

**The  
RIGHTS  
and DUTIES  
of the  
NEGRO**



**By  
Booker  
T.  
Washington**

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An Address delivered by Booker T. Washington, of Tuskegee, Alabama, before the National Afro-American Council in McCauley's Theatre, Louisville, Ky., Thursday Evening, July, 2, 1903 \* \*

## THE RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF THE NEGRO.

In the midst of the present deep interest growing out of matters connected with our race, it can be stated that recent events, as regrettable as they are, have tended to simplify the problem in one direction, at least. The events to which I refer show that the questions pertaining to our race are each day more and more becoming national ones, rather than local and sectional ones. When we carry the question up into the atmosphere where men of all races, North and South, will discuss it with calmness, with absence of passion and sectional feelings, I believe we shall have made a distinct advance.

While my remarks to-night will relate to the race in its national aspect, I speak also as one who was born in the South, who loves it, and expects to abide there permanently. I am glad this great meeting is held south of Mason and Dixon's line. It is in the South that the great masses of our people dwell, and will abide in the future as now. It is fitting that this body should have its hearing, and perform its work, in the section of our country where the Negro race lives; it is equally important that this organization speak its words, and perfect its plans in the midst of the white people who are most directly concerned about the future of the race.

Whatever progress is made in the years that are to come, will result largely from open, frank discussion, and a sympathetic co-operation between the highest types of whites, and the same class of blacks. One thing of which I feel absolutely sure, is that without mutual confidence and co-operation, there is little hope for the progress which we all desire. In the present season of anxiety, and almost of despair, which possesses an element of the race, there are two things which I wish to say as strongly as I may.

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First, let no man of the race become discouraged or hopeless. Though their voices may not be often or loudly lifted, there are in this country, North and South, men who mean to help see that justice is meted out to the race in all avenues of life. Such a man is Judge Thomas G. Jones, of Alabama, to whom more credit should be given for blotting out the infamous system of peonage than to any other. Judge Jones represents the very highest type of Southern manhood, and there are hosts of others like him. There is a class of brave, earnest men at the South, as well as at the North, who are more determined than ever before to see that the race is given an opportunity to elevate itself; and we owe it to these friends, as well as to ourselves, to see that no act of ours causes them embarrassment.

Second, let us keep before us the fact that, almost without exception, every race or nation that has ever got upon its feet, has done so through struggle, and trial, and persecution; and that out of this very resistance to wrong, out of the struggle against odds, they have gained strength, self-confidence, and experience, which they could not have gained in any other way.

And not the least of the blessings of such struggle, is that it keeps one humble, and nearer to the heart of the Giver of all gifts. Show me the individual who is permitted to go through life without anxious thought, without ever having experienced a sense of poverty and wrong, want and struggle, and I will show you a man who is likely to fail in life. "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth."

No one should seek to close his eyes to the truth, that the race is passing through a very serious and trying period of its development; a period that calls for the use of our ripest thought, our most sober judgment, and frequent appeals to Him who has promised strength to the weak.

During the season through which we are now passing, I wish to ask with all the emphasis I am able to command, that each individual of the race keep a calm mind, and ex-

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ercise the greatest degree of self-control; and that we all keep a brave heart. Let nothing lead us into extremes of utterance, or action. By this method of procedure, we shall be able to justify the faith of our friends, and confound our enemies. In the affairs of a race, as with great business enterprises, it is the individual of few words and conservative action, who commands respect and confidence. Vastly more courage is often shown in one's ability to suffer in silence, or to keep the body under when sorely tempted, than in acting through the medium of a mob. In the long run it is the race or individual that exercises the most patience, forbearance, and self-control in the midst of trying conditions, that wins its course, and the respect of the world. Such a course will, in the end, draw to our side all men, North and South, whose good-will and support are worth having. Let nothing induce us to descend to the level of the mob, but rather direct our course in a dignified atmosphere.

In advocating this policy, I am not asking that the Negro act the coward; we are not cowards. The part which we have played in defending the flag of our country in every war in which we have been engaged, is sufficient evidence of our courage when the proper time comes to manifest it.

The recent outbreaks of government by the mob emphasize two lessons, one for our race, and one for the other citizens of our country, South and North; for it is to be noted, I repeat, that the work of the lyncher is not confined to one section of the country.

The lesson for us is, that we should see to it that so far as the influence of parent, of school, of pulpit, and of press is concerned, no effort be spared to impress upon our own people, especially the youth, that idleness and crime should cease, and that no excuse be given the world to label any large proportion of the race as idlers and criminals; and that we show ourselves as anxious to bring to

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punishment, as any other class of citizens, those who commit crime, when proper legal procedure is sure. We should let the world know on all proper occasions that we consider no legal punishment too severe for the wretch of any race who attempts to outrage a woman.

The lesson for the other portion of the nation to learn is, that both in the making and the execution, the same laws should be made to apply to the Negro as to the white man. There should be meted out equal justice to the black man and the white man whether it relates to citizenship, the protection of property, the right to labor, or the protection of human life. Whenever the nation forgets, or is tempted to forget, this basic principle, the whole fabric of government for both the white and the black man, is weakened, and threatened with destruction. This is true whether it relates to conditions in Texas, Indiana, or Delaware.

