AFRICAN
OR
AMERICAN
A Question of
Intellectual Allegiance

Essays
by
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example see “Failure”.) Even more significantly, it echoes Alexis de Tocqueville’s conclusion in *Democracy in America*. The English translation had been published in 1835 two years prior to Easton’s sermon. Thus, this “American” Negro concept seems to have been the creation of European intellectuals. This exemplifies slave rebellion research and the White Question.

Let us close this historical sketch of the 19th century dialogue or debate among Africans with the speakers who most articulately represented the contrasting views, Martin R. Delany and Frederick Douglass. In their early careers they had worked together as co-editors of the *North Star*. One scholar quotes Douglass as having said, “I thank God for making me a man simply, but Delany always thanks Him for making him a black man.”

In 1852 Delany stated the case for nationalism:

> Every people should be the originators of their own designs, the projector of their own schemes, and creators of the events that lead to their destiny—the consummation of their desires.

Situated as we are, in the United States, many, and almost insurmountable obstacles present themselves. We are four-and-a-half millions in numbers, free and bond; six hundred thousand free, and three-and-a-half millions bond.

We have native hearts and virtues, just as other nations; which in their pristine purity are noble, potent, and worthy of example. *We are a nation within a nation:* [my emphasis] as the Poles in Russia, the Hungarians in Austria, the Welsh, Irish, and Scotch in the British dominions.

But we have been, by our oppressors, despoiled of our purity, and corrupted in our native characteristics, so that we have inherited their vices, and but few of their virtues. leaving us in character, really a broken people....

Being distinguished by complexion, we are still singled out—although having merged in the habits and customs of our oppressors—as a distinct nation of people....

Delany’s conclusion about what he considered a self-evident fact was that Africans in the United States should indeed develop their nation and become a liberating force against slavery. He devised a plan for the establishment of a nation of Africans from the diaspora on the African continent. His plan was interrupted by the Civil War and Reconstruction, but he returned to it in the last years of his life. He developed the most comprehensive political theory of African Nationalism in the late 19th century. In his report on his expedition to West Africa where he negotiated a great land deal with African leaders he proclaimed, “Africa for the African race and black men to rule them. By black men I mean, men of African descent who claim an identity with the race.” In short, Delany’s position was Pan-African Nationalism—i.e., Africans uniting spatially and historically.

Frederick Douglass, who was recognized by European Americans as “the leader” of the Africans in the United States for many years, was committed to the African population becoming a part of the United States civil society in the fullest sense. In an 1849 speech to whites he asserted:

> I feel that the black man in this land has as much right to stay in this land as the white man....[In] the same year that Pilgrims were landing...slaves were landing on the James River, in Virginia. We feel on this score...that we have as much right here as any other class of people....Some of our number have fought and bled for this country, and we only ask to be treated as well as those who have fought against it. We are lovers of this country....For my part, I mean, for one, to stay in this country; I have made up my mind to live among you.

Although he made a defense of the African claim to the ancient Nile Valley civilization, there is no indication that Douglass ever wavered from his identification with “America.” There is nothing in his speeches, however, which I have read that suggests that his regard for the principles of
THE
IDEOLOGICAL
ORIGINS
OF
BLACK
NATIONALISM

BY
STERLING STUCKEY

BEACON PRESS
BOSTON
The resolutions were opposed by Dr. Knox and five others, on
the ground that they involved an endorsement of the African
Civilization Society.

The resolutions were then carried by a very large majority,
and the meeting adjourned.

The Weekly Anglo-African
September 19, 1859
Vol. 1, No. 9

THE POLITICAL DESTINY OF THE COLORED RACE
BY MARTIN R. DELANY

To the Colored Inhabitants of the United States:—
FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN: The duty assigned us is an important
one, comprehending all that pertains to our destiny and that of
our posterity, present and prospectively. And while it must be
admitted that the subject is one of the greatest magnitude, re-
quiring all that talents, prudence, and wisdom might adduce, and
while it would be folly to pretend to give you the combined
result of these three agencies, we shall satisfy ourselves with
doing our duty to the best of our ability, and that in the plainest,
most simple, and comprehensive manner.

Our object, then, shall be to place before you our true position
in this country (the United States), the improbability of realiz-
ing our desires, and the sure, practicable, and infallible remedy
for the evils we now endure.

We have not addressed you as citizens—a term desired and
ever cherished by us—because such you have never been. We
have not addressed you as freemen, because such privileges have
never been enjoyed by any colored man in the United States.
Why, then, should we flatter your credulity, by inducing you to
believe that which neither has now, nor never before had, an ex-
istence? Our oppressors are ever gratified at our manifest satis-
faction, especially when that satisfaction is founded upon false
premises; an assumption on our part of the enjoyment of rights
and privileges which never have been conceded, and which, ac-
cording to the present system of the United States policy, we
never can enjoy.

