

From Political Destiny of the Colored Race on the American Continent

Let it then be understood, as a great principle of political economy, that no people can be free who themselves do not constitute an essential part of the *ruling element* of the country in which they live. Whether this element be founded upon a true or false, a just or an unjust basis; this position in community is necessary to personal safety. The liberty of no man is secure, who controls not his own political destiny. What is true of an individual, is true of a family; and that which is true of a family, is also true concerning a whole people. To suppose otherwise, is that delusion which at once induces its victim, through a period of long suffering, patiently to submit to every species of wrong; trusting against probability, and hoping against all reasonable grounds of expectation, for the granting of privileges and enjoyment of rights, which never will be attained. This delusion reveals the true secret of the power which holds in peaceable subjection, all the oppressed in every part of the world.

A people, to be free, must necessarily be *their own rulers*: that is, *each individual* must, in himself, embody the *essential ingredient*—so to speak—of the *sovereign principle* which composes the *true basis* of his liberty. This principle, when not exercised by himself, may, at his pleasure, be delegated to another—his true representative.

Said a great French writer: "A free agent, in a free government, should be his own governor;"¹ that is, he must possess within himself the *acknowledged right to govern*: this constitutes him a *governor*, though he may delegate to another the power to govern himself.

No one, then, can delegate to another a power he never possessed; that is, he cannot *give an agency* in that which he never had a right. Consequently, the colored man in the United States, being deprived of the right of inherent sovereignty, cannot *confer* a suffrage, because he possesses none to confer. Therefore, where there is no suffrage, there can neither be *freedom* nor *safety* for the disfranchised. And it is a futile hope to suppose that the agent of another's concerns will take a proper interest in the affairs of those to whom he is under no obligations. Having no favors to ask or expect, he therefore has none to lose.

In other periods and parts of the world—as in Europe and Asia—the people being of one common, direct origin of race, though established on the presumption of difference by birth, or what was termed *blood*, yet the distinction between the superior classes and common people, could only be marked by the difference, in the dress and education of the two classes. To effect this, the interposition of government was necessary; consequently, the costume and education of the people became a subject of legal restriction, guarding carefully against the privileges of the common people.

In Rome, the Patrician and Plebeian were orders in the ranks of her people—all of whom were termed citizens (*cives*)—recognized by the laws of the country; their dress and education being determined by law, the better to

1. The most likely source is *Principles of Politics* (1815), by Benjamin Constant (1767–1830), French-Swiss political theorist.

carry as much as any man, and can cut as much too, if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now. As for intellect, all I can say is, if woman have a pint and man a quart—why cant she have her little pint full? You need not be afraid to give us our rights for fear we will take too much,—for we cant take more than our pint'll hold. The poor men seem to be all in confusion, and dont know what to do. Why children, if you have woman's rights give it to her and you will feel better. You will have your own rights, and they wont be so much trouble. I cant read, but I can hear. I have heard the bible and have learned that Eye caused man to sin. Well if woman upset the world, do give her a chance to set it rightside up again. The Lady has spoken about Jesus, how he never spurned woman from him, and she was right. When Lazarus' died, Mary and Martha came to him with faith and love and besought him to raise their brother. And Jesus wept—and Lazarus came forth. And how came Jesus into the world? Through God who created him and woman who bore him. Man, where is your part? But the women are coming up blessed be God and a few of the men are coming up with them. But man is in a tight place, the poor slave is on him, woman is coming on him, and he is surely between a hawk and a buzzard.

1851

1. Restored to life by Jesus (John 11.1–44).

MARTIN R. DELANY

During the antebellum period, a number of African American leaders argued that the United States would forever remain a nation of slavery and white supremacy and that beneath the contradictions in Jefferson's vision lay the reality that he and others among the nation's founders never intended for blacks to become citizens of the new republic. Angered and disillusioned by the Compromise of 1850, with its infamous Fugitive Slave Law requiring all citizens to assist in returning escaped slaves to their "owners," the black Pittsburgh leader Martin R. Delany (1812–1885) broke with his friend Frederick Douglass, with whom he had co-edited the antislavery newspaper the *North Star*, and began to call for African American emigration. In 1854 he convened a National Emigration Convention of Colored Men in Cleveland; his address at the convention, "Political Destiny," counseled African Americans to emigrate to Central or South America or to the Caribbean. His emigrationist vision inspired a number of African Americans, including William Wells Brown, who, in the wake of the Supreme Court's 1857 Dred Scott decision declaring that blacks could never become citizens of the United States, advocated African American emigration to Haiti. With the outbreak of the Civil War, however, most black emigrationists, including Delany and Brown, committed themselves to the Union cause, which they regarded as the cause of antislavery. Delany himself became the first black major in the Union Army. For the remainder of his life, however, he remained tempted by the prospect of black emigration to Africa. The text of his 1854 emigrationist speech is taken from *Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People* (1854).

fix the distinction. In different parts of Europe, at the present day, if not the same, the distinction among the people is similar, only on a modified—and in some kingdoms—probably more tolerant or deceptive policy.

In the United States, our degradation being once—as it has in a hundred instances been done—legally determined, our color is sufficient, independently of costume, education, or other distinguishing marks, to keep up that distinction.

