



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: A
ARTS & HUMANITIES - PSYCHOLOGY
Volume 15 Issue 9 Version 1.0 Year 2015
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Emancipation Proclamation for Blacks in the USA: Hypocrisy of the Promises

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GJHSS-A Classification : FOR Code: 130205



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



Emancipation Proclamation for Blacks in the USA: Hypocrisy of the Promises

Didier Kombieni

Abstract- After centuries of forced presence on the American soil as slaves, Blacks finally got hope: President Abraham Lincoln imposed blacks' emancipation to America, to the cost of a civil war that shook the Union. So much determination and effort in the American civil war would hardly have become tricky, unless the idea behind as well as the promise itself are full of hypocrisy. Long after they were said to be emancipated, the ex-slaves' condition in America has been a harder experience, since the African Americans have rather paradoxically moved from domination and exploitation to discrimination and persecution.

Keywords: *emancipation – african americans - paradox – hypocrisy – persecution.*

Résumé - Des siècles après leur présence involontaire sur le sol américain en qualité d'esclaves, les Noirs ont finalement reçu un espoir : le Président Abraham Lincoln a imposé l'émancipation des Noirs au peuple américain, au prix d'une guerre civile qui a failli faire éclater la fédération. Avec tant de détermination et d'efforts, il apparaît inimaginable que l'idée derrière une telle promesse de libération soit simplement truquée, et pleine d'hypocrisie. Les Noirs Américains se rendront donc à l'évidence que leur situation étaient plutôt pire, passant d'une étape de domination à celle de persécution.

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I. INTRODUCTION

No inquiry into the American historical process will be complete unless it gives a great consideration to the part played by the blacks from the development of the colonies to the emergence of the country as the today super power, or at least through their actual presence in that country. But talking about blacks in America, the thing that crosses the mind is first slavery: that scourge “which ate into the fabric of the American society”[1]

But the relations that whites Americans had with those blacks, from their condition of slaves to their early status of free blacks have been marked by contradictory apprehension of promises and democratic principles. These include blacks participation in the American independence, the white Americans' creed for claiming that independence from Great Britain, the right for every humans to life liberty and the pursue of happiness as latter expressed in the preamble to the American Constitution. But the most

striking betrayal came with the supposed emancipation gift, which very soon proved a false promise, since the condition of the blacks now turned from exploitation into persecution.

One of the manifestations of that hypocrisy from the whites was the emergence of geographic apartheid to which the black community was forced to for so long and which prevented them from enjoying the fruits and benefits of their being emancipated. Going along with the geographic apartheid, the supposed emancipated blacks in America would also have to face specific state regulations on the blacks' case, called “Black Codes” and the atrocious acts of a secrete organization, the Klans, who acted for years with an unsaid benediction of the Federal Government.

II. THE FALSE FOUNDATION OF SLAVERY IN AMERICA

a) *The slave trade: an unjustifiable practice*

There was for whites a clearly no foundation for justifying the practice of slavery; and considering the condition of slaves, it is all the same evident that they deserved no rights from the point of view of the whites. Whites in America viewed slaves only as a distinct class of persons, whose rights, if indeed they possessed any, were unconstitutionally reduced to a much narrower compass, than those, of which any 'human' could possess. Whites bought their precious goods, slaves, some from black leaders. Trading with those black leaders would imply that the latter are at least humans. Here, there are a lot of paradoxes: are human beings goods to be traded? How can it be imaginable that a human being decides to buy another human being? Apart from being born from human beings, should there be any other condition to be a human being? However, it has been astonishing that some special criteria have been shaped on purpose to justify the practice of slavery. For the whites, to be a human being means to possess the following three primary Civil rights:

- the right of personal security: a slave could not claim any; being less than a human being, whom could a slave be preserved from? Thinking of personal security for a slave would be like thinking of personal security for an animal. Besides, if every white American adult had the right of possessing a gun, it was among other things to prevent possible attack from the slaves. So, the slaves themselves

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appeared as threats to the whites' personal security.

