

## Substance of an Address Delivered Before the Middletown Colonization Society, At Their Annual Meeting, July 4, 1835

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Willbur Fisk, D. D., 1835

I rise to present, for the consideration of the audience, the following resolution –

*Resolved*, That it is the duty of all American citizens, on the ground both of patriotism and philanthropy, to aid by their countenance and their money, the cause of African Colonization.

I consider, sir, this anniversary of our nation's birth day, an appropriate occasion for investigating this subject. Every successive fourth of July ought, in my opinion, to be a type of the fourth of July, 1776... The fourth of July 1776 was not a day of military parade, of the clashing of arms, and the shout of the battle field; but it was a day of deep thought of close investigation, of firm intellectual discussion, and lofty moral action... On such a day, what can be more important than to direct our attention to the colored population of our country...

If this be a subject of such magnitude, it becomes a grave question with us – What can be done? or more properly, what can *we* do? For the question is not directly, what can others do, or what ought they to do? It is not what can our brethren in the South do, if they would; or what might the whole nation do, if each was ready to do his duty? But what ought we to do in this matter?

There are, sir, but two leading plans before the public, in reference to the object proposed. One is, the “American Colonization Society,” and the other is the “American Anti-Slavery Society.”... If then, we would act at all, on this subject, we must compare the claims and bearings of these two enterprises...

Now, sir, it ought to be particularly understood here, that *the anti-slavery society, has no direct and immediate bearing, upon the interests and condition of the enslaved*; either to secure their freedom, or to mitigate the rigors of slavery... And alas! For human nature, this feeling of theirs has led them, in many instances, to draw “pictures,” either real or imaginary, of rare cases of enormous cruelty, and then, to generalize the specific case, and apply the horrid characteristic, to the entire slave-holding South. Nay, some of their lecturers, have said publicly that one of the greatest difficulties in the progress of their principles, was the fact, that some of the slave owners treated their slaves with kindness. A meliorated condition of slavery, would be to them one of the most undesirable events that could occur. The knotting of the lash, the tightening of the cord, the oppressiveness of the slave legislation – in short, the grinding of the body and the soul of the slave to the dust, until his groans shall drive the mind of the humane and sympathetic to phrenzy, and the sufferers themselves to desperation, are the principal basis on which the anti-slavery society build their hopes of success...

But, sir, I have said that the anti-slavery society has no immediate and direct influence, in the work of *emancipation*. The members of that society are none of them slave-holders—their constitution excludes such—hence they cannot liberate slaves themselves, in a private way. Can they do it in a public way, by legislation? It would seem not. The great theatre of this society's operations is in the non-slaveholding states. Now, sir, what have these states, in their legislative capacity, to do with the question of slavery in the slaveholding states? Nothing. What has the national legislature to do

with it? *Nothing...* Thus it appears, that the members of the abolition society, neither individually nor collectively, neither by private nor public action, can *immediately* and *directly* effect the liberation of slaves. As to purchasing the freedom of slaves, or freeing slaves by sending them out of the states, where the laws will not allow of emancipation, this would be an entire dereliction of abolition principles. The one would be an acknowledgment *of legal ownership*, and the other would involve the principles of *colonization*, either of which, according to the abolition code, would be a *moral crime...* Since therefore this kind of emancipation can only be effected, by the slave owners, (unless it should be done by violence) it follows that the abolition society does nothing *directly* for the good of the slave, and their only chance for favorable action must be *indirectly*, through the agency of others...

We acknowledge, sir, that the direct and official operations of our Society, do not relate to slaves as such. The exclusive business of the society, in its direct official action, is “to colonize the free people of color, with their own consent.” But, sir, the society embraces slave holders, as well as others, and many of its members have emancipated their slaves, for the express purpose of placing them under the action of this Society... And we would point to Liberia herself, and show these emancipated slaves, in the possession, not of nominal merely, but of real freedom and independence. Colonizationists therefore, *have freed slaves*, and freed them also under the influence of Colonization principles, long before modern abolitionism had its being;...

The truth is, sir, Colonizationists, when they cannot do all the good they would, are willing to do what they can; and knowing, as they do, that great and permanent enterprises generally have small beginnings, and at first a slow growth, they feel encouraged to proceed in their work, since they are doing an amount of good in the present tense, sufficient to compensate them a thousand fold for all their labor, and have good hope that they are laying the foundation of an enterprise, the benefits of which will be felt through all coming generations.

