

**"THE NEGRO PROBLEM": AS SEEN  
AND DISCUSSED BY SOUTHERN  
WHITE MEN IN CONFERENCE, AT  
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA; WITH  
CRITICISMS BY THE NORTHERN PRESS**

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**GEO. ALLEN MEBANE**

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# "THE NEGRO PROBLEM"

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SOUTHERN WHITE MEN

IN CONFERENCE, AT MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA;

*WITH CRITICISMS BY  
THE NORTHERN PRESS.*



PREPARED AND COMPILED FOR THE NATIONAL AFRO-AMERICAN  
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## “THE NEGRO PROBLEM.”

On the 8th of March, 1900, the Rev. Edgar Gardner Murphy of Montgomery, Ala., by invitation of several civic organizations, delivered a masterful and, from several viewpoints, wonderful oration, at Philadelphia, Pa., taking for his subject: “The White Man and the Negro in the South.”

In his letter of acceptance he gave notice that he would “deal with the approaching Conference on Race Problems, to be held at Montgomery.”

He was obviously the advance agent of the conference and was sent to prepare the Northern mind for the reception of the very extraordinary policy to be advocated by its members. It may be said that he shaped the course of the Conference. The circuitous route, the pleasing generalities, the self-assumed responsibility for declarations made, the multitudinous phases and the inimitable divisions and subdivisions under which he discussed his subject, with distinctions without differences, stamped him as an artist of no mean order, and ought to entitle him to an enviable page in the history of human events.

No general ever maneuvered an army more adroitly or with such consummate skill as he did his subject. He went to beard the lion in his den. He knew every foot of territory; that the ground on which he was to deliver his speech was dedicated to liberty more than a century ago in every sense applicable to the term; that the fire of universal freedom which kindled in the hearts of William Penn and his colony, the force which impelled Adams to face a hostile Congress and bade defiance to its statute of expulsion, was still alive though smouldering.

But his strategic and countermoves against the once unconquerable spirit of freedom and impregnable walls of the Quaker City would have done credit to a Napoleon, Wellington, Washington, or Grant. If he failed to convince and convict it was not his fault, for surely, no human ingenuity could have contrived a more thorough defense of a “lost cause” or a discreditable purpose.

The political changes, revolutions and evolutions within the Republic during the last forty years have been remarkable in many respects. The Government has relieved itself of the curse that impeded its progress and abridged its greatness. A nation has been emancipated, enfranchised and added to the body poli-

tic, and Christianity in all the world rejoices at the happy consummation. It rejoices in the effacement of the "blot on the escutcheon," though dyed in the blood of a million souls and rinsed in the tears of countless widows and orphans. Civilization rejoices because of the removal of the chains of slavery which fettered the feet of its progress. The mind of man has leaped, as it were, heavenward in science with a rapidity unparalleled in the annals of ancient or modern history, and the world has gone forward with a stride unequalled by the first half century of the Christian era.

The new man, the slave of yesterday, is inducted into the political and social system, cast in the arena of manhood where he constitutes a new element and becomes a competitor for all of its emoluments. He is put upon trial to test his ability to be counted worthy of freedom, worthy of the elective franchise; and after thirty-five years of struggling against almost innumerable odds, under conditions but little removed from slavery itself, he asks judgment; not of those whose prejudice has endeavored to forestall, to frustrate his every forward movement, but rather of those who have lent a "helping hand" that he might demonstrate the truth of the "fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man."

That the negro of the South has met and even surpassed the most sanguine expectations of his most ardent friends and supporters, all must admit. As evidence of this fact, he points with pride and offers as testimony in the high court of reason the following achievements:

They have reduced the illiteracy of the race 45 per cent.\*

They have written and published nearly 400 books.

They have 250 newspapers, two of which are dailies.

They have now in practice 2,000 lawyers and 1,500 doctors.

They have accumulated more than \$12,000,000 worth of school property and nearly \$40,000,000 worth of church property.

