

Transcribed Excerpt from "Will You Ever Give the Colored Race A Show," 1898

The Negro in the Field of Labor.

The battle cry of 1896 was to elect McKinley for president of the United States and prosperity would follow as the mills and factories would be thrown open and give the unemployed working man something to do. The negro of America is a working man but what benefit does the negro receive by the mills and factories being open when he is not allowed to work in them. We are denied the privilege of working almost everywhere, and what positions we can secure the wages we receive are so small we can hardly support our families. We are not given to strikes and we do not cause this country any trouble, neither do we prevent others from working, for the negroes of America are among its loyal citizens. We were told when we were given our liberty to educate ourselves and our children and when we had done so we would be on an equal footing with the white man from a business standpoint, and we have done what we were told to do. In fact we have advanced farther in the last thirty-three years than any other race of people on earth; for we have risen from the cotton fields to the United States Senate in that length of time. But now we are retrograding instead of advancing. And why? Because our so-called republican friends are turning their backs on us by teaching the foreigners that come to this country to keep the negro down, and all the hatred engendered the foreigner has against the negro in America is fostered and encouraged by you. For the foreigner as a rule treats every person with respect be they black or white. This I know to be a fact for I have traveled very extensively throughout the world. You must admit that the republicans, individually and collectively, own and control the majority of the mills and factories in this country and you say that you are the negro's friend. If so why in the name of God and humanity don't you give us some employment. It is useless to try and make us believe that it is the laboring class of people that prevent us from working, for we are not the ignorant negroes now that we were thirty five years ago. Education has improved us and we can see where the real blame lies. You are the ones that are to blame for our mistreatment. If labor was the ruling capitol then the laboring people would be to blame. But capitol rules this country and our so-called republican friends are the capitalists. You are the ones that closed up the majority of your mills and factories in 1896 during our national campaign and threw thousands of working men out of employment and told them that the democratic administration was causing panic and hard times in order to make the masses of the people get in line and vote for McKinley. Now if you are our friend as you want us to believe, here is a way to prove it. Whenever a colored man or woman applies for a position at your place of business, don't turn them away with these words: "We don't employ any colored help." but give them a situation, for we are qualified to fill any position now; and if the white laborer refuses to work with us, then use the same method on the laboring class of people for the negro that you did to elect McKinley to the presidential chair. Surely if you are any kind of a friend at all to us you will do as much for 10,000,000 negroes as you did for one white man, especially after we have helped to save the country from defeat and the flag from being trailed in the dust as often as we have. The 9th and 10th cavalry and the 24th and 25th infantry, all colored except the officers, fought so noble and fast in the battle of San Juan Hill that Spain did not have time to ask you to take the negroes out of the field before they had won the victory; but had she asked, and you had complied with her wishes, where would Roosevelt and his rough riders and the 71st New York regiments have been today? It would have

been another Custer massacre. They would all be sleeping with the rest of the brave. They all owe their lives to those black forgotten heroes. The negro of America associates with the best class of white people that there is in this country in the capacity of a sleeping car porter, and you trust your wives, sons and daughters in our care day after day year in and year out with the words "Porter take good care of my family," and you never hear of any of your ladies being insulted. Now if we are faithful to duty to the aristocracy of the world in the capacity of porters why is it, when fitness, competency and worth presents itself, we are still denied the opportunity of filling stations far removed and above that of a porter? Chauncey M. Depew was a water boy at one time for section hands on a railroad and today he is a railroad king. And why? Because as soon as he was capable of filling a better position he was promoted. But will you promote a colored boy? No. It matters not how much education he has you will always keep him with a mop or broom in his hand. You never give him a chance to better his condition. If we were looking for or wanted social equality and you would draw the color line, we would have no complaint to make. But we are not seeking social equality, but what we want is work so we can support our families. The average position that a colored man can secure is that of a janitor or a waiter, and you are depriving us of that every day. About two years ago the Wagner Palace Car Co. discharged all of their colored waiters of the dining cars on the Lake Shore R.R. and put on white waiters, and they have promoted three of their white waiters to conductors since then. But they never would promote any of their colored waiters. There are a great many cases that I could recall where colored men have been and are at the present time working in your stores and factories as porter, for five, ten, yes and twenty years, and you will not promote them. And it is not because they are not capable of filling a better position but it is because of cast of color. Booker T. Washington is straining his energy and doing everything that is in his power for the advancement of the negro in his training and industrial schools in the south learning our young men and women all kinds of trades so they will be able to support themselves and make them good, law abiding citizens, and our so-called republican friends stand silently by and see every avenue of labor closed against us. You are gradually driving us to the wall and our annihilation and extermination is more sure than that of the Indian, for we are losing ground in the field of labor everywhere. This contamination has even spread throughout the south. Only recently in Florida, at a saw mill where negroes have been employed for at least 25 years, a race war was inaugurated to drive the negroes out in order that only white men should be employed. And in Alabama an organization has been affected among the white men known as the White Shield, and the cardinal principles of the constitution are that no negro should be allowed to work in any position that a white man or woman can fill. Justice cries for mercy in this case from the deliverance of such a great evil, and the only remedy applicable is for those who are at the head of corporations to suppress this great and growing evil and to "Give the Colored Race a Show." Yours Respectfully,

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