

PROTEST OF THE AMERICAN CITIZENS' EQUAL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION OF LOUISIANA AGAINST CLASS LEGISLATION.

TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY:

We, the undersigned American citizens, and citizens of the State of Louisiana, do most respectfully but earnestly protest against the passage of any class legislation now pending before the General Assembly, or which may hereafter come before the Honorable Body, for the following reasons:

That such legislation is unconstitutional, unamerican, unjust, dangerous and against sound public policy.

There is no warrant in the Constitution of the State of Louisiana for the passage of any law establishing discrimination per se against any class of American citizens, while, on the contrary, that instrument, in letter and spirit, seems to protect, with a jealous care, all the essentials of equality.

The boast of the American people is that their government is based upon the self-evident truth, that all men are created equal, and has for some of its objects the establishment of justice and the insuring of domestic tranquility. It is then difficult to conceive how any caste legislation can maintain the sacredness of these truly American principles; we are rather inclined to the belief that any measure lacking the essential of justice is an unfortunate blow at those high conceptions which adorn the Preambles of the Federal and State Constitutions and the Immortal Declaration of Independence.

We ground our protest further upon the high moral precept, that men should not do unto others what they do not wish should be done unto them.

We say that it is unjust, unchristian, to inflict upon any portion of the people the gratuitous indignities which take their motive and their bitterness from the dictates of an unreasonable prejudice. The people against whom such legislation is directed are respectable, useful and law-abiding; they represent, it should be remembered, a considerable percentage of the capital and almost all the labor of the State; they share the burdens of a common responsibility with their fellow citizens and contribute by their special qualities and temperament to the honor, peace and dignity of the commonwealth. Will it be seriously contended that such a problematical proposition as the ethnical origin of color is a sufficient cause for a deliberate interference with settled rights? We do not think that citizens of a darker hue should be treated by law on different lines than those of a lighter complexion. Citizenship is national and has no color. We hold that any attempt to abridge it on account of color is simply a surrender of wisdom to the appeals of passion.

It strikes us that the immediate effects of such legislation would be a free license to the evilly-disposed that they might with impunity insult, humiliate and otherwise maltreat inoffensive persons, and especially women and children who should happen to have a dark skin. Will our legislators, in view of such probable consequences, make themselves purposely guilty of an act that would bring them on?

Besides, we believe that the colored people will be greatly disturbed, when they see that in addition to their many other grievances is to be enacted that legal degradation which is to make of them passive objects of a system as unjustifiable as it would be unmerited.

Under such circumstances, the promotion of good will among inhabi-

tants of the same State would be almost impossible. And while we thus complain of class legislation in general, there are two bills in particular against which our objections are specially formulated. These bills provide for separate cars for the accommodation of white and colored people.

With all due respect, we must express our strongest condemnation against those two measures whose principle is vicious and a breeder of discord.

It cannot be said that such enactments are useful to the community, while they may be regarded as dangerous experiments in the line of legal abuses. We beg leave to observe that such measures becoming the law of the land would place the most innocent and the most defenseless at the mercy of the most brutal. The probable extent of such anticipated mischief must arouse in the breast of the persecuted a feeling of distrust capable of further intensity under the sting of any provocation.

Injustice is likely to beget hatred, or at least resentment, and we should then have to deplore an era of animosities between offending and offended not well calculated to provoke the return of prosperity within our borders, a thing so fervently to be desired. True it is, that very pernicious examples have already been given by courts and States, but, as Louisianians, we may be pardoned for saying that our hearts are filled with a just pride at the fact that our own State has so far fortunately escaped the contamination. Our hope is that she may continue to hold herself aloof from such unnecessary embarrassments, and remain, if need be, an honorable exception among the many votaries of an ungodly prejudice.

It is hardly necessary to remark that such legislation is against good public policy, as it is in direct contradiction with the well recognized principle that every act of the Government must rest upon the authority that it is intended for the common good.

We further beg leave to remind the General Assembly that the best people of the South are not in favor of such legislation.

It was but the other day that the Legislature of the historic State of South Carolina—one of the original Thirteen—voted down a bill similar to the two above mentioned and now pending before your Honorable Body.

We point to the further fact that the Legislature of the Empire State of the South, Texas, a few months ago, declined to enact a law on the subject matter of said bills.

And with pride do we recall that our own cherished Louisiana, the mother of us all, through her Constitutional Convention of 1879, in which body grandly figured her ablest sons, rejected all propositions establishing distinction among her citizens and by the adoption of a uniform and exemplary Bill of Rights emphatically fixed the status of all on the basis of the equality of rights.

In the name of God and the Constitution, Federal and State, in the name of justice, reason and equity, in the name of peace, in the name of an enlightened and Christian civilization, we humbly trust that our protest may be heeded by the loyal hearts of our legislators, and that the chalice of political bitterness may be snatched from the grasp of intolerant persecution and made to melt into the sacred fires of patriotic mercy!

P. B. S. PINCHBACK, A. E. P. ALBERT, A. S. JACKSON, S. T. CLANTON, T. A. WILSON, E. LYON, J. T. NEWMAN, I. E. MULLON,

T. B. STAMPS, PAUL TREVIGNE, JAMES LEWIS, LAURENT AUGUSTE, R. L. DESDUNES, L. A. MARTINET,

J. L. MINOR—Committee A. C. E. R. A.

J. F. Marshall
New Orleans, May 24, 1890.