

## THE AMERICAN NEGRO AND THE WAR

REMARKS MADE AT A MEETING HELD UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE CIRCLE FOR NEGRO WAR RELIEF, AT CARNEGIE HALL, NEW YORK, ON NOVEMBER 2, 1918.

At this time I would not willingly speak for any cause not connected with our direct and immediate duty of winning the war and caring for those who are to win the war. (Applause.) I take peculiar pleasure in coming to speak for the Circle for Negro War Relief. And now if any of you haven't given, turn in a pledge card, and if any one is likely to forget the admirable adjuration at the end of one line of the song before the last, be sure that you pay what you pledge!

I wish to mention that when it became my duty to divide the Nobel Peace Prize among our war activities I gave an equal share to the work being done by Negro women for war relief (Applause) with the shares I had given to such organizations as the Y. M. C. A., the Knights of Columbus, and the Salvation Army, and in doing it I tried to follow out the counsel so wisely given by one of our speakers this evening, to remember that the Negro has a right to sit at the council board where questions vitally affecting him are considered — and at the same time that as a matter of expediency it is well to have white men at the board too. (Laughter and applause.) And I say that though I know there are many colored men — Mr. Scott is one and the Chairman is another — whom I would be delighted to have sit at the council board where only the af-

fairs of white men are concerned. As things are now, the wisest course to follow is that followed in the organization of this Circle. And so when I gave the \$4,100 from the Nobel Peace Prize I mentioned two women, one white and one colored, as the ones whose advice I wished to have followed in the actual disposition of the fund. Now, I only mention this to show that I tried by works to show the faith that is in me. And I want you to do the same with the pledge cards!

I wish to congratulate you on the dignity and self-restraint with which the appeal of the Circle is issued. You have put what I would like to say better than I could have put it, when you say that you would like the men at the front and in the camps to know that there is a distinctively colored organization working for them. The people at home ought to know that this organization, though started and maintained with friendly cooperation from white friends, is intended to prove to the world that the colored people themselves can manage war relief in an efficient, honest and dignified way, and so bring honor to their race. (Applause.) Every organization like the Circle for Negro War Relief is doing its part in bringing about the right solution for the great problem which the chairman has spoken of this evening. I do not for one moment wish to be understood as excusing the white man from his full responsibility for what he has done to keep the black man down; but I do wish to say with all the emphasis and all the earnestness at my command that the greatest work the colored man can do to help his race upward is by his own person, and through cooperation with his fellows,

showing the dignity of service by the colored man and colored woman for all our people. (Applause.)

Let me illustrate by an example suggested to me by one name I see both on your list of vice-presidents and on your list of directors, to show just what I mean when I say the advisability of white coöperation and the occasional advisability of doing without white coöperation. Had I been permitted to raise troops to go to the other side in what will soon be the "late war," I should have asked permission to raise two colored regiments. It is perfectly possible of course that there is more than one colored man in the country fit for the extraordinarily difficult task of commanding one such regiment which would contain nothing but colored officers. But it happened that I only knew of one, and that was Colonel Charles Young. (Applause.) I had intended, and Colonel Young had been so notified, to offer him the colonelship of one regiment, telling him that I expected him to choose only colored officers and that, while I was sure he would understand the extreme difficulty and extreme responsibility of his task, I intended to try to impress it upon him still more; to tell him that under those conditions I put a heavier responsibility upon him than upon any other colored man in the country; that he was to be given an absolutely free hand in choosing his officers; and that on the other hand he would have to treat them absolutely mercilessly if they didn't come right up to the highest level. On the other hand, with the other colored regiment I should have had a colonel and a lieutenant-colonel and three majors who would have been white men. One of them, Hamilton Fish, is over there now.

He was offered promotion in another regiment; but he said no, he would stay with his sun-burned Yankees. (Laughter and applause.) He stayed accordingly.

