

# "Lynching Black People Because They Are Black" by Frederick Douglass, April 1894

The Christian Educator

April 1894

*Lynching Black People Because They Are Black*

## Increasing Savagery

The presence of eight millions of people in any section of this country constituting an aggrieved class, smarting under terrible wrongs, denied the exercise of the commonest rights of humanity, and regarded by the ruling class in that section as outside of the Government, outside of the law, and outside of society, having nothing in common with the people with whom they live, the sport of mob violence and murder, is not only a disgrace and scandal to that particular section, but a menace to the peace and security of the people of the whole country.

I have waited patiently, but anxiously, to see the end of the epidemic of mob law and persecution now prevailing at the South. But the indications are not hopeful. Great and terrible as have been its ravages in the past, it now seems to be increasing, not only in the number of its victims, but in its frantic rage and savage extravagance. Lawless vengeance is beginning to be visited upon white men as well as black. Our newspapers are daily disfigured by its ghastly horrors. It is no longer local, but national; no longer confined to the South, but has invaded the North. The contagion is spreading, extending, and overleaping geographical lines and State boundaries, and if permitted to go on, it threatens to destroy all respect for law and order, not only in the South, but in all parts of our country, North as well as South. For certain it is that crime allowed to go on unresisted and unarrested will breed crime. When the poison of anarchy is once in the air, like the pestilence that walketh in the darkness, the winds of heaven will take it up and favor its diffusion. Though it may strike down the weak to-day, it will strike down the strong to-morrow.

Not a breeze comes to us now from the late rebellious States that is not tainted and freighted with Negro blood. In its thirst for blood and its rage for vengeance, the mob has blindly, boldly, and defiantly supplanted sheriffs, constables, and police. It has assumed all the functions of civil authority. It laughs at legal processes, courts, and juries, and its red-handed murderers range abroad unchecked and unchallenged by law or by public opinion. Prison walls and iron bars are no protection to the innocent or guilty, if the mob is in pursuit of Negroes accused of crime. Jail-doors are battered down in the presence of unresisting jailers, and the accused, awaiting trial in the courts of law, are dragged out and hanged, shot, stabbed, or burned to death, as the blind and irresponsible mob may elect.

## Crime Against Criminals

We claim to be a Christian country and a highly civilized Nation, yet I fearlessly affirm that there is nothing in the history of savages to surpass the blood-chilling horrors and fiendish excesses perpetrated against the colored people by the so-called enlightened and Christian people of the South. It is commonly thought that only the lowest and most disgusting birds and beasts, such as buzzards, vultures, and hyenas, will gloat over and prey upon dead bodies; but the Southern mob, in its rage, feeds in vengeance by shooting, stabbing, and burning when their victims are dead.

Now, the special charge against the Negro by which this ferocity is justified, and by which mob law is

defended by good men North and South, is alleged to be assaults by Negroes upon white women. This charge once fairly stated, no matter by whom or in what manner, whether well or ill founded, whether true or false, is certain to subject the accused to immediate death. It is nothing that in the case there may be a mistake as to identity. It is nothing that the victim pleads "not guilty." It is nothing that he only asks for time to establish his innocence. It is nothing that the accused is of fair reputation, and his accuser is of an abandoned character. It is nothing that the majesty of the law is defied and insulted. No time is allowed for defense or explanation; he is bound with cords, hurried off, amid the frantic yells and cursing of the mob, to the scaffold, and under its shadow he is tortured till, by pain or promises, he is made to think he can possibly gain time, or save his life by confession, and then, whether innocent or guilty, he is shot, hanged, stabbed, or burned to death amid the wild shouts of the mob. When the will of the mob has been accomplished, when its thirst for blood has been quenched, when its victim is speechless, silent, and dead, his mobocratic accusers and murderers, of course, have the ear of the world all to themselves, and the world generally approves their verdict.

### **The "Better Classes" in the South**

Such, then, is the state of Southern civilization in its relation to the colored citizens of that section; and though the picture is dark and terrible, I venture to affirm that no man North or South can deny the essential truth of the picture.

Now, it is important to know how this state of affairs is viewed by the better classes of the Southern States. I will tell you; and I venture to say if our hearts were not already hardened by familiarity with such crimes against the Negro, we should be shocked and astonished by the attitude of these so-called better classes of the Southern people and their lawmakers. With a few noble exceptions, the upper classes of the South are in full sympathy with the mob and its deeds. There are few earnest words uttered against the mob or its deeds. Press, platform, and pulpit are either generally silent, or they openly apologize for the mob. The mobocratic murderers are not only permitted to go free, untried and unpunished, but are lauded and applauded as honorable men and good citizens, the guardians of Southern women. If lynch law is in any case condemned, it is only condemned in one breath, and excused in another.

