

READING 5-1

Excerpts from Wells-Barnett's
A Red Record

These selections are excerpted from pages 1–98. They show the main points in Wells-Barnett's theory and method: that domination results from the interaction of history, ideology, material resources, and emotion; that justice needs the mobilization of public opinion and a legal system that protects the weak; that sexual attraction across race happens frequently, but the ideology of domination tries to hide this; and that the oppressed must turn the oppressors' own words against them, using the white media to convict white people by cross-examination of the data they present. The reader should note Wells-Barnett's careful construction of lynching statistics, of which only a sample is given here.

**EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER I,
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. . . .

Beginning with the emancipation of the Negro, the inevitable result of unbri[d]led power exercised for two and 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 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. . . .

Source: Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *A Red Record* (Chicago: Donohue and Henneberry, 1895).

But Emancipation came and 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 the school of practice in which might makes right, that they disdained to draw strict lines of action in dealing with the Negro. . . . [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. . . .

Naturally enough the commission of these crimes began to tell upon the public conscience, and the Southern white man, as a tribute to the nineteenth century civilization, was in a manner compelled to give excuses for his barbarism. . . . That greatest of all Negroes, Frederick Douglass, in an article of recent date . . . shows that there have been three distinct eras of Southern barbarism, to account for which three distinct excuses have been made.

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." . . . 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. . . .

. . . 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. . . .

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. . . . "No Negro domination" became the new legend on the sanguinary banner of the sunny South, and under it rode the Ku Klux Klan, the Regulators, and the lawless mobs, which for any cause chose to murder one man or a dozen as suited their purpose best. It was a long, gory campaign; the blood chills and the heart almost loses faith in Christianity when one thinks of Yazoo, Hamburg, Edgefield, Copiah, and the countless massacres of defenseless Negroes whose only crime was the attempt to exercise their right to vote.

. . . Scourged from his home; hunted through the swamps; hung by midnight raiders, and openly murdered in the light of day, the Negro clung to his right of franchise with a heroism which would have wrung admiration from the hearts of savages. He believed that in that small ballot there was a subtle something which stood for manhood as well as citizenship, and thousands of brave black men went to their graves, exemplifying the one by dying for the other.

The white man's victory soon became complete. . . . With no longer the fear of "Negro Domination" before their eyes, the white man's second excuse became valueless. . . .

Brutality still continued: Negroes were whipped, scourged, exiled, shot and hung whenever and wherever it pleased the white man so to treat them, and . . . the murderers invented the third excuse—that Negroes had to be killed to avenge their assaults upon women. . . .

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. . . .

The Negro has suffered much and is willing to suffer more. . . . But there comes a time when the veriest worm will turn, and the Negro feels to-day that [he must] . . . defend his name and manhood from this vile accusation. . . .

. . . [T]he Negro must give the world his side of the awful story. . . .

. . . 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 civilized states describe as such? Not by any means. With the Southern white man, any mesalliance 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 proven after the victim's death, that the relationship sustained between the man and woman was voluntary. . . .

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. . . .

But threats cannot suppress the truth.

During all the years of slavery, no such charge was ever made. . . . 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.

Likewise during the period of alleged "insurrection" . . . in the Reconstruction era, when the hue and cry was against "Negro Domination." . . . 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.

. . . To justify their own barbarism [Southern white men] 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 millions of mulattoes in the South, will for a minute conceive that the southern white man had a very chivalrous regard . . . for the womanhood which circumstances placed in his power. . . . Virtue knows no color line, and the chivalry which depends upon complexion of skin and texture of hair can command no honest respect.

When emancipation came . . . [f]rom every nook and corner of the North, brave young white women answered that call and left their cultured homes, their happy associations and their lives of ease, and with heroic determination went to the South to carry light and truth to the benighted blacks. . . . [T]hese young women . . . became social outlaws in the South. . . . **"Nigger teachers"**—unpardonable offenders in the social ethics of the South, and were insulted, persecuted and ostracised, not by Negroes, but by the white manhood which boasts of its chivalry toward women.

And yet . . . thrown at all times and in all places among the unfortunate and lowly Negroes, whom they had come to find and to serve, these northern women . . . went about their work, fearing no assault and suffering none. . . .

The Negro . . . faithful to his trust in both of these instances . . . should now have the impartial ear of the civilized world. . . .

. . . [H]e must disclose to the world that degree of dehumanizing brutality which fixes upon America the blot of a national crime. . . . It becomes a painful duty of the Negro to reproduce a record which shows that **a large portion of the American people avow anarchy, condone murder and defy the contempt of civilization.** . . .

The purpose of the pages which follow shall be to give the record which has been made, not by colored men, but that which is the result of compila-

tions made by white men, of reports sent over the civilized world by white men in the South. Out of their own mouths shall the murderers be condemned. For a number of years the Chicago Tribune, admittedly one of the leading journals of America, has made a specialty of the compilation of statistics touching upon lynching. The data compiled by that journal and published to the world January 1st, 1894, up to the present time has not been disputed. In order to be safe from the charges of exaggeration, the incidents hereinafter reported have been confined to those vouched for by the Tribune.

EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER II, "LYNCH LAW STATISTICS"

From the record published in the Chicago Tribune, January 1, 1894, the following computation of lynching statistics is made referring only to the colored victims of Lynch Law during the year 1893:

ARSON

Sept. 15, Paul Hill, Carrollton, Ala.; Sept. 15, Paul Archer, Carrollton, Ala.; Sept. 15, William Archer, Carrollton, Ala.; Sept. 15, Emma Fair, Carrollton, Ala.

SUSPECTED ROBBERY

Dec. 23, unknown negro, Fannin, Miss.

ASSAULT

Dec. 25, Calvin Thomas, near Bainbridge, Ga.