The political policy of this country was solely borrowed from,
and shaped and modelled after, that of Rome. This was strikingly
the case in the establishment of immunities, and the application
of terms in their civil and legal regulations.
The term citizen, politically considered, is derived from the Roman definition, which was never applied in any other sense—cives ingenui; which meant, one exempt from restraint of any kind. (Cives, a citizen; one who might enjoy the highest honors in his own free town—the town in which he lived—and in the country or commonwealth; and ingenui, freeborn—of good extraction.) All who were deprived of citizenship—that is, the right of enjoying positions of honor and trust—were termed hostes and peregrini, which are public and private enemies, and foreigners, or aliens to the country. (Hostis, a public, and sometimes private, enemy; and peregrinus, an alien, stranger, or foreigner.)

The Romans, from a national pride, to distinguish their inhabitants from those of other countries, termed them all “citzens,” but, consequently, were under the necessity of specifying four classes of citizens: none but the cives ingenui being unrestricted in their privileges. There was one class, called the jus quiriturium, or the waiting or suppliying citizen; that is, one who was continually moaning, complaining, or crying for aid or succor. This class might also include within themselves the jus suffragii, who had the privilege of voting, but no other privileges. They could vote for one of their superiors—the cives ingenui—but not for themselves.

Such, then, is the condition, precisely, of the black and colored inhabitants of the United States; in some of the states they answering to the latter class, having the privilege of voting, to elevate their superiors to positions to which they never dare aspire or even hope to attain.

There has, of late years, been a false impression obtained, that the privilege of voting constitutes, or necessarily embodies, the rights of citizenship. A more radical error never obtained favor among an oppressed people. Suffrage is an ambiguous term, which admits of several definitions. But according to strict political construction, means simply “a vote, voice, approbation.” Here, then, you have the whole import of the term suffrage. To have the right of suffrage, as we rather proudly term it, is simply to have the privilege—there is no right about it—of giving our approbation to that which our rulers may do, without the privilege, on our part, of doing the same thing. Where such privileges are granted—privileges which are now exercised in but few of the states by colored men—we have but the privilege granted of saying, in common with others, who shall, for the time being, exercise rights, which, in him, are conceded to be inherent and inviolate: like the indentured apprentice, who is summoned to give his approbation to an act which would be fully binding without his concurrence. Where there is no acknowledged sovereignty, there can be no binding power; hence, the suffrage of the black man, independently of the white, would be in this country unavailable.

Much might be added on this point to prove the insignific ance of the black man, politically considered, in this country, but we deem it wholly unnecessary at present, and consequently proceed at once to consider another feature of this important subject.

Let it then be understood, as a great principle of political economy, that no one can be free who himself does not constitute an essential part of the ruling element of the country in which they live. Whether this element be founded upon a true or false, a just or an unjust basis, this position in community is necessary to personal safety. The liberty of no man is secure who controls not his own political destiny. What is true of an individual is true of a family, and that which is true of a family is also true concerning a whole people. To suppose otherwise, is that delusion which once induces its victim, through a period of long suffering, patiently to submit to every species of wrong; trusting against probability, and hoping against all reasonable grounds of expectation, for the granting of privileges and enjoyment of rights which never will be attained. This delusion reveals the true secret of the power which holds in peaceable subjection all the oppressed in every part of the world.

A people, to be free, must necessarily be their own rulers; that is, each individual must, in himself, embody the essential ingredient—so to speak—of the sovereign principle which composes the true basis of his liberty. This principle, when not exer-
cised by himself, may, at his pleasure, be delegated to another—his true representative.

Said a great French writer, “A free agent, in a free government, should be his own governor”; that is, he must possess within himself the acknowledged right to govern: this constitutes him a governor, though he may delegate to another the power to govern himself.

No one, then, can delegate to another a power he never possessed; that is, he cannot give an agency in that which he never had a right. Consequently, the colored man in the United States, being deprived of the right of inherent sovereignty, cannot confer a franchise, because he possesses none to confer. Therefore, where there is no franchise, there can neither be freedom nor safety for the disfranchised. And it is a futile hope to suppose that the agent of another’s concerns will take a proper interest in the affairs of those to whom he is under no obligations. Having no favors to ask or expect, he therefore has none to lose.

