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THE
"ATLANTA RACE RIOTS"

"A TALE OF MAN'S INHUMANITY
TO MAN"

BY

J. MAX BARBER

Editor of "The Voice of the Negro," and Author of
the Letter to the "New York World" of Sep-
tember 27, 1906, in which the Real
Cause of the Atlanta Riots
was Exposed.

“THE ATLANTA RACE RIOTS; THEIR CAUSE, THEIR COURSE, AND THE AFTERMATH.”

VALE

Dear Reader, this is a sad story, a story of bloodshed and cruel tyranny, of man's inhumanity to man, of the red reign of anarchy and the bold defiance of law. I am sorry I have to relate it. I wish it were otherwise for I am a lover of home and country and desire with all my heart to do what I can to build up my section.

Negro Loyal to South.—Never before was Job's annunciation, "Though He slay me, yet I will love Him," so literally true as in the case of the Negro and the South. The Negro cherishes no animosity against his former master. He has no desire for revenge. Nobody is more thoroughly a Southerner than a colored man. He believes in the chivalrous traditions of the South and he has all the reverence for woman that that section has. He loves the breezy uplands, the fragrant magnolias, the wondrous melody of the birds and all the purple glory of that shimmering, golden misted country. By birth, by rearing, by training and by every tie of kinship, I belong to the South. I would like to impregnate the little school children with a fervid Southern patriotism. I would like to be able to tell them that in the making of the South, the greatest section on the face of the globe, every inch they add to their chest measurements counts; every increase in deftness of hand, quickness of eye, and alertness of mind, counts; every increase in their love for justice and truth and every speck of self-reliance, counts.

I would like for Negro children to think that thoroughness of work, beauty in manners, care and tact in business and an uncompromising fidelity to truth and fair play will win respect everywhere. I am ready to make every sacrifice for the South, when the South is ready to accept that sacrifice as coming from a MAN.

Oh! how our people have longed to love that country with all the fervor of a great imaginative and emotional race. But our love is spurned our ideals mocked and the door of opportunity is closed in our faces. In the land of our fathers fertilized with their own blood, our presence is unwelcome—unless

George E. Alward Fund

forsooth we lie and pretend satisfaction at present injustices and smile when we are sorely smitten.

Riots Inevitable.—“The Atlanta Race Riots” were the inevitable outcome of the reckless sowing of firebrands for many a month in Georgia by unscrupulous politicians and heartless class of newspaper editors. For eighteen long months, the democratic gubernatorial nominee went up and down the State abusing the Negro. He transformed himself into a human moccasin and hissed out his poisonous anti-Negro doctrine from Rabun’s Gap to Tybee Light. He wanted to disfranchise the black man. But there was the United States Constitution. What did the constitution matter? Smith was prolific in plans as to how to circumvent any little thing like the constitution. He not only advocated the disfranchisement of the Negro, but the actual deportation of those who might complain at such treatment. He denounced as rascals, the Negroes who sold their votes, but seemed to think that the whites were gentlemen who bought them.

Burly Black Brutes.—A day or two before the election of Smith, the whole State was stirred to its depths by what was reported as “assaults” and “attempts at assaults” upon white women by “burly black brutes.” I have strong reasons to believe that many of these reports were fakes, heralded abroad for political purposes. They stirred up the hatred of the whites against the blacks, so that they would vote all the more vigorously for the man who said “Down the Negro.” Smith showed an utter lack of the sentiments of justice in his campaign. Every word he uttered on the race question during those eighteen long months of campaigning helped to inspire profound racial distrust. Every word he uttered about “Negro Domination” was a figment of the imagination, a lie which the democrats are in the habit of working at every election for purely political reasons. Smith was overwhelmingly elected. His fierce negro-hating campaign and now the grand finish with the so-called “epidemic of assaults” by Negroes upon white women did the work effectively.

Yes, it cost the good feelings between the races in Georgia; but what did Smith care about that? What were the little good sentiments towards the Negro when a white man wanted an office? Absolutely nothing. One hour “extras” were hawked about

the streets telling of assaults. The next hour an “extra” would say that the Negro had been caught, identified and hanged. That was the last of it. Did the newspapers protest against lynchings? Not a bit of it. All of their vitriol was for the “Negro brute, the imp from Hell.” Afternoon papers were filled with this kind of stuff.

Black Journalism.—“The Atlanta News” took the lead in the sensationalism on this question. When a Chattanooga mob snatched a black man from beneath the aegis of the Federal Court and lynched him, this paper called the mob a patriot jury, applauded this act and criticized the Supreme Court for intermeddling in this matter. When a mob in South Carolina, after listening to the plea of the governor to let the law take its course, turned away and lynched a Negro, the “News” cheered lustily, and asked how long it would be before the men of Georgia and Atlanta would emulate the noble example of the manly South Carolinians! It fairly shrieked for blood. It called for the reorganization of the Ku Klux Klan, the band of midnight marauders, who held the whole Negro population in terror in the 70’s.