ATTEMPTED ASSAULT

Dec. 28, Tillman Green, Columbia, La.

INCENDIARISM

Jan 28, Patrick Wells, Quincy, Fla.; Feb. 9, Frank Harrell, Dickery, Miss.; Feb. 9, William Fielder, Dickery, Miss. . . .

BURGLARY

Feb. 17, Richard Forman, Granada, Miss.

WIFE BEATING

Oct. 14, David Jackson, Covington, La. . . .

OFFENSES CHARGED ARE AS FOLLOWS

Rape, 39; attempted rape, 8; alleged rape, 4; suspicion of rape, 1; murder, 44; alleged murder, 6; alleged complicity in murder, 4; murderous assault, 1; attempted murder, 1; attempted robbery, 4; arson, 4; incendiarism, 3; alleged stock poisoning, 1; poisoning wells, 2; alleged poisoning wells, 5; burglary, 1; wife beating, 1; self defense, 1; suspected robbery, 1; assault with battery, 1; insulting whites, 2; malpractice, 1; alleged barn burning, 4; stealing, 2; unknown offense, 4; no offense, 1; race prejudice, 4; total, 159.

LYNCHINGS BY STATE

Alabama, 25; Arkansas, 7; Florida, 7; Georgia, 24; Indian Territory, 1; Illinois, 3; Kansas, 2; Kentucky, 8; Louisiana, 28; Mississippi, 17; Missouri, 3; New York, 1; South Carolina, 15; Tennessee, 10; Texas, 8; Virginia, 10. . . .

While it is intended that the record here presented shall include specially the lynchings of 1893, it will not be amiss to give the record for the year preceding. The facts contended for will always appear manifest—that **not one-third of the victims lynched were charged with rape**, and further that the charges made embraced a range of offenses **from murders to misdemeanors**.

In 1892 there were 241 persons lynched. . . .

Of this number 160 were of Negro descent. Four of them were lynched in New York, Ohio, and Kansas; the remainder were murdered in the South. Five of this number were females. The charges for which they were lynched cover a wide range. They are as follows:

Rape, 46; murder, 58; rioting, 3; race prejudice, 6; no cause given, 4; incendiarism, 6; robbery, 6; assault and battery, 1; insulting women, 2; desperadoes, 6; fraud, 1; attempted murder, 2; no offense stated, boy and girl, 2.

In the case of the boy and girl above referred to, their father, named Hastings, was accused of the murder of a white man; his fourteen-year-old daughter and the sixteen-year-old son were hanged and their bodies filled with bullets, then

the father was also lynched. This was in November, 1892, at Jonesville, Louisiana.

**EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER III,
"LYNCHING IMBECILES"
TORTURED AND BURNED IN TEXAS**

Never in the history of civilization has any Christian people stooped to such shocking brutality and indescribable barbarism as that which characterized the people of Paris, Texas, and adjacent communities on the 1st of February, 1893. The cause of this awful outbreak of human passion was the murder of a four year old child, daughter of a man named Vance . . . a police officer in Paris for years . . . known to be a man of bad temper, overbearing manner and given to harshly treating the prisoners under his care. . . .

In the same town there lived a Negro, named Henry Smith, a well known character, a kind of roustabout, who was generally considered a harmless, weak-minded fellow. . . . Smith . . . was accused of murdering Myrtle Vance. The crime of murder was of itself bad enough . . . but . . . the father and his friends . . . shamefully exaggerated the facts and declared that the babe had been ruthlessly assaulted and then killed. . . . As a matter of fact, . . . [p]ersons who saw the child after its death, have stated, under the most solemn pledge to truth, that there was no evidence of such an assault. . . .

Lest it might be charged that any description of the deeds of that day [of Smith's lynching] are exaggerated, a white man's description which was published in the white journals of this country is used. The New York Sun of February 2d, 1893, contains an account, from which we make the following excerpt:

[“]PARIS. Tex., Feb. 1, 1893.—Henry Smith, the negro ravisher of 4-year-old Myrtle Vance, has expiated in part his awful crime by death at the stake. . . . When the news came last night that he had been captured at Hope, Ark. . . . the city was

wild with joy. . . . Curious and sympathizing alike, they came on train and wagons, on horse, and on foot, . . . Whiskey shops were closed, unruly mobs were dispersed, schools were dismissed by a proclamation from the mayor, and everything was done in a business-like manner. . . .

Arriving here at 12 o'clock the train was met by a surging mass of humanity 10,000 strong. The negro was placed upon a carnival float . . . and, followed, by an immense crowd, was escorted through the city. . . .

. . . [W]hen he was told that he must die by slow torture he begged for protection. . . . He pleaded and writhed in bodily and mental pain. . . . His clothes were torn off piecemeal and scattered in the crowd, people catching the shreds and putting them away as mementos. The child's father, her brother, and two uncles then gathered about the Negro as he lay fastened to the torture platform and thrust hot irons into his quivering flesh. . . . Every groan from the fiend, every contortion of his body was cheered by the thickly packed crowd of 10,000 persons. . . . After burning the feet and legs, the hot irons—plenty of fresh ones being at hand—were rolled up and down Smith's stomach, back, and arms. Then the eyes were burned out and irons were thrust down his throat.

The men of the Vance family having wreaked vengeance, the crowd piled all kinds of combustible stuff around the scaffold, poured oil on it and set it afire. The Negro rolled and tossed out of the mass, only to be pushed back by the people nearest to him. . . . Hundreds of people turned away, but the vast crowd still looked calmly on. . . .["]

It may not be amiss in connection with this awful affair, in proof of our assertion that Smith was an imbecile, to give the testimony of a well known colored minister, who lived at Paris, Texas, at the time of the lynching. He was a witness of the awful scenes there enacted, and attempted in the name of God and humanity, to interfere in the programme. He barely escaped with his life, was driven out of the city and became an exile because

of his actions. . . . [W]e quote his account as an eye witness of the affair. . . .

