

## Primacy of "Condition": The Moral Suasion Debate among Afro-Americans in the 1830s

(はじめに「経済状態」ありき —1830年代に  
おけるアフリカ系アメリカ人の間での  
道義的説得をめぐる論争)

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**SUMMARY IN JAPANESE:** 1830年代から40年代の大半にわたり奴隷制廃止運動において支配的であった道義的説得のイデオロギーは、奴隷制や人種差別を道徳の問題としてとらえる考え方を擁護するものであった。人種統合を目指すこの楽観的なイデオロギーは、儉約、勤勉、節制、禁酒などの理想的な徳を養うことでアフリカ系アメリカ人が被っている不正や不公平をなくしていこうというものであった。アフリカ系アメリカ人が奴隷として扱われ、差別をうけ、平等の権利を認められていないのは、彼らが道徳的に劣っていて、しかも物質的貧しい状態に置かれているせいであるという考え方がその根底にあった。黒人達の徳性を高め、その経済状態を改善していくことは、白人の道徳心に訴えかけることで好意的に受けとめられるであろう。その結果、黒人に自由と平等を与えるように白人達を説得することができると考えたのである。この道義的説得を支持する黒人達は、白人の奴隷制廃止論者たちと協力していくために、暴力的で過激な手段や分離主義の方策とはらず、人種や人種に基づく偏見を考慮することも重要ではないと考えた。黒人達がこの道義的説得という方策をとる決断を下すまでの道のりはけっしてやさしいものではなかった。「経済状態」が差別を生む原因だとするグループと人種偏見が問題だとするグループの間でしばしば激しい論争が行なわれた。その結果、「経済状態」を支持する立場が優勢に立ち、1840年代の終わりになるまで黒人達は道義的説得を試みることになった。

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Moral suasion, and the abolitionist movement which inspired and propelled it for about a decade, 1830-1840, have traditionally been conceived as offshoots of the activities of White abolitionists, particularly, William Lloyd Garrison and his New England Anti-Slavery Society. Blacks, according to this view, derived their abolitionist impetus and ethos from Whites. Not surprisingly, Black abolitionists rejected this paternalistic explanation, and claimed credit for inaugurating the anti-slavery crusade. White abolitionists, including Garrison, Blacks countered, began their careers as colonizationists (deemed pro-slavery), and only became abolitionists and anti-slavery after they had come under the influence of Blacks. This contention is perhaps most forcefully defended by Martin Delany.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, there is a dearth of specialized study of moral suasion, despite the tremendous interest that abolitionism generated, and continues to generate among scholars. Reflecting the pervasive character of paternalism, existing studies, with notable exceptions, portray moral suasion as the creation of White abolitionists, best exemplified by the Garrisonians.<sup>2</sup>

Though moral suasion as a well defined abolitionist ideology is identified with Garrison, its historical root as a reform strategy is much deeper, going as far back as to the tradition of the Quakers, and, among African-Americans, to the self-help and cooperative activities of free Blacks in New York and Pennsylvania in the 18th century. These two abolitionists (i.e., the Quakers and free Blacks), espoused and advanced values that would later surface in Garrisonian ideology. The official adoption of moral suasion by the Garrisonians occurred in 1832 with the launching of their party. This was followed in 1833 by the founding of the American Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia by a group of between 50 to 60 abolitionists from about 10 states. Their strategy, as Gerald Sorin shows, entailed the pursuit of abolition through non-violence. They pledged to work for "the destruction of error by the potency of truth... the overthrow of prejudice by the power of love...the abolition of slavery by the spirit of repentance."<sup>3</sup> These events happened *after* the First National Negro Convention in Philadelphia in 1831, at which Blacks acknowledged their problems and shortcomings, and expressed faith in the redemptive power of moral suasion by pledging to work strenuously to "encourage simplicity, neatness, temperance and economy in our habits" in order to disprove preconceived notions and prejudices.<sup>4</sup> Subsequent conventions amplified these moral suasionist ethics, climaxing with the

formation of the American Moral Reform Society in 1835. Change was deemed the result, not of violence, or some other forms of radical political activities, but of the pursuit and realization of the ideals of moral suasion.

Pro-slavery advocates and racial conservatives explain discriminatory policies as the consequence of alleged deficiencies inherent in the character and conditions of Blacks. Blacks, according to popular reasoning, were disadvantaged and degraded in consequence of behavioral and situational imperfections—that they were lazy, ignorant, backward and morally decadent. Though racial conservatives described these traits as inherent, perhaps even divinely conditioned, and therefore permanent, Blacks were somehow optimistic that a serious attempt to alleviate the deficiencies would appeal favorably to the moral conscience of all advocates of Black subordination, and thus usher in a new social, economic and political order that would not only accommodate and elevate Blacks, but also concede their long-denied rights and privileges.

Moral suasion espoused a moral definition of slavery and racism, a view many Blacks accepted. It was an integrative and optimistic ideology, informed by faith in the potency of universal values, values that supposedly impacted humanity equally. It advanced a world view that defined progress as the result of the triumph of universal moral ideals, deemed sufficiently potent, if properly cultivated, to transform Blacks into accepted and integral members of the human family. It also reflected a strong faith in man, in his reasoning ability, and his inclination for progress. Inspired and elated, Blacks proceeded to justify their demands for better treatment. In cooperation with Garrison, leading Blacks worked assiduously to popularize the doctrine of moral suasion, persuaded that such indirect appeal to the presumed moral conscience of the entire nation would induce positive changes.

