

**African-American
Social and Political Thought
1850-1920**

Edited by
Howard Brotz

*With a New Introduction by the Editor
and a Foreword by B. William Austin*

Douglass



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he has none, among all the daughters. By the 16th clause of this bill, no Papist to hold any office, civil or military. Not to dwell in Limerick or Galway, except on certain conditions. Not to vote at elections.

In 1709, Papists were prevented from holding an annuity for life. If any son of a Papist chose to turn Protestant and enroll the certificate of his conversion in the Court of Chancery, that court is empowered to compel his father to state the value of his property upon oath, and to make out of that property a competent allowance to the son, at their own discretion, not only for his present maintenance, but for his future portion after the death of his father. An increase of jointure to be enjoyed by Papist wives upon their conversion. Papists keeping schools to be prosecuted as convicts. Popish priests who are converted, to receive thirty pounds per annum.

Rewards are given by the same act for the discovery of Popish clergy—fifty pounds for discovering a Popish bishop, twenty pounds for a common Popish clergy, ten pounds for a Popish usher! Two justices of the peace can compel any Papists above 18 years of age to disclose every particular which has come to his knowledge respecting Popish priests, celebration of mass, or Papist schools. Imprisonment for a year if he refuses to answer. Nobody can hold property in trust for a Catholic. Juries in all trials growing out of these statutes to be Protestants. No Papist to take more than two apprentices, except in the linen trade. All the Catholic clergy to give in their names and places of abode at the quarter sessions, and to keep no curates. Catholics not to serve on grand juries. In any trial upon statutes for strengthening the Protestant interest, a Papist juror may be peremptorily challenged.

In the next reign, Popish horses were attached and allowed to be seized for the militia. Papists cannot be either high or petty constables. No Papists to vote at elections. Papists in towns to provide Protestant watchmen, and not to vote at vestries.

In the reign of George second, Papists were prohibited from being barristers and solicitors marrying Papists, considered to be Papists, and subjected to all penalties as such. Persons robbed by privateers, during a war with a Popish Prince, to be indemnified by grand jury presentments, and the money to be levied on the *Catholics* only. No Papist to marry a Protestant; any priest celebrating such marriage *to be hanged*.

A full account of the laws here referred to may be found in a book entitled, "History of the penal Laws against Irish Catholics," by Henry Parnell, member of Parliament.—They are about as harsh and oppressive, as some of the laws against the colored people in border and Western States.

These barbarous and inhuman laws were all swept away by the act of Catholic Emancipation, and the present barbarous laws against the free colored people, must share the same fate.

There are signs of this good time coming all around us. Slavery has

overleapt itself.—Having taken the sword it is destined to perish by the sword, and the long despised Negro is to bear an honorable part in the salvation of himself and the country by the same blow. It has taken two years to convince the Washington Government, of the wisdom of calling the black man to participate in the gigantic effort now making to save the country. Even now they have not fully learned it—but learn it they will, and learn it they must before this tremendous war shall be ended.—Massachusetts, glorious old Massachusetts, has called the black man to the honor of bearing arms, and a thousand are already enrolled.

Now what will be the effect? Suppose colored men are allowed to fight the battles of the Republic. Suppose they do fight and win victories as I am sure they will, what will be the effect upon themselves? Will not the country rejoice in such victories? and will it not extend to the colored man the praise due to his bravery? Will not the colored man himself soon begin to take a more hopeful view of his own destiny?

The fact is, my friends, we are opening a new account with the American people and with the whole human family.

Hitherto we have been viewed and have viewed ourselves, as an impotent and spiritless race, having only a mission of folly and degradation before us. Tonight we stand at the portals of a new world, a new life and a new destiny.

We have passed through the furnace and have not been consumed. During more than two centuries and a half, we have survived contact with the white race. We have risen from the small number of twenty, to the large number of five millions, living and increasing, where other tribes are decreasing and dying. We have illustrated the fact, that the two most opposite races of men known to ethnological science, can live in the same latitudes, longitudes, and altitudes, and that so far as natural causes are concerned there is reason to believe that we may permanently live under the same skies, brave the same climates, and enjoy Liberty, equality and fraternity in a common country—June 1863.

