from Up from Slavery

Chapter I
A Slave among Slaves

I was born a slave on a plantation in Franklin County, Virginia. I am not quite sure of the exact place or exact day of my birth, but at any rate I suspect I must have been born somewhere and at some time. As nearly as I have been able to learn, I was born near a cross-roads post-office called Hale’s Ford, and the year was 1856 or 1857. I do not know the month or the day. The earliest impressions I can now recall are of the plantation and the slave quarters—the latter being the home of the plantation, where the slaves had their cabins.

My life had its beginning in the midst of the most miserable, desolate, and discouraging surroundings. This was so, however, not because my owners were especially cruel, for they were not, as compared with many others. I was born in a typical log cabin, about fourteen by sixteen feet square. In this cabin I lived with my mother and a brother and sister till after the Civil War, when we were all declared free.

Of my infancy I know almost nothing. In the slave quarters and even later, I heard whispered conversations among the colored people of the nearest which the slaves, including, no doubt, my ancestors on my mother’s side, suffered in the middle passage of the slave ship while being conveyed from Africa to American. I have been unsuccessful in securing any information that would throw any accurate light upon the history of my family beyond my mother. She, I remember, had a half-sister and a half-brother. In the days of slavery not very much attention was given to family history and family records—what I, black family records. My mother, I suppose, attributed the attention of a purchaser who was afterward my owner and hers. In addition to her slave family pointed out about as much attention as the purchase of a new horse or cow. Of my father I know even less than of my mother. I do not even know his name. I have heard reports to the effect that he was a white man who lived on one of the nearby plantations. Whatever he was, I never heard of his taking the least interest in me or providing.

*Newly generally believed to be 1856.
in any way for my rearing. But I do not find especial fault with him. He was simply another unfortunate victim of the institution which the Nation unhappily had engraved upon it at that time.

The cabin was not only our living-place, but was also used as the kitchen for the plantation. My mother was the plantation cook. The cabin was without glass windows; it had only openings in the side which let in the light, and also the cold, chilly air of winter. There was a door to the cabin—that is, something that was called a door—but the uncertain hinges by which it was hung, and the large cracks in it, to say nothing of the fact that it was too small, made the room a very uncomfortable one. In addition to these openings there was, in the lower right-hand corner of the room, the "cat-hole,"—a contrivance which almost every mansion or cabin in Virginia possessed during the ante-bellum period. The "cat-hole" was a square opening, about seven by eight inches, provided for the purpose of letting the cat pass in and out of the house at will during the night. In the case of our particular cabin I could never understand the necessity for this convenience, since there were at least a half-dozen other places in the cabin that would have accommodated the cats. There was no woodshed floor in our cabin; the naked earth being used as a floor. In the centre of the earthen floor there was a large, deep opening covered with boards, which was used as a place in which to store sweet potatoes during the winter. An impression of this potato-hole is very distinctly engraved upon my memory, because I recall that during the process of putting the potatoes in or taking them out I would often come into possession of one or two, which I roasted and thoroughly enjoyed. There was no cooking-stove on our plantation, and all the cooking for the whites and slaves my mother had to do over an open fireplace, mostly in pots and "skillels." While the poorly built cabin caused us to suffer with cold in the winter, the heat from the open fireplace in summer was equally trying.

The early years of my life, which were spent in the little cabin, were not very different from those of thousands of other slaves. My mother, of course, had little time in which to give attention to the training of her children during the day. She snatched a few moments for our care in the early morning before her work began, and at night after the day's work was done. One of my earliest recollections is that of my mother cooking a chicken late at night, and awakening her children for the purpose of feeding them. How or where she got it I do not know. I presume, however, it was procured from our owner's farm. Some people may call this dark. If such a thing were to happen now, I should condemn it as theft myself, but taking place at the time it did, and for the reason that it did, no one could ever make me believe that my mother was guilty of cheating. She was simply a victim of the system of slavery. I cannot remember having slept in a bed until after our family was declared free by the Emancipation Proclamation. There children—John, my older brother, Amanda, my sister, and myself—had a pallet on the dirt floor, or, to be more correct, we slept in and on a bundle of filthy rags laid upon the dirt floor.

I was asked not long ago to tell something about the sports and pastimes that I engaged in during my youth. Until that question was asked I had never occurred to me that there was no period of my life that was devoted to play. From the time that I can remember anything, almost every day of my life has been occupied in some kind of labour; though I think it would now be a more useful man if I had had time for sports. During the period that I spent in slavery
I was not large enough to be of much service, still I was occupied most of the time in cleaning the yards, carrying water to the men in the fields, or going to the mill, to which I used to take the corn, once a week, to be ground. The mill was about three miles from the plantation. This work I always dreaded. The heavy bag of corn would be thrown across the back of the horse, and the corn divided about evenly on each side; but in some way, almost without exception, on these trips, the corn would shift as to become unbalanced and would fall off the horse, and often I would fill with it. As I was not strong enough to reload the corn upon the horse, I would have to wait, sometimes for many hours, till a chance passer-by came along who would help me out of my trouble. The hours while waiting for some one were usually spent in crying. The time consumed in this way made me late in reaching the mill, and by the time I got my corn ground and reached home it would be far into the night. The road was a lonely one, and often led through dense forests. I was always frightened. The woods were said to be full of soldiers who had deserted from the army, and I had been told that the first thing a deserter did to a Negro boy when he found him alone was to cut off his ears. Besides, when I was late in getting home I knew I would always get a severe scolding or a flogging.

