

RACE PREJUDICE A PERIL TO DEMOCRACY

Recent Meeting of the National Association For the Advancement of Colored People Called "The Twentieth Century Summons to Save Democracy From the New Perils Which Race Prejudice Has Engendered in the Nineteenth Century"—Meetings Stirred the Instinct of Self-Preservation in Every Man and Woman.

OLD "LIBERTY BELL" RINGS OUT NEW IN- DEPENDENCE

Sinai Temple and Handel Hall Seemed Like Independence and Faneuil Halls Transferred Here From Philadelphia and Boston and Built Over Again Into a New Fortress of Freedom—Solve the Race Problem For the Other Man, Him and His, If You Want It Solved For You and Yours—Who Is to Blame?

By Graham Taylor.

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For more than two days last week Chicago witnessed a great scene and heard the new tone of an old sound. The places where these things were seen and heard—Sinai temple and Handel hall—seemed like Independence hall transferred here from Philadelphia and Faneuil hall from Boston, built over again into a new fortress of freedom.

The old "liberty bell" seemed to be ringing out its call for the signing of a new declaration of independence. It was nothing less than a twentieth century summons to save democracy from the new perils with which the race prejudice engendered in the nineteenth century has threatened it.

The reader who did not attend this convention may be surprised to have his nationwide, all-America interpretation given to the meeting of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Nevertheless, the occasion was much bigger than its title. In growing to these larger proportions, however, it did not outgrow either the size of its leaders or their vision of its scope. Although some of them had suffered the bitterness and brutality of race prejudice, less only than those of their own race from whom it had rung the terror of death and the tears over the shedding of kindred blood, yet even these speakers rose above the self-defense of the black race. They stirred the instinct of self-preservation in every man and woman of every other race by the plea for the common human right to life, to justice and to livelihood.

The Case for the Negro.

With all the pathos and power which oppression and injustice beget, but without bitterness or bigotry, these Negro witnesses and confessors pleaded for the justice, for the equality before the law, for the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" guaranteed and proclaimed to the world by American democracy. They pleaded not for themselves only or at all apart from all others. Their plea was for the survival and revival of democracy, on the ground that the denial of its common rights to any menaced all with the loss of liberty and equality. Stirred no less deeply were the whites, who were aroused to the high pitch of the deep passion for freedom which sometimes smolders but never dies out of any true American breast, and is always fanned to white heat when the American is actually brought face to face with injustice and oppression.

Indeed, it was hard to distinguish any difference between the breadth and the depth of this passion for liberty as it steadily glowed or burst into flame either from Oswald Garrison Villard, editor of the New York Evening Post, or W. E. B. DuBois, editor of the Crisis—"a record of the darker races"; either from Dr. B. F. Riley, the southern white man who is making the conquest of race prejudice the white man's burden, or William Pickens, the southern Negro whose native wit is sharpened by the culture which Yale university gave him; either from Mrs. Ida B. Wells Barnett of the Negro Fellowship league or Jane Adams of Hull House; either from Abdul Baha, the Persian apostle of universal religion, who recognized the image of God in the white heart of a black man more than in the black heart of a white man, or in John H. Walker, president of the United Mine Workers of Illinois, who in the name of organized labor demanded for the Negro, his boy and girl, what he himself wanted for himself and for his boy and girl.

For Him and His, If For You and Yours.

"Solve the race problem for the other man, him and his, if you want it solved for you and yours." This was the democratic keynote which rang out from every session of this remarkable conference like a clarion call to all America and every American worthy of the name and of the heritage. But this is not to say that race prejudice does not bear more

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RACE PREJUDICE PERILS DEMOCRACY

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heavily upon some people than upon others. While no one of any race is ever safe from it, those of certain races are always in danger. It is one race that is in peril here and now, and another race then and there. On this occasion the Negro was on the witness stand to lodge the plaintive protest before the bar of justice—not American justice only, but universal human

The bald and brutal facts are that in twenty-six years 2,458 Negroes have been lynched in the United States. The Chicago Tribune has kept account of the gruesome figures each one of all these years and reports 1,521 of these victims of race prejudice to have been put to death without trial or any pretense at the process of law. The alleged crimes for which sixty-three Negroes were illegally put to death in 1911 included only nineteen cases in which the victims were suspected of wronging women. Some are so unjust and shortsighted as to justify the murderous anarchy of a mob by a so-called "unwritten law" under which these nineteen were put to death, but no one can find even such a pretense to excuse the setting aside of law and justice, our courts, judges and jury in the cases of the forty-four others.

The horrible ways in which these victims of lawlessness and brutality in America were hanged, burned and mutilated to death made all who saw the photographs of some of these awful scenes and who heard the stories of others wonder whether we are living in civilization or in savagery. Certainly no recorded ingenuity of savages in torturing their victims exceeds that of these civilized barbarians who in the south are generally described as "prominent citizens" and in the north as "respectable."

But the Negroes in this conference were reminded that they are not the only ones standing in this deadly peril, all the while they were reminding us whites of the risks we are taking in allowing them to suffer. Others of "the darker races" might have been put upon the witness stand—the red man, the yellow Asiatic, the brown Japanese. The white races could have taken their turn in counting the cost of what it means to be "an infidel dog" to Mohammedans, a "foreign devil" to the Chinese, a "Yankee" to the Mexicans, a "feudist" to the mountaineer, a "dago" or a "Polack" or a "hunkie" to all of us other immigrants, including whites in the south, or much more the cost of being a "Jew" in almost any age or land, or among almost any people. To protect ourselves from taking our turn each one of us should join with this National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in using all the law of the land to protect the Negro from taking his turn.

Who Is to Blame?

Now, who is to blame for all this shocking inhumanity and subversion of all human rights?

It will not do to say that only those are guilty who thus set the law at defiance and stab justice to the heart with every blow they aim at the victims of their fury. All of us have a share of responsibility to bear for this ignominious failure of our civilization. John Stuart Mill, the great English economist and advocate of Anglo-Saxon liberty, thus arraigns us all: "It also appears to me that when prejudices persist obstinately it is the fault of nobody so much as those who make a point of proclaiming them insuperable as an excuse for never joining in an attempt to remove them. Any prejudice whatever will be insurmountable if those who do not share in it themselves truckle up to it and flatter it and accept it as a law of nature."

What shall we do, we who have been born in America and love our heritage; quite as much, if not more, we who have left other fatherlands and adopted America as our own country—what shall we do to protect our rights "to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" from this deadliest peril to us all?

Be human, be just, be American. That is all. But it is not enough, unless we carry it into the jury box, up to the sheriff, the police and the governor, into the labor union, the employing corporation and the federations and associations of both, into our social circles, at the family altar where we pray with our children and into the innermost shrines of our religious faiths and hopes where we bow before God with our fellow worshippers or are alone with Him in the sanctuary of each one's own soul.

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