









DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA BILL.

SPEECH

OF THE

Hon. JOHN L. THOMAS, Jr.  
OF MARYLAND.

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Delivered in the House of Representatives, January 16, 1866.

Mr. Speaker, before the vote is taken on the proposition now before the House, I desire to state the reasons that will influence me in my action.

Although the bill only goes to the extent of granting the right of the elective franchise to the people of color in the District of Columbia, in its effect it is of interest to the whole people of my State, and, in the principle which it involves, of importance to the whole country.

While I deny the right or the power of Congress to legislate on this subject, where that legislation is to affect the qualification of electors of any of the States, I at the same time concede the power to pass laws for the good government of this District; and hence, on this or any kindred subject. By the eighth section of the first article of the Constitution of the United States, power is given to Congress—

“To exercise exclusive jurisdiction in all cases whatever over such district (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by concession of particular States, and the acceptance of Congress, become the seat of the Government of the United States.”

And the Legislature of Maryland, by the second section of the act of December 19, 1791, declared and enacted—

“That all that part of the territory called Columbia shall be, and the same is hereby acknowledged to be forever ceded and relinquished to the Congress and Government of the United States, in full and absolute right and exclusive jurisdiction, as well of soil as of persons residing or to reside thereon, pursuant to the tenor and effect of the eighth section of the first article of the Constitution.”

It is needless, therefore, for any one, from the opinions I entertain, to deny the power that Congress possesses to pass this law.

But, sir, I am here to deny either the *expediency*, the *wisdom*, or the *necessity* of legislating on this subject at this time, or in relation to this or any other district or territory subject to or under the jurisdiction or control of the Government.

Said Henry Clay in the Senate, in 1850, in addressing that body, on the bill to abolish the slave trade in the District of Columbia:

“I have always held that under the language of the Constitution, being an investment in Congress of exclusive legislation over this District in all cases whatever, there existed full and complete power over this whole subject. But in reference to the abolition of slavery in this District, I have maintained, what I now continue to maintain, that while the institution remains in Maryland now, or while it existed in Maryland or Virginia before the retrocession, it would be a gross violation of good faith to exercise this power, though it is fully and completely covered by the language of the Constitution.”

Since that speech was made, slavery has not only been abolished by act of Congress in this District, but by the natural results of this great rebellion, and the adoption of the constitutional amendment, throughout the length and breadth of this land. I thank God to-day that such has been the result, and that from the Atlantic to the Pacific no slave treads the soil of our free country.

And yet, while I rejoice at this, I cannot but believe that the efforts now put forth by some in this House to force negro political equality in this District is not only, in the language of Henry Clay, "a gross violation of good faith" toward the people of this District and of the State of Maryland, but is the beginning of similar efforts to force the States of this Union to adopt negro political equality, without due consideration of all the important bearings of the subject.

I had thought, sir, and so had the Union people of my State, that with the total abolition of slavery, all further legislation on that subject would cease, and that further time would be given them to make good the losses of the war, and to repair its devastation, before it was again placed in the political arena, to disturb, to agitate, and to divide. We thought, with the majority here, that slavery was an evil, nay, that it was a curse and a blight; and, although there were many among us who professed to believe in its "divinity," we made up our minds to rid the State of its presence. And we did do it.

We did it at a time and in a manner that, however little credit she may receive for it here, will reflect imperishable honor on her citizens when the acts of this war shall be written by the future impartial historian. Her motive was pure and patriotic; her action self-sacrificing and noble. She did it because it was right, and because she had resolved to tear up by the roots the cursed tree that had produced so much of misery and of woe. It was done in the midst of this great conflict freely and voluntarily, not by force of Federal bayonets, but by force of public opinion and intense love of country.

