

# National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

## HARVARD AND THE NEGRO

THE N. A. A. C. P. has been active in the protest against the action of President Lowell of Harvard in excluding colored students from the freshman dormitories of that institution. For more than a year prior to the recent nation-wide public criticism of President Lowell in departing so markedly from Harvard's tradition of policy of fair play the N. A. A. C. P. has co-operated with those who sought to have President Lowell change his policy of exclusion. This was not made public until it was seen that Mr. Lowell had no intention of changing his position.

One of the leaders of the committee who had been working quietly was Moorfield Storey. When the petition was made public, which had been drafted by this committee and circulated among Harvard graduates, the National Office gave to the press a letter which had been written to Mr. Lowell and in which a new angle was given to the entire question aside from that of gross injustice to the colored students of Harvard. It was pointed out that Harvard's surrender of its tradition and the tradition of liberal America to Southern sentiment intensifies the very problem that President Lowell professes himself as attempting to meet through the new policy of exclusion. This was because whatever amelioration of race problems as has been brought about in the South has occurred in large measure through the effects at Northern institutions on Southern white students who there met an unflinching affirmation of the equality of all men in the realm of the arts and of learning. It was contended that the traditional stand of Harvard had afforded to Southern white students the opportunity of learning to know as human beings their fellow colored students and that if they were deprived of this opportunity to be educated out of their prejudice through Harvard's affirmation of that prejudice the situation will be immeasurably darkened.

The N. A. A. C. P. has also aided the New York *World* and other organs of public opin-

ion in their splendid campaigns against President Lowell's action. At the request of the *World* the National Office secured statements by telegraph from prominent colored Harvard graduates which were used prominently in arousing protest against the proposed policy of exclusion.

## "THE BIRTH OF A NATION"

ON November 24 advertisements appeared in New York newspapers announcing that "The Birth of a Nation" would be shown at a local theatre for one week beginning Monday, December 4. The National Office of the N. A. A. C. P. immediately filed a protest with various city and state officials and with the Motion Picture Commission of the State of New York. A special hearing of the Commission on the picture was held on Saturday, December 2, at 11.00 A.M., and continued until Monday, December 4, at which time carefully documented evidence was presented in support of the N. A. A. C. P.'s contention that the Motion Picture Commission should revoke the license for the producing of this film. Considerable evidence was taken, but on December 8 by a vote of two to one the complaint of the N. A. A. C. P. against the picture was dismissed. Mr. George H. Cobb, Chairman of the Commission and Mrs. Eli T. Hosmer voted in favor of the picture. Mr. Joseph Levenson, Secretary of the Commission recommended the revocation of the permit.

The National Office of the N. A. A. C. P. frequently receives requests from its branches and others for authoritative information on which they can base protests against the showing of this picture. The decision of Mr. Levenson is so scholarly and unbiased an opinion it is published nearly in full that it may be used throughout the country when authorities ask for information to justify the barring of this film. The N. A. A. C. P. takes this opportunity of expressing to Mr. Levenson its appreciation for what it considers the best statement regarding the film that has been issued since 1914, when the picture was first produced.

Mr. Levenson's opinion reads in part:

This picture is a remarkable product of cinematographic art and unquestionably appeals to all classes. If the photo-play could be divided into two parts, one part including all the pictures portraying the Civil War period with its magnificent display of battle scenes, and the other including the scenes portraying the life of the Negro, particularly during the period of Reconstruction, in which he is shown in the main as a menace to established society, it would be very simple to decide upon the merits of the Protest against this stupendous work. The law, however, requires the Commission to decide upon the picture as a whole, unless, in its judgment, it finds it can make eliminations which, when made, will not seriously interfere with the main purpose and the continuity of the story.

The Motion Picture law of this state was enacted primarily to protect the public from the exhibition of pictures that would endanger the welfare of the community. Such regulation, now provided in almost every civilized land, has been due entirely to the realization that the motion picture influences the thought and affects the life and citizenship of a community, because it can be understood and enjoyed without any special concentration of thought on the part of the observer, which makes it particularly attractive to untrained minds, and especially to children, illiterates, the ignorant and mental defectives. . . .

The picture portrays several instances of gross immorality. The idea is conveyed that one of the leading statesmen of the time is a married man with a daughter and two sons, and is living with a mulatto as his mistress introduced to the audience by the sub-title "The great leader's weakness that is to blight a nation." Several scenes without sub-titles convey the thought that the wife and mother is living in the same house. Particularly revolting is the incident depicting a bestial Negro, in uniform, pursuing from her home to the woods, a young white girl, leading to her ultimate self-destruction by jumping off a cliff. These scenes show upon the screen a harrowing display of lustful passion and necessarily create a feeling of horror and loathing to the observer. Another series of pictures show the leading colored man of the community, called the Lieutenant-Governor of the State, a protégé and wardman of the leading white

statesman already referred to, as determined upon every occasion to force his attentions upon the white daughter of his benefactor, terminating in a brutal assault upon her person.

As an incitement to crime, the picture is deliberate, well conceived, admirably executed propaganda to inflame the whole gamut of passions of whites against the Negroes. This is specifically indicated by the sub-titles, some of which are herewith quoted:—

"Election Day—all blacks are given the ballot while leading whites are disfranchised."

"All whites must salute Negro officers on the street."

"Passage of a bill providing for the intermarriage of blacks and whites."

"We will crush the white South under the heel of the \* \* \* black South."

"I will build a Black Empire and you as Queen will stand by my side."

"Lynch, drunk with wine and power, gives orders for a forced marriage." (Referring to Negro and white girl.)

Many of the scenes create a feeling of horror and dismay and nearly all in which Negroes appear are calculated to foster in the white observer a contempt and hatred for the Negro. Before the story really unfolds, we are shown a white family's home being ransacked by Negro troops. From this point on, the Negro's relations to the whites are depicted with hardly a scene produced favorable to the colored people. The scenes attending the election day treatment of the whites, the portrayal of a legislative session in South Carolina in 1871, the banners demanding the marriage of whites and blacks, the attitude of the colored people towards the whites when clothed with power, all are an unmistakable attack on the colored race and are emphasized in a most distinct manner by an organized semi-religious society known as the Ku Klux Klan, whose avowed purpose is to unite in a holy war to subdue the Negro.

The venom that is characteristic of the whole production is best evidenced by the perversion of historic truths. The leading character featured in the production is the white political leader called "Austin Stoneman". It has not been denied by the author or producers that Stoneman is intended to portray Thaddeus Stevens, one of the great-