

How Does It Feel to be a Negro?

This query demands the attention of all colored persons, because they are Negroes, and of all white persons, because *they* are not Negroes.

White gentlemen! White brothers! You who have enjoyed, from time immemorial, Heaven's blessings above any other nation. In seeing, hearing, and reading of the trials and persecutions of your colored neighbors, and in knowing that they have not an equal chance in the race of life—do you ever say, "I wonder how it feels to be a Negro?"

I only address you, who believe in the eternal existence of an impartial God.

To such, please read this with care, and ask yourselves the question.

Since the year 1619, when the first nineteen Negroes were sold into the state of Virginia, as slaves, it has been, more or less, cumbersome for a white soul to awake on the shores of this earth, and find itself entombed in a colored body, there to be imprisoned, for from one, to one hundred and thirty years. This imprisonment has become more and more embarrassing as the race has advanced, with inevitable certainty, from savagery to civilization.

One man has aptly remarked, that discontent can scarcely be, where a knowledge of *better* conditions does not exist.

Two hundred years ago, perhaps, the Negro thought that he was getting all of this world's blessings that Heaven held in store for him. He was taught that his only hope of happiness on earth, was in being faithful to his master, and Heaven was pictured to him, in many instances, as being a place where he could flit from one kitchen to another, and do Massa's biddings. Hence, his highest ambition, both in this world, and the world to come, was in being a faithful servant.

But he was abruptly awakened from this reverie, to the tune, "All men were created free and equal." This tune has since been continually played to him, in about all of the discords that human imagination can conceive, but in very few accords. The worst part of this discord is that most people's "ear for music" seem so paralyzed that they cannot detect the discord.

They will listen, in rapt silence, to the music, as it floats from stump and from pulpit, from court-house and from press, then turn away with serene acquiescence. A charming tune, well and appropriately played. Charming to you who are smiled upon by Heaven and earth, but how would it sound if you were a Negro?

In December, 1893, the "Tradesman" Chatanoga, Tenn., made a statistical examination of the white and colored labor of the Southern States.—"From reports received from the employers of nearly 100,000 hands: * * * Fifty-eight per cent. of the employees are white. * * * "As to the value of white and colored skilled labor, forty-six per cent of the employers say it is about equal, forty three per cent say colored is inferior, and eleven per cent are in doubt. (All of this comparison being from the white point of view.) "The wages paid to skilled workmen average, \$2.51 to white men, and \$1.58 to colored. Unskilled white workmen average \$1.14, and colored \$1.02 per day."

Briefly consider the above statement, concerning skilled labor. According to this statement, the employers of laborers in the South pay a white man 93 cents a day, \$24.18 a month, and \$291.09 a year, more than they pay a colored man for doing the same work, at which work fifty seven per cent of the employers (including the eleven per cent who are in doubt) say that colored and white are equal. *Can justice, for one moment, countenance such startling facts? How would you feel if you were a Negro?*

While in Denver, Colorado, in the year 1891, I found myself in the want of employment. After doing all I could so get a situation, in which I could use my education, to no avail, I concluded to take any employment I could get. So, in company with another lad, I began to go from one lumber yard to another, hunting work. At most of the yards, the foremen were very kind of speech, saying that times were dull, and they had no use for any more men, or they regreted to say that they would soon have to discharge some of the men they then had, and so on, until we came to a big red faced foreman. As we approached him, I asked: "What is our chance of getting employment with you gentlemen?" With a hateful grin and leer, that would have almost shamed the devil, he answered, "Not a G-d-d bit, we don't work your kind."