This war offering of the loyalists of Maryland cannot be properly estimated at this time, nor by you of the North and West. You knew nothing of the effects of slavery on the minds of its victims, nor its influence over the political action of men, except from what you had heard and read from others. You were not born where the "institution" had an existence, and you cannot, therefore, properly estimate the degrading effect on the slave, and the tenacity and love with which thousands clung to it because of love of gain, and because they had grown up under it. But we who were born and reared in a slave State, and who received the curses and anathemas of rebel slave-owners because we favored and succeeded in emancipating the negro, know something of this "old sin" of slavery, and are entitled to some consideration for what we have suffered, and some regard for what we have voluntarily and willingly aided in forever abolishing.

Sir, the people of my State, (at least that portion of them whom I have the honor to represent,) and who have always been true to the Government, and who, in the darkest hours of rebellion, lifted up their hearts in earnest prayer to God in behalf of our country, and sent their sons to the battle-field to maintain and uphold the Union, are opposed to this measure. They see in it, as I do, the first effort to confer political privileges on a class who, although emancipated from slavery, are not at *this time* competent, by reason of their ignorance, nor qualified by reason of their former *status*, to exercise the high and exalted privileges of an elector. It is an attempt to legislate the black man on the same political level with the white—an attempt which even if it succeeded would only show the disparity between the two races, and in the end redound to the permanent injury of the black. It is an attempt to grant universal suffrage and the right to hold office to the negro, not only here but everywhere, and thereby produce as a natural result that "irrepressible conflict" which none but bad men would profit by, and which all good men must deplore.

I do not mean by what I have said that all black men are ignorant and uneducated or incapable of exercising the right of suffrage. What I mean to say is that as a class they are to-day not only ignorant, uneducated, and unfit to exercise this right, but that they are not its safe depositaries. I know many of this class whom I would be willing to trust to-day to exercise this right, but the difficulty in making a law to favor them would be in opening wide a door to admit others whom I could not trust, and whom I am satisfied are incapable of comprehending the new relations they would sustain.

However much gentlemen may be disposed to sneer at the opinions of some, that this is a Government of the white man, I appeal to the history of my country to sustain me in the assertion that it was founded by the white race, has grown to power and greatness by and through them, and if republican Government is to live on this continent, it can only live by and through the support and efforts of the white man. I do not desire to intinate that this is a Government exclusively for the whites, nor that it is a Government where the black man is to be ostracized politically on account of his color. I recognize the fact that all men are to-day free and equal; that they are



entitled to certain inalienable rights; that among them are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that it is the great end of Government to secure these rights, and that the negro, freed and emancipated, is entitled to the same protection, in these respects, that I, as a white man, am entitled to receive.

Sir, the right of suffrage is a precious right, to be exercised by all who are capable, qualified, and loyal to the Government, and to be extended to none who are incapable by reason of nonage, want of mind, or disloyalty. The right to vote is not a natural-born right, but a gift or franchise conferred by the sovereign power on such of its citizens as are capable of exercising it. Until it is once given, the denial of it is no refusal of the right. When you have once received it, then, and not till then, does it become a right, and the withholding or withdrawal of it, except for good cause, subversive of one of the fundamental principles of republican government. The sovereign power grants the right when it thinks it would be beneficial to the State; it withholds it or takes it away when it thinks it would be detrimental or destructive to the State. The citizen receives it to be used in the mode prescribed by law until by some act of his own he forfeits it. Hence, idiots, lunatics, men convicted of crime, aliens, and in some States rebels, are not allowed to vote; and various conditions and qualifications are added to show that it is a power not to be given to every citizen. Mr. Madison, who has been quoted quite frequently during the debates on this bill, thus speaks in relation to suffrage:

"The right of suffrage is a fundamental article in republican constitutions. The regulation of it is at the same time a task of peculiar delicacy. Allow the right exclusively to property, and the rights of persons may be oppressed. The feudal policy alone sufficiently proves it. Extend it equally to all, and the rights of property or the claims of justice may be overruled by a majority without property or interested in measures of injustice. Of this abundant proof is afforded by other popular Governments; and it is not without examples in our own, particularly in the laws impairing the obligation of contracts."—*Madison Papers*, vol. 5, p. 580.

