



Tony Brown's COMMENTS

Fight Against New Slavery!

The period following Black Reconstruction proved to be a nightmare for the newly freed African-Americans. Political gains made by Blacks from 1867-77 during Black Reconstruction were wiped out by white terrorist groups such as the Democrats and the Ku Klux Klan.

This ugly mood moved North. By 1900, a black was lynched every day. Fear of a Second Civil war swept the country. In 1909, after investigating a race riot in Lincoln's hometown of Springfield, Illinois, William English Walling and a group of whites set out to create an organization that would stop this reign of terror. As a result, America's oldest and largest civil rights organization, the NAACP, was born.

Oswald Garrison Villard, president of the New York Evening Post and the fifth member to join the group, issued a "call" for a conference on the Negro problem on the 100th anniversary of Lincoln's birthday.

In New York, plans were being made by the signers of the call to hold a conference on May 31, 1909. Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, founder of the Niagara Movement in 1906, who was regarded as the blacks whom he called the "Talented Tenth," was invited to join the efforts of the Association. By the end of the conference, a Committee of Forty on Permanent Organization was selected.

Conspicuously, one of black America's most prominent citizens, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, who also founded the anti-lynching crusade, was excluded from the committee.

Another prominent black leader was also excluded from the committee. In 1904, however, in Booker T. Washington's case, his absence stemmed from ideological differences between Dr. DuBois and the Association on how to achieve black progress. Washington, President of Tuskegee Institute, considered by whites to be the most influential black spokesman in America, urged blacks to abandon overt protest and to pursue practical trades. He recognized the very real dangers of rocking the boat. DuBois, on the other hand, advocated overt protest and radical change.

In 1912, Americans were preparing to select a new president. Woodrow Wilson, a former president of Princeton University, defeated incumbent President Taft and former President Theodore Roosevelt. Wilson's election set the stage for an immediate halt to black progress. By July, 1913, he had officially introduced segregation in government departments and refused to appoint a national race commission to study the conditions that stifled black Americans.

The NAACP launched a full-scale battle against the rising tide of racism. Public sentiment for the social status of African-Americans was steadily decreasing and mob killings continued.

Added to the NAACP's troubles at this

time were internal battles. Villard became incensed because of a perceived inability of blacks to work together.

For the next few years, the NAACP intensified its efforts against a "social orgy of cruelty" by declaring war against lynching. For the two year period of 1913-14, "The Crisis" magazine reported 154 lynchings. But, with ailing funds, organizational problems and little notoriety, the Association was less than effective.

However, obscurity would cease to be one of its problems in 1915. A vicious "anti-Negro film" was the term used by the Los Angeles branch to describe D. W. Griffith's "The Birth of a Nation." This 1915 film adaptation of Thomas Dixon's novel, "The Clansman," glorified the Ku Klux Klan and portrayed the newly emancipated African as a lecherous, subhuman brute who would bring the South down to his inferior level.

In the film, the black leaders of Reconstruction were shown as idiotic and uncouth clowns. In one scene, a beautiful white woman jumps to her death to escape a lust-filled Negro's attempt to rape her. In other scenes, the night-riders of the Ku Klux Klan are portrayed as saviors of white womanhood and of the South, never as the terrorist organization that it was.

Immediately, protest meetings and picket lines were organized around the country. The NAACP had launched its largest and most impactful protest to

Although successful in getting certain scenes deleted in a few cities, the NAACP was unable to get the film banned. But one very important factor did come out of this effort: the NAACP was now nationally recognized as a formidable foe against social injustice to blacks.

Despite this cinematic setback, 1915 proved to be a year of triumphs for the Association and the black struggle. In an effort to foster racial pride, Joel E. Spingarn created a gold medal award to be issued annually for "the highest and noblest achievement of an American Negro." The Spingard Medal was first awarded to Dr. Ernest Just of Howard University for his research in Biology in February, 1915.

By 1916, the Afro-American population was again held hostage to the terror lynching. The decade before the turn of the century - The Terrible Nineties - the South averaged nearly 190 lynchings a year. The barbaric rites of lynch mobs were an almost everyday occurrence.

Next Week: The NAACP's crusade against lynching.

"Tony Brown's Journal" TV series can be seen on public television Sunday on WTVI, Channel 42, at 5 p.m. It can also be seen on Channel 58 Sundays at 6:30 and Channel 30 Thursdays at 10:30 p.m. Please consult listings.

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