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**Child or Beast?: White Texas'****View of Blacks, 1900-1910**

by Bruce A. Glasrud

"It was just, it was right, it was imperative he should die" proclaimed a white Texas writer in the aftermath of a 1905 lynching of a black Texan.<sup>1</sup> This comment echoed the thoughts of many whites in the state during the first decade of the twentieth century. Blacks frequently faced white displeasure and wrath; whether white contempt and fear assumed violent or nonviolent forms, blacks were reminded often of white racism. Whites were haunted by fear of racial amalgamation, a fear expressed in their apprehension about sexual relations between black males and white females. They worried also that blacks might arm themselves for retaliation against brutal treatment.

The overwhelming white domination attained during this decade fashioned two basic attitudes—that blacks were either childlike or beastlike. Few whites supported the concept of racial equality. For some whites, paternalistic concern, rooted in an assumption that blacks were inferior beings who required white help and guidance, superseded fear and contempt for the black race. Others saw blacks as beasts subject to rigid control, whipping, and, too often, lynching. The best indications of white public opinion can be found in utterances of public officials, in newspaper editorializing and treatment of Negro news, and in the general white acceptance of the violence and intimidation that were a part of the pattern of race relations in the Lone Star state.

Senators Charles Culberson and Joseph Bailey voiced the dominant opposing racial attitudes of the first decade. A paternalist, Senator Culberson emphasized that demands for equality menaced whites, and that

aside from its impossibility, social equality would lead imperceptively to more intimate personal relations, to lower standards and ideals of ultimately, if fully attained, to marriage and partial or complete amalgamation, with the consequent debasement, degradation or destruction of the white race.

However, Culberson advocated providing black Texans with "education, forbearance, moral training, just treatment, [and] opportunities for labor"; he did not endorse destructive tactics.<sup>2</sup> Although a paternalist, Culberson's fear of racial amalgamation engendered lynching and other forms of violence as surely as the contempt articulated by his colleague in the Senate, Joseph Bailey.

Senator Bailey, the nearest approximation to a demagogue the state has produced, illustrated the other side of racial beliefs. Bailey frequently brought the issue of race into his campaigns and speeches and criticized both Democrats and Republicans for being too friendly toward blacks. In 1904, after condemning President Theodore Roosevelt's association with Booker T. Washington, Bailey asserted that "I believe more in the purity of the Anglo-Saxon race than in the principles of democracy."<sup>3</sup> In a speech at Fort Worth the Senator emphasized that blacks should not live side by side with educated whites; since blacks were trained for servitude "nothing in the world could be more supremely foolish than to spend the people's money in trying to educate a race of menials." However, Bailey reminded his audience, "lest I be misunderstood, I have no prejudice against the negro in his place, but I think his place is the white man's kitchen and

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not the white man's dining room." According to Bailey, blacks must remain in their place: "I want to treat the negro justly and generously as long as he behaves himself, and when he doesn't I want to drive him out of this country."<sup>4</sup>

Other politicians<sup>5</sup> expressed views similar to those of either Bailey or Culberson. After Theodore Roosevelt invited Booker T. Washington to the White House in 1901, Texas Congressman Albert Sidney Burlison denounced the President and refused to attend social functions at the White House for the remainder of Roosevelt's administration. Governor Joseph Sayers reminded the Texas legislature in 1901 that "the negro is . . . the weaker race and in matters of legislation, he is altogether dependent upon the white man." Governor S.W.T. Lanham, although willing to use troops to protect individual blacks, warned Negro Baptists in 1904 to keep "out of partisan politics" and to "respect the social limitations between the races. If these are transcended there will be trouble."<sup>6</sup> Four years later, M.J. Denman, who opposed John Nance Garner for the Democratic nomination to Congress, advocated sending all blacks to the Philippines in order to alleviate racial tension. The next year a member of the Texas legislature introduced a resolution opposing any appropriations to the black school at Prairie View on the grounds "that the cotton field is the proper place for the negro."<sup>7</sup> The essential difference between these politicians and Senator Bailey was that Bailey emphasized the question of race and probably profitted politically from it.

