Charleston Syllabus

READINGS ON RACE, RACISM,
AND RACIAL VIOLENCE

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THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA PRESS
Athens

I've Been in the Storm So Long

I've been in the storm so long,
I've been in the storm so long, children,
I've been in the storm so long,
Oh, give me little time to pray.

Oh, let me tell my mother
How I come along,
Oh, give me little time to pray,
With a hung down head and a aching heart,
Oh, give me little time to pray.

Oh, when I get to heaven,
I'll walk all about,
Oh, give me little time to pray,
There'll be nobody there to turn me out,
Oh, give me little time to pray.

I've been in the storm so long,
I've been in the storm so long, children,
I've been in the storm so long,
Oh, give me little time to pray.

DOUGLAS R. EGERTON

Before Charleston's Church Shooting, a Long History of Attacks

(June 18, 2015)

In 1868, three men assassinated the Reverend Benjamin Randolph in broad daylight as he was boarding a train in Abbeville County, South Carolina. Randolph, a black man, had recently won a seat in the State Senate and was then campaigning for the Republican slate. Having served as an army chaplain with the Twenty-sixth Regiment United States Colored Troops, Randolph asked the Freedmen's Bureau to send him "where he can be most useful to his race." He settled in South Carolina in time to take part in the 1865 rededication of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston. It was that church's long history of spiritual autonomy and political activism that caught the attention of the white vigilantes who gunned him down and rode away. Randolph's fate was repeated yesterday with the murder of nine people, including the pastor of the church, the Reverend Clementa Pinckney, who, like Randolph, also served as a state senator.

Reports of yesterday's tragedy have invariably noted that an earlier incarnation of the Emanuel Church was home to Denmark Vesey, a lay minister who was one of the church's founders, but the connections between Vesey, the congregation's long history of activism, and the events of June 17 run far deeper than that.

South Carolina was unique in early America for its black majority. No other southern colony or state had a white minority until 1855, when Mississippi also earned that particular status. In 1822, Charleston housed 24,780 people, only 10,653 of whom were white. Free people of color were a tiny percentage, at 623, and most of them were the mixed-race offspring of white fathers and black mothers. One of the few free blacks in the city was a former slave turned carpenter, Denmark Vesey.

Vesey's early life was so unusual that if it were the plot of a novel or film, most would regard the saga as an absurd fiction. (The fact that his story has not attracted modern filmmakers is in itself curious, and perhaps a commentary on Hollywood's disinclination to wrestle seriously with the American past.) Born around 1767 on what was then the Danish island of St. Thomas, he was purchased in 1781 by Capt. Joseph Vesey, who shipped slaves around the Carib-

bean. Vesey briefly kept the child as a cabin boy, but upon reaching the French sugar colony of St. Domingue—modern Haiti—he sold the child, whom he had rechristened Telemaque, to French planters. Even by the standards of slave societies, St. Domingue was hell on earth. Telemaque pretended to have epileptic fits, rendering him unfit for the fields. When the captain returned with another cargo of humans, he had to take the child back, at which time the fits stopped. Captain Vesey, who settled in Charleston after the British evacuation in 1783, kept Telemaque—whose name had evolved into Denmark—as a domestic servant and assistant.

Denmark's life took yet another turn in the fall of 1799, when he won $1,500 in the city lottery. The captain might simply have confiscated the earnings of his human property, but instead he agreed to sell Denmark his freedom for $600. The bargain was completed on New Year's Eve, and Denmark Vesey woke up in the new century as a free man. But his wife, and therefore his two sons, Robert and Sandy, remained enslaved by a man named James Evans. At length, with his wife in bondage, Vesey married another woman, named Susan, and Vesey was able to buy her freedom. Their children grew up free in their rented house on Bull Street.

A practicing Presbyterian, Vesey was outraged by the pro-slavery brand of Christianity preached from the city's pulpits. White ministers were advised to lecture their black congregants on "their duties and obligations" and avoid troublesome stories, like the exodus out of Egypt, or Christ's sermons on human brotherhood. When 4,376 black Methodists quit their white-controlled church in protest over the elders' decision to construct a hearse house—a garage—over a black cemetery, Vesey was an early convert. As a carpenter, he may even have assisted in constructing the first Emanuel Church, which stood not far from the present building.

The African Church, as black Charlestonians called it, promptly attracted the animosity of the authorities. As a lay minister, Vesey, in his off hours, taught congregants to read and write—a violation of the state's ban on black literacy. State and city ordinances allowed for blacks to worship only in daylight hours and only with a majority of white congregants. City authorities raided the church in 1818, arresting and whipping 140 "free Negroes and Slaves," one of them presumably Vesey. In 1819 they again shuttered the church, and in 1820 the city council warned the Reverend Morris Brown not to allow his church to become "a school for slaves."

