

Hidden History

The Unsung Saga of the Black Man

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THE PRESENT Civil Rights Struggle of the American Negro, accurately labeled the Negro Revolt, has many parallels in the Abolitionist Era. Certainly the degree of intensity of the struggle for freedom from slavery, and recognition of the black man as a human being entitled to those "inalienable rights", has never been so strong as it is today since the Abolitionist Era.

Of noteworthy interest is that then, as now, there were leaders superbly eloquent in attacking what today is described as the white power structure and the self-destructive weakness of the white man's prejudice.

One such Negro, who has been singularly neglected by historians even in the vast area of neglected or hidden history, was Dr. John S. Rock, the first Negro attorney admitted to the bar of the United States Supreme Court. A distinguished abolitionist, physician and lawyer of Boston, Dr. Rock possessed one of the most brilliant minds and sharpest tongues of any pre-Civil War orators.

The following speech was delivered by Dr. Rock at a meeting commemorating the Boston Massacre March 5, 1858 at Boston.

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"WHITE AMERICANS have taken great pains to try to prove that we are cowards. We are often insulted with the assertion, that if we had the courage of the Indians or the white man, we would never submitted to be slaves. I ask if Indians and white men have never been slaves? The white man tested the Indian's courage here when he had his organized armies, his battle-grounds, his places of retreat, with everything to hope for and everything to lose. The position of the African slave has been very different. Seized a prisoner of war, unarmed, bound hand and foot, and conveyed to a distant country among what to him were worse than cannibals; brutally beaten, half-starved, closely watched by armed men, with no means of knowing their own strength or the strength of their enemies, with no weapons, and without a probability of success. But if the white man will take the trouble to fight the black man in Africa or in Hayti, and fight him as fair as the black man will fight him there--if the black man does not come off victor, I am deceived in his prowess. But, take a man, armed or unarmed, from his home, his country, or his friends, and place him among savages, and who is he that would not make good his retreat? 'Discretion is the better part of valor,' but for a man to resist where he knows it will destroy him, shows more foolhardiness than courage. There have been many Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Americans enslaved in Africa, but I have never heard that they successfully resisted any government. They always resort to running indispensables.

THE COURAGE of the Anglo-Saxon is best illustrated in his treatment of the Negro. A score or two of them can pounce upon a poor Negro, tie and beat him, and then call him a coward because he submits. Many of their most brilliant victories have been achieved in the same manner. But the greatest battles which they have fought have been upon paper. We can easily account for this; their trumpeter is dead. He died when they used to be exposed for sale in the Roman market, about the time that Cicero cautioned his friend Atticus not to buy them, on account of their stupidity. A little more than half a century ago, this race, in connection with their Celtic neighbors, who have long been considered (by themselves, of course,) the bravest soldiers in the world, so far forgot themselves, as to attack a few cowardly, stupid Negro slaves, who, according to their accounts, had not sense enough to go to bed. And what was the result? Why, sir, the Negroes drove them out from the island like so many sheep, and they have never dared to show their faces, except with hat in hand.

OUR TRUE and tried friend, Rev. Theodore

Parker, said, in his speech at the State House, a few weeks since, that 'the stroke of the axe would have settled the question long ago, but the black man would not strike.' Mr. Parker makes a very low estimate of the courage of his race, if he means that one, two or three millions of these ignorant and cowardly black slaves could, without means, have brought to their knees five, ten, or twenty millions of intelligent, brave white men, backed up by a rich oligarchy. But I know of no one who is more familiar with the true character of the Anglo-Saxon race than Mr. Parker. I will not dispute this point with him, but I will thank him or any one else to tell us how it could have been done. His remark calls to my mind the day which is to come, when one shall chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight. But when he says that 'the black man WOULD NOT STRIKE,' I am prepared to say that he does us great injustice. The black man is not a coward. The history of the bloody struggles for freedom in Hayti, in which the blacks whipped the French and the English, and gained their independence, in spite of the perfidy of that villainous First Consul, will be a lasting refutation of the malicious aspersions of our enemies. The history of the struggles for the liberty of the United States ought to silence every American calumniator....

THE WHITE man contradicts himself who says, that if he were in our situation, he would throw off the yoke. Thirty millions of white men of this proud Caucasian race are at this moment held as slaves, and bought and sold with horses and cattle. The iron heel of oppression grinds the masses of all the European races to the dust. They suffer every kind of oppression, and no one dares to open his mouth to protest against it. Even in the Southern portion of this boasted land of liberty, no white man dares advocate so much of the Declaration of Independence as declares that 'all men are created free and equal, and have an inalienable right to life, liberty, &c.'