Not only did white politicians voice their racial views, they also acted by restricting blacks from participation in politics. Neither the Democratic nor the Republican party sought black members during this decade. In fact, the Democrats in the state legislature established a poll tax as a prerequisite for voting in Texas elections with the result that the size of the black electorate was substantially reduced.<sup>8</sup> And, when the legislature enacted the Terrell Election Law establishing a direct primary system, the Democratic state executive committee allowed local committees to bar blacks from the Democratic primary. The Republicans, who in the nineteenth century became a viable political force by attracting the black voter, turned to a "lily white" strategy in the twentieth. The Republicans refused to contest local and state elections where victory was dependent upon black votes, and distributed patronage to whites only.<sup>9</sup>

Disfranchisement and political ostracism<sup>10</sup> were not the only indications of hostility to blacks; Texas politicians also perfected an elaborate segregation code. Both *de facto* and *de jure* Jim Crow existed in Texas from before the Civil War, but during the first decade of the twentieth century the most rapid expansion of legal segregation took place. Legislation of the period 1900-1910 decreed segregation on all forms of public transportation, in railroad depots, and in eleemosynary and penal institutions. In 1907, any place of public amusement or recreation was permitted by law to segregate blacks or to bar their admission. The same legislature stipulated that no white couple could adopt a black child, and that no black couple could adopt a white child.<sup>11</sup>

Even when the law made no differentiation on the basis of race, the legal system operated against blacks. Those convicted of a crime usually received longer and harsher sentences than whites convicted of a similar offense. For example, a white charged with attempted assault of a black girl received a sentence of two years, but a Negro charged with assaulting a white girl was punished with thirty-eight years in prison.<sup>12</sup> Since the presence of blacks on juries was virtually non-existent, white juries had little sympathy for the black defendant. Texas courts frequently ruled that the lack of blacks on a jury was not sufficient evidence of discrimination. The presence of a Negro on a jury was

sufficiently unusual that newspapers reported the incident. In 1908, when Washington Williams was a juror, *The San Antonio Daily Express* commented that "it is very seldom that a negro is taken on a jury."<sup>13</sup>

The white sentiments which led to violence or disfranchisement or segregation were faithfully reflected in Texas newspapers; the newspapers helped to mold them as well. News coverage accorded blacks in the white press consisted of three types: crime reports, humorous incidents, and news of lynchings or other forms of white violence directed against blacks. Accounts of Negro criminal acts were scattered throughout Texas papers. For example, the December 26, 1901 issue of the *Houston Daily Post* carried brief stories from around the state on the deaths of three blacks, the wounding of three others, and the shooting and stabbing of whites by blacks. No other information concerning blacks was in the paper. Humorous stories depicting the black Texan as childish and unlearned were common. *The Dallas Morning News* carried a cartoon in the Sunday edition entitled "Sambo," which displayed the childlike qualities supposedly inherent in blacks.<sup>14</sup> Social, economic, and political reports of interest to blacks were suppressed. The inevitable result of such reportorial bias was a picture of blacks as simple or sinister; one or the other view fitted the preconceptions of most whites.

Editors became increasingly sensitive to the image of the state in reporting clashes between white and black. At the turn of the century, newspapers reserved page one and bold headlines for news of lynchings. But, early in the twentieth century, accounts of lynchings were frequently remanded to inside pages and received less sensational coverage. National publicity, Senate criticism, and the frequency of the violence were responsible for the diminished reports. Often, stories of lynchings were not carried in the press; some papers reported a given lynching while others did not. Yet, the suppression on lynching news was less frequent than the suppression of other news about blacks in the state. At least one paper could be counted on to provide lynch news; little mention was made of the accomplishments of life style of black Texans.

The press not only ignored Negro accomplishments and activities, but the terminology used in accounts of race violence was indicative of the prejudices of the era. Newspapers often referred to the Negro "beast," the Negro "fiend," or the Negro "brute." Other blacks were described as "insolent," "idle," or "trifling."<sup>15</sup> The editor of the *Lubbock Morning Avalanche* characterized blacks as "kinky headed coons." A short time later, he opposed the entrance of blacks into Lubbock since "negroes are like Johnson grass when it comes to taking root and increasing in a town."<sup>16</sup> Press approval of lynchings was implicit in the terms used to describe the victim. Guilt was assumed; he was a murderer, a rapist, or a trespasser, and the lynching was probably needed. Referring to a lynching at Whitesboro in 1901, *The Dallas Morning News* headlined the "Negro murderer is burned."<sup>17</sup>

