation. In a country like ours, where the functions of government are conducted through partisan organizations, the secondary meaning of the word is apt to obscure its primary significance in popular estimation. The vast majority of people have no conception of the word aside from party contentions and the procurement of office. So great is the perversity of popular understanding that to refer to a public man as a politician is accounted an uncomplimentary designation.

When considering the negro as a political factor, reference is hardly ever had to the essential functions and purposes of government, but he is regarded merely as the sport, the jest, and the riddle of party rivalry. Our political philosophers are inclined to ignore the negro as a constituent governmental factor by reason of the manner of his introduction into this country. The African was imported for the sole purpose of performing manual and menial labour. His bodily powers alone were called into requisition. His function was as purely mechanical as that of the ox which pulls the plough. He was a chattel, a part of the nation's material assets. There was no more thought of admitting him into the body politic than of thus ennobling the lower animals. The gulf that separated him from the proud Aryan was supposed to be so wide and deep that the two races could never be made amenable to the same moral, political, and social *regime*.



√But the transplanted African has manifested surprising capacities and aptitudes for the standards of his European captors, so that the races must now be separated, if at all, by purely artificial barriers. This upward struggle on the part of the African has been against continuous doubt, ridicule, and contemptuous denial on the part of those who would profit by his inferior status. Those who once assumed the piety of their day and generation at one time stoutly declared that the negro did not possess a soul to be saved in the world to come, but was merely as the beasts that perish; but he is now considered the man of over-soul, as Emerson would say, by reason of his marvellous emotional characteristics. Then the wise ones maintained that he did not possess a mind to be enlightened according to the standards of European intellect, and hence he was forbidden a knowledge of letters. The same dogma affirmed that the black man would not work except under the stern compulsion of the white man's beneficent whip, and that he would die out under freedom. But all these dogmas have been disproved by the progress of events.

The ancient doctrine of racial inferiority however, now reasserts itself under a different guise. With a prudent generality it avers with great vehemence of spirit that the negro is inherently, unalterably, and everlastingly inferior to the white race as a part of God's cosmic scheme of things, and, therefore, is an unfit factor for self-government, which is the highest human function. It is a shrewd and cunning controversialist who posits the universal negative and defies the world to disprove his thesis. His tactical method is to deny all things, and to ignore that which has been proved. But in spite of it all, the negro is steadily and unmistakably moving towards the great free ocean of human privilege, and, like the mountain stream, though his progress here and there may be impeded and delayed, artificial barriers and obstructions can only retard but not stay his onward flow.

√The white race in this country is ensnared in the meshes of its own law. The negro has been, and is, the incidental beneficiary of this entanglement. Circumstances have forced him into a political scheme not designed for him. Universal principles have no ethnic quality. By the irony of history the white man's maxims have risen up to trouble him. The Ten Commandments will not budge, neither will the Declaration of Independence. It is said that the Anglo-Saxon race is noted for its bad logic but good sense. The revolutionary fathers must have shut their eyes to the logical results of their own doctrine, or else they lacked the courage of their conscience. The negro has been the incidental beneficiary of the two waves of revolutionary feeling which has swept the current of popular sentiment beyond the limits of its accustomed channel. He moves up and down on the scale of national sentiment as the mercury in the thermometric tube,

reaching blood-heat in periods of national stress and excitement and sinking to the freezing point in seasons of tranquillity and repose. In none other than revolutionary crises could the Declaration of Independence have been written or the last two amendments appended to our Federal Constitution. The former held out to the negro the hope of ultimate citizenship and political equality, while the latter was the first step towards this realisation. These two milestones of promise and partial fulfilment were one hundred years apart. As the nation is becoming settled in its normal modes, the disposition is to relegate the negro to a state of political nullity.

But, despite this political apostasy, the negro constitutes a political factor which cannot be ignored without local and national peril. He constitutes one-ninth the numerical strength of the American people, and is promiscuously scattered over the whole geographical area of the United States, ranging in relative density from ten to one in the black belts of the South to less than one per cent, in the higher latitudes. He furnishes one-sixth of the wage-earning class, and is inextricably interwoven in the national, industrial, and economic fabric. He speaks the same language, conducts the same modes of activity, reads the same literature, worships God after the same ritual as his white fellow-citizens. As the late Dr. W. T. Harris once said, he has acquired the Anglo-Saxon consciousness and put on his spiritual clothing. He delights in his new habiliment. He appeals to his white brother in the language of Ruth to Naomi: 'Where thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried.'

