

A section from an essay by Stephen Dill Lee titled, "The South Since the War," pages 267-568, with this excerpt from page 346-360, in Volume XII of "Confederate Military History," Confederate Publishing Company, Atlanta, Georgia, 1899.

Page 346

#### THE NEGRO PROBLEM.

With the account of the great strides made by the South since 1880, one will ask, What became of the great negro problem, which for nearly three hundred years has been a running sore in this country? In nearly every stage of our history, this vexed problem has caused division, irritation, bitter political discussions, sectional animosities, and conflicting interests in material development. Even in the constitutional convention of 1789, our wisest states-men knew and said that the States were divided between those having slaves and those not having them, or about getting rid of them. This division existed down to the war between the States; in fact, slavery was the irritating cause which divided the North and the South on sectional lines in the construction of the Constitution. The negro since the war was still the irritating cause which kept the sections wide apart, and was responsible for the harsh reconstruction epoch. He owed his freedom to a war necessity. He was the cause of the drastic political experiments inaugurated by Northern statesmen. From a slave he was made a full citizen, with full political rights.

These were thrust upon him suddenly, without any previous training or preparation. At the same time he was made to face the white man in the great problem of competition, while his aspirations and instincts were entirely different from the stronger ruling race; the one race thrifty, dominating, accumulative and full of enterprise and progress, the other not inclined to lay up wealth or better its condition. For awhile the negro was the ward of the nation, and money was lavishly spent to hold him in his new responsible position, but this had its end.

Page 347

Thinking men knew that while he was not expected, owing to his unfortunate past, to be able to fight the battles of life with the superior race, still it was disappointing, as shown by the statistics, that the masses have been but little advanced in the acquisition of property and education. He is inclined to be wasteful and improvident; inclined to spend his money in baubles rather than in surrounding himself with comforts. It cannot be denied that he has improved in many ways, educationally, materially and morally, but as yet the signs are not of the most encouraging character that he will ever be successful in the great competition in life, which he will necessarily encounter side by side with the white man.

I hardly think it can be denied that prejudice exists against him as a race, both North and South. In his work he cannot compete with the white man in quality or amount. It is also evident that in all lines of employment except agriculture, he is steadily disappearing in numbers at the North, as compared with his hold in those employments years ago, when

there was a sentiment in his favor. He is being more and more restricted in all the avenues of the various industries affording a living to workers. The places are being filled more and more by white employes. He is constantly failing in his ability to keep abreast of the white man in the struggle for employment. He is being pushed aside as the white man needs work and tries to get it, to such an extent that at the North he has but few lines of employment now left. Labor unions are discriminating against him in all mechanical trades, and in fact in all lines of work controlled by guilds, and this discrimination also exists where there are no labor unions. For a long time and until recently this feeling did not pervade the South, but it is growing, and where many negro mechanics got work for a long time, white mechanics are now strongly competing and demanding preference, and as they generally give better work, they are getting it more and more

Page 348

to the exclusion of the negro. The white immigrants, too, from the North to the South, have little use for the negro after a few years, and more and more the negro will have to fight and struggle for a living like every other race; and it remains to be seen how he can run side by side with his more progressive and assertive white neighbor, as the white race outnumbers him more and more, and becomes more aggressive.

Mr. Henry Garnett, in the summary of negro statistics in the Census Bureau for 1890, gives the following results: "The negroes, while increasing rapidly in this country, are diminishing in number relative to the whites. They are moving southward from the border States into those of the South Atlantic and the Gulf. They prefer rural life rather than urban life. The proportion of criminals among the negroes is much greater than among the whites, and that of the paupers is at least as great. In the matter of education, the number of negro attendants at school is far behind the number of whites, but is gaining rapidly on that race." These statistics show that in one hundred years the whites have multiplied eighteen times and the negroes nearly ten times. In 1790, the whites were 80.73 per cent of the population, the negroes 19.27 per cent. In 1890 the negroes constituted only 12 / per cent of the population.

In the criminal statistics, the proportion of negroes in jails was nearly four times as great as that of native white extraction, and the commitment of negroes for petty offenses is in much greater proportion than among the white race. The negroes also marry earlier and their lives are shorter than in the white race.