- the right of personal liberty: being a slave already implies being deprived of personal liberty
- the right of private property: the slaves were private properties to their masters and as such it was not imaginable that they could have any right of private property. Under their bondage status, even if they happened to possess a single thing, this is automatically a possession of their masters who could exercise all authority on that. "The property of the slave", says Hargrave, "also is absolutely the property of his master, the slave himself being the subject of property, and as such saleable, or transmissible at the will of his master"[2]; One of the best illustrations for that was the fact that children of slaves were automatically slaves of their parents' (the mother in particular) owners. This way of acquiring slaves free of charge is so beneficial that white slave owners would never prevent love affairs among their slaves, and even between a female slave of theirs' and a neighbor's male slave, unless this poses a menace to their personal security. Worse, the slave owner had the right to scatter slaves' families, selling the man, but children in particular, as punishment for misconduct of a member of the slave family.

The person of the slave being at the absolute disposal of his master, property for the slave was then nothing but what he was incapable in that state, either of acquiring or holding, in his own use. Hence it will appear how perfectly irreconcilable a state of slavery is to the principles of a democracy, which form the basis and foundation of the American government. The bill of rights to the American Constitution declares that "all men are by nature *equally free* and independent, and have certain rights of which they cannot deprive or divest their posterity, namely, the enjoyment of *life and liberty*, with the means of acquiring and possessing property"[3] This is indeed no more than recognition of the first principles of the law of nature, which teaches this equality. It is then impossible to reconcile the fact of reducing the Negroes to a state of slavery to these natural and democratic principles, unless the Negro is first denied the quality of human being in every regard.

b) The controversial creed for claiming independence

During the period between American independence and the Civil war, many instances appeared where blacks slaves could have benefited from that American creed for claiming separation from the mother country, but even the champions from the activists of blacks liberation, even those who regularly claimed equality, rights of life and liberty for black were all hypocrites: President George Washington, the most outstanding person in America from independence to

the early years of the Republic, the friend of blacks who even invited Phillis Wheatley, a female slave in his house for dinner, was also a slave owner. Having in the preceding part of this enquiry shown the origin and foundation of slavery, or the manner in which men have become slaves, with the legal consequences attendant upon their condition, and the contradiction between the American creed for independence, the democratic principles expressed through the American Constitution and the treatment on Blacks in America, it only remains to consider the mode by which slaves have been emancipated, and the legal consequences of that emancipation in the American society.

c) The projected blacks emancipation and White Americans worries

In 1861, as the Civil War began, there were four open questions among Northerners and Southerners with regard to the slaves: "First, would they rebel? Second, did they want their freedom? Third, would they fight for their freedom? And, finally, would they know what to do with their freedom if they got it? The answer to each question was 'yes', but in a manner that reflected the peculiar experience of blacks in white America".[4]

First was the question of whether bondsmen would rebel or remain passive. The fear of slave rebellion preoccupied both the Southern slaveholder and the Northern invader. If whites Americans had such worries about blacks' attitude during the civil war, this just means that they were conscious about the bad thing slavery represented, but that they had been doing for centuries; for sure, a person suspecting a negative reaction from another person is bearing reproach in his insight. Here, both the pretended savior and the pretended devil feared the man in the middle, the object of the conflict. As such and strikingly, Northerners were as uneasy about the possibility of blacks being emancipated, as were Southerners. Initially the Northerners' goal in the war was the speedy restoration of the Union under the Constitution and the laws of 1861, all of which astonishingly recognized the legitimacy of slavery. It was then apparent that interfering with slavery would make reunion more difficult. Thus, Union generals like George B. McClellan in Virginia and Henry W. Halleck in the West were ordered not only to defeat the Southern armies but also to prevent slave insurrections, although slavery was supposed to be ended; which clearly proves that the American creed for independence, stating equality among all men, was still full of hypocrisy. Concern about outright slave insurrections proved unfounded, however. Were slaves so fool or suicidal to dare jeopardize their effective emancipation through insurrections, revolts or attacks on former white masters? Mary Boykin Chesnut, the famed Southern diarist and one of the South's most

perceptive observers of slavery, foresaw the wrong projected blacks' reaction. She wrote about Dick, a slave from her plantation:

Dick, the butler here, reminds me that when we were children, I taught him to read as soon as I could read myself. . . . But he won't look at me now. He looks over my head. He scents freedom in the air.[5]

Dick, slave like many others, knew that the war was about their freedom, so they were both motivated and cautious; blacks knew that to rebel in that way, was hopeless; the whites were too powerful. But now that the Southern whites who were the hardest slave owners had an equally powerful enemy, the northerners, this meant that the odds had changed, and it was worth being cautious. It was better not to make the sympathizer change attitude.

