

**CONDITIONS  
AFFECTING THE  
SUFFRAGE IN COLONIES**

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Conditions Affecting the Suffrage in Colonies by Henry Reed Burch

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THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Pennsylvania  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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HENRY REED BURCH

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University of Pennsylvania

## I.

### ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AFFECTING THE SUFFRAGE IN COLONIES.

The question of suffrage occupies a significant position in the general field of colonial government. While usually considered as a single problem, it is in reality made up of several important questions. In the first place, should suffrage qualifications be determined by the colony or by the mother country? On this point there is comparatively little difference of opinion. Since the home government is ultimately held responsible for the progress and development of the colony, it is only natural that the mother country should fix the suffrage qualifications in such a way as to subserve these ends and to prevent dangerous political disturbance. It is, therefore, only in the more advanced and highly-developed colonies, where political as well as economic progress has been attained, that the determination of these qualifications is to be safely entrusted to the colonial government. While Canada, for instance, is permitted to define her own suffrage qualifications, in the great body of English colonies these are determined by the imperial legislature. In the next place, it may be asked, are there certain conditions which require particular suffrage qualifications? Do tropical conditions call for a different arrangement of the suffrage than the temperate climates? Under what circumstances is a property or an educational qualification respectively required, and how far do racial characteristics enter into the determination of the franchise? While these questions cannot be answered satisfactorily by the formulation of general rules, it is, nevertheless, of interest to examine the various ways in which a solution has been attempted, as well as the degree of success obtained.

It will be generally agreed that where the resources of the

colony are undeveloped and civilization has not advanced to any considerable extent, the suffrage qualifications should be so arranged as to make it possible for only a small percentage of the population to vote. And, conversely, high economic and social development will lead to the inference of wide participation in the franchise. The basis of self-government being at hand, the natural product can be realized.

In fact, the real point at issue in all the questions propounded above is as to how far the system of government and the extent of the franchise necessarily involved in it are dependent upon economic conditions and upon racial characteristics. Or, to state the problem in still broader terms, how far are political questions dependent upon environment and upon heredity? These two forces constantly interact upon one another—now one exerting the predominant influence and now the other. The state of industry, with its natural physical basis in such elementary conditions as soil, climate, surface and minerals, may have developed so far as to call forth latent powers in the population scarcely expected. With the development of commerce there comes an influx of democratic ideas due to the intermingling of various types of men through business interests.

Liberal ideas are bound to spread under these circumstances and political development is affected by the general democratic influences. This is but one instance, out of many, that might be chosen to illustrate the point. The nature of the suffrage qualifications must be largely modified by the environment, both on its industrial and physical side.

On the other hand, these environmental factors are slow in operating and sometimes exert little effect for long periods of time. Indeed, in some cases their influence may be hardly noticeable and the hereditary forces may long be uppermost in the struggle between the two. The attitude of mind and habits of thought developed by subjection to influences extended over long periods of time are extremely difficult to eradicate. They find expression in racial characteristics



and are everywhere recognized as vitally affecting political government.

The relation of these different factors in the problem of suffrage is well brought out in English experience in colonial government. Before analyzing the influences affecting the suffrage qualifications in the new dependencies of the United States, it may be well to examine the conditions existing in some of the more important English colonies.

In Australia, the colonies of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland possess practically universal suffrage—there being neither a property nor an educational qualification for the election of members of the legislative assembly. The physical and social conditions which form the basis of this system are easily discernible. The climate is such as to permit the existence and survival of an efficient type of man, there is a well-organized system of industry, production has advanced to a point where general prosperity prevails and the resources of the colonies are well utilized. Sufficient means of communication have been established to disseminate common political ideas, to make possible common standards and general interests and to provide bonds for uniting the different parts of the country into a homogeneous whole. The character of the population denotes a considerable degree of intelligence and capacity for self-government, and the original inhabitants make up a very small percentage of the total population. With British subjects constituting almost the entire population, and with the consequent prevalence of English ideas and habits of thought representing a long and continuous development of civil and political liberty, it is possible to establish successfully a broad and liberal suffrage. Now if we contrast Australia with Jamaica, we observe a problem of a totally different character, a problem which has been solved by the establishment of a property qualification in order to exclude the incapable element from political activity. On account of social and physical conditions, the suffrage in a tropical colony frequently re-

quires a different regulation from that in a more temperate dependency. The soil and climate affect the character of industry and type of man to be dealt with, and this in turn reacts upon the political capacity of the individual. Jamaica's decline in fortune is now generally conceded to have been caused by lack of cheap, efficient labor, and the failure of the cane sugar industry. These have caused economic distress and consequent political discontent. In addition, the negro forms the great bulk of the population—the whites constituting only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent of the total number of the inhabitants. England has therefore employed the property qualification to prevent the ultra-radical classes from securing political control. With the increasing decadence of economic conditions, even this safeguard has proved insufficient, and the powers of the elected legislators have been counteracted by the appointed members of the council.

In Cape Colony, also, the conditions are widely different, in some respects, from those prevailing in Australia and somewhat resemble, so far as the constituent elements of the population are concerned, the conditions existing in Jamaica. There is a fair degree of prosperity and the climate is more suited to a high type of labor than in Jamaica. The products are largely agricultural and pastoral, but in addition there is considerable mining and some slight attempt at manufacturing. Roads and railways have also been opened and materially aid the growth of industry. But the character of the population is altogether different from that of the Australian colonies. A glance at New South Wales, the foremost colony of Australia, will serve to illustrate this. In that colony, out of a population of over one million and a quarter, only seven thousand are aborigines and half-castes. But in Cape Colony three-fourths of the population are negroes or half-breeds, possessing little or no education. While about two-thirds of the European population are able to read and write, only 7 per cent of the colored races are so qualified. Under these conditions, therefore, a wide exten-

sion of the franchise would be incompatible with efficient government. The property qualification was consequently prescribed, and no one allowed to be newly-registered as a voter who could not sign his name and write his address and occupation. England thus employed here both the property and educational qualifications to secure an intelligent and capable electorate.

Although our political ideals have been those of equality and political liberty, we have, nevertheless, consciously or unconsciously, followed the example set by Great Britain in the determination of suffrage qualifications for colonial dependencies. This is not to be attributed to imitation, but to the necessities of the case. However tenaciously a nation may cling to the ideal of political equality, such an ideal can only be realized in localities where the foundations of equality exist. Recognizing the force of this, the United States has employed the educational and property qualifications in fixing the conditions necessary for the enjoyment of the franchise in colonial possessions. As the educational test is exclusively employed in Hawaii, it will be discussed first.

Hawaii is the most favorably situated of the lands recently acquired by the United States. Aside from the fact that the islands had become extensively Americanized before their annexation, their physical environment is favorable to economic advance and political growth to a great degree unusual in a tropical country. Although situated in the tropics, the temperature is so modified by trade winds and ocean currents as to produce a climate distinctly different from other regions in the same latitude. The average temperature, 75 degrees, is thus probably reduced ten degrees below the normal temperature of countries similarly situated. Although the islands are mountainous and volcanic in origin, the soil is highly fertile and productive—the lava decomposing into rich red soils particularly adapted to the cultivation of sugar. This sound agricultural basis is of the first importance to Hawaii, as the comparative lack of coal and