



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

The Crisis, Vol. 6, No. 2

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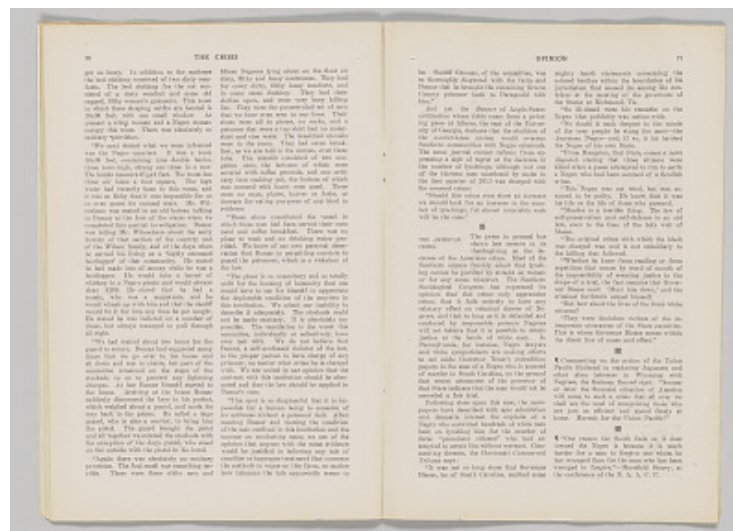
get us lousy. In addition to the mattress consisted of two dirty comforts. The bed clothing for the cot consisted of a dirty comfort and some old ragged, filthy women's garments. This room in which these sleeping outfits are located is 16x30 feet, with one small window. At present a white woman and a Negro woman occupy this room. There was absolutely no sanitary provision.

"We next visited what we were informed was the Negro quarters. It was a room 16x30 feet, containing nine double bunks, three rows high, strung out three in a row. The bunks measure 6 1/2x4 feet. The room has three air holes a foot square. The high water had recently been in this room, and it was so filthy that it was impossible for us to even guess its natural state. Mr. Wilcockson was seated in an old bateau talking to Bomar at the foot of the stairs when we completed this partial investigation. Bomar was telling Mr. Wilcockson about the early history of that section of the country and of the Wilson family, and of the days when he earned his living as a 'highly esteemed bootlegger' of that community. He stated he had made lots of money while he was a bootlegger. He would take a barrel of whiskey to a Negro picnic and would always clear \$100. He stated that he had a cousin, who was a magistrate, and he would whack up with him and that the sheriff would fix it for him any time he got caught. He stated he was indicted on a number of times, but always managed to pull through all right.

"We had waited about two hours for the guard to return. Bomar had suggested many times that we go over to his house and sit down and rest in chairs, but part of the committee remained on the steps of the stockade so as to prevent any lightning changes. At last Bomar himself started to the house. Arriving at the house Bomar suddenly discovered the keys in his pocket, which weighed about a pound, and made his way back to the prison. He called a dago guard, who is also a convict, to bring him the pistol. The guard brought the pistol and all together we entered the stockade with the exception of the dago guard, who stood on the outside with the pistol in his hand.

"Again there was absolutely no sanitary provision. The foul smell was something terrible. There were three white men and fifteen Negroes lying about on the floor on dirty, filthy and lousy mattresses. They had for cover dirty, filthy lousy comforts, and in some cases ducking. They had their clothes open, and were very busy killing lice. They were the poorest-clad set of men that we have even seen in our lives. Their shoes were all to pieces, no socks, and a prisoner that wore a top shirt had no undershirt and vice versa. The breakfast utensils were in the room. They had eaten breakfast, as we are told is the custom, over these tubs. The utensils consisted of two one-gallon cans, the bottoms of which were covered with coffee grounds, and one ordinary iron cooking pot, the bottom of which was covered with burnt corn meal. There were no cups, plates, knives or forks, or tinware for eating purposes of any kind in evidence.

"These alone constituted the vessel in which these men had been served their corn meal and coffee breakfast. There was no place to wash and no drinking water provided. We know of our own personal observation that Bomar is permitting convicts to guard the prisoners, which is a violation of the law.