"I had known Smith for years, and there were times when Smith was out of his head for weeks. Two years ago I made an effort to have him put in an asylum. . . . For days before the murder of the little Vance girl, Smith was out of his head and dangerous. He had just undergone an attack of delirium tremens and was in no condition to be allowed at large."

EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER V, "LYNCHED FOR ANYTHING OR NOTHING"

Details are very meagre of a lynching which occurred near Knox Point, La., on the 24th of October, 1893. Upon one point, however, there was no uncertainty, and that is, that the persons lynched were Negroes. It was claimed that they had been stealing hogs, but even this claim had not been subjected to the investigation of a court. That matter was not considered necessary. A few of the neighbors who had lost hogs suspected these men were responsible for their loss, and made up their minds to furnish an example for others to be warned by. The two men were secured by a mob and hanged.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of this record of lynch law for the year 1893, is the remarkable fact that five human beings were lynched and that the matter was considered of so little importance that the powerful press bureaus of this country did not consider the matter of enough importance to ascertain the causes for which they were hanged. It tells the world, with perhaps greater emphasis than any other feature of the record, that **Lynch Law has become so common in the United States that the finding of the dead body of a Negro, suspended between heaven and earth to the limb of a tree, is of so slight importance that neither the civil authorities nor press agencies consider the matter worth investigating.** . . .

. . . John Hughes, of Moberly, and Isaac Lincoln, of Fort Madison, and Will Lewis in Tullahoma, Tenn., suffered death for no more serious charge than that they "were saucy to white people." In the days of slavery it was held to be a very serious matter for a colored person to fail to yield the sidewalk at the demand of a white person, and it will not be surprising to find some evidence of this intolerance existing in the days of freedom. But the most that could be expected as a penalty for acting or speaking saucily to a white person would be a slight physical chastisement, to make the Negro "know his place" or an arrest and fine. But Missouri, Tennessee and South Carolina chose to make precedents in their cases and as a result both men, after being charged with their offense and apprehended, were taken by a mob and lynched. The civil authorities . . . did not feel it their duty to make any investigation after the Negroes were killed. They were dead and out of the way and as no one would be called upon to render account for their taking off, the matter was dismissed from the public mind.

EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER VI, "HISTORY OF SOME CASES OF RAPE"

It has been claimed that . . . all colored men, who are lynched, only pay penalty for assaulting women. It is certain that lynching mobs have not only refused to give the Negro a chance to defend himself, but have killed their victim with a full knowledge that the relationship of the alleged assailant with the white woman who accused him, was voluntary and clandestine. . . . This [Wells-Barnett's] defense has been necessary because the apologists for outlawry insist that in no case has the accusing woman been a willing consort of her paramour, who is lynched because overtaken in wrong. It is well known, however, that such is the case. . . . Such cases [of mutual consent] are not rare, but the press and people conversant with the facts, almost invariably suppress them.

The Cleveland, Ohio, Gazette, January 16, 1892, gives an account of one of these cases of "rape."

Mrs. J. C. Underwood, the wife of a minister of Elyria, Ohio, accused an Afro-American of rape . . . during [her husband's] absence in 1888, stumping the state for the Prohibition Party. . . . She subsequently pointed out William Offett, a married man, who was arrested, and, being in Ohio, was granted a trial.

The prisoner vehemently denied the charge of rape, but confessed he went to Mrs. Underwood's residence at her invitation and was . . . intimate with her at her request. This availed him nothing against the sworn testimony of a minister's wife, a lady of the highest respectability. He was found guilty, and entered the penitentiary, December 14, 1888, for fifteen years. Sometime afterwards the woman's remorse led her to confess to her husband that the man was innocent. These are her words: "I met Offett at the postoffice. It was raining. He was polite to me, and as I had several bundles in my arms he offered to carry them home for me, which he did. He had a strange fascination for me, and I invited him to call on me. He called, bringing chestnuts and candy for the children. By this means we got them to leave us alone in the room. Then I sat on his lap. He made a proposal to me and I readily consented. Why I did so I do not know, but that I did is true. He visited me several times after that and each time I was indiscreet. I did not care after the first time. In fact I could not have resisted, and had no desire to resist."

When asked by her husband why she told him she had been outraged, she said: "I had several reasons for telling you. One was the neighbors saw the fellow here, another was, I was afraid I had contracted a loathsome disease, and still another was that I feared I might give birth to a Negro baby. I hoped to save my reputation by telling you a deliberate lie." Her husband, horrified by the confession, had Offett, who had already served four years, released and secured a divorce.

There have been many such cases throughout the South, with the difference that Southern white men in insensate fury wreak their vengeance

without intervention of law upon the Negro who consorts with their women.

The Memphis (Tenn.) Ledger, of June 8, 1892, has the following: "If Lillie Bailey, a rather pretty white girl, seventeen years of age, who is now at the city hospital would be somewhat less reserved about her disgrace there would be some very nauseating details in the story of her life. She is the mother of a little coon. The truth might reveal a fearful story of depravity or evidence of a rank outrage. She will not divulge the name of the man who has left such black evidence of her disgrace, and in fact says it is a matter in which there can be no interest to the outside world. She came to Memphis nearly three months ago, and was taken in at the Woman's Refuge. . . . She remained there until a few weeks ago when the child was born. The ladies in charge of the Refuge were horrified. The girl was at once sent to the city hospital. . . . When the child was born an attempt was made to get the girl to reveal the name of the Negro who had disgraced her, she obstinately refused and it was impossible to elicit any information from her on the subject."

