

# THE RACE PROBLEM—TWO SUGGESTIONS AS TO ITS SOLUTION

BY

*REV. FRANCIS J. GRIMKE*

PASTOR FIFTEENTH STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

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I clipped from the *Evening Bulletin* of Philadelphia the following news item:—

“WASHINGTON, July 30, 1919.—That German propaganda may be an important factor in the race riots in various sections of the country is the belief of Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior, expressed in an interview today.

“The Secretary pointed to the known fact that German agents were active during the war in trying to stir up race hatred, adding he thought their activities in this direction had not ceased.

“In reply to a question as to what the Government could do to eliminate race hatred, Secretary Lane said:—

“‘Give us more schools like the Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes. I do not believe any of the Negroes connected with these riots were graduates of these schools.’”

Secretary Lane is a very good man, the very best specimen of the white man in President Wilson's Cabinet, not excepting the President himself; but if this interview is to be taken as evidence of his understanding of the race problem in this country, it shows that he knows very little about it, that he fails utterly to comprehend the great underlying cause, and, therefore, what the real remedy is that is needed.

There are three things that are noticeable in this answer which he gives to the question as to how race hatred is to be eliminated:—

(a) This race hatred, of which he speaks, to his mind evidently is wholly or mainly on the part of the colored people towards the white people, which is not true. The colored people, as a matter of fact, in and of themselves, have no hatred towards the whites; they are rather predisposed in their favor rather than against them.

The hatred that exists is not natural, it has grown up in consequence of the brutal and inhuman treatment to which they are almost everywhere subjected by the whites. If under such circumstances the colored man did not entertain some feelings of hatred to the white man, it would be almost a miracle. The resentment which he feels only shows that he is human. It is what any other race would feel under like circumstances. And the fact that he chafes under it, that he resents it, that every now and then there are outbreaks indicative of his discontent, is one of the hopeful signs that a better day is coming,—must come. It shows that he is developing, that he is growing in self-respect, in the consciousness of what belongs to him as a man, as an American citizen. And this consciousness will never grow less, but will go on steadily increasing. There will be no retreat; and no surrender. The Negro is a man, and he will never be satisfied with anything less than a man's treatment. The Negro is an American citizen by every test, and he will never be satisfied until he is treated as an American citizen.

I am not denying that there is springing up in the hearts of a large number of colored people a feeling of bitterness towards the whites, and that this feeling is growing in intensity, and is spreading more and more among the masses. But it grows out of, and this is the point to which I am calling particular attention, it grows out of the prior hatred of the whites for the colored people, and is kept alive, and ever growing by the constant, almost daily exhibitions of hatred on the part of the whites towards them. Everywhere, all over the country, North and South, East and West, the colored man is never allowed, even for a moment, to forget the fact of his color, and that he is despised, looked down upon as an inferior because of his color. Everywhere he meets with this kind of treatment. Even during this bloody war through which we have just passed, the American white soldier, acting out his natural hatred, and carrying out the policy of the Administration at Washington, did everything in his power to inject into the minds of the European whites the same bitter Negro hating spirit against the colored soldiers who, at the call of their country, had taken their lives in their hands, leaving behind everything they held dear,—fathers, mothers, wives, children,—to make the world safe for democracy. And even now that the war is over, after all that they have suffered abroad, the great sacrifices they have made, the invaluable services which they have rendered in behalf of liberty, in bettering world conditions, this infernal treatment still goes on, and is increasing in virulence.

The white man not only hates the Negro, but there is no meanness to which he will not resort, no infamy to which he will not stoop in order to show it. This Secretary Lane entirely overlooks.

He takes for granted, he assumes that the hatred that exists is on the part of the colored people for the whites. And hence his whole idea of remedies for present race troubles has reference entirely to the colored people; he is thinking of them only; he doesn't seem to realize that it is necessary to set into operation any remedial agencies among the whites. This is the way the white man, with here and there an exception, always looks at the problem of race adjustment. The fault is always with the colored people. Whatever is to be done is to be done among them or with them, never with the whites. And this is the way we find Secretary Lane dealing with the race issue here. The remedy which he suggests is, "More schools like Tuskegee and Hampton Institutes." Both of these schools, you will notice, are for colored people. He says nothing about white institutions. Not one such institution is mentioned. Why? Can it be because there is no need for work among the whites such as Hampton and Tuskegee are doing, or are supposed to be doing, among the colored people? Can it be on the assumption that the whites are all right, and that it is the colored people alone who need to be set right? This, evidently, is the thought in the mind of the Secretary.

