

Daniel R. Hundley: Social Relations in Our Southern States (1860)

Raised in the and educated among the elite southern class, Daniel R. Hundley was hurled into northern society when he attended Harvard Law school and worked in Chicago real-estate. Tired of the way northerners portrayed southern society, Hundley wrote his own account of southern society. The following are excerpts taken from his account that describe the poor white class (trash) in the south, it provides insight into the southern way of life, but also shows some of the differences between Hundley (elite southerners) and the northern way of life.

To form any proper conception of the condition of the Poor White Trash, one should see them as they are. We do not remember ever to have seen in the New-England States a similar class. . . .But everywhere, North and South, in Maine or Texas, in Virginia or New-York, they are one and the same; and have undoubtedly had one and the same origin, namely, the poor-houses and prison-cells of Great Britain.

Moreover, the Poor White Trash are wholly rural; hence, the South will ever remain secure...since such mob violence always originates in towns and cities, wherein are herded together an unthinking rabble...

the Poor Whites rarely live more than a mile or two apart. Each householder, or head of a family, builds him a little but of round log; chinks the spaces between these with clay mixed with wheaten straw...fills up the inside of the rude dwelling with a few rickety chairs, a long bench, a dirty bed or two, a spinning-wheel, a skillet, an oven, a frying-pan, a triangular cupboard in one corner, and a rack over the door on which to hang old Silver Heels, the family rifle...and both the cabin and its furniture are considered as complete.

But, whatever may be said of the poverty [and] ignorance and general spiritual degradation, it is yet a rare thing that any of them suffer from hunger or cold. As a class, indeed, they are much better off than the peasantry of Europe, and many a poor mechanic in New-York City even--to say nothing, of the thousands of day-laborers annually thrown out of employment on the approach of winter

Money, in truth, is almost a perfectly unknown commodity in their midst and nearly all of their trafficking is carried on by means of barter alone....They are about the laziest two-clogged animals that walk erect on the face of the Earth...All they seem to care for, is, to live from hand to mouth; to get drunk...

it is not at all strange that the female Sand-hillers should so soon lose all trace of beauty, and at thirty are about the color of yellow parchment, if not thin and pale from constant attacks of fever...and every house is filled with its half dozen of dirty, squalling, white-headed little brats, who are familiarly know as Tow-Heads on account of the color of their hair, as well as its texture and generally unkempt and matted condition.

In the main the entire family, both male and female, occupy the same apartment at all hours of the day and night just as do the small farmers of the North-west, or the very poor in all large cities. But it is a rare circumstance to find several families huddled into one poor shanty, as is

more often the case than otherwise with those unfortunates in cities who are constrained to herd together promiscuously in tenant -houses and in underground cellars

Few of them can read, fewer still can write, while the great mass are native, genuine Know-Nothings, though always democratic in their political faith and practice. In order that by their votes, however blindly and ignorantly cast, they should help to support the only political party which has been enabled thus far to maintain a National organization [*that is, the Democrats*].... Nor can they be blamed for voting the democratic ticket, for to the democratic party do they owe the only political privilege which is of any real use to them-the privilege of the elective franchise....General Jackson is voted for still at every presidential election.

..could every one of them be blotted out of existence tomorrow, neither the South nor the North, nor the commercial world would be any the poorer for their loss.

The Poor Whites of the South seldom come in contact with the slaves at all, and thousands of them never saw a Negro; still, almost to a man, they are pro-slavery in sentiment. Unlike the Southern Yeomen, who are pro-slavery because these dread the consequences to the humbler whites of the emancipation of the Negroes, and because also they are intelligent enough to understand what would be the nature of these consequences; the Poor White Trash are pro-slavery from downright envy and hatred of the black man... The blacks on their part too, reciprocate the feeling of hatred at least and look with ineffable scorn on a "po' white man."

You (northerner) think such a terrible chimera never has troubled the thoughts of the sober citizens of New-England? You feel assured that men and women, little boys and girls, can stand to work from ten to thirteen hours every day, winter and summer, in heat and in cold, making at that only a beggarly pittance which barely suffices to keep body and soul together;

We have heard agrarian utterances from learned schoolmen, and collegians-utterances alike antagonistic to the spirit of our Federal Constitution, and the generally accepted ideas in regard to the laws of [mine and yours]. We have there heard ultra-anti-slavery men, when driven to the wall by force of irresistible argument, confess that they equally abhorred capitalists as slave holders; and that the only reason why they did not wage as relentless war upon the rich men of the Free States, is upon the Southern Oligarchs, was owing entirely to the dictates of policy. The time has not come yet, was the plea they invariably set up; but after disposing of the Chivalry, then would come the turn of their own rich men.

Source: Daniel R. Hundley. Social relations in our Southern States (H.B. Price 1860) 265.