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Washington

# THE HARDWICK BILL

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An Interview In The  
Atlanta Constitution

—> BY <—

Booker T. Washington,



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## AN INTERVIEW ON THE HARDWICK.

The Hardwick Bill was a measure introduced in the Georgia Legislature for the purpose of disfranchising the colored people. While this Bill was before the Legislature, Principal Booker T. Washington gave the following interview to the Atlanta Constitution. The Bill was defeated in the Legislature, receiving only 3 votes in its favor in the lower House where it was introduced and 137 votes being cast against it.

PROFESSOR BOOKER T. WASHINGTON, the head of the famous industrial school for colored youths at Tuskegee, and probably the foremost man of his race today, gave his views on the question of franchise restriction to a representative of The Constitution yesterday. Professor Washington spent the day in the city, having come here on business. When asked for an expression on the Hardwick bill, he said that he did not care to discuss that or any other specific measure, but on the subject of an educational qualification restricting the ballot to the intelligence of the country, he had very decided views. "I dread the idea of seeming to intrude my views too often upon the public," said Professor Washington, "but I feel that I can speak very frankly upon this subject, because I am speaking to the south and southern people. It has been my experience that when our southern people are convinced that one speaks from the heart and tries to speak that which he feels is for the permanent

good of both races, he is always accorded a respectful hearing. No possible influence could tempt me to say that which I thought would tend merely to stir up strife or to induce my own people to return to the old time method of political agitation rather than give their time, as most of them are now doing, to the more fundamental principles of citizenship, education, industry and prosperity.

#### DECISION LEFT TO THE SOUTH.

“The question of the rights and elevation of the negro is now left almost wholly to the south, as it has been long pleaded should be done,” added Professor Washington. “The south has over and over said to the north and her representatives have repeated it in congress, that if the north and the federal government would “hands off,” the south would deal justly and fairly with the negro. The prayer of the south has been almost wholly answered. The world is watching the south as it has never done before. “Not only have the north and the federal congress practically agreed to leave the matter of the negro’s citizenship in the hands of the south, but many conservative and intelligent negroes in recent years have advised the negro to cast his lot more closely with the southern white man and to cease a continued senseless opposition to his interests. This policy has gained ground to such an extent that the white man controls practically every state and every county and township in the south.

## VARIOUS ELECTION LAWS.

“There is a feeling of friendship and mutual confidence growing between the two races that is most encouraging. But in the midst of this condition of things one is surprised and almost astounded at the measures being introduced and passed by the various law-making bodies of the southern states. What is the object of the election laws? Since there is white domination throughout the south, there can be but one object in the passing of these laws—to disfranchise the negro. At the present time the south has a great opportunity as well as responsibility. Will she shirk this opportunity or will she look matters in the face and grapple with it bravely, taking the negro by the hand and seeking to lift him up to the point where he will be prepared for citizenship? “None of the laws passed by any southern state, or that are now pending, will do this. These new laws will simply change the form of the present bad election system and widen the breach between the two races, when we might, by doing right, cement the friendship between them.

## DANGEROUS ALL AROUND.

“To pass an election law with an “understanding” clause simply means that some individual will be tempted to perjure his soul and degrade his whole life by deciding in too many cases that the negro

does not "understand" the constitution and that a white man, even though he be an ignorant white foreigner with but recently acquired citizenship does "understand" it. "In a recent article President Hadley, of Yale university, covers the whole truth when he says: "We cannot make a law which shall allow the right exercise of a discretionary power and prohibit its wrong use." The 'understanding' clause may serve to keep negroes from voting, but the time will come when it will also be used to keep white men from voting if any number of them disagree with the election officer who holds the discretionary power. "While discussing this matter, it would be unfair to the white people of the south and to my race if I were not perfectly frank. What interpretation does the outside world and the negro put upon these 'understanding' clauses? Either that they are meant to leave a loophole so that the ignorant white man can vote or to prevent the educated negro from voting. If this interpretation is correct in either case the law is unjust. It is unjust to the white man because it takes away from him the incentive to prepare himself to become an intelligent voter. It is unjust to the negro because it makes him feel that no matter how well he prepares himself in education for voting he will be refused a vote through the operation of the 'understanding' clause.