John Adams, the second President of the United States, and one of the fathers of the Republic, uses this language:

"Society can be governed only by general rules. Government cannot accommodate itself to every particular case as it happens, nor to the circumstances of particular persons. It must establish general comprehensive regulations for cases and persons. The only question is which general rule will accommodate most cases and most persons.

"Depend upon it, sir, it is dangerous to open so fruitful a source of controversy and altercation as would be opened by attempting to alter the qualifications of voters. There will be no end of it. New claims will arise, women will demand a vote; lads from twelve to twenty-one will think their rights not enough attended to; and every man who has not a farthing will demand an equal voice with any other in all acts of State. It tends to confound and destroy all distinctions, and prostrate all ranks to one common level."—*Works of John Adams*, vol. 9, p. 378.

I have said that it would be unwise, inexpedient, and unnecessary to confer the right at this time on the people of color. It is unwise, because you are about to clothe men with the power of ballot over one-half of whom have been slaves all their lives, and who do not yet fully apprehend the citizenship conferred upon them. It is unwise, because it is universal, and you have no data from which you can form any estimate of the effect it will have over the minds and actions of the uneducated and ignorant contrabands, who, although familiarly known as "intelligent," is not of that kind desirable in ruling over the destinies of the capital of the nation. It is unwise, because it is an experiment, an introduction of a new element in the political management of our affairs, which promises to work well, but which might, and I fear will, turn out badly.

It is unnecessary and inexpedient, because a vast majority of the voters of the city of Washington and Georgetown have indicated their preference that the franchise should remain as it is. As property holders and tax-payers their voice should have some influence. If you grant the right, it not only goes to the extent of allowing all negroes now in the District to vote, but as many thousands more as would flock from all portions of Virginia and Maryland "to see how voting feels," and "to try on" politics for a change. Some would doubtless offer themselves for office; and is it any wonder that the people of Washington should be opposed to such a measure? Is it reasonable to suppose that the tax-payers consider it safer to trust the enacting of their ordinances to a people hitherto oppressed and enslaved for centuries? Have they discovered that two years of freedom has made the black man as competent to govern as themselves? Since when has the necessity arisen to require a new class of voters to do that to-day what from the time the right to regulate their municipal affairs was intrusted to them, has been in the hands of those who at present exercise it? Have the white people of the District abused their trust? Have they shown themselves incompetent to vote, that you want to make another and a larger class to outvote and to govern them? Would it not be better to allow no one to vote in the District

than to resort to such a punishment? Since when has it occurred to this House that universal suffrage should be granted in this District. By reference to the proceedings of this House in the first session of the Thirty-Eighth Congress, it will be seen that it was supposed at that time that the white man was good enough to manage the affairs of this city, and that the colored man was not competent, or at least was not thought entitled, to vote, as both the Senate and the House refused it. (McPherson's History of the Rebellion, page 241.)

Mr. Speaker, I am not here as the special advocate of the District of Columbia. From what has been said on this floor, one would suppose that this city was the heaven of traitors. For such of her citizens as are or have been traitors I have as little respect or regard for as any gentleman in this House. I take it that no man who left this District or his State to engage in armed rebellion against his country has any right to make laws for me, unless that right be restored to him by the power against which he rebelled. But, sir, there are Union men in this District, I am proud to say, as true and devoted in their love of country as can be found anywhere. For such I have a fellow-feeling. They, like myself, have been born and raised in the South, and are opposed to these measures because they are satisfied it will do no good, and is calculated to do much mischief.