One positive outcome of the Civil War was that, the exigencies of war finally settled the debate as to whether slaves could be used safely and efficiently in industry; the shortage of white manpower due to the war left the South with no other choice than to put slaves to work in its factories and mines. "In the Tredegar Iron Works of Richmond alone for instance, thousands of slaves were employed. The Augusta munitions plants of Georgia likewise were primarily staffed by bondsmen. Thousands of others labored in the ultimately futile effort to keep Southern rail lines operating".[5]

III. THE FALSE PROMISES OF EMANCIPATION

a) *Global conditions and characteristics of the ex-slaves*

For white Americans of the post-Civil war era, emancipation did not confer the rights of citizenship on the person emancipated; on the contrary, the said emancipated black and his posterity, of the same complexion, should remain in their status of civil incapacities. Although the blacks were now said to be free, and that nobody could force them into working for whites free of charge, and that corporal punishment by a master was finished, many laws in the states as well as some practices restrained their actions in many instances. If the ex-slave could now maintain a suit, he could not be a witness, a juror or a judge in any controversy between one of his own complexion people and a white person. The paradox lies in the fact that, even now that blacks met the three conditions set by the whites to be a human being, they remained much less than that. The right of personal security was now acquired, as blacks were no more to be shot, slaughtered or even whipped following a white man's humor or will. The right of personal liberty was now acquired, since the black could make choices for his own life and move across the country. The right of private property was possessed, since it was established that the freed blacks could now possess land, and their children were no longer to fall in natural

slavery. Those three conditions, in the case of whites, had given them full rights, including the one of citizenship and of voting. But, for the black, if he could have his own pieces of lands, he did not have all right of suffrage, which the fact of owning land would confer on his former master; he was not concerned with making those laws by which he would be bound to. Such a paradox made it unfinished the emancipation of blacks. Nevertheless, for most blacks, that new condition was more enviable than their former state.

b) *Discriminatory measures against blacks*

i. *The geographic apartheid system*

After emancipation those African Americans who could then live on their own, move easily in the country, were not easily welcomed, especially in the areas mostly populated with whites. For white Americans, Northerners as well as Southerners, it was unacceptable to have blacks as neighbors, which appears as a paradox. When Blacks were slaves, any white family would be honored to have them by their side, and depending on the number of slaves that a white man possessed, he was privileged in the society. In that moment, leaving with blacks was no shame, no problem. But now that the position of blacks changed, it became dishonoring to accept them in the surrounding, which is incomprehensible. How could it be understood that some people (white Americans) refused to unite with their fellows (black Americans) in establishing the empire of freedom; and after they had imposed upon their fellow man, who differed just in complexion from them, a slavery, ten thousand times more cruel than the utmost extremity of those grievances and oppressions, of which they had usually complained against Great Britain, they were now setting up a likewise cruel system of apartheid. Such were the inconsistencies of the white American of the post emancipation period; such was that partial system of morality which confined rights and injuries to particular complexions; such was the effect of that whites' self-love which justified, or condemned the unfortunate black, not basing on any natural or legal rules, but basing on how God made him and what the persecutor himself made of him.

The white Americans just seemed to have forgotten when they were imploring God to aid the injured and oppressed that they pretended to be vis-à-vis Great Britain. They seemed to have forgotten what they called the justice of their cause which was nothing but their motives for declaring war against Great Britain. Thus, it can be said that "Americans' forefathers had early sown the seeds of an evil, which, like leprosy, descended upon their posterity with accumulated rancor, visiting the sins of the fathers upon succeeding generations"[5]. As such, hyper-segregation was clearly evident since the whites didn't want the blacks to be their neighbors. During the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, whites in their aim to get rid of

the unwanted blacks, created the black ghetto in order to isolate growing urban black populations. But being unable to get blacks leave the inner city, whites moved to the suburbs with the industries, creating difficult living conditions to blacks: the African-American residents lost the stable jobs that had brought them to the area. The federal government provided loans to such moving to the suburbs, by tacitly excluding the blacks. Blacks were then unable to leave the inner city, and they became increasingly poor.

