

[The Resolutions of the Business committee having been read to the meeting, Mr. Douglass said:]

I shall not, Mr. Chairman, in the remarks I shall make this evening, confine myself to the resolutions which have been read, perhaps shall say but little about them, more than that they have my hearty approval. At the conclusion of my remarks this morning I referred to the prejudice existing in this country against the colored people. I had not time, then, to dwell upon it and will choose it as my subject for to night.

Strictly speaking I claim there is no such thing as prejudice against color, either in this country or anywhere else. It is simply nature's protest against slavery, that is called by this name. You do not hate the colored man because he is such. I will not do our oppressors the injustice of supposing for a moment, that they disgrace us on account of our color. I know there may be some exceptions to this rule. I have stopped at hotels and travelled in cars, and I entered churches, and have sometimes met men who seemed to despise me, simply because God brought me into this world, without asking me whether I would, or would not, have a white skin. But the man who would thus insult me, or any man, because of his colored skin, is sunk so low in the scale of decency and manhood, that contempt, clothed with the wings of the swiftest lightning, would require thousands of years to reach him, and would die before it could get half way.

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When we are free, men will find it to be a fact that there is no prejudice against color. It is the

condition, not the color. My color serves as a badge, indicating that I belong to a race which in this land has been doomed to degradation. And just so long as we consent to occupy subordinate condition, and submit without murmuring to our degradation, there is no prejudice against us. So long as the black man is willing to be a slave in this country, all is well enough, but whenever he attempts to take the position of a freeman, it is then the white man seems to hate him. We can fill the places of servants, we can wait on white people at the table, and drive ladies out in carriages; and, so long as we are willing to occupy these positions, there is no prejudice against us. It is only when I feel myself a man and stand forth among men as my own master,—unwilling that any shall rule over me, that this prejudice is aroused against me.

In the State of Illinois, as long as we made no complaint and claimed no manhood we had little difficulty. While, as they say, “we kept our places,” all was well; there was no prejudice. And so it is always. You take our money to sustain your schools and your government, and then shut us out from both; there seems no difference between our money and that of the white people. It is not tainted by passing through our hands. It is only when we would have the benefit of the schools which we pay our money to support, or ask to vote in the government which takes our money by taxation, that this terrible prejudice against color is manifested, and the *Universe* seems

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to be endangered.

All this is natural. As I said this prejudice is nature's protest against slavery and outrage; and the colored people of the country are bound, as they love freedom, and would deserve it, to elevate themselves above this menial condition. So long as we are oppressed, we will be dispised; for men always dispise and hate those whom they have injured. And the amount of injury and hate in proportion to the wrong you have done us; for our presence always brings to the minds of our oppressors, the length and breadth and depth of their meanness. Hence, there are many people who would exile us from this country entirely. Many Republicans advocate this. They propose to send us to Central America, or somewhere else. Franklin Blair, and others of the party, propose the colonization of all the free colored population of the country. But, let me tell you, God never intended that this guilty nation should get rid of its sins and their consequences in that way. The colored man is here for weal or woe, and he must remain for all time to come. You might as well talk of colonizing the granite of New England, as the colored race. We are with you, and our destiny is one. And you need not, if you knew it, desire our removal; for could you send us from you, you would banish all the heroism of the country. It is nearly all on the side of the colored people. Why, you had three heroes in your village to-day,—fugitives from the oppression of your country,—braving all the danger and death which threaten them in their race for liberty.

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Some of you think the colored people do not want their liberty. I know we are a submissive race,—disposed to bear with patience and long-suffering, the wrongs and injuries heaped upon us. The negro is as ready to forgive an injury as the Saxon is to commit it. You may trample upon his very manhood, destroy, almost, his intellectual life; yet he hopes on hopes ever. I know this spirit of long-suffering, on the part of the negro, is claimed as an argument in favor of enslaving him. And some say this docile disposition is a proof of our inferiority, and argue that if well treated, we are the better off for being denied our humanity. I heard a young man, the other day speaking of his uncle, in Mississippi, who was the owner of one hundred and fifty slaves. He said the slaves of his uncle were well cared for,—kindly treated; when their master went on a journey many of them would accompany him to the steamboat landing, and on his return, would meet him joyfully; and he, in return, would always greet them cordially. And this was the equivalent he gave them for the manhood he had wrested from them. Sell my wife away from me in the market, and then shake me cordially by the hand! Rob me of my children and give me a dollar! Crush out my intellectual life, rob me of my humanity, and then speak to me a kindly word as a compensation. Yet people refer to these little acts of kindness as a proof that the slaves are better off than they could be if free. I know that many slaves are better off than I am, physically. I travelled through your State

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last winter and staid over night at the town of Crestline. I could get no place to sleep, no shelter, nothing to eat at any public house in the place. I slept all night on the steps of the Depot. Many slaves at the South were far better provided for that night than I was. But that is not the question. There is more of manhood than food and clothing and sleep. And kind treatment of this character, often adds to the slave's real misery; for you give him the consciousness of his humanity, only to outrage and trample upon it.

