

# "FOUNDED IN AVARICE . . .," 1837

An early and fairly extended analysis by a Negro of the roots of Negro oppression was that produced in March, 1837 by the Rev. Hosea Easton of Massachusetts, an active participant in the early convention movement. Extracts from this work follow:

It is with diffidence that I offer this treatise to the public; but an earnest desire to contribute my mite, for the benefit of my afflicted brethren, is my only apology. The subject is one of peculiar difficulty; especially as it is one in which I am deeply interested.

To speak or write on a subject relating to one's self, is peculiarly embarrassing; and especially so, under a deep sense of injury. As an apology for the frequent errors that may occur in the following pages, I would remark: It cannot be reasonably expected, that a literary display could adorn the production of one from whom popular sentiment has withheld almost every advantage, even of a common education.

If this work should chance to fall into the hands of any whose minds are so sordid, and whose hearts are so inflexible, as to load it, with its author, with censure on that account merely, I would only say to them, that I shall not be disposed to envy them in the enjoyment of their sentiments, while I endeavor to content myself in the enjoyment of a consciousness of having done what I could to effect the establishment of righteousness and peace in the earth. . . .

Excuses have been employed in vain to cover up the hypocrisy of this nation. The most corrupt policy which ever disgraced its barbarous ancestry, has been adopted by both church and state, for the avowed purpose of withholding the *inalienable rights* of one part of the subjects of the government. Pretexis of the lowest order, which are neither witty nor decent, and which rank among that order of subterfuges, under which the lowest of ruffians attempt to hide, when exposed to detection, are made available. Indeed, I may say in candor, that a highwayman or assassin acts upon principles far superior, in some respects, in comparison with those under which the administrators of the laws of church and state act, especially in their attempts to hide themselves and their designs from the just censure of the world, and from the burning rays of truth. I have no language to express what I see, and hear, and feel, on this subject. Were I capable of dipping my pen in the deepest dye of crime, and of understanding the science of the

bottomless pit, I should then fail in presenting to the intelligence of mortals on earth, the true nature of American deception. There can be no appeals made in the name of the laws of the country, of philanthropy, or humanity, or religion, that is capable of drawing forth anything but the retort,—*you are a Negro!* If we call to our aid the thunder tones of the cannon and the arguments of fire arms, (vigorously managed by black and white men, side by side,) as displayed upon Dorchester Heights, and at Lexington, and at White Plains, and at Kingston, and at Long Island, and elsewhere, the retort is, *you are a Negro!*—if we present to the nation a Bunker's Hill, our nation's altar, (upon which she offered her choicest sacrifice,) with our fathers and brothers, and sons, prostrate thereon, wrapped in fire and smoke—the incense of blood borne upward upon the wings of sulphurous vapor, to the throne of national honor, with a hale of national glory echoing back, and spreading and astonishing the civilized world;—and if we present the thousands of widows and orphans, whose only earthly protectors were thus sacrificed, weeping over the fate of the departed; and anon, tears of blood are extorted, on learning that the government for which their lovers and sires had died, refuses to be their protector; if we tell that angels weep in pity, and that God, the eternal Judge, "will hear the desire of the humble, judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress,"—the retort is, *you are a Negro!* If there is a spark of honesty, patriotism, or religion, in the heart or the source from whence such retorting arguments emanate, the devil incarnate is the brightest seraph in paradise. . . .

The injury sustained by the colored people, is both national and personal; indeed, it is national in a twofold sense. In the first place, they are lineally stolen from their native country, and detained for centuries, in a strange land, as hewers of wood and drawers of water. In this situation, their blood, habits, minds, and bodies, have undergone such a change, as to cause them to lose all legal or natural relations to their mother country. They are no longer her children; therefore, they sustain the great injury of losing their country, their birthright, and are made aliens and illegitimates. Again, they sustain a national injury by being adopted subjects and citizens, and then be denied their citizenship, and the benefits derivable therefrom—accounted as aliens and outcasts, hence, are identified as belonging to no country—denied birthright in one, and had it stolen from them in another—and, I had like to have said, they had lost title to both worlds; for certainly they are denied all title in this, and almost all advantages to prepare for the next. In this light of the subject, they belong to no people, race, or nation; subjects of no government—citizens of no country—scattered surplus remnants of two races, and of different nations—severed into individuality—rendered

a mass of broken fragments, thrown to and fro, by the boisterous passions of this and other ungodly nations. Such, in part, are the national injuries sustained by this miserable people. . . .