Had the city not declared war on Emanuel, Vesey might not have participated in the plot that got him killed in 1822. Enslaved Carolinians were never content with their lot, of course, but every slave in the state knew the odds of a successful rebellion. To protect the region's white minority, the city militia was ever active, and Secretary of War John C. Calhoun always stood ready to ship

soldiers to his native state. But the assaults on the church, which the Old Testament taught was a capital offense, reminded blacks that authorities would never allow them even the smallest spiritual freedom.

President Jean-Pierre Boyer of Haiti had recently placed advertisements in American newspapers, urging free blacks to bring their tools and skills and start life anew in his black republic. So, meeting in Vesey's Bull Street home and within the walls of the Emanuel, Vesey and his lieutenants called for domestic slaves to kill their masters in their beds and fight their way to the docks, where they would seize ships and sail south. Originally, the plan was set for July 14, 1822—Bastille Day—but the plot began to unravel, and Vesey moved the plans forward to the night of June 16. The uprising would begin when the city's churches tolled midnight, meaning that the actual black exodus out of Charleston would take place on June 17. Either the shooter in Charleston yesterday knew the importance of this date, or the selection of June 17 was a ghastly coincidence.

As was too often the case, a handful of nervous bondmen informed their masters of what was afoot. In the aftermath of the failed plot, Vesey and dozens of his lieutenants were executed, and city authorities razed the church. Robert Vesey, Denmark's son, rebuilt Emanuel at its current location in 1865. After the pine structure was destabilized by an earthquake in the 1880s, congregants rebuilt the church that exists today. Even as white Americans forgot the story of Denmark Vesey, his struggle, and that of his church, lived on in the black memory. Frederick Douglass invoked his name during the Civil War, and in later years, the church honored his commitment to civil rights by hosting activists, including the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. In 1963, the church sponsored a peaceful protest march for civil rights, which city authorities dubbed a "negro riot" and called in state troops to put down.

More recently, the church, and particularly Pinckney himself, worked tirelessly to memorialize Vesey. Charleston is crammed with countless monuments and markers dedicated to white Carolinians, most of them slaveholders, but until last year, there was nothing to adequately mark the black struggle for freedom and equality. Pinckney was instrumental in funding the statue of Vesey that was finally erected in February 2014. Many white Charlestonians opposed the monument. Letter writers filled the pages of Charleston's newspaper, *The Post and Courier*, with complaints.

In the coming days, the world will find out more about Dylann Storm Roof and his state of mind. But to dismiss him as simply a troubled young man is to disregard history. For 198 years, angry whites have attacked Emanuel AME and its congregation, and when its leaders have fused faith with political activism, white vigilantes have used terror to silence its ministers and mute its message of progress and hope. Denmark Vesey's story should never be forgotten—nor should the tragedy of June 17.

MAURIE MCINNIS

The First Attack on Charleston's AME Church

(June 19, 2015)

In the dark of night, a white man entered the AME church in Charleston, South Carolina, and opened fire. Nine people were killed.

In the dark of night, a white man entered the AME church in Charleston and started a fire. The structure was completely consumed and the church destroyed.

One is a headline from 2015, the other from 1822. The shooting this week has evoked horror and outrage across the nation; the event two hundred years ago provoked only satisfaction among the city's white inhabitants. Charleston, the wealthiest city in pre–Civil War America, was also the city with the largest percentage of residents of African descent, greater than 50 percent in every census until 1860. It has a long history of racialized violence and of violence inflicted against the black church. The shooting this week at the African Methodist Episcopal Church is another bloody chapter in that long history.

The fire in 1822 destroyed a small wooden church located a few blocks away from the present structure affectionately called "Mother Emanuel." The church had been founded in 1818 by Morris Brown, a member of Charleston's small free black population (nearly 1,500 in 1820). Charleston was then a city of 25,000 (more than 12,000 of whom were enslaved), and it is estimated that several thousand African Americans joined the church in the early years. On the corner of Reid and Hanover streets, this earlier church was in an area called Charleston Neck, just north of the city boundary then on Calhoun Street, where today's AME church stands. The early congregants had chosen this location in part because it was not in the city limits, and thus stood outside the close scrutiny of the city's authorities.

Being away from the watchful eye of the authorities was important because that watchful eye was often a harassing one. The most systematic and visible form of racial control in Charleston was the City Guard. Founded in 1783 as one of the first acts of the newly created City Council after American independence, the city's police force was created to control what was the largest enslaved population in an American city. It was given authority over a wide range of behaviors, both black and white. From the beginning, however, black and white residents

were treated differently: the police could "inflict corporal punishment, by whipping, on persons of color."

