

**THE NEGRO AND THE
INTELLIGENCE AND
PROPERTY FRANCHISE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649192762

The Negro and the intelligence and property franchise by Wm. A. MacCorkle

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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WM. A. MACCORKLE

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PROPERTY FRANCHISE**

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Property Franchise.

ADDRESS OF
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WM. A. MACCORKLE,

Late Governor of West Virginia,

BEFORE THE SOUTHERN CONFERENCE
ON RACE PROBLEMS,

Montgomery, Alabama, May 9, 1900.

CINCINNATI:
THE ROBERT CLARKE COMPANY, PRINTERS.
1900.

ADDRESS.

MR. CHAIRMAN, MEMBERS OF THE CONFERENCE, LADIES
AND GENTLEMEN :

By the overkind appreciation of the Chairman of the Committee, I am asked to conclude the debate on this great question, which has within it such potentialities for good or evil to this land, resting under the splendor of the May-day sunshine, a land from whose kingly plenitude of moral and material worth man can reap more abundantly and more easily than at any time since, by the Divine command, fruition was crowned with the toil of the hands.

Coming from the mountains of West Virginia, within the sound of the flow of the Beautiful River, yet I am no stranger to Alabama or to her traditions and her glory ; and when, inclining her proud head to the inscrutable commands of the Great Ruler of governments and armies, she pressed to her pure lips in the day of her agony and sorrow the cup filled with the bitter waters of Mara, I and mine, from the same chalice of suffering, drank the consuming draught of humiliation and distress.

This fair city, pulsating with busy life, hallowed with memories of the past, laden to-day with the sweet luxuriance and redolency of springtime flowers typical of that resurrection which will not wither with the passing of their fragrance, where amidst your foliage-embowered streets I seem to hear the thunderous tread of a mighty spirit, is to me the Mecca of a pilgrimage which I approach with bared head and

unsandaled feet. Holding views as to this great question under discussion differing somewhat from those of the distinguished and honored sons of the South who have preceded me, yet I yield to them nothing, not a hand's breath, in love for the South, reverence for her glorious past, and glowing hope for the sure consummation of her splendid destiny.

Seeing first the light of day and passing the springtime of life in the town where sleep, under the soft shadows of our mountains, Lee and Jackson, words untrue to the South uttered on this classic scene would blister the tongue of him who gave them birth. Every tradition of my people, their joys, their sorrows and their loves, have their resting-place on the spotless and consecrated bosom of old Virginia, and my every hope and ambition for the future is intertwined in the welfare and good of the South. The limpid sunlight of the South and the azure of her sky hold me in a spell which appeals to my soul with a witchery far more potent than happier material conditions amidst other associations and surrounded by other peoples. For her sake, the old home, fragrant with precious and unspeakable memories of the smile around the hearth and rich with the sunlight of the gentle voices in the wide halls in other and happier days, echoes to the footsteps of the alien master; and our fields, under the divine ordering of Him who, with impartial hand, distills the dew and scatters the sunshine, yield their treasures of rich grain to the hand of the stranger. For her sake, without repining, I have sat at the widow's board, where the barrel of meal wasted and the cruse of oil failed; and whilst differing on this question with possibly a majority of the audience before me, yet in the sweet words of affection, old as the love which crowned with glory of

surpassing light the tall pines on the lonely mountains of Moab and gladdened the ripening grain in the harvest-fields of Judea, "Entreat me not to leave thee or return from following after thee, for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge."

Appreciating the importance of this great question to our country, and well recognizing my poverty of experience and ability, I approach the discussion with that diffidence born of a desire that no spirit except the love of my country shall guide my statements and direct my thoughts. On the threshold I pray to the good God of our people that we may reason with each other in a spirit of calmness which will lead us to that high plane where we can put away all feelings less holy than the love of country, and from the sublime heights of true patriotism look down on every unworthy ambition.

