

1844. Protest Against Racism

Source: *New York Tribune*, May 5, 1844, and *The Liberator*, May 31, 1844, in Aptheker 238-243.

In 1844, Secretary of State, John C. Calhoun, made derogatory remarks about African Americans in official correspondence to the British Minister to the United States. James McCune Smith, representing a mass meeting of African Americans from New York City, wrote a reply that was delivered to the United States Senate.

The memorial of the undersigned, free colored citizens of the city and county of New York, respectfully sheweth, that

Whereas, in a letter, addressed to the Right Hon. Richard Pakenham, &c (bearing date April 18th, 1844,) the Hon. John C. Calhoun, Secretary of State for these United States, sheweth, that

First, “That in the States which have changed their former relations, (the States which have emancipated their slaves, meaning,) the African race has sunk into vice and pauperism”;

Secondly, That this “vice and pauperism” is “accompanied by the bodily and mental afflictions incident thereto-deafness, blindness, insanity and idiocy”; and that “the number of deaf, dumb, blind, idiots and insane of the Negroes in the States which have changed the ancient relation between the races is one out of every ninety-six”; and, that, “in the State of Maine, the number of Negroes returned as deaf, dumb, blind, insane and idiots, by the census of 1840, is one out of every twelve”;

Thirdly, “And the number of Negroes, who are deaf and dumb, blind, idiots, insane, paupers and in prison, in the States that have changed, (the’ free States, meaning,) is one out of every six”;

Fourthly, While in all other States that have retained the ancient relations (the slave States, meaning,) between them (the races, meaning,) “they (the slaves, meaning,) have improved greatly in every respect, in number, com-fort, intelligence and morals;”

And whereas, in regard to these allegations,

First, Your memorialists have great reason to doubt the accuracy of the first; because,

Secondly, It appears in regard to the second allegation, which is the particular proof of the first, that in an examination of the census of 1840, it is found to be self-contradictory: to wit, in asserting the existence of the free colored persons insane, blind, deaf, dumb, in certain towns in free States, in which towns, it appears by the same census of 1840, there are no free colored persons whatever of any condition:

For example, in

State	Insane	Blind	Deaf & dumb
MAINE. In 8 towns containing no colored there are reported	27	1	2
NEW HAMPSHIRE. 11 towns containing no colored there are reported	12	0	3
VERMONT. 2 towns containing no colored there are reported	2	2	1
MASSACHUSETT. 5 towns containing no colored there are reported (In Worcester, the 133 white insane at the Asylum are returned as colored).	10	1	0
NEW YORK. 19 towns containing no colored there are reported	29	8	5
PENNSYLVANIA. 11 towns containing no colored there are reported	20	6	6
OHIO. 33 towns containing no colored there are reported	48	9	5
INDIANA. 4 towns containing no colored there are reported	6	9	7
ILLINOIS. 9 towns containing no colored there are reported	18	0	3

MICHIGAN. 12 towns containing no colored there are reported	12	2	5
IOWA. 1 town containing no colored there are reported	2	0	4
Total colored inhabitants- 000. Showing Colored	186	38	36

By the same census, it appears that in the above, and other towns in the free States, there is-

An excess of colored insane over colored residents,	213
Error in the return of colored for white insane at Worcester, Mass.	133
Total,	346

The whole number of colored insane in the free States being stated to be 1,199 by the census of 1840; if from this number we deduct the 346 shown to be not colored persons, there remains 853 colored insane in the free States, or one in about 200, which your memorialists are satisfied is greatly beyond the actual proportion; because, so far as your memorialists have been able to ascertain, the proportion of the insane among the free colored is not greater than among the white population of the free States. It is stated, for example, by Dr. J. Ray, the physician of the Lunatic Asylum of the State of Maine, that there are not five colored lunatics or insane in that State. In the Lunatic Asylum at Blackwell's Island, in the county of New York, there are but 17 colored insane, or about 1 to 1000 colored inhabitants of this country. In 1837, the same proportion existed in the free colored population of Philadelphia.

In regard to the deaf, dumb and blind, it will be seen that the census is self contradictory, asserting that there are 74 free colored afflicted dispensations, in towns which contain no colored inhabitants.

