6-4-1960

Quotes on "civil rights" issue from address by Senator Strom Thurmond, 1960 June 4

Strom Thurmond

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Recommended Citation
Thurmond, Strom, "Quotes on "civil rights" issue from address by Senator Strom Thurmond, 1960 June 4" (1960). Strom Thurmond Collection, Mss100. 2056. https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/strom/2056

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The solution to the so-called "civil rights" issue does not lie in words and speeches. It is quite true that speeches are useful in our efforts to present the South's viewpoint to the remainder of the Nation. We have made substantial headway in this educational project, and, indeed, many of the people of the other parts of the country are in sympathy with our viewpoint. This is reflected in my mail, which includes many letters from such States as New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio and California. It is also apparent from the fact that many of the Senators from outside the South have admitted quite frankly that they received little demand from their constituents for the "civil rights" legislation which they have pushed with so much vigor and passion.

The pressures to persecute the South originate with organized groups, and their leverage is bloc votes that constitute a balance of power in elections. The Northern politicians are reluctant to admit this publicly, but occasionally they do. For instance, on February 18, during the debate on the so-called "civil rights" bill, Senator Javits, while debating with Senator Talmadge, frankly admitted that he had asserted that by strongly espousing "civil rights" legislation, the Republican Party could gain the electoral vote in 17 populous States. Privately, Senators from outside the South are not so reluctant to admit their political motives, which are obvious to any observer of the political scene.

Publicly, those who appear most anti-Southern profess to treat the question in the framework of a moral issue. In fact, many speeches taking this tack have been made by leaders of the NAACP and other anti-South forces. For instance, Senator Clark of
Pennsylvania, one of the most ardent civil-righters, while bemoaning the elimination by the Senate of the worst provisions of the 1960 "civil rights" bill, had this to say—and I quote from the Congressional Record of April 8, 1960:

"How can one explain the behavior of the Senate? I fear our membership merely reflects the indifference of the country at large to the plight of our Negro citizens. Perhaps it reflects more than that: A national failure to measure up to moral challenges; an unwillingness to distinguish right from wrong; . . ."

With these very words, Senator Clark, while trying to picture the issue of so-called "civil rights" as one of "morals," admits that the overwhelming portion of the population of the country is not behind the push on "civil rights."

Not only has the truth become apparent to a large portion of the people of the country, but it is understood and appreciated by many Members of the Senate who have listened to the true record of the South on the race issue. Some of these Senators have objected strenuously to the "civil rights" legislation pushed in Congress. For instance, on March 3, Senator Capehart, a Republican from Indiana, made a speech on the Senate floor in which he pleaded with the Senate to immediately drop consideration of "civil rights" legislation. In this speech, he pointed out that the publicity on the legislation gave a completely false impression as to the true status of race relations and the rights enjoyed by minorities in the United States, including the South. Senator Capehart said, and I quote from page 4049 of the Congressional Record: "What we should be doing if we want to spend as much time as we are on this subject, is to be devoting our efforts to talking about the blessings of minority groups in America." This Senator understands
clearly that a moral question is not involved in the "civil rights" issue. Although from Indiana, he rose in the Senate with a plea that efforts to pass "civil rights" legislation be stopped immediately. His words were obviously heartfelt and conscientiously uttered. No one with an open mind could have heard these words without being impressed, not only by their sincerity and conviction, but by their truth. Yet this plea did not stop the drive of the pro-civil rights forces.

Why? Because few, if any, of those in the Senate who heard or read the words of Senator Capehart were primarily concerned with the truth of his words. The dominant factor in determining their course was the harsh reality of political expediency. In at least eight and possibly more populous States, the Negro race has sufficient votes to constitute a balance of power in turning the entire electoral vote of these States into one column or the other. These eight States have a total of 213 electoral votes, only 53 short of the number required for election to be garnered from the remaining 42 States. These are hard political facts. They are understood by politicians. If we, the South, would change the course which is being charted by those who cater to the minority bloc votes, we must do so with a counter-balancing exercise of political power.

In the nine Southern States which constitute the heart of the Confederacy, there are 93 electoral votes. By unified action, these 93 electoral votes could be wielded as an instrument of political power which is understandable to the politicians of both national parties. In any close election, these 93 votes could themselves constitute the difference between election and defeat for either national party, and through the use of this weapon lies the only practical solution to the "civil rights" dilemma.