

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY NEGRO

Prof. Owen McNeill, Custodian of Presses in the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, Before the Congressional Historical Debating Association.

Ladies and Gentlemen of The Congressional Historical Debating Association:

We do not know when man first came into possession of the earth. His antiquity, like the age of the planet he inhabits, is shrouded in doubt and obscurity. Form, color, and physiognomy divide the human species into three great types, or races, known as the Black, or Negro; the Yellow, or Mongolian, and the White, or Caucasian. These races subdivide themselves into numerous families of peoples. As to which of these great races is the oldest, or original type, we have no positive knowledge; however, many testimonies concur in leading us to believe that they all stand in relation of children to an original mother type long since lost.

Before the coming of Christ, yea, before the days of Jeremiah, even before the gray dawn of history, the ancestors of the twentieth century Negro existed as a distinct and well-defined race. If there was a time when the



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Negro was more intelligent and prosperous than he is at the dawn of the twentieth century, there was certainly a time when he was more ignorant and barbarous than at the present day. In the early days of history we see the progenitors of the twentieth century Negro building great temples in the Valley of the Nile. All the science and learning of ancient Greece and Rome were probably once in the hands of the forefathers of the twentieth century Negro.

If so, we are the descendants of a race of people once the most powerful on earth—the race of the Pharaohs. The present condition of the African is the result of the fall of the Egyptian Empire. That the foreparents of the twentieth century Negro were once a great people is shown by their natural love for the fine arts. They are poetic by nature, and the wonderful regard of native Africans for truth and virtue is surprising, and fixes a great gulf between them and other savage peoples. There was a time when the Blacks were known to be so gentle to strangers that many believed that the gods sprang from them.

The first Negroes of the American colonies were landed at Jamestown, Virginia, in the year 1619. They were imported from the west coast of Africa, and were first used in the colonies to cultivate tobacco. When imported they were crowded into holds of the ships and often suffered for food and drink. The ancestors of the twentieth century Negro, though savage in some respects, were not so bad as many people think.

The Jamestown slaves were doomed to servitude and ignorance both by law and custom. They were not allowed to vote, and could not be set free even by their masters, except for some meritorious service. There were also free Negroes of Jamestown, but these were in a similar condition to that of the slaves.

History recorded not the heroism of our Jamestown ancestors; but their crimes she wrote in letters of blood. Let not the Negro despair because of

his early condition, but rather let him rejoice, as the Negro is not the only race or peoples who have been slaves. In ancient times, when might and power governed the world, one nation or race would conquer another and reduce it to slavery; when the slaves were strong enough they would rise up against their masters, overthrow them and themselves become the ruling power. And so it has continued, age after age, through time immemorial. We should expect to take our chances in common with the other races of the world. All we ask is a just and fair opportunity to better our condition. A few writers on the origin of man hold that the world was peopled in colonies; that is to say, the Negro was created in Africa. The Caucasian in Europe and the Mongolian in Asia. While this is possible, it is not probable, and those who believe this theory cannot believe the Bible—God created of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the earth, Adam and Eve the common parents, and Eden the cradle of the world. Accept either hypothesis and the civilized world must acknowledge the twentieth century American Negro to be superior to the primitive Ethiopian.

The origin and history of the Negro is an important subject, and remains to be written by the twentieth century Negro.

He will write it in letters of gold, and it will be read by all nations. The twentieth century Negro will determine the Negro question, and the average twentieth century school boy will answer forever the race problem. He will say to every nation, There is the history of the Negro. Read it, and judge for yourselves, and the whole world will know it by heart. The sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries produced many Negroes of distinction. Prominent among them are the names of Crispus Attucks, the Negro soldier and martyr; Phillis Wheatley, the Negro poetess; Benjamin Banneka, the Negro astronomer and mathematician; Roberts and L'Overture, the warrior and statesman; Revels and Douglass, Langston and Price, Elliott and others. These centuries also produced many Negro schools, colleges and universities of note. They saw the Negro rise in civilization, and enter into financial schemes and business enterprises commendable to the civilized world.

On the threshold of the twentieth century we see rising in different States Negro grocerymen and dairymen; wholesale and retail merchants; manufacturers and distillers; editors and writers deserving the name. Great as these achievements are, and as encouraging as they must be, they are but initiative steps to what the twentieth century Negro will accomplish. The meridian sun of the twentieth century will shine on Negro railroads and telegraph lines, steamship companies and great corporations. This the Negro will accomplish by the aid of the white man, whose friendship is well worth cultivating.

