Our Relation to the Negro

For nearly two hundred years the colored race had been held in bondage, and when our Civil War closed it left nearly four millions of ignorant, homeless people free. For the last quarter of a century the question of slavery had been the one absorbing political question. During the war the President had proclaimed emancipation as a war measure and the negro was raised from a position where he was regarded merely as property to fill the place of a man. This was not done because the people of the North thought slavery to be a moral wrong, but for the purpose of weakening the spirit and curtailing the power of the states then in rebellion. It is true the people of the North thought slavery was inconsistent with our form of government. Yet they were scarcely willing to force the immediate emancipation of the slave. They desired a gradual abolition of slavery. The Southern people looked at the question from quite a different standpoint. They had been taught to believe that slavery was right — a divine institution.
They believed the negro of an inferior race incapable of providing for himself and that his condition of servitude was for his own benefit as well as for that of his master. They believed the feeling in the North so opposed to slavery was but an outgrowth of envy and jealousy, that the blow aimed at slavery was but a blow aimed at their own prosperity. They could not understand why the North should care whether slavery existed in the South or not. When the negro was declared free, when at a single stroke of Abraham Lincoln's pen the shackles fell from nearly four million slaves—there was another intricate problem placed before the people. What should be done with the negro? The people of the North said the negro was a Medallion and should be regarded as such before the law. He had fought for the government and should be allowed to participate in the government of the nation he had helped to preserve. For this reason and also as a means for political defense the negro was given the ballot. It was thought if he had the power of taking an active part in the government, that the Southern people would have to treat...
him well and legislate for the good of the colored race, in order to secure this vote. Indeed it seemed almost necessary if emancipation was intended to benefit the race that this should be done. There appeared to be no other road to the people the North, if they wanted impartial legislation for all. The constitution and laws passed by some of the Southern States before the Reconstruction showed this would not be the case. Those laws then negro if not in name, in reality to a slave. The people of the North hoped that if the negro was allowed a representation he could legislate for himself. That he could enact laws for his education and protection. But the Southern people were not so inclined to consider the question. They believed that the North cares nothing about the welfare of the negro. That the new power was given here only through malice. That it was intended only to insult and degrade them. When we remember the character of the Southern people, it is not at all astounding, for they were proud, haughty, brave—one might almost say chivalrous. Long accustomed to rule in domestic as well as political affairs and it was
Inmiscible to see all this suddenly changed. They had fought bravely for what they believed to be the right and were fairly defeated they had laid down their arms and returned to their places as American citizens. They to have their old slave codes they had always regarded as their inferior in every respect advanced to the same station as themselves, seduced to their own outrage. While this feeling they looked forward eagerly for the time when these wrongs could be avenged. When the negro could be deprived of his rights and the white again allowed to rule. They had threatened this from the first, not through any jealousy to the negro perhaps but because they thought they were the natural rulers. Now what has been the out-come of the disfranchisement of the negro? On account of the scarcity of educated and intelligent men, many of the ignorant and reckless were elected to office for which they were wholly unqualified. Consequently their state were badly governed. The legislature being filled with men who knew nothing about government, spent money recklessly and levied exorbitant taxes in order to pay the enormous sums which they speak. In a few years the govern-
measure of some of these States were almost bankrupt and the people affected. This was followed by what the South-
ern people call the redemption—the depriving the negro
of his vote—and his place in the government. This work
was done by the intelligent and educated class. Every
where through the South secret organizations were
formed whose object it was to carry out this work of
redemption. These masked raiders visited the negroes
by night and the crimes, outrages, and atrocities which
they committed are without parallel. One may have
some idea of the number of these when he remembers
the report of a committee appointed by Congress
to investigate the matter file twelve large volumes.
The stories, the documents, the testimony reported by
the committee make a strange exhibition of a free
government. The stories of slaves whipped, shot, hanged,
women mutilated, outraged, mutilated. Not even chil-
dren were exempt from their brutality. Evacuation, school,
house and church, burned, and property destroyed in
every conceivable way. People driven from their homes and
hiding in the woods and swamps. Well might the
have been called the "Univisible Empire". In some States
this organization amounted to as much as forty thou-
sand. Throughout the South it is said that this a-
mounted to more than the whole Confederate army.
