

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

ELLEN G. WHITE
AND CHURCH
RACE RELATIONS

RONALD D. GRAYBILL

**Ellen G. White and
Church Race Relations**

Ellen G. White

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About the Author

Ellen G. White (1827-1915) is considered the most widely translated American author, her works having been published in more than 160 languages. She wrote more than 100,000 pages on a wide variety of spiritual and practical topics. Guided by the Holy Spirit, she exalted Jesus and pointed to the Scriptures as the basis of one's faith.

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Ronald D. Graybill

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Foreword

Ronald Graybill has placed certain statements by Ellen G. White on race relations, which have been misunderstood, in their correct historical setting, and conclusively demonstrated their true meaning in terms of the situation that called them forth. In so doing he has performed a most valuable service for the church, by removing the cause of misinterpretation—ignorance of historical context.

This important work could form the basis for a completely new approach to race relations in the church. The source materials he has used set the record straight beyond doubt or question. I have read the manuscript twice, and believe you will agree with me that this book should have been written thirty years ago.

E. E. CLEVELAND

Associate Secretary

Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Preface

This book is concerned with the writings of Ellen G. White on certain aspects of race relations in the life and work of the church in the United States, against the background of the historical situations at the times they were written. This is not an exhaustive study in which all phases of her writings on race are considered. Brief but comprehensive excerpts from her writings setting forth her view on this subject are provided in the Appendix. Other important counsel on this subject may be found in her book entitled the *The Southern Work*.

The attempt here is to discover whether her statements concerning such things as separate church services spring from any latent theory of “Natural Law” forbidding racial contact, or from any possible belief on the part of Mrs. White in the theory of the inherent inferiority of the Negro. Belief in either of these two theories would be, by definitions used here, racism. It is often argued that Ellen White’s counsels regarding separation of the race were an expedient. However, such a position could be used to cover hidden racism. Did Ellen White actually believe that black Americans were, in essence, fully equal to white Americans? These questions arise naturally from statements found in [Testimonies for the Church 9:199-226](#) (sometimes referred to as volume 9), which contain her best-known but by no means her most comprehensive statements pertaining to racial relations. To fully understand Mrs. White’s attitude toward the Negro race it would be necessary to discuss not only her statements on interracial marriage but all her writings concerning the Negro, from her antislavery writings ¹ during the Civil War to her death in 1915. Her great interest in the work of her son, James Edson White, among the Negroes in Mississippi is also relevant. This story is partially told in *Ellen G. White and Church Race Relations*. The

¹ See Ellen G. White, [Testimonies for the Church 1:253-268, 355-368](#). These volumes will henceforth be referred to by the initial T, preceded by the volume number.

study undertaken here cannot be a complete picture, but it is hoped that it will add to a better understanding of Ellen White's counsel.

This book does not discuss the contemporary relevance of Ellen White's counsel. It is an attempt to answer the question What did she say? not the question What does it mean to us today? This should not be understood to imply that the answers to these two questions are always different, but that the *questions are different*, and therefore may or may not have different answers.

Some of the sources used here may have significance that is not immediately obvious. First of all, there are the Ellen G. White letters and manuscripts.²

The bulk of these manuscripts were written between the year 1891, [9] when she made her first major appeal for missionary work among Negroes,³ and 1908, when she prepared the volume 9 material. The manuscripts and letter written from 1895 onward are particularly significant, since it was in January of that year that her son James Edson White began his pioneer work among the black people of Mississippi, beginning at Vicksburg.⁴

Another source used in this study is a collection of seven scrapbooks entitled "The Negro Problem," the property of the library at Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama. These scrapbooks contain newspaper clippings collected by Clarence Crisler during the years 1903-1912.⁵ Crisler was a secretary to Mrs. White during this time, and was probably collecting this material in anticipation of a book concerning Seventh-day Adventist work among Negroes. Such a book was prepared by A.W. Spalding, in cooperation with Clarence Crisler and W.C. White, but was never published.⁶

²Copies of each of these letters and manuscripts are housed both in the main office of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc., in Washington, D. C., and the branch office at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

³Ellen G. White, [The Southern Work, 9-18](#), 1966 reprint. Published initially in 1898 it was reissued in 1966. All references to this work are to the 1966 edition, and it will henceforth be referred to by the initials SW.

⁴"White, James Edson," SDA Encyclopedia, p. 1418.

⁵An occasional newspaper clipping in the scrapbooks bears an address label with Crisler's name on it.

⁶The unpublished book manuscript is titled "Lights and Shades in the Black Belt," Ellen G. White Estate. Office Document File 376. That Spalding was the author is

The bulk of the scrapbook material consists of clippings from the *New York Age*, which billed itself “An Afro-American Journal of News and Opinions.” According to Dr. Rayford Logan, of Howard University, it was one of the leading Negro dailies, at least in the late nineteenth century.⁷ There are a few clippings from other newspapers, as well. The value of the material is enhanced, however, by the tendency of newspapers during this period to reprint stories from other newspapers and magazines.

[10] We do not know whether Ellen White ever studied these scrapbooks. It is likely she was aware of them. They nevertheless speak eloquently of the conditions during the times in which she wrote.⁸

For a general overview of the history of race relations during the period of 1895 to 1910, the following works have been consulted: John Hope Franklin’s *From Slavery to Freedom*, a standard one-volume Negro history; Rayford W. Logan’s *The Betrayal of the Negro*;⁹ and C. Vann Woodward’s *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*¹⁰ and *The Origins of the New South*.¹¹ Franklin and Logan are Negro writers, Woodward a white Southerner.

This book would have been impossible without the facilities of the Ellen G. White Estate at its Washington office and its Berrien Springs branch, and the cooperation and assistance of persons connected with the two offices. Mrs. Hedwig Jemison, who supervises the Berrien Springs branch, spent hours helping the author locate Ellen White letters and manuscripts on the subject. Arthur L. White, secretary of the Board of Trustees and supervisor of the Washington office, was very helpful in arranging access to Crisler’s scrapbooks, as were the Oakwood College and Andrews University librarians.

obvious from the correspondence between him and W. C. White housed in Washington, D. C., office of the Ellen G. White Estate.

⁷Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro*, p. 319.

⁸The scrapbooks are referred to as “Crisler’s scrapbooks,” and each one has been assigned a number in the bibliography. The abbreviation “Sc.” For “scrapbook” is used in the footnotes, with the scrapbook number and the page number. In references to newspapers not in the scrapbook, the newspaper page is given.

⁹First published in 1954 as *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir*.

¹⁰In subsequent references this title will be abbreviated as *Jim Crow*.

¹¹*A History of the South*, vol. 9.

At the Washington office the author was given access to the letters of James Edson White, and the correspondence between W.C. White and A.W. Spalding.

The Trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate have granted permission for the use of heretofore unreleased and unpublished Ellen White manuscripts, and encouraged the publication of this study in book form.

A word of explanation is in order concerning the use of terms to designate the two races. Ellen White generally used the term “colored” in reference to that of African descent, but also “black” and “Negro.” Sometimes she even referred to them as the “Southern race” or the “Southern people,”¹² just as she used “Southern work” and “Southern field” for “the work for the colored people” in the South.¹³ [11]

This book uses the terms *Negro* and *Caucasian* as proper nouns referring to the two races, and the terms *black* and *white*. *Negro* has not been capitalized when it appears in a quotation with a lower-case letter. The controversy over which terms should be used raged then as it does now, and it is hoped that readers will understand that an attempt has been made to use proper terminology.

As has been suggested, much will remain to be done, no matter how thorough and detailed the present study might be. It is the hope of the author that eventually the history of the Negro Seventh-day Adventist will be fully studied, and that that history will contribute to racial harmony and communication within the church, and to making more men of the type Ellen White characterized as “closely connected with Christ” and therefore “lifted above the prejudice of color or caste.”¹⁴

¹²Ellen G. White, [Letter 80a, 1895](#) (to James Edson White, August 16, 1895).

¹³Remarks by J. E. White and Ellen G. White during the 1903 General Conference session (April 9, 1903), and appearing in the articles “Report of Southern Missionary Society” and “The Southern Work: (General Conference Bulletin, V ([April 14, 1903](#)), pp. 199-205).

¹⁴[Testimonies for the Church 9:209](#).

[12]

Did Ellen White Contradict Herself?

[13]

A basic problem in a discussion of Ellen White's statements on race relations stems from what may at first appear to be an inconsistency in her writings. In her first major appeal for evangelistic work among Negroes, read to church leaders on March 21, 1891, in connection with the General Conference session at Battle Creek, Michigan, ¹ she stated the problem she faced clearly:

There has been much perplexity as to how our laborers in the South shall deal with the "color line." It has been a question to some how far to concede to the prevailing prejudice against the colored people. ²

Some Ellen G. White statements may sound as if she were not willing to make any concessions to that prejudice. In this same speech she said: "I know that that which I now speak will bring me into conflict," but she did not cherish the conflict, and added, "I do not mean to live a coward or die a coward, leaving my work undone." ³

[14]

She went on to assert that, "the black mans name is written in the book of life beside the white man's." ⁴ Concerning ones whom she described as having the spirit of Christ, she said: "If a colored brother sits by their side, they will not be offended or despise him. They are journeying to the same heaven, and will be seated at the same table to eat bread in the kingdom of God." ⁵

She repeated this sentiment in other words, saying, "You have no license from God to exclude the colored people from your places of worship.... They should hold membership in the church with the white brethren." ⁶

¹The Southern Work, 9; see editor's note

²Ibid.

³The Southern Work, 10

⁴The Southern Work, 12

⁵The Southern Work, 14

⁶The Southern Work, 15

In the mid-nineties her tone was much the same, citing “the prejudice that the white people have felt and manifested against mingling with them in religious worship” as the reason the Negroes had been neglected. She said that “men have thought it necessary ...to meet the prejudice of the white people; and a wall of separation in religious worship has been built up.” These men, she added, “have not had the spirit of Christ.” ⁷

She points to the inconsistency of this position, saying that these men were willing that the Negro should be converted, but “they were not willing to sit by the side of their colored brethren and sing and pray and bear witness to the truth which they had in common.” ⁸ She likens this to the prejudice cherished by the Jews against the Gentiles.

“There is to be no special heaven for the white man and another heaven for the black man,” ⁹ she said. “We have no time to build up walls of distinction between the white and the black race.” ¹⁰

All this seems in sharp contrast to what she was to write in 1908, when she said that she had already written from Australia that “the workers were to make no political speeches, and that the mingling of whites and blacks in social equality was by no means to be encouraged.” ¹¹ The most specific counsel she gives in 1908 is this:

[15]

In regard to white and colored people worshipping in the same building, this cannot be followed as a general custom with profit to either party—especially in the South. The best thing will be to provide the colored people who accept the truth, with places of worship of their own, in which they can carry on their services by themselves. This is particularly necessary in the South in order that the work for the white people may be carried on without serious hindrance. ¹²

⁷The Southern Work, 19

⁸The Southern Work, 20

⁹The Southern Work, 55

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹Testimonies for the Church 9:206

¹²Ibid

A few pages later she adds that “the colored people should not urge that they be placed on an equality with white people.”¹³

These three passages—one discouraging “social equality,” one advising separate worship services and buildings, and one saying that the Negro should not urge that he be placed on an equality with white people seem to have cut the nerve of Ellen White’s earlier protestations against white prejudice and her condemnation of those who were unwilling to worship with Negroes.

[16] One of the purposes of this book is to balance and illuminate these and similar statements against the background of their immediate and remote literary contexts, and against the background of history. It is impossible, at many points, to render an exact and objective judgment concerning Ellen White’s statements. However, some concrete facts concerning race relations in her day can be brought forward. Statements about “equality” made by her and her contemporaries, both black and white, can be cited, and the experiences of her son, Edson White, can be examined. The apparent inconsistency we have just noted, when placed against these backgrounds, becomes easier to understand, and Ellen White’s basic position on race relations is more clearly seen.

¹³Testimonies for the Church 9:214

The Betrayal of the Negro: 1895-1910

[17]

The real thrust of Ellen White's counsels on race relations cannot be seen without an appreciation of the racial climate in the country at the time she was writing. Once the relevant aspects of Negro history during this period are grasped, what at first appears to be a contradiction in Ellen White's writings becomes understandable. What is more, we can distinguish between the basic principles and the temporary expedients only on the basis of the historical backgrounds of her statements.

For these reasons, this chapter probes the subjects of race relations and Negro rights from 1895 through 1910. The year 1895 is chosen as a starting point in this chapter because, although Ellen White had written concerning the Negro before this date, she had written very little in comparison to what she wrote after 1895.

This date is important not only in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Negro but in American Negro history in general. The Seventh-day Adventist Negro remembers it because it was on January 10 of this year

that James Edson White landed in Vicksburg to begin his work. All American Negroes remember it because it was in 1895 that Booker T. Washington made his famous speech at the Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta and assumed virtually unrivaled leadership of Negro affairs in this country.¹ The date 1910 is arbitrary—it is simply a point of time beyond 1908, the year in which Ellen White compiled the material for volume 9.

[18]

The first and most important thing that can be said about race relations and the status of Negro rights during this time is that they were bad and getting worse. Rayford Logan titled his book about the period 1877-1901 *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901*.² Later, upon revising it for paperback publication, he extended its scope to the time of Woodrow Wilson (1912 and

¹See p.44

²Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought. The Nadir*

following) and called it *The Betrayal of the Negro*.³ Henry Arthur Callis, a physician who, until recently, was still active in the quest for equal rights, termed the first decade of the twentieth century a “low, rugged plateau.”⁴ In the Sidney Hillman Lectures at Howard University in 1961, John Hope Franklin, professor of history at the University of Chicago, said that “The Long Dark Night” continued until 1923.⁵

Dr. C. Vann Woodward, in his book *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, demonstrates that the “Jim Crow” system of racial segregation did not spring full grown from the womb of a dying Reconstruction era in the seventies, but that there was no generally accepted pattern of racial mores until the beginning of the new century.⁶

[19] Indeed, the clippings in Crisler’s scrapbooks indicate that the tendency to separate the Negro from the Caucasian in every phase of American life was still going on apace throughout the first decade of the twentieth century, and even beyond. It must be remembered that in 1913 Woodrow Wilson was busy segregating Federal office buildings in Washington, D.C.⁷

The Compromise of 1877 signaled the onset of a rapid decline in Negro rights over the next thirty years. Presidential candidates Samuel J. Tilden and Rutherford B. Hayes were the principals. The election of 1876 had given Tilden a quarter of a million more popular votes than Hayes, and 184 uncontested electoral votes one short of the number required for his election. A complicated series of moves cornered some doubtful electoral votes for Hayes, who through the Compromise of 1877 was able to make his way into the White House.⁸

A part of the Compromise of 1877 was Hayes’s agreement to leave the South alone to work out the racial problem without interference from the Federal Government. This is significant as the

³Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro*, “Preface to the New Edition,” pp. 11, 12. All subsequent references to “Logan” refer to this book

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 11

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Woodward, *Jim Crow*, pp. 33, 65

⁷Logan, p 361

⁸Woodward, *Origins*, pp. 23, 24, 43-45, 209

beginning of what Logan calls the Negro's "betrayal." In *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* Woodward says:

The acquiescence of Northern liberalism in the Compromise of 1877 defined the beginning, but not the ultimate extent, of the liberal retreat on the race issue. The Compromise merely left the freedman to the custody of the conservative Redeemers upon their pledges that they would protect him and his constitutional rights. But as these pledges were forgotten or violated and the South veered toward proscription and extremism, Northern opinion shifted to the right, keeping pace with the South, conceding point after point, so that at no time were the sections very far apart on race policy.⁹

[20]

W. E. B. DuBois put it a little more simply: "The Northern people, after freeing the Negro and giving him the right of suffrage, left him high and dry."¹⁰ In an article titled "What the Negro Thinks," a writer in the *New York Age* observed:

There seems to be a growing conviction in the North that the solution of the race problem should be left to the South. Attending this settling conviction are the commercial and cowardly shrinkings of the North of her responsibility as to how that problem is solved.¹¹

Ellen White wrote concerning the same situation:

Much might have been accomplished by the people of America if adequate efforts in behalf of the freedmen had been put forth by the Government and by the Christian churches immediately after the emancipation of the slaves. Money should have been used freely to care for and educate them at the time they were so greatly in need of help. But the Government, after a little effort,

⁹Woodward, *Jim Crow*, pp. 69, 70

¹⁰*New York Age*, February 28, 1907, Sc. 1, p. 20

¹¹*Ibid.*, April 1, 1909, Sc. 3, p. 68.

left the Negro to struggle, unaided, with his burden of difficulties.¹²

Again and again Ellen White pointed to the time just after the end of slavery—the period of Reconstruction as the time when the most could have been done for the Negro.

When freedom was proclaimed to the captives, a favorable time was given in which to establish schools and to teach the people to take care of themselves. Much of this kind of work was done by various denominations, and God honored their work.¹³

[21] In 1895 she wrote:

The colored people might have been helped with much better prospects of success years ago than now. The work is now tenfold harder than it would have been then....

