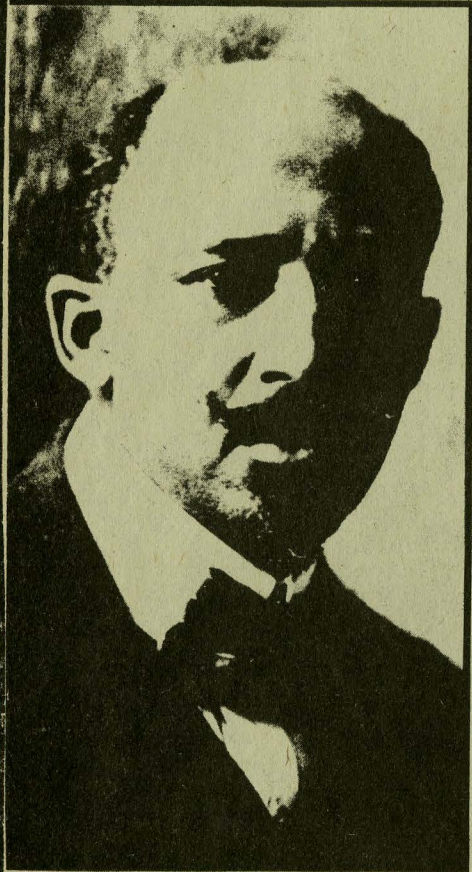


BLACKS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

W.E.B. Du Bois

A brilliant scholar, writer and early leader of the NAACP (pages 98-99), Du Bois fought for full equality of all men. He also believed in the need for a spiritual unification of blacks everywhere. In 1961, having concluded that Negroes had no real future in the U.S., Du Bois went into exile in Africa, where he died in 1963. The passages below are from his book *Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903.



Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require.

To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. And yet, being a problem is a strange experience. I remember well when the shadow swept across me. I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England. In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil.

It is a peculiar sensation, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merger he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa; he does not wish to bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he believes—foolishly, perhaps, but fervently—that Negro blood has yet a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without losing the opportunity of self-development.

Frederick Douglass

As a young slave, he was whipped regularly in an effort to break his spirit; as an outspoken abolitionist he was once beaten unconscious in Indiana and left for dead; he spent two years in exile to avoid being returned to slavery. "It did not entirely satisfy me to narrate wrongs," he once said; "I felt like denouncing them." The passages below are compiled from speeches delivered by Douglass in 1863 and 1865



Men sneer at it as the "nigger question," endeavoring to degrade it by misspelling it. But they degrade nothing but themselves. The destiny of the nation has the Negro for its pivot, and turns upon the question as to what shall be done with him. Putting aside all the hay, wood and stubble of expediency, I shall advocate for the Negro his most full and complete adoption into the great national family of America. I shall demand for him the most perfect civil and political equality. It is demanded not less by the terrible exigencies of the nation, than by the Negro himself; for the Negro and the nation are to rise or fall, be killed or cured, saved or lost together. Save the Negro and you save the nation, destroy the Negro and you destroy the nation, and to save both you must have but one great law of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity for all Americans without respect to color.

The question is not whether the colored man is mentally equal to his white brother; for in this respect there is no equality among white men themselves. The question is not whether colored men will be likely to reach the Presidential chair. I have no trouble here: for a man may live quite a tolerable life without breathing the air of Washington. But the question is: Can the white and colored people of this country be blended into a common nationality? I answer most unhesitatingly. I believe they can.

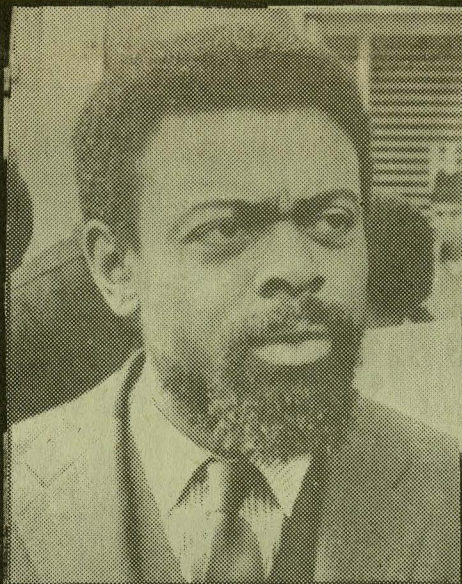
Despite all theories and disparagements, the Negro is a man. His virtues and his vices, his courage and his cowardice, his beauties and his deformities, his wisdom and his folly, everything connected with him attests his manhood.

I think the American people are disposed often to be generous rather than just. What I ask for the Negro is not benevolence, not pity, but simply *justice*. The American people have always been anxious to know what they shall do with us. I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! Your doing with us has already played the mischief with us. All I ask is give him [the Negro] a chance to stand on his own legs! If you see him on his way to school, let him alone! If you see him going to the dinner-table at a hotel, let him go! If you see him going to the ballot-box, don't disturb him! If you see him going into a work-shop, let him alone—your interference is doing him a positive injury.