WHAT THE BLACK MAN WANTS

I came here, as I come always to the meetings in New England, as a listener, and not as a speaker; and one of the reasons why I have not been more frequently to the meetings of this society, has been because of the disposition on the part of some of my friends to call me out upon the platform, even when they knew that there was some difference of opinion and of feeling between those who rightfully belong to this platform and myself; and for fear of being misconstrued, as desiring to interrupt or disturb the proceedings of these meetings, I have usually kept away, and have thus been deprived of that educating influence, which I am always

free to confess is of the highest order, descending from this platform. I have felt, since I have lived out West, that in going there I parted from a great deal that was valuable; and I feel, every time I come to these meetings, that I have lost a great deal by making my home west of Boston, west of Massachusetts; for, if anywhere in the country there is to be found the highest sense of justice, or the truest demands for my race, I look for it in the East, I look for it here. The ablest discussions of the whole question of our rights occur here, and to be deprived of the privilege of listening to those discussions is a great deprivation.

I do not know, from what has been said, that there is any difference of opinion as to the duty of abolitionists, at the present moment. How can we get up any difference at this point, or any point, where we are so united, so agreed? I went especially, however, with that word of Mr. Phillips, which is the criticism of Gen. Banks and Gen. Banks' policy. I hold that that policy is our chief danger at the present moment; that it practically enslaves the Negro, and makes the Proclamation of 1863 a mockery and delusion. What is freedom? It is the right to choose one's own employment. Certainly it means that, if it means anything; and when any individual or combination of individuals undertakes to decide for any man when he shall work, where he shall work, at what he shall work, and for what he shall work, he or they practically reduce him to slavery. He is a slave. That I understand Gen. Banks to do—to determine for the so-called freedman, when, and where, and at what, and for how much he shall work, when he shall be punished, and by whom punished. It is absolute slavery. It defeats the beneficent intention of the Government, if it has beneficent intentions, in regards to the freedom of our people.

I have had but one idea for the last three years to present to the American people, and the phraseology in which I clothe it is the old abolition phraseology. I am for the "immediate, unconditional, and universal" enfranchisement of the black man, in every State in the Union. Without this, his liberty is a mockery; without this, you might as well almost retain the old name of slavery for his condition; for in fact, if he is not the slave of the individual master, he is the slave of society, and holds his liberty as a privilege, not as a right. He is at the mercy of the mob, and has no means of protecting himself.

It may be objected, however, that this pressing of the Negro's right to suffrage is premature. Let us have slavery abolished, it may be said, let us have labor organized, and then, in the natural course of events, the right of suffrage will be extended to the Negro. I do not agree with this. The constitution of the human mind is such, that if it once disregards the conviction forced upon it by a revelation of truth, it requires the exercise of a higher power to produce the same conviction afterwards. The American people are now in tears. The Shenandoah has run blood—the best blood of the North. All around Richmond, the blood of New England and of the North has been shed—of your sons, your brothers and your fathers.

We all feel, in the existence of this Rebellion, that judgments terrible, wide-spread, far-reaching, overwhelming, are abroad in the land; and we feel, in view of these judgments, just now, a disposition to learn righteousness. This is the hour. Our streets are in mourning, tears are falling at every fireside, and under the chastisement of this Rebellion we have almost come up to the point of conceding this great, this all-important right of suffrage. I fear that if we fail to do it now, if abolitionists fail to press it now, we may not see, for centuries to come, the same disposition that exists at this moment. Hence, I say, now is the time to press this right.