In addition to encouraging white families to move to suburbs by providing them loans to do so, the government uprooted many established African American communities by building elevated highways through their neighborhoods. "To build a highway, tens of thousands of blacks' single-family homes were destroyed, because these properties were summarily declared to be in decline"[5]

The overcrowded and bad living conditions in the inner city resulted in infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis. Research has proved that in every major American city, hyper-segregated blacks were far more likely to be exposed to dangerous levels of air toxins. Daily exposure to this polluted air means that African-Americans living in these areas are at greater risk of disease. All these were steps taken on purpose by the white community, legalized by the federal government to confine blacks on an area where only death was awaiting. Such attitudes and measures against millions of people, in modern time would be sufficient to be marked as a programmed genocide.

ii. *Black Americans and the civil rights segregation*

Racial segregation in the United States was nothing but another level of exclusion of the black community from facilities, services, and opportunities such as housing, medical care, education, employment, and transportation along racial lines. The segregation was backed by laws enacted at federal level. These laws, known as Jim Crow laws, had similarities with the situation in South Africa under Apartheid and were characterized by the following: The races were kept separate, with separate schools, hotels, bars, hospitals, toilets, parks, even telephone booths, and separate sections in libraries, cinemas, and restaurants, the latter often with separate ticket windows and counters. State laws prohibiting interracial marriage ("miscegenation"), which had existed in the colonial time, were enforced throughout the South and in many Northern states, especially when the Democrats later came to power. And astonishingly, the Supreme Court of the United States declared such laws constitutional in 1883; this verdict was overturned only in 1967, which displays how inconsistent and hypocrite the white Americans as a whole, and the Northern Americans in particular had been. Such attitudes towards the newly freed blacks could be sufficient to conclude that emancipation to

blacks was just a lure; it won't be any exaggeration to say that blacks conditions under slavery was more enviable than the one of the post slavery: as slaves, at least they had a house to live in, they felt no injustice since they had no rights. But now, things had changed. There was also some state laws (also known as miscegenation laws) that prohibited whites and non-whites, blacks in particular, to marry each other.

Whites also set up voting rights that systematically restricted or denied blacks who could neither read nor write the right to suffrage, knowing that very few blacks could meet such requirements. At the same time, loopholes such as the grandfather clause and the understanding clause protected the voting rights of white people: what a paradox! For instance, in the Democratic Party primary contests, it was established that only whites could vote.

iii. *The Black codes system*

Following blacks' emancipation, whites Americans, and those of the south were faced with the greatest of their worry: who would now plow the land? The hands of those whites were so clean, so neat that holding the machete and the hoe was unimaginable. For three centuries, blacks had been to the service of those whites, and briskly suddenly it was hinted that without learning the craft, they would have to exercise it. Each state adopted their own codes to manage the newly freed blacks, to limit their basic rights and liberties, to control their labor, migration and other activities; but as a whole one thing was common: the blacks, even emancipated had to continue working for the whites. Southern plantation owners feared that they would lose their land. Having convinced themselves that slavery was justified, planters feared African Americans wouldn't work without coercion. The Black Codes were then an attempt to control them and to ensure they did not claim social equality, despite their being emancipated, which all the same sounds astonishing and contradictory.

In Texas for instance, "the Eleventh Legislature produced these codes in 1866"[6]. The intent of the legislation was "to reaffirm the inferior position that slaves and free blacks had held in antebellum Texas and to regulate black labor"[5]. The codes reflected the unwillingness of white Texans to accept blacks as equals and also their fears that freedmen would not work unless coerced. Thus the codes continued legal discrimination between whites and blacks.

The black codes were all intended to secure a steady supply of cheap labor and all continued to assume the inferiority of the freed slaves. The codes in some states even forbade other blacks to set foot on their land, limiting then the right of the blacks to move easily through the country. Article 13 of Indiana's 1851 Constitution, for example, stated "No Negro or Mulatto shall come into, or settle in, the State, after the adoption

of this Constitution.”[5] The 1848 Constitution of Illinois led to one of the harshest Black Code systems in the nation until the Civil War. The Illinois Black Code of 1853 extended a complete prohibition against black immigration into the state.

