

## HENRY W. GRADY

### FROM *The New South* (1886)

*Atlanta newspaper editor Henry W. Grady was one of the most ardent promoters of a New South. In numerous speeches during the 1880s, he praised efforts to encourage industrial development and gave a glowing—and exaggerated—description of improved race relations in his native region. The excerpt below comes from a speech to the New England Society in New York City.*

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From Samuel Harding, ed., *Select Orations Illustrating American Political History* (Indianapolis: Hollenbeck Press, 1908), pp. 490–500.

We<sup>1</sup> have established a thrift in city and country. We have fallen in love with work. We have restored comfort to homes from which culture and elegance never departed. We have let economy take root and spread among us as rank as the crabgrass which sprung from Sherman's<sup>2</sup> cavalry camps, until we are ready to lay odds on the Georgia Yankee as he manufactures relics of the battlefield in a one-story shanty and squeezes pure olive oil out of his cotton seed, against any down-easter that ever swapped wooden nutmegs for flannel sausage in the valleys of Vermont. Above all, we know that we have achieved in these "piping times of peace" a fuller independence for the South than that which our fathers sought to win in the forum by their eloquence or compel in the field by their swords.

It is a rare privilege, sir, to have had part, however humble, in this work. Never was nobler duty confided to human hands than the uplifting and upbuilding of the prostrate and bleeding South—misguided, perhaps, but beautiful in her suffering, and honest, brave and generous always. In the record of her social, industrial and political illustration we await with confidence the verdict of the world.

But what of the negro? Have we solved the problem he presents or progressed in honor and equity toward solution? Let the record speak to the point. No section shows a more prosperous laboring population than the negroes of the South, none in fuller sympathy with the employing and land-owning class. He shares our school fund, has the fullest protection of our laws and the friendship of our people.

Self-interest, as well as honor, demand that he should have this. Our future, our very existence depend upon our working out this problem in full and exact justice. We understand that when Lincoln signed the emancipation proclamation, your victory was assured, for he then committed you to the cause of human liberty, against which the arms of man cannot prevail—while those of our statesmen who trusted to make slavery the corner-stone of the Confederacy doomed us to defeat as far as they could, committing us to a cause that reason could not defend or the sword maintain in sight of advancing civilization. . . .

The relations of the southern people with the negro are close and cordial. We remember with what fidelity for four years he guarded our defenseless women and children, whose husbands and fathers were fighting against his freedom. To his eternal credit be it said that whenever he struck a blow for his own liberty he fought in open battle,

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<sup>1</sup> I.e., Southerners.

<sup>2</sup> Union general William T. Sherman (1820–1891).

claims, and set up shop in the many boom towns cropping up across the Great Plains and in the Far West.

This postwar surge of western migration had many of the romantic qualities so often depicted in novels, films, and television. The varied landscape of prairies, rivers, deserts, and mountains was stunning. And the people who braved incredibly harsh conditions to begin new lives in the West were indeed courageous and tenacious. Cowboys and Indians, outlaws and vigilantes, farmers and herders populated the plains, while miners and trappers led nomadic lives in hills and backwoods.

But these familiar images of western life tell only part of the story. Drudgery and tragedy were as commonplace as adventure and success. Droughts, locusts, disease, tornadoes, and the erratic fluctuations of commodity markets made life relentlessly precarious. The people who settled the trans-Mississippi frontier were in fact a diverse lot: they included women as well as men, African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and European immigrants.

Many of the settlers were also blinded by short-sighted greed and prone to irresponsible behavior. In the process of "removing" the Indians, soldiers sometimes exterminated them. By the 1890s there were only 250,000 Native Americans left in the United States. The feverish quest for quick profits also helped fuel a boom-bust economic cycle that injected a chronic instability into the society and politics of the region.

The history of the Old West is thus a much more complicated story than that conveyed through popular culture—or through the accounts of some historians. In 1893 the historian Frederick Jackson Turner announced his so-called frontier thesis. The process of taming and settling an ever-receding frontier, Turner declared, gave American culture its distinctive institutions, values, and energy. The rigors and demands of westward settlement, for example, helped implant in Americans their rugged individualism and hardihood, and such qualities helped reinforce the democratic spirit that set them apart from other peoples. "Up to our day," Turner said, "American history has been in large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development." He was both right and wrong. The frontier experience explains much about the development of American society, but not all. And while the settling of the West planted seeds of democracy, it also involved the brutal exploitation of the land and its native peoples.

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and when at last he raised his black and humble hands that the shackles might be struck off, those hands were innocent of wrong against his helpless charges, and worthy to be taken in loving grasp by every man who honors loyalty and devotion.

