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“Com. Cunningham On The Amendment”

Why Every White Man in North Carolina Should Give It His Support and His Vote.

Representative government is organized to express the will of the people in the law, and to faithfully interpret the same by the judiciary and enforce it by the arm of the executive power.

According to the theory, at least, of our government, the expression, interpretation and execution are all entrusted to those whom the will of the people designate.

Everything, therefore, depends upon the intelligence directing that will: its moral and intellectual forces. The difference lies just here, between license and liberty—between the tyranny of the mob, which is anarchy enthroned, and the independence and order secured by the just distribution of the greatest good to the greatest number.

The miracle in political history is the survival of representative institutions in this country of the Southern States, weighed down by an immense mass, a mountainous bulk of ignorance and prejudice, incapable of intelligent thought, or wise decision, a monstrous weight, to be rolled in any direction that its wily controllers and managers see fit to dictate.

It will one day be regarded with astonishment, that the proud indomitable Anglo-Saxon people, whose brain had been controlling the civil polity of the Union for nearly a century, and whose gallantry had led its arms to victory with Washington at Yorktown, Scott at Lundy’s Lane and Taylor at Buena Vista, to say nothing of their four years of unparalleled fighting against thrice their number, in the war between the States, should have tolerated the impossible burden laid upon them.

With 120,000 voters, many of them former slaves, and the mass not only ignorant, but incapable short of many generations, of the intelligent and unbiased and incorruptible use of suffrage, there has been a condition of unstable equilibrium, to borrow a term from physics.

Every election becomes a crisis, what ever may be the point of difference as to policies in any respect, the white man has been obliged to sink all things to prevent the greatest possible calamity to his State, his race, his best interests, his very home and sacred shine of life itself.

The results of domination by negro votes are always the same, they may be read in the bloody tale of San Domingo, in the rapine, bloodshed and ruin that overspread Louisiana for ten years, the wholesale plunder of South Carolina, the degradation that fell upon North Carolina, when her judiciary was exhausted, her educational fund absorbed her governmental expenses immensely increased, and the effort made to render her forever a “hewer of wood and a drawer of water” to the holders of a vast volume of fictitious debts piled mountains high.

Fortunately a supreme effort, and the relegation of all issues to the rear brought safety to the white civilization, destroyed the fabric of corruption, before time and power had cemented it into the monument of our financial slavery.

Almost a generation passed, when a body of citizens, eager to advance certain theories of reform, and forgetful of the invariable results of counting the vote controlled in the interest of the negro, in the delusive belief that the negro would be content to vote and shout, and seek no power or profit for himself, were shocked to see in a brief time over one thousand negro officeholders in Eastern North Carolina alone.

But the worse thing they saw was, what might have been foretold from the nature of things, that men who sought the votes of negroes as such, not being able to appeal to higher and noble principles for action, must needs given by pelf and prejudice, by the surrender of trusts and responsibilities to ignorance and brutality, and the result was swift degeneracy in the various institutions and legislation.

Down the inclined plane to chaos in society, we were swiftly drifting, until by a might convulsion in 1898, the people reasserted their dominion in the Old North State.

It will be acknowledged by all that the most extraordinary efforts were made to redeem the land to the control of the white man, whose fathers had made it the birth-place of constitutional freedom in America, and they were successful.

But why should North Carolina undergo this extremity of peril every two years? Why should many of her, counties, like the long suffering people of Craven, Edgecombe, Pitt and various others, where a great mass of negro votes are found, be menaced with the return of () conditions as prevailed in New

Bern, Wilmington, Greenville and other towns of our fair State, that were almost uninhabitable by decent and self-respecting white people?

With a patience that is wonderful, in common with other States of the South, we have for a generation struggled on, bearing this weight of the black vote, and seen it persistently thrown against all our best interests. Blind, unreasoning, moved by leaders who drove the mass like sheep, and rejecting the counsel of the best of their own race, because it did not gratify passion or promise office. This evil blights this aggression of power without knowledge yet remains in our midst, and so long as it exists, nothing, however valued or sacred in our public policy and established customs, can be said to be permanently safe.

We have tried to leaven this great mass. Forced into our popular vote by practical coercion, by combined fraud and military power, we have given privileges of every kind to the negro, and have even paid twenty times his taxation for education, and yet bestowed it upon him per capita with our own children.

Nothing remains to ensure the permanency of good government, but to restore the keeping of the suffrage to the guardianship of the superior race, by the passage of the amendment proposed by the General Assembly.

Other States, where the negro population was still greater and the urgency manifest, have already taken the step.

The spectacle of the havoc made by blind power, drunken with passion and greed, has even taught the statesman of the North to be slow in granting citizenship and suffrage to the masses in Cuba, Porto Rico, Hawaii and the Philippine Islands, notwithstanding a degree of civilization among these races that the negro alone has never shown in the history of mankind.

