

THE
UNIFICATION QUESTION.

*Address of Gen. G. T. Beauregard to the People
of Louisiana.*

FELLOW CITIZENS—I have been made the subject of ungracious and illiberal observation here and elsewhere because of my support of resolutions recommending a closer union of all the members of the permanent population of the State, to promote faithful administration and wise and provident legislation. The ends proposed are not only unobjectionable, but patriotic and praiseworthy.

The complaint is of the means. Those means consist in a candid and frank acknowledgment of constitutional and legal facts which none can deny, and the conforming of our conduct to those provisions of the existing Constitution of the State of Louisiana, which are as follows :

“ART. 13. All persons shall enjoy equal rights and privileges upon any conveyance of a public character: and all places of business or of public resort, or for which a license is required by either State, parish, or municipal authority, shall be deemed places of a public character, and shall be opened to the accommodation and patronage of all persons, without distinction or discrimination on account of color.”

“ART. 135. All children of this State, between the ages of six and twenty-one, shall be admitted to the public schools or other institutions of learning, sustained or established by the State, in common, without distinction of race, color, or previous condition.”

These articles have been enforced by legislation, which gives every party whose rights thereunder have been denied, “a right to recover any damages, exemplary as well as actual, and may sustain, before any court of competent jurisdiction.”

It cannot then be denied that all the citizens of the State have been placed upon terms of equality in their civil and political relations. No preference is given on account of complexion, capacity, employment, pursuits or the holding of property to any individual or class. The superiority that the possession of these may attain depends upon the voluntary recognition by persons differing in complexion and capacity, and of different employments and degrees of education. The suffrage of every man of lawful age is to be counted at every election as of the same value.

My proposition is, if possible, to unite these various conditions of men into a common effort to improve the condition of the State; to remove, if it can be done, all questions that are special to any of these conditions from the contest, and to fix the hearts of all upon higher and more important aims. The strife, hostility, distrust and estrangement that have followed from such questions have placed our State under the control of the depraved, dishonest, over reaching and corrupt. The reputation of the State has suffered, its credit blasted, its finances disordered, its honor stained, and public and private prosperity retarded under the influence of the strife and the use made of it by the artful and selfish adventurers, who have employed power to accomplish these disastrous results. In our distracted condition, after the general elections of last November, we appealed in vain to Congress for relief; the Administration has, moreover, thrown its powerful influence on the side of our corrupt, usurping State government, and we can evidently hope for no assistance from our sister States. We must therefore look only to ourselves for salvation, which can only be secured by making a firm alliance with all classes of our population to rid us of those vampires who are sucking the very life-blood of our people, whites and blacks.

It is manifest that nothing but the forbearance of the colored people prevents them from subjecting common carriers, and all keepers of places of public resort, to such losses and annoyances as would speedily compel the practical acknowledgment of their rights or the abandonment of business. A multiplicity of suits, the result of which (so far as our State courts are concerned) could not be doubtful, would soon exhaust the endurance of the most violent prejudice. Meanwhile during a series of years, the obstinate denial of these claims of our colored fellow-citizens by the whites has been the means of arraying whites and blacks, almost solidly, in bitter political hostility against each other.

It has driven the blacks into an unnatural coalition with horde of unscrupulous adventurers, who have thus secured political power of the commonwealth. How have they not reduced the State to what a sad condition have they not reduced the State. To what a sad condition have they not reduced the State. This is an oft told tale, which I, a son of Louisiana, holding

dearer than "the ruddy drops which visit this sad heart," have no disposition to repeat.

I may be mistaken in supposing that a frank and cordial concession of absolute and practical civil, as well as political equality between all citizens, without discrimination on account of race or color, as proposed in this movement, would remove the last barrier which opposes the political co-operation of good men, of whatever color, for the regeneration of the State; but I am earnest in my conviction that I am not mistaken.

Experience seems, at all events, to have demonstrated two propositions quite conclusively, viz: 1st, that without such co-operation the redemption of the State is impracticable; 2d, that such co-operation cannot be secured on any other terms.

Besides, I am profoundly convinced that no sound and lasting system of political philosophy can be constructed under existing facts in Louisiana, at least, which does not recognize such equality. Every such system must square itself so as to consist in all its expressions and implications with the fundamental fact of impartial suffrage. When we are asked *why* we refuse to admit colored people to the enjoyment of public privileges on a footing of equality with other citizens, it is not sufficient to say that in so doing we merely exercise a right for which we are not compelled to give a reason. There must be some reason or motive at the foundation of all human conduct. And if at the basis of this course of conduct participated in by the mass the white people of the State, there does lie a reason so powerful as to defy the provisions of the constitutions and laws and the decrees of courts, it certainly concerns the colored man to inquire whether, carried to its logical consequences, it does not threaten other rights, of which he already has the full enjoyment. Yet I would ask any one to state why a colored man should not participate in these public privileges, which would not be a better reason why he should not serve on a jury, why he should not hold responsible offices, nay, why he should not possess the right of suffrage itself!

We are bound to give this great experiment of Republican self-government, on the basis of impartial suffrage, a fair trial; and as long as we assume a position antagonistic in principle to his rights, and thereby drive the colored man into opposition to us, if harm results we must lay the blame upon ourselves, rather than on the system.

I am persuaded that the natural relation between the white and colored people is that of friendship. I am persuaded that their interests are identical; that their destinies, in this State where the two races are equally divided, are linked together; and that there is no prosperity for Louisiana which must not be the result of co-operation.



I am equally convinced that the evils anticipated by some from the practical enforcement of equal rights, are mostly imaginary, and that the relations of the races in the exercise of these rights will speedily adjust themselves to the satisfaction of all.

I take it that nothing but malice or stupidity could find anything either in the letter or spirit of the unification resolutions which contemplates any interference or dictation in the private social relations of the people. These lie entirely outside the domain of legislation and politics. It would not be denied that, in traveling, and at places of public resort, we often share these privileges in common with thieves, prostitutes, gamblers, and others who have worse sins to answer for than the accident of color; but no one ever supposed that we thereby assented to the social equality of these people with ourselves. I therefore say that participation in these public privileges involves no question of social equality. By the enjoyment in common of such privileges, neither whites nor blacks assert, or assent to, social equality, either with each other or even between individuals of the same race.

I have not proposed to myself any advantages from the resolutions referred to. I do not seek or desire office or emoluments. I have in view but the restoration of Louisiana to the place of honor from which she has fallen.

I surrender no principle, nor do I separate from any friends. I unite with those who, upon a candid consideration of the circumstances they do not control, have to extract from them the greatest amount of good that they allow of

If there be any who can propose other and better means, I shall not be backward in adopting them. But it is very clear to my mind that the strength of a State consists in the harmonious, cordial, contented union of all the good men of the community in honest efforts for the improvement and progress of the whole. It is equally clear that strife, discord, disunion and distracted efforts and pursuits will produce nothing but weakness and disappointment. The base, selfish, unscrupulous and mercenary always profit from confusion, disorder and the disintegration of society.

This is a full, candid, and to my mind, accurate view of the situation, and I shall regulate my conduct accordingly, so as to free ourselves from "carpet-bag" rule, and the improper interference of the Federal Government in our State affairs.

G. T. BEAUREGARD

NEW ORLEANS, July 1, 1873.

NOTE—By "carpet-baggers" I refer to those corrupt and unscrupulous individuals who come here only to occupy office and despoil our people

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