

NEGRO ORATORS AND THEIR ORATIONS

BY

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NEGRO MIGRATION, THE EDUCATION OF THE NEGRO PRIOR TO 1861,
THE HISTORY OF THE NEGRO CHURCH, THE NEGRO IN OUR HIS-
TORY, FREE NEGRO HEADS OF FAMILIES OF THE UNITED
STATES IN 1830, AND THE MIND OF THE
NEGRO AS REFLECTED IN LETTERS WRITTEN
DURING THE CRISIS, 1800-1860

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ica. I believe that that answer will be the right and just answer. I believe that the spirit in which American democracy was founded, though often turned aside and often thwarted, can never be defeated or destroyed but that ultimately it will triumph.

If American democracy cannot stand the test of giving to any citizen who measures up to the qualifications required of others the full rights and privileges of American citizenship, then we had just as well abandon that democracy in name as in deed. If the Constitution of the United States cannot extend the arm of protection around the weakest and humblest of American citizens as around the strongest and proudest, then it is not worth the paper it is written on.

THE SHAME OF AMERICA, OR THE NEGRO'S CASE AGAINST THE REPUBLIC¹

BY ARCHIBALD GRIMKÉ²

The author of the Declaration of Independence said once that he trembled for his country when he remembered that God was just. And he did well to do so. But while he was about it he might have quaked a little for himself. For he was certainly guilty of the same crime against humanity, which had aroused in his philosophic and patriotic mind such lively sensations of anxiety and alarm in respect to the Nation. Said Jefferson on paper: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," while on his plantation he was holding some men as slaves, and continued to hold them as such for fifty years thereafter, and died at the end of a long and brilliant life, a Virginia slaveholder.

¹ Delivered on various occasions by Mr. Grimké.

² Archibald H. Grimké was born in South Carolina in 1849. Like his brother, he found his way north after the Civil War when he was seeking an education. At Lincoln University, where he received his first systematic training, he made an honorable record. He then studied law at Harvard University. He entered upon the practice of his profession and also participated in politics. Differing from most Negro leaders, however, he voted independently, endeavoring to support the man rather than the party. He served for some years as Consul in Haiti. The recent years of his life he has spent in Washington, largely advocating the rights of the Negro as championed by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. As the President of the local branch of this organization, he has rendered valuable service in snatching many a Negro from the hand of the oppressor, and in forcefully presenting the case of the race to a prejudiced world.

And yet Thomas Jefferson was sincere, or fancied that he was, when he uttered those sublime sentiments about the rights of man, and when he declared that he trembled for his country when he remembered that God was just. This inconsistency between the man's magnificence in profession and his smallness in practice, between the grandeur of what he promised and the meanness of what he performed, taken in conjunction with his cool unconsciousness of the discrepancy, is essentially and emphatically an American trait, a national idiosyncrasy. For it has appeared during the last one hundred and forty-four years with singular boldness and continuity in the social, political, and religious life of the American people and their leaders. I do not recall in all history such another example of a nation appearing so well in its written words regarding human rights, and so badly when it comes to translating those fine words into corresponding action, as this Republic has uniformly exhibited from its foundation, wherever the Negro has been concerned.

Look at its conduct in the War of the Revolution, which it began with the high sounding sentiments of the Declaration of Independence. The American colonists rose in arms because they were taxed by England without their consent, a species of tyranny which bore no sort of comparison to the slavery which they themselves were imposing on the Negro. But with such inconsistency of conduct the men of the Revolution bothered not their heads for a simple, and to them, a sufficient reason. They were white and the Negro was black and was their property. Since they were fighting for a political principle in order the better to protect their pockets, they were not disposed to give up their property rights in anything, not even in human beings. They were contending for the sacred right of loosening their own purse strings, not for the sacred privilege of loosening the bonds of their slaves. Not at all. Millions they were willing to spend in defense of the former, but not a cent to effect the latter, their loud talk in the Declaration of Independence to the contrary, notwithstanding.

Their subsequent conduct in respect to the Negro was of a piece with this characteristic beginning. First they accepted the services of the blacks, both bond and free, as soldiers, and then they debated the expediency and justice of their action, not from the point of view of the slaves but from that of the masters, and later

decided upon a policy of exclusion of the slaves from the Continental army. With the adoption of such a policy the chattel rights of masters in those poor men would be better conserved. Hence the policy of exclusion. But when the British evinced a disposition to enlist the slaves as soldiers, a change passed quickly over the leaders of the Revolution, with Washington at their head. The danger to the master of a policy of inclusion was overridden readily enough in the greater danger to the cause of one of exclusion. Without a thought for the slave, he was put on the military chess-board, withdrawn, then put back in response to purely selfish considerations and needs.

