

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:—

The time was, when the declaration, “I am a Roman citizen,” guaranteed ample protection to the poorest and meanest Roman peasant. Now the declaration, “I am an American citizen,” affords but a poor and scanty protection in this country to any man who wears a dark skin. Hence I propose a Plea for colored Americans. I claim, Sir, that they can be made mentally and politically equal with the whites; that they are now their equals physically and morally.

The argument that is much relied upon to prove colored Americans inferior to white, is the condition of the Negro as found in the rudest portions of Africa. He is represented as having a black skin, thick lips, flat nose, short hair, receding forehead; that he resembles the Orang Outang and Monkey, and thus forms only a link between the human and animal creation.

If all this were true so far as *Africans* are concerned, it would prove just nothing so far as *Americans* are concerned. We are not Africans, Sir, but we are colored Americans. We claim no other soil than this—no other home than this—no other altar where we can kneel to venerate the memory of our fathers; and he who denies it, be he black or white, is a monomaniac and should be immediately indited and sent to the Lunatic Asylum. As yet, colored Americans have had neither time nor circumstances to develop the mental man. For colored men, when

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first they were introduced into the American colonies, were introduced as slaves, and the government rendered the title in them as valid as is the title in lands and houses. And the whole spirit of American law from that fatal hour to this, has moved in this vein.— In some States we have our oath—in others we have not,—in some we have the elective franchise—in others we have not,—in some we can settle—in others we dare not.

We dare not settle in Illinois—that infant State, whose legislators ought to be under the immediate eye of Nicholas, Francis Joseph, or Louis Napoleon. They have cut many a foolish trick—but this one—this last one is the most cruel and heartless of all.

Every man of color who sojourns in the State more than ten days with a view to settle, is to be seized by their official hounds and sold upon the block as a slave, and this for no other crime than the color of his skin, which he had no more to do in forming than he has with the air which he breaths. Let us hear no more cant about the arrogance of Romanism while such a bloody law as this degrades the records of professedly free and protestant State.

In some States we can worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience—in others we cannot—but in no State in the American Union are we free. Our freedom everywhere and under all circumstances is a lie—a cruel, unmitigated lie.—

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Do you deny it? Let the doubting black Thomas, if he be here to night, tell me if he can be admitted, as a general rule, into law schools, at the dinner table, or into Academies and Seminaries of learning. He is bound to answer, No. For we are ostracized in every department of society, and then coolly and contemptuously asked by the demons who have thus robbed us of every moral limb: "What woolly headed Homers, Virgils, Dantes, Moliers, or Shakespears, ever inscribed their name upon the pillar of fame, by the numbers of their immortal song." How long, pray Sir, since I could ask—What silky-headed Miltons, Drydens, Spencers, Fontaines or Popes, in these United States "ever inscribed their names upon the pillar of fame by the numbers of their immortal song"? For it must be confessed, however bitter the pill to Americans, that their Irvings, Coopers, Whittiers, Longfellows and Bryants are but children of an hour.

The only place where a just comparison between the two American races can be drawn, is our private and public schools. In Grammar, Geography, Arithmetic, Reading, Spelling, United States history and Composition, colored children are as forward as white. They are quick in perception and of such literary hucksters as Thomas Carlyle, Thomas Dun English, and your own Doctors of Divinity, when they tell you of

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the extreme docility of the Negro—that he was designed to be a slave. A black Cato or Brutus will yet arise, (unless Heaven decree otherwise), in America, as Toussaint L'overture did in Hayti, and then wo to your ill-gotten possessions.

Oh, that my eyes may not behold this broad land of ours, from the Lake shores to the Gulf of Mexico, from the North to the South—drenched in a brother's blood—but if liberty, fraternity, equality—if the government of God can only be secured and preserved by it—thrice welcome it, Sir, as a messenger from on high to shatter the fetters of the bondman, and to let the oppressed go free.

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