

The BOOKER T. WASHINGTON Papers

To John Elbert McConnell¹

Tuskegee, Ala. Dec. 17th 1885

Dear Sir: After unavoidable delay I now attempt to give you my opinion on the questions submitted by you, though I fear the answer will reach you too late to be of value.

In my opinion nothing would be more conducive of general prosperity and general intelligence than an educational qualification. Reasons — Political parties needing the votes of the ignorant ones would seek to have them educated just as in some states they see that the poor man's tax is paid in order that he may vote. (The number of illiterate whites as well as Negroes is alarmingly great in the South.) It will tend to lessen the political animosity between the black and white races since the leading whites now claim that the Negro is thwarted in his political rights by them because of his ignorance. Time for preparation should be given before such a law is put in operation. The fact of those with a certain amount of education being allowed to vote would create an ambition in the minds of the ignorant Negroes that would soon lead them to seek education. The non-voters would soon be considered to belong to an inferior class.

The reconstruction acts would have been carried out with much less bitterness and blood shed, in consequence of more moderation on the part of the Negroes in the exercise of their newly acquired political rights. For instance, the legislatures of S.C., La. and other Southern States would not have been filled all at once with ignorant and unscrupulous legislators.

The passage of the Blair Educational Bill² will bring about the most speedy remedy for illiteracy. In my mind, the political condition will be most speedily remedied by a division of the present political parties. At present, the Democratic party is composed almost entirely of whites and the Republican party almost entirely of blacks — it is one race against the other. When both races are largely represented in both parties, there will be fair and peaceable elections. The beginning of this change I think is not far distant.

I have attempted to speak of these matters as they bear on the condition of things in the South. Yours truly

B. T. Washington

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