The Rev. L. W. W. Manaway, missionary of the African Methodist church in Mississippi, who has carefully collated statistics as to his race, says:

A great many of my race say that the white people send them to prison. I differ from them. . . . I found that out of 78 convictions of colored people, the testi-

Page 349

mony on which the convictions were had in 77 cases was furnished by colored people,

and that the man convicted by white testimony received a sentence of one year in the penitentiary, and the average sentence of those convicted on colored testimony was from two to five years. . . . Last year there were twenty-two negroes killed over the crap table. . . . It is said abroad that the white people in the South are killing off the negroes. The statistics of crime which I have kept for years disprove the charge. It is true that pernicious crimes are committed which cause lynchings, but the same causes bring the same results in other States of the Union. I must not be understood as defending lynchings. Lynchings are wrong whenever or wherever engaged in. Every lyncher is a murderer. . . . The majority of crimes are not committed by the best colored citizens, but by shiftless people who float from one community to another with no visible means of support. " (Daily Picayune, New Orleans, April 9, 1897.)

From a statistical standpoint, the outlook for the negro is not encouraging. I do not believe that any one can forecast the future of the negro. One thing is certain, when left to himself without the strong will and example of the white man in the black belts, he tends to retrograde; when outnumbered by the whites in the white belts, he assimilates more to the habits of white men, becomes a better laborer and a better citizen. The negro is certainly improving as a laborer all over the South since the last three or four years, and farming is getting more and more in its normal condition. Experimenting is passing away and both white and black races understand each other better, and all work is more strictly on business principles. Labor has got over its disorganization, and is realizing that unless good service is rendered, it is difficult to get on good lands or with good employers. Both white and black have paid old debts and are more careful in incurring new ones. Many mortgages have been lifted in the last three or four years, and good crops have been produced.

Page 350

The white people are realizing fully now that the negro is a constant quantity at the South; that he has no idea of moving away and settling at the North and elsewhere; that he must be educated and fitted for citizenship as rapidly as possible; that it is better to help and encourage him than to repress him; and the whole drift now is to elevate him by education. It is worthy of remark that although he was freed as a war measure, still the great government which freed him has done nothing to remove his illiteracy, poverty and ignorance; but the great burden has fallen on the impoverished white people of the South mainly, which was the most disorganized section of the Union as a result of the war, and they are taxing themselves with as liberal and unselfish a spirit as has been shown by any people under similar circumstances anywhere on the globe. It is not just to say either that the negro, who was and is the principal farm laborer, is not entitled to a large credit for the great and valuable crops raised in the South since 1880. It is true he was directed by the white people who owned the land, but the crops were made mostly through his labor. The white people went to work also on the farms and made a large part of the crops themselves. They worked harder and more industriously than ever, and in the white belts raised a large per cent of the crops. I believe that the next census will show a much better record for the colored race. I remark, then, that the great progress of the South is explained in the energy and push of the Southern whites, under the great necessity to

retrieve and save their country and transmit its Anglo-Saxon civilization unimpaired, and as far as possible untarnished by negroism or its consequences; that the rapid accumulation of wealth was brought about in spite of the incubus of an inferior race, which was forcibly carried along and made to do its part. The negro has seen the great difference and feels it is best for both races. Repression of the negro vote will gradually pass

Page 351

away, and he will become as regular a voter as his white brother, when he loses his identity as a political factor separate and distinct from others. White immigrants will move so rapidly now that the negro will be over-shadowed everywhere, as he is now in the localities where the whites outnumber him two or three to one; they will be assimilated to the whites in thrift and citizenship; never the equal but always the weaker vessel which must not be imposed upon but must be protected.

#### MORALITY OF SOUTHERN PEOPLE.

The morality of the Southern white people will compare favorably with any country or section in the world. Unsympathizing pens have not considered their untoward surroundings in having contact with "an unassimilated and inferior race," that the "submersion of brains, political experience, land ownership, and habits of domination by ignorant members could have but one issue," which was plainly brought out in the reconstruction days and for many years following. The white people have given evidence of their morality in the growth of the religious denominations, and more especially in the prevalence of prohibition in the liquor business by local option laws, especially in Mississippi and Arkansas. About 90 per cent of the counties of Mississippi have prohibition by virtue of local option. It is even better in Arkansas, but in all these elections, the negro votes almost solid for whisky.

