

*The BOOKER T. WASHINGTON Papers*

negro as to all races, by beginning at the bottom and gradually working up towards the highest civilization. My friends, by reason of ignorance, by reason of our freedom beginning at the top instead of at the bottom, the burden has been too heavy for many to carry; the opportunities have been too great. We have spent time and money in political conventions, making idle political speeches, that could have been better spent in becoming leading real estate dealers and leading carpenters and truck gardeners, and thus have laid an imperial foundation on which we could have stood and demanded our rights.

In conclusion, my friends, I make no selfish appeal; it is a plea to save yourselves. The negro can better afford to be wronged in this country than the white man can afford to wrong him. We are a patient, humble people; we can afford to work and wait. There is plenty for us to do away up in the atmosphere of patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and goodness. There the workers are not many and the field is not overcrowded. If others will be little, we can be great. If others would be mean, we can be good. If others can push us down, we can help push them up. If ever there has been a people in this world who have observed the Bible injunction, "If thy brother smite thee on one cheek, turn to him the other also," that people has been the American negro.

To right his wrong the Russian hurls his dynamite, the Frenchman applies the torch as in the French Revolution, the Indian flies to his tomahawk; but the negro must lie by, must be patient, must forgive his enemies, and depend for the righting of his wrong upon his midnight moans, upon his songs, upon his four-day prayers, and upon an inherent faith in the justice of his cause. If we may judge the future by the past, who will dare say that the negro's course is not the better one. Think of it, my friends; we went into slavery a piece of property and we came out American citizens; we went into slavery pagans, we came out Christians; we went into slavery without a language, we came out speaking the proud Anglo-Saxon tongue; we went into slavery with the slave-chains clanging about our wrists, we came out with the American ballot in our hands. Progress is a law of God and progress is going to be the negro's eternal guiding star in this fair land.

National Educational Association, *Journal of the Proceedings and Addresses of the Thirty-fifth Annual Meeting Held at Buffalo, N.Y., July 3-10, 1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1896), 208-17.