A nation consists of the people living in a prescribed territory who hold the same general belief, sentiment, and aspiration. The negro is, therefore, not an alien but an essential part of the body politic. He is not like the Red Indian, with whose corporeal presence alone we have to deal and who stands stolidly aloof from the great throbbing current of national thought, feeling, and aspirations, but he is a vital part in the spirit and potency of the national life. The negro is not merely a recipient but a partaker in all of the objects and aims of government. Is he not a vital element in every measure intended to preserve the national peace and prosperity, to augment the nation's strength and resources, for the protection of citizens in their rights, and the preservation and improvement of their morals? The negro may indeed be eliminated by force as a factor in party management and patronage, but he can no more be eliminated from politics, in the broader significance of that term, than we can eliminate one side from a triangle without destroying the figure.

In current political discussion the negro is ever referred to

as a negligible public quantity. The term 'southern people,' by a strange twist of lexical usage, is intended to signify a part, and sometimes a smaller part, of the community, and yet the negro in the South, in some instances, constitutes the majority of the population and contributes the greater part of the industrial strength, and makes possible the large proportion of the public powers and functions of the State. Whenever political exigency suggests the curtailment of the representative power resident in the black population by way of reducing representation in the national Congress, the beneficiaries of this power interpose the most strenuous and vehement objections. The marble apex of a monument may indeed look with despite upon the grosser material of its foundation, but it cannot deny that the foundation is as essential an element of the structure as its more ornamental and pretentious capstone.

The present reactionary political tendency has produced a class of political leaders who base their motive on race hatred and strife. They are adepts in the use of the dynamic power of race animosity. Without philosophic insight or far-seeing wisdom, they appeal to the passion of their followers with utter recklessness of logic and conscience. That the negro is incapable of self-government is a maxim which springs spontaneously from the lips of every speaker and to the pen tip of every writer who attempts to justify the unrighteous and iniquitous political treatment which is accorded him. This assertion they relish and roll under their tongues as a sweet morsel. By hoary usage and glib recital it has become a stereotyped motto. We are ever referred to the failure of the native tribes in Africa, the dismal experiments of Hayti and Liberia, and the reconstruction *regime* of the Southern States. These are always recounted in the same order of recital, and set forth with the same vehemence of rhetoric as the basis of the same derogatory conclusion. The argument, or alleged argument, has been repeated so often that the indolent feel forced to accept it through sheer weariness. It is dinged into their dull understanding by unending and never-varying repetition as the recurrent chorus of a popular song. The unvaried repetition of a hoary argument ordinarily damages the intellectual reputation of its users as being deficient in originality and resource; but those who delight to belittle and condemn the negro are no whit abashed by such considerations of moral and intellectual frugality.

What is self-government? If by the power of self-government we mean the ability of any people to exist according to the requirements of their own stage of development under their own autonomy, and to adjust themselves to that environment, then all the peoples on the face of the earth are capable of self-government. If, on the other hand, it implies the ability of the retarded races to regulate their affairs after the fashion of the most advanced section of the European people,

then the question is not only unnecessary but preposterous. Ireland has for years been waging a gigantic struggle for the priceless boon of self-government, as the Englishman understands and exercises that function, but England, on the other hand, is determined to withhold it on the ground that the wild, hysteric Celt is not prepared to exercise so high a prerogative with safety to himself and to the British Empire. The masses of the population of Europe, with centuries of inherited freedom and civilization behind them, are not deemed fit for self-government in the most exalted sense of that term. Indeed, it is only the Anglo-Saxon race that has as yet demonstrated the capacity to use this prerogative as a means of social and political progress. The revolutions and counter-revolutions, and rumours of revolutions, which are almost daily occurring in South and Central American Republics, show that the forms of government copied from Anglo-Saxon models are far in advance of the development of these Latin copyists. Self-government is not an absolute but a relative term. The Red Indian governed himself for centuries before the advent of the pale-face, and thrived much better under his own autonomy than under alien control. The negroes of Hayti under their own form of government are as happy and contented, as thrifty and progressive, and are approaching the standards of European civilisation as surely and as rapidly as the corresponding number of blacks in Jamaica under British control, or as a like number of negroes in Georgia under the dominion of the Stars and Stripes. If it be true that the negro has never shown any conspicuous capacity for self government after the European standard, it is also true that the white race has not yet shown any conspicuous success in governing him.