They own 137,000 farms and homes valued at nearly \$750,000,000, and personal property valued at nearly \$170,000,000.\*

The valuation of the real and personal property, in the Southern States, under universal freedom and the elective franchise, was, in 1890, \$13,119,480,368, against \$6,787,428,436 in 1860, and it must be taken into consideration that in 1860 more than four million slaves were rated in the estimate.

\* *New York World*.

They have raised nearly \$11,000,000 for their education.\*

Their property per capita is estimated at about \$75.00.

They are successfully operating several banks and commercial enterprises, among the latter one cotton mill and one silk mill.

They have 32,000 teachers in the schools of the country.

They have built, by the aid of Northern friends, 19,800 churches with a seating capacity of six millions; and support 7 colleges, 17 academies, 50 high schools, 5 law schools, 5 medical schools, and 25 theological seminaries. They own 600,000 acres of land in the South alone.

The cotton product, mainly by their labor, has increased from 4,669,770 bales in 1860 to 11,235,000 in 1899.

Notwithstanding these evidences of progress, it is proclaimed to the world by the pessimist that the emancipation, the enfranchisement and the education of the negro are all failures.

#### THE MONTGOMERY CONFERENCE.

Montgomery occupies a most unique place in the history of the Republic.

It was chosen as the first Capital of the Southern Confederacy.

It was there that the Confederate Congress met and devised plans to maintain the dissolution of the Union and to perpetuate slavery.

And destiny seems to have selected Montgomery in which to assemble the unreconciled, to revive and resuscitate the "lost cause." Unfortunate Montgomery!

Singularly enough, of the original members of that Congress, only two survive.

Of these two, Dr. J. L. M. Curry has adopted the faith of the new and progressive era. With him the "lost cause" is lost forever, because fate has so decreed.

With the view of obtaining complete control of the much mooted "Negro Problem," a conference of Southern men was called and held at Montgomery, Ala., on May 8, 9, and 10, 1900, for the purpose of devising ways and means for the solution of the vexed problem. It was beyond question an able body of men, composed principally of ex-Confederate Generals, Colonels and Congressmen. Apprehensive of the final outcome, both Dr. Frisell of Hampton and Prof. Booker T. Washington issued in advance letters appealing to the public to suspend judgment. Judgment with no small degree of suspicion was suspended, but hung by a tiny thread.



It was tacitly understood that Northern negro-sympathizers were to be excluded unless specially invited, and none were invited. It does not seem to have occurred to the conferees that the so-called "Southern or Negro Problem" was and is a misnomer, and that their position in demanding the exclusive right to deal with it was both false and arrogant.

As well concede to them the absolute right of readjusting the issues which caused the rebellion.

It is a national problem! It was brought into being by the nation and can only be solved by a dispassionate and impartial hearing by the whole people. Until thus solved, no conference or sectional effort of whatsoever nature can possibly be of material interest to the two races.

In the proper solution of the great national problem, then, by the whole people, depends the safety of the fundamental laws of the government upon which is based the elective franchise and all else worth possessing by the citizen.

That no real good, either to the South, the negro, or the country at large, can accrue from that or any assemblage of like character hereafter to be held, was clearly demonstrated by a majority of the propositions advanced and by the tenor of the debate.

The prevailing sentiment seems to have been: How best to disfranchise, to deprive the negro of every habilitment of citizenship, and then reduce him to the mere thing, from which he was elevated by the late amendments to the Federal Constitution; and not, as the nation had a right to expect, How best to fit him for the proper discharge of the responsible duties which citizenship involves.

All thoughtful men must know that the course proposed and pursued by the conference cannot be of long duration, and that "the longer oppression and repression last, the more unmitigating and exacting will be the demands of justice."

The men who ever stood by the South and made it what it is; the men who have been and are still most intimately identified with its prosperity, deserve to be encouraged to go forward, and not shoved back, elevated and not degraded, for,

"Like birds, for others they have built the downy nest,  
Like sheep, for others they have worn the fleecy vest,  
Like bees, for others they have gathered honeyed food,  
Like patient oxen, worn the yoke for others' good."

