



# **THE AMERICAN PREJUDICE AGAINST COLOR**

**WILLIAM G. ALLEN**

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**THE AMERICAN PREJUDICE  
AGAINST COLOR**

**BY  
WILLIAM G. ALLEN**

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thralldom. Once more at liberty she visited, incognito, the town of Syracuse, where I was still tarrying. The mobocrats would not have permitted her to have left Fulton in peace, if they had known whither she was going.

We met again: reviewed the past and discussed the future. As I am not detailing sentiment, but merely stating facts, suffice it to say, that we made up our minds that we would not be defeated by a mob.

But to the future. What was to be done? We came to the conclusion that I could no longer expect to hold my position in M'Grawville. The college had already received a terrible shock by reason of the cry of "amalgamation" which had been raised by the mob. And though the trustees were willing, at heart, to face the storm of prejudice, worldly wisdom, they considered, dictated that they should not incur the odium which they could not avoid bringing upon the college, if they persisted in retaining me longer as one of their professors. The trustees thought it would be better to be cautious, and save the college for the good it might do in the future. Such a union as ours was, in fact, but one of the logical results of the very principles on which the college was founded. I do not profess to sit in judgment, and therefore attempt no comment. They were now evidently anxious that I should resign, though, of course, they did not express so much to me in words.

I also came to the further conclusion that I could no longer, under the circumstances, whatever I might be able to do in future, hold my position in the country. For, however willing I might be to endure all things in my own person, I felt that I ought not to expose to any further danger one who already suffered so much and so heroically for my sake. I knew several of the lady's friends who were bitterly opposed to our union, solely on account of my color, and who were prepared, if the occasion should require it, to go to desperate lengths. They would not have hesitated to have sworn her into the lunatic asylum. I therefore decided not only to resign my professorship in the college, but also to leave the country.

Our plans being now quietly arranged, the lady returned to Fulton, and it was then supposed that all communication between us was for ever broken off. The mob had ordered that it should be so, and doubtless thought it was so. The most mistaken idea they ever entertained. The lady remained for a

short time in Fulton, and then retired into the interior of the state of Pennsylvania. I continued to remain in the town of Syracuse.

Soon a favorable opportunity presented itself, and we met in the city of New York, on the 30th March, 1853, and then and there asserted our rights in due and legal form: after which we immediately took the train for Boston.

Owing to the great publicity which the newspapers had given to our affairs and the consequent excitement thereon, we found it necessary to use the utmost caution, such as walking apart in the streets, and travelling in the trains as strangers to each other. It would have been fool-hardy to have provoked another mob.

We remained in Boston ten days, quietly visiting among our friends, and then set sail for England. Wishing to get out of the country without farther ado, we were compelled to submit to many sacrifices, pecuniary and otherwise, of which it is not necessary to speak. In England and Ireland, including a short trip to Scotland, we have been ever since, and have constantly received that generous and friendly consideration which, from the reputation of Great Britain and Ireland, we had been led to expect; and for which we are grateful.

To go back for a single moment to New York Central College. On receiving the appointment to the professorial chair, the pro-slavery newspaper press of the country opened a regular assault. The "*Washington Union*" thus wrote:

"What a pity that college could not have found white men in all America to fill its professors' chairs. What a burning shame that the trustees should have been mean enough to rob Mr. L—— of his law student, and the Boston bar of its ebony ornament." I was never at the Boston bar, and therefore could not have been its ebony ornament. The imagination of the editors supplied them with the fact, and that answered their purpose as well.

A reverend doctor of divinity writing in a Cincinnati newspaper, wondered "how a man of sense could enter that amalgamation college. If this professor would go to Liberia and display his eloquence at the bar there; or,

if he has any of the grace of God in his heart, enter the pulpit, he would then be doing a becoming work."

From Augusta, Georgia (Slave State), I received the following document, signed by several parties, and containing the picture of a man hanging by the neck, under which was written, "Here hangs the Professor of Greek!"

"Augusta, Geo. Nov. 1850.

"Sir,—We perceive you have been appointed Professor of Greek in New York Central College. Very well. We also perceive that you have occasionally lectured in the North on the 'Probable Destiny of the African Race.' Now, Sir, if you will only have the kindness to come to Augusta, and visit our hemp yard, you may be sure that your destiny will not be *probable*, but certain.

"Signed,

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_"

Of course I did not go to Augusta, Georgia.

These assaults and attempts at ridicule served to bring me into general notice. I soon found that, by reason of them, and without merit or effort of my own, I had become known throughout the whole country as "the Colored Professor." I had a status. The lady being the daughter of a highly respectable minister, she also had a status. To permit therefore the union of these parties would be to bring the principle of amalgamation into respectability. So reasoned those who attempted to reason on behalf, or rather in excuse, of the mob. "We are sorry," they went on condescendingly to say, "for Professor Allen, for though a man of color, he is nevertheless a gentleman, a Christian and a scholar. But this union must not be; the 'proprieties of society,' must not be violated!" Here then was the secret of this extraordinary outbreak. Had we moved in what these good people would have been pleased to term a lower strata of society, they would have let us alone with infinite contempt.