Those who subscribed to moral suasion consequently eschewed violence, convinced that the negative experiences Blacks encountered had more to do with condition, i.e., situational deficiencies, than with skin color. Upholding the precepts of moral suasion was consequently least problematic for Blacks, confident that they possessed the capacity and ability to debunk and obliterate those negative stereotypes. They expressed faith in America, acknowledged their failures and problems, and attempted to redress them. They had optimistic expectations of Jacksonian society, and imbibed the popular notion that the common man had a bright future, if he lived up to certain ideals.

America was, many believed, an open society, with abundant opportunities for those who imbibed the ideals of moral suasion.

Moral suasion in fact reflected the enduring character and impact of an earlier and broader historical reform current—the Enlightenment. Late 18th century Enlightenment culture advanced rationalism, secularism and a utilitarian conception of government. Government, in the words of Palmer and Colton, “undertook to justify itself in the cold light of reason and secular usefulness.”<sup>5</sup> An American representation of this reform impulse is popularly tagged “Jacksonian Democracy.” Jacksonian Democracy stirred optimism and a sense of affinity to government, perceived as defender of the interests of the common man, indeed a friend, to be trusted to redress societal imbalances and problems. A reformist wind blew across the entire nation, inspiring the rise of organized abolitionism in New England and Philadelphia in the 1830s, and a plethora of radical evangelicalism featuring such men as Charles G. Finney, William E. Channing and Lyman Beecher, who emphasized the individual’s responsibility and capacity to initiate change for the good of society.<sup>6</sup>

Blacks launched the National Negro Conventions in 1831, and met annually for the next four years. They openly acknowledged, discussed, and declared a commitment to addressing, their problems with a view to facilitating the process of integration. They endorsed the prevailing universalist culture, and welcomed many Whites to the conventions—William Lloyd Garrison, Arthur Tappan, Benjamin Lundy, Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, Thomas Shipley and Charles Pierce. Blacks had confidence in the redemptive capacity of the moral strength of the nation to relieve them of “those evils that have been illegitimately entailed on us as a people.”<sup>7</sup> They pledged to combine self-exertion, and the benevolent philanthropy of the country to produce the moral and intellectual strength for freedom. A consciousness of affinity with the broader national reform movement is evident in the declaration of the Fourth Convention in New York—“It is our fortune to live in an era when the moral power of this nation is waking up to the evils of slavery and the cause of our oppressed brethren throughout this country.”<sup>8</sup>

The objective of this paper is neither a discussion of the origin of moral suasion, nor its development among Blacks, issues already ably handled by other scholars.<sup>9</sup> The focus is on the philosophical dimension. It seeks to highlight the debate, and supporting ideological and moral values as leading

Blacks theorized on how best to attain the goal of moral suasion. This debate and attendant arguments presaged much of what featured in subsequent discourse among Black leaders—the relative significance of race and condition, integration versus separatism, non-violence against violence, the extent to which Blacks could be held responsible for their predicament, and by extension, the efficacy or otherwise of a policy of reliance on government or some other agencies for assistance.

Those who spearheaded the moral suasion crusade were schooled in Philadelphia. In the 1830s Pennsylvania was a “Mecca” for Blacks. Its relatively liberal tradition attracted migrants from other parts of the country. According to W.E.B. DuBois, migrants made up almost 50 per cent of the Black population of Philadelphia. In fact, the leading men in the Black struggle in the entire state had almost all migrated from other states, driven by a determination to transform Pennsylvania into a model state.<sup>10</sup> Many were imbued with a deep sense of responsibility, and believed strongly that the fate of those in bondage depended very much on how the freed ones utilized their freedom. Among them were John Vashon, Martin Delany, Rev. Lewis Woodson, William Whipper, Ben. Richards, John Peck and Robert Purvis. Some were from wealthy background. Others had to work their way up from poverty. They all shared a consensus on the potency of the economically self-made man. Their economic success induced and strengthened faith in Jacksonian society, believing earnestly that Whites would welcome and embrace a morally upright, industrious, intelligent and economically elevated Black man. Consequently, not only did Blacks imbibe the prevailing abolitionist values, but concurred implicitly, if not explicitly, with the contention that they themselves had contributed to much of their problems, and should therefore assume greater roles in resolving them. This conviction, rightly or wrongly, informed the early national conventions, and induced consensus on the efficacy of moral suasion.

There was therefore little opposition to the endorsement of moral suasion by the Pennsylvania Black elite. The first three conventions held in the state pushed strongly for its propagation, and the proceedings and declarations emphasized its primacy and efficacy as a reform strategy. The first sign of trouble became apparent when the venue shifted to New York in 1834. According to one study, tensions had been growing between the Pennsylvania leadership and its New York counterpart for a long time.<sup>11</sup> Black New Yorkers

like William Hamilton, Samuel Cornish, and Samuel Hardenberger, resented the dominance of the Pennsylvania group, and began to question the moral suasionist thrust of the conventions. It has been suggested that it was to prevent the New York radicals from hijacking and refocusing the convention that the venue was quickly moved back to Pennsylvania the following year. This convention, the last of the national conventions of the 1830s, also marked the beginning of a concerted effort to propagate moral suasion. One of the outcomes was the founding of the American Moral Reform Society, whose objectives included the promotion of education, temperance, economy and universal liberty. Almost from the start, the society broadened its purview to include the whole country—"the successful resuscitation of our country from moral degeneracy depends upon a vigilant prosecution of the holy cause of moral reform, as in its promotion is involved the interest, happiness and prosperity of the great republic, and also that the moral elevation of this nation will accelerate the extension of righteousness, justice, faith and evangelical principles throughout the world."<sup>12</sup> This universalist thrust was also based upon the presumed existence of a universal moral law, that decreed, among other things, universal love. Encouraged by this law, the moral reformers opted to bury "in the bosom of Christian benevolence all those natural distinctions, complexional variations, geographical lines and sectional bounds that have hitherto marked the history, character and operations of men."<sup>13</sup>