I had no schooling whatever while I was a slave, though I remember on several occasions I went as far as the schoolhouse door with one of my young mistresses to carry her books. The pictures of several dozen boys and girls in a schoolroom engaged in study made a deep impression upon me, and I had the feeling that to get into a schoolroom and study in this way would be about the same as getting into paradise.

So far as I can now recall, the first knowledge that I got of the fact that we were slaves, and that freedom of the slaves was being discussed, was early one morning before day, when I was awakened by my mother kneeling over her children and fervently praying that Lincoln and his armies might be successful, and that one day she and her children might be free. In this connection I have never been able to understand how the slaves throughout the South, completely ignorant as were the masses so far as books or newspapers were concerned, were able to keep themselves so accurately and completely informed about the great national questions that were agitating the country. From the time that Garrison, Lovejoy, and others began to agitate for freedom, the slaves throughout the South kept in close touch with the progress of the movement. Though I was a mere child during the preparation for the Civil War and during the war itself, I now recall the many late-night whispered discussions that I heard my mother and the other slaves on the plantation indulge in. These discussions showed that they understood the situation, and that they kept themselves informed of events by what was termed the “gossip vine” telegraph.

During the campaign when Lincoln was first a candidate for the presidency, the slaves on our far-off plantation, miles from any railroad or large city or daily newspaper, knew what the issues involved were. When war was begun between the North and the South, every slave on our plantation felt and knew that, though other issues were discussed, the point one was that of slavery. Even the most ignorant members of my race on the remote plantations felt in their hearts, with a certainty that admitted of no doubt, that the freedom of the slaves would be the one great result of the war. If the Northern armies conquered, every success of the Federal armies and every defeat of the Confederate forces was watched with
the keenest and most intense interest. Often the slaves got knowledge of the results of great battles before the white people received it. This news was usually gotten from the coloured man who was sent to the post-office for the mail. In our case the post-office was about three miles from our plantation and the mail came once or twice a week. The man who was sent to the office would linger about the place long enough to get the drift of the conversation from the group of white people who naturally congregated there, after receiving their mail, to discuss the latest news. The mail-carrier on his way back to our master's house would naturally read the news that he had secured among the slaves, and in this way they often heard of important events before the white people at the "bag house," as the master's house was called.

I cannot remember a single instance during my childhood or early womanhood when our entire family sat down to the table together, and God's blessing was asked, and the family ate a meal in a civilized manner. On the plantation in Virginia, and even later, meals were gotten by the children very much as dumb animals get theirs. It was a piece of bread here and a scrap of meat there. It was a cup of milk at one time and some potatoes at another. Sometimes a portion of our family would eat out of the skillet or pot, while some one would eat from a tin plate held on the knees, and often using nothing but the hands with which to hold the food. When I had grown to sufficient size, I was required to go to the "bag house" at meal-times to fan the flies from the table by means of a large set of paper fans opened by a pullie. Naturally much of the conversation of the white people turned upon the subject of freedom and the war, and it absorbed a good deal of it. I remember that at one time I saw two of my youngMedian apprentices and some lady visitors eating ginger-cakes in the yard. At that one those cakes seemed to me to be absolutely the most tempting and desirable things that I had ever seen, and I then and there resolved that, if ever I got free, the height of my ambition would be reached if I could get to the point where I could secure and eat ginger-cakes in the way that I saw those ladies doing.

Of course as the war was prolonged the white people, in many cases, often found it difficult to secure food for themselves. I think the slaves felt the deprivation less than the whites, because the usual diet for the slaves was corn bread and pork, and those could be raised on the plantation; but coffee, tea, sugar, and other articles which the whites had been accustomed to use could not be raised on the plantation, and the conditions brought about by the war frequently made it impossible to secure these things. The whites were often in great straits. Parboiled corn was used for coffee, and a kind of black mulasses was used instead of sugar. Many times nothing was used to sweeten the so-called tea and coffee.

The first pair of shoes that I recall wearing were woollen ones. They had rough leather on the top, but the bottoms, which were about an inch thick, were of wood. When I walked they made a fearful noise, and besides this they were very inconvenient, since there was no yielding to the natural pressure of the foot in wearing them; I wore an exceedingly awkward appearance. The most trying ordeal that I was forced to endure as a slave boy, however, was the wearing of a flax skirt. In the portion of Virginia where I lived it was common to use flax as part of the clothing for the slaves. That part of the flax from which our clothing was made was largely the refuse, which of course was the cheapest and roughest part. I can scarcely imagine any torture, except perhaps, the pulling of a tooth, that is equal to that caused by putting on a new flax skirt for the first time.
time. It is almost equal to the feeling that one would experience if he had a
doon or more cheetahs burn or a hundred small pinpoints, in contact with his
flesh. Even to this day I can recall accurately the tortures that I underwent when
putting on one of these garments. The fact that my flesh was soft and tender
added to the pain. But I had no choice. I had to wear the flax shirt or mtar, and
had it been left to me to choose, I should have chosen to wear no covering. In
connection with the flax shirt, my brother John, who is several years older than
I am, performed one of the most generous acts that I ever heard of one slave
relieving another for another. On several occasions when I was being forced to wear
a new flax shirt, he generously agreed to put it on in my stead and wear it for
several days till it was "broken in." Until I had grown to be a youth this
single garment was all that I wore.