The most lamentable feature of this Fulton mob was the fact, that we could not, if we had sought it, have secured any redress. No court of law in the State would have undertaken to bring to justice the perpetrators of this outrage. But on the contrary, such court would have been inclined to take sides with the mobocrats, and to justify them in the means which they employed wherewith to chastise a colored man who had presumed so grossly to violate the "proprieties of society."

Before closing I cannot forebear a further word with regard to New York Central College. During the four years I was in connexion with that college as professor, I never experienced the slightest disrespect from trustees, professors or students. All treated me kindly, so kindly indeed that I can truly say that the period of my professorship forms one of the pleasantest remembrances of my life. Terrible as prejudice against color is, my experience has taught me that it is not invincible; though, as it is the offspring of slavery, it will never be fully vanquished until slavery has been abolished.

In illustration of the direct influences of slavery as they affect the free man of color, I again go back for a single moment. Having spent three years at Oneida Institute, I proposed to myself a visit to Virginia, to look once more into the faces of beloved parents, relatives and friends, to walk again upon the strand at Fortress Monroe, where I had so often in childhood beheld the sunbeams play upon the coves and inlets, and seen the surf beat upon the rocks. I, at first, had some difficulty in getting a passage to Virginia, most of the masters of the New York vessels to whom I applied seeming to be of a friendly nature, and not willing to expose me to the slave laws of Virginia. I, however, succeeded at last—the captain of a Philadelphia vessel consenting to land me at the fortress of Monroe. I remained in the home of my childhood and youth seven days in peace; but on the morning of the eighth day, while walking on the strand, I was rudely assaulted by a person who had known me from my infancy. I had always supposed him to be a gentleman, and was therefore greatly surprised and shocked. But slavery is relentless; it ruins both the morals and the manners. This individual, after belaboring me in a savage manner, gave me distinctly to understand that unless I left Virginia speedily, I might find myself in trouble. He afterwards

remarked, as I understood, to his friends that "this Allen has been off to an abolition college and returned among us. Let us look out for him."

I took the hint; and on the next morning secured the services of a party who rowed me off in a small canoe to a vessel lying in the harbor, where I bargained with the captain, who, for a handsome sum, consented to take me quietly out of the state. I left Virginia at once, and have never returned to it since, though I would gladly have done so, as relatives and friends near and dear to me have since died, by the side of whose death beds I desired to stand. In conclusion I have only to say that were I in the United States of America to-morrow, it would be more than my life or liberty would be worth to put foot upon the soil of my native state. Is this freedom? If it be, then give me slavery indeed.

A word or two with regard to my course in this country. Hitherto my income has been derived solely from lectures, tuitions, and such other odds and ends of work in my line as my hands could find to do. I desire a more permanent settlement for myself and family, and hope that the sale of this little narrative may help to create means to that end.

I send it forth therefore, desiring that it may stand upon its own merits, at the same time earnestly hoping that it may interest all into whose hands it may fall.

From Lord Shaftesbury.

"Lord Shaftesbury sympathizes most heartily with Professor Allen and sincerely wishes him success in his undertaking. It will give Lord Shaftesbury great pleasure to assist, in any way that he can, a gentleman of the colored race, who is a hundred times wiser and better than his white oppressors.

"London, *July, 1854.*"

From Rev. I. G. Abeltshouser, LL.D. Trinity College,  
Dublin, and others;—

"Dublin, 14th April, 1856.

"The undersigned having made due enquiry from the most trustworthy sources relative to the character and attainments of Professor William G.



Allen, have much pleasure in recommending him as a gentleman of high attainments and honorable character.

I. G. Abeltshouser, Clk. LL.D. Trin. Col. Dub.

Wm. Urwick, D. D. 40, Rathmines Road, Dublin.

James Haughton, 35 Eccles-street, Dublin.

Richard Allen, Sackville-street, Dublin.

Jonathan Pim, 22, William-street, Dublin.

John Evans, M. D. 38, Richmond-street, Dublin.

R. D. Webb, 176, Great Brunswick-street, Dublin.

John R. Wigham, 36, Capel-street, Dublin.

From Richard D. Webb, Esq. of Dublin.

"Dublin, 3rd November, 1858.