The nation of slaves who were treated as though they had no souls, but were under the control of their masters, were emancipated at immense cost of life on both sides, the North seeking to restrict, the South to perpetuate and extend slavery. After the war, if the Northern people had made the South a real missionary field, if they had not left the Negroes to ruin through poverty and ignorance, thousands of souls would have been brought to Christ. But it was an unpromising field, and the Catholics have been more active in it than any other class.¹⁴

In 1900 she wrote:

The Lord is grieved at the indifference manifested by His professed followers toward the ignorant and oppressed colored people. If our people had taken up this work at the close of the Civil War, their faithful labor

¹²Testimonies for the Church 9:205

¹³The Southern Work, 43, 44

¹⁴Ellen G. White, *Letter 5, 1895* (to “Brethren in Responsible Positions in America,” July 24 1895)

would have done much to prevent the present condition of suffering and sin. ¹⁵

Dr. Woodward points to other factors that contributed to the triumph of racism, i.e. the doctrine of white superiority and white supremacy. The nation's adventures in the Philippines and in the Caribbean began in 1898. ¹⁶ Americans shouldered the "white man's burden," and the South was quick to recognize that the arguments of the nation as a whole in favor of this program were not essentially different from the arguments for white supremacy and Negro disfranchisement. Says Woodward:

At the dawn of the new century the wave of Southern racism came in as a swell upon a mounting tide of national sentiment and was very much a part of that sentiment. Had the tide been running the other way, the Southern wave would have broken feebly instead of becoming a wave of the future. ¹⁷

[22]

Another indication of the trend toward depriving the Negro of his rights was the movement to disfranchise him. The vote was partially taken from him by a number of ingenious methods prior to the time when disfranchisement was actually written into the State constitutions, but it is significant that it was not until 1890 that the first State, Mississippi, undertook to write a clause into its State constitution that allowed for the elimination of the Negro voter. ¹⁸ A variety of methods were used—the "understanding" clause, the "good character" clause, and the "grandfather clause," all, in some way, directed at the Negro, while allowing (at least sometimes, as applied by the local examiner) his white counterpart in the lower socio-economic classes to vote. But the important point here is to notice the dates for these constitutional actions: South Carolina, 1895; Louisiana, 1898; North Carolina, 1900; Alabama, 1901; Virginia, 1902; Georgia, 1908; and Oklahoma, 1910. ¹⁹

¹⁵Ellen G. White, [Letter 37a, 1900](#) (to "Board of Managers of the Review and Herald Office," February 26, 1900)

¹⁶Woodward, *Jim Crow*. p. 72

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp 63, 84 Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, p. 339

¹⁹Woodward, *Jim Crow*, p. 84

These constitutional provisions did not come into existence without propaganda wars. Throughout Hoke Smith's 1906 campaign for the governorship of Georgia, a "barrage of Negro atrocity stories" supported his disfranchisement platform. It might be added that the paper responsible was the *Atlanta Journal*, which Smith edited. The campaign victory was followed by four days of anarchy in Atlanta, in which roving mobs, white and black, freely looted, murdered, and lynched.²⁰

[23] The nineties saw nearly twice as many lynchings as the first ten years of the twentieth century, but the statistics on this crime nevertheless reflect the rise of racial hatred. According to Woodward, of the lynchings committed in the first ten years of the present century, 11.4 per cent of the victims were white. In the previous decade 32.2 per cent had been white. From 1889 to 1899, 82 per cent of all lynchings occurred in the Southern States—the eleven former Confederate States plus Missouri, Kentucky, and what became Oklahoma in 1907. In the first decade of the twentieth century, 91.1 per cent of all lynchings occurred in these States. Lynching "was becoming an increasingly southern racial phenomenon."²¹ This was an era when an extreme white supremacist, Benjamin R. Tillman, of South Carolina, was elected to the United States Senate. In the Senate he defended lynching as a punishment for rape:

"It is idle to reason about it; it is idle to preach about it. Our brains reel under the staggering blow and hot blood surges to the heart. Civilization peels off us, any and all of us who are men, and we revert to the original savage type, whose impulses under any and all such circumstances have always been to kill! kill! kill!"²²

While Ellen White was preparing her material for volume 9, Booker T. Washington came out in print in one of his strongest statements against lynching. He said in part: "Within the past sixty days twenty-five Negroes have been lynched in different parts of

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 86, 87

²¹Woodward, *Origins*, p. 352

²²Congressional Record for January 21, 1907 (59th Congress 2d session), Vol. 41, part 2, p. 1440

the United States. Of this number only four were even charged with criminal assault upon women.”²³

The *Gospel Herald*, a magazine published by Edson White in the interests of his work in the South, became alarmed when lynching was accomplished, not by hanging, but by burning at the stake. Commented the *Herald*: “The mind recoils before the horror of such torture.”²⁴ [24]

It may sound unbelievable to a reader in the latter half of the twentieth century to hear that Negroes were actually burned at the stake around the turn of this century, but it was not unknown. It happened in various parts of the country and in more than one case the perpetrator of the macabre crime followed the act by taking pieces of the victim’s charred body for souvenirs.²⁵

In 1901, the *Gospel Herald* quoted an editorial from the *Nashville American* against lynchings by fire, which the *Herald* said, “have become so common during the last four or five years.”²⁶

Six major race riots occurred between 1900 and 1910.²⁷ In the riots the North vied with the South in both the number and scope of the violent outbreaks. And while there may be some temptation to minimize the seriousness of these riots in the light of more recent civil disorders, there is an essential difference between the riots of the first decade of this century and those of more recent vintage. The riots before 1910 entailed far less death and destruction, but they were authentic “race riots” in that they involved mobs of white citizens perpetrating crimes against Negro life and property, and Negro citizens returning the favor.²⁸ Thus far, the recent riots have generally been directed toward symbols of economic and social oppression, not so much against persons of the opposite race. Mobs of white citizens were virtually unheard of in the riots of the [25]

²³New York Age, August 27, 1908, p. 1

²⁴*Gospel Herald*, IV (May 28, 1902), p. 168

²⁵The New York Times Index lists eleven such burnings in the 1890’s, and a few in the next decade—in some cases preceded by hanging. They occurred in such widely scattered States as Georgia and Colorado, Texas and Illinois. For the gathering of such grisly souvenirs in Cairo, Illinois, see the New York Age, December 2, 1909, Sc. 4, p. 64

²⁶James Edson White (generally referred to as J. E. White), “Where Will It End?” *Gospel Herald*, III (October 1901), p. 77

²⁷Logan, *Betrayal*, p. 349

²⁸John Hope Franklin, *op. cit.*, pp. 441-444

1960's. Very few, if any, have been killed recently by *white private citizens*, and extremely few by Negro citizens.

The further relevance of this climate of violence in race relations will be seen when the work of James Edson White in Mississippi is considered. This element of violence is an area that has been largely overlooked in recent discussions on Ellen White's statements on race relations.

C. Vann Woodward observes the increase in segregation laws as another index of worsening racial relations. Up to 1900 the only segregation law in the majority of the Southern States was that separating passengers on trains.²⁹ But South Carolina did not have such a law until 1898, North Carolina did not adopt one until 1899, and Virginia, the last State to adopt such a law, did so in 1900. Only three States required separate waiting rooms before 1899, but in the next decade, nearly all the Southern States followed suit. Only Georgia segregated its streetcars before 1900. By 1907, such laws were binding in North Carolina, Virginia, Louisiana, Arkansas, South Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, Maryland, Florida, and Oklahoma.³⁰ These laws provided for separation within cars, but not for separate cars. An Atlanta ordinance requiring separate cars was annulled by the court, not on the basis that it might deny Negro citizens equal accommodations, but on the principle that it was "not reasonable nor just to the street railways."³¹

[26] Even the aspirations of Berea College in Kentucky were thwarted by this trend. Famous for its participation in the abolitionist campaign and for its integrated facilities after the Civil War, Berea was caught short in 1907 by a Kentucky law outlawing racially integrated education.³²

The case was fought to the Supreme Court of the United States. When the Supreme Court ruled, the next year, that Kentucky law was constitutional, the editor of the *New York Ager* remarked that the decision was "consistent with that high tribunal's past evasion on technical grounds of the grave issue of Negro protection." Then he went on to add an ominous and prophetic warning:

²⁹Woodward, *Jim Crow*, p. 97

³⁰*Ibid*

³¹Atlanta Constitution, May 24, 1907, Sc. 1, p. 23

³²New York Age, March 7, 1907, Sc. 3, p. 2

Just so sure as America cannot endure half slave and half free, just so sure this republic cannot endure with discrimination between its citizens legalized.... Judge Brewer, like judge Taney, has not settled the question of human rights in this republic. Judge Brewer has simply postponed the dreadful day of reckoning between human rights and race wrongs.³³

Across the country the picture conformed to the same general pattern. By 1909 Oklahoma had passed laws requiring separate schools, train coaches, and railroad station accommodations.³⁴ The Supreme Court of Iowa decided in 1909 that business concerns had the right to refuse to serve Negroes.³⁵ There were segregation practices beyond those required by law. For example, there were even Jim Crow Bibles for Negro witnesses in Atlanta courts!³⁶

Page after page of Crisler's scrapbooks reveal the same worsening trend, confirming C. Vann Woodward's assertion that "whether by law or by custom, that ostracism extended to virtually all forms of public transportation, to sports and recreations, to hospitals, orphanages, prisons, and asylums, and ultimately to funeral homes, morgues, and cemeteries."³⁷

[27]

Woodward shows that by 1900 the pattern of segregation was established, but the process was not complete. This is borne out by Crisler's scrapbook clippings, which reveal that the job was still going on all through the first decade of the twentieth century. Law, says Woodward, is not always a completely accurate index to practice. But it does reveal some consensus in practice and a willingness to accept a given situation as proper and permanent.

It was not until 1907 that the Arkansas legislature repealed a section of the State constitution known as Kirby's Digest, which guaranteed the Negro equal rights with Caucasians in hotels, saloons, theaters, railroads, and other public and quasi-public places.³⁸ The Age commented that the law had been a "dead letter" for thirty

³³Ibid., November 19, 1908, Sc. 3, p. 34

³⁴Ibid., October 14, 1909, Sc. 4, p. 51

³⁵Ibid., November 25, 1909, Sc. 4, p. 58

³⁶Woodward, Jim Crow, p. 102

³⁷Ibid. p. 7

³⁸New York Age, May 16, 1907, Sc. 3, p. 8

years, but it is indicative of the trend of the times that the legislature nevertheless felt it needed to be repealed.

The *Little Rock*[Arkansas] *Democrat* of May 5, 1907, presented its rationale for the repeal of Kirby's Digest:

[28]

An absolute separation between the white man and the Negro, without enmity toward the latter, but marked by a dividing line which cannot be overstepped because of the existing conditions, is the ultimate object of the various legislators who have worked hardest for the repealing of the civil rights chapter. And they would have this separation complete and extending in every condition of life, social as well as in a business way. This bill is prompted, not so much by a desire to down the Negro, but rather to protect the white man from one of them, appropriately called "the black peril."

One senator said: "I have nothing personally against Negroes. God put them here, and we cannot exterminate them, nor banish them from the land. But the primary cause for the repealing of this charter of the statute was one of fear of the ultimate amalgamation of the races; fear that, because of this amalgamation the time may come when a man will no longer be able to tell a white man from one who is not white. Now this sounds harsh, I admit—it sounds unusual; but it is nevertheless our duty to face conditions and probabilities, not theories, and we may as well call the thing by its name."³⁹

Negroes of the period were not unaware of the trend. A writer in the *American Baptist* stated: "In the face of so much hostile legislation against the race and the apparent growth of prejudice along certain lines it is indeed encouraging that the race still has earnest and faithful friends."⁴⁰

John M. Henderson, a Negro medical doctor writing in 1907 in the *Age*, compared the Negro optimist and pessimist:

The least thoughtful of the race are decidedly optimistic in their ideas of the future of the race. The

³⁹Quoted in the *New York Age*, May 23, 1907, Sc. 3, p. 10

⁴⁰Quoted in the *New York Age*. May 9, 1907, Sc. 2, p. 6

optimist does not reason, he indulges in dreams that are inspired by the hope that “springs eternal in the human breast.” ...The pessimist reaches his conclusions from meditation upon what he has actually observed and experienced. ⁴¹

Henderson favored neither the pessimist nor the optimist, but advocated the “rational Negro” who “seeks to take a hand in things” and does what he can to make them better. In 1909 Kelly Miller, a professor at Howard University, traveled around the country studying Negro schools and observing the extent of segregation in such areas as voting and public transportation. He reported in the *Boston Guardian*, another Negro daily: [29]

I find, however, that in all cases the Negro has to maintain a ceaseless effort and eternal vigilance to safeguard the civil privileges which, it is sad to relate, are everywhere being restricted and confined to narrower and narrower limits. ⁴²

On the other hand, anyone listening to Booker T. Washington’s speeches during this period might think that the golden age of race relations had just dawned. In harmony with his philosophy concerning the importance of economic success for the Negro, he constantly recited statistics about how much land Negroes were acquiring, how many graduates they had in this or that profession, how many schools they had built, and so on. He rarely mentioned lynching, disfranchisement, or segregation laws. It was part of his philosophy to look on the “bright” side:

Let us never, as a race, grow discouraged. In the South there are more things upon which the races agree than upon which they disagree. Let us not be so much absorbed in our grievances that we fail to remember our successes and opportunities. ⁴³

⁴¹New York Age, December 26, 1907, Sc. 2, p. 56

⁴²Boston Guardian, July 17, 1909, Se. 4, p. 40

⁴³New York Age, May 16, 1907. Sc. 3, p. 9

[30] Washington certainly lived up to that philosophy, and who can say that encouragement was not needed? In the light of that philosophy, it is interesting to follow his logic in the following statement: “Everything that can happen to disrupt the relations between the races has already happened. We have reached, in my opinion, the extreme of racial friction, and the reaction has already set in.”⁴⁴ This statement is significant, as we have pointed out, in the light of his passion for optimism. And it is, after all, an optimistic statement.

William Howard Taft was neither the greatest friend nor the worst enemy of the Negro. But since he was campaigning for the Presidency while Ellen White sat in her Elmshaven home penning some of the lines we are studying, it may be of interest to observe Taft’s statements in order to get an idea of the role the President played in race relations during this period.

The keynote of Taft’s inaugural address, March 4, 1909, was “I look forward with hope to increasing the already good feeling between the South and other sections of the country.”⁴⁵ It goes almost without saying that the price for maintaining and increasing this “good feeling” was paid in part at the expense of Negro rights.

In his inaugural Taft also said:

While the fifteenth amendment has not been generally observed in the past, it ought to be observed, and the tendency of Southern legislation today is toward the enactment of electoral qualifications which shall square with that amendment. Of course, the mere adoption of a constitutional law is only one step in the right direction. It must be fairly and justly enforced as well. In time both will come.⁴⁶

[31] The importance of this statement lies both in the fact that it approves such “disfranchisement” laws (requirements for voters) as can be in harmony with the Fifteenth Amendment if fairly enforced, and that it expresses a willingness to wait for the just enforcement of the Fifteenth Amendment.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, April 15, 1908, Sc. 4, p. 5.

⁴⁵A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, vol. 15, p. 7375

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 7376

When the *New York World* suggested that Taft's position amounted to a virtual nullification of the Fifteenth Amendment's requirement of nonabridgment of the elective franchise on account of race, color, or previous servitude, the *Atlanta Constitution* termed the *World's* interpretation "strange and farfetched."⁴⁷ The *Constitution* gave Taft high praise for his renunciation of sectionalism and for his approval of voter tests, denying that he had ever approved anything but "proper franchise qualifications honestly administered as between the races."⁴⁸

The ironic thing is that at the same time, the *New York Age* was printing articles that also praised Taft highly for this same inaugural address. It headlined one with the words "Taft Has No Prejudice," and another with "Negroes Are Now Americans."⁴⁹ In the latter the writer asserted:

There is something reassuring in the ring of the President's words when he says that the Fifteenth Amendment has not been generally observed in the past, but it ought to be observed; that it is a great protection to the Negro, and it never will be repealed and it ought not to be repealed. Surely there is no equivocation about this.
50

But either there was equivocation in his statement or he entertained false hopes that the States would apply these voting requirements impartially to both white and black applicants. At any rate, he was either unwilling or unable to enforce the amendment.

Aside from his opposition to the Maryland disfranchisement amendment, the next autumn, the President did virtually nothing to stem the tide of opposition to Negro rights. When Taft's threat of an attack through the courts was followed by the defeat of the measure, Francis D. Winston, former governor of North Carolina, quoted Taft's speech given before the North Carolina Society in New

[32]

⁴⁷ Editorial, *Atlanta Constitution*. April 18, 1909, p. 5

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* See also Logan, pp. 347, 348. The *Atlanta Constitution* here used almost the words from Taft's speech of December, 1908 (see note 51).

⁴⁹ *New York Age*, April 1, 1909, p. 4

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, April 22, 1909, Sc. 4, p. 14

York a year before and grumbled that the “Southern people accepted that utterance as a finality on the subject and we went about our business.”⁵¹ Winston felt that the South had been betrayed by Taft’s opposition to the Maryland amendment. Taft made few such moves.

At Howard University he told the graduating students that “the friendship and sympathetic interest of the white man with whom he lives” was the “best hope” of the Southern Negro.⁵² As President-elect, he comforted the Negroes with a supreme example of “tokenism,” asserting that a race that produced a Booker T. Washington in a century ought to “feel confident that it can do miracles in time.”⁵³

One must not suppose that all Negroes were comfortable with Taft’s public statements. His obvious wooing of the South led some Negro leaders to oppose him.⁵⁴ It was during his administration that the policy of segregating Federal office buildings in Washington began.⁵⁵ It is nevertheless not surprising that many Negroes supported him in the 1908 election; the alternative was William Jennings Bryan, who had said in March of that year:

[33] The white man in the South has disfranchised the Negro in self-protection; and there is not a Republican in the North who would not have done the same thing under the same circumstances. The white men of the South are determined that the Negro will and shall be disfranchised everywhere it is necessary to prevent the recurrence of the horrors of carpet-bag rule.⁵⁶

⁵¹*Ibid.*, December 9, 1909, Sc. 4, p. 70. “That utterance” was presumably Taft’s statement that it would be possible to use voter qualifications to prevent “domination ...by an ignorant electorate, white or black” provided the Negro has an equal chance to qualify himself for the franchise,” and provided it is “not denied by executive discrimination” (“The South and the National Government,” address to the North Carolina Society, New York City, Dec. 7, 1908, p. 11). Taft’s open letter of September 14 declared that the proposed Maryland measure was in gross violation of the spirit of the Fifteenth Amendment. (For Taft’s letter about the Maryland law, see *New York Age*, September 30, 1909, Sc. 4, p. 50)

⁵²*Ibid.*, June 3 1909 Sc. 4 p. 25

⁵³*Atlanta Constitution*, February 26, 1909, Sc. 3, p. 47

⁵⁴*Logan Betrayal*, pp. 360, 361

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 361

⁵⁶Quoted in *New York Age*, October 29, 1908 Sc. 3, p. 29

These political questions indicate the trend of the times. Edson White could have looked for very little help from Washington had he decided to integrate his little Mississippi schools! Much of Dr. Logan's book *The Betrayal of the Negro* is taken up with showing that the other Presidents during this period were no more active than Taft in the field of Negro rights.