Note the wording: "The truth might reveal a fearful story of depravity or evidence of a rank outrage." If it had been a white child, or if Lillie Bailey had told a pitiful story of Negro outrage, it would have been a case of a woman's weakness or assault and she could have remained at the Woman's Refuge. But a Negro child and to withhold its father's name and thus prevent the killing of another Negro "rapist" was a case of "fearful depravity."

EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER X, "THE REMEDY"

It is a well established principle of law that every wrong has a remedy. Herein rests our respect for law. The Negro does not claim that all of the one thousand black men, women, and children, who have been hanged, shot, and burned alive during the past ten years, were innocent of the charges made against them. We have associated too long

with the white man not to have copied his vices as well as his virtues. But we do insist that the punishment is not the same for both classes of criminals. In lynching, opportunity is not given the Negro to defend himself against the unsupported accusations of white men and women. . . . No evidence he can offer will satisfy the mob: he is bound hand and foot and swung into eternity. Then to excuse its infamy, the mob almost invariably reports the monstrous falsehood that its victim made a full confession before he was hanged. . . .

What can you do, reader, to prevent lynching, to thwart anarchy, and promote law and order throughout our land?

1st. You can help disseminate the facts contained in this book by bringing them to the knowledge of every one with whom you come in contact, to the end that public sentiment may be revolutionized. Let the facts speak for themselves, with you as a medium.

2d. You can be instrumental in having churches, missionary societies, Y.M.C.A.'s, W.C.T.U.'s and all Christian and moral forces in connection with your religious and social life, pass resolutions of condemnation and protest every time a lynching takes place; and see that they are sent to the place where these outrages occur.

3d. Bring to the intelligent consideration of Southern people the refusal of capital to invest where lawlessness and mob violence hold sway. Many labor organizations have declared by resolution that they would avoid lynch infected localities as they would the pestilence when seeking new homes. If the South wishes to build up its waste places quickly, there is no better way than to uphold the majesty of the law by enforcing obedience to the same, and meting out the same punishment to all classes of criminals, white as well as black. "Equality before the law," must become a fact as well as a theory before America is truly the "land of the free and the home of the brave."

4th. Think and act on independent lines in this behalf, remembering that after all, it is the white

man's civilization and the white man's government which are on trial. This crusade will determine whether . . . this Nation shall write itself down a success at self government, or in deepest humiliation admit its failure complete; whether the precepts and theories of Christianity are professed and practiced by American white people as Golden Rules of thought and action, or adopted as a system of morals to be preached to heathen until they attain to the intelligence which needs the system of Lynch Law.

5th. Congressman Blair offered a resolution in the House . . . The organized life of the country can speedily make this a law by sending resolutions to Congress indorsing Mr. Blair's bill.

READING 5-2

Excerpts from Cooper's *A Voice from the South*

EXCERPT FROM "OUR RAISON D'ÊTRE."

This selection is excerpted from pages i–iii. In this preface, Cooper invokes the image of the courtroom for her social analysis, arguing that all viewpoints need to be represented in the discussion of American race relations, and that the black woman's vantage point is distinctive and important.

. . . The colored man's inheritance and apportionment is still the sombre crux, the perplexing *cul de sac* of the nation. . . . One important witness has not yet been heard from. The summing up of the evidence deposed, and the charge to the jury have been made—but no word from the Black Woman.

It is because I believe the American people to be conscientiously committed to a fair trial and

ungarbled evidence, and because I feel it essential to a perfect understanding and an equitable verdict that truth from *each* standpoint be presented at the bar,—that this . . . Voice has been added to the already full chorus. The "other side" has not been represented by one who "lives there." . . .

. . . [A]s our Caucasian barristers are not to blame if they cannot *quite* put themselves in the dark man's place, neither should the dark man be wholly expected fully and adequately to reproduce the exact Voice of the Black Woman. . . .

. . . If these . . . utterances can in any way help to a clearer vision and a truer pulse-beat in studying our Nation's problem, this Voice by a Black Woman of the South will not have been raised in vain.

EXCERPT FROM "WOMAN VERSUS THE INDIAN"

This selection is excerpted from pages 80–126. Cooper responds here to a speech by a leading white feminist who argues that it is unjust for men of color (including Native American men) to have the vote denied to white women. Cooper offers a sociological analysis of the importance of manners (or mores) in social life and thus in affecting relations between races; an historical analysis of the power of the white South in influencing politics and manners in the United States; a feminist analysis of the corruption of the white women's movement by Southern racism; and her own vision of feminist values as promoting inclusivity and opposing domination.

In the National Woman's Council convened at Washington, February 1891, among a number of thoughtful and suggestive papers read by eminent women, was one by the Rev. Anna Shaw, bearing the above title. . . .

Susan B. Anthony and Anna Shaw . . . [a]s leaders in the woman's movement of today . . . have need of clearness of vision as well as firmness of soul in adjusting recalcitrant forces, and wheeling into line the thousand and one none-such,

Source: Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice from the South* (Xenia, OH: Aldine Press, 1892).

never-to-be-modified, won't-be-dictated-to banners of their somewhat mottled array.

The black woman and the southern woman, I imagine, often get them into the predicament of the befuddled man who had to take singly across a stream a bag of corn, a fox, and a goose. . . .

The black woman appreciates the situation and can even sympathize with the actors in the serio-comic dilemma.

But, may it not be that, as women, the very lessons which seem hardest to master now, are possibly the ones most essential for our promotion to a higher grade of work? . . .

The American woman of to-day not only gives tone directly to her immediate world, but . . . the deepest layers of society feel the vibrations. It is pre-eminently an age of organizations. The "leading woman," the preacher, the reformer, the organizer "enthuses" her lieutenants and captains, the literary women, the thinking women; these in turn touch their myriads of church clubs, social clubs, culture clubs, pleasure clubs and charitable clubs, till the same lecture has been duly administered to every married man in the land (not to speak of sons and brothers). . . .