The Moral Reform Society consequently developed upon the universalist foundation laid for it by the conventions. Essentially, it defined society as a unified whole, rendered dysfunctional, due partly to a general moral decline and partly to the failures and disabilities of Blacks. The society upheld this conviction for about five years. Studies show that throughout its short span of life, 1835-1841, it failed to develop a national constituency, and was seen, within the context of the Pennsylvania New York schism, as a Pennsylvania movement, glued to, and espousing an ideology that, in the opinion of New Yorkers, misrepresented the realities of the Black experience.<sup>14</sup> From the beginning, the society attempted, with great difficulty, to evolve a rational and convincing ideology that would unite all Blacks. The man who assumed this difficult task, and whose name has become synonymous with moral suasion, was William Whipper, a founding member of the society.

Information on Whipper's early life is unfortunately sparse. He was born on February 22, 1804 in Little Britain, Lancaster county, Pennsylvania. By 1828

he had settled comfortably in Philadelphia, and was supposedly educated. He quickly assumed an active role in Black affairs. Described by a contemporary as “a gentleman of great finesse of character, talents and business qualifications,” Whipper seemed to have excelled in virtually all endeavors he ventured into. He became one of the wealthiest businessmen in the state.<sup>15</sup> He ran a lucrative lumber business in Columbia. In 1834, he opened a free labor and temperance store in Philadelphia, and for many years contributed generously to the anti-slavery cause. He also owned a fleet of street cars.<sup>16</sup>

The relative economic success and affluence of Whipper and several of his associates seemed to have suggested to them that industry and perseverance would attract positive and adequate rewards, irrespective of one’s racial or social background, and this undoubtedly strengthened their faith in the promises of the American Dream. It is inconceivable that Whipper would not at some point have experienced racism. However, by the early 1830s, he seemed to have completely overcome whatever debilitating experience he might have had. He declared as his source of inspiration, the Garrisonian motto, “My country is the world, my countrymen are all mankind.”<sup>17</sup> Garrisonism upheld universalism. Its motto envisioned a consanguineous relationship between peoples, kingdoms and nations, and touched Whipper’s moral sensibility. In his words, “My mind became immediately emancipated from the influence of early prejudices, and I could plainly recognize in every human countenance the impress of DEITY, and was ready to declare that they too are our brethren... My complexional prejudices vanished.”<sup>18</sup> Garrison’s influence on Black abolitionists is widely acknowledged. There was hardly a notable Black abolitionist of the 19th Century—Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany, Henry H. Garnet—who was not associated with Garrison. They all started their careers as Garrisonians, and applauded Garrison’s commitment to abolition through moral suasion. At the Second National Negro Convention in 1832, Whipper sponsored a motion in praise of the Anti-Slavery Society, and described Garrison as “The bold and uncompromising advocate of the rights of man, ...an able and fearless declaimer against oppression,...a true and faithful friend, possessing honesty, virtue and piety.”<sup>19</sup>

The Moral Reform Society declared “moral reform, intellectual culture, and persevering industry” as the means to Black elevation and respectability. Whipper affirmed “God’s moral ethics” as the foundation on which to build the Black struggle, the legitimizing factor against which to measure demands

by Blacks for equality.<sup>20</sup> The notion of "God's moral ethics" underlined his belief in a universal standard, based upon the idea of one God, one humanity. Black leaders accepted the notion of the existence of an overriding divine moral order, one that mandated a uniform standard of morality for humanity, irrespective of race or geographical location. As a strong believer in universalism, Whipper maintained that "virtues" and morality, rather than the color of the skin or some other primordial factor, should differentiate people.<sup>21</sup> These moral and virtuous qualities resulted from adherence to those divinely established universal moral standards. One concept dominated his thought—**Reason**. He described reason as "the noblest of all goals that brings man closer to God." Reason allows human beings to rise above, and transcend, "Physical inflictions that are offspring of passion"—e.g., pains and griefs resulting from racism and slavery. It is in effect a weapon for neutralizing the painful and crippling effects of slavery. It generates stoical quality in human beings, enabling them to transcend, and consequently ignore, earthly pains and suffering. It also motivates people to seek solutions in "something higher than human power"—God's moral power.<sup>22</sup>

Whipper challenged humanity to perfect its reasoning capacity, and move closer to God, a situation that instantaneously neutralizes all physical pains and suffering associated with slavery, racism, societal inequities, and other forms of man's inhumanity to man. Once reason predominates, government actions and policies are transformed as they bear the imprints of divinity, resulting in universal peace and love.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, though Whipper acknowledged the existence of discrimination, his explanation of its causes pointed not to race, or policies of particular individuals, but to humanity's deviation from the path of reason. To be guided by reason, he opined, is to be propelled by love, eventuating in universal peace and harmony.

Color became irrelevant as a defining factor in the Black struggle. Since the problems of Blacks emanated from moral failures, the proffered solution tended to de-emphasize race. Racial distinction and prejudices originated, according to Whipper, "in the spirit of selfishness, cultivated and sustained by a religious and moral delinquency in principle, in utter disregard of the divine will...and every element that is calculated to cement the interest of society in one universal brotherhood."<sup>24</sup> He consequently rejected the notion of a racially exclusive movement.

