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Primary Source: Governor Aycock on "The Negro Problem" [1]

Charles Brantley Aycock (1859–1912), born in Wayne County, was a lawyer in Goldsboro and as a young man served as superintendent of his county's schools. In the 1890s he served as United States District Attorney for the Eastern District of North Carolina.

Aycock became famous during the election of 1898, when he spoke frequently and convincingly for the Democrats' white supremacy campaign. Two years later he was elected governor by what was then the largest margin of victory in the state's history. During his campaign for governor he led the fight for the "suffrage amendment" disfranchising blacks. As governor, he put most of his energies toward improving the public schools.

White supremacists like Aycock believed that all people of color were less intelligent than white people and naturally inferior. Yet they believed that blacks could be educated to a "certain station" and that white people had a responsibility as the superior race to help people of color achieve their potential — even if they could never be equal to whites.

By this logic, allowing black people — whether in America or Africa — to govern themselves or others was dangerous not only to whites, but to blacks themselves. White people had a duty to other races to educate them (which meant imposing European and European-American values on other cultures) and to govern over other races with compassion. This was what the English poet Rudyard Kipling called "the white man's burden."

Governor Aycock's views were not so uncommon during the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. His belief that only whites should be in positions of power, and that whites should use their power to help "lift up" other races, was an ideology promoted by whites in Europe and America to justify colonization in Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia, and to limit the rights of African Americans.

The speech quoted below shows both of Aycock's core beliefs — the absolute supremacy of the white race and the importance of education.

Charles Aycock to the North Carolina Society in Baltimore, December 18, 1903

I am proud of my State... because there we have solved the negro problem.... We have taken him out of politics and have thereby secured good government under any party and laid foundations for the future development of both races. We have secured peace, and rendered prosperity [2] a certainty.

I am inclined to give to you our solution of this problem. It is, first, as far as possible under the Fifteenth Amendment to disfranchise [3] him; after that let him alone, quit writing about him; quit talking about him, quit making him "the white man's burden," let him "tote his own skillet"; quit coddling [4] him, let him learn that no man, no race, ever got anything worth the having that he did not himself earn; that character is the outcome of sacrifice and worth is the result of toil; that whatever his future may be, the present has in it for him nothing that is not the product of industry, thrift, obedience to law, and uprightness; that he cannot, by resolution of council or league, accomplish anything; that he can do much by work; that violence may gratify [5] his passions but it cannot accomplish his ambitions; that he may eat rarely of the cooking of equality, but he will always find when he does that "there is death in the pot." Let the negro learn once for all that there is unending separation of the races, that the two peoples may develop side by side to the fullest but that they cannot intermingle; let the white man determine that no man shall by act or thought or speech cross this line, and the race problem will be at an end.

These things are not said in enmity [6] to the negro but in regard for him. He constitutes one third of the population of my State: he has always been my personal friend; as a lawyer I have often defended him, and as Governor I have frequently

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protected him. But there flows in my veins the blood of the dominant race; that race that has conquered the earth and seeks out the mysteries of the heights and depths. If <u>manifest</u> [7] destiny leads to the seizure of Panama, it is certain that it likewise leads to the dominance of the Caucasian. When the negro recognizes this fact we shall have peace and good will between the races.

But I would not have the white people forget their duty to the negro. We must seek the truth and pursue it. We owe an obligation to "the man in black"; we brought him here; he served us well; he is patient and teachable. We owe him gratitude; above all we owe him justice. We cannot forget his <u>fidelity</u> [8] and we ought not to magnify his faults; we cannot change his color, neither can we ignore his service. No individual ever "rose on stepping stones of dead" others "to higher things," and no people can. We must rise by ourselves, we must execute judgment in righteousness; we must educate not only ourselves but see to it that the negro has an opportunity for education.

As a white man I am afraid of but one thing for my race and that is that we shall become afraid to give the negro a fair chance. The first duty of every man is to develop himself to the uttermost and the only limitation upon his duty is that he shall take pains to see that in his own development he does no injustice to those beneath him. This is true of races as well as of individuals. Considered properly it is not a limitation but a condition of development. The white man in the South can never attain to his fullest growth until he does absolute justice to the negro race. If he is doing that now, it is well for him. If he is not doing it, he must seek to know the ways of truth and pursue them. My own opinion is, that so far we have done well, and that the future holds no <u>menace</u> [9] for us if we do the duty which lies next to us, training, developing the coming generation, so that the problems which seem difficult to us shall be easy to them.

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