
The American Race Problem

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What Is It?

The American Race Problem is the problem of Black and White. Other race problems there are in this country, but before this problem of Black and White all others sink into pale insignificance. It is one of the most written of and talked about of American public questions and the one least understood.

It is based upon hatred of the unlike — the white man's hatred for his racial opposite and for other types that are in any way different from his selected standard. It derives most of its virulence from the firm conviction in the white man's mind of the inequality of races — the belief that there are superior and inferior races and that the former are marked with a white skin and the latter with dark skin and that only the former are capable and virtuous and therefore alone fit to vote, rule and inherit the earth. This belief finds strength and support in the partial decadence and almost complete submergence of Negro culture from the time Arabs overran North Africa and the Sudan offering, by virtue of SUPERIOR FORCE, the Sword or the Koran, and implanting the Mohammedan religion and Arab civilization where formerly had nourished Negro theology and culture of such a type as to excite the wholehearted admiration and emulation of the ancient Hebrews and Greeks.

The American Race Problem is further accentuated by the history of the country and the fact that the Negro a little more than a half a century ago occupied here a most subservient and helpless position. He was a slave and unlike the Anglo-Saxon and other European races who made up the mass of the slaves of the Roman Empire, the freed Negro, on account of his color, was not able to merge with the rest of the free

citizens. He remained, therefore, a thing apart. In the American body but not accepted of it. In many sections of the country he has not the status of an American citizen — since an American citizen VOTES; And in those sections he is not alone disfranchised but made to feel in many other ways the Caucasian-proclaimed inferiority of his Race. So that he may know that he is inferior he is Jim-Crowed on public conveyances, segregated into undesirable and unhealthy locations, and even in the public schools, theatres and moving picture houses the controlling white man assiduously toils to convince him of his inferiority. This Caucasian propaganda aims to exalt the white races into the heaven of the little tin gods by the blatant declaration of the inferiority of the darker races and the more or less effective attempt to cover up their achievements in the past so that, the white man may claim credit for all that has been done in the development of civilization. And when all this fails, and the Negro still feels himself Man, the superior Caucasian descends to the savagery and terrorism of lynching!

Such are some of the most salient phases of the American Race Problem. To fully appreciate the difficulties of the problem however, it is necessary to go a field a bit. In the first place we must remember that racial antipathy is not exclusively confined to the Caucasian, that the Negro dislikes the white man almost as much as the latter dislikes the Negro. We must remember secondly, that this racial antipathy is not of modern origin, that it probably existed before the dawn of history, that it certainly has been a factor in all times and countries of which there are any records, that never before in history have the two races lived together on terms of peace, justice, and equality. That today, only in Brazil and for the first time is this phenomena pre-

sented and that between the NEGRO, INDIAN, AND LATIN RACES, but nowhere on earth in the present or in the past between the Negro and the Nordic — Anglo-Saxon, Teutonic, Scandinavian. And that in Brazil the darker races enjoy equal opportunities and complete equality merely because they greatly outnumber the white races in the country. But that in ancient lands, as in most modern countries, the relations of the two races have always been on the basis of slave and master, inferior and superior. And so strong was this racial antipathy which the Negro in the past felt for his racial antipodes that history records that the Negro women of a Sudan town about to be captured by besieging white enemies committed suicide by flinging themselves from the walls rather than fall into the hands of the hated Caucasian.

Is race prejudice then so light a thing, so shallow an emotion that we can airily prate of an ultimate solution while allowing matters to drift along their own way or rather, the way of the white man, and without taking some action to assure the future “security of life” and happiness of our Race? The solution this magazine has to offer is not easy. It calls for Sacrifice and Service! But at least it leads to Glory and Respect! The other way leads to degradation and hell upon earth.

The White Man's Solution.

Is it for this we all have felt the flame.
This newer bondage and this deeper shame ?
— Dunbar.

While the Negro has been drifting and letting things take care of themselves, trusting in that great illusion, the Ultimate Equitable Peaceful Solution the white man in the South has been solving the Negro Problem in his own way. And in this he has had the acquiescence of the white man in the North.