The balance then thus far, is abundantly in favor of colonization. And how, sir, do the two societies compare in respect to the melioration of the condition of the free people of color? If abolitionism has done much for the benefit of the free blacks, it is more than I know. Certainly they have not *excelled* in this work... How far have they increased the intelligence or happiness of the great mass of the colored population? I know, sir, and you know, of scores and hundreds that they have rendered more miserable; between whom and the white population, they have, by their publications and harangues, excited heartburnings and oppositions and mobs. Why is it that people of color are now, in so many instances, suspicious and restless and discontented, where they used to be confiding and happy? For this, sir, we hold modern abolitionism responsible;... they may imagine that by exciting the blacks to claim privileges that [the] community [at large] are not yet prepared to award them, they shall thereby hasten the elevation of the colored race, to their proposed social and political equality. All this they may imagine – but it most evidently is a day-dream illusion...

But, sir, what has *Colonization* done? The direct and appropriate field of this society, is the elevation of the free man of color, to the high privileges of citizenship and independence. Of this she has her living witnesses in the happy and flourishing colonial republics, that stud the coast of Liberia. More are on the way. While I speak, the breezes of Heaven are wafting some of these nominal freemen, to the land where they can be free in deed and in truth...

But, sir, have colonizationists been idle, in respect to the elevation of the colored man's character here? I know they have not, in their Constitution, an article like that in most Anti-slavery societies, binding the members to "endeavor to improve the character and condition of the free people of color" ... But, sir, have colonizationists done nothing towards the education of colored persons?... Who, at this moment, sir, is conducting a select school for colored young men, at his own risk and expense, in the town of Peterboro' N.Y.? Gerrit Smith, Esq. who is emphatically the colored man's friend, and a vice president of the American Colonization Society... So far then as the direct and immediate influences of the two enterprises are compared, we find the abolition plan doing nothing – yes sir, absolutely and unqualifiedly *nothing*, in the work of emancipating the enslaved, nothing in meliorating their condition; and very little good, but much harm, to the free: while the Colonization enterprise, without waiting for the future and for other to develop all its advantages, is elevating and cheering its beneficiaries...

We will now, sir, compare the two enterprises, in their indirect influences, that is, in their influences upon our fellow citizens, and the nation generally, to induce them to do justice to the colored race, both bond and free...

But, sir, I am willing to allow, that there is a great amount of existing prejudice which is educational and casual, and therefore may, in time, and by proper treatment, be removed. The question however is, which of the two societies, according to the character and bearing of their present operations, and the fruits of the past, is the most likely to remove this prejudice. I believe, sir, ... that taste... can never be changed, by a forcible intrusion of the undesirable object. Taste, to be corrected or formed, must be courted by palliatives, by gentle approaches, by calling the attention to other and more interesting aspects and qualities of the disagreeable object; and above all, by taking the object away from its offensive associations, and elevating it above those unlovely and disgusting conditions, in which it has been wont to be contemplated. During this process, care should be taken, to say little of the unreasonableness and criminality of the existing prejudice – much less should the subject of this supposed prejudice, be denounced and traduced and *commanded* even, by all the sanctions of moral obligation, to feel and act differently. Such a course would be likely to increase the prejudice; and *claims* upon us thus *set up* and *pressed*, would aggravate the disgust, and render the offensive object still more unwelcome and revolting. Every child feels the force of this principle, and all analogy sustains it.

And now, sir, for the application. Who does not know that the course above objected to, has been the very one pursued by the abolitionists?... The effects upon the colored population have already been alluded to – They have had their expectations raised, and have been induced to set up claims in social intercourse, which the community were not prepared to accord to them. This has led to the most unhappy distrust and collision of feeling. Offensive claims pressed upon the public taste, have been responded to, by increased prejudice, and in some instances, by violent resistance. Hence the mobs of New York and elsewhere... The public taste, when it is outraged, revolts against the offensive cause. Grant if you please, sir, that all this is wrong, that the prejudice itself is wrong, and ought to be corrected; but are these the men and this the remedy, to correct the public taste, and remove the unfavorable prejudice?...