#### IN A FALSE POSITION.

"And what is worse this treatment will keep alive in the negro's

breast the feeling that he is being wrongfully treated by the southern white man and therefore he ought to vote against him, whereas with just treatment the years will not be many before a large portion of the colored people will be willing to vote with the southern white people. "Then again I believe that such laws put our southern white people in a false position. I cannot think that there is any large number of white people in the south who are so ignorant or so poor that they cannot get education and property enough that will enable them to stand the test by the side of the negro in these respects. I do not believe that these white people want it continually advertised to the world that some special law must be passed by which they will seem to be given an unfair advantage over the negro by reason of their ignorance or poverty. "It is unfair to blame the negro for not preparing himself for citizenship by acquiring intelligence and then when he does get education and property to pass a law that can be so operated as to prevent him from being a citizen even though he may be a large tax payer. The southern white people have reached the point where they can afford to be just and generous; where there will be nothing to hide and nothing to explain. It is an easy matter, requiring little thought, generosity or statesmanship to push a weak man down when he is struggling to get up. Any one can do that. Greatness, generosity, statesmanship are shown in stimulating, encouraging every individual in the body politic to make of himself the most

useful, intelligent and patriotic citizen possible. Take from the negro all incentive to make himself and children useful property-holding citizens and can any one blame him for becoming a beast capable of committing any crime?

### REPRESSION WILL FAIL.

“I have the greatest sympathy with the south in its efforts to find a way out of present difficulties, but I do not want to see the south tie its self to a body of death. No form of repression will help matters. Spain tried that for 400 years and was the loser. There is one, and but one way out of our present difficulties and that is the right way. All else but right will fail. We must face the fact that the tendency of the world is forward, and not backward. That all civilized countries are growing in the direction of giving liberty to their citizens, not withholding it. Slavery ceased because it was opposed to the progress of both races and so all forms of repression will fail—must fail—in the long run. Whenever a change is thought necessary to be made in the fundamental law of the states, as Governor Candler says in his recent message: “The man who is virtuous and intelligent, however poor or humble; or of whatever race or color, may be safely intrusted with the ballot.” “And as the recent industrial convention at Huntsville, Ala., composed of the best brains of the white south puts it: “To move the race problem from

the domain of politics, where it has so long and seriously vexed the industrial progress of the south, we recommend to the several states of the south the adoption of an intelligent standard of citizenship **THAT WILL EQUALLY APPLY TO BLACK AND WHITE ALIKE.** 'We must depend upon the mental, industrial and moral elevation of all the people to bring relief. The history of the world proves that there is no other safe cure. We may find a way to stop the negro from selling his vote, but what about the conscience of the man who buys his vote? We must go to the bottom of the evil.

#### SHOULD BE EQUALITY OF TREATMENT.

"Our southern states cannot afford to have suspicion of evil intention resting upon them. It not only will hurt them morally, but financially. "In conclusion let me add that the southern states owe it to themselves not to pass unfair election laws because it is against the constitution of the United States and each state is under a solemn obligation that every citizen, regardless of color, shall be given the full protection of the laws. No state can make a law that can be so interpreted to mean one thing when applied to the black man and another when applied to a white man, without disregarding the constitution of the United States. In the second place, unfair election laws in the long run, I repeat, will injure the white man more than the negro, such laws will not only disfranchise the negro, but the

white man as well. "The history of the country shows that in those states where the election laws are most just, there you will find the most wealth, the most intelligence and the smallest percentage of crime. The best element of white people in the south are not in favor of oppressing the negro, they want to help him up, but they are sometimes mistaken as to the best method of doing this. "While I have spoken very plainly, I do not believe that any one will misinterpret my motives. I am not in politics per se, nor do I intend to be, neither would I encourage my people to become mere politicians, but the question I have been discussing strikes at the very fundamental principles of citizenship."—Atlanta Constitution.