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WHY HE REFUSES TO RATIFY 15th AMENDMENT

Heppner, Oregon. November, 29, 1916

To the Editor:-

In last Tuesday's issue of the Oregonian there is an article by G. W. Bowen, under the caption—Race Prejudice, Not Ignorance. Quoting from same, referring to the Negro Suffrage Amendment on the late ballot, the Oregonian has on several occasions applied the words "Prejudice," "Ignorance, Narrow-minded, mistaken etc. To those who voted, NO, and many of those who so voted are the same people that the Oregonian praised for the intelligent way that they voted on other measures and candidates.

Sunday, November the 19th, the Oregonian says the Negro Suffrage Amendment was defeated through an evident misunderstanding.

Now, Mr. Editor, I voted NO on that Suffrage Amendment, and if you will grant me a little space, I will tell you why I did so.

Quoting from your appended statement to Mr. Bowen's article, you say the Oregonian was in a favorable position to observe the cause for defeat of the Negro Suffrage Amendment. That it received by letter, and telephone inquiry from all classes of persons including business and professional men, as to whether negroes could now vote in Oregon. There was quite a number of wealthy influential citizens in Portland who signed the petition to place the Uren Single Land Tax Amendment on the ballot. These influential citizens said the real purpose of the amendment had been misrepresented to them by the persons who got them to sign the petition. Suppose they had written to the Oregonian and been correctly informed what the real purpose and probable results the Single Land Tax Amendment would have, if enacted into law; by their own statements they never would have signed Uren's petition. The fact that a large number of people asked the Oregonian if the negro could now vote in Oregon does not imply that they were ignorant, but it does prove that they are a safe class of people to intrust with the ballot.

Quoting further the Oregonian says: Race Prejudice was doubtless a predominating factor in the result, but ignorance laid in the fact that this prejudice could be exercised. No such belief existed in the minds of those who voted NO on the Negro Suffrage Amendment, and it is not true that they were influenced by race prejudice. It is the conviction of those who voted NO, on the Negro Suffrage Amendment that the success or failure of our Government depends almost entirely upon the way the right of suffrage is exercised. If all the people who are entrusted with the ballot will correctly inform themselves so they can vote intelligently upon all question at issue, then self-government would be an ideal government, but with so many of our voting population depending upon the statements of Soap Orators and reading only such papers as the appeal to reason, it behooves us to guard the ballot as carefully as possible, and instead of recklessly extending the right of suffrage, and as in the case of this Negro Suffrage Amendment where we are asked to ratify with our vote that which we are unalterable opposed to, because we voted in accordance with our conviction, exercising our right of suffrage as was intended to be the right of every elector, the Oregonian has called us Ignorant, Narrow-Minded, Mistaken Prejudice and etc. I found the Chinese to be a very intelligent and honest people, and if a Chinese is your friend, baring your wife and mother, he is the best friend you can have. My convictions are that it is unwise to give the right of Suffrage to any race that we are unwilling to have marry into our families, and what kind of a white American citizen could be satisfied with a Chinese or Negro son-in-law.

Again quoting from the Oregonian,

If it is the correspondent's idea that this prejudice is honestly based on the illiteracy of negroes, here are some contradictory figures: According to the last census the number of illiterate whites in Oregon over ten years old was 9802, of these 2682 had the necessary birth qualifications to make them citizens without naturalization. The number of illiterate negroes in Oregon was 46. I guess we can throw a different light upon this. The total white population of Oregon was 655,090, the total negro population was 1492, the percentage of illiterate whites was one and four hundred and ninety six one thousandths per cent, found as follows: 9802 divided by 655,090 equals .01496, equals per cent of illiterates. The percentage of negroes that are illiterate is three and eight one hundredths per cent found as follows: 46 divided by 1492 equals .0308 equals the per cent of negroes that are illiterate.

To put this in a more comprehensive way, in a population of six hundred and fifty five thousand and ninety whites, there are ninety eight hundred and two illiterates over ten years old. In a population of six hundred and fifty five thousand and ninety negroes there would be twenty thousand one hundred and ninety illiterate negroes, in other words there are more than twice as many illiterate negroes in a given population as there is illiterate whites in the same population, and yet the Oregonian says that it is the correspondent's idea, that prejudice is based on the illiteracy of negroes. Here are some contradicting figures: Hasn't the Oregonian proven itself ignorant? It has not. B-gosh I have. The number of illiterate negroes there would be in a population of 655,090 was found as follows: 46 to 1492 as x to 655,090, 46 times 655,090 divided by 1492 gives 20,197. There is no agent of learning nearly so helpful to us as the leading newspapers. Because this is true a great responsibility is placed upon these newspapers, it seems to me it ought to be the highest ambition of every newspaper to attain this distinction and prove itself worthy of that distinction and after the Oregonian has made such a blunder as I have just shown it did make, how can we place any confidence in what it says.

Quoting farther, the Oregonian takes this occasion to say that the importance of this Amendment's defeat is wholly abstract.

The Oregonian is far wrong in this as it was in the percentage of illiterate negroes. The importance of the amendment's defeat is that it has proven that the majority of those who voted on the Negro Suffrage Amendment refused to express their approval by ratifying this Negro Suffrage Amendment with their votes. And Mr. Oregonian we are intelligent enough to know that your motive in abusing and insulting our intelligence is to whip us into line so that when we vote again on this Negro Suffrage Amendment we will vote, YES. It has come to pass when an electorate must be insulted and humiliated by the Oregonian because he had the courage to vote in accordance with his honest conviction.

Quoting farther from the Oregonian: No one's Status as a voter would have been changed by its adoption. No negro is denied Suffrage by its defeat. We are well aware of all those claims. We did not vote NO in an effort to change the result, but we did vote NO on the Negro Suffrage Amendment because we positively refused to express our approval by voting for it. The Oregonian says the result is interesting only as disclosing a lack of knowledge of the fundamentals of Civil governments, and as one revealing the existence of a race prejudice not due to presence of a consequential number of negroes or the illiteracy of the comparative few negroes in Oregon. The Oregonian had to draw entirely on its imagination for these deductions.

I wish I had the exact vote of the Negro Suffrage Amendment, the fact that it was defeated proves that many thousands voted NO on the Negro Suffrage Amendment. It is amazing that the Oregonian would insult and abuse so large a number of the voting population of Oregon, and because the Oregonian has insulted our intelligence, I would deal the Oregonian a Solar-plexus punch and to give the greatest possible force to that punch I must be accurate in all I say to preclude the possibility of the Oregonian, asking it to give the white population and the negro population in Oregon by our last census. I insert the night wire I received from the Oregonian. Portland, Oregon, November 27th 1916. Mr. Harry Cummings, Heppner, Oregon. Oregon's total population last census 672,765 composed as follows: whites 655,090, negroes, 1,492. Indians, Chinese, Japanese, Hindus, Koreans, and Filipines, 16,183. (Signed) The Oregonian.

It does not matter if above figures are not correct as long as they come from the Oregonian and are not used for any other purpose than to refute the statements made by the Oregonian. Now I want to say to every person that voted NO on this Negro Suffrage Amendment, don't be bluffed out, but vote in accordance with your convictions, changing immediately you believe you are wrong.

HARRY CUMMINGS.

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