

Hidden History

The Unsung Saga of the Black Man

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A PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF INSURRECTION, 1858

Propagation of violence to achieve goals of Negroes is neither new nor has it met with acceptance by the vast majority as a means to obtain the freedom and equality of opportunity the "Sun-tanned Tenth of the Nation" seeks.

This is exemplified by a verbatim report of the proceedings of a State Convention of Massachusetts Negro held during the first week of August, 1858, in New Bedford City Hall. The presiding officer was William Wells Brown and among those present were Charles L. Redmond, Robert Morris, Lewis Hayden, William C. Nell, and Josiah Henson.

The spirited discussion which took place on Aug. 2 at that meeting is reprinted here.

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"MR. MORRIS then came out with great strength on the school question: 'When we wanted our children to go to the Public Schools in Boston,' said he, 'they offered them schools, and white teachers; but no, we wouldn't have them. Then they offered to give us colored teachers; no, we wouldn't stand that neither. Then the School Committee said--'Well, if you won't be satisfied either way, you shall have them as we choose.'" So we decided on a desperate step, but it turned out to be a successful one. We went round to every parent in the city, and had all the children removed from the Caste Schools; we made all our people take their children away. And in six months we had it all our own way--and that's the way we always should act. Let us be bold, and they'll have to yield to us. Let us be bold, if any man flies from slavery, and comes among us. When he's reached us, we'll say, he's gone far enough. If any man comes here to New Bedford, and they try to take him away, you telegraph to us in Boston, and we'll come down three hundred strong, and stay with him. And if any man runs away, and comes to Boston, we'll send to you, if necessary, and you may come up to us three hundred strong, if you can--come men, and women too.'

C. L. REMOND regretted that he was obliged to ask for rights which every pale-faced vagabond from across the water could almost at once enjoy. He did not go so far as Uncle Tom, and kiss the hand that smote him. He didn't believe in such a Christianity. He didn't object to the (Dred Scott) 'decision,' and the slave bill, any more than to the treatment of the colored race in Iowa and Kansas. The exodus for the colored men of this country is over the Constitution and through the Union. He referred to parties, and asked what either of them had done for freedom. The free-soil and republican parties had, alike, been false. We must depend upon our own self-reliance. If we recommend to the slaves in South Carolina to rise in rebellion, it would work greater things than we imagine. If some black Archimedes does not soon arise with his lever, then will there spring up some black William Wallace with his claymore, for the freedom of the black race. He boldly proclaimed himself a traitor to the government and the Union, so long as his rights were denied him for no fault of his own. Our government would disgrace the Algerines and Hottentots. Were there a thunderbolt of God which he could invoke to bring destruction upon this nation, he would gladly do it....

Mr. Remond moved that a committee of five be appointed to prepare an address suggesting to the slaves at the South to create in insurrection. He said he knew his resolution was in one sense revolutionary, and in another, treasonable, but so he meant it. He doubted whether it would be carried. But he didn't want to see people shake their heads, as he did see them on the platform, and turn pale, but to rise and talk. He wanted to see the half-way fellows take themselves away, and leave the field to men who would encourage their brethren at the South to

EDITOR'S MAILBOX

Dr. Charles I. West, M.D.
Editor of The Voice
Las Vegas, Nevada

My dear Dr. West:

It was with sorrow, and utmost disturbance of mind, that I heard the T.V. news report of Mr. Cronkite this evening, of the fatal shooting of a youth in his hometown, by a member of a police force. And I am troubled beyond ability to express my feelings that none of the men went to the lad. I feel that I am only one of thousands, --disturbed, troubled!

Must it not be that the extremity of conditions, of necessity, will bring about a natural, normal sense of brotherhood and national helpfulness!

Very sincerely,

Mrs. Alice Mc P. Morgan
600 So. 7th St.
Las Vegas, Nevada

(The editor would agree, Mrs. Morgan, but an upsurge of "natural, normal sense of brotherhood and national helpfulness" is hardly likely if the letter to the Christian Science Monitor, reprinted below, is an indication of the average citizen's reaction to the present crisis in the nation.)

"To the Christian Science Monitor:"

I have observed that right after major race riots in this country, such as those in Los Angeles and Newark, your editorial columns echo the Negro cry for "equal job opportunity, equal

rise with bowie-knife and revolver and musket.