Negro Saloons Closed.—The city council, in order to be able to close up all Negro saloons and restaurants in certain sections of the town, these having been designated by the papers as the places where idlers and criminals were created, defined a dive, as “any place where men and women congregate together to drink.” If that interpretation had been strictly enforced, all the leading hotels of Atlanta would have been closed. But, of course this was never intended. The aim was to close up all places where colored people could assemble leisurely for either drinking or eating. For a black man to have a few moments of idleness made him look too much like a white man. Saturday the authorities had decided to clean out the thus-defined dives. It is hard for you to imagine the state of the public mind on that fateful Saturday afternoon riot. Colored people slipped around the streets in fear and trembling. The whites were sullen and silent. Everybody knew that there was deviltry in the air.

The Last Straw.—In this state of the public mind, about noon of Saturday, the afternoon papers came out with an “extra” with glaring headlines, telling of an attempt to assault in a neighboring

county. A few hours later there was another "extra" with another attempt. A few hours later there was still another. Finally, Saturday night, about nine o'clock, the fourth "extra" came out telling of the fourth attempt. This was the final straw, which broke the camel's back and precipitated the massacre.

Fake Assaults.—What about the genuineness of these attempts at assault? Frankly, I believe there was one genuine case on Saturday. All the rest were fakes, judging even from the white newspaper reports. In the second case of Saturday, the papers say that a white woman was "knocked down" by a Negro who forthwith fled and who was in all likelihood fleeing when he knocked down the woman. The third case, to use the words of the papers, was one where "A Negro threw a white woman down." When he fled and was discovered in the back yard, he spent no time whatever in revealing his purpose for being in the yard. The fourth and last case was one where an old lady was closing her window blinds at bedtime. She saw—or she imagined she saw—a Negro lurking in the yard. Surely not an extraordinary hallucination when you think of the way the newspapers have excited the public mind against the Negro. This woman screamed, went to the telephone and called a policeman. Nobody was even found about the yard and no trail could be scented. Yet this was "An Attempt to Assault."

The Mob Tasted Blood.—The papers reported that a white man who showed that he was a leader of men, mounted a box in the street, waved aloft a last "extra" of the "News," and called upon the men around him to take revenge upon the Negroes. A colored bicycle messenger came along and was given chase. He was caught and severely beaten. Then and there the mob could have been dispersed, but the police made no effort to arrest the leaders or disperse the mob. They rather seemed to be amused onlookers. Therefore, the mob gave chase to another Negro. He was killed. The mob had tasted blood and wanted more. The mayor tried to disperse these rioters by appealing to their sense of reason. Who ever heard of a mob having reason? He was hissed. Then he called out the fire companies and had the hose turned on the crowd. This maddened them and drove them to another street.

The mob took up its post at a section of the city where but few colored people pass. These individuals were chased and beaten or killed as they appeared. Having chased all the Negroes off the streets, the mob turned to the cars. Every colored man found in a car entering town unaware of the riots, was beaten or killed. From the street cars the mob went to the barber shops. Two barbers were dragged from their chairs and murdered and a bootblack was beaten to death. The beautiful glass front of one of the finest barber shops, a place operated by a colored man, who caters only to white trade, was riddled with bullets.

The Reign of Terror.—This raiding of shops caused every colored man in a store, or tailor shop, or barber shop, at nine o'clock Saturday night to turn out his light and crouch in fear in some corner all night long. The mob then attacked the colored cabmen. When the cabmen fled, the horses were beaten and in one or more instances the cabs demolished. Pullman car porters were chased and when they fled to cars and locked themselves up, the doors were battered down and men taken and severely handled. The mob did not stop at the killing of men, but even a poor innocent woman was murdered. It was a barbarity without a parallel in American history, a veritable reign of hell.

Negroes Disarmed.—When the policemen finally tried to check the mob, they found that it was beyond their control. The militia was finally called out and restored order. On Sunday morning, Atlanta was practically under martial law. Sunday and Monday, certain elements of the black people showed their resentment at the way their people had been murdered Saturday night. They shot into the cars, shot out the electric lights and gave chase to white men who passed through their settlements. When shooting occurred in a Negro community the soldiers searched the community and took every weapon of protection any colored man had in his home for the protection of his family. In Brownsville, where a policeman was killed at night, supposedly by the black people, two hundred and fifty-seven colored people were arrested. The homes of Negro professors and doctors were searched for arms and every weapon of protection for the home was taken away.

