

From Myrlie Evers-Williams and Manning
Marable, eds., *The Autobiography of Medgar
Evers: A Hero's Life and Legacy Revealed
Through His Writings, Letters, and Speeches* (New
York: Basic Books, 2005).

Blanche Kelso Bruce (1841-1898)—During Reconstruction-era Mississippi, Bruce was a powerful politician in Beaufort, holding the offices of sheriff, tax collector and superintendent of education. In 1875, Bruce became the first black senator from Mississippi. President Benjamin Harrison appointed Bruce recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia in 1889. See Thornburgh (1972).

John R. Lynch (1847-1939)—Born a slave in Louisiana, Lynch became a justice of the peace in Natchez County. At age thirty-five he was elected to the state legislature and chosen as the speaker of the house. In 1889 President Benjamin Harrison appointed Lynch auditor of the U.S. Treasury for the Navy Department. See Thornburgh (1972).

Joseph H. Rainey (1832-1897)—Born a slave in South Carolina, Rainey acquired an education while working as a barber. During reconstruction, Rainey was elected to the state constitutional convention in 1868. In 1869 he became the state's first black U.S. congressman. He served in the House until 1876. <http://www.famousamericans.net/josephrainey/>.

19 Medgar W. Evers, Address

AUGUST 11, 1957

MT. HERON BAPTIST CHURCH
VICKSBURG, MISSISSIPPI

Christian friends, brothers and sisters, ladies and gentlemen. I consider it a blessing from almighty God to have this very spiritual pleasure to fellowship with you on this men's day program and to be able to acknowledge the very presence of God within me.

You know it was just above five years and eight months today that in this very same edifice that your Myrlie Louise Beasley and I were united in holy matrimony and to that union, today the Lord has blessed us with two fine youngsters, Darrell Kenyatta and Reena Denise Evers and to you I am eternally grateful.

All that I have said thus far leads me up to here. My topic for today is "Man's obligation to God and to man." *Obligation to God.* You know

we are not as grateful and obliging to God as He would have us to be. We men often take our being too much for granted. We often feel that our responsibility and obligation to God ends when we make a liberal church contribution and attend services regularly. Granted, both are essential in our daily Christian lives but one equally important factor is often expressed in the "negative" by the following quotation: "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn." As I remember from my youth being taught the Golden Rule of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." That part of the Golden Rule is now in many instances being shelved as being obsolete or outdated and therefore no longer usable in this day and time which is possibly the saddest mistake we find ourselves making.

Man is, I would say, God's chosen creature on the face of the earth so much so until in the creation God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God, created He Him: male and female, created He them.

If we note with care the word image which means likeness or an imitation of any person or thing one is immediately impressed with the fact that we are God's children who possess his likeness and who consequently should do His will. That is unquestionably the obligation man owes to God—do His will.

Now we come to the other part of our topic, "man's obligation to man." Certainly we cannot do the will of God without treating our fellow man as we would have him treat us. It is a biblical axiom that to say you love God and hate your fellow man is hypocrisy of possibly the greatest magnitude. So many of us fall into this category either consciously or unconsciously until it behooves each of us to check ourselves closely so as to avoid becoming a party to hate or misunderstanding.

While we must not hate our fellow man, black, white, yellow or what have you, we must nevertheless, stand firmly on those princi-

ples we know are right which brings us to the point of being reminded of the courage of Joshua and Caleb when after "400 years of bondage under the Egyptians and 40 years of freedom, there were many among the Israelites who wanted to go back into Egypt and slavery, because they were not willing to suffer for a cause and for a principle. So it is today many people are not willing to stand up for a cause and a principle. Many persons are willing to sacrifice their birthright, go back into slavery and maintain segregation, and take the easy way out, rather than to suffer a little and gain what is rightfully theirs. In this instance, we find history repeating itself.

We, as men, owe it to our fellow man and to our children to stand firm and stand out for those things that we are entitled to. I count it a blessing from God that I am able to withstand ridicule and abuse because I am willing to stand for my fellow man though many show no appreciation for the work that we are trying to do in their behalf. But let it not be said in the final analysis when history will only record these glorious moments and when your grandchildren will invariably ask: "Granddaddy, what role did you play in helping to make us free men and free women?" Did you actively participate in the struggle or was your support only a moral one? Certainly each person here, and man in particular, should be in a position to say "I was active in the struggle from all phases for your unrestricted privileges as an American citizen."

Christian friends, we are in a righteous struggle. We are living in a great day, a momentous day, a glorious day, a day that will be forever inscribed in the annals of history and in the minds of men.

Now, my friends, I have one or two requests to make and I feel that these requests should be the paramount objective of each person here today. Number one: let us vow to treat our fellow man as we would like him to treat us. Two, let us be in a spirit of cooperativeness. For example, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King and others in Montgomery, Alabama, have to me set an example of cooperation that has been unexcelled in my lifetime and possibly yours.

Those Christian people in Montgomery have really demonstrated cooperation, and how effective it can be in a community. Certainly Reverend King and others demonstrating through actual practice that that they preach from the pulpit can be used in other forms of protest, such as registering and voting, which is my third request: that you select a committee in your community to teach the importance and use of the ballot, so that every person twenty-one years and above is provided with transportation to go down and register and also collect two dollars from everyone twenty-two through fifty-nine years and pay their poll tax.