The great trouble with the Negro in the South is, that all presumptions are against him. A white man has but to blacken his face, and commit a crime to have some Negro lynched in his stead. An abandoned woman has only to start the cry that she has been insulted by a black man, to have him arrested and summarily murdered by the mob. Frightened and tortured by his captors, confused into telling crooked stories about his whereabouts at the time when the alleged crime was committed, and the death penalty is at once inflicted, though his story may be but the incoherency of ignorance or distractions caused by terror.

Now, in confirmation of what I have said of the better classes of the South, I have before me the utterances of some of the best people of that section, and also the testimony of one from the North, a lady, from whom, considering her antecedents, we should have expected a more considerate, just, and humane utterance.

### **Amazing Utterances**

In a late number of the Forum, Bishop Haygood, author of "Our Brother in Black," says that "the most alarming fact is, that execution by lynching has ceased to surprise us. The burning of a human being for any crime, it is thought, is a horror that does not occur outside of the Southern States of the American Union, yet unless assaults by Negroes come to an end, there will most probably be still further displays of vengeance that will shock the world, and men who are just will consider the provocation."

In an open letter addressed to me by Ex-Governor Chamberlain, of South Carolina, and published in the Charleston News and Courier, a letter which I have but lately seen, in reply to an article of mine on the subject, published in the North American Review, the ex-governor says: "Your denunciation of the South on this point is directed exclusively, or nearly so, against the application of lynch law for the punishment

of one crime, or one sort of crime. The existence, I suppose, I might say, the prevalence of this crime at the South is undeniable. But I read your [my] article in vain for any special denunciation of the crime itself. As you say, your people are lynched, tortured, and burned for assault on white women. As you value your own good fame and safety as a race, stamp out the infamous crime." He further says, the way to stop lynching is to stamp out the crime.

And now comes the sweet voice of a Northern woman, of Southern principles, in the same tone and the same accusation--the good Miss Frances Willard, of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. She says in a letter now before me: "I pity the Southerner. The problem on their hands is immeasurable. The colored race," she says, "multiplies like the locusts of Egypt. The safety of woman, of childhood, of the home, is menaced in a thousand localities at this moment, so that men dare not go beyond the sight of their own roof-tree." Such, then, is the crushing indictment drawn up against the Southern Negroes--drawn up, too, by persons who are perhaps the fairest and most humane of the Negro's accusers. But even they paint him as a moral monster, ferociously invading the sacred rights of women and endangering the homes of the whites.

### **Atrocious Crime Alleged**

The crime they allege against the Negro is the most revolting which men can commit. It is a crime that awakens the intensest abhorrence and invites mankind to kill the criminal on sight. This charge, thus brought against the Negro, and as constantly reiterated by his enemies, is not merely against the individual culprit, as would be in the case with an individual culprit of any other race, but it is in a large measure a charge against the colored race as such. It throws over every colored man a mantle of odium, and sets upon him a mark for popular hate more distressing than the mark set upon the first murderer. It points him out as an object of suspicion and avoidance. Now, it is in this form that you and I, and all of us, are required to meet it and refute it, if that can be done. In the opinion of some of us it is thought that it were well to say nothing about it; that the least said about it the better. In this opinion I do not concur. Taking this charge in the broad and comprehensive sense in which it is presented, and as now stated, I feel that it ought to be met, and, as a colored man, I am grateful for the opportunity now afforded me to meet it. For I believe it can be met, and successfully met. I am of opinion that a people too spiritless to defend themselves are not worth defending.

Without boasting, on this broad issue, as now presented, I am ready to confront Ex-Governor Chamberlain, Bishop Fitzgerald, Bishop Haygood, and Miss Frances Willard, and all others, singly or all together, without any doubt of the result.

But I want to be understood at the outset. I do not pretend that Negroes are saints or angels. I do not deny that they are capable of committing the crime imputed to them, but I utterly deny that they are any more addicted to the commission of that crime than is true of any other variety of the human family. In entering upon my argument, I may be allowed to say that I appear not as the defender or any man guilty of this atrocious crime, but as the defender of the colored people as a class.