It may be asked, "Why do you want it? Some men have got along very well without it. Women have not this right." Shall we justify one wrong by another? This is a sufficient answer. Shall we at this moment justify the deprivation of the Negro of the right to vote, because some one else is deprived of that privilege? I hold that women, as well as men, have the right to vote, and my heart and my voice go with the movement to extend suffrage to woman; but that question rests upon another basis than that on which our right rests. We may be asked, I say, why we want it. I will tell you why we want it. We want it because it is our *right*, first of all. No class of men can, without insulting their own nature, be content with any deprivation of their rights. We want it again, as a means for educating our race. Men are so constituted that they derive their conviction of their own possibilities largely from the estimate formed of them by others. If nothing is expected of a people, that people will find it difficult to contradict that expectation. By depriving us of suffrage, you affirm our incapacity to form an intelligent judgment respecting public men and public measures; you declare before the world that we are unfit to exercise the elective franchise, and by this means lead us to undervalue ourselves, to put a low estimate upon ourselves, and to feel that we have no possibilities like other men. Again, I want the elective franchise, for one, as a colored man, because ours is a peculiar government, based upon a peculiar idea, and that idea is universal suffrage. If I were in a monarchical government, or an autocratic or aristocratic government, where the few bore rule and the many were subject, there would be no special stigma resting upon me, because I did not exercise the elective franchise. It would do me no great violence. Mingling with the mass I should partake of the strength of the mass; I should be supported by the mass, and I should have the same incentives to endeavor with the mass of my fellow-men; it would be no particular burden, no particular deprivation; but here where universal suffrage is the rule, where that is the fundamental idea of the Government, to rule us out is to make us an exception, to brand us with the stigma of inferiority, and to invite to our heads the missiles of those about us; therefore, I want the franchise for the black man.

There are, however, other reasons, not derived from any consideration merely of our rights, but arising out of the conditions of the South, and of the country—considerations which have already been referred to by Mr.

Phillips—considerations which must arrest the attention of statesmen, I believe that when the tall heads of this Rebellion shall have been swept down, as they will be swept down, when the Davises and Toombses and Stephenses, and others who are leading this Rebellion shall have been blotted out, there will be this rank undergrowth of treason, to which reference has been made, growing up there, and interfering with, and thwarting the quiet operation of the Federal Government in those States. You will see those traitors, handing down, from sire to son, the same malignant spirit which they have manifested, and which they are now exhibiting, with malicious hearts, broad blades, and bloody hands in the field, against our sons and brothers. That spirit will still remain; and whoever sees the Federal Government extended over those Southern States will see that Government in a strange land, and not only in a strange land, but in an enemy's land. A post-master of the United States in the South will find himself surrounded by a hostile spirit; a collector in a Southern port will find himself surrounded by a hostile spirit; a United States marshal or United States judge will be surrounded there by a hostile element. That enmity will not die out in a year, will not die out in an age. The Federal Government will be looked upon in those States precisely as the Governments of Austria and France are looked upon in Italy at the present moment. They will endeavor to circumvent, they will endeavor to destroy, the peaceful operation of this Government. Now, where will you find the strength to counterbalance this spirit, if you do not find it in the Negroes of the South? They are your friends, and have always been your friends. They were your friends even when the Government did not regard them as such. They comprehended the genius of this war before you did. It is a significant fact, it is a marvellous fact, it seems almost to imply a direct interposition of Providence, that this war, which began in the interest of slavery on both sides, bids fair to end in the interest of liberty on both sides. It was begun, I say, in the interest of slavery on both sides. The South was fighting to take slavery out of the Union, and the North fighting to keep it in the Union; the South fighting to get it beyond the limits of the United States Constitution, and the North fighting to retain it within those limits; the South fighting for new guarantees, and the North fighting for the old guarantees;—both despising the Negro, both insulting the Negro. Yet, the Negro, apparently endowed with wisdom from on high, saw more clearly the end from the beginning than we did. When Seward said the status of no man in the country would be changed by the war, the Negro did not believe him. When our generals sent their underlings in shoulder-straps to hunt the flying Negro back from our lines into the jaws of slavery, from which he had escaped, the Negroes thought that a mistake had been made, and that the intentions of the Government had not been rightly understood by our officers in shoulder-straps, and they continued to come into our lines, threading their way through bogs and fens, over briars and thorns, fording streams, swimming rivers, bringing

us tidings as to the safe path to march, and pointing out the dangers that threatened us. They are our only friends in the South, and we should be true to them in this their trial hour, and see to it that they have the elective franchise.