Long before, the Supreme Court of the United States had set the stage for the downfall of Negro rights during this period. In 1876 it rendered decisions in *United States v. Reese* and *United States v. Cruikshank*, which sharply curtailed the protection afforded Negroes by the Fifteenth Amendment.⁵⁷ In 1883 it threw out the restrictive portions of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which had barred discrimination in public places and on public carriers.⁵⁸ The decision prompted T. Thomas Fortune to remark that the Negro had been "baptized in ice water."⁵⁹

In 1890 the court ruled that a State could require segregation in public carriers, and in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, enunciated the so-called "separate but equal" doctrine.⁶⁰ Finally, the Court, having virtually locked the Negro in the prison of second-class citizenship, threw away the key by approving, in 1898, the Mississippi plan for depriving the Negroes of the right to vote through poll tax and an "understanding clause."⁶¹

[34]

The information in this chapter must not be taken to imply that the Negro made no progress during the period 1895-1910, nor that he was only a helpless pawn in the power-plays of white America. He did make rapid strides in education, economics, and other areas.⁶² But in politics, in civil rights, in the matter of segregation versus integration, he made rapid strides backward under a multitude of irresistible pressures.

Attention has been focused on these areas because they are the ones in which the controversy over Ellen White's statements centers. This book is concerned with Ellen White's counsel about separate

⁵⁷Woodward, *Jim Crow*, p. 71

⁵⁸Logan, p. 56

⁵⁹Ibid

⁶⁰Woodward, *Jim Crow*, p. 71

⁶¹Ibid pp. 71, 83, 84

⁶²Franklin, *op. cit.*, 382-412

schools and churches, with her statements about Negroes' working for their own race only, with her statements about "equality." In these areas Negro history during this period was, as Franklin said, "a long dark night." This was so, as Ellen White often noted, not because of the Negro, but because of his white oppressors.

Between 1895 and 1910 segregation came to be accepted by the majority of the people, North and South, as the American way. And in this the people were led by their President, the Supreme Court, and, ironically enough, the chief leader of the Negro race—not as the ideal way, but as being most realistic under the circumstances.

“The Southern Field Is Closing!”

[35]

[36]

Did Adventists study these trends? Were they aware of what was happening in their country? Did Ellen White know that the Negro was being betrayed? Did she speak out on the issue? The answer to all of these questions is Yes.

[37]

Valuable insights into how Seventh-day Adventists viewed these developments are gained from a pamphlet titled *An Agitation and an Opportunity*, published by the church’s Pacific Press Publishing Association in 1907. ¹ The pamphlet is a collection of reprints from editorials and articles in Southern newspapers that indicated, according to the view of the pamphlet’s author, that

God ...is staying the progress of the “reactionary movement” for a time, and is making it possible for His people to finish their work of proclaiming the third angel’s message to the Negroes of the South.... The winds of racial strife are being held in a way wondrous to behold. ²

The author of the pamphlet fully expected that Adventist work in the South would be curtailed by the “reactionary movement.”

[38]

For several years, it has been recognized by observant men both in the North and in the South, that a “reactionary movement” has been gradually developing and gaining strength. This movement tends toward the

¹An Agitation and as opportunity, Ellen G. White Publications Office Document File, No. 42. The author” of this pamphlet is uncertain: it might have been penned by Clarence Crisler. In the scrapbooks he was collecting one finds material very similar to that cited in this pamphlet. Some quotations in the scrapbooks are identical to three in the pamphlet, though they come from different sources. Furthermore, on page 26 of the pamphlet, the author cites the “Proceedings of the Fifth Conference for Education in the South,” a work listed in the bibliography of books from the Ellen G. White File Library in 1915, the year in which she died

²*Ibid.*, p. 5

more or less complete control of the Negro in educational and religious as well as in civil matters.³

“It has seemed,” the author said, “as if the field would not long remain open for unrestricted effort.”⁴ Ellen White voiced virtually the same view. Speaking to the students and teachers of the Madison school in 1909, she said:

In past years the colored people have been terribly neglected. The time is coming when we can not easily give them the message. Restrictions will be placed about them to such an extent that it will be next to impossible to reach them; but at the present time this is not the case, and we can go to many places where there are colored people, and can open the Scriptures to their understanding.⁵

The introduction to the pamphlet *An Agitation and an Opportunity* cites an article by Carl Schurz in McClure’s Magazine of January, 1904, to support the contention about worsening conditions in the South. Schurz said that it could not be denied that there were, in the South, “strenuous advocates of the establishment of some sort of semi-slavery”: and he continued by saying that the articles in Southern newspapers and the speeches of Southern men at the time bore “a striking resemblance to the pro-slavery arguments.”⁶

[39] On the other hand—and this is the point of the pamphlet’s author—Schurz observed that there were “united efforts for education in the South,” and that the crimes committed in peonage cases had been revealed by Southern law officers and rebuked by Southern judges.⁷

³*Ibid.*, p. 3

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Ellen G. White, [Manuscript 15, 1909](#) (Words of Encouragement to Self-Supporting Workers April 26, 1909)

⁶Carl Schurz, “Can the South Solve the Negro Problem?” McClure’s Magazine, XXII (January, 1904). pp. 270-272

⁷Schurz op. cit., pp. 272-274. “Peonage” is another term for the convict lease system under which prisoners were leased to private corporations. See Woodward, *Origins* pp. 212-215, for a description

These things showed, according to Schurz, “symptoms of moral forces at work.” The whole point of the pamphlet was that these “moral forces” indicated that God was holding back the winds of racial strife. ““The waters are troubled””: proclaimed the fine print on the front of the pamphlet, ““step in, O, step in!””

Bear in mind that the author of this pamphlet looked upon the material he was bringing to light as “favorable.” Yet his materials contained statements such as the following, made by Dr. Ira A. Landrith, of Nashville, to the annual assembly of Northern Presbyterians:

The certain remedy, therefore, of all racial ills lies in the direction of good schools and churches—good, but racially separate schools ...and good, but for the best interests of all concerned, racially separate congregations.
8

In the same speech, Landrith said:

The strongest leaders and most upright members of the Negro race are not ambitious for social equality, but are content to be, and to help their people to become, the best examples of what God made of them—Negroes, not white people, nor yet the unwelcome intimates of white people in white homes and schools and churches.
9

Commenting favorably upon this speech, the editor of the Atlanta Constitution said:

He [Landrith] shows that the dominant leaders of the Negroes have no thought of social equality—an irrevocable premise upon which the plans of both races must be based. But he also indicates the solemn duty of the ruling race.¹⁰

[40]

⁸An Agitation, and as Opportunity, p. 7

⁹Ibid

¹⁰Quoted in An Agitation and an Opportunity, p. 9

The favorable idea in Landrith's speech was that he advocated education and evangelization for the Negro. A Constitution reader wrote in, commenting on the discussions. He agreed with Landrith, but added: "One of the greatest obstacles is that conscientious white men and women, taking this view, are exposed, by the unthinking, to accusations of 'Negro-loving,' and that sort of very undesirable and unjust notoriety."¹¹

In responding to this letter, the editor begged his readers to ignore the "thoughtless fallacy" that those who were striving to further a solution to the race problem through religion were seeking to "coddle" the Negro. "Anglo-Saxon supremacy is established for all time in America," he said. And those who dreamed or raged about "social equality" or "Negro domination" dealt with dead and buried issues.¹²

The implications of this pamphlet seem to be that the "favorable" position was one of wanting to evangelize and educate the Negro, but that it could easily include total acceptance of segregation and white supremacy. Today this looks like racism. Then it looked as though God was holding the winds of strife so that His work could be finished. Certainly education, with white supremacy assumed, would be better than no education, with white supremacy assumed: Evidently the Negro in the first decade of this century was faced with different alternatives from those with which he is faced today.

[41] As has already been pointed out, Ellen White observed that it was becoming more and more difficult to work for the Negro. She predicted in 1901 that "the Southern field will be closed, locked up."¹³ Ellen White evidently used the terms "the Southern field" and "the Southern work" interchangeably, and she meant by the latter "especially the work for the colored people."¹⁴

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 10

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 12

¹³Ellen G. White, Remarks on "The Southern Work," General Conference Bulletin, IV (April 25, 1901) p. 482

¹⁴Ellen G. White, Remarks on The Southern Work General Conference Bulletin, V (April 14, 1903) p. 202. Confusion had arisen over what she meant by the term, and she made a special point of saying that she used it to refer especially to the work among Negroes (see p. 11) We may assume, then, that she meant that the Adventist work among Negroes in the South would be "closed, locked up."

She made a somewhat similar statement in volume 9, although it is not quite so final in its tone. The volume 9 statement reveals that she probably referred to the opportunity for white laborers to work with the Negro in the South when she said the Southern field would be closed: “There is danger of closing the door so that our white laborers will not be able to work in some places in the South.”¹⁵

Earlier, in 1904, she also mentioned the increasing difficulty of the work:

The work in the Southern field should be fifteen years in advance of what it now is. Warning after warning has been given, saying that the time to work the Southern field was fast passing, and that soon this field would be much more difficult to work. It will be more difficult in the future than it is today.¹⁶

At least part of this difficulty she had attributed to racial prejudice: “It is more difficult to labor for the people in the South than it is to labor for the heathen in a foreign land, because of the prejudice existing against the colored people.”¹⁷

It is evident that Ellen White was painfully and acutely aware of the rising tide of racial hatred, and this, coupled with the religious prejudice which Adventists faced particularly in the South because of their beliefs about Sunday, did close certain portions of the South to white laborers for a time.

[42]

Opposition and mob violence closed Edson White’s work around the Yazoo River in Mississippi at the turn of the century. He came out with a special number of the *Gospel Herald*, saying: ““But the fields are closing, and what will our record be when presented with our failure to move out in this work while yet we can?””¹⁸

In spite of the worsening conditions she observed, Ellen White was also aware that there were evidently some pangs of conscience among national leaders concerning these trends, and she wrote to the Nashville church in 1907:

¹⁵Testimonies for the Church 9:214

¹⁶Ellen G. White, *Letter 99, 1904* (to James Edson White, February 25, 1904).

¹⁷Ellen G. White. *Manuscript 24, 1891* (“The Work in the Southern Field”).

¹⁸James Edson White, “The Southern Field Closing to the Message, *Gospel Herald*, II (October, 1900) p. 85

The attention of statesmen is being called to the condition of the colored people, and by some the national laws are being studied in the light of Bible requirements. Ere long we are to have a closer view of the conflict that is before us. The workers in our institutions, the members of our churches, should now be cleansing from their lives every wrong principle, that they may be prepared to meet the emergency when it comes. ¹⁹

For those who have lived through the 1960's, these words seem almost a prophecy of the events that have taken place. Statesmen have taken a look at our national laws in the light of Bible requirements, and those laws have been changed. And certainly the latter part of the statement above, about how Adventists should prepare for "the emergency," is still as applicable today as it ever was.

[43] Ellen White and other Adventists saw these events as a threat to their work among the Negroes in the South, and foresaw the possible closing of the work among Negroes as far as white laborers were concerned.

¹⁹Ellen G. White, [Letter 317, 1907](#) (to Nashville church, September 24, 1907).

The Age of Booker T. Washington

[44]

No account of Negro history or race relations during this period would be complete without some recognition of the role of Booker T. Washington. Negro Historian John Hope Franklin calls this period the age of Booker T. Washington.¹ The “age” began in earnest in 1895, the very year in which James Edson White landed in Vicksburg, and ended in 1915, when both Washington and Ellen White died. Says Negro Journalist Lerone Bennett, Jr.: “In the critical years from 1895 to 1915, Booker T. Washington was the most prominent Negro in America.”²

Washington laid his initial claim to the leadership of the Negro community in a speech made at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia, on September 18, 1895. Says Dr. Logan of this speech:

The national fame that Washington achieved overnight by his Atlanta speech constitutes an excellent yardstick for measuring the victory of “The New South,” since he accepted a subordinate place for Negroes in American life.³

For the purposes of this book, the most significant portion of the speech is the portion that Dr. Logan claims has been most frequently quoted: “In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.”⁴

[45]

Washington assured his white listeners that the Negro was going to stay in the South, that he was going to work “without strikes or labor wars,” that the Negro people were going to be the “most

¹John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, p. 390

²Lerone Bennett Jr. *Before the Mayflower* rev. ed., p. 276

³Logan, *Betrayal*, p. 276

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 279

patient, faithful, lawabiding and unresentful people that the world has seen.”⁵

He amplified his statement about social equality:

The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing.⁶

Washington’s doctrine was basically that the Negro would start at the bottom, getting an “industrial education,” and thus provide a skilled labor force for the rapidly industrializing South. In fact, he all but gave up aspirations for political and social, even civil rights, in favor of economic advancement, on the somewhat naive assumption, stated in 1907, that “there is something in human nature that compels respect for success regardless of color.”⁷

But Washington’s labor theories were rapidly becoming outmoded at the time he enunciated them,⁸ and many of the occupations he was urging Negroes to enter were disappearing at the time he was speaking.⁹

[46] Washington is treated too harshly, however, if it is not recognized that he did look forward to a time when the Negro would reach complete acceptance and integration in American life. His policy was, to use Franklin’s term, one of “expediency.”¹⁰

The reaction of the press, North and South, to Washington’s Atlanta speech was most favorable. Dr. Logan gleaned from Southern newspapers such comments as “hit of the day,” and “most remarkable address delivered by a colored man in America.”¹¹ Concerning Washington himself, the papers used the adjectives that were to be applied to Washington again and again, such terms as “sensible” and “progressive.”

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.* p. 280

⁷New York Age, August 22, 1907, p. 2

⁸Franklin, *op. cit.*, p. 396

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 392, 393

¹¹Logan, pg. 281-283

Crisler's scrapbooks may give a somewhat unbalanced picture of Washington's fame, since the scrapbooks are so heavy with clippings from the *New York Age*, a paper which was pro-Washington. But Logan calls the *Age*'s editor in 1900, T. Thomas Fortune, a "fiery editor."¹² Fiery he may have been, but he was still an intimate friend of Booker T. Washington, so much so that the latter once requested a testimonial dinner with the idea of "paying tribute to Mr. Fortune's work in some fitting manner."¹³ Fortune defended Washington in the pages of the *Age* when, in June, 1909, Washington was attacked by William English Walling, who shortly afterwards helped organize the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.¹⁴

The *Age* always gave indications in its reports of Washington's speeches (which were frequent) of how favorably Washington had been received. When he spoke at Vanderbilt University in 1907, the *Age* noted that he was the first Negro ever to speak there, and said he discussed his subject "in a way to evoke the greatest applause and most sincere attention from the audience."¹⁵

[47]

Robert H. Terrell, later appointed a Federal judge, wrote for the *Age* concerning a speech Washington gave at a Negro Baptist convention:

As the speaker drove home his mighty truths, ...he must have felt deep down in his soul the sympathetic response that showed itself in every countenance.... Not one of them appeared to lose a single word that dropped from the lips of the eminent speaker. Verily the people believe thoroughly and implicitly in Booker T. Washington.¹⁶

Andrew Carnegie, whose friendship with Washington is another indication of the latter's fame, spoke before the Philosophical Institution of Edinburgh, Scotland, telling his listeners: "Booker Washington is the combined Moses and Joshua of his people.... He

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 312

¹³New York Age, March 16, 1911 Sc. 6, p. 56

¹⁴*Ibid.*, June 24 1909, Sc. 4, p. 36

¹⁵*Ibid.*, April 4, 1907, Sc. 2, p. 3

¹⁶*Ibid.*, September 19, 1907, Sc. 2, p. 39

certainly is one of the most wonderful men living or who has ever lived.”¹⁷

The *Selma*[Alabama] *Morning Times*, reporting on a speech by Washington given at the commencement exercises of Alabama University, noted that “he was received by the vast audience with great applause and waving of handkerchiefs. It was some seconds before he could commence, so prolonged was the applause.”¹⁸ The *Times* then reported the typical Washington Speech, urging the Negroes to save money, buy homes, and learn good agricultural methods. The *Times* concluded:

[48] “He spoke for an hour and a half and his speech was replete with good things like the above.”¹⁹

And so it went. His re-election as president of the National Negro Business League at its 1907 Topeka convention was “the signal for prolonged cheers.”²⁰ The resolutions committee at the same meeting presents its report, “sanely,” as the newspaper put it, “reaffirming its belief in commerce, industrial arts and a footing in the soil as the fundamental elements that must finally solve the race problem.”²¹

Clark Howell, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, penned an editorial which was reprinted in the *Battle Creek*(Michigan) *Sunday Record*. His main thrust was an appeal to the North to “just let us alone; that is the whole story.” He set the sentence in all caps, as he did the following:

The people of the South generally are in hearty accord with Booker Washington and his effort for the settlement of the Negro question. They believe he has struck the keynote, and the Southern people will give him hearty support in his efforts to keep the Negro out of politics and build up the industrial education of his race.²²

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, November 14, 1908, Sc. 2, p. 50

¹⁸ *Selma* [Alabama] *Morning Times* May 22, 1903, Sc. 1, p. 3

¹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰ *New York Age*, August 22, 1907, p. 2

²¹ *Ibid*

²² *Battle Creek* [Michigan] *Sunday Record*, January 31, 1904, Sc. 2, inside front cover

Even Benjamin Tillman admitted that Booker T. Washington was “the greatest colored man of this country.” Tillman, racist that he was, explained Washington’s fame, however, by saying that he had inherited his brains and character from his white father.