It then dawned upon me that "your kind" could not get employment at any of the preceding yards, but the foremen had the courtesy not to tell us. And so it is throughout the United States, excluding the South, no difference how much skill a colored man may possess at any trade, he is as a rule, debarred from using it:

While in the South if he works at it, it must be at from ten to thirty five per cent less than a white man. Is this a reasonable and a Christian way for the Negro to be treated? How would you take it if you were one? About the first thing that attracted my attention when I arrived at Norfolk, Va., a few days ago, was a band of music, consisting of a solitary "snare drum," followed by twenty-one white men, the head one of whom carried, what seemed to be, an emancipated table-cloth, in lieu of a banner, on the front of which were daubed the words: "We are the men who were discharged to make room for Negroes." The banner not stating from where they were discharged, I naturally supposed, from their general appearance, that it was from the State's prison. While looking at them my eyes happened to fall upon a well dressed white man near by, who cast a withering glance at me as though he would say "and discharged for such things as you too." I involuntarily looked around for some place in which to escape from his indignant countenance, but seeing none, I compromised, by casting a reproachful look (from my wrong eye) upon every Negro I could see, and a sympathetic look, from my right one upon the twenty-one discharged convicts, who afterwards turned out to be only discharged street cleaners, who had hitherto held, and finally lost their positions through the "spoils system." In reflecting on the above, one of the city papers said the following day, "We do not know whether this is the beginning of the end, or the end of the beginning, but *this* we know, that the displacement of white men by Negroes is an act repugnant to our citizens, an act that must recoil upon the heads of those who dared to perpetrate it." "We" are quite right, such acts are a shame, and a disgrace to our Republic." But how would you feel if you were a Negro?

Instead of being regarded as the heroes of a long and patiently borne oppression, such as no other race under the sun would bear, they are targets, for the contempt of every other nation, which comes to this great free country. The country for which they, (the Negroes) labored two hundred and forty-five years to support, and for which they bled and died to save. Now any alien, one who may possess all of the germs of anarchy and rebellion, may expect what he terms his "rights" in the way of work and wages, before the colored man. Go to the strikes, for instance, the leaders of these riots are foreigners and aliens, whom the country does not owe a thing. And yet, in most cases, the places which they refuse to fill, unless they get more pay, a colored man could not occupy *gratis*. All of the labor unions with a very few exceptions, shut their doors in his face. Whither shall he go?

* * * All thinking persons know that the country is in great danger, because of the imported anarchistic element, which is being nurtured here, and which is now parading the country, in the garb of "wronged laborers," and striking terror to the hearts of the people, and were these wild rioters to precipitate the country into a rebellion; the colored men would be expected to respond with as much alacrity to save the Union as they did in the late rebellion. If they did not (because of neutrality) readily respond, they would be forced, as "United States citizens" to go. And for what would the colored men then fight and die? For the sole purpose of perpetuating a "Union" that ignores their rights in every possible way. And unless we (the Negroes) ask for, and obtain our rights, we may fight and die by the thousands, for this "union" and those of us who survive will be in the same circumstances and straits that we are now in;—Do skilled labor in the South and receive therefor 93 cents per day less than a white man, and go to almost any other part of the United States and ask for work, and, as a rule—"We don't work your kind."

How! O how would you feel if you were a Negro?

Why this oppression? Why this continual serfdom? Does God ever cast a careless look down upon this state of things? Did he look down in 1861, and will he look no more? Or will he look a few years hence, or is he looking now? Who will pretend to answer? Were I to venture an answer, I would say he is looking now, if so, how long will he have to look before he can act? Until all of the political parties in existence has come into power and tested their respective merits before he can extend his hand? Serfdom seems the colored man's doom, to say nothing of lynchings and Southern outrages, unless assistance comes from a scourge higher than this world.

I really do not think that the white race means to be as unfair to the Negro as they are, but they have simply never paused to see what and how they are doing. "Get a man to think right and he will act right." The masses sympathize with him, but procrastination keeps them from asserting their sympathy, and finally they will sit and weep over the corpse of "What might have been."

The Negro has a few loyal white champions, prominent among whom stands Judge A. W. Tourgee of Maysville, N.Y., a man who has sacrificed a brilliant public life to the cause of the oppressed Negro. And when in the distant future, you reach Heaven and feel curious to see who wears the brightest crown, look in the direction of Albion W. Tourgee, and I am sure that your curiosity will be satisfied.

Finally, I ask you to consider what is herein stated, and if you conclude that these conditions are just and unavoidable, ask yourself in all candour, how you would feel if you were a Negro?

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September 12, '94.

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