

*Can the white South come
to feel with the disfranchised?*

The White Primary vs. Democracy

By Ira DeA. Reid

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THE United Council of Church Women recently in session at Washington, D. C., voiced the opinion that "a free vote" must be guaranteed all citizens of the United States. The United Council is composed of 1200 organizations of church women scattered throughout the United States. Their action strengthens the hands of Southern people and organizations that have pressed so hard in Texas, Arkansas, Georgia and other states in behalf of a franchise freed from a poll tax and rid of a primary based on race and exploitation of the many by the few.

However, it is disconcerting, to say the least, to have Georgia's State Department of Justice offer the full weight of its resources and prestige to the president of the Georgia Bar Association in his capacity as counsel for the defendant in an appeal from Judge T. Hoyt Davis' decision in the recent *King vs. Muscogee County Democratic Party*. In this decision Judge Davis upheld the right of Negroes to vote in the Georgia primary and awarded damages to Mr. King. We consider the state's offer of aid disconcerting, because it indicates how desperately the old system is seeking to maintain itself.

The situation we face poses an even greater problem for the region—the desperate need for Democracy in the South to improve and refine itself. What we have long sought in this nation is a doctrine of guarantees. We have looked to constitutional procedures; we have placed faith in enacted lists of principles, like the Bill of Rights. But there must be more. The crucial problem of politics in the South is not facts and knowledge; it is feeling. Can we feel the feelings of those who are denied Democracy, and can we feel *for* them? The political scientists say yes—on three conditions: if they are close to us geographically; if they are present to us constantly; and above all, *if they matter*. The last, we fear, is the rub.

Yet this problem must be solved in so far as it concerns those things without which a breakdown of domestic Democracy must occur. What persuasion can make the ruling South care about the others, and so learn about the others sufficiently to care about them? Is there a principle upon which such persuasion can be founded? Is there an idea to induce at once a temper of continuous readiness to listen and be influenced? Must the South continue to be politically afraid, inept and unjust?