Washington’s teachings were viewed as a “solution” to the race problem—in his day, *the* solution. But certainly there were other “solutions” that had been considered before and were being considered, with various degrees of seriousness. These solutions fitted into a spectrum ranging from a return to slavery to expatriation to Africa, domestic colonization, and systematic distribution, “separate but equal”: civil, political, and social equality; and absorption. [49]

In the face of all these theories some serious, some merely naive, some “crack-pot”—Booker T. Washington’s “solution” went all but unchallenged. But Washington was not entirely without opposition. His leading critic was W. E. B. DuBois, a young Negro who had been educated at Fisk, Harvard (where he got his Ph.D.), and Berlin. ²³ DuBois rallied a group of Negroes at Niagara Falls, Canada, in June, 1905, to launch the “Niagara Movement.” They drew up a platform calling for, among other things, “abolition of all distinctions based on race.” ²⁴

The Niagara Movement members met at Harper’s Ferry the next year and issued a similar manifesto, which Howard University professor Kelly Miller described as “scarcely distinguishable from a wild and frantic shriek.” ²⁵

DuBois does not figure too prominently in the clippings in Crisler’s scrapbooks until 1909, when the NAACP was organized, and DuBois, the only Negro officer of the infant organization, took over the job of publicity and research. ²⁶ This organization resulted from reaction to an Illinois riot. In August, 1908, two months before Mrs. White was to pen her cautions regarding race relation (found in volume 9, pages 204-212), Springfield, Illinois, erupted in a race riot sparked by an alleged rape. White mobs, armed with guns, axes, and other weapons, drove Negroes from their homes, set fire to Negro businesses, and lynched two Negroes, one of them an 84-year-old [50]

²³Franklin, *op. cit.*, p. 33

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 445

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 447

man who had been married to a white woman for more than 30 years.
27

Shocked by the riots, a group of white people, including William English Walling, a writer; Mary White Ovington, a New York social worker; and Oswald Garrison Villard, grandson of William Lloyd Garrison, issued a call for a conference in New York “for the discussion of: present evils, the voicing of protests, and the renewal of the struggle for civil and political liberty.”²⁸

The leaders of the Niagara Movement were invited, and the conference of 1909 laid plans for the organization that came to be called the NAACP (formally organized under that name in May, 1910). The *New York Age* was extremely skeptical. Commenting on the conference, it said that “with here and there an exception, the Negroes attending this conference are those with whom no one has been able to work in harmony.” The editor said, “We certainly hope that these friends [the white organizers] will not become discouraged by reason of their contact with the class of colored people that they met in New York last week, nor feel disappointed.”²⁹ He concluded his piece by saying: “The expressed aims of the conference were good. The evil the Negro delegates accomplished is already apparent. [51] The sum total of good wrought by the conference time alone will demonstrate.”³⁰

As already mentioned, when William English Walling suggested in the June 17th issue of *The Independent* (1909) that “the exclusive endorsement of Booker T. Washington’s Negro policies, now universal in the North, is tantamount to a postponement of the demand for immediate political and social equality of the races,” the *Age* fought back with an article by its former editor, T. Thomas Fortune.³¹ Walling was one of the founders of the NAACP, and the establishment of that organization represented a major break with Washington’s policy.

Even though the opposition was becoming more vocal, Washington was still in control:

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 443, 494

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 446

²⁹New York Age, June 19, 1909, Sc. 4, p. 28

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹*Ibid.*, June 24, 1909, Sc. 4, p. 36

Despite the fact that there were Negroes who vigorously opposed Washington's leadership and that there were some valid exceptions to his program for the salvation of the Negro, he was unquestionably the central figure—the dominant personality—in the history of the Negro down to his death in 1915. ³²

The most significant statement of Ellen G. White relative to these “solution” theories (and possibly to Booker T. Washington), is in volume 9, where she says: “Men may advance theories, but I assure you that it will not do for us to follow human theories.” ³³ A few pages earlier she wrote: “We are not to be in haste to define the exact course to be pursued in the future regarding the relation to be maintained between white and colored people.” ³⁴ Did she see beyond Booker T. Washington?

If Washington's “solution” was a temporary expedient, he did not make its tentative nature clear to his contemporaries, either white or black. Ellen White left no “solution” other than the grace of Christ, but she left no doubt that her position on separation of the races was merely a temporary guideline of expediency to be used “until the Lord shows us a better way.” ³⁵

When she wrote that “the time has not come for us to work as if there were no prejudice,” is it not reasonable to assume that she implied that such a time might come? ³⁶

[52]

³²Franklin op. cit., p. 397

³³Testimonies for the Church 9:213

³⁴Testimonies for the Church 9:209, 210

³⁵Testimonies for the Church 9:207

³⁶Testimonies for the Church 9:215

Crisis in Mississippi

In the background of Ellen White's statements about race relations are concrete historical situations—in Mississippi; Washington, D.C.; Nashville, Tennessee; and other places. Mississippi, of course, is of prime importance, because it was there that Edson White took up his pioneer work among Negroes, a project Mrs. White followed with great interest and much financial and moral support.

Edson White's first serious difficulty relevant to this study erupted in Yazoo City, Mississippi, late in 1898. White was in church on Sabbath in Vicksburg when a telegram arrived telling of mail of "great importance" coming from Yazoo City and instructing him to wait for it. The letter said:

Mr. Rogers was ordered to leave here by some kind of a committee, who claim to have been informed by some colored people, that the Negroes were going to rise and slaughter the whites on Christmas eve, or shortly after. These informers (colored) state that these uprising Negroes are being wrought up by white people, and they (the committee), have gone no further into the investigation, but take these informers' words as being correct, and have ordered all whites who are in any way connected with the colored race here to leave.... They, of course, do not represent the good people of this section.... Please do not connect our name in this matter to anyone as it would destroy our usefulness to you in helping adjust this great and uncalled-for calamity. I will quietly do whatever I can to peaceably settle things.

1

¹J. A.. Crisler, Letter to James Edson White, quoted in letter from James Edson White to Friend and Fellow-Worker, December 18, 1898

The letter was from a physician, J. A. Crisler, in Yazoo City. The next morning a letter came from F. R. Rogers, who was operating the school for blacks in Yazoo City:

Satan is loosed here. We are in trouble. Today at 1:30 p.m. two men rode up to the chapel where we are holding school and called me out and asked my name and told me "This business must stop. We went to the river last night to sink the boat Morning Star, but could not find it. It will never land here again, SO BEWARE." ...Well, Bro. White, we are resting in the Lord and have left the case to Him. However, I applied to the Mayor for advice as to leaving the organ and other things in the chapel, as burning was threatened. The Mayor said all was safe and he would see me protected.²

Commenting on these events in the same letter in which he quoted the two passages above, Edson White said:

On receiving these communications we all felt that great caution and much heavenly wisdom was required to enable us to take the proper course in this matter. The testimonies instruct us that great caution must be exercised so that

these evilly disposed persons shall not be aroused and the work closed up as a result [55]

I am planning now to issue an extra of the *Gospel Herald*. In this we will show our leading denominational institutions It will explain that we have nothing whatever to do with politics, that we have not come down to invade the customs of the country, but only to make better men, better citizens, better Christians out of the people. The general impression is that we have some kind of a hocus pocus religion that we cannot get

²F. R. Rogers to James Edson White, quoted in letter from James Edson White to "Friend and Fellow-Worker," December 16, 1898.

the white people to accept, and so have come down to try to get it off on the negroes They want to know why we do not take it to the white people and not make a business of working among the negroes This extra will show that we are taking it to ALL classes and races. ³

The same day White dispatched a letter to Rogers in Yazoo City in which he said:

Of course we are willing to trust all these matters to the Lord, and yet He requires us to be very cautious; and the Testimonies point out to us the necessity of such extreme care that prejudice shall not be aroused among this class of people down here, for, if it is, it will shut us off from the work entirely. ⁴

Again, on the same day, he wrote back to Dr. Crisler:

I know that these people whom you mention are not of the better class of citizens, and yet they are the people who can really do us the most harm If anything should happen during the holidays of any nature whatever, in the way of a collision [sic] between the colored and the white people, we would be associated with this in spite of all we could say. ⁵

[56] A few days later he reiterated to G. A. Irwin his plans for a special number of the *Gospel Herald*, saying that it would make clear that “we are not connected with politics in any way and do not intend to be; and, further, that we did not come down to combat the prejudices or customs of the people in any way.” ⁶

To anyone who had read Ellen White’s counsels in volume 9 the relevance of this material is abundantly obvious. “Politics” in this period and place had strong overtones concerning race relations, a legacy of the Civil War, and the Reconstruction Era. These workers

³Ibid

⁴J. E. White, Letter to F. R. Rogers, December 18, 1898

⁵J. E. White, Letter to J. A. Crisler, December 18, 1898

⁶J. E. White, Letter to G A. Irwin, December 21, 1898

had done nothing to challenge the racial customs and beliefs of the white people, except that they were educating the Negroes. Yet their work and no doubt their lives were in danger.

By May of the next year, 1899, new trouble had arisen, this time from a white mob made up of what White described as “the best planters along the Yazoo River.”⁷ Edson White wrote his mother reporting the incident on May 14, 1899, but repeated the details more fully in a letter to her on May 25, fearing she had not received the first report:

Two weeks ago tonight a mob of about 25 white men came to our church at Calmer at about midnight. They brought out Brother Stephenson, our worker, and then looted the church, burning books, maps, charts, etc. They hunted for Brother Casey, our leading colored brother of that place, but he had escaped in time so they did not reach him. They then went to the house of Brother Olvin, called him out, and whipped him with a cow-hide. I think they would have killed him if it had not been for a friendly white man who ordered them to stop whipping after they had struck a few blows. They did not pay any attention to him at first, but he drew his revolver, and said the next man who struck a blow would hear from him, and then they stopped. During the time they shot at Brother Olvin’s wife, and struck her in the leg, but did not hurt her seriously. They took Brother Stephenson to the nearest railway station, put him on the cars, and sent him out of the country. They posted notice on the church forbidding me to return, and forbidding the steamer *Morning Star* to land between Yazoo City and Vicksburg.

[57]

The whole difficulty arose from our efforts to aid the colored people. We had given them clothing where in need, and food to those who were hungry, and had taught them some better ideas about farming, introduced

⁷J. E. White, Letter to Ellen G. White, May 14, 1899

different seeds such as peanuts, beans, etc., that bring a high price, ...and this the whites would not stand. ⁸

Ellen White makes the following statement in volume 9:

The colored people should not urge that they be placed on an equality with white people. The relation of the two races has been a matter hard to deal with, and I fear that it will ever remain a most perplexing problem. So far as possible, everything that would stir up the race prejudice of the white people should be avoided. There is danger of closing the door so that our white laborers will not be able to work in some places in the South. ⁹

It may seem, at first, difficult to believe that the opening sentence of the above paragraph could be written by a person who believed in the basic “equality” of all men. But when that statement is viewed against the background of these two incidents, the one in Yazoo City at Christmas time, 1898, and the other a few miles down the Yazoo River in May, 1899, we get a different picture. Edson White wrote his mother about both incidents, the latter in two letters, May 14 and [58] May 25. On June 5, 1899, Mrs. White wrote to A. F. Ballenger about his proposed interracial colony. The letters from Edson White had doubtless arrived mere days before. She wrote:

The white people will stir *up* the blacks by telling them all kinds of stories: and the blacks, who can lie even when *it is* for their interest to speak the truth, will stir up the whites with falsehoods, and the whites who want an occasion will seize upon any pretext for taking revenge, even upon those of their own color who are presenting the truth. This is the danger. *As far as possible, everything that will stir up the race prejudice of the white people should be avoided. There is danger of closing the door so that our white laborers will not be*

⁸J. E. White, Letter to Ellen G. White, May 25, 1899

⁹[Testimonies for the Church 9:214](#)

*able to work in some places in the South.*¹⁰ [Emphasis supplied.]

The words in italics are identical to those just quoted from volume 9, as are other words in this letter to Ballenger. For instance, in this letter we also find the words: “The relation of the two races has been a matter hard to deal with, and I fear that it will ever remain a most perplexing problem.”¹¹ These words make up the second sentence in the paragraph from volume 9 quoted above.

The first use of the statement that black people should not urge that they be placed on an equality with white people has not been located. However, it is known that this statement was penned as early as or prior to the year 1903, because in that year Ellen White wrote to her son saying: “I think I have already written that the colored people should not urge that they be placed on an equality with white people.”¹²

In her opening remarks in the above-mentioned letter to Ballenger, she also says: [59]

It is the prejudice of the white against the black race that makes this field hard, very hard. The whites who have oppressed the colored people still have the same spirit. They did not lose it, although they were conquered in war. They are determined to make it appear that the blacks were better off in slavery than since they were set free. Any provocation from the blacks is met with the greatest cruelty. The field is one that needs to be worked with the greatest discretion.¹³

Comparisons of the various manuscripts of Ellen White relative to race relations reveal that in many instances the materials in volume 9 were assembled from many E. G. White documents written through a decade prior to October, 1908, when the manuscript for volume 9 was prepared. For another example, one can cite [Letter 165, 1903](#), written to W. C. White:

¹⁰[The Southern Work](#), 84

¹¹*Ibid.*; cf. [Testimonies for the Church 9:214](#)

¹²Ellen G. White, [Letter 202, 1903](#) (to J. E. White, September 11, 1903).

¹³[The Southern Work](#), 83

I am sending you today another manuscript on the color question. I wish to say, however, that I have not finished writing on this subject. I think that the less this subject is agitated, the better it will be. If it is much agitated, difficulties will be aroused that will take much precious time to adjust. We can not lay down a definite line to be followed in dealing with this subject. In different places and under different circumstances, the subject will need to be handled differently. In the South, where the race prejudice is so strong, we could do nothing in presenting the truth were we to deal with the color line question as we can deal with it in the North. ¹⁴

[60] This, and more of [Letter 165, 1903](#), appears almost word for word in [Manuscript 107, 1908](#), on which the article “The Color Line,” in volume 9, pages 213-22 is based. Also a large portion of the manuscript to which she refers in this letter ¹⁵ to W. C. White is used in [Manuscript 107, 1908](#). The point of all this is that although the manuscripts for volume 9 were not written until 1908, their historical settings can often be sought much earlier. ¹⁶

In the case of the statement that “colored people should not urge that they be placed on an equality with white people,” it is, as mentioned above, possible to look with some validity to Mississippi and the incident in Yazoo City and along the Yazoo River for historic settings or at least the general conditions pointed to in the Ballenger letter, for it was evidently sometime before 1903 that she first made the statement.

¹⁴Ellen G. White, [Letter 165, 1903](#) (to W. C. White, August 3, 1903).

¹⁵Ellen G. White, [Manuscript 77, 1903](#) (The Color Line)

¹⁶Manuscripts basics to the articles in volume 9 are. “A Call for Colored Laborers,” [Manuscript 109, 1908](#), October 21, 1908, [Testimonies for the Church 9:199-203](#); “Proclaiming the Truth Where There Is Race Antagonism” [Manuscript 103, 1908](#) October 19, 1908 [Testimonies for the Church 9:204-212](#)- “The Color Line,” [Manuscript 107, 1908](#) October 21, 1908 [Testimonies for the Church 9:213.221](#) “Consideration for Colored Laborers,” [Manuscript 129, 1902](#), October 11, 1902, [Testimonies for the Church 9:223-224](#). The article “The Needs of a Mission Field” was printed in the *Review and Herald*, LXXXIV (October 10, 1907), p. 8. The source of several paragraphs placed on pp. 221, 222 has not been located.

To put it simply, we know that the statement about urging to be placed on an equality was made prior to September 1903. We also know that both of the sentences that immediately follow that statement in volume 9 were made at the exact time that Edson White was encountering violence in Mississippi. Therefore the situations in Mississippi can probably be looked to as the background for the counsel about black people's urging that they be placed on an equality.

If Edson White's experiences or the situations outlined in the Ballenger letter have relevance, then the setting was one where prejudiced whites were determined to make it appear that the Negroes had been better off in slavery and where any provocation from the blacks was met with the greatest cruelty. It was in this setting that she said that Negroes should not urge to be placed on equality with white people. Why? Quite clearly not because that would be getting out of their "place," as far as Ellen White was concerned, but because it would be done at the risk of life and at the expense of the work that was being carried on. [61]

By the time Ellen White was assembling the materials for volume 9, she could not even make the unqualified distinction between North and South that she made in 1903 in her letter to W. C. White ("we could do nothing in presenting the truth were we to deal with the color line question as we can deal with it in the North"). By then, Springfield, Illinois, was smoldering with the fires of its bloody riot, and the whole nation had reached what might very well have been its darkest period in the history of race relations. When Ellen White repeated the sentence she had written to W. C. White she said, "*in some places* in the North."¹⁷ (Emphasis supplied.)

In his May 14 letter about the Yazoo River mob violence, Edson White expanded on the implications of the situation in the light of a then-recent controversy in Battle Creek:

The fact is, the people of the North do not know anything of the true situation in this awful field. It is "Ku Klux" days right over and we are in the midst of it. At General Conference the field was taken up, and I am told that the situation was discussed, and those who had

¹⁷Testimonies for the Church 9:213

been in the field spoke plainly of the caution required in working the field.

[62] But the wise Northern people would not accept such a theory, and felt that the color line was not to be regarded, and Dr. Kellogg sent for Mrs. Steele, the principal and proprietor of the Orphan's Home at Chattanooga, Tenn. I understand she came to Battle Creek, and in her enthusiastic way told how she did not regard it, etc. Dr. Kellogg is all taken up with her ideas of this work. But I want to say, she has done more harm to the colored work by such talk than she can ever do in her home.

I am told this by Eld. (N. W.) Allee. He felt distressed at this turn in regard to the work. He said he realized that the workers among the colored people carried their lives in their hands. This is as true a saying as anything ever spoken. The North MUST realize that the workers coming here will have to be the most careful that it is possible for them to be. If not they will not only imperil their own lives, but will also imperil the lives and bring great distress upon the colored people themselves. ¹⁸

In August, Edson White had further convictions:

It is time people began to get the idea that there is earnest, stern work to be done in that (the Southern) field, and that the eight years of neglect of the past has rendered the work far more difficult. I can see that it is far more difficult than it was when we went down five years ago. Dr. Kellogg and others are for ignoring the color line at once, and defying the situation. They will close up the field if they carry out any such ideas.