In other periods and parts of the world, as in Europe and Asia, the people being of one common, direct origin of race, though established on the presumption of difference by birth, or what was termed blood, yet the distinction between the superior classes and common people could only be marked by the difference in the dress and education of the two classes. To effect this, the interposition of government was necessary; consequently the costume and education of the people became a subject of legal restriction, guarding carefully against the privileges of the common people.

In Rome the patrician and plebeian were orders in the ranks of her people—all of whom were termed citizens (cives)—recognized by the laws of the country; their dress and education being determined by law, the better to fix the distinction. In different parts of Europe, at the present day, if not the same, the distinction among the people is similar, only on a modified, and in some kingdoms, probably more tolerant or deceptive policy.

In the United States our degradation being once—as it has in a hundred instances been done—legally determined, our color is sufficient, independently of costume, education, or other distinguishing marks, to keep up that distinction.

In Europe when an inferior is elevated to the rank of equality with the superior class, the law first comes to his aid, which, in its decrees, entirely destroys his identity as an inferior, leaving no trace of his former condition visible.

In the United States, among the whites, their color is made, by law and custom, the mark of distinction and superiority, while the color of the blacks is a badge of degradation, acknowledged by statute, organic law, and the common consent of the people.

With this view of the case—which we hold to be correct—to elevate to equality the degraded subject of law and custom, it can only be done, as in Europe, by an entire destruction of the identity of the former condition of the applicant. Even were this desirable, which we by no means admit, with the deep-seated prejudices engendered by oppression, with which we have to contend, ages incalculable might reasonably be expected to roll around before this could honorably be accomplished; otherwise, we should encourage, and at once commence, an indiscriminate concubinage and immoral commerce of our mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters, revolting to think of, and a physical curse to humanity.

If this state of things be to succeed, then, as in Egypt, under the dread of the inscrutable approach of the destroying angel, to appease the hatred of our oppressors, as a license to the passions of every white, let the lintel of each door of every black man be stained with the blood of a virgin purity and unsullied matron fidelity. Let it be written along the cornice in capitals, “The will of the white man is the rule of my household.” Remove the protection to our chambers and nurseries, that the places once sacred may henceforth become the unrestrained resort of the vagrant and rabble, always provided that the licensed commissioner of lust shall wear the indisputable impress of a white skin.

But we have fully discovered and comprehended the great political disease with which we are affected, the cause of its origin and continuance, and what is now left for us to do is to discover and apply a sovereign remedy, a healing balm to a sorely diseased body—a wrecked but not entirely shattered system. We propose for this disease a remedy. That remedy is emigration. This emigration should be well advised, and like
remedies applied to remove the disease from the physical system of man, skilfully and carefully applied, within the proper time, directed to operate on that part of the system whose greatest tendency shall be to benefit the whole.

Several geographical localities have been named, among which rank the Canadas. These we do not object to as places of temporary relief, especially to the fleeing fugitive—which, like a palliative, soothes, for the time being, the misery—but cannot commend them as permanent places upon which to fix our destiny, and that of our children, who shall come after us. But in this connection we would most earnestly recommend to the colored people of the United States generally, to secure, by purchase, all of the land they possibly can while selling at low rates, under the British people and government; as that time may come, when, like the lands in the United States territories generally, if not as in Oregon and some other territories and states, they may be prevented entirely from settling or purchasing them—the preference being given to the white applicant.

And here we would not deceive you by disguising the facts that, according to political tendency, the Canadas, as all British America, at no very distant day, are destined to come into the United States.

And were this not the case, the odds are against us, because the ruling element there, as in the United States, is, and ever must be, white; the population now standing, in all British America, two and a half millions of whites to but forty thousand of the black race, or sixty-one and a fraction whites to one black!—the difference being eleven times greater than in the United States—so that colored people might never hope for anything more than to exist politically by mere sufferance; occupying a secondary position to the whites of the Canadas. The Yankees from this side of the lakes are fast settling in the Canadas, infusing, with industrious success, all the malignity and negro-hate inseparable from their very being, as Christian democrats and American advocates of equality.

Then, to be successful, our attention must be turned in a direction towards those places where the black and colored man comprise, by population, and constitute by necessity of numbers,
the want of a unity of interests—an identity of origin—the noble Hungarians failed. All know the result.

Nor is this the only important consideration. Were we content to remain as we are, sparsely interspersed among our white fellow-countrymen, we never might be expected to equal them in any honorable or respectable competition for a livelihood. For the reason that, according to the customs and policy of the country, we for ages would be kept in a secondary position, every situation of respectability, honor, profit, or trust, either as mechanics, clerks, teachers, jurors, councilmen, or legislators, being filled by white men, consequently our energies must become paralyzed or enervated for the want of proper encouragement.