LeRoi Jones

Poet, playwright and political organizer, Jones discussed the history of black protest in his 1961 book, *Home*:

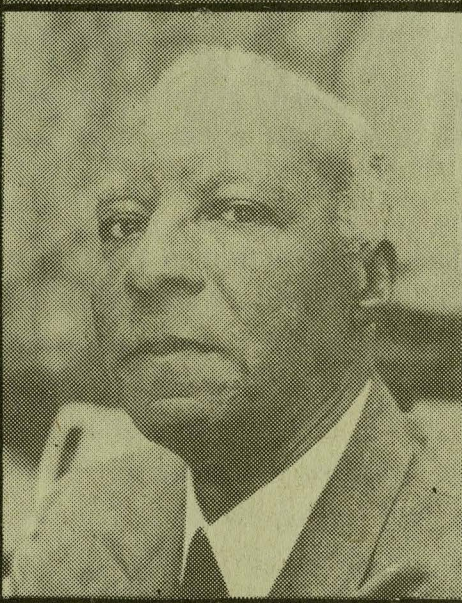
There have been black men trying to get other black men to protest and rise against the weight of America's oppression since those first clipper ships bringing them in in chains. . . . But to a large extent America convinced itself that the black man didn't mind being a slave. (You remember those grinning woogies strutting on the cotton bales? The happy-go-lucky image of Harlem is an extension of this.) Before the Negro came North there was not much room for any protest except one that would have to begin at violence. But the North offered at least a little more room to swing, buoyed up as it was, and is, by a kindly Liberal/Missionary syndrome that will let you say almost anything, as long as you don't threaten to *do* anything.



A. Philip Randolph

A longtime labor leader and advocate of nonviolence, Randolph made these remarks at the historic Washington March of 1963:

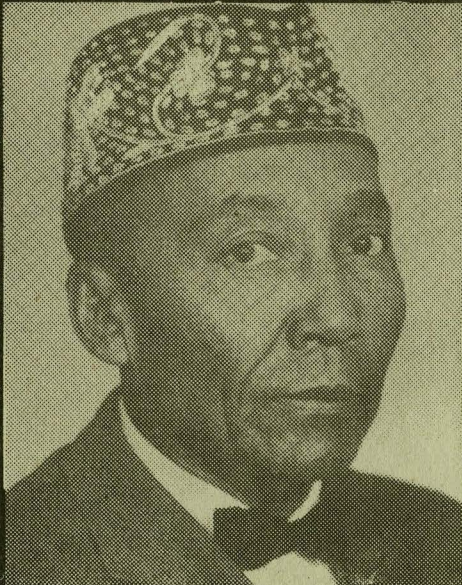
We are the advance guard of a massive moral revolution for jobs and freedom. This revolution reverberates throughout the land, touching every city, every town, every village where black men are segregated, oppressed and exploited. But this civil rights revolution is not confined to the Negroes; nor is it confined to civil rights. Our white allies know that they cannot be free while we are not. Now, we know that real freedom will require many changes in the nation's institutions. For one thing we must destroy the notion that Mrs. Murphy's property rights include the right to humiliate me because of the color of my skin. The sanctity of private property takes second place to the sanctity of a human personality.



Elijah Muhammad

The founder and leader of the Black Muslims exhorted his followers to separation in an address delivered in June 1963 and excerpted below:

We want justice for the so-called Negroes regardless of the price. We are fast learning that non-violence is not respected. Church services, praying and singing glory hallelujah are not regarded any more than singing the blues. We are falling on our knees praying to a merciless, enemy (the White American), begging and pleading with blood and tears streaming down our bodies, without the slightest sympathy from the universally known murderers (the White Race of devils). Now, let us build a nation ourselves that God and the nations of the earth will respect. Do not you want your own Black Nation to see you in a better light? This is the desire of God for us. He did it for Israel. To give you some of this earth is the purpose of His (Allah's) coming.



Martin R. Delany

Trained in medicine and science, Delany was an abolitionist colleague of Frederick Douglass, who once said of him: "I thank God for making me a man simply; but Delany always thanks Him for making him a black man." In 1852 Delany wrote a book entitled *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, from which the following passages are taken.

Cast our eyes about us and reflect for a moment, and what do we behold! every thing that presents to view gives evidence of the skill of the white man. Should we purchase a pound of groceries, a yard of linen, a piece of furniture—all, all are the products of the white man. Pass along the avenues of any city or town in which you live—behold the trading shops—the manufactories—see the stagecoaches coming in—look at the railroads interlining every section, bearing upon them their mighty trains, flying with the velocity of the swallow. Cast again your eyes widespread over the ocean—see the vessels with their white sheets spread to the winds of heaven. Look as you pass along through the cities, at the great and massive buildings—all standing as mighty living monuments, of the industry, enterprise, and intelligence of the white man.

How do we compare with them? Our fathers are their coachmen, our brothers their cookmen, and ourselves their waitingmen. Our mothers their nurse-women, our sisters their scrub-women, our daughters their maid-women, and our wives their washer-women. Until colored men attain to a position above permitting their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters, to do the drudgery of other men's wives and daughters; it is . . . pitiable mockery, to talk about equality and elevation in society.

What is necessary to be done, in order to attain an equality, is to change the condition. White men are producers—we are consumers. They build houses, and we rent them. They raise produce, and we consume it. They manufacture clothes and wares, and we garnish ourselves with them. These are the means by which God intended man to succeed: and this discloses the secret of the white man's success with all of his wickedness, over the head of the colored man, with all of his religion. Until we are determined to change the condition of things, and raise ourselves above the position in which we are now prostrated, we must hang our heads in sorrow and hide our faces in shame. Our elevation must be the result of *self-efforts*, and work of our *own hands*. No other human power can accomplish it.

Are we willing to raise ourselves superior to the condition of slaves, or continue the meanest underlings, subject to the beck and call of every creature bearing a pale complexion?



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