

1834. David Ruggles Replies To An Anti-Abolitionist

In the summer of 1834 a New York physician, Dr. David M. Reese, issued a pamphlet entitled "A Brief Review of the First Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society," in which he insisted the Abolitionists were anti-American since they threatened law and order. Dr. Reese proved, also, to his own satisfaction, the inexpediency if not impossibility of emancipation and concluded by remarking that his work would extinguish abolitionism. This is a response to Reese by David Ruggles, a young African American bookseller and abolitionist. Source: H. Aptheker (1973). *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*. Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, v. 1, 149-151.

Abolitionists do not wish "amalgamation:" I do not wish it, nor does any colored man or woman of my acquaintance, nor can instances be adduced where a desire was manifested by any colored person; but I deny that "intermarriages" between "whites and blacks are unnatural," and hazard nothing in giving my opinion that if "amalgamation" should become popular Dr. R. would not be the last to vindicate it, practically too if expedient. How utterly vain and futile are the following remarks, "The fact that no white person ever did consent to marry a Negro without having previously forfeited all character with the whites, and that even profligate sexual intercourse between the races, everywhere meets with the execration of the respectable and virtuous among the whites, as the most despicable form of licentiousness; is of itself irrefragable proof that equality in any aspect in this country, is neither practicable nor desirable. Criminal amalgamation may and does exist among the most degraded of the species, but Americans (what a patriot!) will never yield the sanction of law and religion to an equality so incongruous and unnatural."

Now "that no white person never did consent to marry a Negro without having previously forfeited all character with the respectable and virtuous among the whites," is not true, unless it is true that a man's "character" depends upon the color of his skin; if it does, which of the two races would "forfeit all character" by intermarrying, the white or the colored? The whites have robbed us (the blacks) for centuries-they made Africa bleed rivers of blood!-they have torn husbands from their wives-wives from their husbands-parents from their children-children from their parents- brothers from their sisters-sisters from their brothers, and bound them in chains-forced them into holds of vessels-subjected them to the most unmerciful tortures: starved and murdered, and doomed them to endure the horrors of slavery! Still, according to Dr. Reese's logic, the whites have virtuous "characters" and we are brutes!

"Deem our nation brutes no longer, Till some reason you can find,
Worthier to regard, and stronger, Than the color of our kind!
Slaves of gold! whose sordid dealings Tarnish all your boasted powers,
Prove that ye have human feelings, Ere ye proudly question ours!"

"Would you be willing to marry a black wife," is a question often asked by colonizationists to members of the A.S. [Anti-Slavery] Society. Were I a white man, or was the question reversed and put to me, my reply would be-you had better put your question to colonizationists at the south, who have been so long in a process of training. Why insult gentlemen with a silly, "quirky," nonsensical interrogative, loped off from the fag ends of extremity. Every man that can read and has sense sufficient to put two ideas together Without losing one, knows what the Abolitionists mean when they speak of elevating us "according to our equal rights." But why is it that it seems to you so "repugnant" to marry your sons and daughters to colored persons? Simply because public opinion is against it. Nature teaches no such "repugnance," but experience has taught me that education only does. Do children feel and exercise that prejudice towards colored persons? Do not colored and white children play together promiscuously until the white is taught to despise the colored?

My dear brother, Rev. Bishop Reese, M.D. closes his famous exegesis by submitting his conclusions to the citizens and christians of America, pretty sure that no "sophistry can evade them." I now submit my criticism to the same candid public, entirely regardless whether sophistry evade them or not, but challenging the truth to search them. If there be anything of importance in the review which I have not

noticed, it was not because the thing itself was impregnable, nor because I was not equal to the seige, but, as I stated before, because my limits did not permit a comment upon every error in my brother's deviating course. But as it is, I submit it to the candor of a generous public, and should public sentiment condemn the work, should it be thought out of place and inexpedient by any of my friends-should it gain for me frowns and reproaches instead of laurels-one thing I know, posterity will requite my wrongs, and when the "extinguisher" of Dr. David M. Reese shall itself have been extinguished in death, and sunk down-down-in the long eternal sleep of oblivion, my little book, pregnant with truth, shall survive the revolution of ages, and give even Dr. Reese himself a reluctant IMMORTALITY!

1837. David Ruggles on Slavery in New York

David Ruggles wrote this letter to the editor of a New York newspaper, *Zion's Watchman*. It was reprinted in *The Liberator* on October 13, 1837. Source: H. Aptheker (1973). *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*. Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, v. 1, 165.

Mr. Editor: I suppose, not one in a thousand of your readers can be aware of the extent to which slavery prevails even in the so-called free state of New York. Within the last four weeks, I have seen not less than eleven different persons who have recently been brought from the south, and who are now held as slaves by their masters in this state; as you know the laws of this state allow any slaveholder to do this, nine months at a time; so that when the slave has been here nine months, the master has only to take him out of the state, and then return with him immediately, and have him registered again, and so he may hold on to the slave as long as he lives I Some of the slaves whom I have recently seen are employed by their masters, some are loaned, and others hired out; and each of the holders of these slaves whom I have seen are professors of religion!! One of these professors is Mr. David Stanford, of Brooklyn; he is a member, I am told, of the Methodist Episcopal Church!

1841. Ruggles on Disunity (Aptheker 211)

The Liberator, September 24, 1841.

In 1840, under the leadership of David Ruggles, a short-lived organization called the American Reformed Board of Disfranchised Commissioners was formed. At the anniversary meeting September 8, 1841, in New York, David Ruggles made some significant remarks on the problem of Negro disunity:

While every man's hand is against us, our every hand is against each other. I speak plainly, because truth will set us free. Are we not guilty of cherishing, to an alarming extent, the sin of sectarian, geographical, and complexional proscription? The spirit abroad is this: Is that brother a Methodist? He is not one of us. A Baptist? He is not one of us. A Presbyterian? He is not one of us. An Episcopalian? He is not one of us. A Roman Catholic? He is not one of us. Does he live above human creeds, and enjoy the religion of the heart? He is of Beelzebub.

Again. Is that brother from the east? He is not of us. From the west? He is not of us. From the north? He is not of us. From the south? He is not of us. From the middle States? He is not of us. Is he a foreigner? He can never be of us. But, forsooth, is that brother of a dark complexion? He is of no worth. Is he of a light complexion? He is of no nation. Such, sir, are the visible lines of distinction, marked by slavery for us to follow. If we hope for redemption from our present condition, we must repent, turn, and UNITE in the hallowed cause of reform.