

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

The Work Before Us

IT IS eminently creditable to the sagacity, if not to the honesty, of the Democratic leaders that they prefer to limit discussion of the merits of their party, in the present canvass, strictly to the platform adopted in New York by their Fourth of July National Convention. For very obvious reasons, they are “dead” against dead issues. There is as much shrewdness as apparent resignation in their willingness to let “by-gones be by-gones.” In this prompt, business-like course there would be much to commend, if one did not see lurking behind it a very ugly fact which it is designed to conceal. In the effort to withdraw the war record of the Democratic party there is either a sense of its criminality or a conviction of its present odiousness. Their policy evidently is to attack, not to defend; and in this they are wise. They are smart men, and largely gifted with powers of utterance; but the task of defending the policy of their party during the war would leave time for little else, were they once to enter upon it. They therefore cast it aside altogether. They know that, like Lord Granby’s character, there are some things which can only pass without censure, as they pass without observation. No men more readily than they perceive the effect which time and events have wrought in the minds of men. Deeds which were once done with impunity, and even gloried in at the time of their perpetration, by a slight change in the varying current of events, assume an aspect too revolting for defense. It is now much easier to assail the Republican party for its awkward management of public affairs than to defend the efforts of Governor Seymour and his friends to resist the drafts and other necessary measures for the preservation of the Union. So far as the endeavor to divert attention from the position occupied by the Democratic party during the war may be taken as a confession, it is at least valuable to outsiders. It is always a decided gain to the cause of justice to have even an implied admission of guilt on the part of the culprit. Excellent, however, as confession is, it does very little good to anybody unless coupled with an honest purpose to forsake the evil way, and an earnest effort to reform.

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Of course, nothing of this sort is a part of the purpose of the Democratic leaders. No men know better than themselves that their party cannot afford to repent. A party without voters is among the most worthless of all worthless things. What the Democratic party now most of all wants is voters—members. These are to be had mainly from those classes of the American people who are proud of their contempt for humanity—who scout benevolence and brotherly kindness as the weakest nonsense. The party can only thrive where pride of race and narrow selfishness would appropriate to a class the rights which belong to the whole human family. To renounce this meanness would be to renounce its existence. Its mission is to keep alive all the malice which the Negro's loyalty and his limited freedom have kindled against him. This is the necessity of the party. The country is divided; and, when it is impossible for a party to receive support from one part, it must seek it in another. Abuse of the Negro is not, therefore, always to be taken as a matter of choice on the part of Democratic editors and speakers; but rather as a necessity of the party to which they belong.

How much the Democratic party might gain were it, merely with a view to its own strength, to endeavor to lead a new life is a speculation upon which I need not enter. The little effort made in that direction with Mr. Chase is thought to have done the party more harm than good. The party is strongest with those who stand no nonsense of this decent sort. They want no smooth-faced concessions to virtue. They want the genuine pungent article of the Negro, with two "*gg's*." Besides, nobody could well believe in it were the party to declare a change of heart and purpose. With a confessed trickster and falsifier as its standard-bearer (a man who, if the reports of his associates can be relied upon, secured his nomination by a course of cunning, duplicity, lying, treachery, and bribery unparalleled in the history of party politics), people would be slow to accept the professions of such a party.

But let us not be deceived nor diverted from the real work we have in hand. The contest to which all good and true men are summoned in the present canvass is no new one. It is, in fact but a continuation of the mighty struggle of a great nation to shake off an old and worn-out system of barbarism, with all its natural concomitants of evil. It is a part of our thirty