The American woman then is responsible for American manners. . . . The atmosphere of street cars and parks and boulevards, of cafes and hotels and steamboats is charged and surcharged with her sentiments and restrictions. Shop girls and serving maids, . . . wage earner, salaried toiler, or proprietress . . . are . . . bound together by a system. . . . The one talismanic word that plays along the wires from palace to cook-shop, from imperial Congress to the distant plain, is *Caste*. With all her vaunted independence, the American woman of to-day is as fearful of losing caste as a Brahmin in India. That is the law under which she lives, . . . the lesson which she instills into her children with their first baby breakfasts, the injunction she lays upon husband and lover with direst penalties attached. . . .

It was the good fortune of the Black Woman of the South to spend some weeks, not long since, in a

land over which floated the Union Jack. The Stars and Stripes were not the only familiar experiences missed. A uniform, matter-of-fact courtesy, a genial kindness, quick perception of opportunities for rendering any little manly assistance . . . in shops and waiting rooms, in cars and in the streets seemed to her chilled . . . soul to transform the commonest boor in the service of the public into one of nature's noblemen, and when the old whipped-cur feeling was taken up and analyzed she could hardly tell whether it consisted mostly of self pity for her own wounded sensibilities, or of shame that her countrymen offered such an unfavorable contrast.

. . . The Black Woman of the South has to do considerable travelling in this country, often unattended. . . .

I purposely forbear to mention instances of personal violence to colored women travelling in less civilized sections of our country, where women have been forcibly ejected from cars, thrown out of seats, their garments rudely torn, their persons wantonly and cruelly injured. America is large . . . There are murderers and thieves and villains in both London and Paris. Humanity from the first has had its vultures and sharks, and representatives of the fraternity who prey upon mankind may be expected no less in America than elsewhere. That this virulence breaks out most readily and commonly against colored persons in this country, is due of course to the fact that they are, generally speaking, weak and can be imposed upon with impunity. Bullies are always cowards at heart and may be credited with a pretty safe instinct in scenting their prey. Besides, society, where it has not exactly said to its dogs "s-s-sik him!" has at least engaged to be looking in another direction or studying the rivers of Mars. It is not of the dogs and their doings, but of society holding the leash that I shall speak. . . .

There can be no true test of national courtesy without travel. . . . Moreover the weaker and less influential the experiment, the more exact and scientific the deductions. . . . [T]he Black Woman holds that her femininity linked with the impossibility of

popular affinity or unexpected attraction through position and influence in her case makes her a touchstone of American courtesy. . . .

I would eliminate also from discussion all uncharitable reflections upon the orderly execution of laws existing in certain states of this Union, requiring persons known to be colored to ride in one car, and persons supposed to be white in another. A good citizen may use his influence to have existing laws and statutes changed or modified, but a public servant must not be blamed for obeying orders. A railroad conductor is not asked to dictate measures, nor to make and pass laws. His bread and butter are conditioned on his managing his part of the machinery as he is told to do. If, therefore, I found myself in that compartment of a train designated by the sovereign law of the state for presumable Caucasians, and for colored persons only when traveling in the capacity of nurses and maids, should a conductor inform me, as a gentleman might, that I had made a mistake, and offer to show me the proper car for black ladies; I might wonder at the expensive arrangements of the company and of the state in providing special and separate accommodations for the transportation of the various hues of humanity, but I certainly would not take it as a want of courtesy on the conductor's part. . . . But when a great burly six feet of masculinity with sloping shoulders and unkempt beard swaggers in, and . . . growls out at me over the paper I am reading, "Here gurl," (I am past thirty) "you better git out 'n dis kyar 'f yer don't, I'll put yer out,"—my mental annotation is *Here's an American citizen who has been badly trained*. . . ; and when in the same section of our enlightened and progressive country, I see from the car window, working on private estates, convicts from the state penitentiary, among them squads of boys from fourteen to eighteen years of age in a chain-gang, their feet chained together and heavy blocks attached—not in 1850, but in 1890, '91 and '92, I make a note . . . *The women in this section should organize a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Human Beings, and disseminate civilizing tracts and send*

throughout the region apostles of anti-barbarism. . . . And when farther on in the same section our train stops at a dilapidated station, rendered yet more unsightly by dozens of loafers . . . ; and when, looking a little more closely, I see two dingy little rooms with "FOR LADIES" swinging over one and "FOR COLORED PEOPLE" over the other; while wondering under which head I come, . . . I know that if by any fatality I should be obliged to lie over at that station, and driven by hunger, should be compelled to seek refreshments or the bare necessities of life at the only public accommodation in the town, that [some] stick-whittler would coolly inform me, without looking up from his pine splinter, "We doan uccommodate no niggers hyur." . . .

. . . I have determined to plead with women . . . to institute reform by placing immediately in our national curricula a department for teaching GOOD MANNERS.

Now, am I right in holding the American woman responsible? Is it true that the exponents of women's advancement . . . can teach this nation to be courteous, to be pitiful, having compassion, one of the other . . . ?

I think so. . . .

One of the most singular facts about the unwritten history of this country is the consummate ability with which Southern influences, Southern ideas and Southern ideals, have from the very beginning even up to the present day, dictated to and domineered over the brain and sinew of this nation. Without the wealth, without education, without inventions, arts, sciences, or industries, without well-nigh every one of the progressive ideas and impulses which made this country, prosperous and happy, personally indolent and practically stupid, poor in everything but bluster and self-esteem, the Southerner has nevertheless with Italian finesse and exquisite skill, uniformly and invariably . . . manipulated Northern sentiment. . . . Indeed, the Southerner is a magnificent manager of men, a born educator. For two hundred years he trained to his hand a people whom he made absolutely his own, in body, mind, and

sensibility. He so insinuated differences and distinctions among them, that their personal attachment for him was stronger than for their own brethren and fellow sufferers. He made it a crime for two or three of them to be gathered together in Christ's name without a white man's supervision, and a felony for one to teach them to read even the Word of Life; and yet they would defend his interest with their life blood; his smile was their happiness, a pat on the shoulder from him their reward. . . .