### **Humane and Christian Defense**

In answer to the terrible indictment thus read, and speaking for the colored people as a class, I, in their stead, here and now plead not guilty, and shall submit my case with confidence of acquittal by good men and women North and South.

It is the misfortune of the colored people in this country that the sins of the few are visited upon the many; and I am here to speak for the many, whose reputation is put in peril by the sweeping charge in question. With General Grant, and every other honest man, my motto is: Let no guilty man escape." But while I say this, I also say, Let no innocent man be condemned and killed by the mob, or crushed under the weight of a charge of which he is not guilty.

You will readily see that the cause I have undertaken to support is not to be maintained by any mere confident assertions or general denials. If I had no better ground to stand upon than this, I would leave the field of controversy and give up the colored man's cause at once to his able accusers. I am aware, however, that I am here to do in some measure what the masters of logic say can not be done--prove a negative.

Of course I shall not be able to succeed in doing the impossible, but this one thing I can and will do. I can and will show that there are sound reasons for doubting and denying this horrible and hell-black charge of rape as the peculiar crime of the colored people of the South. My doubt and denial are based upon two fundamental and invincible grounds.

### **The Natural Presumptive Evidence**

The first is the well-established and well-tested character of the Negro on the very point upon which he is now violently and persistently accused. The second ground for my doubt and denial is based upon what I know of the character and antecedents of the men and women who bring this charge against him. I undertake to say that the strength of this position will become more manifest as I proceed with my argument.

At the outset I deny that a fierce and frenzied mob is, or ought to be deemed, a competent witness against any man accused of any crime whatever. The ease with which a mob can be collected and the slight causes by which it may be set in motion, and the elements of which it is composed, deprive its testimony of the qualities that should inspire confidence and command belief. It is moved by impulses utterly unfavorable to an impartial statement of the truth. At the outset, therefore, I challenge the credibility of the mob; and as the mob is the main witness in the case against the Negro, I appeal to the common sense of mankind in support of my challenge. It is the mob that brings this charge, and it is the mob that arraigns, condemns, and executes, and it is the mob that the country has accepted as its witness.

Again, I impeach and discredit the veracity of Southern men generally, whether mobocrats or otherwise, who now openly and deliberately nullify and violate the provisions of the Constitution of their country, a Constitution which they have solemnly sworn to support and execute. I apply to them the legal maxim, "False in one, false in all."

Again, I arraign the Negro's accuser on another ground. I have no confidence in the truthfulness of men who justify themselves in cheating the Negro out of his Constitutional right to vote. The men who, either by false returns or by taking advantage of his illiteracy, or surrounding the ballot-box with obstacles and sinuosities intended to bewilder him and defeat his rightful exercise of the elective franchise, are men who are not to be believed on oath. That this is done in the Southern States is not only admitted, but openly defended and justified by so-called honorable men inside and outside of Congress.

### **Southern Perjury vs. Indubitable Fidelity**

Just this kind of fraud in the South is notorious. I have met it face to face. It was boldly defended and advocated a few weeks ago in a solemn paper by Professor Weeks, a learned North Carolinian, in my hearing. His paper was one of the able papers read before one of the World's Auxiliary Congresses at Chicago.

Now, men who openly defraud the Negro by all manner of artifice, and boast of it in the face of the world's civilization, as was done at Chicago, I affirm that they are not to be depended upon for truth in any case whatever where the rights of the Negro are involved. Their testimony in the case of any other people than the Negro, against whom they should thus commit fraud, would be instantly and utterly discredited; and why not the same in this case? Every honest man will see that this point is well taken, and I defy any argument that would drive me from this just contention. It has for its support common sense, common justice, common honesty, and the best sentiment of mankind, and has nothing to

oppose it but a vulgar, popular prejudice against the colored people of our country, which prejudice strikes men with moral blindness and renders them incapable of seeing any distinction between right and wrong.

But I come to a strong position. I rest my conclusion not merely upon general principles, but upon well-known facts. I reject the charge brought against the Negro as a class, because all through the late War, while the slave-masters of the South were absent from their homes in the field of rebellion, with bullets in their pockets, treason in their hearts, broad blades in their bloodstained hands, seeking the life of the nation, with the vile purpose of perpetuating the enslavement of the Negro, their wives, their daughters, their sisters, and their mothers were left in the absolute custody of these same Negroes; and during all those long four years of terrible conflict, when the Negro had every opportunity to commit the abominable crime now alleged against him, there was never a single instance of such crime reported or charged against him. He was never accused of assault, insult, or an attempt to commit an assault upon any white woman in the whole South. A fact like this, although negative, speaks volumes, and ought to have some weight with the American people.