Thus it happened that black men fought in that war shoulder to shoulder with white men for American Independence. In every colony from Massachusetts to Georgia, they were found faithful among the faithless, and brave as the bravest during those long and bitter years, fighting and dying with incomparable devotion and valor, by the side of Warren at Bunker Hill, and of Pulaski at Savannah.

The voluntary surrender of life for country has been justly held by all ages to be an act of supreme virtue. It is in the power of any man to give less; it is in the power of none, however exalted in station, to give more. For to lay down one's life at the call of Duty is to lay down one's all. And this all of the general weighs no more than the all of a common soldier. Weighed in the scales of truth this supreme gift of the beggar on foot balances exactly that of the prince on horseback. When prince or beggar, master or slave, has given his life to a cause, he has given his utmost. Beyond that absolute measure of devotion neither can add one jot or tittle to the value of his gift. Thank God there is no color line in acts of heroism and self-sacrifice, save the royal one of their blood-tinted humanity. Such was the priceless contribution which the poor, oppressed Negro made to American Independence.

What was his guerdon? In the hour of their triumph did the patriot fathers call to mind such supreme service to reward it? In the freedom which they had won by the aid of their enslaved countrymen, did they bethink them of lightening the yoke of those miserable men? History answers, no! Truth answers, no! The descendants of those black heroes answer, no! What then? What did such bright, such blazing beacons of liberty, the Washingtons,

Hamiltons, Madisons and Franklins, the Rufus Kings, Roger Shermans, and Robert Morris? They founded the Republic on slavery, rested one end of its stately arch on the prostrate neck of the Negro. They constructed a national Constitution which safeguarded the property of man in man, introducing into it for that purpose its three-fifths slave representation provision, its fugitive slave clause, and an agreement by which the African slave trade was legalized for nineteen years after the adoption of that instrument. That was the reward which the founders of the Republic meted out with one accord to a race which had shed freely its blood to make that Republic a reality among the nations of the earth. Instead of loosening and lifting his heavy yoke of oppression, they strengthened and tightened it afresh on the loyal and long suffering neck of the Negro. Notwithstanding this shameful fact, the founders of the Republic were either so coolly unconscious of its moral enormity or else so indifferent to the amazing contradiction between what they said and what they did, as to write over the gateway of the new Constitution this sonorous preamble: "We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

"We the people!" From the standpoint of the Negro, what grim irony; "establish justice"! What exquisitely cruel mockery; "to insure domestic tranquillity"! What height and breadth and depth of political duplicity; "to provide for the common defense"! What cunning paltering with words in a double sense; "to promote the general welfare"! What studied ignoring of an ugly fact; "and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and posterity"! What masterly abuse of noble words to mask an equivocal meaning, to throw over a great national transgression an air of virtue, so subtle and illusive as to deceive the framers themselves into believing in their own sincerity. You may ransack the libraries of the world, and turn over all the documents of recorded time to match that Preamble of the Constitution as a piece of consummate political dissimulation and mental reservation, as an example of how men juggle deliberately and successfully with their moral sense, how they raise above themselves huge fabrics of false-

hood, and go willingly to live and die in a make-believe world of lies. The muse of history, dipping her iron pen in the generous blood of the Negro, has written large across the page of that Preamble, and the face of the Declaration of Independence, the words, "sham, hypocrisy."

It is the rage now to sing the praises of the fathers of the Republic as a generation of singularly liberty-loving men. They were so, indeed, if judged by their fine words alone. But they were, in reality, by no means superior to their sons in this respect, if we judge them by their acts, which somehow speak louder, more convincingly to us than their words, albeit those words proceed out of the Declaration of Independence, and the Preamble of the Constitution. If the children's teeth today are set on edge on the Negro question, it is because the fathers ate the sour grapes of race-wrong, ate those miserable grapes during their whole life, and, dying, transmitted their taste for oppression, as a bitter inheritance to their children, and children's children, for God knows how many black years to come.