The passage of this bill would be most unjust to the people of my State. I did not suppose that Maryland would be consulted as to the passage of this law; but surely if devoted love to this Union and the efforts put forth by my native State in the cause of freedom deserve anything, some consideration should at least be shown us before so important a step is irrevocably taken. Maryland gave over forty thousand of her gallant sons to aid you in crushing out this rebellion. Shoulder to shoulder they marched alongside of Massachusetts and Ohio, and left their blood and their bones on every battle-field to attest their devotion. Her treasure was poured out as freely as water in aid of the finances of the Government, while her citizens, individually, contributed largely of their substance to feed and nourish the hungry and fatigued of our brave boys as they marched through our State to and from the Potomac and the peninsula. They have the same love for the Union now that they had then, and they never will consent to part with it. The political power of the State is to-day in the hand of loyal men, and it will remain there unless injudicious and unwise measures like this divide us. The great body of the Union element of the State has already spoken out against these measures. Every State and county Union convention that has met since it was agitated has pronounced against it, and the only hope the rebels of Maryland have got for the future is to attempt to divide us from the great Republican party of the country. We love that party because it has been true to the Union and opposed to human slavery; we love it because it helped to save our State, and because it did not believe "the war to be a failure," nor become disheartened at temporary disaster or defeat.

On last Wednesday the Union Governor of Maryland delivered his annual message. He is a man than whom no one more true to his country nor more devoted to the colored race ever lived. Hear what he speaks as to the sentiment of the State:

"The distinctive characteristics and admitted antagonism of the two races cannot be lost sight of in the settlement of these grave issues. In discussing the claim of universal negro suffrage, we must understand, in the very outset, the effect of the measure in its full bearing upon the Southern and border States. It matters not, in some of the States, whether the negro is invested with the right to vote or not. The exercise of suffrage causes no disturbance of existing relations. If we admit his right to vote, we cannot justly exclude him from our representative Halls, from the government of our States and cities, and every other privilege known to our laws. The right to vote assumes the exercise of the power thus conferred for the exclusive benefit of his own race. The effect, then, of universal negro suffrage is the virtual transfer of southern States and southern territory, and it may be some of the border States, to the ultimate possession and control of the negro; it is the substitution of the African for the Anglo-Saxon race in a large section of our national domain."

"With the southern and middle States, perhaps our own, this issue of negro suffrage is a subject of the gravest import. Massachusetts, with her nine or ten thousand negroes, in an aggregate population of 1,200,000 souls; Maine, with her 600 in an aggregate of more than 1,300,000; Vermont, 700 in an aggregate of more than 300,000; New Hampshire, 500 in an aggregate of more than 500,000, and other free States standing in the numerical relation would hardly claim to approach this issue from a common standpoint, even with our own State. The loyal men of the South, admitted to be ever so limited in number, stand in no relation which would justify, even if the power existed under the Constitution, the forcible surrender of their country into the hands of the African race."

The Lieutenant Governor, an original "uncompensated" emancipationist, and a man who, years ago, was persecuted because he entertained abolition sentiments, thus addresses the Senate of Maryland:

"As citizens of this old State of Maryland we have much to feel proud of, much to thank God for. Upon the very border, with hostile armies surging back and forth over our soil year after year, connected by blood and social ties with those who lifted the arm of rebellion, our faith and loyalty have continued inviolate; and if, during the short reign of terror, the polar star of duty seemed to be hidden from view, it



was but the drifting of a cloud over its fair surface, leaving its radiance purer and clearer for the momentary obscuration. No State claims at this hour, or will command in the annals of the future, a prouder record. Not content to yield up her sons a sacrifice upon the altar of the country, she took in advance a step towards the extinction of that fatal cause of contention which culminated in the recent conflict of arms. The first note of freedom went forth from these Halls, proclaiming that within the limits of this old Commonwealth, at least, human bondage should no longer exist. Since then other States have wheeled into line, until it has become morally certain that, if in after years rebellion should ever again lift its hideous front upon American soil, it will find no rallying centre upon the question of slavery. With the extinction of this great evil, and the brilliant vista of prosperity which that act opens before us, are presented unfulfilled duties and obligations to the emancipated people within our borders, which we cannot, which we dare not, overlook, if we would; the prompt consideration of which is demanded by every principle of humanity, advancing civilization, and an enlightened public opinion. I allude not here to the question of suffrage. However correct the affirmative theory, it is evident that the time for legislation upon this subject has not arrived in this country yet, and certainly not in this State. The problem must be left to work out its own solution. But independent of this are obligations to the colored people of which we must acquit ourselves at once, and which are the logical sequences of emancipation."