Thirdly, In regard to the third allegation, which asserts that one in every six of the free colored in the free States are either "deaf, dumb, blind, insane, or in prison," or, in other words, that there are 30,000 free colored supported at the public charge in the free States, your memorialists humbly they have furnished, in answer to the second allegation, sufficient prove the entire accuracy of this astounding assertion. And your memorialists further believe, that the same errors have crept into the census documents based thereon, in regard to the pauperism of the free s they have shown to have crept into the census and other documents based thereon, in regard to the pauperism of the free colored, as they have shown to have crept into the census in regard to the insane, &c. Especially when your memorialists know, from the books of the alms-house of New York and Philadelphia, there are in these places one colored pauper to about 100 of the colored population, a proportion which the same as the pauperism of the free white citizens of these cities; and these cities contain 37,000, more than one sixth part of the entire colored population of the free States; and as it is known that the proportion of paupers in this as well as in other classes is greatest in large cities, it is a fair inference that the third allegation, at least so much of it as relates to pauperism, cannot be accurate.

Fourthly, In relation to the fourth allegation, which is in subsance, that the slaves have improved in morals, intelligence, comfort and number-reversing the order of the items; your memorialists would observe, that the natural increase of the slaves (which is greater than the natural increase of the whites or of the free colored) is a measure of their relative fecundity, not of their relative condition. Whilst the percentage of longevity, and the ratio of mortality, which are tests of relative condition, are greatly in favor of the free colored, the more remotely they may be removed in time from slavery. For the slaves who live beyond 36 years are only 15.49 per cent, while free colored the free States who live beyond 36 years are 22.68, showing a balance of 7.19 per cent in favor of the condition of the free colored.

In the cities of New York and Philadelphia, (by the city Inspector's reports,) it appears that a joint population of 37,000 free colored have diminished their ratio of mortality from 1 in 17 in Philadelphia, and 1 in 21 in New York in 1820; to 1 in 40, in both places in 1843, being a distinct improvement in *condition* of at least 100 per cent in 23 years! There are no records of the mortality among slaves!

In regard to *intelligence* there are in the free States, to a total population of 170,000 free colored persons, 40,000 children of an age to go to school, one school to every 543 children, in addition to a large number of children attending white schools, and a number of colored students who are pursuing their studies at Oberlin Western Theological Seminary, and Dartmouth College whilst the children of slaves are forbidden to be taught to read, under heavy penalties, in the States which have not changed the *ancient relations-death* being the penalty for the second offence. Your memorialists do not deem it irrelevant to state, in this connexion, that the proportion of adults above 20 years of age, who cannot read or write, is 1 in 1081, in the States which have changed the *ancient relations* (the free States) whilst the number of adults who cannot read and write is 1 in 144, in the States that have not changed the ancient relations (the slave States).

In regard to morals, believing that religion is the only basis of sound morals, your memorialists would state that there are to the 170,000 free colored people of the free States-

Denominations	Churches
Independent Methodists	2
Baptist Association	2
Methodist	284
Baptist	15
Presbyterian & Congregational	3
Episcopal	6
Lutheran	1
Total	318

Making about one church to every 543 of the free colored of the free States.

At the same time, granting that all the churches in the South are promiscuously attended by the slaves and whites, it appears, taking the eleven cities of Baltimore, Richmond, Petersburg, Virginia, Norfolk, Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans, Louisville, St. Louis and Washington, with a total population, of all classes, of 360,905; these cities contain only 167 churches; or one church to every 2,161 inhabitants; from which it follows that the free colored people of the North have a greater number of churches by nearly four fold, than have the entire population of these slave-holding cities. They have, also, 340 Benevolent societies; and 7 newspapers are printed by .the free colored people of the free States. For all of which reasons, your memorialists would humbly pray-

1st. That your honorable body would cause the Census of 1840 to be reexamined, and so far as possible, corrected anew, in the Department of State, in order that the head of that Department may have facts upon which to found his arguments.

2nd. That your honorable body would establish at Washington, a general office of Registration, with a proper officer at its head, who shall cause to be returned from each county in the United States, a yearly report of the sanitary condition of each class of inhabitants, as well as the births, deaths, and marriages.

3rd. That your honorable body will cause to be taken, in the Census of 1850, the number of adults who cannot read and write among the whites, the slaves, and the free people of color, in every county of the United States.

And your Memorialists will ever pray.