Negroes Prohibited from Buying Firearms.—The mayor ordered all hardware stores and saloons closed. Notwithstanding this fact, the hardware stores were open all the while and were crowded with whites, buying firearms and ammunition. When a colored man tried to enter, he was asked by two stalwart soldiers who guarded the door, what he wanted. If he wanted nails, a clerk was sent to the door to wait on him; if firearms, he was told that he would have to get a permit from the sheriff. When the sheriff was approached the colored man was informed that the community was being disarmed and that it was best if he had no gun. Every colored man on the street was searched by the soldiers for concealed weapons. If any were found on him, he was sent to the tower. The soldiers might have searched some white men, but in all of my observations, I never saw a single case.

Saloon License Revoked.—The council finally decided to revoke all saloon licenses. One of the newspapers plainly stated that this was in order to close the Negro saloons. Any white saloon would be reopened when it applied for a new license. One white man, writing to a newspaper in the name of the "Master" asked that if any saloons be closed, let them be the white saloons, finally closing his letter by saying: "Take care of the white men and boys and God will take care of the Negro as he does all other brutes." When I left Atlanta, all the Negro restaurants and most of their barber shops had been closed. It was said that they afforded the Negroes a rendezvous for congregating and discussing the situation.

The Answer to Graves.—This brings me to the place where I must tell you why I am in Chicago and why I left Atlanta. The morning after the riot, the "New York World" wired editor John Temple Graves of the "Georgian" for a statement as to the cause of the riot. You read Mr. Graves' letter. It charged that there had been a carnival of rapes in and around Atlanta, that the riot was a thing that was to have been expected under the circumstances and that the South would have repetitions of such riots, until the Negroes ceased to attack white women. He boasted that the "Negroes had been whipped and humbled"—which was the real purpose of the riot—and would probably be al-

right for the next five years. The "World" also wired me for a letter.

My Accusation.—In my letter I accused the "Atlanta News" of fomenting the riot; so did the Fulton County Grand Jury; so did a number of prominent white people of Atlanta; so does everybody who knows the facts and is willing to tell the truth. I stated that it was currently reported that some of George Smith's emissaries blacked their faces and made white women terrified—not assaulted—white women in order to excite anti-Negro feeling. So it is reported and talked among the people, but, of course, with whispered tones. This is altogether likely. Men with blackened faces were killed in South Carolina last year. I stated that a white man, prominent in financial circles, said that in one case blood-hounds repeatedly lost trail near a white man's house, and so the man prominent in financial circles did assert. I said that a white woman cut her own throat and had a whole community up in arms, looking for a "burly black brute;" and I told the truth.

Before the Police Commission.—This letter was wired to the "World." White men concerned with the matter found out from the telegraph operators, who sent the letter. I was sent for by a police commissioner, who is a national bank president, and was questioned about the letter. I was told that if I wrote the letter, I would have to leave the community at once, or suffer such consequences as the community saw fit to administer. I got out of town as quickly as possible. The next day our circulation manager was given the same orders. We had to hurry out of town and leave all of our property. Some way we have got to raise money to re-establish here.

The Coming Tragedy.—There is an awful condition of things in the South. The truth is literally gagged and bound and lies prostrate in the dust. My people are weighed down with an almost incalculable degree of poignant and pathetic misery, while mad caps are sweeping us tumultuously on to a tremendous tragedy—the tragedy of the extinction of the race one day by sword when the Negro's patience is exhausted, or the tragedy of the cowering and dwarfing of a whole people while a thinly-disguised slavery shall triumph. There never was a situation so thoroughly charged with the elements