### **Previous Good Character Must Not Signify**

Then, again, on general principles, I do not believe the charge because it implies an improbable, if not an impossible, change in the mental and moral character and composition of the Negro. It implies a change wholly inconsistent with well-known facts of human nature. It is a contradiction to well-known human experience. History does not present an example of such a transformation in the character of any class of men so extreme, so unnatural, and so complete as is implied in this charge. The change is too great, and the period too brief. Instances may be cited where men fall like stars from heaven; but such is not the usual experience. Decline in the moral character of a people is not sudden, but gradual. The downward steps are marked at first by degrees and by increasing momentum from bad to worse. Time is an element in such changes, and I contend that the Negroes of the South have not had time to experience this great change and reach this lower depth of infamy. On the contrary, in point of fact, they have been, and still are, improving and ascending to higher levels of moral and social worth.

Again, I do not believe it and utterly deny it, because those who bring the charge do not, and dare not, give the Negro a chance to be heard in his own defense. He is not allowed to vindicate his own character, or to criminate the character and motives of his accusers. Even the mobocrats themselves admit that it would be fatal to their purpose to have the character of his accusers brought into court. They pretend to a delicate regard for the feelings of the parties assaulted, and therefore object to grieving a fair trial to the accused. The excused in this case is contemptible. It is not only mock modesty, but mob modesty. Men who can collect hundreds and thousands, if we may believe them, and can spread before them in the tempest and whirlwind of vulgar passion the most disgusting details of crime, with the names of women with the alleged offense, should not be allowed to shelter themselves under any pretense of modesty. Such a pretense is absurd and shameless. Who does not know that the modesty of womanhood is always an object for protection in a court of law? Who does not know that a lawless mob, composed in part of the basest of men, can have no such respect for the modesty of women as a court of law? No woman need be ashamed in a court of law to confront one who has insulted or assaulted her. Besides innocence does not hesitate to come to the rescue of justice.

### **Courts Evaded Because Negroes Innocent**

Again, I do not believe it, and deny it, because if the evidence were deemed sufficient to bring the accused to the scaffold through the action of an impartial jury, there could be, and would be no objection to having the alleged offender tried in conformity to due process of law.

Any pretense that a guilty Negro, especially one guilty of the crime now charge, would in any case be permitted to escape condign punishment is an insult to common sense. Nobody believes, or can believe, such a thing as escape possible in a country like the South. Where public opinion, the laws, the courts, the juries, and the advocates are all known to be against him. He could hardly escape if innocent. I repeat,

therefore, I do not believe it, because I know, and you know, that a passionate and violent mob bent upon taking life, from the nature of the case, is not a more competent and trustworthy body to determine the guilt or innocence of a Negro accused in such a case than is a court of law. I would not, and you would not, convict a dog on such testimony.

But I come to another fact, and an all-important fact, bearing upon this case. You will remember that during all the first years of reconstruction, and long after the war, when the Southern press and people found it necessary to invent, adopt, and propagate almost every species of falsehood to create sympathy for themselves, and to formulate an excuse for gratifying their brutal instincts, there was never a charge then made against a Negro involving an assault upon any white woman or upon any little white child. During all this time the white woman and children were absolutely safe. During all this time there was no call for Miss Willard's pity, or Bishop Haygood's defense of burning Negroes to death.

### **New Charge Trumped Up**

You will remember, also, that during this time the justification for the murder of Negroes was said to be Negro conspiracies, insurrections, schemes to murder all of the white people, to burn the town, and commit violence generally. These were the excuses then depended upon; but never a word was then said or whispered about Negro outrages upon white women and children. So far as the history of that time is concerned, white women and children were absolutely safe, and husbands and fathers could leave home without the slightest anxiety on account of their families.

But when events proved that no such conspiracies, no such insurrections as they were then pretended to exist, and were paraded before the world in glaring head-lines, had never existed, or even meditated; when these excuses have run their course and served their wicked purpose; when the huts of Negroes had been searched, and searched in vain, for guns and ammunition to prove these charges, and no such evidence was found; when there was no way to open there after to prove these charges against the Negro, and no way to make the North believe in these excuses for murder, they did not even bring forward the present allegation against the Negro. They, however, went on harassing and killing just the same. But this time they based the right thus to kill on the ground that it was necessary to check the domination and supremacy of the Negro, and to secure the absolute rule of the Anglo-Saxon race.

