



*The Baptist Home Mission Monthly on the  
“Negro problem”  
(1883)*

*The Baptist Home Mission Monthly was the magazine of the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS), an organization run by white northern Baptists. In its April 1883 issue, under the heading “Public Opinion,” the magazine published a collection of white southern Baptist voices, culled from religious newspapers, opining on the question of whether, or how soon, African Americans could be elevated to equality with whites. Appended to the collection was commentary reprinted from a northern Methodist paper. Reproduced here are the following voices from the collection:*

- *John A. Broadus, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.*
- *An editorial from the Religious Herald, a newspaper published by the Baptist General Association of Virginia, a white convention.*
- *A report of remarks made by speakers at a conference that white Baptists of Virginia had held in the city of Lynchburg.*
- *The Methodist commentary, an editorial from the Western Christian Advocate, a weekly paper produced in Cincinnati by the Methodist Episcopal Church. This majority-white denomination had been a northern denomination since a split over slavery during the 1840s.*

*In an introduction to the collection, not reproduced here, the editors of the Baptist Home Mission Monthly spurned a belief represented by some voices in the collection: belief in “the irremediable inferiority of the colored man, for whom, as a predestined ‘laborer,’ but little education is needed.” (In line with the editors’ rejection of that belief, the ABHMS provided major funding for black colleges in southern states.) It is not clear, however, to what extent the editors may have concurred with other voices in the collection about a need to improve African Americans’ morals or spirituality. Nor is it clear what the editors thought of their selection from the Western Christian Advocate, in which white Methodist minister Daniel Curry, an opponent of slavery before the Civil War, reconciles himself to a post-emancipation society where blacks and whites will be equal but separate.*

### Southern Views Concerning the Freedman

We must make allowance, and be patient, and work with all our might. Some of those noble northern Christians who have been laboring among the Freedmen are at present showing discouragement. Perhaps they expected too much. Perhaps they imagined that the faults of the Freedmen were chiefly the results of slavery and would disappear after a few years of freedom, partial education, and their own earnest and loving influence. But alas! most of those faults came with their fathers from Africa, inherited from untold generations. But the other day, I read a letter from a former pupil who is a missionary on the Guinea coast, describing evils among the converts strikingly similar to those observed in our own colored churches. It is a vast and difficult task to lift up the lower races of mankind into Christian enlightenment.

Christian people, North and South, East and West, it is time to cease trying to shift blame upon each other’s shoulders and rise up with solemn earnestness to face the mightiest problem that ever arose in a Christian country. Our fathers in New England, in the Middle Colonies, and in the

South brought African slaves to America for reasons of their own, which it is impossible to justify and useless now to censure. The God of our fathers has set them free by overruling a vast amount of human selfishness and passion in long-continued political and military conflict. Let the dead past bury its dead. Forgetting the things which are behind, let us reach forth to those things which are before.

—Dr. John A. Broadus, of Kentucky, in *The Standard*

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Some ugly things have been said about our colored brethren of late. North and South, in the pulpit, upon the platform, and in newspapers and magazines, men of all creeds are using these unfavorable accounts to illustrate and enforce their respective views and theories of the “negro problem.” We, too, have several things to say on the subject.

These unfavorable reports are, in the main, correct. You who have not sought to know what is true in this direction, as we claim to have done, would be amazed if you could see the extent of the evil. We might produce the testimony of intelligent colored brethren who see and deplore the facts quite as much as others can. They know that ignorant and immoral pastors and their disorderly churches are a reproach to the cause of religion, and they are trying to correct these evil tendencies.

We should not condemn the innocent with the guilty. In many places, the colored Baptists are doing very well. Here in Richmond and in many other towns and country places, you will find pastors who command the respect of the entire community, and churches that are trying to exercise wholesome discipline and that are abounding in good works. The influence of such will in time, we hope, be more widely felt and become a greater power for good. Of course, it will require time and patience and labor to make much impression upon churches where more importance is attached to shouting and swooning and the holy dance than to the preaching of the gospel.

During these twenty years, they have been surrounded by influences peculiarly unfavorable to the development of the better qualities of their nature. It may be that with the settlement of issues that have kept both races in an unamiable mood, we shall be able, with the divine blessing, to do more for their religious improvement.

If the prospect for the colored Baptists is unpromising, who can tell *how much more so it would now be but for what our brethren at the North have done?* Let us give them full credit for the generous and disinterested contributions they have made in this direction and, as far as possible, cooperate with them in the work. And let intelligent colored pastors and laymen realize the peculiar obligations that rest upon them and do all in their power to remove prejudices which must work evil and only evil, and that continually, to both races and to the whole country.