The settlement of the Race Question, in the present acute condition of the public mind, will take its true direction within the next few years; and the South deserves to have the true expression and the honest action of her sons, unclouded and unbiased by personal ambition or untrammelled by partisan command. Never before did modern civilization have such deep and abiding interest in the ultimate action of a portion of its elements as it has now in the action of the people of the South. Here, I pray and believe, will be witnessed the sublimest consummation of true statesmanship and realization of popular government by a people, who, though prejudiced by local conditions, hampered by another and alien race, and vexed by social and economic conditions such as never before beset a people, yet rising above the complications of the hour, are honestly, impartially, without prejudice and with full justice, solving this ques-

tion to the glory of the whole people. Surely, it will take all of our strength to close rightly the only question which has kept apart the people of this mighty Republic and which has given anxious thought to those who look towards our land for the blessed realization of a government by the people. Only in a spirit of compromise, as exemplified by the Fathers, who gave up cherished convictions that all might meet on a plan on which a government could be inaugurated and successfully conducted, can we to-day succeed. "And thus the Constitution which we now present, is the result of a spirit of amity and of that mutual deference and concession which the peculiarity of our political situation rendered indispensable." The obedience which we owe the glorious traditions of our past and the commanding position of the South in this marvelous and splendid cycle of material development, demands that sobriety of action, tolerance of spirit and charity of opinion which has ever characterized a free people in the solving of the great questions which meet every people designed by Providence for a permanent place among the nations. Says Mr. Hume :

"There are enough of zealots on both sides who kindle up the passions of their partisans, and, under the pretense of public good, pursue the interest and ends of their particular faction. For my part, I shall always be more fond of promoting moderation than zeal; though perhaps the surest way of producing moderation in every party is to increase our zeal for the public. Let us therefore try, if it be possible, from the foregoing to draw a lesson of moderation with regard to the parties into which our country is at present divided; at the same time, that we allow not this moderation to abate the industry and passion with

which every individual is bound to pursue the good of his country."

In the solution of this great problem, surely we can rise above the heat of political discussion, and show to the world complete abnegation of previously formed opinion, and allow our spirits to be touched by that charity which comes alone from Him who, amidst the complexities of change and despair of our future, has always guided us in those ways best for His people.

I shall not attempt to discuss the minor and infinitely various details of this important question. I shall rather briefly, and in my humble way, found my argument upon the basic principles of our national existence, and upon some general principles, and not waste your time in assaulting the outworks of the citadel.

The settlement of this franchise question lies deep upon the very foundation-stones of the Republic, and only by laying bare to the people's view those mighty substructures can we here efficiently serve our country.

Every historic state is underlaid with a fundamental principle, from which it breathes its life and through which it has its civil existence. Each of our colonies had its peculiar idea of government; but after they were bound in one glorious, shining union of states, that great principle of civil philosophy, the right of the people to govern through its own suffrage, shone as the glory of heaven. The State became the sovereign through the power of its own people, and the preservation of its liberty was predicated upon the people.

Therefore, I assert that the constitutional exercise of the right of franchise is the vital and underlying principle of the life of this free people, and that the

infracton of this principle is surely attended with ultimate ruin to our system of republican government. "In democracy, there can be no exercise of sovereignty but by the suffrage of the people which are their will."

Sir, this is fundamental, and, in this splendid presence, it but needs expression to receive assent. Stripped of every covering, it is but the annunciation of the right of the people to choose their servants, indicate their policy and live under the laws they themselves have created. When you depart from this principle, you forsake the underlying principle of national government; and when this is done, surely you drop out of the nations which exercise an abiding power upon civilization.

To enable our country to consummate its destiny, this vital principle, at the risk of weariness of expression, must be kept close to the hearts of the people. It is the golden thread, which at every stage of our national existence, through storm and battle and change, has been held by the patriots to inhere into the very texture of national life. When this principle is abandoned or impaired,

"Our own
Like free states foregone, is but a bright leaf torn
From Time's dark forest, and on the wide gust thrown
To float awhile, by varying eddies borne;
And sink at last forever!"

Says Montesquieu: "It is plain, then, that if the government, whether state or federal, controls or disposes of suffrage, or allows it to be disposed of, without warrant in the constitution, it strikes at the very vitals of the republic from which it derives its entire existence and power."