

Hidden History

The Unsung Saga of the Black Man

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The Message Is The Same

(Conclusion of the address of the Colored National Convention to the People of the United States made during the National Negro Convention held July 6-8, 1853 Rochester, New York. Because of the lengthiness of the address, which should be read by every American during this era of grave national crisis, this monumental document of expression of a people seeking freedom and justice prepared 114 years ago by a committee consisting of Frederick Douglass, J. M. Wagoner, the Rev. A. N. Freeman and George B. Vashon has been reproduced in two parts. Part I appeared last week in the July 20 issue of the Las Vegas VOICE.)

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By birth, we are American citizens; by the principles of the Declaration of Independence, we are American citizens; within the meaning of the United States Constitution, we are American Citizens; by the facts of history, and the admissions of American statesmen, we are American citizens; by the hardships and trials endured; by the courage and fidelity displayed by our ancestors in defending the liberties and in achieving the independence of our land, we are American citizens. In proof of the justice of this primary claim, we might cite numerous authorities, facts and testimonies,--a few only must suffice (Here appear four pages of historical evidence of the citizenship of free Negroes following so closely the material in William Yates' pamphlet, Rights of Colored Men to Suffrage, Citizenship and Trial by Jury (Philadelphia, 1838), as to make it certain that the committee was familiar with this valuable work). We hope you will now permit us to address you in the plainness of speech becoming the dignity of American citizens.

FELLOW-CITIZENS, we have had, and still have, great wrongs of which to complain. A heavy and cruel hand has been laid on us.

As a people, we feel ourselves to be not only deeply injured, but grossly misunderstood. Our white fellow-countrymen do not know us. They are strangers to our character, ignorant of our capacity, oblivious of our history and progress, and are misinformed as to the principles and ideas that control and guide us as a people. The great mass of American citizens estimate us as being a characterless and purposeless people; and hence we hold up our heads, if at all, against the withering influence of a nation's scorn and contempt.

It will not be surprising that we are so misunderstood and misused when the motives for misrepresenting us and for degrading us are duly considered. Indeed, it will seem strange, upon such consideration, (and in view of the influence) that we have not even fallen lower in public estimation than we have done. For, with the single exception of the Jews, under the whole heavens, there is not to be found a people pursued with a more relentless prejudice and persecution, than are the Free Colored people of the United States.

WITHOUT PRETENDING to have exerted ourselves as we ought, in view of an intelligent understanding of our interest, to avert from us the unfavorable opinions and unfriendly action of the American people, we feel that the imputations cast upon us, for our want of intelligence, morality and exalted character, may be mainly accounted for by the injustice we have received at your hands. What stone has been left unturned to degrade us? What hand has refused to fan the flame of popular prejudice against us? What American artist has not caricatured us? What wit has not laughed at us in our wretchedness? What songster has not made merry over our depressed spirits? What press has not ridiculed and condemned us? What pulpit has withheld from our devoted heads its angry lightning or its sanctimonious hate? Few, few, very few; and that we have borne up with it all--that we have tried to be wise, though denounced by all to be fools--that we have tried

to be upright, when all around us have esteemed us as knaves--that we have striven to be gentlemen, although all around us have been teaching us its impossibility--that we have remained here, when all our neighbors have advised us to leave, proves that we possess qualities of head and heart such as cannot but be commended by impartial men. It is believed that no other nation on the globe could have made more progress in the midst of such an universal and stringent disparagement. It would humble the proudest, crush the energies of the strongest, and retard the progress of the swiftest. In view of our circumstances, we can, without boasting, thank God, and take courage, having placed ourselves where we may fairly challenge comparison with more highly favored men.

Among the colored people we can point, with pride and hope, to men of education and refinement, who have become such, despite of the most unfavorable influences, we can point to mechanics, farmers, merchants, teachers, ministers, doctors, lawyers, editors, and authors against whose progress the concentrated energies of American prejudice have proved quite unavailing. Now, what is the motive for ignoring and discouraging our improvement in this country? The answer is ready. The intelligent and upright free man of color is an unanswerable argument in favor of liberty, and a killing condemnation of American slavery. It is easily seen that, in proportion to the progress of the free man of color in knowledge, temperance, industry, and righteousness, in just that proportion will he endanger the stability of slavery; hence, all the powers of slavery are exerted to prevent the elevation of the free people of color.

THE FORCE of fifteen hundred million dollars is arrayed against us; hence, the press, the pulpit, and the platform, against all the natural promptings of uncontaminated manhood, point their deadly missiles of ridicule, scorn and contempt at us; and bid us, on pain of being pierced through and through, to remain in our degradation.