Mr. Cobb has spoken to you as an eyewitness of what has been done by the colored troops across the seas. I am well prepared to believe it. In the very small war in which I served, which was a kind of pink tea affair compared to this, I was in a division, a small dismounted cavalry division, where in addition to my own regiment we had three white regular regiments and two colored regiments; and when we had gotten through the campaign my own men, who were probably two-thirds southerners and southwesterners, used to say "The Ninth and Tenth Cavalry are good enough to drink out of our canteens." (Laughter and applause.)

Terrible though this war has been, I think it has been also fraught with the greatest good for our national soul. We went to war, as Mr. Cobb has said, to maintain our own national self-respect. And, friends, it would have been dreadful if we hadn't gone in. Materially, because the fight was so even that I don't think it is boasting, I think it is a plain statement of fact, Mr. Cobb, that our going in turned the scale. Isn't that so? (Applause.) I think the Germans and their vassal allies would have been victorious if we hadn't gone in. And if they had been victorious and we had stayed out — soft, flabby, wealthy — they would have eaten us without saying grace. (Laughter and applause.) Well, thank Heaven! we went in, and our men on the other side, our sons and brothers on the other side, white men and black, white soldiers and colored soldiers,

have done such admirable work that every American can now walk with his head up and look the citizen of any other country in the world straight in the eyes. (Applause.) We have the satisfaction of knowing that we have played the decisive part. I am not saying this in any spirit of self-flattery. If any of you have heard me speak during the preceding four years, you know that I have not addressed the American people in a vein of undiluted eulogy. But without self-flattery we can say that it was our going in that turned the scale for freedom and against the most dangerous tyranny that the world has ever seen. We acted as genuine friends of liberty in so doing.

Now, after the war, friends, I think all of us in this country, white and black alike, have also got to set an example to the rest of the world in steering a straight course equally distant from kaiserism and bolshevism. (Applause.)

And, friends, I wish as an American to thank you, and as your fellow-American to congratulate you, upon the honor won and the services rendered by the colored troops on the other side; by the men, such as the soldier we have with us to-night who won the cross of war, the French war cross for gallantry in action; by the many others like him who acted with equal gallantry and who for one reason or another never attracted the attention of their superiors, and, well though they did, did not receive the outward and visible token to prove what they had done. I congratulate you on what all those men have done. I congratulate you on what the colored nurses at home have done and have been ready to do (Applause), and I express my very sin-

cere regret that some way was not found to put them on the other side at the front. I congratulate you upon it in the name of our country, and above all in the name of the colored people of our country. For in the end services of this kind have a cumulative effect in winning the confidence and the respect of your fellows of another color. And I hope — and I wish to use a stronger expression than “hope”; I expect — and I am going to do whatever small amount I can to bring about the realization of the expectation — I expect that as a result of this great war, intended to secure a greater justice internationally among the peoples of mankind, we shall apply at home the lessons that we have been learning and helping teach abroad (Applause); that we shall work sanely, not foolishly, but resolutely, toward securing a juster and fairer treatment in this country of colored people, basing that treatment upon the only safe rule to be followed in American life, of treating each individual accordingly as his conduct or her conduct requires you to treat them. (Applause.)

I don't ask for any man that he shall, because of his race, be given any privilege. All I ask is that in his ordinary civil and political rights, in his right to work, to enjoy life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness, that as regards these rights he be given the same treatment that we would give him if he was an equally good man of another color. (Applause.)