Abolitionist values and strategies emanating from Whipper's ideas,



therefore, stressed the primacy of condition (situational deficiencies) over race, and a universalism that discouraged racist tendencies and confrontation. Love, the product of universal reason, mandated peace and non-violence. Whipper urged Blacks to resist the impulse for vengeance, and refused to see a “Black problem” *per se*. He diagnosed instead a societal problem resulting from failure to uphold those universal ideals.<sup>25</sup> Love constituted a central component of the moral suasionist drive. Blacks needed to be loved, and to love others. To be loved was, however, fraught with difficulties, albeit surmountable. Whipper reassured everyone that love would flower and blossom as more human beings cultivated those universal values. Though Blacks suffered disproportionately from existing discrimination, he opposed a racially exclusive and confrontational reform movement, and welcomed the activities of the American Anti-Slavery Society, as complementary to those of the Moral Reform Society. The Moral Reform society therefore belonged to all, anyone interested in, and committed to, the pursuit and implementation of those higher moral and ethical ideals.

It seems plausible to suggest that Whipper pushed the Reform Society beyond the range envisaged by the national conventions. The organizers of the conventions emphasized the peculiarity of the Black situation, and addressed their reform efforts specifically to Blacks. While not totally rejecting the assistance of Whites, they emphasized the centrality of race as a dynamic factor in the Black experience.<sup>26</sup> Whipper’s universalism, however, appealed to both races, and seemed to obscure the racial factor. What he observed was a universal, as opposed to a racial problem—humanity’s failure to live up to the tenets of universal ideals and values.

In a contribution to the debate, “F.A.S.”, the president of the Theological Seminary in New York, opined, “If we would gain the love of all men, we must love all men. We must pity and compassionate the unworthy, and approve the virtuous...” He identified two types of love—the first is related to God’s injunction to humanity to love regardless of racial/complexional differences, and the second is grounded in virtuous character. The first is characterized by feelings of compassion, piety and benevolence, and it is general. The second, which is selective, is dependent upon certain conditions—“honesty in all things, under all circumstances, in every place; sober, abandonment of intemperance, industry.” Blacks should not expect to be treated decently if they were “wanting in industry, purity, cleanliness in all things.” “F.A.S.” was

more interested in the second type of love, in which he deemed Blacks deficient. He insisted that Blacks had yet to justify an extension to them of the second type, and consequently implored them to pursue seriously the outlined conditions. It was the duty of Blacks to satisfy these conditions in order to inspire the love of Whites. "Who would not love a character composed of—honesty, sobriety, temperance, industry, intelligence, purity and love?" he asked. "No, not for the shortest moment conceivable", he responded. "And even if there could be found a man so debased in heart and perverted in nature, as to hate such a character, still these excellent traits would wear upon his prejudice like the continuous smiting upon a rock", he affirmed.<sup>27</sup>

The situational deficiency argument was particularly popular among Blacks. Among its most ardent advocate was the New York—based *Colored American*, ironically Whipper's most rabid critic. The paper was alleged to have acknowledged that:

the real ground of prejudice is not the color of the skin, but the condition. We have so long associated color with condition that we have forgotten the fact, and have charged the offence to the wrong account. The colored people should all understand this, that the prejudice which exists against them arises not from the color of the skin, but from their condition. Hence they may see that just in proportion as they elevated their condition, prejudice will wear away.<sup>28</sup>

The editor, Samuel Cornish, forcefully advanced the situational deficiency argument, and hinged progress in race relations on the degree to which Blacks "elevated their condition". This was no doubt a serious indictment from a paper that professes to defend the interests of Blacks. Cornish, it seems, was very eager to inspire in Blacks a sense of responsibility for, and a commitment to, self-improvement, and never intended to absolve the government, or other agencies, of complicity in the subordination and exploitation of Blacks. This is reflected in his response to an editorial comment of another paper, *The Observer*, in corroboration of the situational deficiency thesis. The paper had alleged that, "the condition of the colored people in this country **is partly their own fault**, in that they have not always made the best possible use of the advantages within their reach." (emphasis added). In a sharp response, Cornish repudiated any inference from the pages of his paper that suggested concurrence with the claim that Blacks were responsible for their condition. He described the conclusions of *The Observer* as valid only in the abstract, and

“an outrage on truth and common sense.” He distinguished between the moral condition of Blacks, and the social and political condition. While acknowledging the moral failures of Blacks, he rejected sternly any suggestion that Blacks had any responsibility for the ugly social and political realities. Blacks, he argued, were the “involuntary victims of a social and political despotism, alike unrighteous and cruel, the guilt of which lies wholly at the White man’s door”.<sup>29</sup> Cornish’s rebuke and refutation of the comments of *The Observer* established in unambiguous terms his rejection of the blame-the-victim syndrome.