And he not only managed the black man, he also hoodwinked the white man, the tourist and investigator who visited his lordly estates. The slaves were doing well, in fact couldn't be happier,—plenty to eat, plenty to drink, comfortably housed and clothed—they wouldn't be free if they could. . . .

In politics the two great forces, commerce and empire, which would otherwise have shaped the destiny of the country, have been made to pander and cater to Southern notions. . . . Every statesman from 1830 to 1860 exhausted his genius in persuasion and compromises to smooth out her ruffled temper and gratify her petulant demands. But like a sullen younger sister, the South has pouted and sulked and cried: "I won't play with you now; so there!" and the big brother at the North has coaxed and compromised and given in, and—ended by letting her have her way. Until 1860 she had as her pet an institution which it was death by law to say anything about, except that it was divinely instituted, inaugurated by Noah, sanctioned by Abraham, approved by Paul, and just ideally perfect in every way. And when, to preserve the autonomy of the family arrangements, in '61, '62 and '63, it became necessary for the big brother to administer a little wholesome correction . . . she assumed such an air of injured innocence, . . . the big brother has done nothing since but try to sweeten and pacify and laugh her back into a companionable frame of mind. . . .

. . . Still Arabella sulked,—till the rest of the family decided she might just keep her pets, and manage her own affairs and nobody would interfere.

So now, if one intimates that some clauses of the Constitution are a dead letter at the South and that only the name and support of that pet institution are changed while the fact and essence, minus the expense and responsibility, remains, he is quickly told to mind his own business and informed that he is waving the bloody shirt.

. . . Not even the chance traveller from England or Scotland escapes. The arch-manipulator takes him under his special watchcare and training, uses of his stock arguments and gives object lessons with his choicest specimens of Negro depravity and worthlessness; takes him through what, in New York, would be called "the slums" . . . but in Georgia is denominated "our terrible problem, which people of the North so little understand." . . . [A]nd not long after the inoculation begins to work, you hear this old-time friend of the oppressed delivering himself something after this fashion: "Ah, well, the South must be left to manage the Negro. . . . The Negro is not worth a feud between brothers and sisters."

Lately a great national and international movement characteristic of this age and country . . . the movement making for Woman's full, free, and complete emancipation, has, after much courting, obtained the gracious smile of the Southern woman—I beg her pardon—the Southern lady. . . .

Now the Southern woman (I may be pardoned, being one myself) was never renowned for her reasoning powers. . . .

. . . [S]he imagines that because her grandfather had slaves who were black, all the blacks in the world of every shade and tint were once in the position of slaves [and that] . . . [c]ivility to the Negro implies social equality. . . .

When I seek food in a public café or apply for first-class accommodations on a railway train, I do so because my physical necessities are identical with those of other human beings of like constitution and temperament, and crave satisfaction . . . ; and I can see no more "social equality" in buying lunch at the same restaurant, or riding in a

common car, than there is in paying for dry goods at the same counter or walking on the same street.

The social equality which means forced or unbidden association would be as much deprecated and as strenuously opposed by the circle in which I move as by the most hide-bound Southerner in the land. Indeed I have been more than once annoyed by the inquisitive white interviewer, who, with spectacles on nose and pencil and note-book in hand, comes to get some "points" about "your people." My "people" are just like other people—indeed, too like for their own good. . . .

What the dark man wants then is merely to live his own life, in his own world, with his own chosen companions, in whatever of comfort, luxury, or emoluments his talent or his money can in an impartial market secure. Has he wealth, he does not want to be forced into inconvenient or unsanitary sections of cities to buy a home and rear his family. Has he art, . . . [h]is talent aspires to study without proscription all the masters of the ages. . . .

Has he religion, he does not want to be made to feel that there is a white Christ and a black Christ, a white Heaven and a black Heaven, a white Gospel and a black Gospel,—but the one ideal of perfect manhood and womanhood, the one universal longing for development and growth. . . .

This . . . is why I conceive the subject to have been unfortunately worded which was chosen by Miss Shaw at the Women's Council and which stands at the head of this chapter.

Miss Shaw is one of the most powerful of our leaders, and we feel her voice should give no uncertain note. Woman should not, even by inference, or for the sake of argument seem to disparage what is weak. For woman's cause is the cause of the weak. . . .

The cause of freedom is not the cause of race or a sect, a party or a class,—it is the cause of human kind . . . [T]he reform of our day, known as the Woman's Movement, is essentially such an embodiment. . . . And specially important is it that there be no confusion of ideas among its leaders as to its

scope and universality. All mists must be cleared from the eyes of woman if she is to be a teacher of morals and manners. . . . [I]t is important and fundamental that there be no chromatic or other aberration when the teacher is settling the point, "Who is my neighbor?"

. . . Woman in stepping from the pedestal of statue-like inactivity in the domestic shrine . . . is merely completing the circle of the world's vision. . . .

. . . The world has had to limp along with the wobbling gait and one-sided hesitancy of a man with one eye. Suddenly the bandage is removed from the other eye and the whole body is filled with light. It sees a circle where before it saw a segment. The darkened eye restored, every member rejoices with it. . . .