Now, the white man's solution of the Negro Problem is great — for himself. For the Negro it is hell and worse! The white man's solution is simply that the Negro should behave himself and keep his place. To this end he has instituted Jim-Crowism, segregation, the terrorism of lynching, and peonage and convict-labor. If the Negro will stand for this, in the end he will be the dehumanized, servile, unambitious, and

abject creature that the white man evidently desires to see him. And lest we be accused of exaggeration we call the white man himself to the witness stand. Read what white men, naturally in half-sympathy with the South and only protesting when cracker cruelty went too far, have to say in the white man's solution then consider whether the Northern Negro can afford to stand by in smug complacency of mistaken geographical safety while his brother is being dehumanized in the South. The first we shall call to testify is William P. Pickett, a resident of Brooklyn and author of *The Negro Problem: Abraham Lincoln's Solution*, a book we have lately read with great interest. Says Mr. Pickett:

One of the most alarming aspects of the Southern situation is the constantly increasing tendency towards reducing the Negro to a condition of peonage. A chapter might be profitably devoted to this view of the subject, did space permit.

From Virginia to Texas various state laws are in force which virtually operate to restrain the Negro farmhand from leaving the farm, or the common laborer under contract from leaving his employment, and enable the employer through a system of fines or imprisonment to control the personal liberty of his employee.

...This amounts substantially to selling into enforced public service or the retaining in private involuntary servitude, persons who fail to pay alleged debts, frequently extortionate or fraudulent. The crime appears to be on the increase throughout the South...

No more may be said upon this point here than that this system, with the barbarous and inhuman convict-labor system of the extreme Southern States, has a general tendency compulsorily to retain the Negro upon his native soil, and *is leading towards a system of complete physical subjugation which promises to be fruitful of the greatest injury to the race.*

The practice prevails throughout the range of states extending from Virginia to Texas, of leasing persons convicted of crime (the great majority being Negroes) to the highest bidder, who thus acquires the right to avail himself of their labor as a matter of speculation. Statistics relating to this barbarous practice are simply incredible.

The usual custom is for the bidder, frequently some favored politician, to sublet the convicts by hundreds to contracts for road-making, lumbering, working in the turpentine industry, or other similar exhausting labor. The prices paid for the labor of these convicts by those employing their services appears almost beyond belief.

...and when we take in consideration the ordinary wages paid to unskilled labor in that section, or even the highest compensation of the same class in the North, and reflect upon what must be exacted in the way of production from an ill-fated convict for whom a subcontractor is paying \$47.50 per month, with the expense of keeping, the horrors of the system must at once impress themselves on the mind of any person possessing the least spirit of humanity.

Mr. Pickett's testimony is substantiated by other whites who have written on the subject. Prof. Albert Bushnell Hart in *The Southern South* bears witness that

Even without a contract a Negro may be legally obliged to labor for a white man under vagrancy laws, by which Negroes who are not visibly supporting themselves may be convicted for that crime, and then sent to the County Farm, or hired out to somebody who will pay their fine. Once in the hands of a master, they are helpless. For instance, one Glenny Helms, who was apparently guilty of no offense, was in 1907 arrested, fined and sold to one Turner, who in this case thought it prudent to plead guilty of peonage. The son of this Turner was the agent in the most frightful case of peonage as yet recorded. A woman was accused of a misdemeanor; it is doubtful whether she had committed any; but at any rate she was fined fifteen dollars; Turner paid the fine; she was assigned to him and he set her to the severe labor of clearing land. And then what happened? What was a hustling master to do with a woman who would not pile brush as fast as the men brought it, but to whip her, and if she still did not reform, to whip her again, and when she still would not do the work, to string her up by the wrists for two hours, and when she still "shirked," God Almighty at last came to the rescue; she was dead! †

This much testimony does space allow for peonage and convict-labor. Of the cruelty of the system there can be no doubt. Of the menace to the future of the Race let thinking Negro men and women judge for themselves. Of "Jim-Crowism" William P. Pickett says:

Of all devices employed for the purpose of marking the distinction between the white and Negro races in the South, probably the most offensive to the Negro is what are commonly known as the "Jim Crow" laws.