This example upon our children, and the colored people generally, is pernicious and degrading in the extreme. And how could it otherwise be, when they see every place of respectability filled and occupied by the whites, they pandering to their vanity, and existing among them merely as a thing of convenience?

Our friends in this and other countries, anxious for our elevation, have for years been erroneously urging us to lose our identity as a distinct race, declaring that we were the same as other people; while at the very same time their own representative was traversing the world, and propagating the doctrine in favor of a universal Anglo-Saxon predominance. The “universal brotherhood,” so ably and eloquently advocated by that Polyglot Christian Apostle of this doctrine, had established as its basis a universal acknowledgment of the Anglo-Saxon rule.

The truth is, we are not identical with the Anglo-Saxon, or any other race of the Caucasian or pure white type of the human family, and the sooner we know and acknowledge this truth the better for ourselves and posterity.

The English, French, Irish, German, Italian, Turk, Persian, Greek, Jew, and all other races, have their native or inherent peculiarities, and why not our race? We are not willing, therefore, at all times and under all circumstances to be moulded into various shapes of eccentricity, to suit the caprices and conveniences of every kind of people. We are not more suitable to everybody than everybody is suitable to us; therefore, no more like other people than others are like us.

We have, then, inherent traits, attributes, so to speak, and native characteristics, peculiar to our race, whether pure or mixed blood; and all that is required of us is to cultivate these, and develop them in their purity, to make them desirable and emulated by the rest of the world.

That the colored races have the highest traits of civilization, will not be disputed. They are civil, peaceable, and religious to a fault. In mathematics, sculpture and architecture, as arts and sciences, commerce and internal improvements as enterprises, the white race may probably excel; but in languages, oratory, poetry, music, and painting, as arts and sciences, and in ethics, metaphysics, theology, and legal jurisprudence—in plain language, in the true principles of morals, correctness of thought, religion, and law or civil government, there is no doubt but the black race will yet instruct the world.

It would be duplicity longer to disguise the fact that the great issue, sooner or later, upon which must be disputed the world's destiny, will be a question of black and white, and every individual will be called upon for his identity with one or the other. The blacks and colored races are four-sixths of all the population of the world; and these people are fast tending to a common cause with each other. The white races are but one third of the population of the globe—or one of them to two of us—and it cannot much longer continue that two thirds will passively submit to the universal domination of this one third. And it is notorious that the only progress made in territorial domain, in the last three centuries, by the whites, has been a usurpation and encroachment on the rights and native soil of some of the colored races.

The East Indies, Java, Sumatra, the Azores, Madeira, Canary, and Cape Verde Islands; Socotra, Guadaloupe, and the Isle of France; Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, Barca, and Egypt in the North, Sierra Leone in the West, and Cape Colony in the South of Africa; besides many other islands and possessions not herein named; Australia, the Ladrone Islands, together with many others of Oceanica; the seizure and appropriation of a great por-

1 Elihu Burritt.
tion of the Western Continent, with all its islands, were so many encroachments of the whites upon the rights of the colored races. Nor are they yet content, but, intoxicated with the success of their career, the Sandwich Islands are now marked out as the next booty to be seized in the ravages of their exterminating crusade.

We regret the necessity of stating the fact, but duty compels us to the task, that, for more than two thousand years, the determined aim of the whites has been to crush the colored races wherever found. With a determined will they have sought and pursued them in every quarter of the globe. The Anglo-Saxon has taken the lead in this work of universal subjugation. But the Anglo-American stands pre-eminent for deeds of injustice and acts of oppression, unparalleled, perhaps, in the annals of modern history.

We admit the existence of great and good people in America, England, France, and the rest of Europe, who desire a unity of interests among the whole human family, of whatever origin or race.

But it is neither the moralist, Christian, nor philanthropist whom we now have to meet and combat, but the politician, the civil engineer, and skilful economist, who direct and control the machinery which moves forward, with mighty impulse, the nations and powers of the earth. We must, therefore, if possible, meet them on vantage ground, or, at least, with adequate means for the conflict.

Should we encounter an enemy with artillery, a prayer will not stay the cannon shot, neither will the kind words nor smiles of philanthropy shield his spear from piercing us through the heart. We must meet mankind, then, as we meet us—prepared for the worst, though we may hope for the best. Our submission does not gain for us an increase of friends nor respectability, as the white race will only respect those who oppose their usurpation, and acknowledge as equals those who will not submit to their oppression. This may be no new discovery in political economy, but it certainly is a subject worthy the consideration of the black race.

After a due consideration of these facts, as herein recounted,