FATHER HENSON doubted whether the time had come for the people of Massachusetts to take any such step. As for turning pale, he never turned pale in his life. (Father Henson is a very black man.) He didn't want to fight any more than he believed Remond did. He believed that if the shooting time came, Remond would be found out of the question: As he didn't want to see three of four thousand men hung before their time, he should oppose any such action, head, neck and shoulders. If such a proposition were carried out, everything would be lost. Remond might talk, and then run away, but what would become of the poor fellows that must stand? And then the resolution was ridiculous for another reason. How could documents be circulated among the Negroes at the South? Catch the masters permitting that, and you catch a weasel asleep. However, they had nothing to fight with at the South--no weapons, no education. 'When I fight,' said Father Henson, 'I want to whip somebody.'

Captain Henry Johnson concurred with the last last two speakers. It was easy to talk, but another thing to act. He was opposed to insurrection. In his opinion, those who were the loudest in their professions, were the first to run. The passage of the resolution would do no good. It would injure the cause. If we were equal in numbers, then there might be some reason in the proposition. If an insurrection occurred, he wouldn't fight.

MR. REMOND expressed himself as quite indifferent whether his motion was carried or not. He was in collusion with no one, and he cared nothing if no one supported him. It had been intimated that he would skulk in the time of danger. The men who said so, judged of him by themselves. Some had said the address could not be circulated at the South; in that case, its adoption could certainly do no harm. Others had said, many lives would be lost if an insurrection should come about. He had counted the cost. If he had one hundred relations at the South, he would rather see them die to-day, than live in bondage. He would rather stand over their graves, than feel that any pale-faced scoundrel might violate his mother or his sister at pleasure. He only regretted that he had not a spear with which he could transfix all the slaveholders at once. To the devil with the slaveholders! Give him liberty, or give him death. The insurrection could be accomplished as quick as thought, and the glorious result would be instantaneously attained.

A vote was taken, and the motion was lost. This was by far the most spirited discussion of the Convention."

The Liberator, August 13, 1858.

housing, equal education and above all, equal love and respect...."

Your plea is justified, but your timing wrong. After such periods of mass devastation, certainly the Monitor has the primary moral responsibility of helping to establish an atmosphere of sanity and reason. Emphasizing existing inequalities during a period of crisis is not the way to do this. It is virtually inflammatory--tantamount to pouring salt into an open wound.

Santa Monica, Calif.

M.L. Pastore

THIS WEEK IN NEGRO HISTORY

AN "NPI" FEATURE

- Aug. 17, 1890 Marcus Garvey, originator of the "Back to Africa" movement, born at St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica.
- Aug. 18, 1882 Booker T. Washington married Fannie N. Smith of Malden, W. Va.
- Aug. 19, 218 BC African Emperor Hannibal began a journey of conquest that eventually overran most of Europe.
- Aug. 19, 1926 Tiger Flowers, first Negro middleweight champion, won over Harry Greb in Chicago.
- Aug. 20, 1819 First groups of Africans brought as slaves to Jamestown, Va.
- Aug. 21, 1831 Nat Turner, a slave, led what is regarded as the best known of all American Negro slave revolts, an uprising in Southampton county, Va., in which approximately 60 whites were killed. In the suppression, at least 100 Negroes died. Thirteen slaves and three Negroes were arrested immediately, tried and hanged. Turner captured Oct. 30, was executed--going calmly to his death, according to newspaper reports--on November 11, 1831. The rebellion was the climax of a three-year period of great slave unrest throughout the South, and had significant repercussions upon pro- and anti-slavery thoughts.
- Aug. 21, 1906 Orchestra leader and composer William "Count" Basie born in Kansas City, Mo.
- Aug. 22, 1939 Henry "Hammering Hank" Armstrong lost the lightweight title to Lou Ambers. Armstrong was the only fighter in history to hold three world championships simultaneously.
- Aug. 23, 1917 Negro soldiers attacked at Houston, Tex., leading to protest by Negro troops; 13 were hanged; 41 given life sentences. The men, members of the 24th U.S. Infantry, were executed for their alleged part in a Houston riot.
- Aug. 23, 1796 The African Methodist Episcopal Church, founded by Richard Allen, was incorporated, under Pennsylvania state laws.
- Aug. 23, 1922 Dr. Rebecca Cole, physician and first Negro woman to graduate from Women's Medical College, Philadelphia.

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