Take the case of Washington as an example. He was rated an abolitionist by his contemporaries. And so he was if mere words could have made him one. On paper he was one person, but on his plantation quite another. And as far as I know his history, he never made any effectual attempt to bring this second self of his into actual accord with the first. In theory he favored emancipation, while in practice he was one of the biggest, if not the biggest slaveholder in the country, who enriched himself and his family out of the unpaid toil of more than two hundred slaves. The father of his country did not manumit them during his lifetime, or of that of his wife. Not until his death, not until the death of his widow, did he, as a matter of fact, release his hold upon the labor of those people, did they escape from his dead hands. As first President, moreover, he signed the first fugitive slave law and was not ashamed to avail himself of its hateful provisions for the reclamation of one of his runaway slave-women. And yet Washington, and Jefferson also, are the two bright, particular stars of our American democracy. They had very fine words for liberty, no two men ever had finer, but when it came to translating them into action, into churning them into butter for the poor Negro's

parsnips, no atom of butter did they yield, or will ever yield, churn them ever so long. *Ex pede Herculem.*

Naturally enough under the circumstances of its origin and antecedents, American democracy has never cared a fig in practice for the fine sentiments of its Declaration of Independence, or for the high sounding ones of the Preamble to its Constitution, wherever and whenever the Negro has been concerned. It used him to fight the battles for its independent political existence, and rewarded his blood and bravery with fresh stripes and heavier chains.

History repeats itself. In America, on the Negro question, it has been a series of shameful repetitions of itself. The Negro's history in the first war with England was repeated exactly in the second. In this conflict no more loyal and daring hearts bled and broke for the country than were those of its colored soldiers and sailors. On land and water in that war the Negro died as he fought, among the most faithful and heroic defenders of the American cause. But to praise him is to condemn the country, which in this instance I will leave to no less an American than General Jackson. Out of his mouth shall this condemnation be spoken. Said Jackson three weeks before the battle of New Orleans to the black soldiers who had rallied at his summons to repel a formidable invasion of our national domain by a powerful foreign enemy:

“From the shores of Mobile I called you to arms. I invited you to share in the perils and divide the glory of your white countrymen. I expected much from you, for I was not uninformed of those qualities which must render you so formidable to an invading foe. I knew you could endure hunger and thirst, and all the hardships of war. I knew that you loved the land of your nativity, and that, like ourselves, you had to defend all that is most dear to men. But you surpass my hopes. I have found in you, united to those qualities, that noble enthusiasm that impels to great deeds.

“Soldiers: The President of the United States shall be informed of your conduct on the present occasion, and the voice of the representatives of the American nation shall applaud your valor, as your General now praises your ardor. The enemy is near. His sails cover the lakes, but the brave are united, and if

he finds us contending among ourselves, it will be for the prize of valor, and fame its noblest reward.”

Jackson's black troops proved themselves in the actions of Mobile Bay and New Orleans entitled to every mouthful of the ringing applause which Old Hickory gave them without stint. They got fair enough words as long as the enemy was in sight and his navy covered the waters of the country. But as soon as the peril had passed those fair words were succeeded by the foulest ingratitude. On every hand Colorphobia reared its cursed head, and struck its cruel fangs into those brave breasts which had just received the swords and the bullets of a foreign foe. They were legislated against everywhere, proscribed by atrocious laws everywhere. They had given the nation in its dire need, blood and life, and measureless love, and had received as reward black codes, an unrelenting race prejudice, and bondage bitterer than death.

Strange irony of fate which reserved to Andrew Jackson, whose mouth overflowed with praise in 1814 for his black soldiers and with fair promises of what he intended to do for them—strange irony of fate, I say, which reserved to that man, as President in 1836, the elevation of Roger B. Taney to the Chief-Justiceship of the United States, of Taney, the infamous slave Judge who wrote the Dred Scott Decision, which argued that black men had no rights in America which white men were bound to respect. The downright brutality of that opinion was extremely shocking to some sensitive Americans, but it was no more so than was the downright brutality of the facts, which it reflected with brutal accuracy. The fell apparition of American inhumanity, which those words conjured up from the depths of an abominable past and from that of a no less abominable present, was indeed black, but it was no blacker than the truth. The dark soul of the nation was embodied in them, all of its savage selfishness, greed and iniquity. There they glared, large and lifelike, a devil's face among the nations, seamed and intersected with the sinister lines of a century of cruelty and race hatred and oppression. Of course the fair idealism of the Declaration of Independence was wanting in the photographic naturalism of the picture, and so was the fictive beauty of the Preamble of the Constitution, because they were wanting in the terrible original, in the malignant, merciless, and murderous spirit of

a democracy which the dark words of the dark judge had limned to the life.