Though many Blacks espoused the situational deficiency idea, they had difficulty with several of Whipper’s implication and postulations. Anti-Whipperism was most pronounced, not surprisingly, among New York Blacks, and as earlier indicated, in the pages of *The Colored American*. Founded in 1837, the paper declared itself a “political sentinel” dedicated to ensuring that Blacks were protected, their interests defended, and also enlightened on fundamental issues, especially those relating to what Cornish called “the visionary views and fantastical dreams of Philadelphia.”<sup>30</sup> In justifying the need for the paper, Cornish emphasized the depth and pervasiveness of racism and slavery, and the need for a media that would adequately instruct the downtrodden on the true nature of their condition and the appropriate means of improvement.<sup>31</sup> The paper left no one in doubt on its endorsement of moral suasion. It reminded Blacks, “We live in an age of reform, and if we lay not hold on every means of reformation and improvement, we shall be left in the background..” and urged them to “establish for themselves a character..become more religious and moral, more industrious and prudent than the other classes of community, it will be impossible to keep us down.”<sup>32</sup> Acknowledgement of Blacks failures, however, did not lead the paper toward universalism.

It was clear from the beginning that universalism was unpopular among New York Blacks, and a few had given this indication, even before the emergence of the Reform Society. At the Fourth National Convention in 1834, William Hamilton characterized America as a society sharply divided along racial and social lines—Blacks had basically different interests from Whites—a justification for racially exclusive reform strategy. This notwithstanding, he shared the prevailing optimism, and expressed confidence in man’s capacity for development through reason. Reason would lead humanity to “the highest

state of morality"—happiness.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the reformist inclinations and optimism of Cornish, Hamilton, and other New York Black leaders, they dissociated themselves from Whipper's universalism. Cornish called upon the Moral Reform Society to evolve a clear-cut and definite plan, to identify concrete goals, and develop a definite strategy for attaining them, rather than engaging in what he perceived as a spurious and deceptive universalism that was "destined to influence nobody."<sup>34</sup> The problems of "the poor, proscribed, down-trodden and helpless people" deserved more time and efforts.<sup>35</sup> Societal reality revealed, Cornish observed, that some people occupied comfortable positions, sustained by the exploitation and subordination of others. Universalism blurred both this reality and its fundamentally racial character. *The Colored American* therefore pushed for a racially exclusive strategy and ideology. Whipper denounced separatism as a measure destined to erode the moral legitimacy of the reform movement. He implored Blacks, as members of the human family, who are also susceptible to universal values, to join force with, rather than oppose Whites in the quest for a better society.<sup>36</sup> Cornish disagreed, and accused the Moral Reform Society of assuming national responsibilities, instead of zeroing in on critical Black problems. Putting it bluntly, he charged Whipper with endeavoring to "elevate Whites to the neglect of Blacks", and also make Blacks "beasts of burden" by placing the entire nation on their shoulders. He proposed a redefinition of the society's mission to emphasize issues pertaining solely to "the proscribed colored people."<sup>37</sup>

Cornish identified the following as the critical issues of contention. First, should Blacks form an organization for universal reform or one specifically for their own improvement? Second, was it wise to overlook their own immediate problems and disabilities of Blacks, and concentrate instead on the general good of the nation? Third, was universalism capable of bringing any benefits to Blacks? He answered all with a strong affirmation of the need for a racially exclusive movement. He unequivocally opposed universalism. Despite this opposition, Cornish conceded that exclusivity and universality were not necessarily antithetical. He believed that by first improving themselves (exclusivity), Blacks would more efficiently and effectively improve and develop the entire nation (universality). As he put it, "the shortest and best way for us to improve the nation, if this is our object, is to improve ourselves."<sup>38</sup>

Universalism proved problematic also largely because of the socio-

economic and political contexts of Black exploitation, subordination and oppression. It was difficult to popularize such a strategy in an atmosphere in which Blacks continued to encounter racially motivated violence. The 1829 anti-Black riots in Cincinnati which sent hundreds of Blacks fleeing from the city, and, according to some, launched the convention movement, had hardly subsided, when similar explosions reverberated in other places. There were race riots in New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois and Ohio in the 1830s. These anti-abolitionist and anti-Black riots were perpetrated largely by "Gentlemen of property and standing"; precisely those at whose presumed moral conscience moral suasion was targeted.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the most critical development resulted from the 1837 Reform Convention of Pennsylvania which amended the state constitution to extend suffrage to poor Whites while excluding Blacks who owned property and paid taxes. The introduction of the word "White" into the third article of the constitution effectively eliminated Blacks as citizens.<sup>40</sup> This cast a shadow of doubt on universalism. It underscored the depth and persistence of racism, and dampened the enthusiasm of many Blacks. The climate of race riots heightened the racial sensitivities of many Blacks and induced skepticism over moral suasion.

Another respondent to the moral suasion debate was one Sidney, who quickly declared his stand against universalism—"In an effort for freedom, there are several important and indisputable qualifications, which the oppressed alone possess." He identified two interrelated qualifications as the most critical. First, a sense of actual suffering, and second, a determination to end suffering. Sidney insisted upon a convergence of both the feeling (i.e. consciousness) and the purpose (i.e. reaction) of those who suffer in order to effect any meaningful and effective strike for freedom. Put differently, to struggle effectively and legitimately against oppression, one has to have experienced oppression. Consequently, in the estimation of Sidney, Blacks alone possessed the moral legitimacy to organize against slavery. Underlining the necessity for a racially exclusive movement, Sidney linked the elevation of a people to "the inward rational sentiments which enable the soul to change circumstances to its own temper and disposition." It "is not measured by dependent upon external relations" (or forces). In his view, "the relative position and the relative duties and responsibilities of the oppressed and the oppressors" constituted the only ground upon which to predicate any argument for or against "complexionally distinctive organization." Whenever a people

are oppressed peculiarly, he noted, "distinctive organization or action is required on their part to destroy oppression."<sup>41</sup>