But prejudice against the colored people, as I said only exists when we are in a certain condition. The chasm which opened in the Roman Forum would not be closed till the most precious thing in all the nation was thrown in. So the gulf between the white man and the black ceases to exist only when all that is manly,—the self-respect of the negro, is thrown in. But the sacrifice is too great. No more physical comfort can compensate for the loss of manhood. Dr. Watts, on being rallied by a lady on his diminutive stature, said:—

“If I had arms to reach the pole,
And grasp the ocean in my span,
I must be measured by my soul;
The mind's the standard of the man.”

You do not thus measure the colored man. If he can sing and dance and act the monkey for your amusement he is the “d—dest smartest nigger you have ever seen.” This is the experience of all who hear me. Just so long as we will not strive to be men we are approved. You judge of

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the colored man by the elasticity of his heel, not that of his mind. If he is a good barber, or waiter, or boot-black, you commend him. These positions you have set aside especially for us, as though we were capable of nothing else; and when a colored man is thus engaged you say "he knows his place." But why should you decide. My place is wherever my capabilities shall qualify me to go, and I ask no one to find a position for me to occupy.

There never was a wider separation of races than in England for some time after the Norman Conquest. It was as deep a disgrace for a Norman to marry a Saxon as it is, in this country, for a black man to marry a white woman. All the nobility of England yet trace their lineage back to the Norman race, because the Saxons were slaves. All the races have, at one time or another, been reduced to slavery, and but one has ever lifted itself into freedom,—that was the black race in Haiti; all the others have waited for a change of circumstances to work out their deliverance. We have been slaves about four hundred years. All other slavery has been that of white men. The Roman slaves were white, so were those of Greece. I am proud of the negro race. According to history we once led the van of civilization, and gave manners and customs to the world.

As colored men, then, we have no cause to be ashamed of our race. We will yet become as respectable as the proud Saxon; while that race may sometime sink as low as the negro is to day.

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I do not think that white is a better, or a more beautiful color than black. While we are degraded our color partakes of our disgrace, and is used as the badge of condition. In this country you paint all the ancients, no matter what may have been their color, white. The twelve apostles you represent as white; yet from the country in which they lived, we know they must have been darker than I am. So you carry your idea into everything. The bible says God created man in his own image; men do the same thing; they always create Gods in their own image and after their own likeness. So you paint your God white, and the devil black. Jesus of Nazareth, you represent as of pure white color; yet he could not have been so; for the race to which he belonged were of a darker color. In some countries of the world, where your color is not so popular as in this, they have painted God black, just like we are; and the Devil white, just like you, and I don't think they have made any great mistake:

Not one fifth of the population of the world are white; the other four fifths are of all shades, but all darker than I am. So as a general rule the human race is not white but colored; and you are an exception. Perhaps it is your color instead of ours that should be regarded as defective and disgraceful. You see in our shops, that articles of furniture are of a light color, like you, at first, and they paint them to give them a darker shade. They are white because they are not finished.—

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Perhaps this is the case with you. There must certainly be such an impression in the Southern states, on the part of the whites. The *finishing* process is going on there all the time; and lest the shade should not become deep enough for the best effect, they are going to open the slave trade, to supply themselves with more coloring matter.

At the North this finishing process is not going on. Here you stand aloof from us. Let a colored man go into any of your churches, and he will find he always has a seat to himself. Your religion knows no true humanity. Yet you say Garrisonians are infidels, because they do not reverence your pro-slavery church and its religion. I desire, always, to be an infidel to such a religion. I would rather take the chances of Tom Paine and the other infidels you denounce, a thousand times, than to stand in the last day, in the position of Dr. Adams and the other *Plug ugly* divines of this country. Dr. Adams favors the slave trade, as a missionary operation, that the heathen of Africa shall be brought under the light of our pure religion! You carried on war against the Seminole Indians, to make them send back fugitive slaves, into christian bondage. Your missionaries labored to make the Indians pro slavery; and it has been the effects of your christainizing operations every where, to make men viler and meaner than they were.— In the Feejee Islands they eat the man you send to convert them. I don't blame them much,—your flesh and blood are of so superior a quality.—

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And how much better are you than they? You go to Africa and bring the colored people here, then you work them up into sugar, molasses and tobacco, and in this form you eat them and drink them and chew them and snuff them, and seem to delight in doing so.

During the war in India two of our christian missionaries were put to death by the Sepoys, for attempting to introduce christianity among them, and great meetings were held in our cities to lament over the horrid deed. It was bad enough, doubtless, but these men need not have gone all the way to India, to suffer this martyrdom. Why didn't they go to Virginia and attempt to teach the same gospel which they carried to India, and they could have had their heads taken off in their own country. In Virginia, the glorious old Dominion, Mrs. Douglas, was sent to the penitentiary, for a year and a day, for teaching colored children to read the bible, and we had no indications of excitement on the part of our churches. To attract the attention of the church and priesthood these things must be done in the Isles of the Sea. I believe in the power of christianity, to benefit and bless all mankind, but I repudiate what is called christianity in this land. Had the American churches obeyed the teachings of christianity, we should not have had a slave in this land to day. But they have given their influence against freedom and in favor of tyranny, and are unworthy of the countenance and support of any one who regards the interests

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