God has made iniquitous power ultimately self-destructive. Into every combination of evil He puts the seed of division and strife. Without this effective check wickedness would conquer and permanently possess the earth. The law of the brute would rule it forever. Where today are the empires of might and wrong, which men reared in their pride and strength, on the Nile, the Tigris, and the Euphrates, on the Tiber, the Bosphorus, and the Mediterranean? They flourished for a season and seasons, and spread themselves like green bay trees. But behold they are gone, perished, burnt up by the fires of evil passions, by the evil power which consumed them to ashes. Centuries have flown over their graves, and the places once cursed by their violence, and crushed by their oppressions, shall know them and their vulture laws and trampling armies no more forever.

So it happened in the case of the American people when in order "to form a more perfect union," they ordained and established their Constitution. Within the "more perfect union" was enfolded a fruitful germ of division and discord. No bigger at first than the smallest of seeds, the germ grew apace with the growth of the new nation, drawing abundant nourishment from the dark underworld of the slave. Slender sapling in 1815, it was a fast growing tree in 1820, bearing even then its bitter apples of Gomorrah. Where its bitter fruit fell, there fell also on the spirit of the people mutual distrust, and incipient sectional hate. And no wonder, for when the North clasped hands with her Southern sister in "a more perfect union," she did so the better to conserve a set of interests and institutions peculiar to herself and inherently hostile to those of the South, and vice versa with respect to the action of the latter in the premises. The "more perfect union" had, thank God, effected a conjunction, under a single political system, of two sets of mutually invasive and destructive social ideas and industrial forces. Differences presently sprang up between the partisans of each set, and discontent, and wide-spreading fear and contention. National legislation which oxidized and enriched the blood of the North, not only impoverished but actually poisoned that of the South. And so it came to pass that the compromise Constitution which was designed "to form a more perfect union,"

failed of its purpose, because with human slavery at the core of it, it brought face to face two warring social systems, whose unappeasable strife it had not the secret or the strength to subdue.

As in Egypt more than three thousand years ago, the Eternal spoke to the master-race at divers times and with divers signs, saying, "let my people go," so he spoke to the master-race in this land through divers omens and events, saying likewise, "let my people go." Those with ears to hear might have heard that divine voice in the Hartford Convention and the causes which led to its call; in the successive sectional conflicts over Missouri, the Tariff, and Texas; in the storm winds of the Mexican war, as in the wild uproar which followed the annexation of new national territory at its close; in the political rage and explosions of 1850 and 1854, and in the fierce patter of blood-drops over Kansas. They might have surely heard that commanding voice from the anointed lips of holy men and prophets, from the mouths of Garrison and Sumner, and Phillips, and Douglass, from the sacred gallows where John Brown heard and repeated it while his soul went marching on from city to city, and State to State, over mountain and river, across a continent, and from the Lakes to the Gulf with rising accent saying, "let my people go." Alas! the nation hearkened not to the voice of justice, but continued to harden its heart, until thunder-like that voice broke in the deep boom of Civil War.

When masters fall out a way oftentimes opens for the escape of their slaves. In the death grapple of the sections for political supremacy, the dead weight of two centuries of oppression lifted from the neck of the Negro. The people and their leaders of both sections despised him to such a degree that neither would in the beginning enlist his aid against the other. "We the people" of the glorious union of 1789 had quarrelled like two bloody scoundrels over their ill-gotten gains, and had come to murderous blows. Yet in spite of their deadly hatred of each other, they said in their mad race-pride and prejudice, the North to the South, and the South to the North, "go to, shall we not settle our differences without the aid of him who is our slave? Shall not we white men fight our duel to a finish; shall either of us appeal for help to that miserable being who by our laws, written and unwritten, has never possessed any rights among us which we have ever respected?" They chose to forget how in two wars this faithful man had for

their sakes, received into his sad but brave breast the swords and the bullets of a foreign enemy, and all unmindful of self had helped them to achieve and maintain their liberty and independence. And thus choosing to forget his past services and to remember only their bitter race-prejudice against him, they fought on with deadly malice and violence, the one side against the other, rending their dear Union with fraternal strife, and drenching it with fraternal blood.