Some newspapers approved burning and hanging as punishment and warned blacks of an armed white repression. A Nacogdoches paper declared in 1903 that "you can say what you please, but the negro will never rise in respectability or even be classed as a human being, until he ceases his damnable outrages on women. He has either got to stop it, leave the U.S., or be exterminated." The same year a Carthage paper expressed similar views; according to *The Panola Watchman*, "the negro can stop lynching tomorrow. Let him let white girls alone." A newspaper editorial from Longview argued that:

almost every day some negro brute assaults a white woman in this state, and often one to a half-dozen murders are committed in an effort to hide

the crime. . . . If rape and murder by brutish negroes are to become common, the negro must expect extermination. . . . Burning or hanging the culprit does not seem to check it and if nothing else will do, the people will rise in their might and put an end to it.

The same year, 1905, some white Houstonians asked Governor S.W.T. Lanham to allow mobs to punish blacks guilty of assaults upon white women. They asserted that these assaults must be stopped "even if it is necessary to wipe out the race."<sup>18</sup>

Other papers seldom expressed themselves as openly, but their failure to condemn the mobs and their recitals of extenuating circumstances for lynchings implied approval. In 1910, for example, after a mob estimated at well over 5,000 persons took Allen Brooks, a black man under indictment for assault, from the courthouse at Dallas during a recess in the trial and hanged him from a pole, *The Dallas Morning News* refused to condemn the lynching. Instead, the *News* asserted that:

something may be said, in certain instances, not in justification, but in extenuation of the conduct of those who resort to lynching . . . Many of them are moved by their contempt for the delays, reversals, and failures of courts.<sup>19</sup>

The inconsistencies of white attitudes were also reflected by the press. The white paternalists' capacity for holding contradictory views could be observed in newspaper editorials inveighing against race prejudice while supporting separation of white and black. According to the editor of *The San Antonio Daily Express*, "there is and must always be race distinction, but there is absolutely no excuse for race prejudice." A writer for the *Houston Chronicle* noted that "the negro is inferior not because he is black nor is he black because he is inferior, but he is inferior because he belongs to an inferior race."<sup>20</sup>

An extreme example of race prejudice took place in 1910 with white Texans' response to a boxing match between the world heavy-weight champion, Jack Johnson, a Galveston black, and Jim Jeffries, the "white hope." Johnson defeated Jeffries to the delight of blacks and the consternation of whites. Minor disturbances arose, and whites demanded that films of the bout be prohibited. The belief prevailed that if blacks watched their champion defeat a white in a boxing match, full-scale outbreaks would occur.<sup>21</sup> Texas Governor Thomas M. Campbell was widely applauded after he asked the state legislature to bar showing of the film. Although the legislature responded by enacting a law banning movies of prize fights, some members of the legislature attempted unsuccessfully to ban only those fight pictures in which blacks were participants.<sup>22</sup>

The Johnson-Jeffries fight and its aftermath epitomized the racial dogmas which produced this period in Texas history. The irrational belief in white supremacy and the concomitant emphasis on forcing blacks into a subordinate and separate caste permeated all classes of white society; few raised voices of opposition. Perceiving blacks as childlike and/or beastlike led to treating blacks with paternalistic concern, or to dominating their lives. Yet, definite improvements in race relations in the Lone Star state eventually took place; violence continued to occur, but the year 1910 marked the end of an era when it was used with impunity against black Texans. Blacks struggled successfully to acquire a more equitable status in Texas society, and more and more whites made genuine efforts to extend the rights of full citizenship to all Texans. In the matters of race the 1970s are much different from the first decade of the twentieth century.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*Waco Weekly Tribune*, August 12, 1905.

<sup>2</sup>*The Dallas Morning News*, November 21, 1901. For additional information on Culberson see James William Madden, *Charles Allen Culberson* (Austin, 1929). White paternalism can also be noticed in a book written by a white Texas minister, James Jefferson Pipkin, *The Story of a Rising Race: The Negro in Revelation, in History, and in Citizenship* (New York, 1902). Pipkin claimed that "what the Negro needs is encouragement in every line of lawful endeavor, all the aid that can be extended to him by generous whites without inducing idleness, an open recognition of whatever manhood he evinces in the inevitable struggle of the poor and lowly, and the arousing of renewed determination to do his part in the uplifting of his people (v)."