I know that we are inferior to you in some things—virtually inferior. We walk about among you like dwarfs among giants. Our heads are scarcely seen above the great sea of humanity. The Germans are superior to us; the Irish are superior to us; the Yankees are superior to us; they can do what we cannot, that is, what we have not hitherto been allowed to do. But while I make this admission, I utterly deny, that we are originally, or naturally, or practically, or in any way, or in any important sense, inferior to anybody on this globe. This charge of inferiority is an old dodge. It has been made available for oppression on many occasions. It is only about six centuries since the blue-eyed and fair-haired Anglo-Saxons were considered inferior by the haughty Normans, who once trampled upon them. If you read the history of the Norman Conquest, you will find that this proud Anglo-Saxon was once looked upon as of coarser clay than his Norman master, and might be found in the highways and byways of old England laboring with a brass collar on his neck, and the name of his master marked upon it. *You* were down then! You are up now. I am glad you are up, and I want you to be glad to help us up also.

The story of our inferiority is an old dodge, as I have said; for wherever men oppress their fellows, wherever they enslave them, they will endeavor to find the needed apology for such enslavement and oppression in the character of the people oppressed and enslaved. When we wanted, a few years ago, a slice of Mexico, it was hinted that the Mexicans were an inferior race, that the old Castilian blood had become so weak that it would scarcely run down hill, and that Mexico needed the long, strong and beneficent arm of the Anglo-Saxon care extended over it. We said that it was necessary to its salvation, and a part of the "manifest destiny" of this Republic, to extend our arm over that dilapidated government. So, too, when Russia wanted to take possession of a part of the Ottoman Empire, the Turks were "an inferior race." So, too, when England wants to set the heel of her power more firmly in the quivering heart of old Ireland, the Celts are an "inferior race." So, too, the Negro, when he is to be robbed of any right which is justly his, is an "inferior man." It is said that we are ignorant; I admit it. But if we know enough to be hung, we know enough to vote. If the Negro knows enough to pay taxes to support the government, he knows enough to vote; taxation and representation should go together. If he knows enough to shoulder a musket and fight for the flag, fight for the government, he knows enough to vote. If he knows as much when he is sober as an Irishman knows when drunk, he knows enough to vote, on good American principles.

But I was saying that you needed a counterpoise in the persons of the slaves to the enmity that would exist at the South after the Rebellion is

put down. I hold that the American people are bound, not only in self-defence, to extend this right to the freedmen of the South, but they are bound by their love of country, and by all their regard for the future safety of those Southern States, to do this—to do it as a measure essential to the preservation of peace there. But I will not dwell upon this. I put it to the American sense of honor. The honor of a nation is an important thing. It is said in the Scriptures, "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" It may be said, also, What doth it profit a nation if it gain the whole world, but lose its honor? I hold that the American government has taken upon itself a solemn obligation of honor, to see that this war—let it be long or let it be short, let it cost much or let it cost little—that this war shall not cease until every freedman at the South has the right to vote. It has bound itself to it. What have you asked the black men of the South, the black men of the whole country, to do? Why, you have asked them to incur the deadly enmity of their masters, in order to befriend you and to befriend this Government. You have asked us to call down, not only upon ourselves, but upon our children's children, the deadly hate of the entire Southern people. You have called upon us to turn our backs upon our masters, to abandon their cause and espouse yours; to turn against the South and in favor of the North; to shoot down the Confederacy and uphold the flag—the American flag. You have called upon us to expose ourselves to all the subtle machinations of their malignity for all time. And now, what do you propose to do when you come to make peace? To reward your enemies, and trample in the dust your friends? Do you intend to sacrifice the very men who have come to the rescue of your banner in the South, and incurred the lasting displeasure of their masters thereby? Do you intend to sacrifice them and reward your enemies? Do you mean to give your enemies the right to vote, and take it away from your friends? Is that wise policy? Is that honorable? Could American honor withstand such a blow? I do not believe you will do it. I think you will see to it that we have the right to vote. There is something too mean in looking upon the Negro, when you are in trouble, as a citizen, and when you are free from trouble, as an alien. When this nation was in trouble, in its early struggles, it looked upon the Negro as a citizen. In 1776 he was a citizen. At the time of the formation of the Constitution the Negro had the right to vote in eleven States out of the old thirteen. In your trouble you have made us citizens. In 1812 Gen. Jackson addressed us as citizens—"fellow-citizens." He wanted us to fight. We were citizens then! And now, when you come to frame a conscription bill, the Negro is a citizen again. He has been a citizen just three times in the history of this government, and it has always been in time of trouble. In time of trouble we are citizens. Shall we be citizens in war, and aliens in peace? Would that be just?