The Republic of Hayti, contrary to prevailing belief, is the most marvellous illustration of self-governing ability on the face of the glob. Where else can be found a race of slaves who rose up in their independence of spirit and banished the ruling race to another continent, set up free government, and maintained it for one hundred years in face of the taunts and sneers and spiteful usage of a frowning world? If there be imperfections, internal dissensions, and repeated revolutions, it is merely a repetition of the experience of mankind in learning the lesson of self-government.

Liberia is held up to ridicule and scorn, and pointed to as an everlasting argument of the negro's governmental incapacity; and yet we have here a handful of ex-slaves who had only played for a while in the backyard of American civilisation, and who, feeling the fires of freedom burning in their breasts, crossed the ocean and established a government on the miasmatic coasts of Africa. This Government has been maintained, however feebly, for ninety years. For nearly a century a handful of American negroes have exercised a salutary control over two millions of natives, and have

maintained themselves amid the intrigue and sinister design of great European Powers. If the colony at Jamestown or at Plymouth had been forced to confront such an overwhelming number of savages as the Liberian colony has had to do, and had they been cut off from the constant stream of European reinforcement, direction and support fifty years after their foundation, they would have perished from savage onslaught and the vicissitudes of the wilderness of the new world.

But those who deny the political capacity of the negro point to the reconstruction *regime*, and exclaim 'What need we of further proof?' At the time of reconstruction 95 per cent. of the negroes were densely illiterate, none of whom had had experience in governmental affairs. This happened, too, at a period of general political and social upheaval, when the country was overrun with nondescript and renegade adventurers who were going throughout the land seeking whom they might devour. They seized upon the newly enfranchised negro as their natural prey. And yet these ignorant ex-slaves, amid all the snares which beset them from without and within, maintained Governments for several years, against which the only charge that has ever been preferred is that they were grotesque and extravagant. Grotesqueness is a matter of taste. In many minds it is synonymous with the unusual. If we are unaccustomed to seeing negroes in places of political control, the spectacle of the negro Congressman or judge would at first seem incongruous and grotesque, but as a part of the usual order it would become normal and seemly in our eyes. If we may believe the rumours of municipal mismanagement, it is doubtful whether any one of the Southern States, in their palmyest reconstruction days, could equal New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis or San Francisco in the quality or extent of public corruption. The corrupting influence and practice, be it understood, was not due to the initiative of the negro, but of the white carpet-bagger and native scalawag who exploited him in his weakness. These much-abused 'negro Governments,' as they are called, changed the oligarchy of the conquered States into true democracies, inaugurated a system of public instruction for all classes, and the general character of their Constitutions was regarded as so excellent that many of them have not been altered up to the present time, except for the worse. As documents of human liberty they stand out bold and pronounced as compared with the tricky instruments which have supplanted them. They passed no laws against human liberty, or at variance with the Constitution of the United States. They denied no man the God-given right of liberty, or the constitutionally vouchsafed privilege of participating in the Government under which he must live. The failure of these Governments was inevitable. To expect ignorant and inexperienced slaves to maintain a Government not merely for themselves, but also for a greater

number of Anglo-Saxons with trained faculty for leadership and inborn power of dominion, is a proposition too preposterous for the present generation to entertain. The marvel is not that they succeeded so poorly, but that they proceeded at all. It is not to the negro's discredit that he did not accomplish the impossible.

It is time to lay aside the animosities of bygone reconstruction and consider the situation in the light of changed conditions. The question of the present day is not whether the negro can govern himself, but how far, with increasing intelligence and substance, he can co-operate with the white race in maintaining good government for all; and whether he can be effectually ignored as a governmental factor by any section of the country without accumulating serious peril, not only for that section but for the nation at large.

That the participation of the negro in governmental affairs constitutes a menace both to himself and the community is a dogma which has attained wide currency and general acceptance in present-day discussion; but, like other damaging dogmas of which he from time immemorial has been made the victim, this proposition is not justly upheld by facts or argument; and yet it has been proclaimed and asseverated with such positiveness of assertion and rhetorical vehemence, as almost to deceive his erst-while friends, who once championed his cause as being entitled to the full measure of the prerogative and privilege of an American citizen. The former enthusiastic and aggressive attitude towards the rights of this race has given way to a feeble, apathetic and apologetic avowal of faith in the abstract principle of human rights, but there is a sinister indifference to practical application and concrete sanction. Such defenders of the negro's cause

Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer;  
And without sneering teach the rest to sneer.