(b) Both of these schools are distinctively of the industrial type. Not one higher educational institution is mentioned. No mention is made of Howard, or Fisk, or Atlanta.

(c) The Secretary says: "I do not believe that any of the Negroes connected with these riots were graduates of these schools." Some of them may have been graduates of higher educational institutions: the Secretary does not say so in so many words, but that is clearly to be inferred from what he says. He is sure of Hampton and Tuskegee, but he isn't sure of a single one of the higher educational institutions.

This statement of Secretary Lane set me thinking, and the more so, because I was anxious to get hold of his idea of solving the race problem. The question that I asked myself was, what is there about Hampton and Tuskegee that makes them peculiarly adapted to this work of training the Negro so that he will become less and less dissatisfied with the white man's treatment of him,—so that there will be less and less hatred in his heart towards the white man?

(1) Is it because of the limited intellectual training which they get in such institutions? Such limited training may help to keep things quiet, or to prevent the awakening of a spirit of discontent. Whatever tends to limit or restrict intellectual development will act as a damper upon aspiration. The more highly a man is developed intellectually, the less likely is he to be content with conditions that tend to destroy his self-respect,—his manhood.

(2) Is it because in such institutions he is taught to work? The Negro has always been a worker. Ever since he landed on these

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shores some three hundred years ago he has known what toil is by day and by night. He has been compelled to work whether he wanted to or not. These industrial schools are playing an important part in the Negro's development so far as they are teaching him habits of industry, and are giving him trades by which to earn a living, though after he has learnt a trade, owing to race prejudice, he often finds it difficult to get employment. In so far, however, as they tend to beget in him the feeling, that that is all that he is fitted for,—to be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water, a mere beast of burden, they may help to solve the race problem to the satisfaction of the white man, for that is his idea of what the Negro is fitted for, and the place which he should occupy in the social scale. But it will not be likely to stay solved unless the whole race can be hypnotized into the belief that that is all that it is fitted for. The majority of white people when they think of industrial schools for the Negro, think of them not only as agencies for making him efficient as a laborer, but also as somehow helping to make him content to be only a laborer, which is the attitude of mind which they wish to beget in him. The Negro, however, and it is just as well to have it understood now, once for all, is not going to be content to limit his activities or aspirations to any sphere in which any other race would not be content to be circumscribed. He wants every door of opportunity opened to him that is opened to the men of every other race. And he is not going to be satisfied with anything less.

(3) Is it because in these institutions the policy has been, so understood by the white donors, by white people generally, especially the southern whites, to develop a certain type of Negro,—a Negro that is less assertive, that is less disposed to make trouble by quietly submitting to the deprivation of his rights, under the impression that somehow without any effort on his part things are going to work out all right?

Whatever the reason or reasons may be, it is clear that to such institutions Secretary Lane is looking for the solution of the race problem, for the abatement of the Negro's hatred for the white man. The higher educational institutions he makes no mention of: they are, evidently, not in his thought. The type of Negro that these higher educational institutions are developing is not the type that is likely to be quiet under oppressive conditions, or is likely to allow the masses to be quiet under. And this is why the white man, as a general thing, doesn't think very highly of such institutions, and is little disposed to encourage them. He says, the Negro doesn't need the higher education. What he really means is, that the higher education is not only not necessary to him, but that it unfits him for the position which he thinks he ought to occupy. His whole conception of him is as an inferior, and as such to be kept in a position of inferiority. If a man is inferior, created such, why

is it necessary to try to keep him down, to hedge him about with restrictions, with limitations? He will have no desire to rise; he will not rise though every possible influence should be brought to bear upon him to push him up, to make something of him. The fact that it is thought necessary to curb his ambition, to limit his aspirations, shows that this assertion of inferiority is a bare assumption which those who use it do not themselves believe to be true. It is an invention, conceived in malice for the purpose of discrediting the Negro, just as the lies that were circulated about him in France was done for the same purpose.