The authority to whip and physically punish people of African descent, with little or no due process, was an important element of the slave regime. We know well that many slave owners used physical punishment and the threat thereof to control the people they owned, but such violence also had state sanction, regulations that were only to increase as the decades passed. As one visitor noted, they "know and they dread the slaveholder's power." With the church being in Charleston Neck, however, it meant that the City Guard did not regularly patrol there, which gave its members some degree of freedom in their worship.

The primary concern of the police was to guard against servile insurrection. And as a white population living among an enslaved majority, they had reason to fear. In addition to the police force, they established a curfew for African Americans. Every night curfew was announced by the tolling of the bells of St. Michael's and the beating of drums for a quarter-hour. After "drum beat," the City Guard patrolled the streets, arresting black Charlestonians out after curfew. Visitors often noted that the city felt as if it were under constant threat. When landscape architect and journalist Frederick Law Olmsted visited Charleston, he noted that when curfew rang, the city felt like a "military garrison," under a "general siege."

Charleston's City Guard arrested people of color for many reasons, most of them mere excuses to harass and intimidate: being on the streets without a pass after the ringing of the bells; not wearing a slave badge (if required); participating in merriment; smoking a cigar; hollering; selling goods in the market without a pass; or gathering in groups of greater than seven. These are just a few of the supposed offences specified in the city's ordinances.

The city's pervasive fear of servile unrest was confirmed one day in May 1822 when an enslaved man named Peter Desverneys told his owner what he had heard about plans for a slave uprising. The city authorities jumped into action (or overreaction), arresting men and confining them in the city's Work House, the notorious institution for the punishment and incarceration of people of color. The City Guard was on high alert for weeks, patrolling its streets in greater numbers and with enhanced vigilance.

The city, under the leadership of Mayor James Hamilton Jr., convened a court and initiated proceedings. The testimony that emerged, most of it coerced through violence and threats of hangings, only heightened the city's fears. A white resident told a friend elsewhere that during those weeks, "no one, not even children ventured to retire" and that the "the passing of every patrol and every slight noise excited attention."

A free black man named Denmark Vesey was fingered as the leading orga-

nizer. Born into slavery in the Caribbean, Vesey had purchased his freedom in 1799 with the proceeds from a lottery. Though named by several of the accused, Vesey himself never spoke to the court. He was not allowed to face his accusers. He did not admit guilt. Nevertheless, he was condemned to execution by hanging. On July 2, Vesey and five other men were carried in wagons from the Work House to a site in Charleston Neck called "the Lines." There they swung from trees, "their bodies . . . delivered to the surgeon for dissection, if requested," according to the newspaper announcement. It was a site carefully crafted to send fear throughout the African American community. More hangings followed later in the month.

Eventually more than 131 men were arrested, 35 were hung, and 43 were ordered to leave the state or the country. In August of that year, the court proceedings were published. This document, voraciously read and consumed by all in the city, told a story that deviated somewhat from the surviving court transcripts. It seemed calculated to frighten the city's slaveholding elite, emphasizing certain parts of the testimony more than others. One of the principal points emphasized was that many of the men involved in the plot were the "indulged and trusted" domestic servants who were intimately connected with their slave-owning families. Now every Charlestonian was looking at the people they owned and wondering, *What if?*

The other chilling fact for many Charlestonians was the supposed role of religion, especially the "African Church," as they called it then. According to the printed testimony, Vesey was "considered the Champion in the African church business. . . . [I]t is generally received opinion that this church commenced this awful business." Of those arrested, nineteen were members of the AME church. Rolla Bennett, one of the men eventually hanged who belonged to the then-governor of South Carolina, Thomas Bennett, supposedly told the court that Vesey "was the first to rise up and speak, and he read to us from the Bible, how the Children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt from bondage." Preaching a liberation theology, Vesey supposedly met with enslaved men in the city, convincing them to work with him in plotting the takeover of the city's armories, and commencing a massacre of all the whites, "not permitting a white soul to escape."

Today historians disagree on the extent of the planning for the insurrection. Did Vesey and his men have a plan for as many as nine thousand men ready to attack the city from the countryside? Or was there merely talk of freedom and liberty that was then exaggerated by the city's leaders in order to spread fear? Or is the answer somewhere in between?