This radical change of attitude has been due to a studied and deliberate policy on the part of the more rabid and rancorous anti-negro agitators, who study to make this race odious and offensive in the eyes of the civilized world. They have seized upon the evil deeds of the dastardly wrongdoer, and exploited them to the everlasting detriment of a whole race. Their chief delight consists in learning that some negro, in some part of the land, has committed a flagrant and outrageous crime. They count that day a sad one when the morning's paper does not reveal that some one out of ten millions has been apprehended for a grave and nefarious offence. With ghoulish glee they revel in the hideous manifestations of human nature if the culprit happens to be of the despised blood.

Such a deliberate and calculated propaganda to exploit and magnify the moral and criminal imperfections of any other element of our population would blast and blacken the reputa-

tion of the race held in despite, and make it odious in the estimation of their fellow-men. If every offence committed by an Italian wrongdoer should be magnified in its heinous and hideous features, and proclaimed in flaming headlines all over America as portraying the bestial traits and tendencies of the diabolical 'dago,' that race would soon be deemed unfit to form a constituent and participating factor in the equation of our national life. The negro race is daily subjected to microscopic search for shortcomings and imperfections to be exploited for political ends. The negro is the victim of the iniquitous propaganda that portrays and magnifies repugnant imperfections which in the case of other races are attributed to human frailty. This political philosophy is clearly expressed in one of the homely maxims of its chief philosopher: 'The negro is a frozen serpent, and we propose to keep him frozen.' His facts are erroneous and his philosophy is false. The negro is in no sense a menace to America or to any part of it except in so far as ignorance is a menace to knowledge, vice to virtue, degradation to decency; and the only effective way to relieve the menace of the situation is by removing the cause and not perpetuating it under the spell of any fancied dread. If the negro is to be kept 'frozen' under such frenzied philosophy, the white race, too, may become frost-bitten by the resulting frigidity of the atmosphere.

On the other hand, the negro has evinced amazing patriotic devotion. As soon as the first pangs of grief at severance from his native land faded away, he fell completely in love with his new environment. He soon forgot the 'sunny clime and palmy wine' of his native land for the 'cotton, corn, and sweet potatoes' of old Virginia. The negro is unsurpassed in the strength and intensity of his local attachment. Herein consists the true quality of patriotism. It is not to be found merely in the achievements of renowned warriors and statesmen, which indeed are their own reward. In this sense only a few conspicuous names in any country could be accounted patriotic, but rather the duties and endearments of the common people make the deeper and more lasting impression upon the human heart. Robert Burns, the national poet of Scotland, has seized upon the endearments and local attachments of the lowly life of Scotland and woven them into soulful song, and has thus rendered old Scotia ever dear to all mankind. If the human heart ever turns with a passionate longing to our own southland, it will not be in quest of traditions of their great warriors and statesmen, but rather to revel in the songs, the sorrows, the sighings, and the spiritual strivings as embodied in the plantation melodies. Which of her patriotic odes would America not willingly give in exchange for 'Swing low, sweet chariot,' or 'Steal away to Jesus'? Or where can be found a pathetic or patriotic appeal more racy of the soil and melting to the soul than



'Way down on the Suwanee River'? It is curious that negro furnished the musical inspiration for the Southern Confederacy, for the famous song of *Dixie* merely expresses the longing of the slave to return to his native home 'way down South in Dixie.'

It is claimed that it is the white man's country. This proposition is understandable when we consider that the white race constitutes eight-ninths of its population, and has absorbed a still larger proportion of its material and substantial strength; and, representing as they do the most populous and powerful factor, they are fairly entitled to, as they are in the habit of securing, all that justly belongs to them: but, according to any just and righteous standard, this country belongs to the negro as much as to any other, not only because he has helped to redeem it from the wilderness by the energy of his arm, but because he has also bathed it with his blood and watered it with his tears, and hallowed it with the yearnings of his soul.

Not only in local attachment but also in devotion of spirit to American institutions and ideals the negro has played a notable part. It was the negro slave whose blood was first shed in the streets of Boston as an earnest of American independence. The statue of Crispus Attucks on Boston Common was doubtless intended to typify the spirit of the revolutionary war, but it has a deeper and muter meaning. It illustrates the self-sacrificing patriotism of a transplanted race. In every national crisis the negro has demonstrated his patriotism anew. It runs like a thread through every chapter of our national history from Boston Common to San Juan Hill. His soldierly service has not been that of the Hessian hireling peddling his prowess for pay, or the cowardly conscript forced to the front by the bayonet behind, but he has ever rushed to his country's battle-line with his country's battle-cry exultant on his lips. He was with Washington in the days of Valley Forge. He was with Jackson behind the fleecy breast-works of New Orleans. He responded two hundred thousand strong to the call of Father Abraham for the preservation of this Union; and it was his valour, as much as any other, that placed the American standards on the Spanish ramparts in the West Indies. Is it a political as it is a sacred principle that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins? If this be true, when we consider the blood of the captive making red the Atlantic current on his way to a cruel bondage, the blood of a slave drawn by the lash, the blood of the soldier shed in behalf of his country the blood of the victim of cruelty and outrage, we may exclaim, with Kipling:

If blood be the price of liberty,  
If blood be the price of liberty,  
If blood be the price of liberty,  
Lord God! he has paid in full.



It does seem remarkable that this crude, untutored race, without inheritance of freedom, should display such an absorbing passion for free institutions. Throughout the whole range of sectional contention the negro has been on the side of liberty, law and the national authority. On the whole he has advocated the party, men, measures and policies that were calculated to uphold the best traditions and the highest American ideals. He is passionately attached to party organization, which embodies principles too subtle to be grasped in the abstract. His attachment to the party of Lincoln and Sumner was characterized by blind hysteria verging on fanaticism. He did not regard it as an instrument to be used, but as a fetish to be worshipped. He bowed down before it with reverence and gratitude and awe, as Friday before the gun of Robinson Crusoe because it had once rescued him from circumstances of great peril. This is the manner in which the negro manifested patriotism. To him party signified all that there was worthy and noble in the country. All else was ruin and destruction. His ablest and most sagacious leader, Frederick Douglass, at that time counselled that 'the Republican party is the ship, all else is the sea.' The verdict of history will show that even this excessive party devotion was in the line of the highest and best patriotism, for the party of his love was, at that time, the exclusive party of progress and freedom. The political historian will seek in vain to find in any national or local crises that the negro has ever upheld unworthy local or national aim or ideal. The possibility of such patriotic devotion ought to convince the nation that the black race is a natural storehouse of loyalty which it may yet be called upon to utilize in the day of peril. No people of Anglo-Saxon breed would, like the negro, practise civic and political self-sacrifice, and say to their country, 'Though you slay me, yet will I serve you.'

By what possible stretch of argument can a race with such potential patriotic capacity be construed into a menace to free institutions? If there be any menacing feature in the negro's political status, it is merely that he grows out of ignorance, poverty, and the resultant degradation. These are only temporary and incidental, and they endure only until adequate means are put forth for their removal. There are some who are blinded by the spirit of racial animosity and hate, and with whom racial passion is the only political stock-in-trade, so that they will willingly create a racial menace where none exists, or perpetuate it though it might easily be removed. These are the most unloyal, unpatriotic men in America, and could profitably sit at the feet of the negro, whom they hold in despite, and learn the fundamental principles of loyalty and devotion to country and its cause.

That the negro is unfit to participate in any degree in the affairs of government passes as a political axiom in some sections of the country. Whoever dares question the validity of

this axiom, by that attitude puts himself outside the pale of tolerant consideration. Acquiescence is the one test of political and social sanity. Men always resent the attempt to uproot their fondly cherished dogmas, especially if they inure to their benefit or appeal to their vanity; but, like most passionate dogmas, this one fails of substantiation when subjected to practical test. Its only support is a vehement and intolerable spirit which is appealed to as the first and last principles of argument.

Experience does not show that, where the negro exercises the untrammelled right of franchise, he ever votes for men or measures inimical to the best welfare of the country at large or of the community in which he resides. In Missouri, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Maryland, where the negro vote represents a considerable fraction of the totalelectorate, negro voters uniformly support the best men and measures put forward in their respective States. The men who, in these border States, have succeeded to office largely on the basis of negro votes stand, and have always stood, for the best local and national ideas. If we take the *personnel* of the Senators, Representatives, and local officials, with negro support, and compare them with the corresponding officials, on the basis of an exclusive white electorate, the former would suffer no whit by comparison either in ability, devotion, or patriotic integrity. In a border State, where the negro vote constitutes one-fifth of the total electorate, desperate efforts have been made to eliminate him from the franchise. The reasons urged are mainly speculative and frenzied. The most ardent eliminatist may be confidently challenged to point out where the negro vote in that State has ever resulted in the choice of unworthy or incompetent public servants, or has promoted measures contrary to the peace, progress, and well-being of the commonwealth.

