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*undated but early*

### The Case for the Negro

The position of the Negro in regard to the right of suffrage is clear and simple. He is perfectly willing to be subjected to any such reasonable tests of efficiency, intelligence and morality as are applied to other citizens of the Republic. And this, too, in spite of the fact that his history in this land furnishes the basis of a strong plea for special consideration in his case. Nevertheless he asks for no special consideration for himself - nor for others. Simple, plain, even-handed Justice is all he demands.

We have full sympathy with many of the difficulties of the South today; its vast number of ignorant voters, black and white, are no light burden. Even if the South had no Negro problem, its own social problems would demand patience and statesmanship. And certainly if the American Negroes were themselves a separate nation their leading classes would have a hard problem in dealing with their own ignorant and poverty stricken masses. The Negroes have never had the political training which the nation owes them. There is a widespread fiction that some such training was offered them after the war, but that they wilfully followed carpet-baggers and scalawags instead. This is untrue. Not one respectable white man in a thousand offered to lead the Negroes anywhere but back to slavery. It was a case of carpet-baggers or nothing for those who aspired to free citizenship. Moreover it is hardly fair to add to the sins of the Carpet-baggers that of poisoning the minds of the Negroes against their former owners. The whites either actively or passively attended to that themselves in the deeds of the Ku-Klux, the lynching and lawlessness, which have so firmly convinced the many Negroes that the white South does not desire the black man's best good. Probably some such bitter feelings were inevitable under the

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circumstances, and yet to this day, among the fairer minded southern whites, there is a certain lack of candor in dealing with the race problem which is unfortunate. Examine for instance the temperate, and in many respects fair article in the Forum, entitled The Case for the South. There is in that article scarcely an intimation that there exists anywhere intelligent law-abiding Negroes capable of casting a safe ballot. Doubtless if categorically questioned Mr. Williams would acknowledge that there were such men. And yet his whole article tacitly assumes the opposite. He argues forcible and conclusively against the ignorant voter of the South and then hastens to ask for the disfranchisement of the Negro. One would think the logical conclusion would be the disfranchisement of ignorance, whether black or white, and the protection and encouragement of intelligence whether white or black.

The post-bellum generation of Negroes cannot help but notice continually such cases of disingenuous pleading. They know that southern men are perfectly aware of the rise in the South since the war of a class of industrious, property-holding Negroes who deserve the ballot. And yet in nearly all discussions this class is studiously egnored. In reality the whole question hinges here; Are the intelligent Negroes of the South to be deprived of the ballot and left to the mercy of the white, who themselves embrace no small proportion of ignorant and venal voters?

On the other hand the white can without douby charge a lack of candor in Negro apologists in not acknowledging the low social condition of the mass of Negroes and basing their claims on the saving remnant. The misrule of Reconstruction times still makes clear-minded treatment of the suffrage question difficult. The Negroes feel and have a right to feel that they have been wronged and misjudged. The white Southerner regards that carnival of extravagance

as a never-to-be-forgotten enormity. And yet whether white or black can we not candidly ask ourselves: Was this any fair test of Negro suffrage? Was it any fair test of the Negro's capacity? For my part it seems that every honest mind must here answer, No! We have had many examples of corrupt Negro politicians, and a few of whites. Mr. Williams mentions five Negro failures in North Carolina. He says nothing of a dozen or more examples of success and ability on the part of black men high in office today. The black Internal Revenue Collector of Atlanta, Georgia is acknowledged to be one of the most efficient officers in the treasury service, and has an uncle of Henry W. Grady serving under him. The Colored Collector of the Port of Savannah had the endorsement of nearly all the prominent business men of that city. There are hundreds of Negro post-office employees in southern cities and the few complaints that have been made are in nearly every case against their color not against their efficiency. It is perfectly fair to point out unsparingly cases of Negro failure, but is it also fair to be silent over known cases of success?

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There is still deeper question for the South to consider: What will be the effect on the white South if millions of its workingmen are suddenly deprived of the legal right to vote? Would this leave the Negro's destiny to be worked out by the best sentiment of the South? I know this is the prevailing opinion among many honest southerners but I think it is a grave mistake. Certainly it is flying directly in the face of every historical precedent. In any country, the deprivation of a despised class of a right to the voice in their own government means leaving them helpless before the aggressions of the worst enfranchised elements in that community. With an elective Judiciary, wide administrative activity, and growing correlation of industry and government, and added to this, deep race prejudice, it

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would be a miracle if the hands of the best southerners were left unfettered by the worst in their desire to treat Negroes justly. To be sure the bugbear of "Negro domination" would be removed, and that is something; but industrial competition would still remain, prejudice emboldened by success would increase, while the chief motive toward the instruction and guiding of the Negro would be gone. Looking the situation squarely in the face I am at a loss to understand how any clear thinker can see permanent advantage to the South in the sweeping disfranchisement of the working classes. Certainly to the Negro's best interests it is bound to be unfavorable. Can anyone expect under modern competitive industry that a class of workers could survive without the defense of a vote? Are Negroes, handicapped by the past and discriminated against in the present, to accomplish what German, French, and English workingmen could scarce do with law, order, and universal suffrage?

No! The Negro cannot and is not expected to. Stripped of all verbiage the demand for the disfranchisement of the Negro simply on the ground of race is a demand that the welfare of a wronged people be no longer considered an object of the Nation's solicitude. This is the cry that chills the dawn of the twentieth century of Christianity. "But" someone objects "there is no such demand. We demand only the disfranchisement of ignorance." Very well. Then answer me two questions that I may judge of your sincerity:

Do you propose to disfranchise ignorant white people?

Do you propose to leave the ballot in the hands of intelligent Negroes and protect them in its exercise?

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