

"PART 2"

"Trust Me"

Governor Tillman sits for the following interview with Mr. August Kohn a correspondent of the News and Courier in October, 1894. Sharing a well painted picture of the state of the white man in South Carolina. His assertion is specific and must be read by every White man in the state regardless of factional differences.

Tillman's concerns about the status of white men in politics is a warning of the dangers of an impending crisis. One which revisits an ill time in history since 1861 of a dark wave of corruption, misgovernment and well nigh anarchy which engulfed the state during the eight years of Reconstruction (Negro Domination). The state of South Carolina survived destruction because, "of a feeling of race unity, blood thicker than water by responding to the call of white supremacy."

"When the tocsin was sounded in 1876 the white men of the State responded as one man and our people moving swiftly to recovery liberties and brought decency back to our social affairs. Tillman warns, "there is a second alarm and division reaching to the point where white men are willing to use the negro with our politics to gain a stronghold on the great Democratic party. Tillman, is now calling for a very important convention to be called to reorganize the factions and divisions being created to get the most Negro votes.

He is adamant in his concern and speaks firmly to "every thinking man" who might not be taking this threat to the state and its business interest seriously by stating the following:

"But can ye touch pitch and not be defiled? Can the 100,000 white men in South Carolina energize and marshal the 140,000 negro voters in this State and lead them to the polls, contending for mastery, without destruction of all of our business interests and paralysis of every industry? Can this vast horde of ignorant and debased negro voters participate in government without corrupting and debauching the public service? It is not clear that while in the first fight, and even possibly in the second, decent and honest men may be elected to office, that the inevitable trend of politics will be for those who are most willing to go to the level with the negro to control them? Will the negroes not demand and enforce a division of the offices as a recognition of their service? Will not the needy and greedy office seekers, the corrupt, the low base, among the whites finally use the negro votes to virtually confiscate property and give more years of good stealing?"

Tillman is in further distress when sharing details that support this "burning question of a negro supremacy or quasi supremacy, is cause for alarm". He sees the degradation and miseries of the Reconstruction Period being used as a plea to frighten poor whites, which he says is the key reason why white men must come to the constitutional convention.

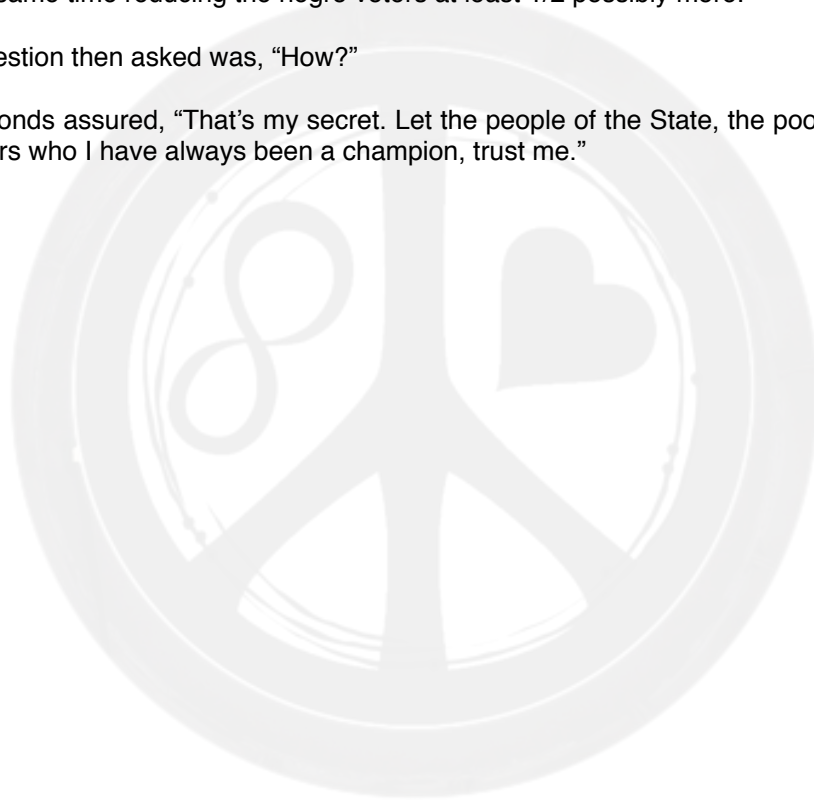
Tillman, then asked a question to which he knows everyone is concerned, " But Governor, how is the Constitution to prevent all this?"

To which he answers with, "We have been trying to get the Constitutional convention every since the whites regained possession of the State of Government. The two thirds of the House necessary to call one, was defeated in the Senate. The people were not then divided, as they are now and there never was the danger that now exists. It is the lack of unity among the white men which will produce these dire results, and the calling of a convention is the only way to upset the registration laws.

His projection onto a problem if the Constitutional Convention is not called there will be "40 or 50 negro representatives in the South Carolina Legislature and in most counties half, while in many counties all the county offices will be filled by the negroes. Tillman feels very intensely about his plan against this alarming threat, "A constitutional convention can deal with the suffrage question in a way to save the suffrage to every white man who is worthy of a vote, while at the same time reducing the negro voters at least 1/2 possibly more."

The next question then asked was, "How?"

Tillman responds assured, "That's my secret. Let the people of the State, the poor working men my supporters who I have always been a champion, trust me."





(Tillman around 1910)

Editor's Note

Governor Benjamin Tillman, was a politician of the Democratic Party and served as Governor of South Carolina from 1890 to 1894, and was a US Senator from 1895 until his death in 1918. A white supremacist who opposed civil rights for blacks. Tillman led a paramilitary group of Red Shirts during the South Carolina violent 1876 election. On the floor of the US Senate, he frequently ridiculed blacks, and boasted of having helped kill them during the "Red Shirts" campaign. (Wikipedia.org, Benjamin Tillman)

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Reference:

3. Tillman, Gov. Benjamin (October 31, 1894), *"The Voice of A Statesman"* The Manning Times., page 1

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