The fact is, others might do more in this line than we can. Even in medical lines we cannot do as others who leave not the last message and the Sabbath to proclaim. I saw this again and again. ¹⁹

¹⁸J. E. White, Letter to Ellen G. White, May 14, 1899

¹⁹J. E. White, Letter to Ellen G. White, August 19, 1899

A few days later still Edson again wrote his mother, evidently commenting on discussions he had had in Battle Creek concerning the issue of the color line and Mrs. Steele's influence:

I felt the necessity to counteract so far as possible the wrong mold which has been given to the work by the influence of Sister Steel [e] of Chattanooga, Tenn. I felt that her work has done much harm in some respects, as she is inclined to disregard all Southern prejudices and customs to be met in the work, which we know to be a dangerous thing. ²⁰

[63]

In his biography of John Harvey Kellogg, Richard W. Schwarz offers this interesting side light:

Dr. Kellogg did not confine his support of activities to aid under-privileged Negroes to those sponsored by Adventists alone. For a number of years he was an enthusiastic supporter of the Negro orphanage maintained by Mrs. A. S. Steele in Chattanooga Kellogg was a liberal contributor to Mrs. Steele's work and encouraged her to solicit help among the Battle Creek Sanitarium's wealthy patients. ²¹

It was within six months of the mob violence along the Yazoo River and less than a year after the dangers in Yazoo City, that Ellen White wrote to F. E. Belden in Battle Creek. She pointed to the fact that it was then (in 1899) much harder to help the Negro people than it would have been just after the emancipation from slavery. (Edson White had observed the growing difficulty in the five years he had been in Mississippi.) She mentioned to Belden how Negroes had been "deprived of the means of bettering their condition," and how "almost every possible avenue to improvement" had been closed to them. God would "judge the nation for their neglect and abuse of His creatures." She told Belden that "God calls for His workers to consecrate themselves to the cause of justice and reform." ²² She also

²⁰J. E. White, Letter to Ellen G. White, August 24, 1899.

²¹Richard W. Schwarz, "John Harvey Kellogg: American Health Reformer" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1964), p. 340

²²Ellen G. White, [Letter 165, 1899](#) (to F. Belden, October 22, 1899).

[64] commented on the right and wrong way to carry out these objectives, and said that integrated schools were not to be encouraged. Then she added:

The age in which we live calls for decided reformatory action; but wisdom must be exercised in dealing with the race that has so long been degraded and abused. That which is now undertaken cannot be carried forward as it might have been had the white churches at the time of the abolition of slavery acted as Christ would have done in their place. ²³

If a reconstruction of the historical situation can be hazarded, it appears that Mrs. Steele, as a good friend of Dr. Kellogg, had convinced the doctor and others that the color line could be defied. Edson White had sought to combat this idea in Battle Creek. This situation could well be probed more fully, to discover in exactly what ways Mrs. Steele herself defied the color line in her work, and with what results. Also, the racial climate in which she worked needs to be compared with that in which Edson White worked. But even beyond this, Edson White notes that he, as an Adventist, had not only racial but religious prejudice to contend with, and that the latter prevented him from doing more in the line of combating the former.

On October 10, 1899, after the mob violence and after the controversy with Kellogg, Edson White wrote to a woman in Washington, D.C., who was planning to work for Negroes there. In the letter, he interpreted the *Testimonies* as he understood them.

Now in regard to the testimonies respecting colored schools unmixed with whites. I understand that this refers to the South only where mixed schools will not be tolerated.

[65] God forbid that we should build up color lines where they do not now exist. You say, "I have been asked by several whether that testimony would apply here

²³Ibid

and whether they should separate them.” I would not undertake anything of the kind myself. I should feel that I would sin in so doing.

I think there is a rule that we may safely follow in this color line business. We must regard it only as it affects the outside element in such a way as to close up our work and injure its usefulness. If you disregard [White probably meant to use “regard”] the sons and daughters of Christ you cannot make divisions where God regards us all blood relation to the Lord, God Almighty and brethren and sisters of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. For us to build up anything of the kind will be as bad as the “Middle Wall of Partition” built up by the ancient Jews.

God has made [of] one blood all nations of the earth and He so regards them. If we are true children of God we will regard them in the same way. We are not to regard the prejudice of men in matters of this kind only as we are compelled to do so in order that we may be allowed to work for them where a different course would close the field to our work and make it difficult and impossible to reach the people at all. I do not think I have any further advice to give upon this point.²⁴

Of course, Edson White cannot be regarded as an “inspired” interpreter of his mother’s counsels any more than anyone else, but he worked more closely with her on this subject of race relations than any other person and was certainly closer to the situation than anyone else. It is significant, then, to notice that he interprets her testimonies concerning separate schools as given in order that the work for Negroes might not be closed by white prejudice, and says that the prejudice is only to be regarded when a different course would make it difficult and impossible to reach the people at all. [66]

Ellen White’s frequent statements that Negroes should be trained to teach and preach for their own race is also illuminated by the situations that Edson White faced.

²⁴J. E. White, Letter to M. A. Cornwell, October 10, 1899

F. R. Rogers has already been mentioned. This assistant of Edson White, with his wife and small boy, arrived in Yazoo City in December, 1898, and took over the school work in Lintonia, a suburb of Yazoo City. After the violence there and a few miles down the Yazoo River, Edson White wrote:

At this place the prejudice was very strong against Bro. Rogers and his wife teaching the colored school, and we felt very sure that it was necessary to put colored teachers into this school and this would allay the prejudice. ²⁵

By February of the next year, 1900, Edson White was saying:

Now, the fact is, I shall not favor sending many white laborers into the great cotton belt of the South, unless the ground has in each instance been carefully studied. I think in the main we shall have to put colored teachers into the principal part of the colored work for at least four of the great cotton growing states. Bro. Rogers will have to turn over his school at Wilsonia [another suburb of Yazoo City] to colored teachers very soon, and we are now planning for a man and his wife to come here at once and take up the work.

Threats are out now, and we do not know what moment there will be an outbreak. I want to be where the Lord can lead me so that I can have heavenly skill to see the trend of every situation and turn seeming defeats into victories. If we wait here until the lower element strikes, it will then be too late to do anything with either white or black teachers. If we move in time we can avoid the outbreak, I am sure. Bro. Rogers can take the position of Supt. of instruction, and that is admissible here. ²⁶

[67]

To N. W. Allee, the church's superintendent of the Southern States, White wrote in the same vein:

²⁵J. E. White, Letter to Ellen G. White, November 20, 1899

²⁶J. E. White, Letter to Ellen G. White, February 16, 1900

There is a matter of utmost importance that I must write you about. It is Bro. Rogers and the school at Lintonia. It is the settled conviction of the workers here that unless a change is made in the teachers of this school, and colored teachers put in, violence will be done to Bro. Rogers. I tried to talk this when you people were here, but it did not seem to impress you as it did us who are and have been on the ground through it all. Now I feel that the time has come when something must be done. I can never consent to keep this faithful man in such a place of danger as he now occupies.

I think I shall not favor white teachers coming into Mississippi in the future. I think it will result in nothing but disaster as a rule. ²⁷

These situations help clarify the counsel Ellen White gave in volume 9 concerning Negro people working for their own race. This was not given in a spirit of bigotry or discrimination, but as she herself said in a talk to the Negro students at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama, on June 21, 1904:

We need, O so much, colored workers to labor for their own people, in places where it would not be safe for white people to labor. White workers can labor in places where the prejudice is not so strong. This is why we have established our printing office in Nashville You can labor where we can not, in places where the existing prejudice forbids us to labor. Christ left Jerusalem in order to save His life. It is our duty to take care of our lives for Christ's sake. We are not to place ourselves, unbidden, in danger, because He wants us to live to teach and help others.

God wants the colored students before me today to be His helping hand in reaching souls in many places where white workers cannot labor. ²⁸

[68]

²⁷J. E. White Letter to N. W. Allee, February, 1900

²⁸Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 60, 1904* (talk given in Huntsville, Ala., "The Work of the Huntsville School")

When A. W. Spalding visited Yazoo City twelve years after Edson White's experiences in Mississippi to interview the workers in preparation for his book, he wrote to W. C. White, Edson's brother:

Bro. Rogers is fond of back streets when in Yazoo City. It was not so many years ago that his visits to this place were always made under cover of the night, and even this time we stayed at a boarding house on a back street, where the proprietor did not know his name or his business. He ventured with me upon one of the main streets.

Along that same street he was accustomed in days of yore to be accompanied by a string of boys holding his coat-tails, chorusing, "Nigger-lover! nigger-lover!"

²⁹

In a similar letter a few days later Spalding tells how he stood on the spot where some years ago Bro. Rogers was knocked down, pelted with brickbats, had his hat shot off, and was chased to his home by a bloodthirsty mob. ³⁰

²⁹ Arthur W. Spalding, Letter to William C. White, September 26, 1912

³⁰ Spalding, Letter to W. C. White, October 6, 1912

Quietly at Work for the Negro

[69]

[70]

Evidently Ellen White was not relying on private fears and rumors when she wrote her cautions concerning agitating the color line, but as she declared, on “the light that the Lord has given me.”¹ And if Edson White had any doubts about the opposition he faced, they were certainly dispelled in June, 1900, when both newspapers in Yazoo City came out with inflammatory editorials about F. R. Rogers and the Seventh-day Adventists. These editorials were reprinted and replied to in a special number of the *Gospel Herald* (October, 1900). The first blast evidently came from the *Yazoo City Herald*, on June 1, 1900. The editorial led with these words:

The religiously inclined of our colored people—and most all of them have a tendency toward religion—are becoming exercised at the influence certain Seventh Day Adventists are having over their race in Yazoo City. For more than a year the Adventists have been quietly at work among the negroes, having established a church and school for them in Lintonia. For a time their doctrine did not seem to make much headway. But they have persisted, and by throwing in a large slice of social equality with their Seventh Day observance doctrine, they have influenced a number to join them and to renounce the Sabbath Day, which is and has been observed by every Christian denomination since the morning the Saviour rose from the tomb.²

[71]

The journalist went on to tell how a meeting had been held by the Negroes recently to counteract the influence of the Seventh-day Adventists:

¹Ellen G. White, *The Southern Work*, 72

²Yazoo City Herald, June 1, 1900, quoted in *Gospel Herald*, II (October, 1900), p. 88

To counteract the influence of the Seventh Day people there was a large meeting of the colored people at St. Stephens church Friday night. This meeting was attended by several whites, who wanted to assure the colored people of their sympathy in their efforts to overcome the trouble to follow their acceptance of the doctrine, teachings, and practice of these Seventh Day people.³

Next the editor attacked the Adventists as what are nowadays termed outside agitators:

These people are strangers to the negro, and have no real sympathy with his material and religious welfare. The whites and blacks are now living harmoniously together, and it would be the utmost folly for the blacks to listen to any man or woman whose teachings would in the least interfere with this condition. If the Seventh Day doctrine is a good one, and the only correct one, then the blacks should insist that those who seem so deeply interested in their welfare should go among the whites and teach it, and not confine their teachings exclusively to their race. That they are not doing this in Yazoo City, should be enough to make the colored people let these strangers alone.⁴

The next paragraph attacked the Adventists because they supposedly taught that it was “neither wrong in morals or law” to do any and all kinds of work on Sunday, though Mississippi law forbade such work.

[72]

The laws of the State of Mississippi recognize the Sabbath Day, and prohibit worldly employment on that day. This law these Seventh Day people want their followers to fly in the face of and to bid it defiance. They teach that Saturday is the day that should be observed as

³Ibid

⁴Ibid

one of rest and that it is neither wrong in morals or law to do any and all kinds of work on what is recognized as the Christian Sabbath. ⁵

Then the editor remarked:

This is a dangerous doctrine for anyone to be teaching in this community—especially among the colored people. No good can result from such a doctrine, and the dangers are only increased when coupled with the practice of social equality. The *Herald* knows enough about the old Southern darkey to know that they never expect to see the social barrier between the two races broken down, and it knows more than that, that the negroes have no respect for the white man or woman who practices or teaches it. ⁶

The editor then observed that he did not know how widespread the influence of the Adventists was, but that he felt it was time to speak a word of warning:

If these Seventh Day people are here teaching social equality between the races and defiance to a State law, they should be told quietly but firmly to move on. It is easier to put out a spark than it is a conflagration. ⁷

The piece concluded with the assertion that the editor was speaking as much in the interests of the Negroes as of the whites, and said that for the Negroes to take the advice of the Adventists “against the counsel and teaching of their lifelong friends of both races” was folly and nonsense, and could only result in injury to the Negroes.

Given Mississippi’s possible definitions for the term “firmness” when dealing with racial matters, particularly when they involve Northern whites, it is obvious to the meanest intelligence that the situation was grave. The matter of the seventh-day teachings of the missionaries was certainly a factor, but “social equality” seems to

[73]

⁵Ibid

⁶Ibid

⁷Ibid., p. 89

be a more important one to the editor. He comments that it was only after the Adventists had thrown in “a large slice” of social equality that they began to make headway. His concluding thrust deals particularly with this aspect.

Edson White fought back in the *Gospel Herald*, although his defense was probably intended more for his Adventist readers than for the people of Yazoo City. This issue of the *Herald* did not come out until October. White asserted that “we do not teach our people to ‘fly in the face’ of the Sunday laws of Mississippi.” This was indeed true, and in harmony with the repeated counsel of Ellen White: “Tell them they need not provoke their neighbors by doing work on Sunday.”⁸

Many Adventists then felt that the fourth commandment required one not only to abstain from work on the seventh day but actually to work on every other day, including Sunday. After all, they reasoned, the commandment says: “Six days shalt thou labour.” Writing concerning the South in 1895, Ellen White said:

When the truth is proclaimed in the South, a marked difference will be shown by those who oppose the truth in their greater regard for Sunday, and great care must be exercised not to do anything to arouse their prejudice.

[74] Otherwise, we may just as well leave the field entirely, for the workers will have all the white people against them.⁹

She pointed to danger that would come from “secret organizations” such as the Ku Klux Klan, perhaps:

Those who oppose the truth will not work openly, but through secret organizations, and they will seek to hinder the work in every possible way. Our laborers must move in a quiet way, striving to do everything possible to present the truth to the people, remembering that the love of Christ will melt down the opposition.¹⁰

⁸The Southern Work, 73

⁹The Southern Work, 68

¹⁰Ibid

She gave counsel that nothing should be taught to increase the already high degree of prejudice between the races. It is interesting to note in this same connection that she rejects the idea that there is a positive duty to labor on Sunday:

From the light that I have received, I see that if we would get the truth before the Southern people, we must not encourage the colored people to work on Sunday. There must be a clear understanding regarding this, but it need not be published in our papers. You must teach these people as you would teach children. Not a word should be spoken to create prejudice, for if by any careless or impulsive speech to the colored people in regard to the whites any prejudice is created in their minds against the whites, or in the minds of the whites against them, the spirit of the enemy will work in the children of disobedience. Thus an opposition will be aroused which will hinder the work of the message, and will endanger the lives of the workers and of the believers.

We are not to make efforts to teach the Southern people to work on Sunday. That which some of our brethren have written upon this point is not based upon right principles. When the practices of the people do not come in conflict with the law of God, you may conform to them. If the workers fail to do this, they will not only hinder their own work, but they will place stumbling blocks in the way of those for whom they labor, and hinder them from accepting the truth. ¹¹

[75]

But Mrs. White did not imagine that Sunday should be an idle day for Adventist believers in the South. She envisioned another kind of labor to be done on Sundays:

On Sunday there is the very best opportunity for those who are missionaries to hold Sunday schools, and come to the people in the simplest manner possible,

¹¹Ibid

telling them of the love of Jesus for sinners and educating them in the Scriptures. There are many ways of reaching all classes, both white and black. We are to interest them in the life of Christ from His childhood up to manhood, and through His life of ministry to the cross. We cannot work in all localities in the same way. We must let the Holy Spirit guide, for men and women cannot convince others of the wrong traits of character. While laboring to introduce the truth, we must accommodate ourselves as much as possible to the field and circumstances of those for whom we labor. ¹²

This subject of Sunday labor had been the primary topic of the council meeting held in 1895 at Armadale, a suburb of Melbourne, Victoria, in Australia, mentioned in volume 9, page 206. The results of this meeting are reported quite fully in [The Southern Work, 66-78](#). The combination of religious and racial prejudice that would result in danger for the Negroes was spelled out repeatedly, and in 1899, Ellen White wrote:

[76]

The colored people may work on Sunday as on other days of the week before the Sabbath truth is brought to them, but if they do this after they have accepted the truth, they will be noticed and condemned. Prejudice is strong in the South and in presenting the Sabbath great care should be taken. The people will soon learn all you believe. Educate the people in the simplest manner, and make no great stir about it. Use every precaution, lest you be cut off from your work.

The spirit which has held the colored people so long in slavery is alive today, and among the whites there are those who will work in every possible way against that which has a tendency to uplift the colored people

If you would make the southern whites and the colored people your friends, you must meet them where

¹²Ibid

they are, not to act as they act, to sin as they sin, but to present the truth to them in your daily life.¹³

Getting back to the subject of the newspaper attacks on the Adventists, Edson White also resented the statement that he and his associates had “no real sympathy” with the material and spiritual welfare of the Negro. A few days after its first editorial, in response to a letter from F. R. Rogers, the *Yazoo City Herald* commented that “the Seventh-day Adventist cesspool in Yazoo City has been cleared of much of its filth.”¹⁴

Edson White, in his belated rebuttal, said:

If to be a law-abiding citizen, to regard the poor of the country in which we are working, to teach the pure and simple gospel of Jesus Christ, and to endeavor to uplift the fallen and teach the poor, entitles us to such names as are given in this article, we are willing to receive them. But please remember that these statements show the trend of events in some portions of the South.¹⁵

Seven days later, on June 7, the *Yazoo Sentinel* unleashed an even more explosive attack. The editor opened by reminding his readers of the period of Reconstruction, which was a history, he said, [77] “written in the blood of the best manhood of the State.”¹⁶ He went on to point out that—

The mounds in our cemeteries are silent monuments to the heroic sacrifices that were made to maintain natural conditions and the right of a superior race to rule a country which his intelligence had brought to a high state of civilization.¹⁷

¹³Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 118*, 1899 (“The Work in the South”).

