

Dr. James McCune Smith Calls on African Americans to Join the Battle for Civil Rights

[Dr: James McCune Smith, a scholar and physician who had earned his bachelor of arts, master of arts, and medical degrees at the University of Glasgow, urged his people to fight their own battles at a Black convention in New York City in 1855.]

The influence of our land and its institutions reaches to the uttermost parts of the earth; and go where we may, we will find American prejudice, or at least the odor of it, to contend against. It is easiest, as well as manliest, to meet and contend with it here at the fountain head....But the hour has come for us to take a direct and forward movement. We feel and know it....We are awakened, as never before, to the fact that if Slavery and caste are to be removed from the land, we must remove them ourselves; others may aid and assist if they will, but the moving power rests with us. ...We must act up to what we declare. ...And from the mere act of riding in public conveyances, up to the liberation of every slave in the land do our duties extend-embracing a full and equal participation, politically and socially, in all the rights and immunities of American citizens. If our duties are weighty, we have the means to perform them. ...[Some states have] made movements toward recognizing our rights as citizens thereof. But efforts on our own part have helped toward this good result: in Massachusetts mainly by the efforts of some colored citizens, led by a member of this Council, both houses of the Legislature, have done their share toward granting us equal suffrage, and the Governor has strongly recommended the same. In New-York, through the efforts of a member of this Council and the President of our State Council, aided by the moving eloquence of another member of our council, the Legislature passed a vote of equal suffrage. ...In Pennsylvania strong and able effort has been made to obtain the franchise by our colored brethren, and not without some signs that the labors of her intelligent and energetic colored citizens have not been in vain. ...The time is come when our people must assume the rank of a first-rate power in the battle against caste and Slavery; it is emphatically our battle; no one else can fight it for us, and with God's help we must fight it ourselves