One may get the idea from what I have said, that there was bitter feeling
toward the white people on the part of my race, because of the fact that most of
the white population was away fighting in a war which would result in keeping the
Negro in slavery if the South was successful. In the case of the slaves on our
place this was not true, and it was not true of any large portion of the slave
population in the South where the Negro was treated with anything like
decency. During the Civil War, one of my young masters was killed, and two were
severely wounded. I recall the feeling of sorrow which existed among the slaves
when they heard of the death of "Mars Billy." It was no sham sorrow, but real.
Some of the slaves had nursed "Mars Billy," others had played with him when
he was a child. "Mars Billy" had begged for mercy in the case of others when the
overseers or master was0 ssisting them. The sorrow in the slave quarter was only
second to that in the "big house." When the two young masters were brought
home wounded, the sympathy of the slaves was shown in many ways. They
were just as anxious to assist in the nursing of the family relatives of the wounded.
Some of the slaves would even beg for the privilege of sitting up at night to
speak to their wounded masters. This tenderness and sympathy on the part of those
held in bondage was a result of their kindly and generous nature. In order to defend
and protect the women and children who were left on the plantations when the
white males went to war, the slaves would have laid down their lives. The slave
who was selected to sleep in the "big house" during the absence of the males
was considered to have the place of honour. Any one attempting to harm "young
Marvins" or "old Masters" during the night would have had to cross the dead
body of the slave to do so. I do not know how many have noticed it, but I think
that it will be found to be true that there are few instances, either in slavery or
freedom, in which a member of my race has been known to betray a specific
trust.

As a rule, not only did the members of my race entertain no feelings of
bitterness against the whites before and during the war, but there are many
instances of Negresses tenderly caring for their former masters and mistresses who
for some reason have become poor and dependent since the war. I know of
instances where the former masters of slaves have for years been supplied with
money by their former slaves to keep them from suffering. I have known of still
other cases in which the former slaves have assisted in the education of the
descendants of their former owners. I know of a case in which a large plantation in the
South in which a young white man, the son of the former owner of the estate,
had become so reduced in purse and self-control by reason of drink that he is a
pitable creature, and yet, notwithstanding the poverty of the colored people themselves on the plantation, they have for years supplied this young white man with the necessities of life. One sends him a little coffee or sugar, another a little meat, and so on. Nothing that the colored people possess is too good for the use of "Old Mass Tom," who will perhaps never be permitted to suffer while they remain on the place who knew directly or indirectly of "Old Mass Tom."

I have said that there are few instances of a member of my race betraying a specific trait. One of the best illustrations of which I know of is in the case of an ex-slave from Virginia whom I met not long ago in a little town in the state of Ohio. I found that this man had made a contract with his master, two or three years previous to the Emancipation Proclamation, to the effect that the slave was to be permitted to buy himself, by paying so much per year for his body, and while he was paying for himself, he was to be permitted to labor where and for whom he pleased. Finding that he could secure better wages in Ohio, he went there. When freedom came, he was still in debt to his master some few hundred dollars. Not wishing that the Emancipation Proclamation freed him from any obligation to his master, this black man walked the greater part of the distance back to where his old master lived in Virginia, and relapsed the last dollar, with interest, in his hands. In talking to me about this, the man told me that he knew that he did not have to pay the debt, but that he had given his word to his master, and his word he had never broken. He felt that he could not enjoy his freedom till he had fulfilled his promise.

From these things that I have told you may get the idea that some of the slaves did not want freedom. This is not true. I have never seen one who did not want to be free, or who would return to slavery.

