

MR. LANGSTON'S SPEECH.

MR. PRESIDENT AND LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Some great man has remarked that a nation may lose its liberty in a day and be a century in finding it out. There is not, within the length and breadth of this entire country, from Maine to Georgia, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, a solitary man or woman, who is in the full possession of his or her share of civil, religious and political liberty. This is a startling announcement, perhaps, in the heart and centre of a country loud in its boasts of its free institutions, its democratic organizations, its equality, its justice, and its liberality. We have been in the habit of boasting our Declaration of Independence, of our Federal Constitution, of the Ordinance of 1787, and various enactments in favour of popular liberty, for so long that we verily believe that we are a free people; and yet I am forced to declare, looking the truth directly in the face and seeing the power of American slavery, that there is not, within the bosom of this entire country, a solitary man or woman who can say, I have my full share of liberty. Let the President of this Society arm himself with the panoply of the Constitution of the United States, the Declaration of Independence, and the Word of God, and stand up in the presence of the people of South Carolina, and say, I believe in the sentiments contained in the Constitution of my country, in the Declaration of Independence, and in the Word of God respecting the rights of man, and where will be his legal protection? Massachusetts will sit quietly by and see him outraged;

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the President of the United States will not dare to interfere for his protection; he will be at the mercy of the tyrant slaveholder. Why? Because slavery is the great lord of this country, and there is no power in this nation to-day strong enough to withstand it.

It would afford me great pleasure, Mr. President, to dwell upon the achievements already gained by the Anti-Slavery movement. I know that they have been great and glorious; I know that this movement has taught the American people who the slave is and what his rights are—that he is a man, and is entitled to all the rights of a man; I know that the attention of the public has been called to the consideration of the coloured people, and the attention of the coloured people themselves has been awakened to their own condition, so that, with longing expectations, they begin to say, in the language of the poet:

“Oh tell me not that I am blessed,  
Nor bid me glory in my lot  
While plebian freemen are oppressed  
With wants and woes that I have not.  
So let a cage, with grates of gold  
And pearly roof, the eagle hold;  
Let dainty viands be his fare,  
And give the captive tend’rest care;  
But say, in luxury’s limits pent,  
Find you the king of birds content?  
No; oft he’ll sound the startling shriek;  
And beat the grates with angry beak.  
Precarious freedom’s far more dear  
Than all the prison’s pampering cheer;  
He longs to seek his Eyrie seat—  
Some cliff on Ocean’s lonely shore,  
Whose old bare top the tempests beat  
And on whose base the billows roar;  
When, dashed by gales, they yawn like graves,  
He longs for joy to skim those waves,  
Or rise through tempest shrouded air  
All thick and dark with loud winds swelling,  
To brave the lightning’s lurid glare  
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As the mountain eagle hates the cage and loathes confinement, and longs to be free, so the coloured man hates chains, loathes confinement and longs to shoulder the responsibilities of a man (applause). He longs to stand in the Church a man; he longs to stand up a man upon the great theatre of life, everywhere a man; for, verily, he is a man, and may well adopt the sentiment of the Roman, Terence, when he said, *Homo sum, et nihil humani a me alienum puto*. I am a man, and there is nothing of humanity, as I think, estranged to me. Yes, the Anti-Slavery movement has done this; and it has done more. It has revolutionized, to a great degree, the theology and religion of this country; it has taught the American people that the Bible is not on the side of American slavery. No, it cannot be. It was written in characters of light across the gateway of the old Mosaic system, "He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, shall surely be put to death." That is the only place in the Scriptures where the matter of chattel slavery is mentioned, and the declaration of the Almighty, through Moses, is: "He that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death" (applause). Theodore D. Weld was right when he said, "The Spirit of Slavery never takes refuge in the Bible of its own accord. The horns of the altar are its last resort. It seizes them, if at all, only in desperation—rushing from the terror of the avenger's arm. Like other unclean spirits, it hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest

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its deeds should be reproved. Goaded to madness in its conflicts with common sense and natural justice, denied all quarter, and hunted from every covert, it breaks at last into the sacred enclosure, and courses up and down the Bible, seeking rest and finding none. THE LAW OF LOVE, streaming from every page, flashes around it an omnipresent anguish and despair. It shrinks from the hated light, and howls under the consuming touch, as the demoniacs recoiled from the Son of god and shrieked, 'Torment us not.' At last it slinks among the shadows of the Mosaic system, and thinks to burrow out of sight among its types and symbols. Vain hope! Its asylum is its sepulchre; its city of refuge, the city of destruction. It rushes from light into the sun; from heat into devouring fire; and, from the voice of God, into the thickest of His thunders."

Yes, the Anti-Slavery movement has taught the American people this, and more than this. It has taught them that no political party established on the basis of ignoring the question of slavery, can live and breathe in the North (applause). Where is the Whig party?

"Gone glimmering through the dream of things that were; A schoolboy's tale, the wonder of an hour."

The Anti-Slavery movement has dug its grave deep; it has buried it, and is writing for its epitaph, "It was, but is no more" (applause). With Daniel Webster the Whig party breathed its last breath.

And where is the Democratic party? It is in power, but all over it is written, *Mene, mene, tekel*

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*upharsin* (applause).

I would like to dwell on these results of the Anti-Slavery movement, but I want to make good, before this audience, my proposition, that there is not, within the length and breadth of this land, a solitary freeman. The American people may be divided into four classes: the slaves, the slaveholders, the non-slaveholding whites and the free people of colour.