. . . Why [then] should woman become plaintiff in a suit versus the Indian, or the Negro or any other race, or class who have been crushed under the iron heel of Anglo Saxon power and selfishness? If the Indian has been wronged and cheated by the puissance of this American government, it is woman's mission to plead with her country to cease to do evil and to pay its honest debts. If the Negro has been deceitfully cajoled . . . , let it be woman's mission to plead that he be met as a man and honestly given half the road. . . . [L]et her rest her plea, not on Indian inferiority, nor on Negro depravity, but on the obligation of legislators to do for her as they would have others do for them were relations reversed. Let her try to teach her country that every interest in this world is entitled at least to a respectful hearing, that every sentiency is worthy of its own gratification, that a helpless cause should not be trampled down, nor a bruised reed broken; and when the right of the individual is made sacred, when the image of God in human form, whether in marble or clay, whether in alabaster or ebony, is consecrated and inviolable, . . . when race, color, sex, condition, are realized to be the accidents, not the substance of life, . . . then is mastered the science of politeness, the art of courteous contact, which is naught

but the practical application of the principal of benevolence, the back bone and marrow of all religion; then woman's lesson is taught and woman's cause is won—not the white woman nor the black woman nor the red woman, but the cause of every man or woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong. . . . Her wrongs are thus indissolubly linked with all undefended woe, all helpless suffering, and the plenitude of her "rights" will mean the final triumph of all right over might.

EXCERPT FROM "HAS AMERICA A RACE PROBLEM; IF SO, HOW CAN IT BEST BE SOLVED?"

This selection is excerpted from pages 149–174. It presents Cooper's sociological theory of the interconnections among conflict, diversity, equilibrium and progress; and her argument that racial diversity and multi-culturalism are essential.

There are two kinds of peace in this world. The one produced by suppression, which is the passivity of death; the other brought about by a proper adjustment of living, acting forces. . . .

Now I need not say that peace produced by suppression is neither natural nor desirable. Despotism is not one of the ideas that man has copied from nature. All through God's universe we see eternal harmony and symmetry as the unvarying result of the equilibrium of opposing forces. Fair play in an equal fight is the law written in Nature's book. And the solitary bully with his foot on the breast of his last antagonist has no warrant in any fact of God. . . .

. . . Progressive peace in a nation is the result of conflict; and conflict, such as is healthy, stimulating, and progressive, is produced through the co-existence of radically opposing or racially different elements. Bellamy's ox-like men pictured in *Looking Backward* . . . are nice folks to read about; but they are not natural; they are not progressive. God's world is not governed that way. The child can never gain strength save by resis-

tance, and there can be no resistance if all movement is in one direction. . . .

I confess I can see no deeper reason than this for the specializing of racial types in the world. . . .

Each race has its badge, its exponent, its message, branded in its forehead by the great Master's hand which is its own peculiar keynote, and its contribution to the harmony of nations.

Left entirely alone,—out of contact, that is with other races . . . there is unity without variety, . . . a monotonous dullness which means stagnation,—death.

It is this of which M. Guizot complains in Asiatic types of civilization; and in each case he mentions I note that there was but one race, one free force predominating. . . .

Now I beg you to note that in none of these [ancient civilizations that died] was a RACE PROBLEM possible. . . .

But the course of empire moves one degree westward. Europe becomes the theater of the leading exponents of civilization, and here we have a *Race Problem*,—if indeed, the confused jumble of races, the clash and conflict, the din and devastation of those stormy years can be referred to by so quiet and so dignified a term as "problem." Complex and appalling it surely was. Goths and Huns, Vandals and Danes, Angles, Saxons, Jutes. . . .

Taine describes them as follows:

"Huge, white bodies, cool-blooded, with fierce blue eyes, reddish flaxen hair; ravenous stomachs, filled with meat and cheese, heated by strong drinks. Brutal drunken pirates and robbers, they dashed to sea in their two-sailed barks, landed anywhere, killed everything; . . ."

What could civilization hope to do with such a swarm of sensuous, bloodthirsty vipers? . . .

Once more let us go to Guizot. . . . "European civilization has within it the promise of perpetual progress. It has now endured more than fifteen centuries and in all that time has been in a state of progression. . . . While in other civilizations the exclusive domination of a principle (*or race*) led to

tyranny, in Europe the **diversity of social elements** (*growing out of the contact of different races*) the incapability of any one to exclude the rest, gave birth to the **LIBERTY** which now prevails. . . .”

There is no need to quote further. This is enough to show that the law holds good in sociology as in the world of matter, *that equilibrium, not repression among conflicting forces is the condition of natural harmony, of permanent progress, and of universal freedom.* . . .

But European civilization, rich as it was . . . was still not the consummation of human possibilities. . . . It is not . . . till the scene changes and America is made the theater of action, that the interplay of forces narrowed down to a single platform.

Hither came Cavalier and Roundhead, Baptist and Papist, . . . conservative Tory, the liberal Whig, and the radical Independent, . . . the Englishman, . . . the Chinaman, the African, . . . Irish, Jews. Here surely was a seething caldron of conflicting elements. . . .

Conflict, conflict, conflict.

America for Americans! . . . shrieks the exclusionist. Exclude the Italians! Colonize the blacks in Mexico or deport them to Africa. Lynch, suppress, drive out, kill out! America for Americans!

“Who are Americans?” . . .

The red men used to be owners of the soil,—but they are about to be pushed over into the Pacific Ocean. . . . If early settlers from abroad merely are meant and it is only a question of squatters’ rights—why, the Mayflower, a pretty venerable institution, landed in the year of Grace 1620, and the first delegation from Africa, just one year ahead of that,—in 1[6]19. . . .

The fact is **this nation was foreordained to conflict from its incipency**. Its elements were predestined from their birth to an irrepressible clash followed by the stable equilibrium of opposition. . . . Compromise and concession, liberty and toleration were the conditions of the nation’s birth and are the *sine qua non* of its continued existence. . . .