I pray from the bottom of my heart any nation or body of people that is so unfortunate as to get entangled in the net of slavery. I have long since ceased to cherish any spirit of bitterness against the Southern white people on account of the enslavement of my race. No one section of our country was wholly responsible for its introduction, and, besides, it was recognized and prescribed for years by the General Government. Having once got its terracles fastened on to the economic and social life of the Republic, it was too easy matter to relieve itself of the institution. Then, when we tried ourselves of prejudice, or racial feeling, and took sides in the race, we must acknowledge that, notwithstanding the cruelty and moral wrong of slavery, the one million Negroes inhabiting this country, who themselves or whose forefathers went through the school of American slavery, are in a stronger and more hopeful condition, materially, intellectually, morally, and religiously, than is true of an equal number of black people in any other portion of the globe. This is so to such an extent that Negroes in the country, who themselves or whose forefathers went through the school of slavery, are constantly returning to Africa as missionaries to enlighten those who remained in the barbarism. The I say, not to justify slavery—on the other hand, I condemn it as an institution, as we all know that in America it was established for selfish and financial reasons, and not from a missionary motive—but to call attention to a fact, and to show how Providence so often uses misfortune to accomplish a purpose. When persons ask me in these days how, in the midst of what sometimes seems hopeless discouraging conditions, I can have such faith in the future of my race in this country, I remind them of the wilderness through which and out of which, a good Providence has already led us.
Ever since I have been old enough to think for myself, I have entertained the idea that, notwithstanding the cruel system inflicted upon us, the black man got nearly as much out of slavery as the white man did. The hereditary influences of the institution were not by any means confined to the Negro. This was fully illustrated by the life upon our own plantation. The whole machinery of slavery was so constructed as to cause labor, as a rule, to be harked upon as a badge of degradation, of inferiority. Hence labor was something that both races on the slave plantation sought to escape. The slave system on our place, in a large measure, took the spirit of self-reliance and self-help out of the white people. My old master had many boys and girls, but not one, so far as I know, ever mastered a single trade or special line of productive industry. The girls were not taught to cook, sew, or to take care of the house. All of this was left to the slaves. The slaves, of course, had little personal interest in the life of the plantation, and their ignorance prevented them from learning how to do things in the most improved and thorough manner. As a result of the system, fitters were set out of repair; gates were hanging half off the hinges. Joes created, window-gazes were out, planting had fallen but was not replaced, weeds grew in the yard. As a rule, there was food for whites and blacks, but inside the house, and on the sitting-room table, there was wanting that delicacy and refinement of touch and finish which can make a home the most convenient, comfortable, and attractive place in the world. Without there was a waste of food and other materials which was sad. When freedom came, the slaves were almost as well fitted to begin life anew as the master, except in the matter of book-learning and ownership of property. The slave owner and his sons had mastered no special industry. They unconsciously had imbued the feeling that manual labor was not the proper thing for them. On the other hand, the slaves, in many cases, had mastered some meid-knife, and some were armed, and few unwilling, to labor.

Finally the war closed, and the day of freedom came. It was a momentous and eventful day to all upon our plantation. We had been expecting it. Freedom was in the air, and had been for months. Deserting soldiers returning to their homes were to be seen every day. Others who had been discharged, or whose right to be present were constantly passing near our place. The 'grapevine telegraph' was kept busy night and day. The news and mutterings of great events were swiftly carried from one plantation to another. In the fear of 'Yankee' invasions, the silverware and other valuables were taken from the 'big house,' buried in the woods, and guarded by trusted slaves. Woe be to any one who would have attempted to disturb the buried treasure. The slaves would give the Yankee soldiers food, drink, clothing—anything but which had been specifically intimated to their care and honor. By the great day three months, there was more singing in the slave quarters than usual. It was colder, had score rings, and lasted later into the night. Most of the verses of the plantations' songs had some reference to freedom. True, they had sung those same verses before, but they had been careful to explain that the 'freedom' in those songs referred to the next world, and had no connection with life in this world. Now they gradually turned off the mask, and were not afraid to let it be known that the 'freedom' in their songs meant freedom of the body in this world. The night before the eventful day, word was sent to the slave quarters to the effect that something unusual was going to take place at the 'big house' the next morning. There was little, if any, sleep that night. All was excitement and expectancy. Early the next
morning word was sent to all the slaves, old and young, to gather at the house, in company with my mother, brother, and sister, and a large number of other slaves. I went to the master's house. All of our master's family were either standing or seated on the veranda of the house, where they could see what was going to take place and hear what was said. There was a feeling of deep mourn, or perhaps sadness, on their faces, but not bitterness. As I now recall the impression they made upon me, they did not at the moment seem to be sad because of the loss of property, but rather because of parting with those whom they had reared and who were in many ways very close to them. The most distinct thing that I now recall in connection with the scene was that some man who seemed to be a stranger's United States officer, I presume) made a little speech and then read a rather long paper—the Emancipation Proclamation, I think. After the reading we were told that we were all free, and could go where and when we pleased. My mother, who was standing by my side, leaned over and kissed her children, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks. She explained to us what it all meant, that this was the day for which she had been so long praying, but feeling that she would never live to see.

For some minutes there was great rejoicing, and thanksgiving, and wild scenes of ecstasy. But there was no feeling of bitterness. In fact, there was a joy among the slaves for our former owners. The wild rejoicing on the part of the emancipated colored people lasted but for a brief period, for I noticed that by the time they returned to their cabins there was a change in their feelings. The great responsibility of being free, of having charge of themselves, of having to think and plan for themselves and their children, seemed to take possession of them. It was very much like suddenly remitting a youth of ten or twelve years out into the world to provide for himself. In a few hours the great questions with which the Anglo-Saxon race had been grappling for centuries had been thrown upon these people to be solved. These were the questions of a home, a living, the rearing of children, education, citizenship, and the establishment and support of churches. Was it any wonder that within a few hours the wild rejoicing ceased and a feeling of deep gloom seemed to pervade the slave quarters? To some it seemed that, now that they were in actual possession of it, freedom was a more serious thing that they had expected to find it. Some of the slaves were seventy or eighty years old, and their best days were gone. They had no strength with which to earn a living in a strange place and among strange people, even if they had been sure where to find a new place of residence. To this class the problem seemed especially hard. Besides, deep down in their hearts there was a strange and peculiar attachment to "old Master" and "old Missus," and to their children, which they found it hard to think of breaking off. With these they had spent in some cases nearly a half-century, and it was no light thing to think of parting. Gradually, one by one, stealthily at first, the older slaves began to wander from the slave quarters back to the "big house" to have a whispered conversation with their former owners as to the future.