Creating a distinct identity was crucial to Sidney, and he implored Blacks to adopt the name "Colored American", a term Whipper had vehemently opposed on the ground that it undermined universalism, favoring instead the appellation "Oppressed American." Sidney was adamant. Unless there was that convergence between the consciousness of oppression, and a reaction against it, "the aids of sympathizing friends are of but little advantage." White abolitionists were consequently incapable of appreciating the magnitude of the Black condition, no matter how deeply sympathetic they appeared. "They are our allies", he declared, "**ours** is the battle." (emphasis in original) Though he welcomed White support, Sidney strongly objected to "generalities or universalities." He portrayed Whipperism as a deviation from the tradition established by "our fathers", at the early conventions. Sidney touched upon issues that continue to engage the attention of Blacks down to the present—the necessity and relevance of White support, and the uniqueness of the Black experience itself as the key factor that legitimizes one's role in the struggle.<sup>42</sup>

Whipper was not the only focus of the moral suasionist controversy. Another contributor, whose views perhaps generated even more heat was the Rev. Lewis Woodson. A fugitive from Virginia, Woodson rose rapidly through the ranks of Philadelphia Black leaders. His was equally a success story. He owned several barber shops and assisted in establishing and running the only Colored school in Philadelphia. As a member of both the religious community and the elite Black intelligentsia, Woodson would have had difficulty isolating himself from the controversies. Furthermore, his deep commitment to the Black struggle rendered such an isolationist posture unlikely. His approach seemed, in the estimation of contemporaries, critical of Whipper. However, on closer examination, his ideas tended to complement Whipper's. In a seven part series titled "Moral Work For Colored Men", he underlined the peculiarity of Blacks and the need for special attention and strategies:

The relation in which we have for generations been held in this land, constitutes us a distinct class. We have been held as slaves, while those around us have been free. They have been our holders, and we the held. Every power and privilege have been invested with them, while we have been divested of every right. The distinction of our classification is as

wide as freedom and slavery.<sup>43</sup>

He too approved of the moral reform efforts, strongly believing that Blacks were miserably deficient in education, morality, industry, and, therefore, needed to elevate themselves in order to justify any claims of rights and privileges. Writing under the pseudonym "Augustine", Woodson acknowledged Black deficiencies, but stopped short of endorsing a racially exclusive movement. Like Sidney he too welcomed the sympathy and support of Whites, while emphasized the prime responsibility of Blacks.<sup>44</sup>

In its totality, Woodson's strategy paradoxically seemed to steer Blacks in the direction of Whipper's universalism. He praised Whites, and expressed faith and optimism in the inevitability of change. He perceived a flexible and malleable society, one that was susceptible to moral arguments. Colored persons of healthy state of morals, he observed, attracted the respect and admiration of Whites, and are encouraged, rather than discriminated against, thus underscoring the conditional imperative of prejudice. In his words, "I have noticed that the intelligent Colored man of polished manners, and pleasing address, is always well received and well treated, while some others, who are even wealthy, but who had paid no attention to the cultivation of the manners and habits of polished society, were rejected."<sup>45</sup> He too, like Whipper and many others, placed greater burden on Blacks. To benefit from the reformist impulse of American society, Blacks had to demonstrate both the will to improve, and also take the first tentative steps in that direction. He charged three Black institutions with the task of veering Blacks in the right direction—the School, the Press and the Pulpit.<sup>46</sup>

Woodson identified as a major shortcoming of previous reform efforts among Blacks, the fact that they impacted only a minority, the elite. He wanted reforms that influenced a greater number of people, and believed that Blacks themselves had a greater responsibility in this regard. Prejudice would decline in proportion to the attainment of elevation in all aspects of moral suasion by the greater majority of Blacks. He consequently opposed universalism, a dependent strategy since it tied the elevation of Blacks to the efforts and activities of others. Reliance on the assistance of Whites not only contravened God's wish, he affirmed, but also constituted an acknowledgement of inferiority. Like Sidney, Woodson considered the prevalence of racism a strong justification for separate actions.<sup>47</sup>

Though fully aware of society's dysfunctional state, Woodson expressed

confidence in Blacks, especially in their ability to endure and transcend secular pains and injustice. Though a mortal being, man, Woodson emphasized, was blessed with an "immortal soul". Consequently, though susceptible to pains and sufferings, yet the inherent divinity within the soul would enable man to transcend "casualties of the body", and all external circumstances and "regain his native divinity."<sup>48</sup> This dual character of humanity, central to understanding Woodson's perception of American society, bears close resemblance to Whipper's utilization of reason.

The issue of internal emigration featured prominently in Woodson's discourse on moral suasion. One of the goals of moral suasion was economic development. Woodson believed that the acquisition and cultivation of land was central to the economic elevation of Blacks. To take advantage of the available land, he advised Blacks to emigrate, especially from densely populated and racially tense environment, to the West, identified as comprising Indiana, Illinois and Ohio; where, according to him, land and other avenues of economic advancement abounded. The West was the new frontier for Blacks, with promises of a more comfortable and desirable life. He cautioned, however, against mass emigration. Only those of "Intelligence and judgement, capable of devising and executing whatever is necessary" for the advancement of the rest, should move to the West. He made a strong case for the "Talented Tenth"—a vanguard upon whose intelligence and abilities depended the development of the "greater good for the greatest number." He published a series of articles on the West stressing the potentialities that awaited Blacks.<sup>49</sup>