Perceiving the unlimited capacity of mankind for all sorts of folly, no wonder Puck exclaimed, "What fools these mortals be!" Yes, what fools, but of all the fools who have crawled to dusty death the most stupendous and bedeviled lot are those who strut their fools' feet and toss their fools' heads across their little stage of life, thanking their fools' selves that God made them different from other men—superior to other men—to rule over other men. Puffed up with their stupid race-pride and prejudice, inflated to the bursting point with their high and mighty notions, and *noli me tangere* airs, the North and the South went on for nearly two years goading and tearing each other like two infuriated bulls of nearly equal strength, before either would call on the Negro for assistance. Not until bleeding at every pore, sickened at the loss of its sordid dollar, and in despair at the threatened destruction of that to which it ascribed, as to the Almighty, all of its sectional progress, prosperity and power, viz.: the dear Union, did the North turn for help to the Negro, whom it had despised and wronged, and whom it even then, in its heart of hearts, despised and intended, upon occasion, to wrong anew.

Think of the incredible folly and selfishness of a people fighting for existence and yet begrudging freedom to an enslaved race, whom it had called upon to help defend that existence; doling out to its faithful black allies, with miserly meanness, its blood-money and its boasted democratic equality and fair play; denying to its colored soldiers equal pay and promotion with its white ones, albeit many of those white ones were mercenary aliens from Europe. Nevertheless, of such bottomless depths of folly and meanness was the National Government certainly guilty. The Fifty-fourth and the Fifty-fifth Massachusetts regiments enlisted to fight the battles of the country, with the understanding that there would be no discrimination against them on account of their

color. Yet the government violated its understood pledge, and proceeded to pay, or tried to pay those men ten dollars a month where it was paying other men, because they were white, thirteen dollars a month for the same service. All honor to Massachusetts for objecting to this shameful act, and for offering to make up to her colored regiments the three dollars out of which the National government was endeavoring to cheat them. Three times three cheers for the brave and true men who had the sagacity, and the courage, and the self-respect, to resist the injustice of the government, and to refuse firmly to compromise by a cent their right to equality of pay in the army.

Take another instance of the meanness of the government's conduct toward its colored defenders. In January of 1864, Henry Wilson embodied, in a bill to promote enlistments, a clause which provided that when "any man or boy of African descent, in service or labor in any State under its laws, should be mustered into the military or naval service of the United States, he and his mother, wife and children, shall be forever free." Now will you believe that this just and moderate measure took thirteen long months before its friends could get Congress to enact it into law? "Future generations," exclaimed Charles Sumner in closing his remarks on the subject, "future generations will read with amazement, that a great people when national life was assailed, hesitated to exercise a power so simple and beneficent; and this amazement will know no bounds, as they learn that Congress higgled for months on a question, whether the wives and children of our colored soldiers should be admitted to freedom."

Need I repeat in this presence the old, grand story, how in numbers nearly two hundred thousand strong our colored boys in blue, left their blood and their bones in every State from Virginia to Louisiana? How, like heroes, they fought and died for the Union at Port Hudson, and Fort Wagner, and Petersburg, and Honey Hill, and Olustee, and Milliken's Bend? How in winter and summer, in cold and heat, in valley and on hilltop, on horse and on foot, over rivers and swamps, through woods and brakes, they rushed to meet the foe? How leaving behind them fields strown thick with their dead and wounded, they mounted the blazing sides of grim fortresses, climbing on great deeds and self-sacrifices

through storms of shot and shell, to death and a place among the stars?

No, no, it is not required of me on this occasion to read afresh that glorious record. Sufficient then this: The Northern army, reinforced by the strength which it drew from that of the Negro, broke in time the back of the Rebellion, and saved the Union, so that in 1865 the flag of the nation floated again over an undivided country, and the Republic, strong and great beneath that flag, launched anew to meet the years, and to reach her fair ideals of liberty and equality which were flashing like beacon lights upon her way.

Amid widespread rejoicing on the return of peace and the restoration of the Union, the Negro rejoiced among the gladdest, for his slave fetters were broken, he was no longer a chattel. He imagined in his simple heart, in his ignorance and poverty, that he had not only won freedom, but the lasting affection and gratitude of the powerful people for whom he had entered hell to quench for them its raging fires with his blood. Yes, although black and despised, he, the slave, the hated one, had risen above his centuries of wrongs, above their bitter memories and bitterer sufferings to the love of enemies, to the forgiveness of those who had despitefully used him, ay, to those moral heights where heroes are throned and martyrs crowned. Surely, surely, he, who had been so unmindful of self in the service of country, would not be left by that country at the mercy of those who hated him then with the most terrible hatred for that very cause. He who had been mighty to save others would surely, now in his need, be saved by those whom he had saved. "Oh! Justice, thou has fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost their gratitude."