Now what could not the well organized Body com-
pose of the most intelligent and determined people
do against the poor, helpless ignorant negro? Yet this
was not done with any feeling of personal hate agai-
against the negro or the carpet-baggers but an account
of the power which he wielded, the feeling which un-
derlay all this perfidy was from a pure motive. The
old feeling of pride, of an insulted dignity prompted
these actions. They believed they were but redeeming
themselves from a yoke of tyranny which had been
imposed on them at the close of the rebellion. Lost
came about in a short time that the negro or his
white leader in the South upheld his head and voted
his sentiments at the sacrifice of his life. The South
was at last redeemed from the hand of the oppressor.
Now what has been the fruit of this redemption? The
Southern people have always been very intolerant in
regard to opinions differing from their own. When Northern men
moved into the South as a good many did just after
the close of the war, bringing Northern ideas and customs
with them, they were immediately branded as a dan-
groso element. They were excluded from society and looked
down on with contempt by all the higher classes in the
South. So when they again got control of those States,
they thought it their duty to rid themselves of every vestige
of the Northern idea of government. They laughed at the
reconstruction act which had been passed in such
good faith. They saw in that good faith which the
people of the North placed in these laws while they
had invested their source of political power, these
laws in themselves were but a shell. They had in-
vested the negro with all the rights of citizenship and
yet they refused to protect him in exercising those
rights. The people had seen him shot, slabbed, driven
from home and kept away from the ballot-box and
said and did nothing. They looked on equably and
saw that it would come out all right in the end. The
people of the South were not slow to see this and to
take advantage of it, the first thing they did when they
got control was to pass laws so that the three
Democrats
party could retain control of these States as long as
they
broke down the township system, which
had been established in the Southern States by the con-
stitutions where they adopted immediately after the
reconstruction act. The officers of the County and
Township which had been before elected were appointed
by executive of the State, or elected by the legislature.
The security of an honest count and the protection
of the ballot box against fraud was broken down.
Thus one of the greatest rights guaranteed to the American
Citizen by the Constitution was denied the negro by the
local State governments. Do it any wonder that the
Colored people should feel depressed? Do it any wonder
that a people who had been held in bondage for nearly two centuries all this time deprived by
law of the blessings of education should not be able to
rise up and defend themselves against the threeds,
and most intelligent in the land? On account
of this injustice the negro is leaving his home in
the South and seeking a home in not so genial a climate but among a people where the prejudice against his race is unknown as compared to that in the South. The great tide of the colored immigration has been toward the Great West. The great body of this has been toward Kansas. With this sight before them the Southern leaders are beginning to see their mistake in so suppressing the negro, with this threatened loss of their population, and some political questions which are growing up in the now dominant party in the South. Faction is being formed. Both of these are claiming the negro vote. With both factions of the same party, watching the ballot box, the laws will soon be anguished to secure a free ballot and a fair count. But this is not all. The stream of immigration will not always be toward the West. In the course of time the colored race will be rather locally distributed all over the whole country. The people will then legislate justly for all. Having the Negro among them, they will lay aside all prejudice and strife for controling
the colored vote and look only for the good of the country. The negro thus enjoying the benefit of education, is more competent for governing himself than at the present time. Indeed, the great promoter of all this will be education. The attention of Congress has been called to the needs of education in the South. The eyes of Southern Statesmen have been opened to the fact and they are today asking help from the National government. There is a need suggested of the national government allowing each state a certain educational fund according to the extent of illiteracy in that state. In a nation where the whole power lies in the hands of the people, the only safeguard against foreign and internal trouble is in the education of the masses. This action of Congress is almost a necessity. It takes a broad view of the matter and shows a liberal spirit in the nation, legislating for those sections which most need help. Looking over this brief history of the colored race since the war which gave them their freedom, looking at them at the present time, as they struggling...
for the right shall we try to look into the future? Shall we try to predict what shall become of this wronged race. Looking into near future their struggle for their rights is yet unfinished. But right is stronger than wrong and in time it will triumph. This may take a few generations but it is as sure to come as the rising of the sun tomorrow. When the negro the old time prejudice will melt away before education like barberism before civilization. And when this shall come to pass there will be known no North and South, only one grand inseparable Union.