His advocacy of emigration provoked sharp criticism. Many accused him of propagating the obnoxious colonization scheme. He quickly distanced himself from colonization, and distinguished his scheme as emigration, which, unlike colonization, was voluntary and conceived to benefit the cause of Black liberation.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps the most critical response again came from *The Colored American*. Cornish identified emigration with escapism, an abandonment of other Blacks, particularly the slaves.<sup>51</sup> Woodson strongly disagreed, and maintained that his emigration was in fact a continuation of the struggle, and indeed the most probable and effective chance of success, since it ensured the survival and preservation of the crucial free Black element, without whom the slaves were doomed to perpetual bondage. Furthermore, he declared, "It has ever been my constant and unwavering belief that the most powerful and



legitimate agents in effecting the entire physical and mental emancipation of the slaves, are their brethren who are free.” The safety of the elite vanguard was paramount. It should be isolated and protected at all times from violence and all life-threatening conditions.<sup>52</sup>

Woodson emphasized his opposition to confrontation with a rhetorical question that implied the primacy of survival—“Strike from the list of the living, the freedmen, and what becomes of the slave?” Cornish objected. Violence was not, and should not be, the issue. He identified the central issue as the defense of fundamental principles, i.e., should a small minority of people hazard their lives, if need be, “for the inalienable right to the moral and physical good of the masses?” The pursuit of moral suasion, in Cornish’s view, entailed an awareness of both the possibility and necessity of confrontation. To emigrate, given this knowledge, therefore, violated the sacred commitment of free Blacks to stand by the slaves. Woodson countered. It might be expedient for the vanguard to abandon the slaves, and seek temporary refuge from violence in order to survive and be able to continue the struggle later.<sup>53</sup> This conflict over emigration was no doubt the result of a major difference in their conception of moral suasion. While Whipper, and to a certain extent Woodson, emphasized the moral aspect, and sought solution in purely moral values, Cornish and his paper, acknowledged the moral aspect while refusing to ignore the social and political context, in essence, the political dimension. Disagreement over the political implication of moral suasion sharply divided Blacks, and in fact alienated one of Woodson’s major institutions from the anti-slavery movement—the Church.<sup>54</sup>

Woodson’s ideas became even more provocative. Though he recognized segregation, he seemed willing to accommodate it and, in the estimation of many, appeared to justify it on the ground that it was necessary to protect people’s right to private property. In their quest for social equality, he urged Blacks to concede and respect the absolute and unconditional rights of Whites to own, protect and dispose of private property. This included the freedom to an exclusive use of their schools and churches, should they choose to. He strongly defended the sacred character and exclusivity of private property. This drew a storm of rebuke from *The Colored American*. Cornish accused him of justifying segregation and identifying with the oppressors.<sup>55</sup> Woodson reiterated that he had no problem with segregation *per se*. What he objected to was the denial to Blacks the opportunity to generate resources to provide for

and develop themselves, once segregated and barred from White institutions.<sup>56</sup> He found Blacks equally guilty to the extent that they spent more time struggling to secure access to White institutions than trying to build theirs. Segregation thrived, he claimed, only because Blacks seemed insistent upon integrating. He consequently believed that segregation would cease, and equal opportunities prevail, as more Blacks became self-reliant and independent. If the goal of the Black struggle was integration, the quickest way to its accomplishment, he observed, was through self-reliance. This contention bears close resemblance to Cornish's attempt to reconcile exclusivity with integration. As Blacks demonstrated the spirit of enterprise and independence, "the passage from one side to the other would be easy because the way would in fact be smooth and level."<sup>57</sup>

Woodson's most contentious views resulted from his notion of the dual character of humanity—that it was possible to succeed, even in the most prejudiced environment. The oppressive legal system was not the problem, he intimated, but the demeanor and condition of human beings, especially Blacks. The most effective remedy against prejudice, therefore, remained the cultivation of pleasing manners and unquestionable integrity. However violent or virulent racism was, it would crumble once confronted by a colored man of a healthy state of morality. The immortal side of man, i.e., his inherent divine nature, allowed him to live and escape the evil effects of cruel laws. Though every individual possessed this divine quality, it is, however, functional and effective only in those who invoke it, and invoking it entailed a conscious effort to live according to the tenets of moral suasion. Prejudice, consequently, is most pronounced, he believed, whenever Blacks were immoral, corrupt and illiterate. Such negative qualities induce mistreatment from Whites, and a disposition on their part against integration. He referred to his personal experience in justification of the notion that "condition and not color" was the major cause of prejudice. He outlined the following as the "qualification" for the admission of Blacks into "polished society"—hardwork, polished manners, and elevated physical and material condition. When these qualifications are achieved, "a man slides into his proper circle with ease."<sup>58</sup>

Though Woodson blamed segregation on Blacks, he expressed confidence in their capacity to attain the qualifications necessary for integration. Bad and oppressive laws, even the notorious Ohio Black Laws, were not enacted

specifically for Blacks, in spite of what the name suggested! They exist, in Woodson's view, for people of poor and decadent manners, irrespective of race or class.<sup>59</sup> He even classified Ohio as an open society, the obnoxious Blacks laws notwithstanding. "An experience of nearly 20 years has taught me", he wrote, "that a cautious, prudent man, may live safely and happily under the unjust laws of Ohio."<sup>60</sup> The laws were not designed to stifle the upward mobility of Blacks, but, on the contrary, to encourage them to become self-reliant, just as Whites have had to contend with bad laws at some point. Segregation, therefore, was a necessary transition Blacks had to pass through. Woodson further contended, with reference to Pennsylvania, that segregation was at times a reaction to Black decadence, and *ipso facto* legitimate. Whenever and wherever Blacks manifested good and polished manners, they had little difficulty getting access to White facilities. He accused Blacks of "repining at the injustice and partiality of the government", as if "government ever conferred wealth or learning on those even whom it seem to favor."<sup>61</sup> He declared in very provocative terms that the central issues were not, and should not be, the oppressive laws and discriminatory government policies, but the behavior of Blacks.