Ruffians have maltreated him, rascals have misled him, philanthropists established a bank for him, but the South, with the North, protests against injustice to this simple and sincere people. To liberty and enfranchisement is as far as law can carry the negro. The rest must be left to conscience and common sense. It must be left to those among whom his lot is cast, with whom he is indissolubly connected, and whose prosperity depends upon their possessing his intelligent sympathy and confidence. Faith has been kept with him, in spite of calumnious assertions to the contrary by those who assume to speak for us or by frank opponents. Faith will be kept with him in the future, if the South holds her reason and integrity.

But have we kept faith with you? In the fullest sense, yes. When Lee<sup>3</sup> surrendered . . . the South became, and has since been, loyal to this Union. We fought hard enough to know that we were whipped, and in perfect frankness accept as final the arbitrament<sup>4</sup> of the sword to which we had appealed. The South found her jewel in the toad's head of defeat. The shackles that had held her in narrow limitations fell forever when the shackles of the negro slave were broken. Under the old regime the negroes were slaves to the South; the South was a slave to the system. The old plantation, with its simple police regulations and feudal habit, was the only type possible under slavery. Thus was gath-

ered in the hands of a splendid and chivalric oligarchy the substance that should have been diffused among the people, as the rich blood, under certain artificial conditions, is gathered at the heart, filling that with affluent rapture but leaving the body chill and colorless.

The old South rested everything on slavery and agriculture, unconscious that these could neither give nor maintain healthy growth. The new South presents a perfect democracy, the oligarchs leading in the popular movement—a social system compact and closely knitted, less splendid on the surface, but stronger at the core—a hundred farms for every plantation, fifty homes for every palace—and a diversified industry that meets the complex need of this complex age.

The new South is enamored of her new work. Her soul is stirred with the breath of a new life. The light of a grander day is falling fair on her face. She is thrilling with the consciousness of growing power and prosperity. As she stands upright, full-statured and equal among the people of the earth, breathing the keen air and looking out upon the expanded horizon, she understands that her emancipation came because through the inscrutable wisdom of God her honest purpose was crossed, and her brave armies were beaten.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How does Grady characterize the "Negro"?
2. According to Grady, what were the negative effects of slavery on the South?
3. In what respects might Grady have tailored his remarks to his New York audience?

<sup>3</sup> Confederate general Robert E. Lee (1807–1870).

<sup>4</sup> To settle a dispute by force.

## D. AUGUSTUS STRAKER

### FROM *The New South Investigated* (1888)

*Henry Grady's glowing account of the New South glossed over many unpleasant realities. In 1888 an African-American lawyer, author, and judge named D. Augustus Straker provided his own assessment of the New South.*

From *The New South Investigated* (Detroit: Ferguson Publishing Co., 1888), pp. 26–27, 92–93, 94, 96–97.

The South today has, amid all its troubles, political and otherwise, made great advancement in industry, education and commerce. Our land owners are now ready and willing to utilize their lands and not let them lie uncultivated. Our farmers no longer confine themselves to the growing of cotton only, but are engaged in the more varied industry of planting corn and rice. . . . Manufactories begin to dot the South in all of its principal cities and towns.

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Is it true that the progress of the South, which I have shown to have taken place, improved the social condition of the South? Is it true that the Negro of the South, which is known as largely the laboring class, and, therefore, the producing class, has improved in *his* social condition compared with the white class, which is known as largely the capital or non-producing class? Why is it, in plainer terms, that the Negro who was poor at the close the war when made free, is today yet poor when compared to the white man of the South? You may say that this is the result of the ignorance of the one and the knowledge of the other, but while I do not deny that ignorance and knowledge enter largely into the producing and non-producing quality of material advancement, it has not, and should not, have anything to do with the just relationship between capital and labor and the just wages paid as compensation for adequate labor.

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As I have said before, it is not only the political change in the administration which is daily causing thousands of colored farm hands, and even mechanics, to migrate from the South to the West, but it is also caused by unjust wages, wages which do not admit of bare living, such as 15 cents a day, and \$6 or \$8 per month. These low wages are carrying out a plan, said to have been suggested by Calhoun,<sup>1</sup> for the purpose of “keeping the Negro down.” And how is this done in the South? Not only by paying him lower wages and giving him poorer rations, but still further denying him the opportunity for further material advancement. A colored man in the South cannot purchase land with the facility of his white brother, not only because of his poor wages as compensation for his services, but because of the general indisposition to sell him land. Since the war, thousands of colored people who have commenced to purchase lands have been unable to do so and have lost what they have already paid, not only because some were defaulters in payment, but because more were the victims of the white man’s original design to defraud him by some clause in the mortgage or fee simple deed, which defeated his tenure just at the time when he thought most sure he was the absolute owner. . . .

<sup>1</sup> South Carolina statesman John C. Calhoun (1782–1850).