It is important to notice that there has been three distinct periods of persecution of Negroes in the south, and three distinct sets of excuses for persecution. They have come along precisely in the order in which they were most needed. First you remember it was insurrection. When that was worn out, Negro supremacy became the excuse. When that is worn out, now it is assault upon defenseless women. I undertake to say that this order and periodicity is significant, and means something, and should not be overlooked. And now that Negro supremacy and Negro persecutions, there has come in due course this heart-rending cry about that while women and little white children of the South.

### **Evident Explanation**

Now, I ask what is the rational explanation of this singular omission of discharge in the two periods preceding the present? Why was not the charge made at the time as now? The Negro was the same then as to-day. Temptations to wrong doing were the same then as to-day. White women and children were the same as to-day. Why, then, was not this dreadful charge brought forward against the Negro in war times, and why was it not brought forward in reconstruction times?

I will tell you; or you, yourselves, have already answered the question. The only rational answer is, that there is no foundation for such a charge, or that the charge itself was either not thought of or was not deemed necessary to excuse the lawless violence with which the Negro was then persecuted and killed. The old charges already enumerated were deemed all-sufficient. This new charge has now swallowed up all the old ones, and the reason is obvious.

Things have changed since then; Old excuses were not available, and the Negroes accusers have found it necessary to change with them. The old charges are no longer valid. Upon them the good opinion of the North end of mankind can not be secured. Honest men no longer believe in the worn out stories of interaction. They no longer believe that there is just ground to apprehend Negro supremacy. Time and events have swept away these old refuges of lies. They did their work in their day, and did it with terrible energy and effect; but they are now cast aside as useless. The altered times and circumstances have made necessary a sterner, stronger, and more effective justification of southern barbarism; and hence, according to my theory, we now have to look into the face of a more shocking and blasting charge than either Negro supremacy or insurrection, or that of murder itself.

This new charge has come at the call of the new conditions, and nothing could have been hit upon better calculated to accomplish its purpose. It clouds the character of the Negro with a crime of the most revolting, and it is fitted to drive from him all sympathy, and all fair play, and all mercy. It is a crime that places him outside of the pale of the law, and settles upon his shoulders a mantle of wrath and fire that blisters and burns into his very soul.

### **To Blast and Ruin Character**

It is for this purpose, as I believe, that this new charge," thought of in the times two which I have referred, has been largely invented, if not entirely trumped up. It is for this purpose that it has been constantly reiterated and adopted. It was to blast and ruin the Negro's character as a man and a citizen.

I need not tell you how thoroughly it has already done it's wonted work. You may feel it's malign influence in the fairy air. You may read it in the faces of men. It has cooled your friends. It has heated our enemies, and arrested in some measure the efforts that good men were wont to make for the colored man's improvement and elevation. It has deceived our friends at the North and many good friends at the South; for nearly all have in some measure accepted the charge as true. It's perpetual reiteration in our newspapers and magazines has led men and women to regard us with averted eyes, increasing hate, and dark suspicion.

Some of the Southern papers have denounced me for my unbelief in their new departure; but I repeat I do not believe it, and firmly deny it. I reject it because I see in it evidence of an invention, called into being by a well-defined motive, a motive sufficient to stamp it as gross expedient to justify murder assault upon a long-enslaved and hence a hated people.

I do not believe it, because it bears on its face the marks of being a makeshift for a malignant purpose. I reject it, not only because it was sprung upon the country simultaneously with well-known efforts now being industriously made to degrade the Negro by legislative enactments, and by repealing all laws for the protection of the ballot, and by drawing the color line in all railroad cars and stations in all other public places in the south; but because I see it as a means of paving the way for our entire disfranchisement.

### **It Is Color Then, Not Crime**

Again, I do not believe it, and deny it, because the charge is not so much against the crime itself, as against the color of the man alleged to be guilty of it. Slavery itself, you will remember, was a system of legalized outrage upon the black women of the South, and no white man was ever shot, burned, or hang out for availing himself of the power that slavery gave him at this point.

Upon these grounds, then - grounds which I believe to be solid and immovable - I dare here, and now in the Capital of the Nation, my home, and in the presence of Congress, to reject it, and ask you, my reader, and all just men, to reject this horrible charge so frequently made and constructed against the Negro as a class.