Sir, what are the evils we apprehend from the passage of this bill? They are simply the natural results that flow from a new condition of things inaugurated here, and that will inevitably have its effect on the colored people of my State. So soon as emancipation was enacted here, thousands of slaves left the State and came into the District—how many thousands I do not know. Why did they come here? To get free; for no other reason. And mark me well, the same thing will follow the passage of this law. The poor fellows have heard so much talk about voting, that as soon as they hear they can vote in the District, we will find them coming by the thousand. And what advantage will it be to them? Simply nothing but to vote. And how in my own State? You will find that the sharp, designing, ambitious negro, and there are a few such, will improve their opportunities by telling them that the white men of Maryland are cheating them of their rights, and incite them to discontent, the result of which will be a bitterness of feeling, and in the end a struggle to obtain the right to vote. Suppose the right is given them, what then? Is there any danger; are they not all loyal; will they not all vote on the side of the Union? Mr. Speaker, I doubt it. I know many loyal negroes, and some who are not loyal. But the negroes as a general thing are the most quiet, passive, lamb-like beings on the earth. They will never forget a friend; seldom ever their old masters. Although they are free, many of them will not leave their old homes. Those who have found homes elsewhere, on the large farms or in the city, and work for wages as laborers, in time, will become as much attached to their new employers as they were to him who formerly owned them. All that is required is to treat them kindly, and I venture the assertion—there may be exceptionable cases here and there, but as a general thing—the former master or the new employer will, nine cases out of ten, exert more influence in obtaining their vote than all other influences combined. The effect of this will be to give the rebels more influence than they now possess.

Suppose I am wrong in this, and that no party will control them, but that they will vote as a class and a race, just as we do. What will be the effect, then?

According to the census of 1860, the aggregate white male population of the State was 256,859; free colored male, 39,746; slave male (free) 44,313; making free colored 84,059 to 256,859 free white.

You will find that the colored population is so unevenly and unequally distributed that in the city of Baltimore, with a white male population of 88,000, there were but 10,000 free male colored, while in Anne Arundel, with a male white population of 6,258, there were free male colored 6,238. The effect of this unequal distribution will be that in some parts of the State the free colored voters will not only possess the balance of power, but will be powerful enough to outvote the whites altogether. The moment this takes place, I fear the negro will be the loser in the conflict for the mastery.

Observe the relative numbers of the two classes as exhibited in the following table:

	Male, white.	Free male, colored.
Calvert county.....	2,044.....	3,237
Caroline county.....	3,914.....	1,758
Charles county.....	2,929.....	5,468
Dorchester county.....	5,933.....	4,155
Kent county.....	3,914.....	3,124
Montgomery county.....	5,804.....	3,488
Prince George's county.....	4,852.....	7,114
Queen Anne's county.....	4,420.....	3,839
St. Mary's county.....	3,472.....	4,247
Talbot county.....	4,065.....	3,392

Compare, sir, these statistics with the average white males and colored males in other States, and you will find why gentlemen from the North and West are not influenced by the same motives and causes that influence me, and why I can disagree with them, and not be classed with the enemies of the negro. In Maine the population is divided thus: male, white, 316,530, free male, colored, 659, distributed among sixteen counties; and the highest number of male colored in any county is 212; and in this county (Cumberland) there are 36,050 male whites.

New Hampshire has a white male population of 159,563. She has a free male colored population of 252, divided up into ten counties; and the greatest number in any one county is 67. That county (Merrimack) has 20,306 white males.

Vermont has 158,415 white males, and 371 free male colored. The greatest number of male colored in any one county is 78, and that county (Rutland) has 18,267 male whites.