Though we may never know for certain if the plot was real, the fear aroused was very real. The outcome of that fear was an increase in violence and intimidation aimed at the city's enslaved residents. These actions took many forms. For example, in 1822, Charleston passed the Negro Seaman Act and incarcerated *all* free black sailors who entered Charleston until the time of embarkation, on account of their race alone. In 1825, Charleston started construction on a massive building called the Arsenal (later home to the Citadel), to fortify the city with weapons in preparation against insurrection. That same year, the city added a new form of punishment to the Work House: the treadmill. The enslaved were forced to walk for eight hours a day, three minutes on and three minutes off. Perhaps most shocking of the Work House's provisions was that a master could send the people he owned to the Work House, where, for a fee, they would be "corrected by whipping," confined to a cell, or forced to walk on the treadmill. No proof of wrongdoing was required. A master could do this on a whim. No questions were asked.

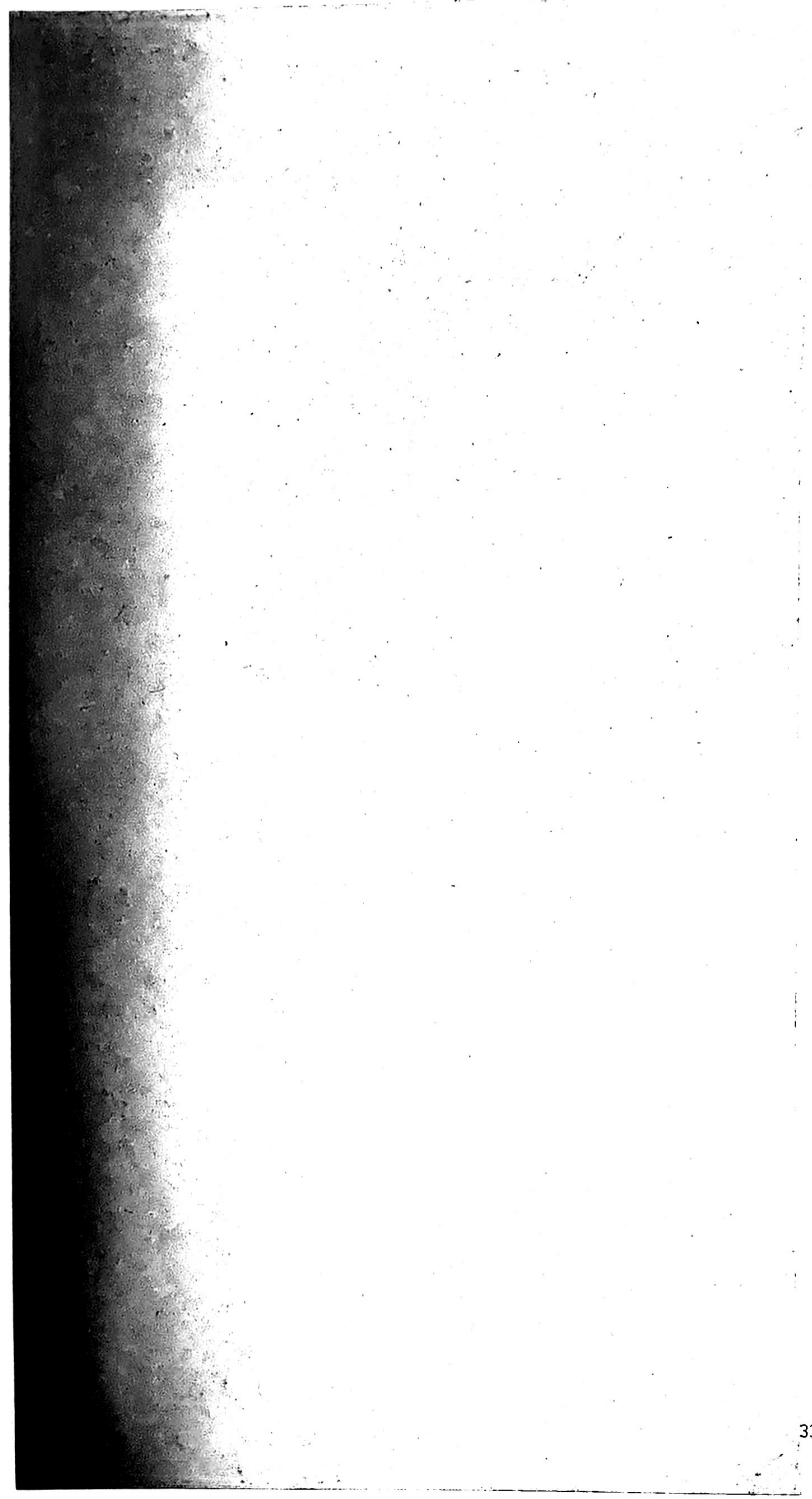
The city's white leadership also saw to it that the African Church was burned. Not long afterward, the city outlawed all black churches. The enslaved were not allowed to meet for worship without a white person in attendance.

