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The Comparative Mortality of the White  
and Colored Races in the South.

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## The Comparative Mortality of the White and Colored Races in the South.

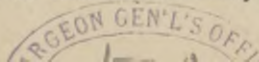
By J. T. WALTON, M. D., San Antonio, Texas.

The Negro has several things to show for his quarter century of freedom: astonishing progress, encouraging morals and intellectual improvement and an abnormally large death-rate. In late years, notwithstanding his increasing intelligence beneath his own vine and fig tree, he seems to have fallen an easy victim to disease and death.

While philanthropists were earnestly looking after him educating him, building churches for him, and otherwise contributing to his elevation, it became as a matter of peculiar moment and interest to them to know that, in proportion, he was dying twice as fast as his white brother.

Though statistics prior to the emancipation are scarce, there is every reason to believe that the colored man's death-rate has largely increased since his liberation, for as a slave he seemed hardy enough, his health being guarded by his master for obvious reasons. His physical condition today does not appear very stable or encouraging, for he is showing a striking susceptibility to disease in general and disorders hitherto uncommon to him, while his powers of resistance in seasons of epidemic seem far from strong.

Consumption, in Ante-bellum days, in



a colored person was a rarity—the exception and not the rule, some observers going so far as to say they had never seen a case of it. At any rate, physicians who practised in that time are very united in the expression that it was an extremely rare disease among the slave element. It is now, however, a very common affection, occurring more frequently among Negroes than whites. The excess in the proportionate death-rate of the colored people of this country particularly in the South where they form a large element of the population and where comparisons can the more readily be drawn, by reason of their previous condition has received the attention of some very high authority.

Prof. Robert Reyburn, M. D., of Washington, D. C., says: "There can be no doubt that the mortality of the Negroes now in this country nearly double that of the Caucasian." Dr. G. W. Hubbard, of Meharry Medical College, an institution for the education of colored physicians, located at Nashville, Tenn., states "when we consider that the death-rate among the colored people of the larger cities of the South is nearly double that of the whites, we can readily understand the importance of providing more properly prepared physicians to minister to the physical necessities of their own people, instructing them in regard to the laws of health, and by precept and example, teaching them to live on a higher and a better plain of life." Dr. Hubbard

has given some time to the subject and the above statement must be taken at some account. Dr. Eugene Foster, President of the board of health, Augusta, Ga., says "the Negro death-rate in this city is about double that of the whites, and while consumption was formerly rarely met with in the Negro before the war, it is now a common affection among them." These gentlemen are in a position to be authorities upon the subject, and some weight must necessarily be attached to their views. The emancipation was a starting point in the Negro's history in more ways than one. Here began, not only his career as a freedman and the struggle for elevation, but his physical decline. A few years of freedom have very much reversed the order of things as to his physical as well as general state, so, that whether, through ignorance, neglect gradual decrease in vitality, one or severally, it is certain that his death-rate is uniformly double that of the whites and in many cases as much as three or four times as large, while in his mortality from consumption, alone, he is far in excess.

Not only is he being born in less numbers, but he is dying faster. The Negroes reputed fecundity seems rather over-estimated, if the reader will pardon the digression. The tenth census shows the following comparative increase for twenty years: Whites 61 per cent.; Colored 48 per cent. The following

figures, culled from the latest census report, are interesting, if not striking: Comparative rate of increase for a hundred years, from 1790 to 1890 are as follows:

1790 to 1800, whites	35.76,	colored	32.33
1800 to 1810,	" 36.12,	"	37.50
1810 to 1820,	" 34.12,	"	28.59
1820 to 1830,	" 34.03.	"	31.44
1830 to 1840,	" 34.72,	"	23.40
1840 to 1850,	" 37.74,	"	26.63
1850 to 1860,	" 37.69,	"	22.07
1860 to 1870,	" 34.76,	"	9.86
1870 to 1880,	" 29.22,	"	34.85
1880 to 1896,	" 26.68,	"	13.51
Average whites,		33.084.	
" colored,		26.018.	

It will be observed that the general average shows the Negro to be considerably in the rear; with a heavy falling off between '80 and '90. Commenting upon the previous table the census officers says "in the hundred years the whites increased from 80.73 to 87.80, while the colored element diminished from 19.27 to 11.93. The proportion of colored elements today is two thirds less than it was a hundred years ago."