#### SOCIAL MATTERS.

It is a wise provision also that the races are kept separate in the schools, in churches and in railroad cars. Equal accommodations are granted under the laws. In some of the States no separation appears in railroad cars, and soon it will- be the rule in all the States in this particular, but it will be a long time, if ever, before the children of the two races will attend schools in common, so long as the negro is numerous in particular localities.

Page 352

The race instinct is implanted by a stronger hand than that of man, and a different arrangement where the races are anyway equal or the blacks more numerous, would result in constant collision and disorder. The young generations of whites and blacks have far less disposition to adjustment in such matters than the older members of the respective races. The sensible negro never aspires to social equality; the broad men of the race distinctly state this; and any tendency in this direction is found only with the worse

element and those disposed to create disorder and trouble. At the North it is hypocrisy to pre-tend that the negro is admitted in social circles equally with the whites. He is held more at arm's length than even at the South, this, too, in face of the fact that the negro is the exception there and seldom met, as compared with the South, where in several States he out-numbers the whites, and in many localities, the same condition exists in almost every State.

Of late years one hears more of negroes not being admitted to hotels and restaurants and public resorts at the North than at the South. Social equality is not recognized North or South, and the sentiment is the same among the whites and blacks in both sections.

### LYNCHINGS.

Lynching to the extent it has existed in the South is indefensible. The crime invoking it began and has been continued solely by the irrepressible and worst element of the negro race, inaugurating a new crime, which was unknown and impossible in the days of slavery, and which, from that fact and the existence of slavery, invested it with peculiar horror and atrocity. That the race instinct is strongly implanted in human society is undeniable; and when this crime is committed under the peculiarly harrowing surroundings of isolation in sparsely-settled communities, upon helpless and unprotected white women, combined with the murder in many cases of the

Page 353

outraged female, it arouses a fierceness and revengeful spirit uncontrollable at times. It should be borne in mind, too, that a most abnormal state of society had pre-ceded the advent of this crime of rape, for which the Southern people were not alone responsible and which they tried to prevent. What is now regarded as a great political mistake was committed in the sudden enfranchisement and investment of the negro race with all the privileges of citizenship, including suffrage, lawmaking, and governing at the point of the bayonet a superior race, who had always been aggressive in the assertion of every political right. This race was under a ban as a punishment for so-called rebellion and insurrection. Their hands were tied when this great political and social reversion of the races was put in operation and upheld by the military government of the United States from 1867 to 1880 (almost). When the military power of the government in this period stood aside, apparently to see what the new State governments would do alone, those governments inaugurated a similar system only worse, in that negro militia, armed to the teeth, took the place of the white United States troops, and most offensively flaunted their newly-invested rights in the faces of the white people of the South, a proud, sensitive race. The conventions and legislatures, called to inaugurate new State governments, were divested of every essence of the theory and tradition of local self-government, composed mainly of designing men called carpet-baggers, who could not succeed at their former homes, with not a particle of sympathy for the people who had always governed. They were their avowed enemies, using a large number of the most ignorant of the negro race to assist them. To illustrate: In the convention in Alabama, out of ninety-seven, members of the one hundred and thirty-one, thirty-one were from Vermont, Connecticut,

Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Maine, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Canada, and Scotland; bearing in mind, too,

Page 354

that these were mainly white strangers to the people, and that they controlled the negro element. Some of the Southern whites, who could not get office from the people among whom they lived, except in such upheavals of society, united with them and were even more extreme than the white aliens; they, too, were striving for influence among the negroes to hold office by their votes, and had to keep abreast of or surpass their alien white colleagues to allay their suspicions of loyalty to the new order of things, in order to win the confidence of the negroes by posing as their foremost defenders in their newly given rights obtained by military power.