The Black Codes also denied the blacks the rights to testify against whites, to serve on juries or in state militias, or to vote. And in response to planters' demands that the freed people be required to work on the plantations, the Black Codes declared that those blacks who failed to sign yearly labor contracts could be arrested and hired out to white landowners. “Some states limited the occupations open to African Americans and barred them from acquiring land, and others provided that judges could assign African American children to work for their former owners without the consent of their parents”.[7] In Mississippi, for instance, blacks had to make annual contracts for their labor in writing; if they happened to run away from their tasks, they forfeited their wages for the year. Whenever it was required of them they must present licenses (in a town from the mayor; elsewhere from a member of the board of police of the beat) citing their places of residence and authorizing them to work. Fugitives from labor were to be arrested and carried back to their employers. All these measures to subdue the freed blacks simply made no difference between slavery time and emancipation, which more than a paradox, is revolting.

iv. *Strategies of the Ku Klux Klan to oppress the blacks*

Can it be conceivable that white Americans, and the Northerners in main, said to the blacks that they were now on free, and at the same time, but had them become a new form of slaves of their society? No doubt, the new condition of the blacks was a thousand times worse than the former. For any said emancipated black who happened to come across the Ku Klux Klan,” it was better that the federal government should return him to the custody of the original owner, where he would have a master to look after his well-being, than that his neck should be placed under the heel of a society, vindictive towards him because he was declared free”[7]

The Klan men had enacted their own laws, directed against the freed blacks, with the tacit consent of the local and federal authorities (since they took a long time to act against it). The operations of the Klan were executed in the night and were invariably directed against members of the Republican Party who supported and promoted the blacks total emancipation. The Klans' men would break into the house of the blacks at the dead of night, drag them from their beds, torture them in the most inhuman manner, and in many instances murder them, without the states nor the federal government to do any real thing to stop that practice.

In 1868 the Ku Klux Klan drew up a series of questions for people who wanted to join its organization,

among which the most inhuman are following: Are you opposed to Negro equality, both social and political? Are you in favor of a white man's government in this country?

How could such philosophy be admitted in a society of humans? Would those whites ever try to punish their cows and horses that way? How did those whites happen to think of treating the blacks, who had a great share in the prosperity of that American land of 'theirs', that way; those blacks who asked nothing but to find their way through the only society they knew, even if their forefathers were brought there unwillingly; those blacks who asked nothing but to be accepted and to be given a piece of land to live and to survive on.

American institutions, courts, legislators, executive officers were said to be strong enough to keep the peace and promote justice and goodwill in the community, as clearly expressed in the preamble to the constitution. If this promotion of justice, security and welfare did not hold for black Americans, then the thing to do was to change these institutions and quickly. “For a self-constituted body of moral idiots, who would substitute the findings of the Ku Klux Klan for the processes of law to try to better conditions, would be a most un-American outrage which every good citizen should resent”[7]

In her autobiography, *Song in a Weary Throat*, Pauli Murray wrote about the experiences of her grandparents living in Orange County after the American Civil War:

In the early days of their marriage, when my grandparents were struggling to establish a foothold, Grandmother often stayed alone in the farm near Chapel Hill. Grandfather was working in his brickyard in Durham, twelve miles away, until he was able to build the family home there, and their children were often in Durham helping him. It was a time when the Ku Klux Klan in Orange County sought to run colored farmers off their land, and Grandmother's isolated cabin in the woods was an easy target. Late at night she would be awakened by the thudding of horses' hooves as nightriders, brandishing torches and yelling like banshees, swept into the clearing and rode round and round her cabin, churning the earth outside her door. She never knew when they might set fire to the place, burning her to death inside, and some nights she was so terrified that she would get out of bed in the middle of the night, creep through the woods to the roadway, and trudge the twelve miles to Durham, preferring the dark, lonely but open road to the risk of being trapped at the farm.[8]

The *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) is also a testimony to the terror atmosphere set up by the Klan on the blacks:

When my mother was pregnant with me, she told me later, a party of hooded Ku Klux Klan riders

galloped up to our home in Omaha, Nebraska, one night. Surrounding the house, brandishing their shotguns and rifles, they shouted for my father to come out. My mother went to the front door and opened it. Standing where they could see her pregnant condition, she told them that she was alone with her three small children, and that my father was away, preaching in Milwaukee. The Klansmen shouted threats and warnings at her that we had better get out of town because "the good Christian white people" were not going to stand for my father's "spreading trouble" among the "good" Negroes of Omaha with the "back to Africa" preaching of Marcus Garvey.[9]