In Europe, when an inferior is elevated to the rank of equality with the superior class, the law first comes to his aid, which, in its decrees, entirely destroys his identity as an inferior, leaving no trace of his former condition visible.

In the United States, among the whites, their color is made, by law and custom, the mark of distinction and superiority; while the color of the blacks is a badge of degradation, acknowledged by statute, organic law, and the common consent of the people.

With this view of the case—which we hold to be correct—to elevate to equality the degraded subject of law and custom, it can only be done, as in Europe, by an entire destruction of the identity of the former condition of the applicant. Even were this desirable—which we by no means admit—with the deep seated prejudices engendered by oppression, with which we have to contend, ages incalculable might reasonably be expected to roll around, before this could honorably be accomplished; otherwise, we should encourage and at once commence an indiscriminate concubinage and immoral commerce, of our mothers, sisters, wives and daughters, revolting to think of, and a physical curse to humanity.

If this state of things be to succeed, then, as in Egypt, under the dread of the inscrutable approach of the destroying angel, to appease the hatred of our oppressors, as a license to the passions of every white, let the lintel of each door of every black man, be stained with the blood of virgin purity and unsullied matron fidelity. Let it be written along the cornice in capitals, "The will of the white man is the rule of my household." Remove the protection to our chambers and nurseries, that the places once sacred may henceforth become the unrestrained resort of the vagrant and rabble, always provided that the licensed commissioner of lust shall wear the indisputable impress of a *white* skin.

But we have fully discovered and comprehended the great political disease with which we are affected, the cause of its origin and continuance; and what is now left for us to do is to discover and apply a sovereign remedy—a healing balm to a sorely diseased body—a wrecked but not entirely shattered system. We propose for this disease a remedy. That remedy is Emigration. This Emigration should be well advised, and like remedies applied to remove the disease from the physical system of man, skillfully and carefully applied, within the proper time, directed to operate on that part of the system, whose greatest tendency shall be, to benefit the whole.

1854

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE 1811–1896

The author of the best-selling novel of the pre-Civil War period, Harriet Beecher Stowe was born in Litchfield, Connecticut, the seventh child and fourth daughter of Lyman Beecher, an eminent evangelical Calvinist minister, and Roxana Foote Beecher. After bearing two more children, Roxana died when Harriet was four; typically for this era, Lyman remarried quickly. Harriet Beecher found her stepmother aloof and overly formal, and continued to grieve for her mother. The family eventually numbered thirteen children, among whom Harriet was especially close to her brothers Henry Ward (1813–1887) and Charles (1815–1900), her sister Catharine (1800–1878), and her half-sister Isabella (1822–1907). Profoundly influenced by Lyman Beecher's ambitions to shape the nation along the lines of his Protestant evangelical vision, many of the children grew up to take on leadership roles in the culture. The men became ministers; the women became writers, teachers, and reformers. Catharine was a pioneer in women's education and teacher training; Isabella turned to suffragism and women's rights; Harriet wrote the most effective antislavery novel in the nation's history.

Between 1819 and 1824, Harriet Beecher studied at Sarah Pierce's Litchfield Female Academy, one of the earliest schools in the nation to offer serious academic training to women. Pierce (1806–1863) believed that properly trained women were ultimately destined (as she phrased it in a commencement address) to "instruct and enlighten the world." In 1823, Catharine Beecher, who had also attended Pierce's school, joined with another sister, Mary, to found a girls' academy in Hartford, Connecticut. Harriet Beecher began to study there in 1824 and became a teacher at the academy in 1827.

In 1832 the Beecher family moved to Cincinnati, where Lyman Beecher assumed the presidency of the new Lane Theological Seminary, convinced of the importance of doing Protestant evangelical work in the western states. Working with her father and her sister Harriet, Catharine Beecher founded the Western Female Institute in order to train "Protestant young women" to teach the children of farmers and workers in the burgeoning schools of the Midwest. Although the Beechers regretted leaving their beloved New England, they became part of an active home-based cultural life (scholars call this a "parlor culture") in Cincinnati, at that time the largest city in the West. Harriet Beecher began to write short stories in 1834. That same year she became acutely aware of the controversy over slavery when a number of Lane students, including the soon to be prominent abolitionist Theodore Dwight Weld, rebelled against Lyman Beecher's lukewarm antislavery position—he supported shipping free American blacks to a colony in Africa—and withdrew from the seminary.

In 1836, a year that saw major antiabolitionist riots in Cincinnati, Harriet Beecher married Calvin Stowe, a professor of biblical literature at Lane who was one of the best Hebrew scholars of his day. Because his salary was small and the Stowes began to rear a large family very quickly—twin girls (Eliza and Harriet) were born in 1836, a son (Henry) in 1838—Harriet Beecher Stowe continued to write for money even though she found childbirth extremely debilitating. Her first book—a collection of stories titled *The Mayflower*—appeared in 1843. Her first antislavery sketch, "Immediate Emancipation," appeared in 1845. The death of her baby boy Samuel, who succumbed to cholera in 1849 before he was a year old, was a great blow and infused her writing with sympathy for people who were helpless in the face of great personal

2. Exodus 12.21–23 describes Moses instructing the Israelites to put the blood of the lamb just above their doorposts so God would know not to smite them.