

The Atlanta Massacre

[The following article is from an educated negro, a life-long resident of Georgia, in whom, were it safe to print his name, our readers would have every confidence.—EDITOR.]

ATLANTA, Ga., has again demonstrated that it is not a civilized community. Last Saturday the Atlanta News, hard pressed for existence in competition with two other afternoon papers, felt called upon to print sensational charges of assault upon white women by negroes. Not one of these charges has yet been proved, but the mere report was enough to call together all the white "toughs" in the city as soon as they had drawn their week's wages, and to give them license to set upon innocent and unsuspecting blacks wherever found and butcher them upon the spot.

The cause of all this violence, by careful inquiry, I have traced to four sources—one remote and three immediate.

The remote cause is the contest between Hoke Smith and Clark Howell for Governor, in which both men openly declared that negroes have no rights save those granted thru sufferance by the white people. The three immediate causes are: 1. There was circulated by the Atlanta newspapers—*The News* and *The Georgian* especially—the report that five assaults had occurred in one week and an additional one on Saturday—not one of which charges has been proved. 2. There is a sharp struggle for existence among three evening papers, which feel called upon to use any measures whatsoever to attract readers among a population that can be best attracted by abuse of the negro. 3. There is an increasing number of educated and prosperous negroes, whose business and whose success are an eyesore to some of the whites, who can in no peaceable way prevent that progress, as the facts here will show.

The facts about the most aggravating case of assault I have found to be as follows: A negro whose purpose was unknown was seen in the yard of a white woman; she drove him away with abusive language without asking him about his mission; the negro again returned and the woman again began to call him vile names and to scream and to cry that

the negro was attempting to assault her. A mob at once assembled, and before they had well got together all of the evening papers—*The News* and *The Georgian* especially—were circulating "extras" under the glaring headlines, "Another Assault." Then separate and extra editions of *The News* appeared hourly until dark, saying, "Another Assault." It seemed only necessary for a white woman to see a negro meeting her in the same street or looking at her on her front porch to make her cry out, "Assault!"

That is the evidence that drove the editors mad and made them advocate the gathering of a mob to murder peaceable negroes. It is coming out little by little that the whole affair was planned. A negro lad, the driver of a laundry wagon, told me that his employer said to him Saturday morning, "Well, Sammie, we are going to kill all the niggers tonight." The most horrible exhibition of savagery was in the treatment of negro passengers on the street cars as often as they came into the public square—negro men, women and children were beaten unmercifully. Even the negro barbers were dragged out of their shops while they were shaving white men, beaten and their shops demolished. One of the finest shops in the whole country had the glass front smashed because the owner was colored. It is believed that this violence upon the barbers was done by white barbers who were members of the mob and who have been unable to cope successfully in Atlanta in competition with negro barbers. They used the mob as a cover to destroy their competitors.

A hardware store and a pawnshop were broken into by the mob, and all revolvers and ammunition taken, but none of the stores would sell weapons to negroes. A negro fled thru a fruit house kept by Greeks, and when the Greeks attempted to defend their store against the mob, it was straightway demolished and the fruit taken. A stable owner, with revolver in hand, defied the mob

to break open his door to take his horses to chase negroes to the suburbs. This only shows what one policeman might have done.

Where were the policemen? That is what all negroes asked at first, but when the bluecoats began to halt them on back streets, arrest them upon State charges for carrying concealed weapons, it became plain that the policemen were not interested in quelling the mob. When one was seen in a crowd he made no effort to use his club or his gun to rescue a prisoner. One of the newspapers confesses that on Peachtree street, in the heart of the city, where the mob gathered, "only one policeman could be seen, and, of course, he could do nothing with such a mob."

Where were the conservative, good white people? That is not a question any one will ask when he knows that *ten* of the leading white pulpits in Atlanta are vacant because the pastors of moral courage have either been driven away or will not come to stifle their conscience in such service. On Sunday morning only one pastor stood up *positively* for law and order, according to statements published in the Atlanta *Constitution*, and that one was a Catholic bishop. All the others said it was what you might expect.

What will be the outcome of all this?

That is more a question for the white people North and South than it is for negroes. It certainly is not going to make the lawless element of whites, who are very much in the majority in Georgia, disposed to hate the negro less when he beats them in competition, as in the case of the barbers; it certainly is not going to frighten the negroes who are actually bad, and it certainly is not going to make the great majority of negroes, who are honest, law-abiding folk, assume the responsibility of chasing down every one of their number who is merely accused by some malicious, frightened white woman, any more than a report of theft is going to make the honest bankers of New York close their doors to hunt down absconding cashiers because they happen to be of the same race. All that Christian piety in humble homes, all that honest labor and forbearance, and all that teaching and preaching can do has been done by the better element of negroes to help their fellows; and if the white people of the South are going to expect negroes to co-operate in catching negroes accused of crime, or actual criminals, when experience proves every day that such persons have no hope in the world of a fair trial, then the white people are doomed to disappointment.

ATLANTA, GA.