In Missouri in 1850 the Negro element constituted 13.20 of the population; 1890 it had diminished to 5.61. The State of Alabama which has a population of 479,441 whites and 468,862 colored, shows the following birth records:

1891, births per thousand,	whites	23.65
	colored	19.70





whites 7.98, colored 8.799. In 1891 deaths from consumption, whites 318, colored 543. 1892, deaths per thousand, whites 8.65, colored 11.60; 1892, deaths from consumption, whites 318, colored 500.

From 1880 to 1894, thirteen years, the average annual death rate in the city of Augusta, Ga., was whites 16.47, colored 32.04. The deaths from consumption, were 1892, whites 21, colored 45. 1893, whites 24, colored 54. The following returns from Macon, Ga., show deaths for past ten years: whites 1605, colored 2971; difference 1366. From Brunswick, Ga., I have been able to secure only the report of mortality from consumption:

1890,	whites 7,	colored 5.
1891,	" 4,	" 16.
1892,	" 6.	" 24.
Average,	" 5.66,	" 15.

The city of New Orleans, La., which has a very high death-rate, shows the following comparative mortality:

Deaths per thousand, 1892,	whites 25.72
	colored 39.59
Deaths per thousand, 1893,	whites 24.40
	colored 38.19
From consumption, 1892,	whites 458
	colored 447
From consumption, 1893,	whites 447
	colored 393

In Tennessee, February, 1893, six cities reported an average annual death-rate per 1,000 was, whites 10.80, colored

24.75 ; July, 1894, the death rates for five cities was, whites 10.15, colored 19.36. The mortality from consumption is also large in this State.

The average death-rate for 17 years in the District of Columbia was, whites 18.57, colored 33.72.

The proportion in Virginia was about 2 to 3, both as regards to the total mortality and that from consumption.

Baltimore, Md., showed an annual death-rate of 19.19 from the whites, and 30.76 for the colored population. The same city shows that out of the total mortality nine per cent. of the whites die from consumption, while fifteen per cent. of the colored die from the same cause.

The annual rate per thousand in the State of Florida, in 1892, was, whites 8.04, colored 8.59. The seeming paucity here of the rates is due to influx of white invalids into this State, and also the imperfection in the returns for the blacks, many deaths going unreported.

Atlanta, Ga., in 1892, gives a proportion of deaths from consumption as related to total mortality, whites 9 per cent., colored 18 per cent. The uniform excess in the colored mortality is apparant.

To those who have accustomed themselves to regard the negro as something less than a physical giant, this will, no doubt, prove surprising information. His rate of increase is not prodigious as has been supposed, and there seems but little ground for the apprehension that the

country will eventually be dominated by a "seething, surging mass of black humanity." Indeed, it is a question whether at this rate there will be ultimately any of the race left. The prediction that it would eventually become absorbed in the other race may have more truth in it than most of us want to imagine, for it is fast losing its individuality—is a multi-colored instead of a black race. The simon pure African negro is fast becoming a creature of the past in this country, and the rapidity with which he is becoming blended with the other race, taking on its mental as well as physical characteristics, suggests that he must inevitably lose himself. The consideration of the causes of this disproportionate mortality is no less interesting than the condition itself. To one acquainted with the situation of the race in large parts, it is difficult to account for the state of affairs. The question seems pertinent as to whether the transportation of the race from a native climate, a natural habitant, to a country differing in climatic conditions did not materially unfit it for residence, at least survival here.

Miscegenation, no doubt, has worked its evils in the premises, the gradual admixture of Caucasian blood, resulting in anything but robust physique. The majority of negroes who die of consumption are of the lighter element; and a large per cent. of them will be found on careful examination with a latent tendency to the

disease. Of the two elements, black and colored, the later is the most unstable. Ignorance and poverty are potent causative factors; with the former we might expect a disregard for even the most trivial laws of health, seeing how careless even educated humanity is on this point. Poverty means deprivation and crowding with all its concomitant evils. In the days of slavery, while a stranger to luxury, the negro was, nevertheless, reasonably comfortable.

His log cabin with its ample ventilation was far preferable to the dwellings which he now occupies, in many cases; he was fairly well fed, kept better hours, had good medical care and was kept aloof from many excesses to which he now abandons himself without stint. His life is now one of continuous irregularity, and the struggle for maintenance is telling upon him. However, avoiding details, the writer would offer the following as a good summary of causes bearing on the conditions named:

First, the heretofore almost general ignorance of the negro, including his want of education, special and general.

Second, lack of proper food and clothing.

Third, illy ventilated dwelling places and meeting places.

Fourth, want of medical care.

Fifth, unhealthy habits and surroundings.



