

SOME NOTES

ON

NEGRO CRIME

PARTICULARLY

IN GEORGIA

**Report of a Social Study made under the direction
of Atlanta University; together with the Pro-
ceedings of the Ninth Conference for the
Study of the Negro Problems, held at
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EDITED BY

W. E. BURGHARDT DU BOIS

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY OF THE CONFERENCE

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teachers, with an enrollment of about 2,000 pupils. This leaves at least 2,000 other children unprovided for.

As to the criminals it may be said that not many girls, but a goodly number of women, are sent to jail. There are some among these who are continually brought before the recorder, and they receive their sentence with stoical indifference. Sad it is to say that among the so-called criminals are many young boys who are not criminals in the true sense of the word. There is the offending boy caught for throwing rocks, or spinning his top, or pitching his ball in the street. While some of these young boys are pardoned, a large number are fined; and as these fines cannot always be paid, they are therefore "sent up" and thereby classed as criminals.

According to various city officials consulted by investigators, crime among Negroes in Augusta is constantly decreasing. One official said that it was his opinion that Negroes of the ignorant type and whites of the ignorant type were those guilty of crime. Ignorant whites commit the same kind of crime that ignorant Negroes commit, and 15 per cent. of the ignorant whites were associates and co-workers in crime with the same class of Negroes.

10. What Negroes think of Crime. As a rough answer to this question, the results of written answers of Negro school children and students have been collected. A series of simple questions were first put to 1,500 Negro school children in the Atlanta public schools. The most of them were between the ages of 9 and 15 years and were city bred. Of these 583 said that laws were made "for protection;" 315, "to keep peace" or "order;" and 135, to "govern" or "rule" persons.

The answers classed under "For protection" include many forms of protection; e. g., protection of one's rights, of property, of person, protection of city, of state, of country. Under the hundred or more unclassified answers are many which speak of laws as a means of preventing fighting, stealing, etc.

Their ideas of courts were correct: "To determine guilt or innocence" (398); "to see that the laws are obeyed" (222); "to settle matters" (222); a few say for "bad people" (69). Policemen are for the purpose of "arresting people" (522), or "protecting" them (346). Policemen are usually kind to 618 of the little ones, but were considered unkind by 459 and variable by 204. Most of them say that persons are sent to the "chaingang" for breaking the law and wrong-doing, but some others say that people are sent to the chaingang because "they haven't the money to pay their fines." One boy says: "Some good people are sent to the chaingang and some bad ones. They are sent because they are convicted."

The students, 534 in number, were older (13 to 21 years of age) and come from all parts of the state. Policemen have never helped or protected most of them (408); and 21 declared they have been specifically wronged by policemen. Of those who have seen courts in session (134), 71 think the judge and jurors acted fairly, and 41 that they did not;

their opinions of persons sent to the "chaingang" vary: 164 think them "bad or unfortunate;" 54 think they deserve punishment "if guilty," and 46 doubt the guilt of many of them; 25 are "sorry for them," and 22 think their punishment "makes them worse," but 28 consider them "a disgrace to their race." In general, many students consider that persons who are sent to the chaingang are very unfortunate. Many say that, while they are in favor of punishment for law-breakers, they consider the "chaingang" the worst and poorest means of punishment. These also speak of and deplore the treatment of the criminals on the "gang."

Many speak of the very disastrous results upon young criminals and express the wish that reformation be provided for the youthful offenders of the law. One says along this line: "The chaingang system is discreditable. It seems to defeat the purpose of punishment. I grow indignant over the presence of young boys in the chaingang." Another says: "The intermingling of young criminals with old ones in the chaingang is one of the worst evils of the system." A third says: "I think it [the chaingang] is one of the last resorts to which the state should give itself. The treatment of the men in most cases is very severe and especially unbearable in the fierce winter months."

When asked why so many young Negroes get into the clutches of the law, 152 ascribe it to "indolence" and "laziness;" 62 say for "not attending to their own business;" 57, "disobedience;" 40, "bad company;" 39, "ignorance;" 67, "lack of home-training;" and 19, "race prejudice." Most of them have several causes why so many young colored boys get into trouble. As an example of this one student says: "Ignorance, prejudice, poverty, wrong-doing." Another says: "Idleness is almost sole cause. Race prejudice also aids, as more Negroes are handled by the courts for the same offenses than whites." A third says: "The important causes are, I think, the lack of moral training, the lack of educational privileges, and beyond all the lack of good home-training. Another cause is the difficulty Negro boys have in getting employment."

As a remedy for criminality among Negroes, 118 say "better employment;" 112, "education;" 77, "teaching them the right;" 35, "home-training;" 24, "establishing reformatories;" 22, "Christian work;" 12, "by raising their standards and ideals;" and 10, "by closing places of evil and vice." Many suggest fair trial and unprejudiced decision in courts. Many also speak of good association, while some add that "our best people should dwell on the disgrace of being confined to the chaingang."

11. Causes of Negro Crime. This study is too incomplete to lead us to many definite conclusions. Yet certain causes of crime among Negroes today seem clear. They may be briefly classified as follows:

A.—Faults of the Negroes.

1. Abuse of their new freedom and tendency toward idleness and vagrancy.
2. Loose ideas of property, petty pilfering.
3. Unreliability, lying and deception.