The church has always been a symbol of black community and of resilience in the face of racism, violence, and hatred. It has also been a frequent target of racial hatred. Throughout American history, burning and bombing churches has been used as a way to intimidate. After the Vesey insurrection scare, one Charlestonian wrote that "some plan must be adopted to subdue them." That sounds chillingly like what Dylann Storm Roof, the alleged shooter in this week's attack, supposedly said: "I have to do it. You rape our women and you're taking over our country, and you have to go."

It appears that Roof may have driven from near Columbia, South Carolina, to Charleston. It therefore seems likely that he chose this church for its historic and symbolic importance. Located in the heart of the city, just off Marion Square, only a few hundred yards from the Arsenal built to protect the city against servile insurrection, it stands there defiant: a historic AME congregation in a beautiful, soaring building of an architectural style and grandeur reminiscent of many of the city's white churches. The church is proud of its history. Just under the steps leading to the church's front door is a sculptural monument to Denmark Vesey. It shows the faces of young children, supposedly listening to his preaching. Erected after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, their eager young faces speak to the promise of liberty that Vesey supposedly fought for and that the post–Civil Rights era supposedly promised. Now the faces of those young children, and the entire nation, are streaked with tears as we realize how deeply rooted racial violence and hatred remain in the heart of at least one young man who walked into the AME church in Charleston and opened fire.

There was no justice for Denmark Vesey and the others who were executed

and banished in 1822. There was no justice for the members of the AME church when their building was burned. There was no justice for the millions of African Americans who were wrongly held in bondage. Justice in this case will not merely be a guilty verdict for the accused shooter. Justice demands that we acknowledge and address our nation's continuing racial prejudice and disparities. Justice demands that we address police brutality, mass incarceration, and the lack of equal access to opportunity for millions of black Americans. The shooting is not simply the action of one deranged and evil individual, but instead springs from our nation's long history of racial prejudice and violence against black Americans.



MANISHA SINHA

The Long and Proud History of Charleston's AME Church

(June 19, 2015)

When twenty-one-year-old Dylann Roof opened fire at the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Charleston, South Carolina, on Wednesday night killing nine worshippers, including its pastor, the Reverend Clementa Pinckney, he struck at the very heart of black America. Established by the Reverend Richard Allen, a former slave and Methodist preacher, the AME is the oldest black denomination in the country. Its roots lie in one of the first black religious and mutual help societies, the Free African Society founded by Philadelphia blacks in 1787. Like other independent churches and societies founded by newly free African Americans, it has a proud history of black protest and community activism.

In 1792, Allen and the Reverend Absalom Jones, led a walkout at St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia. They had dared to pray in the front pews reserved for whites rather than in the segregated gallery constructed for blacks. Zealous church authorities had interrupted their prayers and forced them to rise to their feet. As the story goes, this unseemly incident was the impetus for the founding of independent black churches. In 1794, with black contributions and donations from the British abolitionist Granville Sharp, President George Washington, and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Jones's African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas opened its doors, boasting over four hundred members. Founded the same year, Allen's Mother Bethel Methodist Church was incorporated in 1796. Later Allen composed an "African Supplement" to proclaim his church's autonomy. In 1816, he issued a call to all black Methodists in the surrounding area. Delegates from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland, including Moses Brown from Charleston, South Carolina, met and founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816, and Allen became its first bishop.

AME churches soon spread north, west, and even to the south acquiring a large congregation in Charleston, South Carolina, in the midst of one of the largest slave societies in the United States. In 1818, the Reverend Brown, replicating Allen's and Jones's actions, led a walkout of black members from the

Methodist church protesting the treatment of black burial grounds by whites and established the AME church in Charleston with four thousand members.

Right from the start, the AME, like other independent black churches, gave birth to antislavery protest. Allen and Jones were authors of early abolitionist pamphlets and petitions. Their "An Address to Those Who Keep Slaves and Uphold the Practice" reminded whites that slavery is "hateful . . . in the sight of God" and that "God himself was the first pleader of the cause of the slaves." The most potent challenge to slavery came from the AME church in Charleston. One of its founders and class leaders, Denmark Vesey, a literate black carpenter who had bought his freedom after winning a lottery, was implicated in a slave conspiracy scare in 1822. State authorities had harassed church members and used the conspiracy as an excuse to destroy the church. Its ministers, Brown and the Reverend Henry Drayton, were forced to leave South Carolina. Brown became the second bishop of the AME on Allen's death. Black Charlestonians rebuilt their church until the city outlawed independent black churches in 1834. In a fitting coda, Robert Vesey, Denmark Vesey's son, helped rebuild the Charleston church in 1865, after the Civil War and emancipation. It was renamed Emanuel AME church, a name that it carries until today.