I ask my friends who are apologizing for not insisting upon this right, where can the black man look, in this country, for the assertion of his

right, if he may not look to the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society? Where under the whole heavens can he look for sympathy, in asserting this right, if he may not look to this platform? Have you lifted us up to a certain height to see that we are men, and then are any disposed to leave us there, without seeing that we are put in possession of all our rights? We look naturally to this platform for the assertion of all our rights, and for this one especially. I understand the anti-slavery societies of this country to be based on two principles,—first, the freedom of the blacks of this country; and, second, the elevation of them. Let me not be misunderstood here. I am not asking for sympathy at the hands of abolitionists, sympathy at the hands of any. I think the American people are disposed often to be generous rather than just. I look over this country at the present time, and I see Educational Societies, Sanitary Commissions, Freedmen's Associations, and the like,—all very good: but in regard to the colored people there is always more that is benevolent, I perceive, than just, manifested towards us. What I ask for the Negro is not benevolence, not pity, not sympathy, but simply *justice*. The American people have always been anxious to know what they shall do with us. Gen. Banks was distressed with solicitude as to what he should do with the Negro. Everybody has asked the question, and they learned to ask it early of the abolitionists, "What shall we do with the Negro?" I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. Do nothing with us! If the apples will not remain on the tree of their own strength, if they are wormeaten at the core, if they are early ripe and disposed to fall, let them fall! I am not for tying or fastening them on the tree in any way, except by nature's plan, and if they will not stay there, let them fall. And if the Negro cannot stand on his own legs, let him fall also. All I ask is, give him a chance to stand on his own legs! Let him alone! If you see him on his way to school, let him alone, don't disturb him! If you see him going to the dinner-table at a hotel, let him go! If you see him going to the ballot-box, let him alone, don't disturb him! If you see him going into a work-shop, just let him alone,—your interference is doing him a positive injury. Gen. Banks' "preparation" is of a piece with this attempt to prop up the Negro. Let him fall if he cannot stand alone! If the Negro cannot live by the line of eternal justice, so beautifully pictured to you in the illustration used by Mr. Phillips, the fault will not be yours, it will be his who made the Negro, and established that line for his government. Let him live or die by that. If you will only untie his hands, and give him a chance, I think he will live. He will work as readily for himself as the white man. A great many delusions have been swept away by this war. One was, that the Negro would not work; he has proved his ability to work. Another was, that the Negro would not fight; that he possessed only the most sheepish attributes of humanity; was a perfect lamb, or an "Uncle Tom;" disposed to take off his coat whenever required, fold his hands, and be whipped by

anybody who wanted to whip him. But the war has proved that there is a great deal of human nature in the Negro, and that "he will fight," as Mr. Quincy, our President, said, in earlier days than these, "when there is a reasonable probability of his whipping anybody"—1865.