Nothing more destructive of the natural pride of an intelligent and self-respecting man or woman can be conceived than the treatment to which the better class of Negroes in the South are subjected in this ruthless enforcement of the mortifying regulations for the separation of the races. Yet all protest is unavailing. The laws which accomplish this degrading discrimination against the black man are denounced by the enlightened members of the race, but have been steadily upheld by the courts and sanctioned by the Interstate Commerce Commission as constituting proper and reasonable regulations of travel. The Negro asserts that these unjust laws result in the dwarfing of the manhood and womanhood of his people, and bitterly denounces the practice of exacting payment for first-class accommodations and then compelling the members of his race, theoretically equal before the law, to submit themselves to such obnoxious requirements.

Of lynching, the weapon of terrorism used by

the Southern whites when all else have failed to break the spirit on lynching, let Walter F. White, assistant secretary of the NAACP, and investigator of the recent lynchings in Brooks and Lowndes County, Ga. speak. We quote from his report in the September *Crisis*:

The murder of the Negro men was deplorable enough in itself, but the method by which Mrs. Mary Turner was put to death was so revolting and the details are so horrible that it is with reluctance that the account is given. It might be mentioned that each detail given is not the statement of a single person but each phase is related only after careful investigation and corroboration. Mrs. Turner made the remark that the killing of her husband on Saturday was unjust and that if she knew the names of the persons who were in the mob that lynched her husband, she would have warrants sworn out against them and have them punished in the courts.

This news determined the mob to "teach her a lesson," and although she attempted to flee when she heard that they were after her, she was captured at noon on Sunday: The grief-stricken and terrified woman was taken to a lonely and secluded spot, down a narrow road over which the trees touch at their tops, which, with the thick undergrowth on either side of the road, made a gloomy and appropriate spot for the lynching. Near Folsom's Bridge over the Little River a tree was selected for her execution — a small oak tree extending over the road.

At the time she was lynched. Mary Turner was in her eight month of pregnancy. The delicate state of her health, one month less previous to delivery, may be imagined, but this had no effect on the tender feelings of the mob. Her ankles were tied together and she was hung to the tree, head downward. Gasoline and oil from the automobiles were thrown on her clothing and while she writhed in Agony and the mob howled in glee, a match was applied and her clothes, burned from her person. When this had been done and while she was yet alive, a knife, evidently one such as is used in splitting hogs, was taken and the *woman's abdomen was cut open, the unborn babe falling from her womb to the ground. The infant, prematurely born, gave two feeble cries and then its head was crushed by a member of the mob with his heel. Hundreds of bullets were then fired into the body of the woman, now mercifully dead, and the work was over.*

Of the general attitude toward the Negro, Prof. Hart says:

So far as can be judged, the average frame of mind in the South includes much injustice, and unwillingness to permit the Negro race to develop up to the measure of its limitations.

Observe that this ferocity is not directed against the Negro simply because he does ill, but equally if he does well.

†- This passage is garbled in Briggs' original, corrected to Hart's published text here.

And William Pickett admits that

The conditions under which the great majority of the Negro race live, the handicap imposed upon them by their color, the 'implacable hostility which they encounter in their endeavors to compete industrially with the white man, their exclusion from the unions, all combine to constitute them a class apart in the realm of productive activity, arid to compel them to accept the most meagre wages for their unskilled efforts, and in like manner to accommodate themselves to the lowest scale of living.

The Negro's Solution.

While lynching, Jim-Crowism, peonage, convict slave labor, segregation and other forms of oppression leading to the ultimate dehumanization of the Negro constitute the white man's "Solution" to the American Race Problem, the Negro's Solution, until recently, has been more of a hope against hope, a dream in a realm of fact, than any definite attempt towards a solution that would be just and honorable to his race as well as acceptable to the white man.