The arguments founded on these premises, are many. Cotton, rice, indigo, tobacco, and sugar, are great blessings to the world, say they, and they may as well be made to produce them as not; for they are a lazy crew at the best, and if they are not made to work for us, they will not work at all, &c. But to come to the truth, the whole system is founded in avarice. I believe the premises to be the production of modern philosophy, bearing date with European slavery; and it has been the almost sole cause of the present prevailing public sentiment in regard to the colored population. It has given rise to the universal habit of thinking that they were made for the sole end of being slaves and underlings. There could be nothing more natural, than for a slaveholding nation to indulge in a train of thoughts and conclusions that favored their idol, slavery. It becomes the interest of all parties, not excepting the clergy, to sanction the premises, and draw the conclusions, and hence, to teach the rising generation. What could accord better with the objects of this nation in reference to blacks, than to teach their little ones that a Negro is part monkey?

"The love of money is the root of all evil;" it will induce its votaries to teach lessons to their little babes, which only fit them for the destroyers of their species in this world, and for the torments of hell in the world to come. When clergymen, even, are so blinded by the god of this world, as to witness the practice of the most heinous blasphemy in the house, said to be dedicated to God, for centuries, without raising their warning voice to the wicked, it would not be at all surprising if they were to teach their children a few lessons in the science of anatomy, for the object of making them understand that a Negro is not like a white man, instead of teaching him his catechism.

The effect of this instruction is most disastrous upon the mind of the community; having been instructed from youth to look upon a black man in no other light than a slave, and having associated with that idea the low calling of a slave, they cannot look upon him in any other light. If he should chance to be found in any other sphere of action than that of a slave, he magnifies to a monster of wonderful dimensions, so large that they cannot be made to believe that he is a man and a brother. Neither can they be made to believe it would be safe to admit him into stages, steam-boat cabins, and tavern dining-rooms; and not even into meeting-houses, unless he have a place prepared on purpose. Mechanical shops, stores, and school rooms, are all too small for his entrance as a man; if he be a slave, his corporeality becomes so diminished as to admit him into ladies' parlors, and into small

private carriages, and elsewhere, without being disgusting on account of his deformity, or without producing any other discomfiture. Thus prejudice seems to possess a magical power, by which it makes a being appear most odious one moment, and the next, beautiful—at one moment too large to be on board a steam-boat, the next, so small as to be convenient almost any where.

H. Easton, *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character, and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States* . . . (Boston, 1837), pp. 33-34, 43-44. Copy in Columbia Univ. Library.

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## A NEGRO DENOUNCES PREJUDICE WITHIN THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT, 1837

At the convention of the New York State Anti-Slavery Society, held in Utica, September 20, 1837, the Rev. Theodore S. Wright made the following dramatic speech directed against the white supremacist thinking present within the Abolitionist movement:

Mr. President: All who have heard the [annual] report which has been presented are satisfied it needs no eulogy. It supports itself. But, sir, I would deem it a privilege to throw out a few thoughts upon it—thoughts which arise on beholding this audience. My mind is involuntarily led back a few years to the period prior to the commencement of this great moral effort for the removal of the giant sin of oppression from our land. It is well known to every individual who is at all acquainted with the history of slavery in this land, that the convention of 1776, when the foundations of our government were laid, proclaimed to the world the inalienable rights of man; and they supposed that the great principles of liberty would work the destruction of slavery throughout this land. This remark is sustained by an examination of the document then framed, and by the fact that the term "slavery" is not even named. The opinion that slavery would be abolished—indeed, that it had already received a death-blow, was cherished by all the reformers.—This spirit actuated Woolman, Penn, Edwards, Jefferson, and Benezet, and it worked out the entire emancipation of the North.

But it is well known that about 1817 a different drift was given—a new channel was opened for the benevolence which was working so well. The principle of expatriation, like a great sponge, went around in church and state, among men of all classes, and sponged up all the benevolent feelings which were then prevalent, and which promised so much for the emancipa-