

*Here is an example of the kind of virulent hatred and bigotry that some Americans brought to the consideration of the future of race relations in the late 19th and early 20 centuries. William Cowper Brann (1855-1898) was born in Illinois and eventually settled in Texas. He became a successful, although often viriolic, journalist, editor, and lecturer, whose career was cut short when he was shot on the street by someone angered by one of his articles. His journal, The Iconoclast, from which the essay below is printed, had at one point an international circulation of 90,000.*

## **William Cowper Brann, "THE BUCK NEGRO" (1898)**

I once severely shocked the pseudo-philanthropists by suggesting that if the South is ever to rid herself of the negro rape-fiend she must take a day off and kill every member of the accursed race that declines to leave the country. I am not wedded to my plan; but, like the Populists, I do insist that those who object to it are in duty bound to offer something better.

We have tried the restraining influence of religion and the elevating forces of education upon the negro without avail. We have employed moral suasion and legal penalties; have incarcerated the offenders for life at hard labor, and hanged them by the neck in accordance with statutory law. We have hunted the black rape-fiend to death with hounds, bored him with buckshot; fricasseed him over slow fires and flayed him alive; but the despoilment of white women by these brutal imps of darkness and the devil is still of daily occurrence. The baleful shadow of the black man hangs over every Southern home like the sword of Damocles, like the blight of death - an avatar of infamy, a decree of damnation. . . .

This condition of affairs is becoming intolerable. A man's first duty is not to an alien or inferior race, but to his family. It is much better to shoot a negro before he commits an irreparable crime against the honor of a family than to hang him afterwards.

Drive out the "n . . . [ a racist term for African Americans] "—young and old, male and female - or drive him into the earth! It may be urged that the " good negro " would suffer with the bad. It is impossible to distinguish the one from the other until it is too late. It were better that a thousand " good negroes " -if so many there be- should suffer death or banishment than that one good white woman should be debauched. We must consider ourselves first, others afterwards. The rights of the white man are paramount, and if we do not maintain them at any cost we deserve only dishonor.

During the slavery regime the negro kept his place like any other beast of the field. He no more dreamed of cohabitation with white women than does the monkey of mating with the swan; but when his shackles were stricken off and he was accorded political equality with his old-time master he became presumptuous, insolent—actually imagined that the foolish attempt of fanatics to humanize him had been successful—that a law of nature had been repealed by act of Congress! If we could but restore the Negro to his old ante-bellum condition of involuntary servitude and give him time to forget the social fallacies with which he has been inoculated by misguided theorists, all might be well with Sambo; but that is out of the question. We do not want to re-enslave him—he is not worth it. And if we desired to do so, the world, which is crazed with its own foolish cackle of " equality and fraternity," would not permit it.

No, we could not revive the old customs if we would. There are too many long-haired men and short-haired women picking up a more or less honest livelihood by experimenting with Sambo at our expense, his wonderful "progress," his divine "rights" and his devilish "wrongs," to permit serious consideration of what is really best for him.

The negro is to the American social organism what a pound of putty would be in the stomach of a dyspeptic. The sooner we realize this fact and spew him out, the better. It were wise to make the eagle and the crow tenants of the same eyre as the white and black man of the same territory; as sensible to yoke Pegasus and a plow-horse as to make the Caucasian and African co-rulers of the same country. The attempts of sociologists to "harmonize the races" are as absurd as trying to bring into the same diapason the twanging of a jew's-harp and the music of the spheres—the effort to make the negro an

element of strength to the nation's energy is as misdirected as the labors of Gulliver's scientists at the Academy of Lagado. The American nation would be billions of dollars better off today had Ham failed to get into the ark. The negro has been the immediate cause of more bitterness and bloodshed than his entire race, from its genesis to the present, is worth, and he will continue the fruitful cause of trouble so long as he is permitted to remain.