My last request is that you support more earnestly the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*, an organization that has contributed possibly more than any other in our struggle for first class citizenship. Just think where we would have been today had it not been for the work of the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*. Many of the achievements of the organization have been forgotten or ignored. For example, the grandfather clause and the white primaries were declared unconstitutional through the legal maneuvering of the organization. Restrictive covenants, discrimination in public education, and the separate but equal doctrine have all been declared contrary to the U.S. Constitution and the American way of life. And even here in our state where sickness knows no color, veterans' hospitals have been integrated, and in Army, Navy, and Air installations the work of the NAACP has made the brotherhood of man a workable thing in Mississippi.

Furthermore, the average member of the organization is a member of some church, which strengthens our ties with the churches, almighty God and this great nation of ours.

As men living in as highly a diversified and complex society as ours, it is our duty and responsibility to our fellow men and our children to tackle the problems that lie ahead with faith and courage. Faith that is spoken of in the Bible, which in paraphrase says "Only possess the faith of a small mustard seed and you will be able to move mountains and then the courage to withstand the greatest onslaught the enemy can muster, and you are bound to succeed." No,

it will not be easy, but neither does one find it altogether easy to be a Christian in this very sin sick world.

I am reminded here of a secular song, the lyrics of which are as follows: "Give me some men who are stout-hearted men, who will fight for the rights they adore. Start me with ten who are stout-hearted men, and I will soon give you ten thousand more. Oh, shoulder to shoulder, and bolder and bolder, they grow as they go to meet the foe. Then there is nothing in this world that can halt or mar a plan when we stick together man to man." There is no doubt in my mind that the lyrics to that song have a very appropriate meaning in this day and time.

Then it was Samuel Garth who said: "When honor is lost, it is a treat to die; death's but a sure retreat from infamy."

There is an urgent need for dedicated and courageous leadership. If we are to solve the problems ahead and make social justice a reality, this leadership must be four-fold in our various communities. Men and women in every possible community endeavor should busy themselves in an effort to work out our problem on a mutual respectful basis with our fellow men. This is no time for faint-hearted men, but rather a time when our true faith in God should emerge and take over our complete self. It is spoke of in one passage of the scripture, that man should not fear men who can only destroy the body but rather God, who can destroy both body and soul.

In closing, I am reminded of the writings of James Weldon Johnson, who wrote:

"God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, Thou who hast brought us this far on the way; Thou who hast by thy might, led us into the light, keep us forever in Thy path, we pray. Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee. Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee; shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand true to our God, true to our native land."

Samuel Garth (1661-1719)—A Neo-Classical poet and physician of Yorkshire, England. Garth attempted to establish a system of medical charity for the poor in the city. Upon the failure to implement his program, he wrote "The Dispensary," a satiric poem against medical traders' obsession with

monetary interest, from which Medgar quotes here. The original reads, "When Honour's lost, 'tis a Relief to die; Death's but a sure Retreat from Infamy." See <http://www.hn.psu.edu/Faculty/Kkemmerer/poets/garth/dispens5.html>.

James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)—A celebrated teacher, poet, songwriter, and civil rights activist. Johnson served as an American consul at Puerto Cabello, Venezuela, and later in Nicaragua. He anonymously published a novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912). Appointed Executive Secretary of the NAACP in 1920, Johnson won praise as an effective organizer. He resigned from the position in 1930 due to the post's strenuous duties. Johnson was the author of *Black Manhattan* (1930), *Along This Way* (1933), and *Negro Americans, What Now?* (1934). See Robert E. Fleming, *James Weldon Johnson* (Boston: Twayne, 1987); and Lawrence J. Oliver and Kenneth M. Price, ed., *Critical Essays on James Weldon Johnson* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1997).

20 Medgar Evers to Robert Carter, General Counsel, NAACP

September 4, 1957

Mr. Robert Carter
General Counsel
20 West 40th Street
New York 18, New York

Dear Bob:

On September 3 three men of good reputation, Negro, came into my office and said their plans were to ride the buses unsegregated here in Jackson. They also consulted with our local attorney and gave him a retainer to represent them legally if it becomes necessary.

No steps have been taken other than the above mentioned ones, pending an okay from the National Office. The attorney has been reluctant to proceed in any other field, except registration and voting,

until he is otherwise instructed from the National Office, so if you deem the contemplated action advisable to pursue, please inform the attorney and myself of same *immediately* (by Monday, September 9).

Sincerely yours,

Medgar W. Evers
Field Secretary
MWE:mes
cc: Mr. Gloster B. Current

21 News Release

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1957
MISSISSIPPI STATE CONFERENCE OF N. A. A. C. P. BRANCHES
JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI

Negroes in Mississippi are being "hood winked" and "cow licked" into believing that everything is well with his condition here in the state. State and national officials are engaging in an extensive brainwashing campaign to induce the Mississippi Negro to remain silent and complacent about the rights he is now being denied. Evidence of these brainwashing techniques is found in the every day attempt on the part of some jurist or politician who praises the "so called harmonious race relations," that exist in the state, and at the same time deny Negroes, regardless to their educational qualification, the right to register and vote.

Any person with common sense (especially Negro), who has lived in Mississippi for any length of time, knows the fallacies that accompany such utterances.

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