To-day the South would be poor without them. She would not, she dare not exchange them for the striking dynamiters of the North, East and West, composed of the lowest class of foreign countries, many of whom are fugitives from justice.

The negro's greatest crime against the South and himself is that he has served it long and faithfully as a slave.

And he has written his past injuries, as it were, on the sands of the seashore. So far as he is concerned they have long since been effaced. He entertains no malice and has not been resentful.

He has withheld the bludgeon and the torch when these would have been his most powerful weapons of defence against oppression and wrong.

The persistent efforts to eliminate the negro from participation in the government, as voiced by the Montgomery Conference, have ever been the great hindrances to the speedy and proper adjustment of all questions pertaining to the so-called problem.

That such thoughts were suggested, such efforts were made, thirty years after the abolition of slavery, are in themselves sufficient to condemn the object of the Conference, and to make all liberty-loving Americans despair of benefit from its future gatherings.

But the contest against negro suffrage, once thought to have been settled for all time, is on, and is being waged with unceasing and increasing acrimony and bitterness. And thus, the country (and not the South), is again confronted with the question: Shall the negro be recognized as a man and a citizen, or be again forced into vassalage?

Will the civilization of the age halt and await the answer, or with suppressed indignation and gloomy forebodings sweep down the avenue of futurity, chained to the body of this death?

The conditions leading up to and making the question debatable, strongly suggest the possibility of a renewal of the battle in defense of manhood rights, so ably fought to a supposed finish by the great reformers—Beecher, Brown, Smith, Garrison, Lundy, Sumner, Mrs. Stowe, Stevens, Phillips, Wilson, Adams, Tappan, Whittier, Longfellow, Dr. Garrett, Colfax, Hamlin, Seward, Grimke, Mott, Coats, Benj. F. Purvis, Williamson, Davis (E. M.), Chase, Cameron, Bates, Morton, Wheeler, Arthur, Crandall, Theodore Cuyler, Lovejoy, Douglass, Malone, Lincoln,

Dodge and the host of Christian people who devoted their lives to the cause of human freedom.

To change this government from a slave oligarchy to a true democracy cost a million of lives, billions of dollars, and untold suffering.

The South was totally bankrupt. She is regaining her wonted strength and cannot afford to take a single step backward. She cannot, in justice to herself, even attempt to curtail the citizen rights of her best laborers, much less to disfranchise them. The most humble citizen of the Republic is entitled to the benefits of citizenship.

If the country would submit to the disfranchisement of the negro, it must abolish its present system of government. It is a system of equal rights, of universal suffrage, and cannot be maintained under the system of disfranchisement proposed and being forced throughout the South.

Disfranchise and goad the negro to desperation and it may take a standing army of men and bloodhounds to keep him repressed; that will cost more than "white supremacy" will be worth. Strip him of every legal right and there will be nothing for him to live. He will not fear death.

He will know that those who would, will be powerless to guarantee justice in the courts to the man whose word will be worth nothing.

And will he not take refuge in the swamps, where it is possible that he will be both dreaded and feared? Educate him? That is inimical to slavery.

Stamp, if you will, any man with the badge of inferiority, helplessness and ignominy, and you will fail to educate him.

His soul cannot expand, as all well know, under the ban of disfranchisement. "There is nothing between the citizen and slavery but the ballot-box, and the ballot is his proudest legacy," strongest weapon, only shield.

"Southern sentiment," says Dr. Murphy, "will not approve the disfranchisement of the illiterate Confederate soldier. In any civilization, there is a deep and rightful regard for the man who has fought in the armies of the State." A bright and happy thought ingeniously expressed. It discloses the real purpose of the proposed conference. The word "*State*" is used as an evasive term and is not meant to apply to nor include country or republic,