To show how far we have already been led astray by those who disregard the majesty of the law, and would insult governors and judges; by those who would uphold the law in one case, and trample it under foot in another, we have but to call attention to the lamentable fact that the most careful and systematic investigation into the subject of lynching that has ever been made in this country shows that only thirty-five per cent. of those lynched have ever been charged with violence to women. To attempt to say that all these thirty-five per cent. were guilty, would be to argue that the judgment of the mob is more unerring than that of the court. We cannot, and should not, escape the punishment for our sins of commission, or of omission.

It is with a nation as with an individual: "Whatsoever we sow that shall we also reap;" if we sow crime, we shall reap lawlessness. If we break the law where a helpless Negro is concerned, it will not be very long before the same law is disregarded when a white man is concerned. Out of the present conditions, there is one sign more encourag-

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ing than all others; and that is that in the South as well as in the North, the voice of the press is speaking out as never before in favor of upholding the majesty of the Law.

The Negro in this country constitutes the most compact, reliable and peaceful element of labor; one which is almost the sole dependence for production in certain directions; and I believe that, if for no higher reason than the economic one, the people will see that it is worth while to keep so large an element of labor happy, contented, and prosperous, by surrounding and guarding it with every protection and encouragement of the laws. In the long run, nothing is more costly and unsatisfactory than discontented, unhappy and restless labor. Few people are wise enough to learn the economic value of justice!

In our efforts to go forward, we should keep in mind the difference between the problem presented previous to the Civil war, and that now confronting us. Before our freedom, a giant tree was growing in the garden, which all considered injurious to the progress of the whole nation. The work to be done was direct and simple—destroy the hurtful tree. The work before us now is not the destruction of a tree, but the growing of one. Slavery presented a problem of destruction; freedom presents one of construction. This requires time, patience, preparation of the soil, watering, pruning, and the most careful nursing.

In this connection, we should bear in mind that our ability and our progress will be measured largely by evidences of tangible, visible worth. We have a right in a conservative and sensible manner to enter our complaints, but we shall make a fatal error if we yield to the temptation of believing that mere opposition to our wrongs, and the simple utterance of complaint, will take the place of progressive, constructive action, which must constitute the bed-rock of all true civilization. The weakest race or individual can condemn a policy: it is the work of a statesman

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to construct one. A race is not measured by its ability to condemn, but to create. Let us hold up our heads, and with firm and steady tread, go manfully forward. No one likes to feel that he is continually following a funeral procession.

Let us not neglect to lay the greatest stress upon the opportunities open to us, especially here in the South, for constructive growth in labor, business and education. Back of all complaint, all denunciation, must be evidences of solid, indisputable accomplishment in the way of high moral character and economic foundation. An inch of progress is worth more than a yard of complaint.

The whites and the blacks are to reside together in this country permanently, and we should lose no opportunity to cultivate in every straightforward, manly way, the greatest harmony between the races. Whoever, North or South, black or white, by word or deed, needlessly stirs up strife, is an enemy to both races, and to his country. While making our appeals for help and sympathy, we should not forget that in the last analysis, the most effective appeal will consist in laying our case before the community and state in which we reside; nor that usefulness in our own homes will constitute our most lasting and most potent protection.

I appreciate from the bottom of my heart the tremendous and trying strain that is now upon us, and how difficult it is for us to make progress under such circumstances; but I believe the momentous period through which we are now passing, will draw to our assistance in larger numbers, the good will, the sympathy, and helpful co-operation of white men in the South, as well as in the North, if we only exercise due patience, self-control, and courage.

## SUFFRAGE LAWS UNJUST.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON, IN PHILADELPHIA "NORTH AMERICAN"

Inquiries are so often made as to Mr. Washington's position on the subject of Suffrage that the following is inserted as containing the views which he has repeatedly uttered both at the South and at the North and through the press and from the public platform :—

"I do not believe that any State should make a law that permits an ignorant and poverty-stricken white man to vote and prevents a black man in the same condition from voting.

"Such a law is not only unjust, but it will re-act, as all unjust laws do, in time; for the effect of such a law is to encourage the Negro to secure education and property, and at the same time it encourages the white man to remain in ignorance and poverty. I believe that in time, through the operation of intelligence and friendly race relations, all cheating at the ballot-box will cease.

"It will become apparent that the white man who begins by cheating a Negro out of his ballot soon learns to cheat a white man out of his, and that man who does this ends his career of dishonesty by the theft of property or by some equally serious crime.

"In my opinion, the time will come when the South will encourage all of its citizens to vote. It will see that it pays better, from every standpoint, to have healthy, vigorous life than to have that political stagnation which always results when one-half of the population has no share and no interest in the government.

"As a rule, I believe in universal, free suffrage, but I believe that in the South we are confronted with peculiar conditions that justify the protection of the ballot in many of the States, for a while at least, either by an educational test, property test, or by both combined; but whatever tests are required they should be made to apply with equal and exact justice to both races."