To sum up my argument on this lynching business: It Remains to be said that I have shown that the Negro's accusers in this case have violated their oaths, and have cheated the Negro out of his vote; that they have robbed and defrauded the Negro systematically and persistently, and have boasted of it. I have shown that when the Negro had every opportunity to commit the crime now charged against him, he has never been accused of it by his bitterest enemies. I have shown that during all these years of reconstruction, when he was being murdered at Hamburg, Yazoo, New Orleans, Copiah, and elsewhere, he was never accused of the crime now charged against him. I have shown that, in the nature of things, no such change in the character and composition of a people as this charge implies could have taken place in the limited period allowed for it. I have shown that those who accuse him dare not confront him in a court of law, and have their witnesses subjected to proper legal inquiry. And in showing all this, and more, I have shown that they who charge him with this foul crime may be justly doubted and deemed unworthy of belief.

### **Human and Inhuman Nature**

But I shall be told by many of my Northern friends that my argument, though plausible, is not conclusive. It will be said that the charges against the Negro are specific and positive, and that there must be some foundation for them, because, as they all allege, men in their normal condition do not shoot and hang their fellow man who are guiltless of crime. Well! This assumption is very just, very charitable. I only ask something like the same justice and charity could be shown to the Negro as well as to the mob. It is credible to the justice and humanity of the good people of the North by whom it is entertained. They rightly assume that men do not shoot and hang their fellow man without crime. But the vice of their argument is in their assumption that the lynchers are like other men. The answer to that argument is, what may be truly predicated of human nature under one condition is not what may be true of human nature under another. Uncorrupted human nature may shudder at the commission of such crimes of those of which the southern mob is guilty.

But human nature uncorrupted is one thing, and human nature corrupted and perverted by long abuse of a responsible power is quite another and different thing. No man can reason correctly on this question who reasons on the assumption that the lynchers are like ordinary men.

We are not, in this case, dealing with men in their natural condition, but with men brought up in the exercise of arbitrary power. We are dealing with men whose ideas, habits, and customs are entirely different from those of ordinary men. It is, therefore, quite gratuitous to assume that the principles that apply to other men apply to the Southern murderers of the Negro, and just here is the mistake of the Northern people. They do not see that the rules resting upon justice and benevolence of human nature do not apply to mobocrats or to those who were educated in the habits and customs of a slaveholding community. What these habits are I have a right to know, both in theory and in practice.

### **The Lynchers and the Lynched**

I repeat: the mistake made by those who, on this ground, object to my theory of the charge against the Negro is, that they overlook the natural effect in influence of the life, education, and habits of the lynchers. We must remember that these people have not now, and have never had, any such respect for human life as is coming to other men. They have had among them for centuries a peculiar institution, and that particular institution has stamped them as a particular people. They were not before the War, they were not during the War, and have not been since the War, in their spirit or in their civilization, a people in common with the people of the North. I will not here harrow up your feelings by detailing their treatment of Northern prisoners during the war. Their institutions have taught no respect for human life, and especially the life of the Negro. It has, in fact, taught them absolute contempt for life. The sacredness of life which ordinary men feel does not touch them anywhere. A dead Negro is with them a common jest.

They care no more for a Negro's right to live than they care for his rights to liberty or his rights to the ballot. Chief-Justice Taney told the exact truth about these people when he said: "They did not consider



that the black man had any rights which the white man were bound to respect." No man of the South ever called in question that statement, and they never will. They should always shoot, stab, and burn the Negro without any such remorse or shame as other men would feel after committing such a crime. Any Southern man who is honest and is frank enough to talk on the subject will tell you that he has no such idea as we have of the sacredness of human life, and especially, as I have said, of the life of the Negro. Hence it is absurd to meet my argument with the facts predicated of our common human nature.

### **Let Justice Be Done Though the Heavens Fall**

I know I shall be charged with apologizing for criminals. Ex-Governor Chamberlain has already virtually done as much. But there is no foundation for any charge. I affirm that neither I nor any other colored man of like standing with myself, has ever raised a finger or uttered a word in defense of anyone really guilty of the dreadful crime now and in question.

But what have I contend for, and what every honest man, black or white, should content for, is, that when any man is accused of this or any other crime, of whatever name, nature, or extent, he shall have the benefit of a legal investigation; that he shall be confronted by his accusers; and that he show, through proper counsel, be able to question his accusers in open court and open daylight, so that his guilt or his innocence maybe duly approved and established.

If this is to make me liable to the charge of apologizing for crime, I am not ashamed to be so charged. I dare to contend for the colored people of the United States that they are law abiding people; and I dare to insist upon it that they, or any man, black or white, accused of a crime, shall have a fair trial before he is punished.