CHAPTER 14

The Atlanta Exposition Address

The Atlanta Exposition, at which I had been asked to make an address as a representative of the Negro race... was opened with a short address from Governor Bullock. After other interesting exercises, including an invocation from
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Bishop Nisbet, of Georgia, a dedicated soul by Albert H. McDonald, J., addressed the President of the Expedition and Mr. Joseph Thompson, the President of the Woman's Board, Governor Bullock, introduced me with the words, "We have with us to-day a representative of Negro enterprise and Negro civilization."

When I arose to speak, there was considerable cheering, especially from the colored people. As I remember it now, the thing that was uppermost in my mind was the desire to say something that would cement the friendship between the races and bring about hearty cooperation between them. As far as my outward surroundings were concerned, the only thing I recall distinctly now is that when I got up, I saw thousands of eyes looking into my face. The following is the address which I delivered:

MR. PRESIDENT AND CITIZENS:

One-third of the population of the South is of the Negro race. No enterprise seeking the benefit, civil, or moral welfare of this section can disregard this element of our population and reach the highest success. I have conveyed to you, Mr. President and Directors, the sentiment of the masses of my race when I say that in no wise have the shame and malodour of the American Negro been more fittingly and generously recognized than by the management of this magnificent institution at every stage of its progress. It is a recognition that will do more to cement the friendship of the two races than any occurrence since the dawn of our freedom.

Not only this, but the opportunity best afforded will awaken among a new era of industrial progress. Ignorant and inexperienced: it is no strange that in the last years of our new life we began at the top instead of at the bottom, that a seat in Congress or the state legislature was more sought than real ease or industrial skill that the political conversion of stump speaking had more attractions than starting a dairy farm or truck garden.

A ship lost at sea for many days suddenly sighted a friendly vessel. From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen a signal, "Water, water, we die of thirst!" The answer from the friendly vessel at once came back, "Cast down your buckets where you are." A second time the signal, "Water, water, we die of thirst!" came up from the distressed vessel, and was answered, "Cast down your bucket where you are." And a third and fourth signal for water was answered, "Cast down your bucket where you are." The captain of the distressed vessel, at last, hearing no more inquiry, cast down his bucket, and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon River. To those of my race who depended on bettering their condition in a foreign land or who underestimate the importance of cultivating friendly relations with the Southern white man, who is their next-door neighbor, I would say: "Cast down your bucket where you are"—cast it down in making friends in every genuine way of the people of all races by whom we are surrounded.

Cast it down in agriculture, mechanics, in commerce, in domestic service, and in the professions. And in the connection it is well to bear in mind that whatever other sins the South may be called to bear, when it comes to business, pure and simple, it is not less than the negro is given a man's chance in the commercial world, and in nothing is this more eloquent than in emphasizing this choice. Cast greatest durance is that in the gnat leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the produce of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn...
so dignify and glorify common labor and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life; shall prosper in proportion as we learn to draw the line between the superficial and the substantial, the ornamental gew-gaws of life and the useful. No race can prosper all its learned that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top. Nor should we permit our prejudices to overshadow our opportunities.

To those of the white race who look to the incoming of those from foreign lands and strange tongues and habits for the prosperity of the South, were I permitted I would repeat what I say to my own race, "Cast down your bucket wherever you are." Cast down your bucket among those people, helping and encouraging them as you are doing on these grounds, and in education of head, hand, and heart, you will find that they will buy your surplus land, raise cotton, raise cotton, the wave places in your hands and run your factories. While doing this, you can be sure in the future, as in the past, that you and your families will be surrounded by the most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen. As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past, in nursing your children, washing the sick bed of your Returned soldiers and others, and often following them with weepers' dimmed eyes to their graves, so in the future, in our humble way, we shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach, ready to lay down our lives, if need be, in defense of yours, interlacing our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious life with yours in a way that shall make our interest of both races use in all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.

There is no defense of security for any of us except in the highest intelligence and development of all. If anywhere here are offices tenable to curtail the fullest growth of the Negro, let these be turned into stimulating, encouraging, and making him the most useful and intelligent citizen, effort or means be invested with a thousand per cent interest. These efforts will be twice blessed—blessing him that gives and him that takes.

There is no escape through law of man or God from the inevitable—

The laws of changeless justice bind
Oppressor with oppression;
And close as sin and suffering joined
We march to fate without.