The supremacy of one race,—the despotism of a class or the tyranny of an individual **can not ultimately prevail** on a continent held in equilibrium by such conflicting forces and by so many and such strong fibred races as there are struggling on this soil. . . .

Has America a Race Problem?

Yes.

What are you going to do about it?

Let it alone. . . .

God and time will work the problem. . . .

. . . And we think that men have a part to play in this great drama no less than gods, and so if a few are determined to be white—amen, so be it; but don’t let them argue as if there were no part to be played in life by black men and black women, and as if to become white were the sole specific and panacea for all the ills the flesh is heir to—the universal solvent for all America’s irritations. . . .

. . . Let us not disparage the factor which the Negro is appointed to contribute to that problem. America needs the Negro. . . . [H]is instinct for law and order, his inborn respect for authority, his inaptitude for rioting and anarchy, his gentleness and cheerfulness as a laborer, and his deep-rooted faith in God. . . .

. . . [T]he historians of American civilization will yet congratulate this country that she has had a Race Problem and that descendants of the black race furnished one of its largest factors.

EXCERPT FROM “ONE PHASE OF AMERICAN LITERATURE”

This selection is excerpted from pages 173–237. Here, Cooper uses white American literary texts about the African American as her data for exploring American black–white relations, exposing white racism and presenting her own portrait of the African American contribution to American society. She also ventures into a sociology of literature in her explorations of the relations between society and artistic product. Albion Tourgee is a now relatively forgotten white author who had served in the Union army and been a judge during Reconstruction.

By a rough classification, authors may be separated into two groups: first, those in whom the artistic or poetic instinct is uppermost—those who write to please—or rather write because *they* please. . . .

In the second group belong the preachers,—whether of righteousness or unrighteousness, . . . all those writers with a **purpose or a lesson**. . . .

Now owing to the problematical position at present occupied by descendants of Africans in the American social polity,—growing, I presume, out of the continued indecision in the mind of the more powerful descendants of the Saxons as to whether it is expedient to apply the maxims of their religion to their civil and political relationships,—most of the writers who have hitherto attempted a portrayal of life and customs among the darker race have belonged to our class II: they **have all, more or less, had a point to prove** . . . and through sheer ignorance oftentimes, as well as from design occasionally, have not been able to put themselves in the darker man's place. The art of "thinking one's self imaginatively into the experiences of others" is not given to all, and it is impossible to acquire it without a background and a substratum of sympathetic knowledge. . . .

This criticism is not altered by our grateful remembrance of those who have heroically taken their pens to champion the black man's cause. . . .

. . . In presenting truth from the colored American's standpoint Mr. Tourgee **excels, we think, in fervency and frequency of utterance** any living writer, white or colored. . . . Not many colored men would have attempted Tourgee's brave defense of Reconstruction and the alleged corruption of Negro supremacy, more properly termed the period of white sullenness and desertion of duty. Not many would have dared, fearlessly as he did, to arraign the country for an enormous pecuniary debt to the colored man for the two hundred and forty-seven years of unpaid labor of his ancestors. . . . We appreciate the incongruity and the indignity of having to stand forever hat in hand as beggars or

be shoved aside as intruders in a country whose resources have been opened by the unrequited toil of our forefathers. We know that our bill is a true one—that the debt is as real as to any pensioners of our government. But the principles of patience and forbearance, of meekness and charity, have become so ingrained in the Negro character that there is hardly enough self-assertion left to ask as our right that a part of the country's surplus wealth be *loaned* for the education of our children; even though we know that our present poverty is due to the fact that the toil of the last quarter century enriched these coffers, but left us the heirs of . . . empty handed mothers and fathers. Oh, the shame of it! . . .

In [his novel] *Pactolus Prime* Mr. Tourgee has **succeeded incomparably, we think, in photographing and vocalizing the feelings of the colored American in regard to the Christian profession and the pagan practice of the dominant forces in the American government**. And as an impassioned denunciation of the heartless and godless spirit of caste founded upon color, as a scathing rebuke to weak-eyed Christians who cannot read the golden rule across the color line, . . . the book is destined to live. . . .

Among our artists for art's sweet sake, Mr. Howells has recently tried his hand also at painting the Negro, . . . and I think the unanimous verdict of the subject is that, in this single department at least, **Mr. Howells does not know what he is talking about**. . . . [In] *An Imperative Duty*. . . . Mr. Howells merely meant to press the button and give one picture from American life involving racial complications. The kodak does no more; it cannot preach sermons or solve problems.

. . . [In portraying black characters, however] Mr. Howells fails—and fails because he gives only a half truth, and that a **partisan half truth**. One feels that he had no business to attempt a subject of which he knew so little, or for which he cared so little. There is one thing I would like to say to my white fellow countrymen, and especially to those who dabble in ink and affect to discuss the

Negro; . . . namely that it is an insult to humanity and a sin against God to publish any such sweeping generalizations of a race on such meager and superficial information. We meet it at every turn—this obtrusive and offensive vulgarity, this gratuitous sizing up of the Negro and conclusively writing down his equation, sometimes even among his ardent friends and bravest defenders. Were I not afraid of falling myself into the same error that I am condemning, I would say it seems an *Anglo Saxon characteristic* to have such overweening confidence in his own power of induction that

there is no equation which he would acknowledge to be indeterminate, however many unknown quantities it may possess. . . .

. . . What I hope to see before I die is a black man honestly and appreciatively portraying both the Negro as he is, and the white man, occasionally, as seen from the Negro's standpoint.

There is an old proverb "The devil is always painted *black*—by white painters." And what is needed, perhaps, to reverse the picture of the lordly man slaying the lion, is for the lion to turn painter.
