

TUSKEGEE NORMAL AND INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE.

(INCORPORATED).

FOR THE TRAINING OF YOUNG COLORED MEN AND WOMEN.

COMMITTEE ON INVESTMENT OF ENDOWMENT FUND.

MR. WM. H. BALDWIN, JR.,
President Long Island Railroad,
128 Broadway, New York City.
MR. J. G. PHELPS STOKES,
47 Cedar St., New York City.

Tuskegee, Ala., May 23, 1901.

Hon. John B. Knox, President,
Alabama State Constitutional Convention,
Montgomery, Ala.

Dear Sir:-

I have been appointed chairman of a committee composed of Messrs. W. H. Council, Henry A. Loveless, Wm. Watkins, W. R. Pettiford, Chas. O. Boothe and Dr. S. S. H. Washington, to present the enclosed address representing the feelings and wishes of the colored people of the State of Alabama to your Convention, and I very much hope that you can see your way clear to have it read to the Convention and to make whatever other disposition of it you think proper.

Yours truly,

Booker T. Washington,

To the Members of the Constitutional Convention:-

Since it is true that our race numbers in this state about 800,000 and there is no member of the race a member of your body, who can speak directly for us in an official capacity, we do not think that you will misunderstand the object and spirit of this communication, for it is not sent to you in a dictatorial, fault-finding spirit, but with an earnest desire to be of some assistance in the performance of a grave and perplexing task. We make ourselves all the more bold to send you this communication because members of your body in nearly every part of the state have expressed a desire to hear from us.

It could not be expected that the 800,000 colored people in this state would not have some interest in the deliberations of a body that is to frame the fundamental law under which both races are to be governed in this state, perhaps for all future time.

Your petitioners are not stirrers up of strife between the races, but we feel that the questions with which you are to deal are above and beyond party politics. Each of us, in some calling, is a hard working, tax paying, and we trust, law abiding citizen, and we believe that we represent in a large measure the feelings and desires of the masses of our people in the state.

We beg to your honorable body to keep in mind in dealing with the problems that grow out of our presence that, as a race, we did not force ourselves upon you, but were brought here in most cases against our will; but nevertheless, we recognize that since being here, we have been vastly benefitted. We have gotten habits of industry, the English language, and the Christian religion, and at the same time, we have tried in an humble

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way, to render valuable service to the white man in clearing the forests, building the railroads, cultivating the lands, working the mines, as well as in many forms of domestic service and in other activities. Our fathers and mothers have helped nurse you and your children, and when the male members of the family were away from home fighting in war that might have meant our continued enslavement, we remained at home, working your farms, supporting and protecting your helpless wives and daughters. When we have been called to perform any duty of citizenship, whether fighting a foreign foe, working the public roads, or any other duty, we have tried to do our best.

We beg of you to bear in mind that for more than twenty years the Negro in this state has not, as a rule, been a disturbing or offensive element. Immediately after the war, we made mistakes just as would have been true of any people placed in the same position, but we have learned our lesson from those mistakes and they are not likely to be repeated.

The changes wrought by time and the Providence of God, it seems to us, place your body in a particularly responsible position. You assemble at a time when your actions will not be directed or restricted by any pressure from the Federal government or elsewhere. The North is almost unanimous in its agreement that the future of the Negro in a large degree rests with the South. Almost for the first time since freedom came to us, a law-making body assembles in the South, bearing the supreme law-making power of the state, and is left free to act entirely untrammelled by outside influences. Almost for the first time, the Negro is to rest his future in a large degree upon the conscience and intelligence of a great law-making body of a great Southern state. You have the power. The world will watch while you act.

It requires little thought, effort or strength to degrade and pull down a weak race, but it is the sign of great statesmanship to encourage

and lift up a weak and unfortunate race. Destruction is easy; construction is difficult.

There are these among your petitioners who have persistently urged the Negro to learn to trust his future with his Southern white neighbor and that when the supreme test came he would receive justice at his hands. This is a crucial hour for those who have thus advised our race, but we do not believe that our faith in you will be misplaced. We believe that the possession of great power will deepen your sympathy for the weak and dependent elements of our population.

