
Black Persecution

by Eugene V. Debs

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It took just 15 and a half minute to try, convict, and sentence a Negro to the gallows down in Kentucky a few days ago.

It is the record for the swift execution of justice as administered by courts of law in the United States.

It is granted that the Negro thus summarily sentenced was guilty of a terrible crime.

The point we are now making, though set like steel against capital punishment, is not that the punishment was too swift or too severe, but that the extraordinary trial and conviction in this case were due solely to the fact that the defendant was a Negro.

Had he been a white man instead of a Negro there would have been no such excitement as to give the case nationwide attention; the governor would not have been required to order out the state militia; and all the resources of the state would not have been brought into play to prevent another lynching, a possible burning at the stake, followed perhaps by the gruesome sale of the victim's bones as souvenirs of the vindication of "white supremacy" and of the law as administered in our Christian civilization.

The Negro in this instance committed murder and was guilty, it is assumed, of rape, though this feature of the frightful affair is left to the inference in the press reports.

In any event it was, as we have said, a terrible crime.

But what made the crime infinitely more terrible in the eyes of the Christian citizens of Kentucky, where Nordic culture and white supremacy prevail, and where our vaunted civilization, based upon the

golden rule and upon the precepts of charity and forgiveness taught by the Master is made manifest in many thousands of churches established in His name, is that it was committed by a human being with a BLACK skin instead of a WHITE one.



That the mob of bloodthirsty Christians who surrounded the courthouse and were only held at bay by the armed forces of the state did not add another lynching to their Christian record was not at all their fault. They surged through the streets, these pious American citizens, with all their basest passions unleashed, thirsting for blood to glut their ferocious vengeance. Morally speaking, they lynched their victim and are guilty of that enormous crime, for in their hearts there seethed the blood-lust inherited from their remote ancestors in the primeval jungles.

Many and many a Negro girl, scarcely out of her childhood, has been seduced, raped, assaulted by a Nordic gentleman (!) with a white skin, but it has never been necessary to order out the state militia to protect him against the avenging wrath of his Christian fellow-citizens.

Times without number have white men committed crimes as monstrous as that of the Negro in this case, but there is not 15-and-a-half minute record in their trials, and in many cases they went scot free or were dismissed with light sentences.

It makes all the difference in the world in this "land of the free and home of the brave"; this land of Christian civilization; this land of equal rights and equal opportunities, cornerstoned in the doctrine that all men are created equal; this land of Nordic culture

that boasts of being the vanguard of intellectual, moral, and spiritual progress, the herald of “peace on earth and good will to men” — it makes all the difference in the world whether God Almighty gave you a white skin or a black one, for the color of your skin determines the color of your soul.

It is a pathetic commentary on this tragic affair that what was in the feeble, flickering, benighted brain of that black wretch was infinitely less dangerous to society than was the blood-lust in the hearts of the “peace-loving and law-abiding” white citizens who madly strove to rend him and perhaps burn him at the stake and dance like fiends incarnate to the music of his agonizing shrieks.

Biological science has no difficulty in accounting for the black wretch who rapes a white woman, any more than it has in accounting for the white wretch who rapes a black woman.

But there is a clear-cut line of cleavage in the accounting. From first to last the white man has every advantage and the Negro is the victim of the most cruel and wicked discrimination and persecution.

Let it not be overlooked in this connection that the Negro was designedly kept in ignorance by statutory enactment in this country for more than 2 centuries; that it was forbidden by law, drastically enforced, that he be taught to read or write, or that he be permitted to rise above the animal level; and that the Negro did not degenerate wholly into a brute is a fact for which Mr. White Man need lay no flattering unction to his guilty soul.

The whole history of the Negro race in America is one to make the white race blush scarlet with shame.

From the time the poor black man was seized in his native land by the brutal kidnapper of the slave-trader, loaded into a boat like a beast and on landing sold like one from the auction block; from that time to the “Jim Crow” car has been one continuous shameless persecution of the Negro, and for the improvement he has been able to make under such inhuman and degrading conditions he is certainly under no obligation to his former white slave-drivers — his present white persecutors.

The people of Kentucky are neither better nor

worse in this regard than the people of any other state. If there is less cruelty in dealing with the Negro in the North than in the South the reason is not to be found in the humaner consideration of the Negro in the Northern states.

A study of the Kentucky mob held at bay by the state militia would have revealed the fact, in all probability, that the mob consisted wholly of people who pride themselves upon being “peaceable and law-abiding citizens.” We doubt if one could have been found who was not strong for “equality before the law” and for the preservation of “law and order.”

It is equally certain that without exception they were all 100% Americans. There were few, if any, “ignorant and vicious foreigners” milling around madly intent upon the feast of blood. They were chiefly if not wholly native to the soil, having from the beginning enjoyed all the advantages of Christian culture, and having never been, like the poor Negro, kept under the lash, exploited, robbed, degraded in every possible way to make possible the blessings of such culture and civilization for the white race.

No less certain is it that the mob consisted entirely of American patriots. Not one in it could be called a “traitor.” Every one of them is long on “patriotism” and would fight at the drop of the hat to punish “traitors,” especially Socialists and such who “have no respect for law” and who are bent upon “overthrowing the government by force.”

I venture to say that there was not a Socialist in that mob of Christian citizens and American patriots.

This article has been written from the point of view that men are men and that human beings are human beings, irrespective of creed or color, and any civilization based upon the vicious fallacy that a race should be discriminated against on account of the color of its skin is a false and pernicious civilization and a hypocritical one as well, if it dare avow itself Christian in the name of the Galilean Carpenter who would today, were he here, scorn and lash the pharisees who profess to be his followers while they persecute and brutalize, rob, and debase those of their fellow-beings over whom they exercise their despotic and damnable domination.

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