In answer to the question, What can be done to eliminate race hatred? raised in the interview with Secretary Lane and looked at by him purely as it respects the colored people, I have given you his answer.

II. I want now to give my answer to the same question, looked at as it pertains to the white man. It is not safe to assume, as is done by Secretary Lane, that there is nothing for the white man to do. The simple fact is he has the most to do. The responsibility for present unfortunate conditions is mainly *his*. They have grown out of *his* conduct, and they are being kept up through *his* action. The Negro's responsibility is small in comparison with the white man's. The problem with the Negro is largely that of self-development; with the white man, that of getting rid of his prejudice, his race-hating spirit. This is the very first thing to be recognized in the solution of the race problem. Things are as they are because the white man wants them as they are; because he is doing nothing to make them better, but everything to keep them as they are, and to make them even worse than they are. This may be denied, but it is true nevertheless. No denial can alter the fact.

If race hatred is ever to be eliminated, certain things are necessary on the part of the white man:—

(a) He must recognize *his* responsibility for present conditions. The hatred which has been engendered in the heart of the colored man, *he* has engendered it. It is due to *his* treatment of him,—his unkind, unbrotherly treatment of him. And, this has been made possible by the unfaithfulness, by the false teaching or no teaching at all in regard to the treatment which one human being owes to another, to say nothing of what the conduct of Christians should be who are supposed to be the representatives of Jesus Christ, who came to break down walls of separation and to make all men brethren. This blast from hell, in the shape of race hatred, that is cursing the country, cursing both races, to the shame of the Christian Church,—to the shame of forty millions of professing Christians, has not only been allowed to grow up, but to go on steadily increasing, not against the protest of the Church, against the active, determined opposition of the Church, but with its consent, or with its cowardly connivance.

(b) The white man must change his course towards the Negro. His whole attitude towards him must change. He must cease all his meanness, his dirty, contemptible little acts through which he vents his venom against the Negro. He must turn from his evil ways. He must come to a realization of the fact that he is created in the image of God and that the manner in which he is treating his brother in black or permitting others to treat him without a word of protest, is utterly unworthy of him, and for which, some day, he must answer at the bar of God. Here I am reminded of Tennyson's noble lines:—

“Ring out false pride in place and blood,  
The civic slander and the spite;  
Ring in the love of truth and right,  
Ring in the common love of good.  
Ring in the valiant man and free,  
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;  
Ring out the darkness of the land,  
Ring in the Christ that is to be.”

This call the white man must heed; this spirit the white man must catch; this is the way he must act towards his brother in black; there must be “The larger heart, the kindlier hand” if race hatred is to be eliminated. Unless the white man changes his course, treats the Negro differently from what he is treating him, though you may plant a Hampton, a Tuskegee in every city, town, and hamlet in the land,—in every county in every State in the Union, things will go on just as they are. It is unreasonable to expect the colored man to feel kindly towards the white man as long as the white man continues to treat him as he does. It may be the part of a Christian to feel no bitterness towards those who despitefully use and persecute him, but most of the colored people are not Christians, are not even nominally Christians, and whether it is expected of them or not, it is not likely to take place.

(c) The white churches, the white Sabbath Schools, the white Endeavor societies, must become centers, not professedly so, but really centers for the propagation of Christianity, pure and simple. They must teach and live the brotherhood of man. They must cease their cowardly silence and speak out in regard to this evil, and they must back up their teaching by consistent living. They must teach the gospel of love, of brotherhood,—the brotherhood of all men. It must be taught in the churches, in the Sabbath Schools, from the pulpits, in the homes,—taught to the children so that they will grow up, not as they are growing up now to hate others because they happen to be of a different hue from themselves. In less than a generation, all this sad, painful, disgraceful condition of things could be changed, if the Church was all right, if it did its duty, if it were half way trying to fulfill its mission as the salt of the earth,—as the Light of the world.