Since reconstruction, numerous negroes have filled official positions under the Government, both elective and appointive. They have usually conducted the business committed to them to the entire satisfaction of the people, and have been subjected to the same test of competency as white officials in like stations. The Chief Federal official in a Southern State is a negro who has filled the position for thirteen years, and holds a record of efficiency comparable with any official of his grade in the entire public service. Protest against such officials is not because they are incompetent or undeserving, but merely because, for racial reasons, they are considered undesirable. If the reasoning might be put in a logical formula, it would run thus: 'The white man should rule; therefore the negro is unfit to exercise any of the functions of government.' Or, as a famous critic once said, Shakespeare should not have painted Othello black, because a hero of a drama ought to be white.

The negro is now passing through the most distressing

stage of his political experience. He stands listlessly by as his political rights are denied, his privileges curtailed, and the current of public feeling grows cold and chilly. The constitutional amendments in the reconstruction States have been and are inspired by the purpose to eliminate the black factor from the governmental equation. This is the overt or covert intention of them all. By the utmost stretch of ingenuity and strain of conscience the technical phrasing of the letter may seem to square with constitutional requirements, but there is no room to doubt the underlying spirit and purpose. It does not lessen the fraudulent quality of fraud by giving it legal sanction. These tricky and ingenious instruments may seem to do credit to the cunning of their devisers, but they portray a lamentable state of the conscience. If the offence must needs come, it were far better that the wrongdoer should sin against the law than that the seared conscience of the State should enact an unrighteous code. President Taft has explained, in extenuation of the devious devices to eliminate the negro, that statesmen in the afflicted States, growing weary of individual fraud and violence, preferred that the State should relieve the individual conscience by a legal sanction. We condemn butchery and slaughter in Turkey, not because they are more outrageous than the innumerable murders and lynchings in the United States, but because they have the tacit or avowed sanction of constituted authority. Lygching is the outbreak of an evil propensity which constituted authorities are either unable or unwilling to check; but is it not infinitely better that, if lynchings must needs be, they should stand as an expression of individual sin against the law rather than that they should be sanctioned by law?

No law, whether enacted by God or man, has ever been perfectly obeyed. The Ten Commandments have been violated hourly ever since they were announced amid the thunder and smoke of Mount Sinai. Should the Divine Author, therefore, modify his law to accommodate human frailties and imperfections? Above all things the organic laws of a State should be fair and candid, and should recommend themselves to the conscientious approval of all honest and upright citizens. Great indeed is the condemnation of that commonwealth whose organic law rests upon the basis of a lie.

These disfranchisement measures, harsh and severe as they are in many features, meet with little or no opposition from the nation at large. Although the clear and unmistakable intent of the Federal Constitution is set at naught, yet the nation suffereth it to be so. There is no moral force in the nation at present that will lead to their undoing, and no political exigency seems to demand it. That they violate the spirit, if not by letter, of the Federal Constitution is notorious. Every fourteen-year-old child in America is fully aware of this fact, and yet the nation winks at the violation of its own

fundamental law. Men of the highest patriotic and personal probity ignore their oath to execute the law, and condone its annulment. If there is a growing disrespect for law in the attitude of the American mind, the cause is not far to seek or hard to find. If one portion of the organic law of the land may be violated with impunity, why may not another if it seems to conflict with our interests or with our prejudices?

The negro is impotent. He makes his puny protest, but the nation heeds it not. It is like sheep proclaiming the law of righteousness to a congregation of wolves. A complaint is effective only in so far as there is power to enforce it. That individual, race, or nation is considered cowardly, and justly so, that will not use all available means to enforce a proper recognition of its rights and prerogatives; while the world looks with contempt upon a people who allow themselves to suffer wrong and injustice without using the most effective protests at their command. It also despises a lachrymose race which possesses no language but a cry. The sufferer owes it to the wrongdoer, not less than to himself, not to remain impassive or indifferent under outrage and wrong. It lowers the moral status of the perpetrator, not less than the victim, to encourage him to continue in his career of evil-doing with none to molest or make afraid.

The Anglo-Saxon race boasts that it neither needs nor heeds a law in face of its imperial will. It is his imperturbable spirit

That bids him flout the laws he makes,  
That bids him make the laws he flouts.