There were some good white men in these conventions and legislatures intent on trying to get the best possible government, but these were silenced. Instead of realizing the dangerous situation, the new lawmakers began discussing, with most inflammatory language and bearing, the matter of intermarriage of the races, the further disfranchisement of classes of whites who might throw obstacles to their proposed plans, and mixed schools in common for all children, white and black. When it is recalled now that in some of the States the negroes were largely in the majority, and in others nearly equally divided, this complete social upheaval was enough to turn the heads of the worst element of a more fortunate race than that of the negro. But even with these temptations the crime of rape was not committed then, for the shrewd carpet-bagger knew that this one offense would not be tolerated, and so long as they remained, it did not occur except in most isolated cases. The older negroes, too, and pleasure is taken in stating it, under the influence of even the great temptations and their previous living among the white people as slaves, never dreamed of such a crime, and held their growing sons for a time under that control which they had had under the system of slavery. No other race, under similar temptations and surroundings, would have done better.

Page 355

They had no revenges of a personal character to inaugurate against their former masters. This new and hideous crime remained to be inaugurated by a younger generation of negroes, raised amidst the upheaval of those troublous times, while their fathers were mainly engaged in listening to inflammatory appeals, many of a social coloring, by designing and robbing strangers who held political power; and while their fathers themselves had laid aside their industrious habits of life and were leading a careless, wandering existence in their new-born freedom, not one-third of their time being given to productive labor.

Amid such surroundings the new generation of negro boys and men was raised. Parents, in a measure, gradually lost control of their boys in that loose period, and they grew up in idleness and with distorted and ugly ideas of their rights. They felt that they had to assert those rights personally by insolence and bravado toward the white males and females,

among whom they had lived. The young negroes remembered that their fathers were held in place by the white troops of the government which had given them freedom. They saw soldiers of their own race parading almost every plantation and town to keep down the whites and hold the negroes in power. Even an ignorant negro boy could see that the "black man's party" was in power, and the "bottom rail on top."

Under these conditions, when the brains of the carpet-baggers were lost to the negroes by a change of government into the hands of the Southern property-holders and educated class, the young negroes could scarcely appreciate the import of the change, and they found that dreams of social equality had vanished forever. This dream had never taken strong hold on the older blacks, but it had seized the younger ones. They recalled all the discussions and talks of the dark days as to the inter-marrying of the races, and the crime of raping a white

Page 356

woman came into existence as a sequence. It occurred generally under most revolting and harrowing circumstances. It was in sparsely-settled districts where the crime was committed, in secluded paths and roads, when young girls were going to or returning from school, when wives were alone in their homes with children, their husbands being at work in the fields or otherwise engaged in the great struggle of breadwinning, and in communities generally where the blacks predominated in numbers. The feeling of utter lack of protection existed in places, and those who lived under such terrible facts, felt that the sanctity of their homes could only be protected by taking the law into their own hands and meting out punishment to the brutes. They did it just as they would turn out to kill a mad dog in a small town, or crush a rattlesnake under their feet, when beloved ones were in such peril. Women were afraid to go about with-out a guard. Life became unbearable; for the peace and security of home are gone when rape is committed. They felt that if the brute was not lynched, the wretch might get loose and repeat the same crime.

These acts of lynching, of course, always shocked every law-abiding citizen. They struck terror to the negro. The law-abiding sentiment was weakened when-ever a lynching occurred. The crime was indefensible; but those who condemn it must not forget the abnormal conditions. Those who engaged in lynching put them-selves outside of the law, but at the same time those who committed rape put themselves also outside of the law. It would always be better to abide by the law, for human society and civilization are based on the principle that the individual gives up his right of protection of life and property to the State which must perform this duty. But in the isolated spots where the crime was generally committed, it was almost impossible in many cases to get this

Page 357

legal protection promptly, and when it was needed, the community was swayed by a terrible cyclone of excitement and horror.

The conditions evoked, too, are most peculiar. The whites felt themselves outraged, and

by a state of tutelage of the negro for which they were not responsible. This is no excuse for the crime of lynching. It is only stated to bring out the unfortunate facts incident to a great political crime in thrusting responsibilities on a weak and unfortunate race by a too rapid hotbed process of development, a procrustean operation.