—*Religious Herald*, Virginia

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At the recent Baptist Congress in Lynchburg, a paper was presented on “The Present Aspect of

the Negro Problem,” by Rev. John Hart of Virginia.<sup>a</sup> The *Religious Herald* reports his utterances and the discussion that followed:

“Mr. Hart does not believe in the ‘centuries of debasing slavery.’ He does believe that the negro was brought here a savage and that the ‘centuries of slavery’ did more for his cultivation and general elevation in the scale of being than had ever been done for him before. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is not all gospel. Slavery was a blessing to the negro if not to the master. The negro should be made to understand that his sphere is that of a laborer under the guidance of the white man. Much of what is called educating the negro is simply unfitting him for the only sphere in which he will ever be a useful and happy member of society.

“Following Mr. Hart comes Dr. Andrew Broadus of Caroline.<sup>b</sup> He seems to be much of Mr. Hart’s opinion as to the general mental status of the negro. He thinks it cruel to attempt to train an ox to trot at 2:40. You may *kill* your ox by striving to force him out of the sphere to which he naturally belongs. He is a strong, slow, patient laborer and, as such, fills a useful sphere in the creation.

“Dr. Hatcher<sup>c</sup> takes the other side. He does not think that Bro. Hart’s essay does justice to the capacity of the negro. In Petersburg, ten years after emancipation, 1,400 negroes owned their homes. Let the negro have the best educational facilities, and give him a fair and equal opportunity to develop all the force that is in him. Dr. Hatcher’s speech was warmly received by not a few of the audience, and there were evident signs of applause.”

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#### A Methodist View

We saw the destruction of slavery with great satisfaction, though even in that we rejoiced with trembling. In our zeal, we fondly, but only too sanguinely, hoped that the prejudice of color would give way with the emancipation of the slaves and the enfranchisement of the Freedmen; but events show that, as free men, the colored people are further from the whites than before. It is easy for the few who have really conquered their prejudices, and they are indeed only a few, to say that this ought not to be so. It certainly ought not, but it is.

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<sup>a</sup> The author has incorrectly given John Hart the ministerial title “Rev.” Hart was not a minister but a professor of English. He had recently served on the governing board of the University of Virginia and as acting president of the college that became Virginia Tech.

<sup>b</sup> This is Baptist minister Andrew Broaddus II. He lived a rather narrowly circumscribed life: he was born and died in Caroline County, Virginia, where he spent half a century pastoring a church that had been led by his father before him.

<sup>c</sup> William E. Hatcher had pastored a Baptist church in Petersburg, Virginia, during the Reconstruction era. When he spoke at the Lynchburg conference, he was pastoring a church in Richmond. He was also serving as editor of the *Religious Herald*, the Baptist newspaper from which this report of his remarks has been taken.

The people and churches of this country are very far from having reached the end of this subject of caste and race distinctions. The homogeneity of our population is only a reminiscence; we are now not specifically and genetically a nation but an empire—a conglomerate of distinct nationalities dwelling together under the same laws but socially separated into clearly distinct classes. As the state has (at least in form) obliterated the distinctions that grew out of “race, color, or former condition of slavery,” so some of us have hoped that the church might be able practically to do what the state pretended to do. But socially, the white and colored races are tending to a more and more clearly defined distinction, in proportion as the latter develop into a proper individuality with the aids of increased intelligence and culture. The question of social equality is not open to discussion; but social unity among the two principal races of our citizens is a rapidly vanishing idea.

The hope of the Africo-American is shut up to the destiny of his own people; between them and the Caucasians there may be—must be—reciprocal, kindly relations, but evidently the two races are destined to draw apart rather than together. And since all churches, and preeminently Methodist churches, are social bodies, so the social separation of whites and colored, *ipso facto*, necessitates the “color line.” To some of us, this necessity is far from being agreeable; but it is not wise to resist manifest destiny, and especially so when it may be the design of the divine Providence to effectuate his own wise and merciful purposes by another way than that which we had chosen and thought to be the only right way.

—Dr. Daniel Curry, in *Western Christian Advocate*

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The lowercasing of the racial labels *negro*, *colored*, and *white*, where those appear in the text of the selections, reproduces the usage of the source publication, but *Negro* has been capitalized in the title assigned by Duffy to the curated selections as a whole. The capitalizing of *Freedmen* replicates the source. So too do the capitalizing of compass directions used as regional names (*North*, *South*, etc.) and the use of lowercase for corresponding adjectives (*northern*). The words *gospel*, *state*, and *church*, capitalized in the source, have been converted to lowercase here for the sake of modernization.

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