Nearby sixteen millions of hands will aid you in pulling the load upward, or they will pull against you the load downward. We shall constitute one-third and more of the ignorance and crime of the South, or one-third its intelligence and progress. We shall contribute one-third to the business and industrial prosperity of the South, or we shall prove a veritable body of death, stagnating, depressing, retarding every effort to advance the body politic.

Conditions of the Emancipation, as we present to you our humble effort at an
exhibition of our progress, you must not expect overmuch, starting thirty years ago with ownership here and there in a few quilts and pumpkins and chickens (gathered from miscellaneous sources), remember the path that has led from these to the inventions and production of agricultural implements, buggies, steam-engines, newspapers, books, statues, carvings, paintings, the management of drug-stores and banks, has my been trodden without contact with sports and thrills. While we take pride in what we exhibit as a result of our independent efforts, we do not for a moment forget that our part in this exhibition would fall far short of your expectations but for the constant help that has come to our educational life, not only from the Southern states, but especially from Northern philanthropists, who have made their gifts a constant stream of blessing and encouragement.

The work among my race underlines that the agitation of questions of social equality is the expression folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of sweet and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing. No race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree classified. It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercises of these privileges. The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house.

In conclusion, may I repeat that nothing in thirty years has given us more hope and encouragement, and drawn us so near to you of the white race, as this opportunity offered by the Exposition; and here beseech, as it were, over the star that represents the results of the struggles of your race and mine, both starting practically empty-handed three decades ago, I pledged that in your effort to work out the great and intricate problems which God has laid in the doors of the South, you shall have at all times the patient, sympathetic help of my race; only let this be constantly in mind, that while from representations in these buildings of the produce of field, of forest, of mine, of factory, letters, and art, much good will come, yet far above and beyond material benefits will be that higher good, for, let us pray God, will come, in a blossoming out of sectional differences and racial animosities and suspicions, in a determination to administer absolute justice, in a willing obedience among all classes to the mandates of law. This, then, coupled with our material prosperity, will bring into our beloved South a new heaven and a new earth.

The first thing that I remember, after I had finished speaking, was that Governor Bullock rushed across the platform and took me by the hand, and that others did the same. I received so many and such hearty congratulations that I found it difficult to get out of the building. I did not appreciate to any degree, however, the impression which my address seemed to have made, until the next morning, when I went into the business part of the city. As soon as I was recognized, I was besieged to find myself pointed out and surrounded by a crowd of men who wished to shake hands with me. This was kept up on every street on to which I went, to an extent which embarrassed me so much that I went back to my boarding-place. The next morning I returned to Tuskegee. At the station in Atlanta, and at almost all of the stations at which the train stopped between that city and Tuskegee, I found a crowd of people anxious to shake hands with me.
The papers in all parts of the United States published the address in full, and for months afterward there were complimentary editorial references to it. Mr. Clark Howell, the editor of the Atlanta Constitution, telegraphed to a New York paper, among other words, the following: "I do not exaggerate when I say that Professor Booker T. Washington's address yesterday was one of the most notable speeches, both as to character and to the warmth of its reception, ever delivered to a Southern audience. The address was a revelation. The whole speech is a platform upon which blacks and whites can stand with full justice to each other."

The Boston Transcript said editorially: "The speech of Booker T. Washington at the Atlanta Exposition, this week, seems to have dwarfed all the other proceedings and the Exposition itself. The sensation put it has caused in the press has never been equaled.

I very soon began receiving all kinds of propositions from lecture bureau and editors of magazines and papers, to take the lecture platform, and to write articles. One lecture bureau offered me fifty thousand dollars, or two hundred dollars a night and expenses, if I would place my services at its disposal for a given period. To all these communications I replied that my life work was at Tuskegee; and that whenever I spoke it must be in the interests of the Tuskegee School and my race, and that I would enter into no arrangements that seemed to place a mere commercial value upon my services.

Some days after its delivery I sent a copy of my address to the President of the United States, the Hon. Grover Cleveland. I received from him the following autograph reply—

GROVER CLEVELAND, BROOKLYN, N. Y.,
October 6, 1895

MY DEAR SIR: I thank you for sending me a copy of your address delivered at the Atlanta Exposition.

I thank you with much enthusiasm for making the address, I have read it with intense interest, and I think the Exposition would be fully justified if it did not do more than furnish the opportunity for its delivery. Your words cannot fail to delight and encourage all who wish well for our race; and if our colored fellow-citizens do not from your utterances gather new hope and form new determinations to gain every valuable advantage offered them by their citizenship, it will be strange indeed.

Yours very truly,

GROVER CLEVELAND

Later I met Mr. Cleveland, for the first time. When, as President, he visited the Atlanta Exposition. At the request of myself and others he consented to spend an hour in the Negro Building, for the purpose of inspecting the Negro exhibit and of giving the colored people in attendance an opportunity to shake hands with him. As soon as I met Mr. Cleveland I became impressed with his simplicity, gentleness, and rugged honesty. I have met him many times since then, both at public functions and at his private residence in Princeton, and the more I see of him the more I admire him. When he visited the Negro Building in Atlanta he
seemed to give himself up wholly, for that hour, to the colored people. He seemed to be as careful to shake hands with some old colored "saints" clad partially in rags, and to take as much pleasure in doing so, as if he were greeting some millionaire. Many of the colored people took advantage of the occasion to get him to write his name in a book or on a slip of paper. He was as careful and patient in doing this as if he were putting his signature to some great state document.