Rhode Island has 82,302 white males, and 1,831 free male colored, distributed among five counties; and the highest number of male colored in any one county is in Providence, which has 898 to 51,000 male whites.

Massachusetts has 592,244 white males and 4,469 free male colored, distributed among fourteen counties; and the highest number of blacks in any one county is in Suffolk, where the proportion is 91,055 white males to 1,089 free colored males.

New York has 1,910,354 male whites to 23,178 male colored; Pennsylvania, 1,457,945 male whites to 26,373 male colored; Ohio, 1,171,720 male whites to 18,442 male colored; and so you may continue throughout the whole catalogue, and you will find the same disproportion in favor of the whites in the North and West. But, sir, it is needless for me to say further on this subject.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I do not desire my action in this bill, or the votes I shall give on those of similar importance, to be misconstrued, either by this House or the country. Some may suppose that because I am not in favor of negro suffrage, I am an enemy to the negro. Sir, I am not his enemy, but his friend, and shall continue to be his friend so long as he continues to merit my friendship. I enlisted in the cause of emancipation in my State at a time when, to be an emancipationist, was to be hated and despised by many of my best and warmest friends. I have stood true and steadfast with these parties, and intend to remain with them so long as they represent the true Union sentiment of my State. I shall vote for no measure or connect myself with any party that would either deprive the black man of what he already has or that would oppose the conferring all the rights necessary and essential in securing to him life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and the enjoyment of the fruits of his own labor. I am neither disposed to "take a step backward" nor to pull down what for four years I have been aiding, in my humble way, to build up.

The negro is free. I will do all in my power to make his freedom a blessing to him and to us. As a freeman, he is entitled to acquire and dispose of real and other property, to labor and receive the avails and proceeds of his labor, to have his life, liberty and person protected by the same laws that protect me. I am in favor of the passage and enforcement of such laws as will carry out those objects. I will go further, and say that as he shall have the right to contract, so shall he not only have the right to enforce his contract, but to that end shall be received as a witness in a court of justice on the same terms, and subject to the same laws as are binding on us. It would be an outrage, a shame on the American people of to-day, if, after they had freed these poor unfortunate beings, and had placed them among those who have apposed their freedom and where they are compelled to work out their own redemption, and to earn their own livelihood, we were to refuse to throw around them such legal guards as will prove their only protection and secure to them the enforcement of their rights.

I will go even further than this, and will vote for all measures to elevate their condition, and to educate them separate and apart from the whites, so that they may not only properly appreciate the freedom they now have, but become fitted to exercise the higher duties of freemen whenever the dominant race see proper to confer such privileges upon them hereafter. In all this I conceive I act the part of the philanthropist, and no less the friend of my own than of the black race. In refusing at this time to give him the right to vote, I consider I act none the less as his friend. I have no hatred, no prejudice to the negro. I am willing to confer upon him everything necessary and essential to his well-being and his future happiness and usefulness, but when it comes to placing him upon the same social and political level as my own race, I must refuse to do it, because in doing it I would be doing an injury to both races that the future at least will develop.

If I believed that the matter of suffrage was the only mode to help the negro in his



elevation, and the only safeguard to his protection, or guarantee to his rights, I would be willing to give it to him now, subject to proper qualifications and restrictions. But I am honest in my conviction that, uneducated and ignorant as he is, a slave from his birth, and subject to the will and caprice of his master, with none of the exalted ideas of what that privilege means, and with but a faint conception of the true position he now occupies, the negro is not the proper subject to have conferred upon him this right. I believe if it is given to him, that in localities where his is the majority vote, parties will spring up, each one bidding higher than the other for his ballot, and that in the end the negro-voting element will be controlled by a few evil and wicked politicians, and a something to be bought and sold as freely as an article of merchandise. I am satisfied of another fact, from my experience of the southern negro, that if they are ever allowed to vote the shrewd politician of the South, who has been formerly his master, will exert more influence over his vote than all the exhortations from Beecher or Cheever.