During the civil rights movement, the Emanuel AME Church of Charleston continued to be the site of black protest. In 1969, the South Carolina National Guard arrested the church's pastor and nine hundred others at a demonstration for hospital workers led by Coretta Scott King. The black church lay at the organizational base of the mass movement for black rights and equality in the South. With good reason, white supremacists and segregationist have targeted it, most infamously in the 1963 Birmingham church bombing that killed four young black girls. A resurgence of black church burnings in the South in the 1990s led the Justice Department to launch a civil rights investigation and civil rights activists volunteered to rebuild them. This latest attack on a black church is all too reminiscent of this tragic history.

Just a year ago, the city of Charleston finally honored Denmark Vesey with a statue after years of controversy when some conservative commentators labeled him a "terrorist." One might well paraphrase the great black abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who asked, "Pray, tell me who is the barbarian here?" during the height of lynching in the post–Civil War South. On the 150th anniversary of Juneteenth or June 19, the day many of the enslaved celebrated as the day of emancipation, one might ask, Pray, who is the terrorist here?

ALEXANDER H. STEPHENS

Corner Stone Speech

(March 21, 1861)
Savannah, Georgia

. . . [W]e are passing through one of the greatest revolutions in the annals of the world. Seven States have within the last three months thrown off an old government and formed a new. This revolution has been signally marked, up to this time, by the fact of its having been accomplished without the loss of a single drop of blood. . . .

. . . The new constitution has put at rest, forever, all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institution African slavery as it exists amongst us the proper status of the negro in our form of civilization. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution. Jefferson in his forecast, had anticipated this, as the "rock upon which the old Union would split." He was right. What was conjecture with him, is now a realized fact. But whether he fully comprehended the great truth upon which that rock stood and stands, may be doubted. The prevailing ideas entertained by him and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the old constitution, were that the enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature; that it was wrong in principle, socially, morally, and politically. It was an evil they knew not well how to deal with, but the general opinion of the men of that day was that, somehow or other in the order of Providence, the institution would be evanescent and pass away. This idea, though not incorporated in the constitution, was the prevailing idea at that time. The constitution, it is true, secured every essential guarantee to the institution while it should last, and hence no argument can be justly urged against the constitutional guarantees thus secured, because of the common sentiment of the day. Those ideas, however, were fundamentally wrong. They rested upon the assumption of the equality of races. This was an error. It was a sandy foundation, and the government built upon it fell when the "storm came and the wind blew."

Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the

history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth. This truth has been slow in the process of its development, like all other truths in the various departments of science. It has been so even amongst us. Many who hear me, perhaps, can recollect well, that this truth was not generally admitted, even within their day. The errors of the past generation still clung to many as late as twenty years ago. Those at the North, who still cling to these errors, with a zeal above knowledge, we justly denominate fanatics. All fanaticism springs from an aberration of the mind from a defect in reasoning. It is a species of insanity. One of the most striking characteristics of insanity, in many instances, is forming correct conclusions from fancied or erroneous premises; so with the anti-slavery fanatics. Their conclusions are right if their premises were. They assume that the negro is equal, and hence conclude that he is entitled to equal privileges and rights with the white man. If their premises were correct, their conclusions would be logical and just but their premise being wrong, their whole argument fails. I recollect once of having heard a gentleman from one of the northern States, of great power and ability, announce in the House of Representatives, with imposing effect, that we of the South would be compelled, ultimately, to yield upon this subject of slavery, that it was as impossible to war successfully against a principle in politics, as it was in physics or mechanics. That the principle would ultimately prevail. That we, in maintaining slavery as it exists with us, were warring against a principle, a principle founded in nature, the principle of the equality of men. The reply I made to him was, that upon his own grounds, we should, ultimately, succeed, and that he and his associates, in this crusade against our institutions, would ultimately fail. The truth announced, that it was as impossible to war successfully against a principle in politics as it was in physics and mechanics, I admitted; but told him that it was he, and those acting with him, who were warring against a principle. They were attempting to make things equal which the Creator had made unequal. . . .

