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Civil Rights Act of 1964

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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Or let them search, if they will, in the long and tortuous history of human liberty. Let them search in the Constitution and in the documents of freedom which we have enshrined.

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And we should delude neither ourselves nor the people of the Nation that they will be anything else. An issue of this magnitude carries the accumulated action and neglect, the accumulated achievements and failures, the accumulated commissions and omissions of generations of Americans. And it will take, for many years, the combined contribution of all the sources of reason and unity within the Nation to bring the issue to adequate resolution.

The Senate's role, then, Mr. President—this Senate's role—is neither everything nor nothing. It is the role of a leading participant, an essential and active participant in shaping the continuing process of equalizing opportunities, that all Americans may share fully in the promise of the Constitution.

We shall not fulfill that role, Mr. President, if we calculate its dimensions with the slide rule of political expediency. To act on this issue on the basis of the white or black vote, the North, the South, East, or West vote, is as illusory as it is cynical. There is no political profit for anyone in this issue. At least there is no political profit which can be realized except at the expense of the Nation's unity and welfare. If history teaches us anything, it teaches us that such profits are short lived even to those who reap them and that their heavy costs are paid, in the end, by the whole Nation.

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from Illinois [Mr. DOUGLAS], to the distinguished Senator from the State of Lincoln, to lend us not only of his profound convictions on human freedom but of his warm and compassionate nature to help close the wounds of division. And I appeal to the Senator from Georgia [Mr. RUSSELL], not as the leader of any bloc, not as an outstanding legislative tactician, but as the great American and the great Senator which he is, and I beseech him to give us not only of his immense parliamentary capacity but even more of his legal wisdom and of his heart in order that this Senate will be remembered, not for what it did not do, but because of what it did for the Nation.

And, finally, Mr. President, I appeal to every Member of this body to bring to this issue, when it is before the Senate, all their resources of wisdom, courage, perseverance, and understanding, so that we may, with mutual restraint and in all humility, fashion a contribution to the freedom, order, and well-being of American life which is worthy of ourselves, of the Senate, and of the Nation.

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