Mr. Cleveland has not only shown his friendship for me in many personal ways, but has always consented to do anything I have asked of him for our school. This he has done. Whether it was to make a personal donation or to use his influence in securing the donations of others. Judging from his personal acquaintance with Mr. Cleveland, I do not believe that he is conscious of possessing any color prejudice. He is too great for that. In my contact with people I find that, as a rule, it is only the little, narrow people who live for themselves, who never read good books, who do not travel, who never open up their souls so as to permit these to come into contact with other souls—with the great outside world. No man whose vision is bounded by color can come into contact with what is highest and best in the world. In meeting men, in many places, I have found that the happiest people are those who do the most for others, the most miserable are those who do the least. I have also found that few things, if any, are capable of making one so blind and narrow as race prejudice. I often say to our students, in the course of the talks to them on Sunday evenings in the chapel, that the longer I live and the more experience I have of this world, the more I am convinced that, after all, the one thing that is most worth living for—and dying for, if need be—is the opportunity of making some one else more happy and more useful.

The colored people and the colored newspapers at first seemed to be greatly pleased with the character of my Atlanta address, as well as with its reception. But after the first burst of enthusiasm began to die away, and the colored people began reading the speech in cold type, some of them seemed to feel that they had been hypocritical. They seemed to feel that I have been too liberal in my remarks toward the Southern whites, and that I had not spoken out strongly enough for what they termed the "rights" of the race. For a while there was a reaction, so far as a certain element of my own race was concerned, but later these practical men seemed to have been won over to my way of believing and acting.

While speaking of changes in public sentiment, I recall that about ten years after the school at Tuskegee was established, I had an experience that I shall never forget. Dr. Lyman Abbott, then the pastor of Plymouth Church, and also editor of the Outlook (then the Christian Union), asked me to write a letter for his paper giving my opinion of the exact condition, mental and moral, of the colored ministers in the South, as based upon my observations. I wrote the letter, giving the exact facts as I conceived them to be. The picture painted won a rather black vote—one, or, since I am black, shall I say "white"? It could not be otherwise with a race but a few years out of slavery, a race which had not had time or opportunity to produce a competent ministry.

What I said soon reached every Negro minister in the country. I think, and the letters of condemnation which I received from them were not few. I think that for a year after the publication of this article every association and every com-
ence or religious body of any kind, of my race, that pitt, did not fail before
admitting me to pass a revolution condemning me, or calling upon me to renounce or
modify what I had said. Many of these organizations went so far in their resolu-
tions as to advise parents to cease sending their children to Tuskegee. One
association even appointed a "missionary" whose duty it was to warn the people
against sending their children to Tuskegee. This missionary had a son in the
school, and I noticed that, whatever the "missionary" might have said or done
with regard to others, he was careful not to take his son away from the Insti-
tution. Many of the colored papers, especially those that were the organs of reli-
gious bodies, joined in the general chorus of condemnation or demands for
retraction.

During the whole time of the excitement, and through all the criticism, I did
not utter a word of explanation or retraction. I knew that I was right, and that
time and the sober second thought of the people would vindicate me. It was not
long before the bishops and other church leaders began to make a careful
investigation of the conditions of the ministry, and they found out that I was
right. In fact, the oldest and most influential bishop in one branch of the Meth-
odist Church said that my words were far too mild. Very soon public sentiment
began making itself felt, in demanding a purifying of the ministry. While this is
not yet complete by any means, I think I may say, without egotism, and I have
been told by many of our most influential ministers, that my words had much to
do with starting a demand for the placing of a higher type of men in the pulpit.
I have had the satisfaction of having many who once condemned me think me
heavily for my frank words.

The change of the attitude of the Negro ministry, so far as regards myself, is to
complete that at the present time I have no warmer friends among any class than
I have among the clergy. The improvement in the character and life of the
Negro ministers is one of the most gratifying evidences of the progress of the race.
My experience with them, as well as other events in my life, convince me that the
thing to do, when one feels sure that he has said or done the right thing, and is
condemned, is to stand still and keep quiet. If he is right, time will show it.

In the midst of the discussion which was going on concerning my Alasna
speech, I received the letter which I give below, from Dr. Gilman, the President
of Johns Hopkins University, who had been made chairman of the judges of
award in connection with the Alasna Exposition—

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY, BALTIMORE,
President's Office, September 30, 1895

DEAR MR. WASHINGTON: Would it be agreeable to you to be one of the judges of
award in the Department of Education at Alasna? If so, I shall be glad to place
your name upon the list. A letter by telegraph will be welcomed.