I need not undertake to show this audience that the American slave is deprived of his rights. He has none. He has a body, but it is not his own; he has an intellect, but he cannot think for himself; he has sensibility, but he must feel for another. He can own nothing; all belongs to his master.

Then, as to the slaveholder, we have all got to [.....]  
cannot sit on the bench or stand at the bar, in the forum or in the pulpit, and utter a solitary sentiment that could be construed as tending to create insubordination among the free people of colour, and insurrection among the slaves. Look at the press in the Southern States; it is muzzled, and dare not speak out a sentiment in favour of freedom. Let but a sentiment tending towards abolition escape, and what is the consequence? Look at the *Parkville Luminary*, broken to atoms, and the people of that portion of Missouri avowing that that paper never uttered their sentiments or represented their views, and giving thanks to God Almighty that they here had the mob spirit strong enough to destroy that press.

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Is not this evidence sufficient to show that even slaveholders themselves are not in possession of their full share of civil, religious and political liberty?

As to the great mass of white people of the North, have they their rights? I recollect, when the anti-slavery people held a Convention at Cleveland, in 1850, the question came up whether they should hold their next National Convention in the city of Washington. The strong political anti-slavery men of the country were there. There were Chase and Lewis, of Ohio; Cassius M. Clay, of Kentucky; Lewis Tappan, of New York, and a great many other strong men of the party; and yet when this question came up, how was it decided? That they would not hold the next National Convention at Washington. And what was the reason given? Because the people of that city may use violence towards us! Had the people their full share of liberty, would they have been afraid to go to the capital of the country and there utter their sentiments on the subject of slavery or any other topic?

But to make the fact more apparent, some two years afterwards, the great National Woman's Rights Convention was held in the same city; and there the very same question came up, whether they should hold their next meeting at Washington or Pittsburg. How was it decided? As the question was about being put, Lucy Stone came forward and said, "I am opposed to going to the city of Washington. They buy and sell women

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there, and they might outrage us." So the Convention voted to hold the next meeting at Pittsburgh. Were they in the possession of their full share of liberty? Think of it; our mothers, our wives and our sisters, of the North, dare not go to the capital of the country to hold a meeting to discuss the question of the right of their own sex. And yet the Constitution declares that the "citizens of each State shall be entitled to all the rights and immunities of citizens in the several States."

I now wish to speak of another class, and more at length—of that class which I have the honour to represent—the free people of colour. What is our condition in respect to civil, religious and political liberty? In the State in which I live (Ohio), they do not enjoy the elective franchise, and why? It is owing to the indirect influence of American Slavery. Slavery in Kentucky, the adjoining State, says to the people of Ohio, you must not allow coloured people to vote and be elected to office, because our slaves will hear of it and become restless, and directly we shall have an insurrection and our throats will be cut. And so the people of Ohio say to the coloured people, that they cannot allow them the privilege of voting, notwithstanding the coloured people pay taxes like others, and in the face of the acknowledged principle that taxation and representation should always go together. And I understand that in the State of New York the coloured man is only allowed the elective franchise through a property qualification, which amounts to nothing short of an insult; for it is not the

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coloured man that votes, but the \$250 that he may possess. It is not his manhood, but his money, that is represented. But that is the Yankee idea—the dollar and the cent (laughter). In the State of Ohio, the coloured man has not the privilege of sending his child to the white schools. Nor is he placed even in the penitentiary on a fair footing (laughter). If a coloured man knocks a white man down—perhaps in defence of his rights—he is sent to the penitentiary; and when he gets there, there is no discrimination made between him and the worst white criminal; but when he marches out to take his meal, he is made to march behind the white criminal, and you may see the prisoners marching—horse-thieves in front—coloured people behind (laughter).

All the prejudice against colour that you see in the United States is the fruit of Slavery, and is a most effectual barrier to the rights of the coloured man. In the State of Illinois they have a law, something like this: that if any man comes there with the intent to make it his residence, he shall be taken up and fined \$10 for the first offence; and if he is unable to pay it, he is put up and sold, and the proceeds of the sale are to go, first, towards paying the costs that may accrue in the case, and the residue towards the support and maintenance of a charity fund for the benefit of the *poor whites* of that State (laughter). That is a part of the legislation of the State that Stephen A. Douglas has the honour to represent (renewed laughter). The public sentiment that is growing up in this country, however, will soon, I hope, be

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the death of Douglas and of that sort of legislation (applause).

In the light, therefore, of all the facts, can there be any question that there is no full enjoyment of freedom to any one in this country. Could John Quincy Adams come forth from his mausoleum, shrouded in his grave clothes, and, in the name of the sovereignty of Massachusetts, stand up in Charleston and protest against the imprisonment of the citizens of Massachusetts, as a violation of their constitutional rights, do you think the people of South Carolina would submit to it? Do you think the reverence due to his name and character, or even the habiliments of the grave about him, would protect him from insult and outrage? And so far are the people of this country lost to all sense of shame that many would laugh at such an outrage.

American slavery has corrupted the whole mass of American society. Its influence has pervaded every crevice and cranny of society. But, Mr. President, I am glad to know that a great change is coming on, and that the American people are beginning to feel that the question of slavery is not one which affects the coloured people alone. I am glad to know that they are beginning to feel that it is a national question, in which every man and woman is more or less interested. And when the people of the North shall rise and put on their strength, powerful though slavery is and well-nigh omnipotent, it shall die. It is only for the people to will it, and it is done. But while the Church and the political parties continue to sustain it;

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