"Dear Mr. Allen,

"Your name was familiar to me long before I knew you personally. I had often heard of 'Professor W. G. Allen,' who, while connected with the Central College, in the State of New York, and respected there as a man and a teacher, was obliged to leave his native country for the offence of marrying a white lady of respectable family and great excellence of character, who is now much liked and esteemed by her numerous friends in this city. I became acquainted with you soon after your arrival in London; and particularly during your residence in Ireland I have had nearly as much opportunity of knowing you as any of your acquaintances here. I can truly say, that you have earned the hearty respect of all who know you (of whom I have any knowledge), by the industry, energy, and self-respect you have evinced in the course of a long and difficult battle with those adverse circumstances, with which a comparatively unknown and friendless stranger has to contend, in his efforts to effect a settlement in a strange country. Your conduct has been industrious, honorable and in every way deserving of esteem and sympathy. Some time since, in the columns of the 'Anti-Slavery Advocate,' without hint or solicitation on your part, I took the liberty to speak of your course as I do now; for amongst all the colored Americans with whom my interest in the Anti-Slavery cause has made me acquainted—

and many of whom are my own personal friends—I have known none more deserving of respect and confidence than yourself.

"Yours truly,  
"Richard D. Webb."

Having, in my avocation as lecturer on "The African Race" and "America and the Americans," visited nearly the whole of Ireland, I respectfully submit the following letters and notices, the letters being from gentlemen who kindly presided at the meetings:—

From the Rev. Doctor Fitzgerald, Archdeacon of Kildare,  
(now Lord Bishop of Cork).

"Professor Allen delivered some lectures on the African Race, in Kingstown, which seemed to have given general satisfaction. I regret that I was unable to attend more than one, but I can truly say that it bore evidence of a highly cultivated mind, and imparted valuable information in a pleasing form. From what I have seen and heard of Professor Allen, I should be glad to think that any testimony of mine could be of service to him.

"W. Fitzgerald, Archdeacon of Kildare,  
(Now Lord Bishop of Cork.)

"Dublin, Nov. 1856"

From Rev. Doctor Urwick, Dublin.

"I have known Professor Allen since his first coming to Ireland, and believe him to be a gentleman of high character and attainments. His lecturings, more than one of which I have heard, display much power, and by the amount of information they contain, united with a clear and often eloquent style, and earnest manner, cannot fail, at once, to interest and instruct the audience. I cordially commend him to the confidence and kind attention of my friends.

"W. Urwick.

"Dublin, Nov. 30, 1857."

From Cork—see "Constitution," "Examiner" and "Reporter," March 1858.

"Cork, Feb. 28, 1858.

"To William G. Allen, Esq. late Professor of Greek in New York Central College.

"Dear Sir—We, the undersigned, having heard your lectures on 'America' and 'Africa,' and derived therefrom much instruction as well as gratification, do, on our own part and that of many of our fellow citizens who are anxious to hear you, respectfully request that you will give, at least, two lectures more upon these interesting subjects.

"(Signed)

Henry Martin, Congregational Minister.

R. W. Forrest (Free Church).

Richd. Corbett, M. D.

J. D. Carnegie.

Henry Unkles.

George Baker.

Richard Dowden, (Rd.)

William Magill, (Scots' Church).

Joseph R. Greene, Professor, Queen's Coll.

Thomas Jennings.

N. Jackson, C. E.

Joseph Colbeck."

From "Belfast News-letter," Dec. 10, 1858.

"Rev. Doctor Cooke occupied the chair. Professor Allen then delivered a lecture of great ability and interest. Dr. Cooke said he had listened to a remarkable oration. He was glad he had heard it. He thanked Professor Allen, in the name of the meeting, for his truly valuable and instructive lecture."

From the Dean of Waterford.

"Professor W. G. Allen, an American gentleman of color, having visited Waterford, delivered two lectures here, one on 'America,' and the other on 'Africa and the African Races.' On each occasion I had the pleasure to occupy the chair at the meetings held to hear Mr. Allen's lectures, which proved most interesting and instructive. The Professor is himself a witness that there is nothing in color or race to hinder a man from being distinguished for eloquence, good taste, and religious feeling.

"I have seldom heard public addresses which have interested me more, and I have no doubt that Mr. Allen's lectures will prove useful, wherever they are delivered, in creating an interest on behalf of our fellow men, who have suffered so great wrongs from professing Christians, though happily no longer at the hands of British subjects.

"Edw. N. Hoare,  
Dean of Waterford.

"Deanery, Waterford, Jan. 16, 1858."

From Rev. Doctor Browne, Principal of Kilkenny College.

"Kilkenny College, Feb. 3, 1858.

"I have attended Professor Allen's lectures on 'America and the Americans,' and on the 'African Races,' and have received much pleasure as well as information from the talent and power with which he has handled the subjects of which he treated.

"His knowledge, his ardent and impressive manner, and clear melodious voice, render him a most pleasing as well as instructive lecturer.

"John Browne, Clk. LL.D."

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