"The place is so unsanitary and so totally unfit for the housing of humanity that one would have to see for himself to appreciate the deplorable condition of the convicts in this institution. We admit our inability to describe it adequately. The stockade could not be made sanitary. It is absolutely impossible. The ventilation is the worst this committee, individually or collectively, have ever met with. We do not believe that Bomar, a self-confessed violator of the law, is the proper person to have charge of any prisoner, no matter what crime he is charged with. We are united in our opinion that the contract with this institution should be abrogated and that the law should be applied in Bomar's case.

"This spot is so disgraceful that it is impossible for a human being to conceive of its unfitness without a personal visit. After meeting Bomar and viewing the condition of the men confined in this institution and the manner on conducting same, we are of the opinion that anyone with the same evidence would be justified in believing any tale of cruelties or improper treatment that concerns the methods in vogue on this farm, no matter how inhuman the tale apparently seems to

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be. Sheriff Grooms, of the committee, was so thoroughly disgusted with the farm and Bomar that he brought the remaining Greene County prisoner back to Paragould with him."

And yet the Banner of Anglo-Saxon civilization whose folds come from a printing press at Athens, the seat of the University of Georgia, declares that the abolition of the convict-lease system would overrun Southern communities with Negro criminals. The same journal cannot refrain from expressing a sigh of regret at the decrease in the number of lynchings, although not one of the thirteen men murdered by mobs in the first quarter of 1913 was charged with the unusual crime:

"Should this crime ever show an increase we should look for an increase we should look for an increase in the number of lynchings for almost invariably such will be the case."

THE AMERICAN CRIME.

The press in general has shown less reserve in its thanksgiving on the decrease of the American crime. Most of the Southern organs frankly admit that lynching cannot be justified by attacks on women or for any cause whatever. The Southern Sociological Congress has expressed its opinion that this crime only aggravates crime, that it fails entirely to have any salutary effect on criminal classes of Negroes, and that so long as it is defended and condoned by responsible persons Negroes will not believe that it is possible to obtain justice at the hands of white men. In Pennsylvania, for instance, Negro lawyers and white sympathizers are making efforts to set aside Governor Tener's extradition papers in the ease of a Negro who is accused of murder in South Carolina, on the ground that recent utterances of the governor of the State indicate that the man would not be accorded a fair trial.

Following close upon this, the newspapers have described with epic admiration and dramatic interest the exploits of a Negro who outwitted hundreds of white men bent on lynching him for the murder of three "prominent citizens" who had attempted to arrest him without warrant. Commenting thereon, the Cincinnati Commercial Tribune says:

" It was not so long since that Governor Blease, he of South Carolina, emitted some mighty harsh statements concerning the colored brother within the boundaries of his jurisdiction that caused ire among his confrères at the meeting of the governors of the States at Richmond, Va.

"So ill-timed were his remarks on the Negro that publicity was nationwide.

"No doubt it sank deepest in the minds of the very people he stung the most - the American Negro - and, if so, it hit hardest the Negro of his own State.

"From Hampton, that State, come a news dispatch stating that three citizens were killed when a posse attempted to run to earth a Negro who had been accused of a fiendish crime.

" This 'Negro was not tried, but was assumed to be guilty. He knew that it was his life of the life of those who pursued.

"Murder is a terrible thing. The law of self-preservation and self-defense is an old law, even to the time of the holy writ of Moses.

"The original crime with which the black was charged was and is not subsidiary to the killing that followed.

"Whether he knew from reading or from repetition that comes by word of mouth of the impossibility of securing justice in the shape of a trial, the fact remains that Governor Blease said: 'Hunt him down,' and the criminal forthwith armed himself.

"But how about the lives of the three white citizens?

"They were doubtless victims of the intemperate utterances of the State executive. This is where Governor Blease comes within the direct line of cause and effect."

Commenting on the action of the Union Pacific Railroad in replacing Japanese and other alien laborers in Wyoming with Negroes, the Railway Record says: "Sooner or later the financial situation of America will come to such a crisis that all over we shall see the need of recognizing those who are just as efficient and spend freely at home. Hurrah for the Union Pacific!"

" One reason the South feels as it does toward the Negro is because it is much harder for a man to forgive one whom he has wronged than for the man who has been wronged to forgive." -- Moorfield Storey, at the conference of the N.A.A.C.P.

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