And yet this imperturbable race must be amenable to the ethic principles which operate regardless of ethnic proclivities. The question as to whether might makes right must be relegated to the realm of pure morals; but sensible men know that might is still the effective force in practical government. In spite of constitutional compacts or written pledges, the strong will rule the weak, the rich will control the poor, and the wise will dominate the simple. In such contingences we can always foretell the outcome with the predictive decision of natural law, and we may rely upon the prediction with the same assurance as we expect sparks to fly upward, or water to seek its level. This may not be the written law or the preached gospel, but in its effective sanction of the practical conduct of men it is stronger than either. Social forces work out their inevitable results as assuredly as natural causes. The laws of social evolution are not going to suspend their operation. No one expects that the earth will again stand and gaze like Joshua's moon an Ajalon until a feebler contestant wins a victory over a more powerful adversary. If history teaches any clear lesson it is to the effect that the developed races are superior in all practical tests of power to the backward ones. This is especially true in the political arena. It is this sphere that the Anglo-Saxon race manifests its peculiar genius. Worldwide dominion seems to be in the line

of its natural destiny. The Englishman has clearly manifested his political superiority over the Asiatic, as did the old Roman over the Gaul and the Briton. A handful of Englishmen control the destiny of two hundred million dusky Hindoos with as much ease as the legions of Cæsar controlled the nomads of the forests of Northern Europe. This political dominance is not due to an attribute of blood, but rises from a practical efficiency gained through the discipline of civilisation. Thirty thousand American co-Liberians are able to keep under governmental control two million of native Africans by reason of their superior discipline and efficiency. All of which goes to show that it is not blood but circumstances and conditions that count for political dominance. Negro domination is an absurd and impossible issue which has served only sinister political ends. The negro, with his traditional handicaps and political ineptitude, can no more dominate any section of the nation than the babies in the cradle. But conscience makes political cowards who tremble at a shadow. A timid statesmanship is dominated by a fancied dread which a sober judgment shows to be impossible of realisation.

The question of government of a heterogenous population is always one of great difficulty and complexity. The racial situation in the United States leads to an endless tangle. The negro is promiscuously scattered throughout the entire white population. The unequal density of distribution complicates the political question. If there were territorial compactness of this racial element, or if it were equally diffused throughout the whole area, the problem in its political aspect would be greatly simplified. It is a much simpler problem to formulate a satisfactory plan of political privilege for the Philippine Islands than it is for South Carolina or Alabama. The Filipino has territorial and racial solidarity, whereas in the South two dissimilar classes cover the same area. It is always easier to govern one race than two. On the other hand, if the negro were equally distributed among the States he would not constitute more than one-eighth of the strength of any community, and there would scarcely be any necessity for special political plans or policies to cover his case. As a political factor he would be absorbed in the general equation. The very complexity of the racial situation will ultimately compel political and civil uniformity. In this country political, social, and economic conditions gravitate toward equality. We may continue to expect thunderstorms in the political firmament so long as there exists inequality of political temperature in the atmosphere of the two regions. Neither Massachusetts nor Mississippi will rest satisfied until there is an equality of political condition in both States. We are just beginning to appreciate the full significance of Abraham Lincoln's philosophy when he said that this country cannot exist 'half slave and half free.' Democratic institutions can no

more tolerate a double political status than two standards of ethics or discrepant units of weight and measure.

All patriotic citizens must be interested in any honest effort to purify and elevate the suffrage. Honest effort to eliminate ignorance and corruption, in order to promote good government for all the people, must be appreciated as a political exigency, if not approved as a political principle. But no plan, not based on racial grounds and operated by tricky and fraudulent manipulation, can be devised which will shut in all white men and shut out all negroes. No such racial separatrix can be found. The clear purpose of the revised constitution, as is shown by ancestry clauses as well as by unfair manipulation of these laws between the races, is to eliminate the negro wholly from all governmental control. The negro is willing to any test which the white race is willing to impose upon itself. He is willing to drink of the political cup of which the white man drinks, and to be baptised with the baptism with which he is baptised withal.

There are in the United States ten million of negroes, a large proportion of whom possess the requisite intelligence and general qualification for the exercise of the high function of citizenship, and yet they are without a voice in the government. There is no negro in either House of the National Congress, scarcely one in any State Legislature, to make the laws by which the race is to be governed, nor yet a judge on the bench to interpret these laws, nor an administrative officer to enforce them. If the nation desires the negro to develop into an effective factor of the American people he must be given the same consideration, both before the law and behind the law, as enjoyed by his white fellow-citizens. He merely asks for equality of rights; no more, no less, no other.