I would gladly seal forever the dark chapter of our history, which followed the close of the war. Gladly would I forget that record of national shame and selfishness. But as it is better to turn on light than to shut it off, I will, with your forbearance, turn it on for our illumination and guidance, in the lowering present.

The chapter opened with an introductory of characteristic indifference on the part of the country in respect to the fate of the Negro. With his shackles lying close beside him, he was left in the hands of his old master who, seizing the opportunity, proceeded

straightway to refit them on the disenthralled limbs of the former slave. State after State did so with such promptitude and to such effect that within a few months a formidable system of Negro-serfdom had actually been constructed, and cunningly substituted in place of the system of Negro slavery, which the war had destroyed. An African serf-power, Phoenix-like, was rising out of the ashes of the old slave power into national politics. At sight of this truly appalling apparition, the apparition of a returning slave power in thin disguise, all the old sectional fear and hatred which had existed against it in the free States before the Rebellion, awoke suddenly and hotly in the breast of the North. Thinking mainly, if not wholly of its own safety in the emergency which confronted it, and how best to avert the fresh perils which impended in consequence over its ascendancy, the North prepared to make, and did in fact make, for the time being, short shrift of this boldly retroactive scheme of the South to recover within the Union all that it had lost by its defeated attempt to land itself outside of the Union.

Having tested to its entire satisfaction the Negro's value as a soldier in its war for the preservation of the Union, the North determined at this juncture to enlist his aid as a citizen in its further conflicts with the South, for the preservation of its sectional domination in the newly restored Union. To this end the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution were, in the progress of events, incorporated into that instrument. By these two great acts, the North had secured itself against the danger of an immediate return of the South to anything like political equality with it in the Republic. Between its supremacy and the attacks of its old rival, it had erected a solid wall of Negro votes. But immensely important as was the ballot to its black contingent, it was not enough to meet all of his tremendous needs. Nevertheless, as the North was considering mainly its own and not the Negro's necessities at this crisis, and as the elective franchise in his hands was deemed by it adequate to satisfy its own pressing needs, it gave the peculiar wants of the Negro beyond that of the ballot but scant attention.

Homeless, landless, illiterate, just emerging from the blackness of two centuries of slavery, this simple and faithful folk had surely other sacred claims on the North and the National Government

than this right to the ballot. They had in truth a strong claim to unselfish friendship and statesmanship, to unfaltering care and guardianship, during the whole of their transition from slavery to citizenship. They needed the organized hands, the wise heads, the warm hearts, the piled-up wealth, the sleepless eyes, the faith, hope, and charity of a Christian people and a Christian government to teach them to walk and to save them from industrial exploitation by their old masters, as well as to vote. Did they receive from the Republic what the Republic owed them by every consideration of justice, gratitude and humanity, as of enlightened self-interest? Alas! not a tithe of this immense debt has the Republic ever undertaken to pay to those who should have been, under all circumstances, its sacredly preferred creditors. On the contrary they were left to themselves by the government in the outer darkness of that social state which had been their sad lot for more than two centuries. They were left in that darkest night of moral and civil anarchy to fight not alone their own terrible battle with poverty, ignorance, and untutored appetites and passions, but also the unequal, the cruel battle for the preservation of Northern political domination in the Union. For ten awful years they fought that battle for the North, for the Republican party, in the face of persecutions and oppressions, terrors and atrocities, at the glare of which the country and the civilized world shrank aghast.

Aghast shrank the North, but not for the poor Negro, faithful unto death to it. For itself rather it shrank from the threatening shadows which such a carnival of horrors was casting athwart its vast and spreading network of trade and production. The clamor of all its million-wheeled industry and prosperity was for peace. "Let us have peace," said Grant, and "let us have peace" blew forthwith and in deafening unison, all the big and little whistles of all the big and little factories and locomotives, and steamships from Maine to California. Every pen of merchant and editor scratched paper to the same mad tune. The pulpit and the platform of the land cooed their Cuckoo-song in honor of those piping times of peace. The loud noise of chinking coin pouring into vaults like coal into bins, drowned the agonized cry of the forgotten and long-suffering Negro. Deserting him in 1876, the North, stretching across the bloody chasm its two greedy, commercial

hands, grasped the ensanguined ones of the South, and repeated, "let us have peace." Little did the Northern people and the government reckon then or now that at the bottom of that bloody chasm lay their faithful black friends. Little did they care that the blood on those Southern hands had been wrung drop by drop from the loyal heart of the Negro. But enough.