¹⁴James Edson White, “The Southern Field Closing to the Message,” *Gospel Herald*, II (October, 1900), p. 88

¹⁵Ibid

¹⁶Yazoo City Sentinel, June 7, 1900, quoted in “The Southern Field Closing to the Message,” *Gospel Herald*, II (October, 1900), p. 86.

¹⁷Ibid

He continued by telling how ““carpet-bagism”” had been overthrown and the ““temple scourged of the scalawags and thieves who had invaded the South and attempted to put upon them a yoke worse than death.”” But, he said, a condition of peace was again restored, and it had been maintained uninterruptedly to the present time.

Then he added: ““Now, however, an element of discord has been introduced in local affairs, and unless prompt and radical measures are taken to avert the impending trouble, a conflict, the end of which no man can foresee, is sure to follow.””

What was this threatening disaster? No less than ““a white man named Rogers, representing the so-called Seventh-day Adventists.”” The editor went on to point out how Rogers had been proselyting among the Negroes for about a year, and how he had established a school ““exclusively for Negroes.”” No open protest had been made, said the editor, ““until it became known that Rogers is not only teaching social equality, but practicing it.”” As proof of this, the editor cited reports from ““reliable negroes.””

[78]

It is stated by reliable negroes that he has adopted two negro girls aged about sixteen. Whether or not this is true, we do not know, but we state as an absolute certainty that these negro girls are living with Rogers as members of his family; that they eat at the same table, sleep in the house with his family, sit around the fireside with them, and to all appearances are equal members thereof. ¹⁸

The journalist went on to add that:

Aside from this, which, in itself, is enough to damn him in the eyes of all decent people, the so-called religious doctrine which he teaches is contrary to the law of the land. In brief, he teaches that the day which we all recognize as the holy Sabbath, is not the Sabbath at all, and that any kind of work may be done on that day with impunity. And this in face of the fact that the Supreme Court of the United States has refused to sustain them

¹⁸Ibid

in their position. Our Sunday has been set apart by all Christian nations for centuries as a holy day—a day of rest, in conformity with Divine injunction, and no intelligent, Christian community will tolerate any man who persistently teaches open violation of it. ¹⁹

The editor then introduced the suggestion that the work being done by Rogers had an ulterior motive.

Rogers' deluded followers are not smart enough to see that his only interest in them is to separate them from their hard earned money, and that the doctrine which he is teaching will sooner or later bring them to grief. The better element of their race recognize this, and are outspoken in their denunciation of the work he is doing here. ²⁰

The *Sentinel* concluded its editorial remarks with a long paragraph about how much the citizens of Yazoo County would regret to see the history of 1875 repeated, but asserted that “we greatly mistake the temper of her people if they sit calmly by and long permit this interloper to teach and practice a doctrine which is so repugnant to the traditions of her people.” ²¹

[79]

The editor's concluding remarks leave no doubt that the repugnant doctrine to which here refers is not the Seventh-day Sabbath, but the “social equality” doctrine. He asserted that the “rule of color” and the “law of race” had always been preserved in the South, that strict segregation had been maintained in homes, churches, and schools, and the editor concluded with a warning: “We trust that Rogers will have sense enough to understand and respect this sentiment, and seek more congenial fields for the propagation of his noxious social equality ideas before it is too late.” ²²

In reply, Edson White asserted that the Southern Missionary Society and no single individual was responsible for the school

¹⁹Ibid

²⁰Ibid

²¹Ibid

²²Ibid

in Lintonia, and that furthermore Rogers was superintendent of instruction for the State of Mississippi—a title White had given him specifically to avoid the controversy in which he was now embroiled. White said that: “To the political side of this question we shall make but little comment, for with this we as a people have nothing to do.”

²³ The charges about the Negro girls he stamped as false.

Rogers came to his own defense after this editorial, and sent a letter to his original antagonist, the *Yazoo City Herald*, dated June 8, 1900, stating:

[80] Understanding the reports that have been circulated about us and our work, I wish to state to the public, in order to right myself on these matters, that we DO NOT believe in social equality, neither do we teach or practice it. We have never adopted any colored girls nor do we ever expect to do so. None has ever eaten at our table or spent their evenings in our parlor. True, we have had servants and treated them as such. We have ever been cautious to observe the customs of this place and be governed by them. ²⁴

Rogers went on with some assertions about his loyalty as a citizen to law, but the paper was unconvinced, saying:

“His denial will do him no good, for the proof is conclusive that he both taught and practiced it [social equality].” ²⁵

The *Sentinel* took the same dim view of Rogers’ veracity, stating that: “Of course any statement a man like Rogers may make is not worthy of notice or credence, and is referred to here only to emphasize his true character.” ²⁶

Rogers had evidently been called to Vicksburg on business shortly after he sent his letter to the editor, and the *Sentinel* took this as convincing proof that Rogers was guilty. “If Rogers was not guilty, as charged, why did he make such haste to leave town?” the editor asked. ²⁷

²³ Ibid

²⁴ *Yazoo City Herald*, n.d., I bid., p. 87

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ *Yazoo City Sentinel*, n.d, Ibid., p. 88

²⁷ Ibid

In this exchange with the *Sentinel*, the matter of race prejudice is clearly paramount over the religious prejudice. It was the charge of “social equality” to which Rogers replied. This book is not concerned with the charges and countercharges concerning what Rogers had actually done, although one certainly must side with him on the questions of fact.

What is important is that even though these Adventists probably never taught or practiced social equality, they were accused of having done so, and this charge was viewed as serious enough to raise the ghost of Reconstruction violence and hint that the Adventists had better quit before it was “too late.” [81]

It is again interesting to note Edson White’s interpretation of these events in the light of what has already been seen concerning Ellen White’s assertions about the closing of the Southern field to white laborers. Edson White headlined this article which quoted the editorials with the words: “The Southern Field Closing to the Message.” He quoted, in the article, from a July number of the *Gospel Herald*:

“These omens, together with developments in other places, indicate that Mississippi, at least, is practically closed to white labor among colored people.”²⁸

Edson White, in his introduction to the editorials, asserted that no organized opposition had arisen until the Sabbath question became prominent.²⁹ The editor of the *Sentinel* saw it differently, saying that “no open protest was made until it became known that Rogers is not only teaching social equality, but practicing it.”

It has not yet been determined with certainty how this difference arose, but if a reconstruction of the chain of events can again be attempted, a good guess would be that opposition was at a minimum for some time, and then the Sabbath was introduced. This called for decision and a break with established churches, and the Negro church leaders were aroused. These ministers probably called the meetings mentioned in the articles, white people being in attendance. The Negroes, knowing their most potent weapon, probably produced the [82]

²⁸Ibid

²⁹Ibid

charges of “social equality,” and this aroused the whites sufficiently to bring on the editorials.

Ellen White had written to Edson on August 11, 1898: “Ministers who teach the blacks will report a tissue of lies concerning the work of God which will give the Southern people a supposed excuse to create mobs, and thus the field will be closed.”³⁰ This is, by Edson White’s account, exactly what had happened in the Yazoo City incident at Christmas time in 1898:³¹

Upon quite careful inquiry, we find that the difficulty originated with some of the mean colored preachers of this city. They are exasperated at the success attending the work, and among themselves in some way raised \$25.00, and paid it to a man of hard reputation, so that he should do the dirty work, which they were too big cowards to undertake. This man collected a few kindred spirits and came to the landing place of the boat, intending to destroy it; but in the good providence of God the boat was more than 50 miles down the river when they reached the landing. Then they hunted up Bro. Rogers and ordered him to leave town.³²

In the letter to A. F. Ballenger, written June 5, 1899, after the initial incidents in Yazoo City and along the river, Ellen White said:

It is from the whites that the greatest opposition may be expected. This is the quarter that we shall need to watch. The white people are prejudiced against the doctrines taught by the Seventh-day Adventists, and a religious opposition is the greatest difficulty.

[83] The white people will stir up the blacks by telling them all kinds of stories; and the blacks, who can lie even when it is for their interest to speak the truth, will stir up the whites with falsehoods, and the whites who want an occasion will seize upon any pretext for taking

³⁰Ellen G. White, [Letter 136, 1898](#) (to J. E. White and his wife, August 14, 1898).

³¹See *supra.*, pp. 53-56

³²James Edson White, Letter to “Friend,” January 3, 1899

revenge, even upon those of their own color who are presenting the truth. This is the danger. As far as possible, everything that will stir up the race prejudice of the white people should be avoided. There is danger of closing the door so that our white laborers will not be able to work in some places in the South. ³³

Certainly the June editorials with the stories about Rogers having adopted the Negro teenagers were lies. However, it is clear that the Sabbath did arouse the opposition of both white and black, but particularly the Negro ministers. The black ministers, in this situation, evidently disagreed with Ellen White on what was “for their interest.” They saw it as more important to be rid of the Adventist religion than to keep the Adventists as educators. So, they evidently produced the “lies” that they saw would achieve their objectives.

The chief factor reflected in the editorials was the matter of “social equality,” and it was mainly on this basis that the white opposition arose. Edson White, on the editorials in the Yazoo City papers, appealed to his Adventist readers: “But please remember that these statements show the trend of events in some portions of the South, and emphasize strongly the statement that *the fields are closing.*” ³⁴

Near the close of the article, he returned to his theme:

The effort to bring these facts to our people is to open before them some of the evidences which show the rapid closing of this Southern work. The efforts of certain States to disfranchise the negro is only intensifying the problem, and will result in making the work more difficult wherever this effort is being made. There are yet many places where the work can go forward and where white labor can still operate. What shall we do as a people in the way of pressing in and occupying these places before the devil has the start of us that he is gaining in many localities? ³⁵

[84]

³³The Southern Work, 84

³⁴Jams Edson White, “The Southern Field Closing to the Message,” Gospel Herald, II (October, 1900), p. 88.

³⁵Ibid., p. 89

The reference to the relationship between disfranchisement and the increasing difficulty of the field is relevant to what has been said before about the disfranchisement campaigns being accompanied by a wave of anti-Negro propaganda and race hatred. It might also give some clue to the issue involved in the “politics” which Edson White said he had nothing to do with, and about which Ellen White, in volume 9, said the workers were to make no political speeches.³⁶

On December 10, 1900, probably after receiving the October issue of the *Gospel Herald*, Ellen White wrote to her son:

I have received the last two copies of the *Gospel Herald*. I have been expecting things to go as they have done in the Southern field, and I have felt intensely that decided work should be done. You must not fail or be discouraged. The Lord understands all about the difficulties. Try to do your very best. This is all the Lord requires of you. He has accepted your labors of love for the downtrodden African race; and if the fields you have tried so hard to work have been closed to you, may the Lord have compassion upon those who have given the work so little attention, except to criticize. They closed their eyes to the situation, after the warning was distinctly given that things would be as they are now.

[85]

The only thing now to be done for the closed field is for those who have refused to be impressed with their duty, to change this terrible phase of their conduct. It is possible that something may yet be done. Those who have passed by on the other side might better do their duty now in regard to the Southern field. The light given me is that had they at the right time done the work the Lord gave them to do for the class in such great need of help, the voice of entreaty and instruction from the Lord would have been heard, and the showing in the Southern field would be very different from what it now is.³⁷

³⁶Testimonies for the Church 9:206

³⁷Ellen G. White, [Letter 156, 1900](#) (to James Edson White December 10, 1900).

Needless to say, only part of the picture is seen when it is assumed that all the material Ellen White wrote about the separation of the races was written in an effort to avoid offending the prejudices of white people. The evidence brought to light here supports the contention that the “segregation” practiced by Adventists in the first decade of this century was motivated, at least in Mississippi, by a desire to reach the Negro and win him to Christ. Speaking to the congregation in the Negro church in Nashville, Tennessee, on April 25, 1909, Ellen White said:

As this work is continued, we will find prejudice arise, and this will be manifested in various ways; but we must have wisdom to labor in such a way that we shall not lose the interest of either party, the white or the colored.³⁸

The difficulty is that in volume 9 the references to the need to get through to white people are clear: “If we were to act as if this prejudice did not exist we could not get the light before the white people.”³⁹ And speaking of the need to separate the churches, Ellen White said: “This is particularly necessary in the South in order that the work for the white people may be carried on without serious hindrance.”⁴⁰

[86]

The references in volume 9 which connect the need of caution with the need to get the gospel to Negro people are not so clear, but they can be easily seen once the background that has been discussed here is understood. Referring to her 1895 instructions, Ellen White said:

I said that perilous times were coming, and that the sentiments that could then be expressed in regard to what should be done along missionary lines for the colored people could not be expressed in the future without imperiling lives. I said plainly that the work done for the colored people would have to be carried

³⁸Ellen G. White, [Manuscript 17, 1909](#) (“A Holy Calling”).

³⁹[Testimonies for the Church 9:204](#)

⁴⁰[Testimonies for the Church 9:206](#)

on along lines different from those followed in some sections of the country in former years. ⁴¹

This prediction was borne out with unerring accuracy as the tide of racism began to sweep the country in deeper and deeper waves from 1895 onward. Ellen White said also in volume 9, that “as time advances, and race prejudices increase, it will become almost impossible, in many places, for white workers to labor for the colored people.” ⁴²

[87] These statements, and many others in volume 9, when their historical setting is understood, reveal that Ellen White’s counsel concerning the separation of the races was motivated not merely by a desire to reach white people, but more important, by a desire to maintain the work among Negroes. Even without agitating the color line, race prejudice had served, along with religious prejudice, to actually close some of the work in Mississippi. It is clear that the counsel in volume 9 was given, among other reasons, to prevent this occurrence in other areas of the South. It was a time of dire emergency. Ellen White put it clearly when she said: “The powers of hell are working with all their ingenuity to prevent the proclamation of the last message of mercy among the colored people.” ⁴³

⁴¹Ibid

⁴²Ibid., pp. 207, 208

⁴³[Testimonies for the Church 9:208](#)

“We Have Been Eating of the Large Loaf”

[88]

Ellen White’s interest in the Negro was not limited to her interest in her son’s work, and her interest in her son’s work was not limited to matters of guidance and encouragement. She appealed to Adventist Church leaders and to all Adventists, not only for spiritual but also for economic and educational help. She wrote letters, manuscripts, and articles on the subject, and even planned a book.

Her interest in Edson White’s work extended to matters of finance and publicity, as well. She wrote in 1901:

At the different places which I have visited lately I have gathered some money for your work. I wish you would send me the amount you have received, so that if all has not been sent, I may write in regard to it. In every meeting we have attended there have been necessities that had to be met, and sometimes so many calls were made that I hardly dared to put in my plea. Nevertheless I have. I want to hear often just what progress you are making, and I will do my best to help you. I might hire money or perhaps

get the loan of some without interest. Keep me informed as to your work. ¹ [89]

Later she again related her fundraising activities:

I called for means here for the work in the South, and it seemed almost like stealing; for they are trying to gather means to establish a Sanitarium somewhere near Los Angeles It was on Sunday afternoon that I made an appeal for your work. Ninety dollars were raised

I told the people just a little of what you are trying to do in Nashville. I told them I felt perfectly free to call

¹Ellen G. White, [Letter 62, 1901](#) (to James Edson White, June 26, 1901).

upon the trustees of the Lord's money to help in that needy field. I asked them to be God's helping hand by giving of their means to advance His work. I called upon believers and unbelievers to do something for Christ's sake. We may get something from this appeal

The Lord give you all courage to work on in the Southern field. I call upon you all to have faith in God. I am sorry, so sorry that you have to be delayed in your work. There is plenty of money in the hands of the Lord's stewards.²

She was not satisfied with the amount of interest displayed by the leaders of the church toward Edson White's work. When he faced the danger of having his work destroyed in 1898, she wrote:

I know that you are in a difficult and a most dangerous field, made thus because of the prejudice of the whites against the blacks, and because our brethren have not interested themselves personally in that field to decide how it should be worked. Our brethren do not yet have correct ideas, and they button up their coats over their hearts, hearts that should go out in sympathy and tenderness and encouragement to the laborers in that poor, destitute, neglected field

[90]

In the Southern field small churches are to be built. If they are burned, this act will stand as a witness against the men who oppose the work of God when the judgment shall sit and the books be opened, and every one judged according to the deeds written in the books.³

To the church leaders in Battle Creek and other places she had in 1895 appealed:

How much self-denial will our institutions manifest in binding about their imaginary wants? Will they

²Ellen G. White, [Letter 113, 1901](#) (to James Edson White, August 13, 1901).

³Ellen G. White, [Letter 136, 1898](#) (to J. E. White, August 14, 1898).

continue to spread themselves and obtain more and still more conveniences for their better accommodation, while the means to be expended for the down-trodden colored race is so little and meager? ...

Men of ability are willing to work for a meager sum, two or three dollars a week to sustain their families; they have souls as precious as those of the men who because of their selfishness and covetousness received thirty dollars a week. Will those who have an abundance put their hands into their pockets, and out of their plentiful supplies impart something to furnish their neighbors with facilities? Will they make provision to help men to do the work they can do for a few dollars a week? Most earnest work should have been done many years ago. There might have been an altogether different presentation from what we now see

We have been eating of the large loaf, and have left the suffering, distressed people of the Southern regions starving for education, starving for spiritual advantages. By your actions you have said, Am I my brother's keeper? ...

The colored people might have been helped with much better prospects of success years ago than now. The work is now tenfold harder than it would have been then. But who will continue to dishonor God by their indolence, by their neglect, by passing by on the other side?

Do not, I beseech you, look upon the hard field, groan a little, set two or three at work in one locality, a few in another, and provide them only enough for the bare necessities of life. Those who labor in the Southern field will have to stand amid the most discouraging, hopeless poverty. ⁴

[91]

She pointed to prejudice as the very reason why more had not been done in the past to help the Negro:

⁴Ellen G. White, [Letter 5, 1895](#) (to "My Brethren in Responsible Positions in America," July 24, 1895)

In the past, some attempts have been made to present the truth to the colored people, but those among the white people who claim to believe the truth have wanted to build a high partition between themselves and the colored race. We have one Saviour, who died for the black man as well as for the white. Those who possess the spirit of Christ will have pity and love for all who know not the precious Saviour. They will labor to the utmost of their ability to wipe away the reproach of ignorance from white and black alike

The colored people have been neglected because the vexed question of how to build a wall of distinction between the whites and the blacks has been in agitation. Some have thought it the best way to reach the white people first, for if we should labor for the colored people we could do nothing for the white population. This is not the right position to assume. Christ's followers are to learn all about the woes of the poor in their immediate vicinity and in their own country, be they white or black. The poor, friendless, untaught colored people need our assistance because they are ignorant and friendless. Those who have a dark, disagreeable life are the very ones whom we should bid to hope because Christ is their Saviour. God has jewels in the rough, and His true followers will find them. All who possess the spirit of Christ will have a tender, sympathetic heart, and an open, generous hand.