<sup>3</sup>Sam Hanna Acheson, *Joe Bailey, The Last Democrat* (New York, 1932), 171; *Houston Daily Post*, September 7, 1904; *The City Times* (Galveston), September 24, 1904; *The Dallas Morning News*, October 23, 1904. The former Democratic Governor, James S. Hogg, disagreed with Bailey and declared that "I don't want the young men of the this country to understand that they are to make any attack upon any human being unless it is by due process of law." Hogg received national publicity and a letter of thanks from G.W. Jackson, black president of the Central Texas Negro Fair Association of Corsicans for his response to Bailey. Robert C. Cotner, *James Stephen Hogg: A Biography* (Austin, 1959), 562-563; *The Dallas Morning News*, October 13, 1904. Also see Bob Charles Holcomb, "Senator Joe Bailey: Two Decades of Controversy" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1968), on Bailey's checkered career.

<sup>4</sup>*The Dallas Morning News*, March 22, 1907. Politicians were not the only ones to express such views. William Hayne Levell, minister for the largest Presbyterian church in Houston, asserted that lynching was a needed punishment for the rape of white women by black men. It was also needed to keep blacks from "getting the upper hand." William Hayne Levell, "On Lyncing in the South," *Outlook*, LXIX (November 16, 1901), 731-733.

<sup>5</sup>Politics and politicians of the period have been studied in a number of different ways. See, for example, Alwyn Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform: Texas Politics, 1876-1906* (Austin, 1971); Maurice Henry Sochia, "The Progressive Movement in Texas, 1900-1914" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Southwest Texas State Teachers College, 1959); and James A. Tinsley, "The Progressive Movement in Texas" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1953).

<sup>6</sup>Adrian Norris Anderson, "Albert Sidney Burleson: A Southern Politician in the Progressive Era" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Texas Tech University, 1967), 81; *The Dallas Morning News*, January 11, 1901, September 15, 1904. On Sayers, see James Leighton Tenney, "The Public Services of Joseph Draper Sayers" (Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Texas, 1933); and on Lanham see Martha Lanham, "Governor S.W.T. Lanham" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Baylor University, 1930), and Ruby Lee Martin, "The Administration of Governor S.W.T. Lanham, 1903-1907" (Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Texas, 1937).

<sup>7</sup>*The Galveston Daily News*, June 22, 1908; *The San Antonio Daily Express*, May 1, 1909.

<sup>8</sup>On the poll tax in Texas see Dick Smith, "Texas and the Poll Tax," *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, XXIV (1964), 167-173; Donald S. Strong, "The Poll Tax: The Case of Texas," *American Political Science Review*, XXXVII (1944), 693-709; Laura Snow, "The Poll Tax in Texas: Its Historical, Legal, and Fiscal Aspects" (Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Texas, 1936); Judith Kidd Rudoff, "The Poll Tax in Texas: Political Panacea" (Unpublished Master's thesis, East Texas State University, 1968);

Edwin Larry Dickens, "The Poll Tax in Texas" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Texas College of Arts and Industries, 1963). However, the most accurate treatment of the poll tax and its background in Texas is found in Lawrence Rice, *The Negro in Texas* (Baton Rouge, 1971), 22-25, 132-139.

<sup>9</sup>*General Laws of the State of Texas*, regular session, 1903, chapter CI, section 93; first called session, 1905, chapter II; *The Dallas Morning News*, March 30, 1903, April 19, 1904; Paul Casdorph, *A History of the Republican Party in Texas, 1865-1965* (Austin, 1965), 7-97. The position of the two parties during this period can also be seen in Ernest William Winkler (ed.), *Platforms of Political Parties in Texas* (Austin, University of Texas Bulletin No. 53, 1916), 411-519, and Barr, *Reconstruction to Reform*, 188-208.

<sup>10</sup>Systematically denied political participation by the Republicans and Democrats by the end of the decade, some blacks turned their attention to the prohibition crusade which culminated in an important election in 1911. Some whites asserted that blacks needed to be on the prohibition side because blacks were "about to exchange the slavery of the white man for the slavery of drunkenness." Thomas S. Henderson to L.L. Campbell, May, 1911, Thomas S. Henderson Papers, University of Texas Archives. Additional information concerning blacks and prohibition can be found in Anti-Saloon League, *The Brewers and Texas Politics*, 2 volumes (San Antonio, 1917).