. . . Many governments have been founded upon the principle of the subordination and serfdom of certain classes of the same race; such were and are in violation of the laws of nature. Our system commits no such violation of nature's laws. With us, all of the white race, however high or low, rich or poor, are equal in the eye of the law. Not so with the negro. Subordination is his place. He, by nature, or by the curse against Canaan, is fitted for that condition which he occupies in our system. The architect, in the construction of buildings, lays the foundation with the proper material—the granite; then comes the brick or the marble. The substratum of our society is made of the material fitted by nature for it, and by experience we know that it is best, not only for the superior, but for the inferior race, that it should be so. It is, indeed, in conformity with the ordinance of the Creator. It is not for us to inquire into the wisdom of His

ordinances, or to question them. For His own purposes, He has made one race to differ from another, as He has made "one star to differ from another star in glory." The great objects of humanity are best attained when there is conformity to His laws and decrees, in the formation of governments as well as in all things else. Our confederacy is founded upon principles in strict conformity with these laws. This stone which was rejected by the first builders "is become the chief of the corner" the real "corner-stone" in our new edifice. I have been asked, what of the future? It has been apprehended by some that we would have arrayed against us the civilized world. I care not who or how many they may be against us, when we stand upon the eternal principles of truth, if we are true to ourselves and the principles for which we contend, we are obliged to, and must triumph.

IDA B. WELLS-BARNETT

From *A Red Record*

(1895)

1. The Case Stated

The student of American sociology will find the year 1894 marked by a pronounced awakening of the public conscience to a system of anarchy and outlawry which had grown during a series of ten years to be so common, that scenes of unusual brutality failed to have any visible effect upon the humane sentiments of the people of our land.

Beginning with the emancipation of the Negro, the inevitable result of unbridled power exercised for two and a half centuries, by the white man over the Negro, began to show itself in acts of conscienceless outlawry. During the slave regime, the Southern white man owned the Negro body and soul. It was to his interest to dwarf the soul and preserve the body. Vested with unlimited power over his slave, to subject him to any and all kinds of physical punishment, the white man was still restrained from such punishment as tended to injure the slave by abating his physical powers and thereby reducing his financial worth. While slaves were scourged mercilessly, and in countless cases inhumanly treated in other respects, still the white owner rarely permitted his anger to go so far as to take a life, which would entail upon him a loss of several hundred dollars. The slave was rarely killed, he was too valuable; it was easier and quite as effective, for discipline or revenge, to sell him "Down South."

But Emancipation came and the vested interests of the white man in the Negro's body were lost. The white man had no right to scourge the emancipated Negro, still less has he a right to kill him. But the Southern white people had been educated so long in that school of practice, in which might makes right, that they disdained to draw strict lines of action in dealing with the Negro. In slave times the Negro was kept subservient and submissive by the frequency and severity of the scourging, but, with freedom, a new system of intimidation came into vogue; the Negro was not only whipped and scourged; he was killed.

Not all nor nearly all of the murders done by white men, during the past thirty years in the South, have come to light, but the statistics as gathered and preserved by white men, and which have not been questioned, show that during these years more than ten thousand Negroes have been killed in cold blood,

without the formality of judicial trial and legal execution. And yet, as evidence of the absolute impunity with which the white man dares to kill a Negro, the same record shows that during all these years, and for all these murders only three white men have been tried, convicted, and executed. As no white man has been lynched for the murder of colored people, these three executions are the only instances of the death penalty being visited upon white men for murdering Negroes. . . .

The first excuse given to the civilized world for the murder of unoffending Negroes was the necessity of the white man to repress and stamp out alleged "race riots." For years immediately succeeding the war there was an appalling slaughter of colored people, and the wires usually conveyed to northern people and the world the intelligence, first, that an insurrection was being planned by Negroes, which, a few hours later, would prove to have been vigorously resisted by white men, and controlled with a resulting loss of several killed and wounded. It was always a remarkable feature in these insurrections and riots that only Negroes were killed during the rioting, and that all the white men escaped unharmed.

From 1865 to 1872, hundreds of colored men and women were mercilessly murdered and the almost invariable reason assigned was that they met their death by being alleged participants in an insurrection or riot. But this story at last wore itself out. No insurrection ever materialized; no Negro rioter was ever apprehended and proven guilty, and no dynamite ever recorded the black man's protest against oppression and wrong. It was too much to ask thoughtful people to believe this transparent story, and the southern white people at last made up their minds that some other excuse must be had.

Then came the second excuse, which had its birth during the turbulent times of reconstruction. By an amendment to the Constitution the Negro was given the right of franchise, and, theoretically at least, his ballot became his invaluable emblem of citizenship. In a government "of the people, for the people, and by the people," the Negro's vote became an important factor in all matters of state and national politics. But this did not last long. The southern white man would not consider that the Negro had any right which a white man was bound to respect, and the idea of a republican form of government in the southern states grew into general contempt. It was maintained that "This is a white man's government," and regardless of numbers the white man should rule. . . .

The white man's victory soon became complete by fraud, violence, intimidation and murder. The franchise vouchsafed to the Negro grew to be a "barren ideality," and regardless of numbers, the colored people found themselves voiceless in the councils of those whose duty it was to rule. With no longer the fear of "Negro Domination" before their eyes, the white man's second excuse became

valueless. With the Southern governments all subverted and the Negro actually eliminated from all participation in state and national elections, there could be no longer an excuse for killing Negroes to prevent "Negro Domination."

