

1809. Address to the New-York African Society

William Hamilton, *An Address to the New-York African Society, for Mutual Relief, delivered in the Universalist Church, January 2, 1809* (N.Y., 1809). Copy in Boston Athenaeum. Delivered in New York City on January 2, 1809, the speaker being William Hamilton, a Negro pioneer Abolitionist and an organizer of subsequent nation-wide Negro conventions.

Source: H. Aptheker (1973). *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*. Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, v. 1, 52-53.

The proposition has been advanced by men who claim a pre-eminence in the learned world, that Africans are inferior to white men in the structure both of body and mind; the first member of this proposition is below our notice; the reasons assigned for the second are, that we have not produced any poets, mathematicians, or any to excel in any science whatever; our being oppressed and held in slavery forms no excuse, because, say they among the Romans, their most excellent artists and greatest scientific characters were frequently their slaves, and that these on account of their ascendant abilities, arose to superior stations in the state; and they exultingly tell us that these slaves were white men.

My Brethren, it does not require a complete master to solve this problem, nor is it necessary in order like good logicians to meet this argument, that we should know which is the major and the minor proposition; and the middle and extreme terms of syllogism, he must be a wilful novice and blind intentionally, who cannot unfold this enigma.

Among the Roman's it was only necessary for the slave to be manumitted, in order to be eligible to all the offices of state, together with the emoluments belonging thereto; no sooner was he free than there was open before him a wide field of employment for his ambition, and learning and abilities with merit, were as sure to meet with their reward in him, as in any other citizen. But what station above the common employment of craftsmen and laborers would we fill did we possess both learning and abilities; is there ought to enkindle in us one spark of emulation; must not he who makes any considerable advances under present circumstance be almost a prodigy: although it may be true we have not produced any to excel in arts and sciences, yet if our situation be properly considered, and the allowances made which ought to be, it will soon be perceived that we do not fall far behind those who boast of a superior judgment, we have produced some who have claimed attention, and whose works have been admired, yes in despite of all our embarresments our genius does sometimes burst forth from its incumbrance.