Yours very truly,
D. GILMAN

I think I was even more surprised to receive this invitation that I had been to
receive the invitation to speak at the opening of the Exposition. It was to be a
part of my duty, as one of the jurors, to pass not only upon the exhibits of the
colored schools, but also upon those of the white schools. I accepted the posi-
tion, and spent a month in Atlanta in performance of the duties which it entailed. The board of letters was a large one, consisting of all of sixty members. It was about equally divided between Southern white people and Northern white people. Among them were college presidents, leading scientists and men of letters, and specialists in many subjects. When the group of letters to which I was assigned met for organization, Mr. Thomas Nelson Page, who was one of the number, moved that I be made secretary of that division, and the motion was unanimously adopted. Nearly half of our divisors were Southern people. In performing my duties in the inspection of the exhibits of white schools I was in every case treated with respect, and at the close of our labors I parted from my associates with regret.

I am often asked to express myself more freely than I do upon the political condition and the political future of my race. These recollections of my experience in Atlanta give me the opportunity to do so briefly. My own belief is, although I have never before said so in so many words, that the time will come when the Negro in the South will be accorded all the political rights which his ability, character, and material possessions entitle him to. I think, though, that the opportunity to freely exercise such political rights will not come in any large degree through outside or artificial forcing, but will be accorded to the Negro by the Southern white people themselves, and that they will protect him in the exercise of those rights. Just as soon as the South gets over the evil feeling that it is being forced by "foreigners," or "aliens," to do something which it does not want to do, I believe that the change in the direction that I have indicated is going to begin. In fact, there are indications that it is already beginning in a slight degree.

Let me illustrate my meaning. Suppose that some months before the opening of the Atlanta Exposition there had been a general demand from the press and public platform outside the South that a Negro be given a place on the opening program, and not a Negro be placed upon the board of judges of award. Would any such recognition of the race have taken place? I do not think so. The Atlanta officials went so far as they did because they felt it to be a pleasure, as well as a duty, to reward what they considered merits in the Negro race. Say what we will, there is something in human nature which we cannot blot out, which makes each man, in the end, recognize and reward merit in another, regardless of color or race.

I believe it is the duty of the Negro—as the greater part of the race is already doing—to assert himself modestly in regard to political claims, depending upon the slow but sure influences that proceed from the possession of property, intelligence, and high character for the full recognition of his political rights. I think that the acceding of the full exercise of political rights is going to be a matter of natural slow growth, not an over-night, gourd-size affair. I do not believe that the Negro should cease voting, for a man cannot learn the exercise of self-government by ceasing to vote any more than a boy can learn to swim by keeping out of the water. But I do believe that in his voting he should move and be more influenced by those of intelligence and character who are his next-door neighbors.

I knew colored men who, through the encouragement, help, and advice of Southern white people, have accumulated thousands of dollars' worth of property, but who, at the same time, would never think of going to those same
persons for advice concerning the casting of their ballots. This, it seems to me, is unwise and unpalatable, and should cease. In saying this I do not mean that the Negro should muzzle, or not vote from principle, for the instants he casts a vote from principle he loses the confidence and respect of the Southern white man, even.

I do not believe that any state should make a law that permits an ignorant and poverty-stricken white man to vote, and prevents a black man in the same condition from voting. Such a law is not only unjust, but it will react, in all在一个 laws do, in time; for the effect of such a law is to encourage the Negro to secure education and property, and at the same time it encourages the white man to remain in ignorance and poverty. I believe that in time through the operation of intelligence and friendly race relations, all clear thinking ballot box in the South will cease. It will become apparent that the white man who begins by cheating the Negro out of his ballot soon learns to cheat white man out of his, and that the man who does this ends his career of dishonesty by the theft of property or by some equally serious crime. In my opinion, the time will come when the South will encourage all of its citizens to vote. It will see that it pays better, from every standpoint, to have healthy, vigorous life than to have that political stagnation which always results when one-half of the population has no share and no interest in the Government.

As a rule, I believe in universal, free suffrage, but I believe that in the South we are contended with peculiar conditions that justify the protection of the ballot in many of the cases for a while at least, either by an educational test, a property test, or by some combined, but whatever tests are required, they should be made to apply with equal and even justice to both races.

Malcolm X (1925-65)

Even before his assassination in 1965, civil rights leader Malcolm X had become a cultural and political legend, his philosophies inspiring many African American artists, educators, and students who revered his life—and his ultimate sacrifice. In 1992, the biographical feature film Malcolm X by director Spike Lee turned the legendary figure into an American popular icon, his face and name appeared on T-shirts, bookcovers, jackets, and in a commercial reboot of his legacy. Although the reenactment image of Malcolm X in the early 1960s was merely a trendy fashion for mainstream America, the black community accorded Malcolm X an honor and acclaim that had been intensifying for decades since his death.

Born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska, the youngest of seven children, Malcolm X endured an untreated childhood that took him from Nebraska to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and then to Lansing, Michigan. In Lansing, a white supremacist group burned down his family's house and was later suspected of killing Malcolm's father, an outspoken minister who supported the separatist ideas of Marcus Garvey (see p. 733). Malcolm's mother would raise support for her family due to her psychological instability after her husband's death. When she was placed in a psychiatric institution, Malcolm and his siblings were separated into various detention homes. Malcolm remained on the contrary of the state until he completed the eighth grade. He then moved to the Roxbury section of Boston to live with his half-sister. In this urban environment, the young Malcolm turned