years' effort to place the country in harmony with the age, and to make her what she ought to be—a leader, and not a mere follower, in the pathway of civilization. Rebellion has been subdued, slavery abolished, and peace proclaimed; and yet our work is not done. The Democratic party has changed the whole face of affairs. The foe is the same, though we are to meet him on a different field and under different leaders. In the ranks of Seymour and Blair is the rebel army, without its arms. Let not the connection of the present with the past be ignored nor forgotten. We are face to face with the same old enemy of liberty and progress that has planted agony at a million hearthstones in our land. There has been no change in the character or in the general purpose of the Democratic party. It is for peace or for war, or against either, precisely as it can be made to serve the great privileged class at the South, to which it belongs. The party that annexed Texas; that began and prosecuted the inglorious war against a neighboring Republic, thus setting the bad example subsequently followed by France and Austria—the strong against the weak; that hunted down the humane Seminoles with bloodhounds, because they gave shelter to slaves running away from Georgia; that avowed its purpose to suppress freedom of speech and of the press in time of peace in the interest of slavery; that repealed the Missouri Compromise, and opened the blackened tide of bondage upon the virgin soil of Kansas; that, from the beginning to the end of the late war against slavery in arms, uniformly sided with the rebels and against the loyal North—is the same party from footsole to crown, unchanged and unchangeable. Its character is not better known to loyal men than to the defeated rebels. It is neither strange nor surprising that the latter flock to it as the last resort of their Lost Cause.

We have had many issues with the slave power during the past thirty years, but we have never had but one *cause*; and the same is true of the slave power. Indeed, the same is always true in all countries and in all times. The world has always been in some way divided essentially as parties are now divided in our country. Men change; principles are eternal. Holland—whether pleading her ancient charters; asking the removal of oppressive, dissolute, mercenary Spanish troops from her borders; opposing the establishment of new bishoprics; humbly appealing for

the removal of the gifted but cruel and treacherous Cardinal Granville; or boldly resisting that grand aggregation of human horrors, the Inquisition—was all the while serving only one cause. The sacred liberty of conscience; the right of a man to form his own opinions upon all matters of religion—this was the cause of freedom then. While popery, on the other side, whether dealing in fair words or fierce blows, whether entangling its victims in cunningly-devised sophistries or torturing them with cord and steel, rack and fire, had but the same old cause—religious slavery. Think as we command, or die! As in our day men claim the right to dispose of the bodies of men, so they of Mother Church claimed the right to dispose of both soul and body. As stood the sturdy old Hollanders three centuries ago, so we stand to-day. Times change and new issues arise; men appear and disappear; but evermore the same old principles of good and evil, right and wrong, liberty and slavery, summon their respective votaries to the contest. The slaveholding rebels, struck down by Gen. Grant as by a thunderbolt, scarcely recover from the terrific shock before they stagger off to the Democratic party. There they go—stricken generals of the rebel army—Henry A. Wise and Wade Hampton, Toombs and Cobb, Forrest and Beauregard. The evil spirits cast out of the man among the tombs take refuge in the herd of swine. We shall see with what consequences to the poor animals in November, and to themselves.

The policy, but not the purpose, of the rebels is changed. Names are nothing. It matters little to them by what name the thing for which they strive is called; and equally indifferent are they as to the means they employ. Success is the main consideration.

Secession and rebellion were undertaken for one purpose, and one purpose alone—and that was to secure to the slaveholding class permanent control over the black laborers of the South. It was to give to white capital a firmer hold and a tighter grip upon the throat of the Negro. They believed in the Divine appointment of slavery. What they believed then they believe now; what they meant then they mean now. Here and there in the rebel states there may be found a man who has honestly renounced his ancient faith, and accepted the true doctrine of liberty and the great principle of *Equal Rights*; but the mass of Southern

white men and women are in heart and purpose the same as when they confronted the free North on the battle-field. You may send General Lee a million of dollars for his rebel college; but, while Arlington Heights is the resting-place of our loyal dead, you will get no sign of a hearty renunciation of the malign purpose for which he drew his rebel sword.

The South to-day is a field of blood. Murder runs riot in Texas, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana. Assassination has taken the place of insurrection. Armed bands of rebels stalk abroad at midnight with blackened faces, and thus disguised go forth to shoot, stab, and murder their loyal neighbors.

It is impossible to exaggerate the solemn character of the crisis. While Andrew Johnson remains in the presidential chair, and the Democratic party, with Seymour and Blair, are in the field, feeding the rebel imagination with a prospect of regaining through politics what they lost by the sword, the South must continue the scene of war she is. The work to which every loyal man and woman in the country is now called is to employ every possible honorable means, between now and November, to defeat and scatter the Democratic party. Our one work now is to elect Grant and Colfax—and that by a vote so pronounced and overwhelming as to extinguish every ray of hope to the rebel cause.

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