White men have no room to taunt us with tamely submitting. If they were black men, they would work wonders; but, as white men, they can do nothing. 'O, Consistency, thou art a jewel!'

Now, it would not be surprising if the brutal treatment which we have received for the past two centuries should have crushed our spirits. But this is not the case. Nothing but a superior force keeps us down. And when I see the slaves rising up by hundreds annually, in the majesty of human nature, bidding defiance to every slave code and its penalties, making the issue Canada or death, and that too while they are closely watched by paid men armed with pistols, clubs and bowie-knives, with the army and navy of this great Model Republic arrayed against them, I am disposed to ask if the charge of cowardice does not come with ill-grace...

I DO NOT envy the white American the little liberty which he enjoys. It is his right, and he ought to have it. I wish him success, though I do not think he deserves it. But I would have all men free. We have had much sad experience in this country, and it would be strange indeed if we do not profit by some of the lessons which we have so dearly paid for. Sooner or later, the clashing of arms will be heard in this country, and the black man's services will be needed: 150,000 freemen capable of bearing arms, and not all cowards and fools, and three quarter of a million slaves, wild with the enthusiasm caused by the dawn of the glorious opportunity of being able to strike a genuine blow for freedom, will be a power which white men will be 'bound to respect.' Will the blacks fight? Of course they will. The black man will never be neutral. He could not if he would and would not if he could. Will he fight for this country, right or wrong? This the common sense of every one answers; and when the time comes, and come it will, the black man will give an intelligent answer. Judge Taney may outlaw us; Caleb Cushing (Cushing was a leading Massachusetts Democrat. He was Attorney-General of the United States from 1853 to 1857) may show the depravity of his heart by abusing us; and this wicked government may oppress us; but the black man will live when Judge Taney, Caleb Cushing and this wicked government are no more. White men may despise, ridicule, slander and abuse us; they may seek as they always have done to divide us, and make us feel degraded; but no man shall cause me to turn my back upon my race. With it I will sink or swim.

THE PREJUDICE which some white men have, or affected to have, against my color gives

me no pain. If any man does not fancy my color, that is his business, and I shall not meddle with it. I shall give myself no trouble because he lacks good taste. If he judges my intellectual capacity by my color, he certainly cannot expect much profundity, for it is only skin deep; and is really of no very great importance to any one but myself. I will not deny that I admire the talents and noble characters of many white men. But I cannot say that I am particularly pleased with their physical appearance. If old mother nature had held out as well as she commenced, we should, probably, have had fewer varieties in the races. When I contrast the fine rough muscular system, the beautiful, rich color, the full broad features, and the gracefully frizzled hair of the Negro, with the delicate physical organization, wan color, sharp features and lank hair of the Caucasian, I am inclined to believe that when the white man was created, nature was pretty well exhausted--but determined to keep up appearances, she pinched up his features, and did the best she could under the circumstances. (Great laughter.)

I would have you understand, that I not only love my race, but am pleased with my color; and while many colored persons may feel degraded by being called Negroes, and wish to be classed among other races more favored, I

(See HISTORY, page 3)

THIS WEEK IN NEGRO HISTORY

AN "NPI" FEATURE

- Aug. 3, 1800 Gabriel Prosser slave revolt took place at Richmond, Va.
- Aug. 4, 1776 James Forten, wealthy Negro businessman, helped protect Philadelphia from the British.
- Aug. 5, 1810 Robert Purvis, Negro abolitionist, was born.
- Aug. 5, 1364 John Lawson, Negro gunner of the flagship of Admiral David Farragut, exhibited marked courage in the Battle Mobile Bay and won the Congressional Medal of Honor.
- Aug. 6, 1950 Pfc. William Thompson was killed in Korea when he refused to retreat and though repeatedly wounded, fought while his buddies withdrew to safety. Thompson was posthumously awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the first Negro to receive the medal since the Spanish-American War.
- Aug. 6, 1864 Wilnot proviso to limit slavery defeated.
- Aug. 6, 1846 Frederick Douglass addressed the World's Temperance Convention in London, England.
- Aug. 7, 1904 Dr. Ralph Bunche, UN under-secretary, born in Detroit.
- Aug. 7, 1919 Secret information regarding Negro troops issued in France by General Pershing's headquarters to establish jimcrow system.
- Aug. 8, 1842 Robert Brown Elliott, Negro member of the 42nd and 43rd Congress, was born in South Carolina.
- Aug. 8, 1866 Matthew Henson, who reached the North Pole with Admiral Robert E. Peary in 1909, was born. He died in New York, March 9, 1955, at the age of 86.
- Aug. 9, 1922 Edgar T. Rousseau, Negro War correspondent in World War II, died in New York City.

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