Now, friends, both the white and the black man in moments of exultation are apt to think that the millennium is pretty near; that the “sweet chariot” has swung so low that everybody can get upon it at once. I don't think that my colored

fellow-citizens are a bit worse than my white fellow-citizens as regards that particular aspiration! But mine is the ungrateful task of warning both that they must not expect too much. They must have their eyes on the stars but their feet on the ground. I have to warn my white fellow-citizens on this point when they say "Well now, at the end of this war we are going to have universal peace, and everybody will always hereafter love everybody else!" I wish you to remember that the strongest professional exponents of international love in public life to-day are Lenine and Trotsky; and when these professed internationalists got control of Russia they ruined Russia and betrayed the liberty-loving nations of mankind. I wish to help forward the cause of internationalism; and for that very reason I decline to indulge in dreams that might turn to nightmares. Now, in the same way, I will do everything I can to aid, to help bring about, to bring nearer, the day when justice, the square-deal, will be given as between black man and white. (Applause.) And yet I want to warn you that that is only going to come gradually; that there will be very much injustice; injustice that must not overmuch disappoint you; that must not cow you; and, above all, must not make you feel sullen and hopeless. And one thing I wish to say, not to you here, but to the colored men who live where the bulk of colored men do, in the south: always remember the lesson which I learned from Booker Washington: that in the long run the white man who can give most help to the colored man is the white man who lives next to him. And in consequence I have always felt it my duty, in or out of office, and I have

always tried — not always successfully, but I always tried — to work so that I could command the assistance and respect of the bulk of the white men who are decent and square, in what I attempted to do for the colored man who is decent and square. I say I did not always succeed. Sometimes I had most intricate rows with one side, and sometimes with the other — there were moments when I thought I had committed both in an offensive alliance against myself.

But at any rate such is the ideal I have had before me. It is the ideal all of us must have before us: to try never to be content unless we have gone forward; never to be content unless we are trying to make things better, but always to be taking into account just how far it is possible to press things forward so as not to invite a reaction that would make things worse than they were before. It is not an easy task; but it is a task that every one of us must set himself to perform. The prime thing for the white man to remember is that it is his business to treat the colored man, and even more the colored woman, squarely; to give him or her not only the proper treatment in material things, but also the respect to which every decent man or woman is entitled as a matter of right. (Applause.) And the prime thing for the colored man is to conduct himself so that the unjust suspicions of the white may not be given any foundation of justice so far as his colored neighbor is concerned. To each side I preach the doctrine of thinking more of its duties than of its rights. I don't mean that you shan't think of your rights. I want you to do so. But it is awfully easy, if you begin to dwell all the time on your rights, to find that

you suffer from an ingrowing sense of your own perfections and wrongs and that you forget what you owe to any one else. To the white man I never speak of the Negro's failings at all. When I speak to the white man I speak to him about his duty to give the colored man a square deal in industry, in self-respect, in matters like housing, in everything of the kind, and just so far as possible to aid him to preserve, as is said here "his dignity so that he shall live and work in an efficient, honest and dignified way." In other words, so that he or she shall keep and maintain his or her self-respect, the most valuable quality that any citizen can have. That's the advice that I give to the white man.

To the colored man I say, "Stand up for your rights of course, but be perfectly certain that the right-thinking white man understands what your point of view is and that he is given a full opportunity to know your rights so that he can join you in standing up for them. And set your faces like flint against the Negro criminal." And I ask that because of the very fact that too often the white man is guilty of the dreadful injustice of putting on the whole Negro race the responsibility for the Negro criminal, as he never dreams of doing in the case of the white race and the white criminal. But as colored men I wish to impress upon you to the limit of my power that the colored criminal is peculiarly an enemy of the colored race; because of the very fact that the white man and white woman who hear of him inevitably symbolize him as the race. They ought not to do it; but they do! And therefore the worst offender against the colored race is the colored criminal. He is the man who does more

to keep the Negro down than any white man can possibly do. And I ask you colored men to of all things hunt down, hunt out, the colored criminal of every type. Thereby you will render the greatest service to the colored race that can possibly be rendered.

Well, friends, you see I have suffered from my usual temptation to drop into a sermon. I didn't intend to preach it. I have come here simply to wish you well and to congratulate all colored men and women, and all their white fellow-Americans upon the gallantry and efficiency with which the colored men have behaved at the front, and the efficiency and wish to render service which has been shown by both the colored men and the colored women behind them in this country.