



The Regeneration of Africa Alexander Crummell (1865)

Alexander Crummell was a freeborn African American from New York. In the 1840s, he became an Episcopal priest. He was also an anti-slavery activist and a pioneering black scholar, studying at Yale and later at Cambridge, in England. In the 1850s, Crummell moved to the newly independent Republic of Liberia as a missionary. He continued to make his home there until the 1870s, when he fled the country to escape violent political conflict among Liberia's African American settlers. He spent the rest of his life back in the United States.

"The Regeneration of Africa" is a speech Crummell delivered during a return visit to the United States in 1865, a few months after the American Civil War had ended. Crummell gave the speech to support the work of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, an organization founded by whites to encourage African Americans to emigrate to Liberia.

Africa cannot be redeemed by her own unaided energy and agency. If left thus to herself for regeneration, her pagan populations can never become spiritually enlightened. You cannot find one single instance where a rude, heathen people have raised themselves by their own spontaneous energy from a state of paganism to one of spiritual superiority. In every instance that we know of where men have been morally elevated, they have always had the missions from superior people, of either letters or grace, as the origination of such elevation.

[...But] I add still further that the redemption of Africa cannot be brought about through the one single agency of foreign missionaries. Without their presence and primal agency, the gospel is not likely to enter any land. They must, from necessity, first carry missions and letters to Africa, first plant the germs of churches all along that coast. The superior and more enlightened peoples are always the founders of a new faith, or the pioneers of a fresh civilization, in rude and pagan countries. But though the first beginnings and the quickening start come from them, the *permanent* work is always completed by indigenous agencies. [...] Christianity never secures *thorough* entrance and complete authority in any land save by the use of men and minds somewhat native to the soil. And from the very start of the Christian faith, this idea has always been illustrated in the general facts of its conquest. [...F]or the propagation of the faith, the main lever and agency must needs be indigenous. The faith, at first, is an exotic in all new lands; but in order to make its roots strike deep into the new soil, men native in blood, lineage, feelings, and sentiments must needs be raised up and put to active effort.

Now, the Almighty, in a most marvelous manner, has been providing just this agency, with almost every indigenous quality, for the propagation of the faith on the continent of Africa. Millions of the Negro race have been stolen from the land of their fathers. They have been the serfs for centuries—on the plantations and in households in the West Indies and the United States—of civilized and Christian people. By contact with Anglo-Saxon culture and religion, they have themselves been somewhat permeated and vitalized by the civilization and the Christian principles of their superiors. Numbers of them have become emigrants, settlers, denizens of a free republic and of thriving colonies of the British on the west coast of Africa; and numbers more of them ever and anon emigrate from the lands of their past thralldom back, not unfrequently, to the very spots whence their parents were first stolen. And these emigrants

almost invariably profess the faith of Jesus. They are *Christian* emigrants, journeying across the wide ocean with Bibles, and prayer books, and tracts, and sermons, and family altars, seeking a new home amid the heathen population of Africa. [...]

Whose work is this? Who has prompted this movement of Christian black men [...] back to the land of their ancestors, laden with gifts and talents; sanctified, as numbers of them are, by the spirit of grace? Who but the Spirit of God is moving these Christian "remnants" of black society—this seed of civilization—from the West Indies and America to the coast of Africa? Who but God himself has called and elected this germ of Christianity to a great work of duty in the land of their fathers? [...]

Does any man doubt this assertion of distinctive providence? Come, then, with me for a moment to the west coast of Africa. Take your position, say, at Sierra Leone. Run your eye along the whole line of the coast from Gambia to the Cameroons, and watch that steady, quiet, uninterrupted emigration of cultivated colored men who are coming over from Jamaica, Antigua, Barbados, St. Kitts, St. Thomas, and Demerara—many of them men who have "ate their terms" at the Inns of London; some graduates of Edinburgh, St. Augustine's, Canterbury, Codrington College, and other great schools—coming over to the west coast of Africa and becoming merchants, planters, postmasters, government officials, lawyers, doctors, judges, and (blessed be God) catechists and clergymen at British settlements in western Africa! Then go down 200 miles to the Republic of Liberia, and see there 14,000 black emigrants from more than half of the states of America; and see there, too, how God, after carrying on his work of preparation in the black race in America in dark, mysterious, and distressful ways, has at length brought out a "remnant" of them and placed them in a free republic to achieve high nationality, to advance civilization, and to subserve the highest interests of the cross and the church! [...]