Whether it was the advice to "buy pigs" or the declaration that white men would learn to respect and honor Negroes as soon as Negroes acquired sufficient property and education it was all diametrically opposed to human nature, the lessons of history and the facts in the case. The South has long since proved the fallacy of the theory that the ownership of pigs (and other property) will secure one in the rights of life and property. "Observe," says Prof. Hart, "that this ferocity is not directed against the Negro simply because he does ill, *but equally if he does well.*" While William P. Pickett, a keen observer of conditions in the South, says:

Now the fallacy of this view (that education or wealth will solve) lies in the assumption that the higher the state of education and ability the Negro can attain, the more wealth he can accumulate and the greater his prosperity, the more he will be liked and appreciated by the white race in the South.

The contrary is always the case. The Southern Negro who performs humble duties, who is content with menial occupation, who bears himself meekly, stands in the attitude of hat in hand, is not ordinarily the subject of aggressive racial animosity. It is the Negro who asserts himself to the level, social or political of the white man, who meets with the sternest opposition.

Another proffered solution for the problem is "simple justice;" a beautiful theory, indeed, but one

that absolutely ignores the kind of human nature that made the poet exclaim that "man's inhumanity to man makes countless millions mourn." In the face of the fact that the white race (nor, in truth, any other race) has never been just in its dealings with unorganized and (therefore) weak peoples it would seem that Negro leaders who are expected to be versed in the human records called history) would hesitate to offer seriously such a solution as "simple justice," yet a sea of talk has been sent out along this line and much good mental energy wasted.

Still yet another beautiful solution is "to leave it to God." This is the advice of those who would have us egoistically look for a special dispensation of Providence in our own particular case, forgetful of the fact that "God helps those who help themselves."

All these beautiful theories come together to form the "Ultimate Equitable Solution," the great illusion of the Negro in an alien civilization. But the fact is that beautiful theories and eloquent harangues upon justice, liberty, and the guarantees of the Constitution little avails in the face of the many-sided race problem, imbedded as the latter is in the natural fortresses of human nature (Caucasian nature in particular) and the cold reality of racial antipathy.

Latterly, however, a new solution has been offered as the Negro began to recognize that the salvation of his race and an honorable solution of the American Race Problem call for action and decision in preference to the twaddling, dreaming, and indecision of "leaders."

This new solution is nothing more or less than independent, separate existence. "Government of the (Negro) people, for the (Negro) people and by the (Negro) people."

"When two ride a horse one must ride behind" is an old adage the truth of which has yet to be questioned. Then, too, Negroes have had the opportunity of observing how quickly the Japanese adaptation of their Government and philosophies to the Caucasian gospel of force won for them the respect and consideration still denied the Jew after centuries of achievement and much accumulation of wealth. Negroes are rapidly learning that superior force (not sentiment whether of justice or liberty) dominates the thoughts and actions of men.

The Menace of the Future.

The end of the war is in sight. In the sharp industrial competition which will follow the war (and which was on the way war or no war) the Negro Race in America and in the sub-tropical sections of Africa will face annihilation and economic death unless protected economically — as other and wiser races have seen fit to protect themselves — by the ownership of territories large and rich enough in resources to supply present needs and guarantee future requirements. All the dead and dying races were not conquered by the sword; many were victims of economic warfare.

For years the white man has been assiduously fencing off the earth while the darker races slept. The vast Dominion of Canada, the illimitable expanse of Siberia, the entire continent of Australia have been fenced off to supply the future territorial needs of the white race while, at the present moment supporting puny white populations who, backed by mother nations in Europe, plainly tell the Colored races to keep out, that they will have none of them, that these vast territories, once the habitat of Colored races, and ca-

pable of supporting millions upon millions of human beings, are to be held by sparse white populations — backed by militant Europe — for white posterity.

Here we have an example of the white man looking hundreds of years into the future and taking steps now to safeguard the white men of a far distant future day.

His action is wise and deserves applause — *from white men*. To Negroes, however, his action is a menace and from them deserves the sharpest and swiftest opposition.

In the economic war that is to follow the war — that in fact, is already upon us — Negroes in countries dominated by a numerically superior white population will be at a deadly disadvantage.

Ownership and control of large and rich territories is necessary to safeguard the existence of the race and to guarantee it political equality and justice and the freest opportunity for development. Without control of resources we are lost. Only the race that is in possession and control of such resources can hope to survive the stern economic competition of the future.

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