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Those who press close to the bleeding side of Christ will have the spirit of Christ, and a nature that will be quickly responsive to His call. They will work to relieve the necessities of suffering humanity, as Christ worked, while, before the world fallen, the worlds unfallen, and all the heavenly host, He was representing the ways and works of God. In the life of Christ we see what a Christian can do in relieving the distressed, binding up their physical and spiritual wants. ⁵

⁵Ibid

In a letter to Edson White, Ellen White also spoke of the moral obligations of Christians toward those who are educationally and economically deprived:

It was presented to me that God in His providence was measuring the temple and the worshippers therein. There are those who, in the providence of God, have been placed in positions where they have received many blessings. With self-denial and self-sacrifice these could do a good work, in imparting to the most needy and suffering ones, to those who have few blessings and but little encouragement. This is a work which God has laid upon every saint to do, and for the neglect of which they will be held accountable. The Lord marks the longing of many souls for privileges that they might become better informed and better clothed. The angels of the Lord are looking to see what testimony they can carry to the courts above of this suffering class. Oh, that those who have so many comforts of life would deny self, take up the cross, and follow Jesus.

Human beings in their suffering humanity are crying unto God, and their prayers are just as surely coming up before God as did the blood of Abel. Christ-like men will not employ their time in devising to profit self, and promote their own interest. God is not indifferent to the pressing need of white or black in any place, wherever they may be. Who is saying, “Be thou warmed, and be thou clothed and fed,” yet do nothing to relieve the situation? ⁶

In 1895 Ellen White’s interest in these matters led her to write a series of articles in the *Review and Herald* concerning the work in the South for Negroes. These were published in late 1895 and early 1896. ⁷ Later she even planned a book on the subject: [93]

I realize that the first thing I ought to do is to prepare matter for the books that should be brought out; but there

⁶Ellen G. White, [Letter 136, 1898](#) (to J. E. White and wife, August 14, 1898).

⁷These articles are reprinted in [The Southern Work, 19-65](#)

are other things that I must do. The attitude of some of my brethren in regard to the Southern field, and the reports that are being circulated—reports that I know to be untrue—make it necessary for me to take up this matter. I can no longer allow false impressions to be made, without saying what I know to be the truth. I shall publish in book form what I have written in regard to the work in the Southern field. I shall no longer handle this matter with the tips of my fingers. Our people shall have in book form the facts of the history of the work in the South. When this book is out, I shall know that I have done my part to undeceive minds. ⁸

The book was never carried through to its final form. The work later prepared by Spalding ⁹ was an attempt to fulfill Ellen White's desires in this line, but it was not finished until 1913, shortly before her death. Ellen White's age and the press of other duties probably delayed its publication, and when she died the matter was not carried further. Nevertheless, her repeated testimonies to denominational leaders urging greater interest and activity in evangelism and education for Negroes were many during the period from 1891 until her death.

It could be argued, of course, that her interest in this work was the interest of a mother in her son, not a concern for the advancement of the Negro race. But she not only promoted her son's work; there are on file her letters to others, such as J. S. Washburn, concerning the work among Negroes.

⁸Ellen G. White, [Letter 206, 1902](#) (to W. C. White, December 13, 1902).

⁹Spalding, "Lights and Shades in the Black Belt."

Why Did We Choose Nashville?

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As a background for the statements of Ellen White, Nashville, Tennessee, has significance beyond the historical incidents that took place there. Indeed, perhaps the major significance of Nashville lies in the reasons why it was chosen as a center for Adventist work in the South. In mid-1895, the year in which Edson White went into Mississippi to work among the colored people, the church had no organized work in that State—the last Southern State that had no regular workers. In the whole South the denominational work consisted of two conferences and several missions with 1,072 members, most of whom were in Florida, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

As White and his associates developed a going work among the colored people some sort of organization became essential. In 1895 they organized the Southern Missionary Society, which was recognized by the General Conference. The headquarters were quite naturally at Yazoo City, Mississippi. Then when Edson and Emma

White found it necessary for health reasons to return to Michigan, the work of the society was for a short time managed from Battle Creek. In 1900 White began to plan another move. To his mother, in Australia, he wrote:

[96]

My mind is now directed to Nashville, Tenn. This is midway between the North and the South, and it is in a high, hilly region that is very healthful, and not malarious There are between 40,000 and 50,000 colored people in that city, and I feel that I can attend to the general interests of the work that I am attending to here, as well, and yet be where I can be engaged actively in the work of the ministry, and build up a work in that city as we have done in smaller places in the South. There is not the prejudice against such work there that there is further South, and then, in a large city, there is

not such attention given to our work by outsiders that there is in small places like Yazoo City. ¹

On February 16, 1900, he wrote in much the same vein, stressing the advantages of a larger city where prejudice against work for Negroes would not be so prominent. That the Spirit of God was leading in a move in this direction was clear to Ellen White, and what she said in an address to the General Conference session of 1903 spoke eloquently of her interest in the work among the Negroes. She mentioned that many had asked why Nashville had been selected as a center for the Seventh-day Adventist work in the South. She said that the Lord had directed such a move, that it was a good place for carrying forward the publishing work, and that—

[97]

There is not in Nashville the bitter opposition to the work for the uplifting of the downtrodden colored race that exists in many other cities of the South. Much work is being done there to uplift the colored people, and the sentiment in favor of these efforts will be a security to our people in their work.

There are in Nashville large educational institutions for the colored people. In these institutions much excellent work has been done and is being done. The teachers and students in these institutions are to be given the privilege of hearing the message of present truth. It is for this reason that God directed that different interests for the advancement of our work should be established in Nashville. ²

Later, in a letter to the officers of the General Conference, she repeated this sentiment about the educational institutions for Negroes in Nashville:

One of the strong reasons presented to me why our office of publication should be established at Nashville,

¹J. E. White, Letter to Ellen G. White, January 6, 1900

²Ellen G. White, "The Southern Work," General Conference Bulletin, V (April 14, 1903), p.202

was that through our publications the light of truth might shine to the teachers and students in these institutions. I expected long ago to hear that this work had been undertaken.

Recently light again came to me instructing me that decided efforts should be made in an honorable way to get into the ranks of the students in these schools, and by gaining the confidence of the white teachers, get permission to give them talks on missionary subjects. It was because of the existence of these large institutions of education in Nashville that I was shown that this city was the most favorable place in which to open up our work in the Southern field. There has been a sad failure to take advantage of circumstances.³

Nashville was the location of Fisk University, a leading Negro institution, and other Negro colleges. Ellen White was pleased when she heard that J. S. Washburn, an Adventist worker in Nashville, had in 1907 visited the Negro colleges there: [98]

I have just received and read your letter, in which you tell me about your visits to the colleges in Nashville. I am so glad that you are beginning to understand why our work should be located in Nashville. A wide interest should be manifested for the colored people

Should you follow the course that has been pursued in the past toward the colored people, you would not fulfill your duty. The Lord calls for missionary work to be done. Those who make the South their field of labor are not to perpetuate the prejudice that has existed in the past against the colored people. They are not to pass them by with little or no attention. The teachers of the truth are to labor for this neglected race, and by their efforts win the respect, not only of the colored people, but of the workers in other denominations. May the Lord bless you in this work is my earnest prayer

³Ellen G. White, [Letter 228, 1907](#) (to “Officers of the General Conference,” June 14, 1907).

I hope you will follow up the work begun in Nashville, for there is much to be done for all classes in that city. Do not forget that there is an important work to be done in the schools for the colored people in that city. Give special attention to the colleges established there. Much labor has been expended in educational lines of work by other denominations.

We must not treat the colored people as though God had no message for them. Become acquainted with the teachers. Encourage them in their work, and take a part with them in their labors when this is possible. The gospel in its simplicity is to be presented to this people. If you will labor in the spirit of Christ, conversions to the truth will be the result of this work. ⁴

[99] Almost a year later, in another letter to Washburn, Ellen White insisted again that this work among the students of these Negro schools be carried on. Next she said:

I have repeatedly stated that one of the reasons that we were led to select Nashville as a suitable center for our work in the South was because of the location of the large schools there for the colored people This was clearly presented to me when we first entered the city of Nashville.

Some of those in the Madison school should keep always the object in view of learning the best methods of educating the colored people. ⁵

She had been disappointed that more had not earlier been done along these lines. In a stirring letter to the white church in Nashville she had written in 1905:

Will our brethren and sisters in Nashville consider that they are being tested and tried? Some who have neglected to do the work that should have been done

⁴Ellen G. White, [Letter 154, 1907](#) (to J. S. Washburn, April 17, 1907).

⁵Ellen G. White, [Letter 48a, 1908](#) (to J. S. Washburn, February 4 1908).

long ago, are in heaven accounted as unfaithful stewards. A more decided interest should be manifested in the work of helping the colored people. If in the future we are to do nothing more for the colored people than we have done in the past, let us lay aside all pretence that we have entered Nashville for the purpose of helping them. If the interest we have taken in helping those who are laboring in the South is to have no better results, we had better turn our attention to the opening of the work in new fields, until the converting power of God comes upon the church in Nashville, and barriers are removed. The Lord is not pleased with the present showing. Let there now be a reformation, and the Lord will work with those who are willing to cooperate with Him. ⁶

But in spite of the fact that Nashville was more favorable for work among Negroes, Edson White found there that the situation [100] was still not sufficiently liberal to allow integrated facilities.

The *Gospel Herald* for January, 1901, issued in Nashville, reflects the same conditions we have noted before. For this issue of his paper Edson White penned an editorial titled “Labor for the Two Races,” in which he observed that “the Southern Missionary Society has been quite severely scored for conducting school and other work for white and colored people of the South by themselves and on separate lines.” ⁷

White set about to defend the organization for its method of operation. He asserted that the method was in harmony with the “instruction received from the Lord, as we understand it.” ⁸ Then he added:

We have done this because it is *the* only way we can *work*. We tried working for both races together and our lives were threatened. We *preferred to live* and work in *such lines* as we *could* than to force the issue and *be cut*

⁶Ellen G. White, [Letter 119, 1905](#) (to “Members of the Nashville Church,” April 14, 1905)

⁷J. E. White, “Labor for the Two Races” *Gospel Herald*, III (January, 1901), p. 4

⁸*Ibid*

off from the work. ⁹ [Emphasis on “preferred to live” supplied.]

White admitted that he had been referred to schools in Tennessee where bi-racial education took place, but he asserted that it had only been after years of battling that these schools were able to operate in peace, and that “time is too short and the work is too great for Adventists to enter such a season of strife.” He also mentioned that the peculiar doctrines of Seventh-day Adventists made it even harder for them than for other groups to do such things.

[101] But he had still further arguments in his favor. He pointed out that the bi-racial schools were threatened by new danger, and quoted a recent issue of the *Nashville American*, which announced that a bill had been introduced in the State senate to forbid racially integrated education on all levels. White added: “How long before such enactments will extend to church attendance and membership no one can forecast.” ¹⁰ This statement reflects again Edson White’s observation that race tension and hatred were on the increase. He said:

During the six years of our labor in this field we have seen race prejudice and hatred spread and deepen. Work we could do at first we cannot do now. Disfranchisement in some States, mob violence, educational enactments like the above, undertaken in Tennessee and Florida, all indicate that some present methods of work will not be possible much longer. ¹¹

Even before he could get his editorial printed, he spied a fresh news item in the *Nashville Banner* of January 21, 1901. It said:

The bill introduced in the Senate Saturday by Senator Walter Peak of Chattanooga prohibiting the employment of White teachers in schools, colleges, and universities where colored pupils are taught, is a measure of great importance and involves large and varied interests. ¹²

⁹Ibid

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹Ibid

¹²Ibid

Edson White asked:

My brethren, can you see the trend of these events?
How shall we relate ourselves to the work in the light of
such sentiments which may soon be crystallized into the
law of the land? Shall we be reckless and inconsiderate,
or shall we heed the warnings which have been given?
¹³

Then, in a separate item clearly inserted at the last moment, he added even one more bit of evidence:

Still later, and just before going to press, the papers
announced another bill presented, which is to compel
street car companies to put on *special street cars for
the colored people*. Now the races ride in the same car.
What next? ¹⁴

[102]

It is interesting here to note that Edson White's defense in his day for racially separate schools substantiates a major contention of this book—that Ellen White's statements concerning racial separation were given at a time when the trend of the whole country, by force of law, opinion, and violence, was toward racial separation.

We turn now to another city that provides background against which we may well study Ellen White's counsel. As has been shown, much of the material in the section of volume 9 studied here was drawn from writings of Ellen White penned six or eight years preceding the time of their publication in 1909. However, we have found nothing prior to 1908 that specifically instructed that there should be separate churches and church services for the two races. Adventist churches, at least in the South, were probably segregated from the first, but churches in Denver, Colorado; St. Louis, Missouri; and in Washington, D.C., were at first integrated.

When Ellen White visited Washington, D.C., in 1904, one church was integrated, others were not. There was some tension evident, but there is no evidence that she advised any change in the situation. She wrote to Mrs. M. J. Nelson on April 28:

¹³Ibid

¹⁴Ibid

[103]

Yesterday I had a visit from Elder Sheafe, who has charge of the church here in which both white and colored people assemble. He came to ask me to speak in this church next Sabbath. He will invite the members of the colored church to be present. Some little difficulty in regard to the color line exists here, but we hope that by the grace of God things will be kept in peace. Under the labors of Elder Sheafe, many colored people in this city have accepted the truth. Sixteen were baptized the Sabbath before last, and seven last Sabbath. I was only too glad to promise that I would speak in the church next Sabbath. ¹⁵

The situation was seen as potentially explosive and Ellen White prayed for peace, but did not ask for changes in the integrated church. A few days later, she wrote to Edson, saying:

But I am free to say that the Lord does not call upon me to take upon myself the burden of doing pioneer work in a place where there have been Sabbathkeepers for years, and where there are two classes of believers, white and colored. We had some experiences at St. Louis that I can never think of without a feeling of dread. ¹⁶

Four years later, while she was preparing manuscripts for volume 9, Ellen White wrote a letter addressed to “Our Churches in Washington, D.C.,” which said:

There is a work to be done both for the white and the colored people in Washington, and in the neighboring States. Many obstacles will arise to retard this work. Inconsiderate or premature movements would bring no real satisfaction, and would make it far more difficult to carry forward any line of work for the colored people. The work in behalf of this people has been sadly

¹⁵Ellen G. White, [Letter 157, 1904](#) (to Mrs. M. J. Nelson April 28, 1904).

¹⁶Ellen G. White [Letter 105, 1904](#) (to J. E. White, March 1, 1904)

neglected, and the powers of darkness are prepared to work with intensity of effort against those who take up this work. From the light given me, I know that every injudicious movement made in or about Washington, or in other parts of the Southern field, to encourage the sentiment that the white and the colored people are to associate together in social equality, will mean more in retarding our work than any human mind can comprehend.

[104]

There is too much at stake for human judgment to be followed in this matter. If the Conference should say that no difference is to be recognized and no separation is to be made in church relationship between the white people and the colored people, our work with both races would be greatly hindered. If it should be recommended and generally practiced in all our Washington churches, that white and black believers assemble in the same house of worship, and be seated promiscuously in the building, many evils would be the result. Many would say that this should not be, and must not be.

But who will press the question of entire exclusion? Both white and colored people have the same Creator, and are saved by the redeeming grace of the same Saviour. Christ gave His life for all. He says to all, "Ye are bought with a price." God has marked out no color line, and men should move very guardedly, lest we offend God. The Lord has not made two heavens, one for white people and one for colored people. There is but one heaven for the saved. ¹⁷

It would seem that the situation in Washington, like that in the whole nation, had deteriorated between 1904 and 1908 to the point where this counsel was called for.

But regardless of what happened in Washington between 1904 and 1908, the significance of [Letter 304, 1908](#) from which we have just quoted can hardly be overestimated. It was written on the very

¹⁷Ellen G. White, [Letter 904, 1908](#) (to "Our Churches in Washington. D.C.," October 19, 1908).

day that Ellen White prepared the article “Proclaiming the Truth Where There Is Race Antagonism” for volume 9. In that article, she said:

[105] In regard to white and colored people worshipping in the same building, this cannot be followed as a general custom with profit to either party—especially in the South. The best thing will be to provide the colored people who accept the truth, with places of worship of their own, in which they can carry on their services by themselves. ¹⁸

This separation called for, was to be carried out “in order that the progress of the truth may be advanced,” and arrangements for separate facilities were not to be made “because they are black.” The plan was to be followed “until the Lord shows us a better way.” ¹⁹

A few reflections as to the racial situation in Washington, D.C., at this time are gained from Crisler’s scrapbooks.

First of all, it should be noted that Washington was recognized as a “Southern” city. When the *Atlanta Georgian* of April 15, 1909, listed the population, Negro and Caucasian, of the “South,” the District of Columbia was included. ²⁰ Washington has generally been considered a “Southern city.”

The District of Columbia was subjected to the same segregationist trend that was being experienced in the rest of the country. An article in the *New York Age* observed—April 4, 1907—that the “District of Columbia separates the races in its public schools” ²¹

[106] Actually, the District did not have laws requiring “Jim Crow” cars, but Maryland and Virginia laws requiring such cars meant that in fact the cars that came in and out of the District were segregated. ²² Negroes of the District were angered when they discovered that Maryland and Virginia law effectively segregated them. There were

¹⁸Testimonies for the Church 9:206

¹⁹Testimonies for the Church 9:208

²⁰Atlanta Georgia, April 15 1909, Sc. 4, p. 1

²¹*Ibid.* April 4, 1907 Sc. 2 p. 1.

