

COLOR LINE IN POLITICS

GOV. GRAHAM'S FAMOUS LETTER.

Interesting Epistle to the Meeting in Raleigh on October 12th, 1867, Just Prior to the Convention Called by Congress in the Effort to Give to the People the Appearance of Approval by the People—The Enfranchisement of the Negro the Chief Matter at Issue—Invited to Address a Meeting at Raleigh, Called by the People of the State to Consider the Best Course to Pursue, Governor Graham, Being Unable to Attend, Gives His Countrymen the Benefit of His Sage Wisdom.

Under the provisions of the Andry Johnson plan of reconstruction (which was said to have had the endorsement of President Lincoln) North Carolina reorganized its State government with the provisions as to suffrage unaltered from date of 1861.

In 1867 Congress overturned the measure, paid no attention to amnesty granted by President Johnson, enacted new laws as to pardons, disfranchised nearly all officers of the State or national governments prior to 1861, who had sympathized with the Confederacy, enfranchised the negroes, and then as if to give their villainy the appearance of approval by the people, provided for an election by the new voters for a convention to frame a constitution.

There was no convention called by the Conservative or Democratic party in the State to agree upon action in the campaign. Apart from private correspondence there was little conference. Each county acted for itself and the nominee made his own platform.

Some parties called a meeting to be held in Raleigh on October 12, to consider as to the best course to pursue. Prominent persons were invited to address the assembly.

Not being able to attend, Gov. Graham sent a letter. Upon its publication political matters assumed a definite shape and the "color line" was adopted as fundamental plank in his platform by almost every candidate of the white people.

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Hillsboro, Oct. 10, 1867. Gentlemen: I shall be unable, by reason of engagements of business, to be present at the meeting of the conservative people of Wake on the 18th inst. and to address them on the topics involved in the approaching election in accordance with the invitation received from you a few days since.

I regret this both because of the pleasure I should have derived from a free communication with so intelligent an assemblage of citizens of the State on the duties of the present time, and because the topics in question are too numerous and suggestive to be treated satisfactorily in a letter, without unbecoming tediousness.

I was pleased in observing that such a meeting had been called. In the opinion of some, with whom I have conversed, it was supposed there had been too great delay among conservative citizens in communication together, in the face of very active exertions to form a party adverse to them and to the best interests of the State, in which it was sought to combine all the colored voters by appeals to prejudice, passion and hopes of unlawful gain.

Never, heretofore, in America has the election franchise been extended to all males of the black race 21 years of age and upwards, with no other qualifications than those above recited; but only so far, however, as regards the present election. And, according to my recollections, it was stated in the debate on these acts by Mr. Fessenden, of Maine, certainly one of the ablest and most experienced members of the Senate, that no permanent regulation of this measure could be constitutionally established in a State without the sanction of the people; and I think the correctness of the remark was acquiesced in by the subsequent action of Congress.

The inquiry cannot be excluded from our consideration, if we could, whether, under the constitution of the United States or any republican organization, a constitution of government for the regulation of the internal affairs of a State can be forced upon people against the wishes of a majority of qualified voters, by constraint or duress?

But, it may be said, there is little disagreement among ourselves on this question, but Congress certainly has deposed to good order and happiness of the country. The freedmen as a class are less informed than foreigners and less capable from want of education and early instruction.

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