On the other hand, what has *colonization* done, and what is it doing to remove those disabilities?... African Colonization is predicated on the principle, that there is an utter aversion in the public mind, to an amalgamation and equalization of the two races: and that any attempt to press such

and equalization is not only fruitless, but injurious. It is predicated also upon the further principle, that so far as existing prejudice is vincible, it is so only, and has been already stated, by slow degrees, and by elevating the victims of prejudice, from their degrading associations and conditions. Hence this society lifts up the man of color, at once, from his connections and disabilities; and places him beyond the influence of the shackles of prejudice, and teaches him to act and feel as a man. She teaches him self-government, she bids him rear cities, and build ships, and spread abroad his commerce, and lay deep and extended, the foundations of his social and political institutions, and thus give practical demonstration, to his oppressors and despisers, that he is “a man and a brother.” Is this fostering prejudice? I know not, sir, which astonishes me most, the charge that the Colonization Society is the organ and support of a wicked prejudice, or the claim, that the anti-slavery society is successfully employed in breaking down that prejudice...

Towards all the slaveholders, and the slaveholding states, they are ringing all the changes of denunciation, and all the forms of anathematizing, without mitigation, qualification, or exception. – They assume that independent of all circumstances, every slaveowner is guilty of kidnapping, robbery and theft: and each of the slaves ought to immediately be free.\* And how has this course succeeded with the South? It has raised against them the indignation and most inveterate opposition not only of those who advocate slavery from principle, but of those also who were looking, praying and laboring for the redemption of the enslaved. The christian and the infidel, the slaveholder and those who have none, the rich and the poor, are all driven, as by a common impulse, into one consolidated array of opposition against these doctrines and their advocates...

But it is said the result will ultimately be favorable, and therefore they are encouraged to persevere. But on what principles do they calculate upon these favorable results?...

In the first place, the anti-slavery movements tend directly to political action and political partisanship... A political anti-slavery party will doubtless soon be organized, and when once this is made a question at the polls, its moral bearings will be lost sight of. If such a political party should succeed, nothing short of a dissolution of the union will follow. Let no man flatter himself, that the South would not be inclined to revolt from the union, or would not *dare* to do it. The South, sir, *dare* do any thing, she is *inclined* to do; and there is nothing, she would be more inclined to do, than to separate herself from the northern states, whenever they assume a political attitude in opposition to her social and political rights – rights that were guaranteed to her, by the solemnities of constitutional provisions, and publicly plighted faith. Any political interference of ours in that matter would to all intents and purposes, on this question, be a foreign interference, and therefore would be improper and injurious.

Now, sir, let every candid man ask himself the question, whether such measures, prosecuted with such a spirit, will ever directly or indirectly, operate favorable for the interests of the man of color, either bond or free? If he is constrained to answer in the negative, then, if he loves his country and would do her service; if he feels for the colored man and would relieve him of his disabilities and oppressions, let him turn to the other glorious alternative – THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY. Here are channels for his benevolence; here is an organization efficient and operative, for his co-operation. -- Let him put his hand to his work, as one that not only *needs* but *claims* his aid – claims it on the high principles of justice and benevolence; claims it by the united voice of patriotism, of philanthropy, and of religion...

We need more interest, more zeal, more liberality in this work. The Society, in the language of the resolution, needs our “*countenance* and our *money*.” It is increasing the facilities and comforts of the colony, it is rectifying former mistakes, enlarging and improving its plans, paying off its debts, at the same time it is defending itself against slander and opposition, at home and abroad. The laborers, in this work, like the ancient Jews, have to build the wall with one hand, while they bear their weapons of defence in the other; and shall we, at this time of trial and of exigency, stand aloof, or put our hand to the work feebly and inefficiently? Sir, it must not be – the contributions of this day, and our labors and munificence in this cause hereafter, will show, I trust, that we are faithful and efficient friends of that noble enterprise, which is laying a foundation for the future independence of the degraded, oppressed and exiled sons of *abused and bleeding Africa*.

\*And yet Judge Jay tells us, that “many may conscientiously, doubt whether immediate emancipation is safe or wise.” What? and still morally obligated to emancipate immediately? what a moral code is this?