Years of struggle and oppression follow and we come to another chapter of American history; namely, the Spanish-American War. In the Spanish-American War the Negro attracted the attention of the world by his dashing valor. He attracted the attention of his country also. His fighting quality was of the highest, unsurpassed, and perhaps unequalled in brilliancy by the rest of the American army that invaded Cuba. He elicited applause and grudging justice from his countrymen, dashed with envy and race prejudice. Still it seemed for a brief time that his conspicuous service had given his case against the Republic a little better standing in Court—a little better chance for a fair hearing at the Bar of Public Opinion. But our characteristic national emotionalism was too shallow and insincere to last. In fact, it died aborning. The national habit of a century and a half reasserted itself. There was no attempt made to square national profession and national practice, national promise and national performance. The Negro again had given his all to his country and had got in return at the hands of that country wrong and injustice. Southern propaganda presently renewed all of its vicious and relentless activity against the Negro. He was different, he was alien, he was unasimilable, he was inferior, and he must be kept so, and in the scheme of things he must be made forever subordinate to the white race. In this scheme of things white domination could best be preserved by the establishment of a caste system based on race and color. And so following the Spanish-American War the North and the South put their heads together to complete their caste system. Everywhere throughout the Republic race prejudice, color proscription grew apace. One by one rights and privileges which the Negroes had enjoyed for a brief space were withdrawn and the wall of caste rose higher and higher. He was slowly and surely being shut out from all the things which white men enjoyed by virtue of their citizenship, and shut within narrowing limits of freedom. Everywhere within his prison house he read in large and

sinister letters, "Thus far and no farther." He was trapped, and about to be caged. In spite of the Emancipation Proclamation and the Three War Amendments he found that white men were becoming bolder in ignoring or violating his freedom and citizenship under them. The walls of the new bondage were closing about his right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness in this boasted Land of the Free and Christian Home of Democratic Hypocrisy and Cruelty.

Then Mr. Taft appeared upon the scene and became famous or infamous as a builder on the walls of the Temple of the New American Jerusalem, where profession is High Priest to the God of Broken Promises. He proved himself a master workman in following the lines of caste, in putting into place a new stone in the edifice when he announced as his policy at the beginning of his administration that he would not appoint any colored man to office in the South where the whites objected. Caste had won and the Negro's status was fixed, as far as this bourgeois apostle of American Democracy was able to fix it. His adds but another illustrious name to the long list of those architects of national dishonor who sought to build the Temple of American Liberty upon a basis of caste.

Then in the fullness of time came Woodrow Wilson, the ripe, consummate fruit of all this national contradiction between profession and practice, promise and performance. He can give Messrs. Washington, Jefferson, Jackson and Company odds and beat them in the subtle art of saying sonorously, grandiosely, what in action he does not hesitate to flout and spurn. When seeking the Negro's vote in 1912 he was the most profuse and generous in eloquent profession, in iridescent promises, but when he was elected he forgot straightway those fair professions and promises and began within a week after he entered the White House to put into office men filled with colorphobia, the better to finish the work of undoing in the government the citizenship of the Negro, to whom he had promised not grudging justice but the highly sympathetic article, heaping up and running over. Mr. Taft had established the principle that no Negro was to be appointed to office in the South where the whites objected—Mr. Wilson carried the principle logically one step farther, namely, no Negro was to be put to work in any department of the Government with white

men and women if these white men and women objected to his presence. Segregation along the color line in Federal employment became forthwith the fixed policy of the Wilson administration.

There sprang up under the malign influence of this false prophet of the New Freedom all sorts of movements in the District of Columbia and in the Federal Government hostile to the Negro—movements to exclude him from all positions under the Civil Service above that of laborer and messenger and charwoman, to jim-crow him on the street cars, to prohibit him from intermarrying with the whites, to establish for him a residential pale in the District; in short, to fix forever his status as a permanently inferior caste in the land for which he had toiled in peace and bled and died in war. The evil influence of this false apostle of freedom spread far and wide and spurred the enemies of the Negro to unwonted activity. The movement of residential segregation and for rural segregation grew in volume and momentum in widely separated parts of the country until it was finally checked by the decision of the Supreme Court in 1917.