ADDRESS BEFORE THE TENNESSEE COLORED AGRICULTURAL AND MECHANICAL ASSOCIATION

When I had the honor to receive your kind and unexpected invitation to visit Nashville, a city famous for its elegance and refinement, and the scene of so many thrilling events and patriotic associations during the late struggle for Union and liberty, I was naturally enough very much pleased with the prospect of being present on this occasion; but when I was informed that my visit was not to be either for pleasure or observation, but to make an address, and that the said address must be of a character appropriate to this your third annual agricultural exhibition, my joy and enthusiasm received a very decided check; the "native hue of resolution was sicklied over with the pale cast of thought." The fact is—and I am not ashamed to admit it—I felt very much as some of our Generals did when called upon to face the enemy on the open field of battle. I would have gladly been relieved of the command, and to have allowed the imposing task assigned me to fall into other and more competent hands. But your committee was composed of earnest and resolute men. They were men from Tennessee, and as willful as old Hickory himself. They made no account of any modest distrusts of my ability, would hear none of my excuses, and in short would be satisfied with nothing less than my presence and speech on this occasion. Well, gentlemen, these willful men have succeeded; they have got me here, but I beg you to remember the old saying, which must have originated with farmers, for the best things always have originated with them, that "one man may carry a horse to water, but twenty cannot make him drink."

The ground of my hesitation about coming here was not the cholera, for Nashville is now tolerably healthy; it was not the distance I would have to travel to get here, for your railway communications are nearly equal to any in the country, but the trouble was the address, the *appropriate* address. There was the rub. It was the rub then and it is the rub now, and instead of disappearing on my approach it is all the more perplexing when I look out upon this expectant multitude, and remember the high-sounding praises heaped upon me in anticipation of my coming.

Gentlemen, this is an agricultural and mechanical industrial fair. I am surrounded today by industrious mechanics and farmers, and you have got

me up here to tell you what I know about farming. Now, I am neither a farmer nor a mechanic. During the last thirty-five years I have been actively employed in a work which left me no time to study either the theory or the practice of farming. I could far more easily tell you what I don't know about farming than what I do know, though the former would take more time to tell than the latter. Well, gentlemen, I do not mean to censure your excellent committee for paying me in advance and insisting upon my coming, thus buying a pig in a bag, not knowing what kind of animal would come forth at the opening, but I am bold to say that they violated in that act one of the very first rules of successful farming, which is to see that the tools are always placed in the hands that can use them best. There are, undoubtedly, hundreds of colored men in the vicinity of Nashville, practical farmers and mechanics, who could address you upon the subjects of this occasion far more appropriately and effectively than I can do. This suggestion may seem rather late, but it may serve you a good turn when the business of selecting a speaker shall come around again.

But, gentlemen, there is a sunnier side to this distressing picture. Since I am now here, and there is no possible way of escape, I may at least employ the device of the boy who whistled in the graveyard to keep up his courage. Several considerations serve in some measure to reconcile me to my task. One of these is the fact that being a public speaker, I have often found myself in just such embarrassing situations at other times and places. If you will pardon me a little autobiography, and, perhaps, a little egotism as well, I will tell you, that like many other men, I have been all my life long doing extraordinary things for the first time, some of which had been better undone. I have been constantly required to undertake the performance of works which came upon me as a surprise, and for which I had no previous training or preparation, and while my work has generally been rather unskillfully and imperfectly done, I have always had a thoughtful and generous people for my judges, who have measured and estimated my achievements not by the rule of intrinsic excellence, but by the rule of my disadvantages, and have thus often accorded me higher praise than I could possibly claim on the score of merit.

Besides this, there is encouragement in the subject itself. Agriculture is one of the very oldest themes and one upon which only a genius can be expected to say anything either new or striking. Originality is out of the question. The knowledge already accumulated and recorded on this subject is vast and minute, and the man who can give you but a glimpse of one of the many sides of this vast accumulation of knowledge does not speak in vain.

In few things perhaps, more than in farming, does one find that there is nothing new under the sun. The sages of today do but reiterate the wisdom of the sages of antiquity. The perception of truth may be new or old, but the truth itself is neither old nor new, but eternal as the Universe. The discovery of the fundamental principles of agriculture reach far beyond