His vision of America was one of a liberal and open society, compelled to engage in discriminatory practices by the deficiencies and failures of Blacks. His faith in moral suasion is further manifested in his objection to "political action", or actions aimed specifically at the repeal of repressive laws. These would constitute misdirected efforts. Bad laws did not originate slavery and racism. The twin evils were, he argued, products of an unrighteous and corrupt mind, or, as he put it, of "the corrupt moral sentiment of the country." Once the moral sentiment was purified, slavery and all accompanying evils would disappear. He thus elevated man's moral quality to a height of prominence—the key determinant of human action and societal condition. The condition of this moral impulse influenced societal values and institutions. This led him to another conclusion: "that a morally good man cannot do a physically bad deed." There is undoubtedly a strong element of Whipperian universalism in Woodson's moral interpretation of human actions. His ultimate goal it seems was to reform the "corrupting element" in the moral fibre of society, and slavery would cease as "the great source from whence it springs would be dried up."<sup>62</sup> Both he and Whipper saw Blacks as the major source of the corrupting element.

Woodson thus adduced two interlocking explanations for societal problems, especially as they impacted Blacks. First, the situational deficiencies of Blacks, and second a general decline in the morals of society. Improvement in both aspects was a prerequisite for overall societal development, and for positive changes in the Black experience. In spite of all the visible societal problems, American society, he assured, was not solidly frozen and closed. Opportunities existed for those Blacks interested in change and willing to assume the necessary tasks. It seems plausible to suggest that Woodson's separatist ethics notwithstanding, he was an integrationist at heart, perhaps even a universalist who, driven by knowledge and an appreciation of the enormity of Black problems, strove to induce in Blacks not only an awareness of their problems, but also the extent of their culpability, and **ipso facto**, responsibility in redressing them. His ultimate objective was, of course, integration.

The debate and controversies over the implications of moral suasion notwithstanding, Blacks remained faithful to the basic premise that moral improvement would result in positive changes, and that it was largely their responsibility to achieve this moral development. Moral suasion thus remained entrenched, even as Blacks began to organize politically vocal state conventions in the 1840s. They hinged everything on the potency of reason, on man's presumed desire and inclination for progress, on the reality, and compelling force of universal values, and perhaps most significantly, on the existence of one humanity, guided by universal, divine values. Given this integrative **weltanschauung**, Blacks jettisoned confrontation in favor of cooperation. Even when they acknowledged extraneous circumstances, they often emphasized their own failures. Moral suasion was supposed to serve as a dynamic, intertwining ideology that would ultimately bridge what was deemed an ephemeral schism between Blacks and Whites. Paradoxically, it would take the success of moral suasion to reveal its deficiency as a reform strategy. By the late 1840s the number of morally upright and economically elevated Blacks had more than doubled. Their reward, however, came in the form of increased anti-Black violence.<sup>63</sup> It dawned on many that the key factor was not condition but race, and consequently, no matter how hard Blacks worked to cultivate moral suasion, the chances of integration remained bleak. Moral suasion then gave way to immediatist and political strategies.

## Notes

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- 13 *Ibid.*, pp.26-27.
- 14 H. H. Bell, "The American Moral Reform Society" Adam D. Simmons, *op. cit.*
- 15 Martin R. Delany, *op. cit.*, p.95.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp.95-96. See also Richard P. McCormick, *op. cit.*
- 17 McCormick, *Ibid.* See also *The Colored American*, March 3, 1838.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 "Minutes and Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention" in H. H. Bell, *op. cit.*, p.31.
- 20 *The Colored American*, July 29, 1837.
- 21 *Ibid.*, September 9, 1837.
- 22 William Whipper, "An Address on Non-Resistance to Offensive Aggression" 1 & 2, *Ibid.*, September 16, 30, 1837.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*, March 29, 1838.
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- 27 *Ibid.*, March 16, 1839.
- 28 *Ibid.*, July 8, 1837.

## Primacy of "Condition"

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- 30 *Ibid.*, September 9, 1837.
- 31 *Ibid.*, March 4, 1837.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 "Minutes of the Fourth Convention," *op. cit.*
- 34 *The Colored American*, March 13, 1841.
- 35 *Ibid.*, September 9, 1837.
- 36 *Ibid.*, September 9, 16, 1837; February 10, March 17, 1838.
- 37 *Ibid.*, September 9, 1837; March 13, 1841.
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- 44 *Ibid.*, November 3, 1837.
- 45 *Ibid.*, February 16, 1839.
- 46 *Ibid.*, December 9, 1837; January 13, 1838.
- 47 *Ibid.*, December 9, 1837.
- 48 *Ibid.*, February 10, 1838.
- 49 See his series on "The West" in *Ibid.*, February 17, May 3, 1838; January 15, February 5, March 2, 16, July 15, August 31, 1839.
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- 58 *Ibid.*, January 15, February 5, 1839.
- 59 *Ibid.*, January 15, 1839.
- 60 *Ibid.*, August 31, 1839
- 61 *Ibid.*, June 15, 1839.
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