The contention that in a heterogeneous racial situation one race alone must govern is without sanction either in ethics or experience. No man is good enough to govern another without his consent. The rich are not good enough to govern the poor; the Protestant is not good enough to govern the Catholic; the white man is not good enough to govern the negro. The class that is shut out from all participation in government will soon be shut out from participation in everything else that is worth while, and that the controlling class covets. The privilege to work, to acquire an education, and to accumulate property is indeed of great value, but it cannot atone for the loss of the right to vote, which under our scheme of government is the right preservative of all other rights and privileges.

Experience shows that schemes of disfranchisement are always accompanied by vehement onslaught on the negro, and proscriptive legislation restricting his general welfare. It is noticeable that, in sections of cities where disfranchised negroes reside, there are few public improvements, because



the residents have no voice directly or indirectly in the choice of the city councilmen. The black resident has no say as to who shall be alderman from his ward, and consequently this prudent official, exercising ordinary political sagacity, gives first consideration to the insistent claims of his white constituents, who can influence his continuance in office. It is a law of human nature that, where we are intent on our own interests, we abate our zeal for the welfare of others who may not be insistent upon their own claims. If the Protestants had exclusive control of government, the Catholics would have little show of a 'square deal' where their interests seemed divergent or in conflict with the welfare of the dominant creed. It is precisely for this reason that all elements in a heterogeneous population should have some say in the common government. This country is making a mistake by depriving the negro of all participation in government, locally and nationally. The negro should be taught the beneficent purpose and principles of law and order. He should be led to have implicit faith in the righteousness and integrity of the law. Good citizenship cannot be secured by holding up the harsh, the cruel and repressive features of government. The policeman's club is oftentimes the only governmental instrument with which the negro comes in contact. No other enlightened nation on earth adopts this method of dealing with a backward or retarded people. England, France, and Germany always make such people see and appreciate the beneficent ends of government by making them a participant factor in it. There is no enlightened Government on earth, with a prudent regard for its own best interests, that ruthlessly overrides the sensibilities of the governed.

The political status of the negro will probably culminate under the administration of President Taft. If by tacit acquiescence he lends implied encouragement to the retrograde tendency of the times, the repeal of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, which is now merely a matter of academic discussion, may become a practical issue. If, on the other hand, the last two amendments of the Constitution are regarded as a vital part of that instrument whose enforcement is involved in the obligation of his high office, then an affirmative attitude will do much to check the growing sentiment which makes the last addition to the highest law of the land void and of none effect. President Taft comes of the highest patriotic and philanthropic traditions and ideals; but the tangle of the race problem will not yield to a generous disposition and personal goodwill, of which the President has an unlimited endowment. To the negro the danger seems that he may allow the rights of a race to be sacrificed on the altar of other pressing national problems. His ardent desire to establish peace and goodwill between the North and the white South must meet with sympathetic response in the heart of every true and loyal American; but a sacrifice of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments is too great a price to be

paid even for a consummation so devoutly to be wished. Mr. Taft is the first American President to come to the office with a colonial experience and policy whose very foundation rests upon the inferior political status of the subject race. It is easy to transfer the habit of mind and bias of feeling from the Filipino in the Islands to the negro in the states. In his letter of acceptance, Candidate Taft stated that he stood unequivocally by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments of the Constitution, both in letter and in spirit. His advisory, though unofficial attitude in the recent campaign in Maryland was to the same effect. But these utterances were more than offset by the statement in his inaugural address to the effect that he would not appoint coloured men to office where local opposition was gendered. This suggestion is sufficient to invite the fiercest antagonism to the appointment of a negro to a federal office in any community in the United States. It seems somewhat anomalous that in places where the majority of the population are negroes who belong to the President's political party, no one of this race can be appointed to any federal office if the minority, who opposed his election, should enter protest. From the present appearance of things, under the operation of the announced policy of the President, there will probably not be a negro office-holder in the South by the close of his administration. The elimination of the negro from office in the South means his eventual elimination in the nation. Elimination from office means elimination from politics.

The fact that a Cabinet officer, in open public utterances, boldly advocates the elimination of the negro from politics gives the whole race much anxiety. Usually a Cabinet Minister voices the policy and purpose of the administration of which he forms a part. President Taft has finished the first year of his administration. His policies are not yet distinctive and definitely set. It does not yet clearly appear what they shall be. Every patriotic and loyal citizen should be patient with an administration charged with such heavy duties and responsibilities, even though it may not be able at once to stress the issues in which he is especially, even vitally, concerned. The negro is watching the administration of President Taft with hopes and fears. May his hopes be triumphant over his fears!

KELLY MILLER.

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