While the white man's dealings with the black man have not and are not now always just and equitable, the black man has much for which to thank the white man. There is a racial gulf between the white man and the black man, yet their interests are the same—one and inseparable. That which is good for the white man is also good for the black man. Notwithstanding the trials and difficulties; the hardships and disadvantages accorded the Negro by the country he gave his heart's blood to make free and labored with his brawny muscle to preserve, the Negro is rapidly, steadily, and surely advancing in education, honesty, religion, and wealth, and all things that go to make a race united, prosperous, and happy.

If the curse theory is correct, the Negro is fast regaining that high scale of civilization, from which he, by the sin of Ham, has fallen. If we reject the curse theory and accept the hypothesis that the world was peopled in colonies, then the origin of the Negro dates from the creation of man, and shows the Negro to be a perpetual advancer. It is as it is.

We must accept stern facts and meet the inevitable with fortitude. It is as it is. We cannot change our origin and make it otherwise than it is; but we can improve as the years and centuries roll by. We have done much,

but there is more to accomplish. We must work together in peace and harmony, friendship, and love. Never allow your station in life to swell your head. Be courteous and polite to all. Lift up the fallen humanity wherever you can. If you can do nothing more than speak an encouraging word to the poor and destitute, do that. It will inure to the betterment of the human soul. Let your religion be, do unto others as you would that they should do unto you. Whatever your hands find to do, do your best. That which is worth doing at all is worth doing well. Honest labor begets honest money, and money is a means to all ends. Young ladies, do not be ashamed to do manual work for an honest dollar. All cannot be dressmakers and school teachers. If you cannot find employment in one avenue of life, go into another. Never remain idle. An idle brain is the devil's workshop. Young men, don't be ashamed to drive a carriage or shoe a horse for an honest dollar. All cannot be lawyers and doctors. Catch the world by the throat and demand of it a living, and she will yield. Money, character, education, honesty, industry, and religion are essential to your success. Make a bank account. It is an incentive to industry. Bank a part of your salary each month, and there let it remain until you shall have deposited enough to commence a little business, or a big business, just as you wish. Reverence gray hairs and obey the laws of your country.

"Guard well thy tongue; thou canst not know,

What evils from thy lips may flow—
What guilt, what grief may be incurred
By one incautious, hasty word."

The last sun of the twentieth century will rise on the descendants of a race of slaves torn from the degrading influence of heathenism and fetichism and set on a race of free, intelligent, united, and prosperous people, forging its way into every avenue of life, and standing shoulder to shoulder with the other great races of the world.

JOTTINGS.

Mrs. J. Willis Menard has taken apartments at 333 Spruce street, Le Droit Park.

Messrs. T. M. Dent and T. H. Malone are writing some breezy letters to the Atlanta Age, and H. Eugene Wilson is performing a similar service for the Philadelphia Tribune.

Rapid progress is being made in the erection of the Colored Manual Training School, on P street, between First and Third, northwest. It will be a handsome and commodious structure.

Tomorrow morning at the Second Baptist church, Rev. W. Bishop Johnson will preach the Easter sermon at 11. Solos will be rendered by Prof. William Rosborough, of Tennessee, Miss Georgia Makell, and Miss Emm Stephens and the choir. In the evening, the Sunday-school under the direction of Miss Emma Kinner, will hold special exercises.

The First Baptist church, of which Rev. W. J. Robinson is pastor, is engaged in celebrating its 37th anniversary, the church having been organized in 1864. Payton Washington is church clerk. George Harris, treasurer and Richard Johnson, Jr., assistant clerk. A number of local pastors are assisting in the festivities which will continue every evening until April 15th.

Mr and Mrs John Bush celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of their marriage Monday evening of last week at their residence, 919 4th street, n. w. The affair was highly enjoyable and was attended by many friends of the couple. Among those present were Mr and Mrs F. M. Welch, Mr. and Mrs. James Cary, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Brown, Miss Lena Bush, Mrs. Jennie Turner and others. Some handsome presents were received.

Easter will be magnificently observed tomorrow afternoon by the Second Baptist Lyceum. Recorder H. P. Cheatham will deliver the annual address on "The triumph of Endurance." Miss Georgia Makell will render "The Palms," Prof. J. B. Felder presents a cornet solo, and a specially selected quartet will appear, composed of Miss Georg's Smith, Miss Lizzie Toler, Mr. John Baxton and Mr. Lincoln Alexander.

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