It is a notorious fact that the southern planter maintained his political influence over the poor white man of the South, because the poor white man was dependent on him for his living and support. And you will find, when it is too late, that the southern planter will maintain the same political influence over the poor, uneducated, ignorant, and dependent African, even to a greater extent than he formerly exercised over what used to be called the "poor white trash."

Mr. Speaker, let us not, because we have the majority here to-day, pass upon measures which, if we were evenly divided, we would hesitate to pass. Let us not, because we are called radicals, strike at the roots of society, and of the great social and political systems that have existed for over a century, and attempt to do in a day, without any preparation, what to do well and safely will require years of patience on the part of the freedmen, and earnest, honest, exertions to elevate, improve, and educate on our part. Let us look at this question as statesmen, not as partisans. Let us not suppose that the parties of to-day will have a perpetual existence, and that because the negro, freed and emancipated by us, would naturally vote on the side of his deliverer to-day, that it is any guarantee, when new parties are formed and a competition arises, that the whole or a major part of his vote will be cast on the right side. White men and black men are liable to the same infirmities.

Let us rather, sir, rejoice at what has been already done for him, and be content to watch his future. Let us help to elevate and improve him, not only in education, but in morals. Let us see to it that he is not only protected in all his rights of person and of property, but let us insist that the amplest guarantees shall be given. Let us wait until the great problem the African is now working out has been finished, and we find that he thoroughly comprehends and will not abuse what he has got, before we attempt to confer other privileges, which, when once granted, can never be taken from him. Sir, let it not be forgotten that "revolutions never go backward;" and if you ever confer this right on the negro, and find it will not work well, that you have been too hasty, that you should have waited awhile longer, you will find it is too late, and that, once having possessed it, they will not part with it except with their lives.

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#### PERSONAL EXPLANATION.

Mr. J. L. THOMAS. I ask the gentleman from New Jersey to yield to me for a moment to make a personal explanation as to my absence from the House on Thursday last, when the final vote was taken on the passage of the District of Columbia suffrage bill.

Mr. ROGERS. I will yield for that purpose.

Mr. J. L. THOMAS. In the report of the proceedings of the House in the *Baltimore Sun* the following note appears appended to the report:

"NOTE.—Owing to the great confusion on the floor of the House last evening, Mr. JOHN L. THOMAS, of Maryland, was understood to have voted against the negro suffrage bill; although he voted on the previous question he did not vote on the bill, being absent from the Hall when the vote was taken."

That statement, without any further allusion to it on my part, subjects me to misconstruction, and intimates that I shirked a responsibility which I am always ready and willing to make.

I will state that on the afternoon of that day I was in receipt of two communications which made it absolutely necessary for me to leave this city in the Annapolis train, which left at 35 minutes after four, to attend to the business of my constituents, on matters equally important to them as the suffrage bill.

Anxious to vote on the several propositions, I came to the House on the afternoon of that day and voted to lay the bill on the table, which I considered a test question. I voted also against the proposition of the gentleman from New York [Mr. HALE] which proposed qualified suffrage, and then I turned my face to the clock and found that it only wanted ten minutes of the starting time of the Annapolis train, and I left the House.

I desire to say further, that when I left this Hall it was with no intention of evading the issue of that bill, because I had placed myself, as I thought, fairly and squarely against negro suffrage, either qualified or universal, and I desire now to ask the consent of the House to allow me, under these circumstances, to record my vote against the passage of the bill.

The SPEAKER. The Chair will state that, under the rule of the House, unanimous consent cannot be given. The rule adopted by the last Congress requires a member who records his vote to be in his seat during the roll call, and if he is not in during the roll call, the Chair cannot entertain a proposition to ask unanimous consent to record his vote.

Mr. J. L. THOMAS. I will state then, that had I been present when the vote was taken, I would have voted against the passage of the bill.