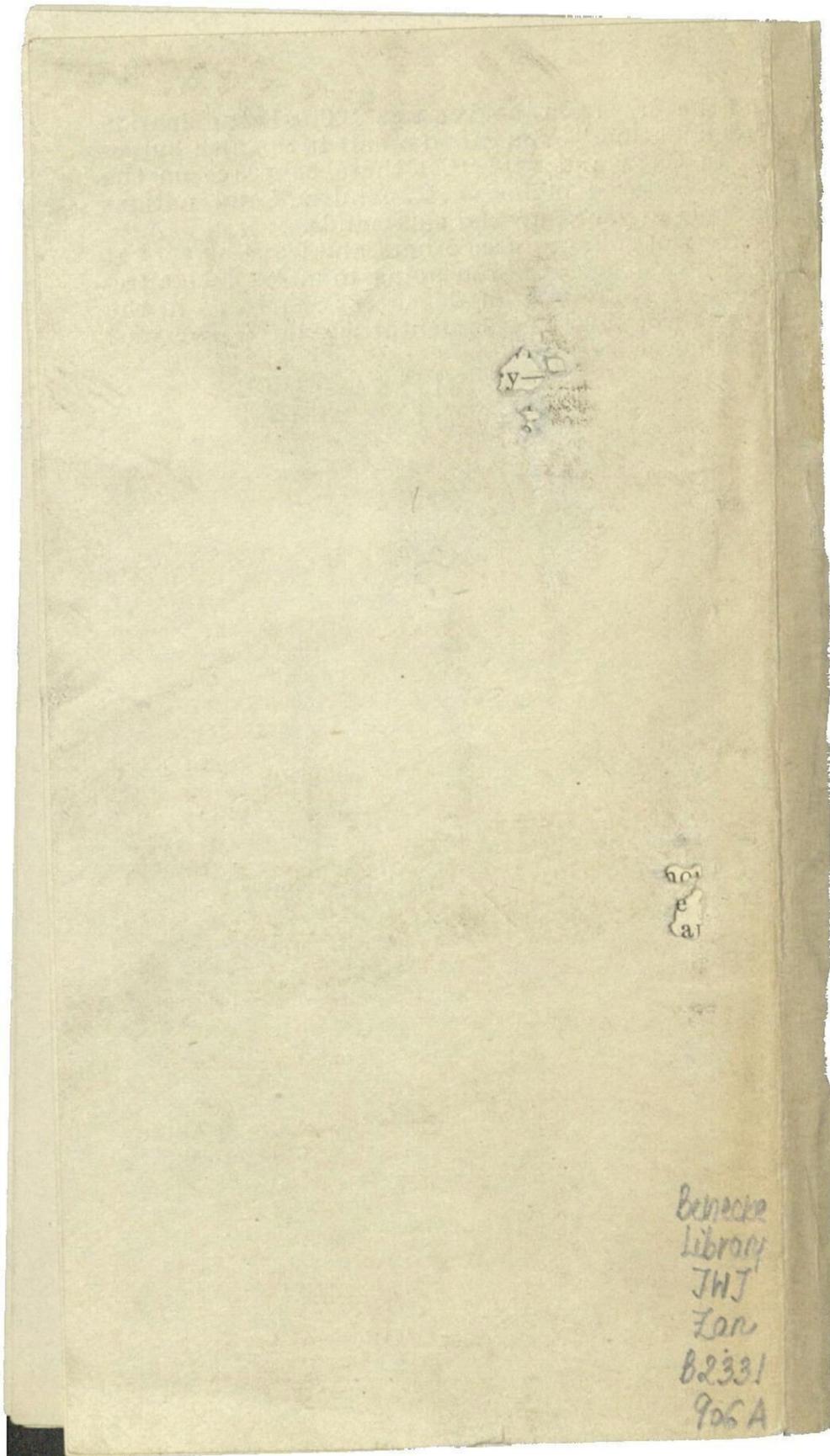
of hate, of fearful hope and lawless idealism. The mob flouts the law of the land and defies decent American sentiment.

An Appeal for Justice.—I ask you in the name of high heaven to do what you can to uproot prejudice and meanness in the South! My people are discouraged and cast down. Their hearts are bleeding, their ambitions are crushed, and their inspirations to be men like other men are witheringly frowned upon. The Southern white people are the greatest dwarf-makers of history—making dwarfs of us and of their own souls. Fearful, fearful will be the judgment of God upon a people whose best energies are directed to keeping down another people. Fearful must be the judgment against them when arraigned before the bar of progressive humanity. Nobody can try to tether humanity to some dank and fetid sub-human, super-animal world, without dwarfing his own soul.

A Word to the North.—To the Northern white people let me say: You and the South are bound together irrevocably by the crimson tie of kinship. Will you permit your brethren to go astray from American ideals? Will you permit this tremendous tragedy? You men and women who mold and shape public opinion in this country, will you stand for this? Will you not lead us out of this wilderness of fratricidal hatred? You can, if you will. You are the progeny of an imperial race, whose genius recognizes no insurmountable obstacles. You and your forebears have turned the ponderous granite leaves of the earth and read therein the history of ten thousand years. You have plumbed the darkened caverns of the ocean and weighed the stars on your scales. You have planted the flag of liberty in a wild Western wilderness, and as if by magic, there sprung up a mighty people and a mighty civilization. You smote the rock in the desert and forthwith there flowed milk and honey. Your writers, with the romantic touch of a breezy novel, or the rugged thrill of their Western verse, have vitalized the mutual affections of mankind from pole to pole and lead captive the whole earth in their chains. Your forebears threw off the yoke of tyranny and unfurled along the Atlantic coast the flag of liberty and equality. You poured out your richest life blood as a choice libation upon the altar of freedom

and the fire from heaven was "The Emancipation Proclamation." You called a halt to Spanish butchery in Cuba and said "Let there be peace on the blood-weltered plains of Manchuria," and nations listened to your imperial commands.

Are you going to free others and leave slavery at your own door? Are you going to make such a tremendous confession of degeneracy as to fly in the face of your own fundamental maxims? Are you? I can never believe



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