Brutality still continued; Negroes were whipped, scourged, exiled, shot and hung whenever and wherever it pleased the white man so to treat them, and as the civilized world with increasing persistency held the white people of the South to account for its outlawry, the murderers invented the third excuse—that Negroes had to be killed to avenge their assaults upon women. There could be framed no possible excuse more harmful to the Negro and more unanswerable if true in its sufficiency for the white man.

Humanity abhors the assailant of womanhood, and this charge upon the Negro at once placed him beyond the pale of human sympathy. With such unanimity, earnestness and apparent candor was this charge made and reiterated that the world has accepted the story that the Negro is a monster which the Southern white man has painted him. And today, the Christian world feels, that while lynching is a crime, and lawlessness and anarchy the certain precursors of a nation's fall, it can not by word or deed, extend sympathy or help to a race of outlaws, who might mistake their plea for justice and deem it an excuse for their continued wrongs. . . .

If the Southern people in defense of their lawlessness, would tell the truth and admit that colored men and women are lynched for almost any offense, from murder to a misdemeanor, there would not now be the necessity for this defense. But when they intentionally, maliciously and constantly belie the record and bolster up these falsehoods by the words of legislators, preachers, governors and bishops, then the Negro must give to the world his side of the awful story.

A word as to the charge itself. In considering the third reason assigned by the Southern white people for the butchery of blacks, the question must be asked, what the white man means when he charges the black man with rape. Does he mean the crime which the statutes of the civilized states describe as such? Not by any means. With the Southern white man, any misalliance existing between a white woman and a colored man is a sufficient foundation for the charge of rape. The Southern white man says that it is impossible for a voluntary alliance to exist between a white woman and a colored man, and therefore, the fact of an alliance is a proof of force. In numerous instances where colored men have been lynched on the charge of rape, it was positively known at the time of lynching, and indisputably proven after the victim's death, that the relationship sustained between the man and woman was voluntary and clandestine, and that in no court of law could even the charge of assault have been successfully maintained.

It was for the assertion of this fact, in the defense of her own race, that the writer hereof became an exile; her property destroyed and her return to her home forbidden under penalty of death, for writing the following editorial which was printed in her paper, the *Free Speech*, in Memphis, Tenn., May 21,1892:

> Eight Negroes lynched since last issue of the *Free Speech* one at Little Rock, Ark., last Saturday morning where the citizens broke(?) into the penitentiary and got their man; three near Anniston, Ala., one near New Orleans; and three at Clarksville, Ga., the last three for killing a white man, and five on the same old racket—the new alarm about raping white women. The same programme of hanging, then shooting bullets into the lifeless bodies was carried out to the letter. Nobody in this section of the country believes the old threadbare lie that Negro men rape white women. If Southern white men are not careful, they will overreach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction; a conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women.

But threats cannot suppress the truth, and while the Negro suffers the soul deformity, resultant from two and a half centuries of slavery, he is no more guilty of this vilest of all vile charges than the white man who would blacken his name.

During all the years of slavery, no such charge was ever made, not even during the dark days of the rebellion, when the white man, following the fortunes of war went to do battle for the maintenance of slavery. While the master was away fighting to forge the fetters upon the slave, he left his wife and children with no protectors save the Negroes themselves. And yet during those years of trust and peril, no Negro proved recreant to his trust and no white man returned to a home that had been dispoiled.

. . . It must appear strange indeed, to every thoughtful and candid man, that more than a quarter of a century elapsed before the Negro began to show signs of such infamous degeneration.

. . . It is not the purpose of this defense to say one word against the white women of the South. Such need not be said, but it is their misfortune that the chivalrous white men of that section, in order to escape the deserved execration of the civilized world, should shield themselves by their cowardly and infamously false excuse, and call into question that very honor about which their distinguished priestly apologist claims they are most sensitive. To justify their own barbarism they assume a chivalry which they do not possess. True chivalry respects all womanhood, and no one who reads the record, as it is written in the faces of the million mulattoes in the South, will for a minute conceive that the southern white man had a very chivalrous regard for the honor due the women

of his own race or respect for the womanhood which circumstances placed in his power. That chivalry which is "most sensitive concerning the honor of women" can hope for but little respect from the civilized world, when it confines itself entirely to the women who happen to be white. Virtue knows no color line, and the chivalry which depends upon complexion of skin and texture of hair can command no honest respect.

CLAUDE MCKAY

If We Must Die

(1919)

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!