The condition of the Negro was at its worst and his outlook in America at its darkest when the Government declared war against Germany. Then was revived the Republic's program of false promises and hypocritical professions in order to bring this black man with his brawn and brains, with his horny hands and lion heart, with his unquenchable loyalty and enthusiasm to its aid. No class of its citizens surpassed him in the swiftness and self-forgetfulness of his response to the call of country. What he had to give he brought to the altar and laid it there—labor and wealth, wounds and death, with unsurpassed devotion and patriotism. But what he received in return was the same old treatment, evil for his good, ingratitude and treachery for his loyalty and service. He was discriminated against everywhere—was used and abused, shut out from equal recognition and promotion with white men and women. Then when he went overseas he found American colorphobia more deadly than the gun and poison gas of the Germans. In the American army there was operated a ceaseless propaganda of meanness and malice, of jealousy and detraction against him. If our Expeditionary Force had given itself with a tithe of the zeal and industry to fighting the Germans, which a large section of it devoted to fighting the black soldier, it would have come out

of the war with more honor and credit, and left behind in France a keener sense of gratitude and regard than exists for them in that country today. But, alas, thousands of them were more interested in watching the Negro and his reception by the French, in concocting villainous plots to degrade him in the eyes of that people, in segregating him from all social contact with them, and in keeping him in his place, within the hard and fast lines of caste which they had laid for him in America.

But the Negro went and saw—saw the incredible meanness and malice of his own country by the side of the immense genius for Liberty and Brotherhood of France. There he found himself a man and brother regardless of his race and color. But if he has seen these things in France he has also conquered certain other things in himself, and has come back not as he went but a New Negro. He has come back to challenge injustice in his own land and to fight wrong with a courage that will not fail him in the bitter and perhaps bloody years to come. For he knows now as he has never known before that he is an American citizen with the title deeds of his citizenship written in a century and a half of labor and suffering and blood. From his brave black lips I hear the ringing challenge, "This is my right and by the Eternal I have come back to claim all that belongs to me of industrial and political equality and liberty." And let us answer his high resolve with a courage and will to match his own, and so help to redeem our country from its shame of a century and a half of broken promises and dishonored ideals.

But be not deceived, friends. Let us, like brave men and women, face the stern reality of our situation. We are where we are. We are in the midst of a bitter and hitherto an invincible race-prejudice, which beats down into the dust all of our rights, all of our attainments, all of our aspirations after freedom and excellence. The North and the South are in substantial accord in respect to us and in respect to the position which we are to occupy in this land. We are to be forever exploited, forever treated as an alien race, allowed to live here in strict subordination and subjection to the white race. We are to hew for it wood, draw for it water, till for it the earth, drive for it coaches, wait for it at tables, black for it boots, run for it errands, receive from it crumbs and kicks, to be for it, in short, social mudsills on which

shall rest the foundations of the vast fabric of its industrial democracy and civilization.

No one can save us from such a fate but God, but ourselves. You think, I know, that the North is more friendly to you than the South, that the Republican party does more for the solution of this problem than the Democratic. Friends, you are mistaken. A white man is a white man on this question, whether he lives in the North or in the South. Of course, there are splendid exceptions. Scratch the skin of Republican or Democrat, of Northern white men or Southern white men, and you will find close to the surface race prejudice, American colorphobia. The difference, did you but know it, is not even epidermal, is not skin-deep. The hair is Democratic Esau's, and the voice is Republican Jacob's. That is all. Make no mistake here, for a true understanding of our actual position at this point is vital.

On Boston Commons stands a masterpiece in bronze, erected to commemorate the heroism and patriotism of Col. Robert Gould Shaw and his black regiment. There day and night, through summer and winter, storm and shine, are to march forever those brave men by the side of their valiant young leader. Into the unknown they are hurrying to front and to fight their enemies and the enemies of their country. They are not afraid. A high courage looks from their faces, lives in the martial motion of their bodies, flashes from the barrels of their guns. On and yet ever on they are marching, grim bolts of war, across the Commons, through State Street, past the old State House, over ground consecrated by the martyr's blood of Crispus Attucks, and the martyr's feet of William Lloyd Garrison. Farther and farther they are pressing forward into the unknown, into the South, to Wagner and immortal deeds, to death and an immortal crown.

Friends, we too are marching through a living and lowering present into the unknown, through an enemy's land, at the summons of duty. We are to face great labors, great dangers, to fight like men our passions and American caste-prejudice and oppression, and God helping us, to conquer them.¹

¹ Grimké, *The Shame of America, or the Negro's Case Against the Republic*.