Let us distinguish between the uneducated and the ignorant. About one-fifth in 1890 of the white population was classed, technically, among the illiterate. But such has been the improvement of the schools and continually increasing interest in education, that the next census will doubtless show a marked decrease.

But the white-man, whether he have book knowledge or not, is a fit and proper holder of the right to vote, because he has the inherited qualities of his ancestry, a personality of his own, and a training by his social life among his fellows, in his church, at the courts, in all places of public resort. He is as patriotic and devoted to the interests of his State as he who has wealth or learning.

With his strong right arm he takes care of his household and is as truly independent and self-reliant, and conscientious as any man who walks the earth. In his hands the ballot is safe, and he casts it for the protection of the Anglo-Saxon civilization.

There is no need to split hairs in regard to technicalities in this discussion. The best legal talent in our State, and in the Federal Senate has pronounced the passage of the amendment as entirely compatible with the obligations of North Carolina under the Constitution of the United States. In the face of this assertions to the contrary by stump-speakers are ridiculous. Any serious challenge of its constitutionality is a matter for the courts. It does not concern us, who have only to perform our duty at the polls.

Disappointed managers of the negro vote may make a desperate effort to clutch at the straw of Federal interference, but the conservative action of the Supreme Court of United States on such question forbids the belief that the tribunal of last resort will vary from its decisions in favor of restrictions guarding the purity of suffrage in other States.

I might enlarge, not only upon the dangers we shall forever escape upon the passage of the amendment, but also upon its inspiring and uplifting effect as a positive force for our future welfare.

There is no doubt that with the relief from the incubus that has been upon us, either directly, or always looming in the political horizon, that immigration will increase, manufacturing multiply, trade develop as never before under legislation devoted to the promotion of the great economical interests. But the farmer will perhaps feel the benefit most of all. The colored hands that have been led off to the caucus, the cross-road saloon and the conventions, to waste their time in shouting over issues as unintelligible to them as foreign tongues, will be at work in the fields, making happy homes for themselves, building prosperity for all the interests that rest upon agriculture.

Moreover, with increasing means, and the requirement that by 1908 youths reaching twenty-one years of age must be able to read and write, the whole school system of the State will receive such attention, and stimulation as never before.

Steadily increasing valuation of property will enable liberal appropriations for public education to be made, without adding to the taxation, or burdening any taxpayer. Indeed, with the decrease of idleness and dissipation caused by steady habits of industry undisturbed by political frenzy, crime, especially in the

colored race, will naturally diminish, and its heavy tribute direct and indirect, upon the honest and well-doing, will grow less as the conditions improve.

These are not dreams or vain wishes; they are logical results of good government, and must follow the great initial movement. For the sake then, of the permanent welfare of the State, it behooves every white man, with whom the general good is more than temporary partisan advantage, whatever his political views hitherto, to cast his vote and his whole influence for the amendment.

Indulge me with one more reflection. As an illustration of the great peril of great masses moved by unreasoning prejudice, see what the negro vote of Kentucky, controlled by adroit schemers, has done to tear up the bulwarks of society, set law at defiance, plunge a great State into risk of civil war, and it is believed sought to compass a political end by an assassination that recalls the dark ages.

Stand up every white man to duty in this hour! The day will come when its bitterest opponent will have reason to be thankful that the true men of North Carolina by the passage of the amendment, insuring intelligent suffrage, laid the corner-stone of perpetual progress and liberty.

Finally, if asked why the Democratic party of North Carolina has prepared this amendment, and good men in all parties will vote for it upon its merits, I will offer these conclusions, every one of which can be proven, to the satisfaction of any candid mind.

1. Because it removes a great peril, by denying any longer the possible contest of the superior race by the inferior, wielded as a compact mean for selfish ends, by those who surrender patriotism for gain or partisan victory.
2. It disfranchises no white man who now votes. Any fear of its being manipulated to that end by hostile courts can be dissipated, if judged needful, at the coming session of the General Assembly.
3. It removes in future political diversions, the bitter element of social antagonism, and contributes to the settlement of disputed economical questions upon their merits.
4. By destroying the possibility to negro domination, it renders property more secure, institutions more stable; encourages enterprises, invites immigration and fosters manufacturers.
5. It brings about homogeneous legislative bodies, without the anomaly of distasteful and impossible relations between legislators and officers of the State.
6. It secures general and similar county government without danger to taxpayers.
7. It stimulates education, and promises a great advance in the systems of the schools.
8. It is a powerful safeguard of the State treasury, and must tend to the greater strengthening of the public credit.
9. It removes temptation from the laboring element of the colored race, and renders industrial operations more steady, reliable, and serviceable; especially would this be true of critical seasons in farming operations.
10. It brings peace to the people, especially where the exactions of petty negro officials have harassed and annoyed communities with white minorities; insures tranquillity for trade, decreased idleness, intrigue, corruption and drunkenness, and therefore diminishes crime and the losses and evils it involves, and so it advances the public welfare in a high degree.

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