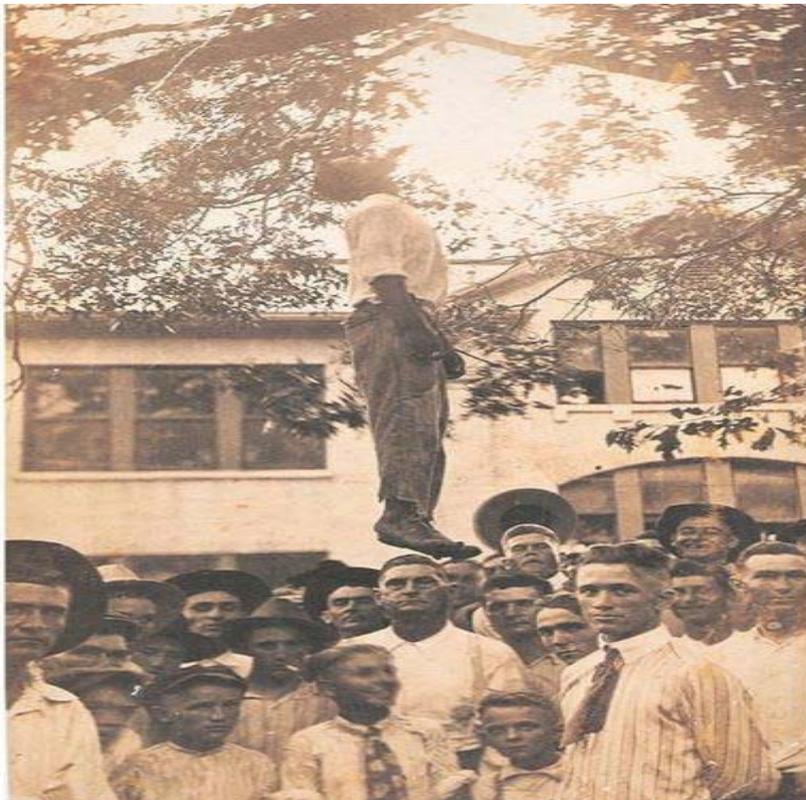
IV. CONCLUSION

Today, it is evident that the United States of America receive respect from the rest of the world, with reference to their economic and military power, but also the democracy teacher they seem to be, regardless controversial intervention in other countries political affairs. Yet, a glance back into the history of America, with reference to the blacks, would be sufficient to stain the overall legitimacy of American claimed position worldwide. In effect, the promise of emancipation to blacks was full of hypocrisy: Blacks, who despite their being slaves, were precious goods with regard to their importance in the white man's household and plantation, now were unwanted on the American land,

just because they were said to be free; a freedom that they deserved and wanted, but which they were offered by those who were persecuting them for that same freedom. For sure if local and federal officials did not back those atrocious actions against blacks, emancipation would have really been effective earlier. But that was not the case, and this is what justifies the term 'hypocrisy'.

Robert F. Williams, in *Liberation Magazine* (September, 1959), affirms, the following: "Each time the Klan came on a raid they were led by police cars. We appealed to the President of the United States to have the Justice Department investigate the police. We appealed to Governor Luther Hodges. All our appeals to constituted law were in vain"[10].

Below is a testimony of what it looked like to be black, after emancipation proclamation in the USA. There was no need for trial for a black man. Any white represented a whole court when it was about the black. You can just read on the faces of those white men in the picture, a kind of full satisfaction with both the scene and their having an opportunity to be taken in a picture with a hung black man. Worse, you can see children all the same enjoying themselves with all that; no doubt, they were learning how to perpetuate this kind of treatment to blacks, and this can justify the fact that until now, blacks are still forging their way through the American society.



Postcard depicting the lynching of Lige Daniels, Center, Texas, USA, August 3, 1920.

On the back of the postcard, one could read: "He killed Earl's grandma. She was Florence's mother. Give this to Bud. From Aunt Myrtle." *Texas, 1920.*

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