<sup>11</sup>*General Laws of the State of Texas*, regular session, 1907, chapters XIV, section 1, XXXVI, XLVII, section 1; regular session, 1909, chapter LVI, article 2949; second called session, 1909, chapter XIII, section 1; first called session, 1910, chapter X, section 36; third called session, 1910, chapter III; *The Dallas Morning News*, July 12, 30, 1907. Secondary studies of Jim Crow and its background in Texas include Bruce A. Glasrud, "Jim Crow's Emergence in Texas," *American Studies*, XV (1974), 47-60; Leonard Brewster Murphy, "A History of Negro Segregation Practices in Texas, 1865-1958" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1958); Barry A. Crouch and L.J. Schultz, "Crisis in Color: Racial Separation in Texas During Reconstruction," *Civil War History*, XVI (1970), 37-49; George E. Hopkins, "The Origins of Jim Crow Laws in Texas" (Unpublished Paper delivered at annual meeting, Texas State Historical Association, 1966); Artis Hill, "'Jim Crow-ism' in Several Areas of Twentieth Century Life Relative to the Negro: Transportation, Eating and Lodging Places, Public Parks, and Movie Theaters" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Abilene Christian College, 1969).

<sup>12</sup>*The Dallas Morning News*, August 30, 1904, October 18, 1905; *The Galveston Daily News*, February 2, 1910.

<sup>13</sup>*Smith v. State*, 69 SW 151 (1902); *Thomas v. State*, 95 SW 1069 (1906); *Hanna v. State*, 105 SW 793 (1907); *Thompson v. State*, 74 SW 914 (1903); *The San Antonio Daily Express*, February 29, 1908. Without legal protections, black Texans reverted to other means for protecting their rights and resisting the implementation of segregation codes; see August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, "The Boycott Movement Against Jim Crow Streetcars in the South, 1900-1906," *Journal of American History*, LV (1969), 756-775.

<sup>14</sup>*Houston Daily Post*, December 26, 1901; *The Dallas Morning News*, March 22, June 21, 1908.

<sup>15</sup>*The Dallas Morning News*, May 26, 1902, April 1, 1905, November 26, 1906; *Semi-Weekly Courier-Times* (Tyler), March 5, 1910; *The Times-Clarion* (Longview), October 5, 1905; *Houston Daily Post*, November 16, 1900, November 23, 1902, September 8, 1905; *The San Antonio Daily Express*, July 15, 1908.

<sup>16</sup>*Lubbock Morning Avalanche*, November 18, December 4, 1909.

<sup>17</sup>*The Dallas Morning News*, August 21, 1901.

<sup>18</sup>*Nacogdoches Weekly Sentinel*, 1903, cited in David W. Livingston, "The Lynching of Negroes in Texas, 1900-1925" (Unpublished Master's thesis, East Texas State University, 1972), 110; *The Panola Watchman* (Carthage), August 26, 1903; *The Times-Clarion* (Longview), October 5, 1905; *New York Times*, October 7, 1905.

<sup>19</sup>*The Dallas Morning News*, March 4, 1910.

<sup>20</sup>*The San Antonio Daily Express*, May 1, 1909; *Houston Chronicle*, October 22, 1902.

<sup>21</sup>Richard Bardolph, *The Negro Vanguard* (New York, 1961), 268-269; David G. McComb, *Houston: The Bayou City* (Austin, 1969), 161; *The Dallas Morning News*, July 7, 8, 1910. Studies of Johnson's life include Jack Johnson, *Jack Johnson in the Ring and Out* (Chicago, 1927); Denzil Batchelor, *Jack Johnson and His Times* (London, 1956); Finis Farr, *Black Champion: The Life and Times of Jack Johnson* (New York, 1964); and Al-Tony Gilmore, *Bad Nigger! The National Impact of Jack Johnson* (New York, 1975). Johnson has also been the subject of a play by Howard O. Sackler, *The Great White Hope* (New York, 1968). Part of the reason for the white southern antipathy toward Johnson was because he associated with white women. See Al-Tony Gilmore, "Jack Johnson and White Women: The National Impact," *Journal of Negro History*, LVIII (1973), 18-38.

<sup>22</sup>*The Dallas Morning News*, July 7, 8, 1910; *General Laws of the State of Texas*, third called session, 1910, chapter VIII.