It seems to us on the whole, that the relations of the two races in this state are reasonably satisfactory, and we tremble and fear lest something will be done to disturb these relations and to bring discouragement and demoralization to our race.

Of the greatest importance is the economic consideration. The greater portion of our people are settled upon the plantations in the cotton raising districts, while a large number of others is in the mining districts. These people are occupying and cultivating land that is largely owned by white people or operating other industries owned by white people. Still others are buying homes and thereby contributing to the welfare of the state. In most cases, they are a contented, producing, law-abiding people. Already, alarm is beginning to spread among them and their fears are being worked upon by emigration agents and exodus associations who are telling them that under the new constitution the Negro's citizenship will be taken from him and that his schools will be virtually blotted out. These agencies expect in one way or another to reap gain by reason of something that you will do in your convention.

Anything that will unsettle and cause excitement of people at the present time when, more than ever, in all parts of the state, the race is beginning to improve, to settle down to habits of thrift, economy and

common sense, will not only prove injurious to our race, but to yours also. The history of all races proves that a contented intelligent friendly working class is the greatest possession of any state.

The Negro youth must have some incentive for right and useful living held out to him. Let the Negro youth feel that no matter how intelligent or useful he makes himself, that there is no hope of reward held out before him, and there will be danger that he will become a beast, revelling in crime and a body of death about the neck of the state. In a thousand ways, the ignorant, shiftless, criminal Negro will retard the progress of the white race.

The Negro is not seeking to rule the white man. In this state the Negro holds not a single elective office. Whenever he votes, he usually votes for some white man and is learning more and more to vote for the best white man. There is in the last analysis a feeling of tenderness, good will and sympathy existing between the two races in this state, which the outside world can hardly understand or appreciate. We pray that this relation may not be disturbed.

The Negro does ask, however, that since he is taxed, works the roads, is punished for crime, is called upon to defend his country, that he have some humble share in choosing those who shall rule over him, especially when he has proven his worthiness by becoming a taxpayer and a worthy reliable citizen. While the amount of direct taxes paid by the Negro is small, all will acknowledge that he is a large factor in enabling some one else to pay taxes; for the Negro who rents a farm or a house not only pays the rent, but indirectly, the taxes also.

We rejoice in that we have reached a period in our development, when we can speak in frank but friendly terms of the objects of your convention, the chief aim of which is, we trust, the wise and just government of all the people of Alabama. In this high purpose, your petitioners

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agree and sympathize with you. We are all owners of property and tax payers and have the same interest in good government that you have. We know that the task before you is a delicate, trying and perplexing one. In this connection, we desire to add that, in our humble opinion, while there may be doubt and uncertainty in many directions, one thing is absolutely and unmistakably clear,--that nothing that is not absolutely just and fair, will be permanently successful.

Any law which will merely change the name and form of fraud, or can be interpreted as meaning one thing when applied to one race and something else when applied to another race, will not in our opinion improve our present condition, but may unsettle the peace and thrift of our people and decrease the wealth and prosperity of Alabama.

While you deliberate and act, be assured that you will have the prayers and good wishes of thousands of black people in every part of our state.

Respectfully submitted,

(Signed)

Chas. O. Boothe,

D. H. Tulane,

Elijah Cook,

John L. Thomas,

Booker T. Washington,

M. H. Adams,

Moses Davis,

H. J. A. Loveless,

A. J. Wilborn,

A. J. Wood,

J. W. Adams,

Jno. N. Brown,

R. E. Lee,

Ad. Wimbs,

S. S. H. Washington, M. D.,

C. F. Steers, Sr.,

Wm. Watkins,

Henry Todd,

S. Ross,

R. H. Herron,

W. R. Pettiford,

W. H. Council,

R. B. Hudson,

Alfred C. Dungee, M. D.

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May 30, 1901
R & F

May 31, 1901
Refd S & E

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION
OF 1901

STATE OF ALABAMA.

6/29 1901

Received with report
of Committee on
S & E

Frank N. Julian
Secretary