The negroes felt outraged, too, for it appeared to them that only their race was lynched for the crime. They did not remember that white men, however loose in morals, did not find it necessary, in gratifying their beastly impulses for the other race, to commit the crime. This is no excuse for the white man to indulge his lustful desires. It was the misfortune of the negro race that in its condition of slavery and in the little time for improvement since free, habits of purity and chastity among them were not of a high grade. It was not to be expected that it should be otherwise. This is as much regretted by the conservative element of the negroes them-selves as by their best well-wishers. At any rate, the negro was, as was natural, shocked and sullen and felt aggrieved. The two races in similar frame of mind from the peculiar circumstances, did not view, and have not as quickly viewed, the crime as it should have been. The example of the whites has been a bad one for the negroes themselves, for they, too, follow in the tracks of their neighbors. Only two years ago a negro girl near Enterprise, Miss., had to go through a lonely swamp to her home from work. She got a negro man to go with her for protection. Her dead body was found and her would-be protector was a fugitive, while outraged negroes, to protect their race from the great crime even among themselves, scoured

Page 358

the swamps, woods and everywhere to catch the brute and lynch him. It should not be forgotten, too, that lynchings occur sometimes at the North under similar atrocious surroundings. Outraged communities in all parts of the world take the law in their own hands and lynch those who endanger the sanctity of home and society.

The negro element is hardly perceptible at the North; it is not in sufficient numbers to cause much friction. Still it does do it. Even mixed schools, where a small per centage of the scholars are negroes, have stirred up many communities, and considerable friction has resulted from the inborn race feeling implanted in every bosom. This presentation of facts is not given to excuse the lynching of negroes and whites, but to exhibit afresh the surroundings in the South in that new formative period after the war with its consequent chaos in society and morals. It is possible that some few lynchings may have been meted out to innocent parties, but barely possible. The greatest harm done always is in familiarizing public sentiment in witnessing such violations of law, and breaking down 'reliance on the law to redress grievances. The remedy lies in both races trying to put a stop to the crime which produces the violation of law by lynching.

The statistics show that the number of lynchings in 1896 within the limits of the United States was 131; 107 occurred in the South, and 24 in other parts of the Union, in Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, New York, Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory. Of the negroes, 80 were lynched (40 for the crime of rape, 20 for murder and house burning). Fifty-one whites were lynched. So it appears that lynching is not meted



out to negroes alone, but that nearly 40 per cent of those lynched were white men, and of the negroes 50 per cent of those lynched were killed for the crime of rape, and 18 per cent of the lynchings occurred out of the South. (Memphis Commercial-Appeal, January 5, 1897.)

Page 359

The law-abiding citizens everywhere have always tried to prevent lynching. Leading citizens in every State have, from the inception of the crime, done all they could, by pen and speech, to hinder and check it. Every leading paper in the South, in fact I will say the press generally, has done its duty to stop it. Governors have exercised all their power, and have often prevented it. In South Carolina legislation disfranchises an officer who even appears to play into the hands of a mob, and debars him from office. It renders the county liable in damages to the amount of \$2,000 to go to the family of the lynched person. It is more frequent now that culprits are lodged in jail to await the slow process of law. Officers are doing their duty in protecting criminals and getting them beyond the reach of lynchers. Public sentiment is growing stronger and stronger in condemnation of the act. Whites and blacks alike are now working more together to root out the crime of rape, and have offenders tried as other criminals. Bishop W. J. Gaines, a colored man of the Methodist African church, says: "I am as emphatic in my condemnation of the lawless and godless crime of lynching as Bishop Turner can be, but he is entirely too radical. The best element of the white people is opposed to lynching as much as are the negroes. The governors and peace officers of the Southern States are doing all they can to bring about a proper condition of affairs. The best remedy for our evils is education and Christianity. The crimes for which lynching is the punishment are committed by the most ignorant of our race. It will take time to educate them." This is what he says in reply to Bishop Turner of the same race, who would have the negroes arm themselves and virtually inaugurate neighborhood war, and which some vile negroes would construe as a protection for those who committed rape, and which would result in the greatest calamity to the blacks if started. It is fortunate that so good an adviser is to be found as Bishop Gaines. I remark that

Page 360

the people of the South are as moral and law-abiding as any people anywhere in the world. It would be well if those who judge them harshly would consider what they would have done themselves, surrounded by the most grave social problem the world has ever seen; viz., the race problem in its ugliest presentation in the South, and by the provocation of the mistake of statesmen.