²²Washington Post, July 21, 1904, Sc. 1, p. 11; New York Age, August 22, 1907, Sc. 2, p. 29.

several suits over the matter, with no apparent success. One Negro journalist gave a graphic description of the situation:

Gradually the dragon of Jim Crowism has been coiling itself about the National Capital making it impossible for the Afro-American citizens residing here to travel beyond the limits of the District of Columbia without having their manhood and womanhood, their consciousness of citizenship rights and their self-respect insulted, degraded, and outraged by its poisonous venom. ²³

Remember also that the Federal office buildings were beginning to be segregated about this time. So, again, the church was faced with a situation where every trend was toward segregation, and where “the powers of darkness” were “prepared to work with intensity of effort” against those who take up the work for the Negro people. In the letter to the Washington churches she mentions that “inconsiderate or premature movements” would make it far more difficult “to carry forward any line of work for the colored people.” Perhaps it is unfortunate that this consideration was not mentioned in volume 9 along with the statement that this was “particularly necessary in the South in order that the work for the white people may be carried on without serious hindrance.” ²⁴

²³New York Age, August 22, 1907, Sc. 2, p. 29

²⁴Testimonies for the Church 9:206

[107]

Ellen White on Racial Equality

[108]

That Ellen White held to no latent doctrine of inherent inferiority for the Negro is supported by the fact that she explained the apparent or real deficiencies of the Negroes of her time as the result of slavery and subsequent oppression. Writing to Edson White and his wife, Emma, shortly after they had begun their labors among the Negroes in Mississippi, she said:

My children, you will meet with deplorable ignorance. Why? Because the souls that were kept in bondage were taught to do exactly the will of those who call them their property, and held them as slaves. They were kept in ignorance, and were untaught. Thousands of them do not know how to read They are taught that they must not think or judge for themselves, but their ministers must judge for them

[109]

This is a favorable field for the working of seducing spirits, and they will have success, because of the ignorance of the human minds so long trammled and abused as their bodies have been. The whole system of slavery was originated by Satan, the tyrant over human beings whenever the opportunity offers for him to oppress. Whenever he can get the chance he ruins. Now there are those who are intelligent. Many have had no chance who might have manifested decided ability if they had been blessed with opportunities such as their more favored brethren, the white people, have had. ¹

The important point here is that she explains the condition of ignorance as a result of slavery and lack of opportunity, not as an inherent racial defect. Ellen White's denunciations of slavery are as passionate and thorough going as anything she ever penned:

¹Ellen G. White, [Letter 80a, 1895](#) (to J. E. White, August 16, 1895).

One finite human being compelling another to do his will, claiming to be mind and judgment for another, and this sentiment, that has Satan for its originator, has presented a history, terrible, horrible in oppression, tortures and bloodshed.

Man is God's property by creation and redemption, but man has been demanding the right to compel the consciences of men. Prejudices, passions, satanic attributes, have revealed themselves in men as they have exercised their powers against their fellow men.

All is written, all, every injustice, every harm, every fraudulent action, every pang of anguish caused in physical suffering, is written in the books of heaven as done to Jesus Christ, who has purchased man at an infinite price, even His own life. All who treat His property with cruelty; are charged with doing it to Jesus Christ in the person of His heritage, who are His by all the claims of creation and redemption. And while we are seeking to help the very ones who need help, we are registered as doing the same to Christ.

A correct knowledge of the Scripture would make men fear and tremble for their future, for every work will be brought into review before God, and they will receive their punishment according as their works have been. God will give to the faithful and true, patience under trial. ²

[110]

One never finds Ellen White giving support to the myth that there was such a thing as a "contented" slave, or that the Southern white man was the Negro's "best friend." Even in 1895, her picture of the treatment received by Negroes is not a pleasant one:

Here are your neighbors, poor, beaten, oppressed; thousands of human beings suffering for the want of educational advantages; many, so many, who need to hear the gospel preached in its purity This neglected field has been presented before me in its sinfulness and

²Ibid

degradation because of the treatment received from the whites.³

Perhaps her clearest statement of “equality” was made the next year, in 1896, when she described the Negroes as “men standing in God’s broad sunlight with mind and soul like other men, with as goodly a frame as has the best developed white man.”⁴ In this same letter she spoke of the crippling effects of racial prejudice, saying that “lives are embittered by the prejudice against them, being stigmatized as unworthy to associate with the whites, even in the worship of God.”⁵

She speaks of the fact that “there are keenly sensitive minds that brood long and intensely over the oppressions suffered, and the slights they are made to feel,” and she asserts that “even commiseration is humiliating, because it calls the sensitive mind to the misfortune that excites pity.”⁶

[111] Ellen White asks in this context: “Cannot the children of God see that in conceding to the prejudice against the color of race, they are giving their influence to sanction a long course of neglect, of insult, of oppression? Will not the Lord call those to account who have had a part in this work?”⁷

She clearly enunciated the principle that all men are equal, and called on all Christians to adhere to this principle regardless of the consequences:

No matter what the gain or the loss, we must act nobly and courageously in the sight of God and our Saviour. Let us as Christians who accept the principle that all men, white and black, are free and equal, adhere to this principle, and not be cowards in the face of the world, and in the face of the heavenly intelligences. We should treat the colored man just as respectfully as we

³Ellen G. White, [Letter 5, 1895](#) (to “My Brethren in Responsible Positions in America,” July 24, 1895)

⁴Ellen G. White, [Manuscript 7, 1896](#) (“The Colored People”)

⁵Ibid

⁶Ibid

⁷Ibid

would treat the white man. And we can now, by precept and example, win others to this course.⁸

She condemned racial prejudice as a moral evil. And she said: “Those white people who appreciate the ministry of Christ in their behalf, cannot cherish prejudice against their colored brethren.”⁹

In speaking of the South as a “difficult” field, she did not suggest that this was so because of any inherent inferiority of the Negro, but “because of the white people who have the slave master’s spirit, with the slave master’s cruelty in exercising the same, as if the blacks were no more than beasts; and to be treated worse than the dumb animals because they are in the form of man, having the marks of the black—Negro—race.”¹⁰

In the letter to Frank Belden already mentioned, she refers to the “degrading habits taught them by the ...whites,” and in the same letter, in what might be her only direct allusion to lynching, she says:

[112]

The colored people have had before them the example of commonness and adultery. These evils are all through our world, but when the poor, wretched, ignorant race, who know scarcely anything of purity and righteousness, do commit sin—sin that committed by white people is scarcely condemned—colored people are tortured to death whether proved guilty or not. And the nation that permits this bears the name of Christian. God says, “Shall I not judge for these things?”¹¹

The evidence which thus far has come to light tends to indicate that Ellen White believed that, inherently, the Negro was fully and totally equal to the Caucasian, and that the differences she may have observed were the result of environmental influences, and where these differences reflected backwardness, she laid the blame, not on the Negro, but on his white oppressors.

The question is often asked, What would Ellen White have written had she been writing to the American of today, where the

⁸Ibid

⁹Ellen G. White, [Manuscript 107, 1908](#) (“The Color Line”).

¹⁰Ellen G. White, [Letter 223, 1899](#) (to J.E. White, June 22 1899).

¹¹Ellen G. White, [Letter 165, 1899](#) (to F.E. Belden October 22 1899).

[113]

trend of the nation, through its courts and government, and in the opinions of many of its people, is quite different from what it was in the first decade of this century? This, of course, is a question that can never be answered with certainty. As in 1908 she called for the acceptance of segregated churches, she hastened to pen the words “until the Lord shows us a better way.” But any reliable projection of what she might say today must be grounded in a thorough and balanced understanding of what she said in her day, and what the conditions were and what it meant to the people to whom it was first directed.

That understanding must take notice, when considering the subject under discussion here, of a letter written in 1900 to a worker in South Africa, another country with acute racial problems:

In regard to the question of caste and color, nothing would be gained by making a decided distinction, but the Spirit of God would be grieved. We are all supposed to be preparing for the same heaven. We have the same heavenly Father and the same Redeemer, who loved us and gave Himself for us all, without any distinction. We are nearing the close of this earth’s history, and it does not become any child of God to have a proud, haughty heart and turn from any soul who loves God, or to cease to labor for any soul for whom Christ has died. When the love of Christ is cherished in the heart as it should be, when the sweet, subduing spirit of the love of God fills the soul-temple, there will be no caste, no pride of nationality; no difference will be made because of the color of the skin. Each one will help the one who needs tender regard and consolation, of whatever nationality he may be.

Ask yourselves if Christ would make any difference. In assembling His people would He say, Here brother, or, Here sister, your nationality is not Jewish; you are of a different class. Would He say, Those who are dark-skinned may file into the back seats; those of a lighter skin may come up to the front seats?

In one place the proposition was made that a curtain be drawn between the colored people and the white people. I asked, Would Jesus do that? This grieves the heart of Christ. The color of the skin is no criterion as to the value of the soul. By the mighty cleaver of truth we have all been quarried out from the world. God has taken us, all classes, all nations, all languages, all nationalities, and brought us into His workshop, to be prepared for His temple. ¹²

[114]

¹²Ellen G. White, [Letter 26, 1900](#) (to W. S. Hyatt, February 15, 1900).

Conclusions

It has been reliably reported that in 1958 a white Seventh-day Adventist church in California took action by which a young physician was refused membership because he was a Negro. This local church action referred to a “long standing policy of the denomination, following the counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy, to maintain separate churches for the colored and the white members wherever possible.”¹ This church actually felt that it was following the counsel of God in excluding the black physician from membership.

The action went on to quote a statement from volume 9, page 215:

If you see that by doing certain things which you have a perfect right to do, you hinder the advancement of God’s work, refrain from doing those things. Do nothing that will close the minds of others against the truth. There is a world to save, and we shall gain nothing by cutting loose from those we are trying to help. All things may be lawful, but all things are not expedient.

[116] It is hoped that this book makes clear that such action involves misunderstandings of the writings of Ellen G. White. First of all, even in volume 9, Ellen White does not say that separate churches are to be the plan “where possible.” This would imply that she favored separate churches unless they were impossible. Rather she said that separate churches were to be maintained “where demanded by custom or where greater efficiency is to be gained.”² This would imply quite the opposite—that she favored separate facilities only where it was impossible to have integrated churches. But aside from this, the statement quoted in the above action was first offered in the

¹W. S. Lee, “Integration and the Regional Department,” General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Regional Department, mimeographed, p. 4

²[Testimonies for the Church 9:208](#)

report of the interview at Armsdale campground in Australia which, as has been pointed out before, dealt primarily with the question of whether Negroes should be instructed to labor on Sunday in the South.³ It was embodied in 1908 by Mrs. White as part of materials she was preparing for volume 9.

Probably the most important conclusion is that “those we are trying to help,” of whom Ellen White speaks in *The Southern Work*, and also in volume 9, were black people. Although she did speak of the necessity of caution in order that the work among white people might not be hindered, an equally important reason for her statements regarding the separation of the races, the color line, and “social equality,” was to protect Adventist work among Negroes. These statements were given at a time when agitation over the color line would have been met by violence and bloodshed in many places in the South, and where such action would have closed up Adventist work among Negroes, because of the prejudice of whites. [117]

When this historical background is forgotten, only the statements concerning the effects of integrated facilities on the effort to reach white people are noticed, but this was not the only, or even the most important, reason for Ellen White’s counsel concerning separate facilities.

Ellen White believed, basically, in the essential equality of the Negro and the Caucasian. Her counsels regarding separate church services were given, not on the basis of any belief in a “natural law” forbidding such contact or on the basis of a belief in the supposed inherent inferiority of the Negro, but because of conditions in a country mired in the depths of its deepest pit of racism.

The apparent inconsistency between her early statements, that white people had no license to exclude Negroes from their places of worship, and her 1908 statements that separate provisions be made can be explained then only by the rise of racial tensions and segregation during the intervening years, and by Ellen White’s conviction that extreme caution must be exercised in order to prevent the closing of the Negro work entirely in the South. She hoped that

³For the statement quoted in the action, see [The Southern Work](#), 70, 71, and [Testimonies for the Church](#) 9:215.

it would be only a matter of time until the Lord “shows us a better way.”

[118] The beauty of her position is that even though she observed the country moving more and more toward segregation and subordination of the Negro, she still refused to lay down a definite line to be followed in every place for all time, and made clear that her counsel concerning separate facilities was a temporary expedient. That expedience was necessitated by the force of law and the threat of violence, loss of life among Negroes, and the abrogation of the opportunity to work among all classes of mankind for whom Christ, the Prince of heaven, gave His life.

Appendix—Ellen G. White on Race Relations

[119]

Christ recognized no distinction of nationality or rank or creed Christ came to break down every wall of partition. He came to show that His gift of mercy and love is as unconfined as the air, the light, or the showers of rain that refresh the earth.

The life of Christ established a religion in which there is no caste, a religion by which Jew and Gentile, free and bond, are linked in a common brotherhood, equal before God. No question of policy influenced His movements. He made no difference between neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies. That which appealed to His heart was a soul thirsting for the waters of life

He sought to inspire with hope the roughest and most unpromising, setting before them the assurance that they might become blameless and harmless, attaining such a character as would make them manifest as the children of God.—[The Ministry of Healing, 25, 26.](#)

One Brotherhood

Christ came to this earth with a message of mercy and forgiveness. He laid the foundation for a religion by which Jew and Gentile, black and white, free and bond, are linked together in one common brotherhood, recognized as equal in the sight of God. The Saviour has a boundless love for every human being. In each one He sees capacity for improvement. With divine energy and hope He greets those for whom He has given His life. In His strength they can live a life rich in good works, filled with the power of the Spirit.—[Testimonies for the Church 7:225.](#)

[120]

One Family by Creation and Redemption

No distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption. Christ

came to demolish every wall of partition, to throw open every compartment of the temple, that every soul may have free access to God In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. All are brought nigh by His precious blood.—[Christ's Object Lessons, 386](#).

The Lord has looked with sadness upon that most pitiful of all sights, the colored race in slavery. He desires us, in our work for them, to remember their providential deliverance from slavery, their common relationship to us by creation and by redemption, and their right to the blessings of freedom.—[Testimonies for the Church 7:223](#).

No Caste or Color in Bible Religion

The religion of the Bible recognizes no caste or color. It ignores rank, wealth, worldly honor. God estimates men as men. With him, character decides their worth. And we are to recognize the Spirit of Christ in whomsoever it is revealed. [Testimonies for the Church 9:223](#).

Thus Christ sought to teach the disciples the truth that in God's kingdom there are no territorial lines, no caste, no aristocracy; that they must go to all nations, bearing to them the message of a Saviour's love.—[The Acts of the Apostles, 20](#).

Impartial Love Melts Prejudice

[121] The walls of sectarianism and caste and race will fall down when the true missionary spirit enters the hearts of men. Prejudice is melted away by the love of God.—[The Review and Herald, January 21, 1896](#); [The Southern Work, p. 55, 1966 ed.](#)

Walls of separation have been built up between the whites and the blacks. These walls of prejudice will tumble down of themselves as did the walls of Jericho, when Christians obey the Word of God, which enjoins on them supreme love to their Maker and impartial love to their neighbors.—[The Review and Herald, December 17, 1895](#); Republished in [The Southern Work, 43, 1966 ed.](#)

When the Holy Spirit is poured out, there will be a triumph of humanity over prejudice in seeking the salvation of the souls of human beings. God will control minds. Human hearts will love as Christ loved. And the color line will be regarded by many

very differently from the way in which it is now regarded. To love as Christ loves, lifts the mind into a pure, heavenly, unselfish atmosphere.—[Testimonies for the Church 9:209](#).

Approach God as One Brotherhood

When the Holy Spirit moves upon human minds, all petty complaints and accusations between man and his fellow man will be put away. The bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness will shine into the chambers of the mind and heart. In our worship of God there will be no distinction between rich and poor, white and black. All prejudice will be melted away. When we approach God, it will be as one brotherhood. We are pilgrims and strangers, bound for a better country, even a heavenly. There all pride, all accusation, all self-deception, will forever have an end. Every mask will be laid aside, and we shall “see him as he is.” There our songs will catch the inspiring theme, and praise and thanksgiving will go up to God.—[The Review and Herald, October 24, 1899](#), p. 677.

Excerpts from the Appeal of March 20, 1891

The Lord Jesus came to our world to save men and women of all nationalities. He died just as much for the colored people as for the white race. Jesus came to shed light over the whole world. At the beginning of His ministry He declared His mission: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” ...

[122]

“Who,” says Paul, “maketh thee to differ?” The God of the white man is the God of the black man, and the Lord declares that His love for the least of His children exceeds that of a mother for her beloved child

The Lord’s eye is upon all His creatures; He loves them all, and makes no difference between white and black, except that He has a special, tender pity for those who are called to bear a greater burden than others. Those who love God and believe on Christ as their

Redeemer, while they must meet the trials and the difficulties that lie in their path, should yet with a cheerful spirit accept their life as it is, considering that God above regards these things, and for all that the world neglects to bestow, He will Himself make up to them in the best of favors

When the sinner is converted he receives the Holy Spirit, that makes him a child of God, and fits him for the society of the redeemed and the angelic host. He is made a joint heir with Christ. Whoever of the human family give themselves to Christ, whoever hear the truth and obey it, become children of one family. The ignorant and the wise, the rich and the poor, the heathen and the slave, white or black Jesus paid the purchase money for their souls. If they believe on Him, His cleansing blood is applied to them. The black man's name is written in the book of life beside the white man's. All are one in Christ. Birth, station, nationality, or color cannot elevate or degrade men. The character makes the man. If a red man, a Chinese, or an African gives his heart to God, in obedience and faith, Jesus loves him none the less for his color. He calls him His well-beloved brother

[123] Men may have both hereditary and cultivated prejudices, but when the love of Jesus fills the heart, and they become one with Christ, they will have the same spirit that He had. If a colored brother sits by their side, they will not be offended or despise him. They are journeying to the same heaven, and will be seated at the same table to eat bread in the kingdom of God. If Jesus is abiding in our hearts we cannot despise the colored man who has the same Saviour abiding in his heart.—[Manuscript 6, 1891](#). Published in [The Southern Work, 9-14](#), 1966 ed.