If the white man thinks that the solution of the race problem is to be brought about by the colored man accepting as a finality the brutal treatment to which he is at present subjected, he will be sadly disappointed. The colored man has no idea, not the remotest idea of accepting it as a finality: and God Almighty, who sits on the throne, is not going to allow it to be a finality. The heathen may rage, the people imagine a vain thing; but right is going to triumph, the forces of evil are going to be put down. Lowell has well said,

“I watch the circle of the eternal years,  
And read forever in the storied page,  
One lengthened roll of blood and wrong and tears,  
One onward step of truth from age to age.”

The only solution of this race problem, as of every other problem, is to meet it in the spirit of justice and kindness. “What doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?” In no other way can it be settled; and the sooner the white man,—the sooner the white Christians of America wake up to that fact and begin in earnest to labor with a view of bringing about a spirit of justice and kindness, the sooner will this race problem be solved. It would have long since been solved if the white man had done his part, had measured up to his responsibilities. His attempt to solve it has always been on the assumption of the inferiority, the natural, inborn inferiority of the colored man,—on the assumption of a difference, a difference so wide, so radical that there can never be any such thing as real brotherly affiliation. That is where the trouble has been, in his arrogant assumption of race superiority. And, until he gets that fool notion out of his head, and gets into his heart the spirit of Jesus Christ, there will be no solution to the problem. The only thing, or the main thing that stands in the way, is this fool notion about his superiority. It was the same fool notion that made Germany for so many years a menace to the peace of the world, and that has brought her at last where she is today, in the dust.

“Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” The white man has been sowing for years, in every conceivable way, the seeds of race hatred; and, if he goes on, there can be no question as to what the harvest is sure to be. It is time, it seems to me, that all this hellish business should stop, and that a different kind of sowing should begin,—sowing seeds of kindness, of brotherhood, of love. It has been more than nineteen hundred years since Jesus Christ came into the world, as the Light of the world. It is a shame that with nineteen Christian centuries behind us, in this boasted land of the free and home of the brave, in these United States, claiming to be in the van of the world’s progress, these awful conditions should exist,—conditions that would be a disgrace to savages, to say nothing of civilized man. The question is, shall they continue to exist?

It is for the white man, for the white Christians of America to answer that question: *Theirs* is the responsibility. These disgraceful conditions will cease, if *they* want them to, otherwise they will continue.

Men of the white race, think of it! At the beginning of the twentieth century, it is America, Christian America, assuming the roll as the enlightener of the world, that is foremost in this dirty, wicked business of fomenting, of propagating race hatred,—in showing its contempt for peoples of darker hue, and in inciting other white races to do the same! It seems to be particularly anxious, think of it, not only to keep the Negro in what is supposed to be his place in this country, but to follow him wherever he goes and to heap upon him the same odious treatment, and to induce others to do the same. It followed him to Europe during the great war, and though he went out under the Stars and Stripes, and though he labored and fought under most trying conditions, everything was done that could be done to make him odious in the eyes of the French people!

Such conduct is worthy only of fiends, and until it is stopped the race problem, with its ever increasing bitterness, will remain to curse both races, and to curse the world. It is vain to talk about eliminating race hatred unless the white man makes up his mind to treat his brother in black as he knows he ought to be treated, and not in the way he has been treating him, and is still treating him. We had just as well face the issue squarely and not attempt to dodge it, as we have been doing,—hiding behind every miserable excuse in order to evade it.

There is but one solution to the race problem, and, it is to treat the Negro as a man and brother. It will be solved on principles laid down by Jesus Christ, or it never will be solved. The trouble is the white man has been trying to solve it in every other way, except the right way. He wants to solve it, and, at the same time hold on to his prejudices, to his fool notions, which never can be done. The fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of man alone holds the solution. And whatever there is in his philosophy or crude notions that is not in harmony with this divine revelation of truth, must be given up. The white man takes upon himself a tremendous responsibility in continuing conditions as they are. Let us hope there will be an awakening; that common sense and the principle of love, of righteousness, will somehow get the ascendancy, and so shall begin the ushering in of a better day.