Let the same amount of money be employed against the interest of any other class of persons, however favored by nature they may be, the result could scarcely be different from that seen in our own case. Such a people would be regarded with aversion; the money-ruled multitude would heap contumely upon them, and money-ruled institutions would proscribe them. Besides this money consideration, fellow-citizens, an explanation of the erroneous opinions prevalent concerning us is furnished in the fact, less creditable to human nature, that men are apt to hate most those whom they injure most. Having despised us, it is natural that they should strive to prove us unfit for freedom; having denounced us as indolent, it is not strange that they should cripple our enterprise; having assumed our inferiority, it would be extraordinary if they sought to surround us with circumstances which would serve to make us direct contradictions to their assumption.

IN CONCLUSION, fellow-citizens, while conscious of the immense disadvantages which beset our pathway, and fully appreciating our own weakness, we are encouraged to persevere in efforts adapted to our improvement, by a firm reliance upon God, and a settled conviction, as immovable as the everlasting hills, that all the truths in the whole universe of God are allied to our cause.

And yet, again, we would free ourselves from the charge of unreasonableness and self-sufficiency.

IN NUMBERS we are few and feeble; but in the goodness of our cause, in the rectitude of our motives, and in the abundance of argument on our side, we are many and strong.

We count our friends in the heavens above, in the earth beneath, among good men and holy angels. The subtle and mysterious cords of human sympathy have connected us with philanthropic hearts throughout the civilized world. The number in our own land who already recognize the injustice of our cause, and are laboring to promote it, is great and increasing.

It is also a source of encouragement, that the genuine American, brave and independent himself, will respect bravery and independence in others. He spurns servility and meanness, whether they be manifested by nations or by individuals. We submit, therefore, that there is neither necessity for, nor disposition on our part to assume a tone of excessive humility. While we would be respectful, we must address you as men, as citizens, as brothers, as dwellers in a common country, equally interested with you for its welfare, its honor and for its pros-

perity.

To be still more explicit: we would, first of all, be understood to range ourselves no lower among our fellow-countrymen than is implied in the high appellation of 'citizen.'

Notwithstanding the impositions and deprivations which have fettered us--notwithstanding the disabilities and liabilities, pending and impending--notwithstanding the cunning, cruel and scandalous efforts to blot out that right, we declare that we are, and of right we ought to be American citizens. We claim this right, and we claim all the rights and privileges, and duties which, properly, attach to it.

IT MAY, and it will, probably, be disputed that we are citizens. We may, and probably shall be denounced for this declaration, as making an inconsiderate, impertinent and absurd claim to citizenship; but a very little reflection will vindicate the position we have assumed, from so unfavorable a judgement. Justice is never inconsiderate; truth is never impertinent; right is never absurd. If the claim we set up be just, true and right, it will not be deemed improper or ridiculous in us to declare it. Nor is it disrespectful to our fellow-citizens, who repudiate the aristocratic notions of the old world that we range ourselves with them in respect to all the rights and prerogatives belonging to American citizens. Indeed, we believe, when you have duly considered this subject, you will commend us for the mildness and modesty with which we have taken our ground.

PROTEST AT THE POLLS REGISTER TO VOTE

THIS WEEK IN NEGRO HISTORY

AN "NPI" FEATURE

- July 27, 1953 Fighting ceases in Korea conflict, during which full-scale integration was inaugurated in U.S. Armed Forces.
- July 28, 1866 Negro armed troops were made an official part of the U.S. Army by act of Congress passed on this date.
- July 30, 1863 Henry Ford, father of assembly line in the manufacture of automobiles and one of the first to pay Negro workers equal salaries for commensurate work, was born.
- July 31, 1881 Slavery was abolished in Egypt.
- Aug. 1, 1834 Slavery abolished in British dependencies.
- Aug. 1, 1874 Charles C. Spaulding, co-founder and president, North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, born in Clarkston, N.C. He died in 1952.
- Aug. 2, 1865 Booker T. Washington moved with his mother from Hale's Ford, Va.
- Aug. 2, 1850 William Still started Underground Railroad passenger file.
- Aug. 2, 1906 The late Roi Ottley, Chicago newspaperman and author, was born in New York City. He was the author of "New World A-Coming," "Black Odyssey," "No Green Pastures," and "The Lonely Warrior."
- Aug. 2, 1924 James Baldwin, author, was born. One of his best known works is "Another Country."

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