It is all God's work, and to him be the glory! While for 240 years, the brutal hand of violence has been at the black man's throat, *God* has been neither blind nor quiet. He has seen it all—he has been moving, too, amid it all, latent and restrained in power, although atrocious and repulsive as it has ever been to him. [...] Yes, the Omnipotent has ever been present amid all the agonizing details of African history this two centuries and a half past [...] until this poor people, as by a mighty resurrection, have come forth from this dark charnel house to fulfill a grand destiny and to accomplish a great history! And as God has thus clearly, plainly, distinctly set before us his great plans and purposes, I bow with submission and joyful acquiescence to his most manifest will and would fain hold it up for recognition. The whole of this movement to Africa is evidently designed for the regeneration of that continent. Rightfully it belongs to Christianity; its possession by the devil is an usurped possession. The agency of Christian black men, emigrants and missionaries, is to bring it back to its divine owner as a precious jewel in his diadem.

[...T]he deportation of the whole Negro race in this land is not a necessity, nor a requirement, considered with respect to the end just referred to. God does not work out his great ends in this manner. It is by "*remnants*" that he achieves the marvels of his providence and his grace. It is "the called," "the elect," "the chosen"—few, indeed, they may be—whom he selects, and puts in fit places, and sets to their proper work for his own glory. [...]

Just so—that is, by fragments, "remnants," of English society—in the seventeenth century, this western world was peopled. [...T]he emigrants from the old country to New England, during the

first hundred years of its settlement, did not exceed 21,000 persons; and from them, mainly, has sprung that powerful New England influence which helps so powerfully to determine American interests. Just so in the present day, “remnants” of northern society, from New England and New York, venture out upon the trackless wilds of the distant west and spread new society abroad to the shores of the Pacific. And just so, when a high culture shall have elevated and refined the black race in this country—and when the faith of Christ, combining therewith, shall have moved all the finer, deeper, more delicate springs of action within them—will numbers, nay multitudes, of them rush forward, inspired by the Spirit of God, to carry the gospel to Africa and to bring that continent in subjection to our Lord Jesus Christ!

[...W]hen men’s souls can no longer tolerate the abominations of African paganism—when their hearts are sickened at the dishonor done to Christ by the gross heathenism of a whole continent—then the white man will acknowledge the value and the worth of the black man, in God’s economy, as a noble instrument for the highest services; the black man himself will feel the tenderest sensibility for the land of his fathers. From your schools and churches, scores of African teachers, and ministers, and Christian mechanics will offer themselves for the work of God in Africa. The glory of Christ, and *not* the expulsion of the Negro, will prompt the noblest charities; prospective villages, well furnished and equipped, will start up from the midst of your then-cultivated freedmen. Men, chosen of God, will come forward and band themselves together to go and possess Africa for Christ. In goodly companies will they speed their way across the ocean to evangelize a continent. [...E]ven now, the time, it seems to me, has come; “the day is at hand,” and all the great obstacles to the redemption of Africa are well nigh removed; the wide door of saving opportunity is opened; and now good men everywhere should seize the “staff of accomplishment,” and enter in at once, and claim that continent for their Lord.

Source: Alex Crummell, “The Regeneration of Africa,” in *Africa and America: Addresses and Discourses* (Springfield, MA: Willey & Co., 1891), 431-453, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hw26xx>. Public domain, Google-digitized.

Excerpts edited by John-Charles Duffy. A paragraph break omitted for a more compact presentation of the text. Two additional sentence breaks inserted for readability. A potentially confusing archaism emended (*how that* → *how*). The spelling of three geographical names modernized. Spelled-out numbers converted to numerals for readability and consistency of style. Punctuation corrected, regularized, or otherwise emended in line with modern conventions. The use of italics replicates the source publication.

For the sake of modernization, several words capitalized in the source have been converted here to lowercase: the political terms *states* and *republic* (except in the name *Republic of Liberia*); the geographical references *west coast*, *western*, and *northern*; and the religious terms *gospel*, *prayer books*, *tracts*, *sermons*, *cross*, *church*, and *divine*, as well as divine pronouns. The capitalizing of *Negro* but the lowercasing of the racial label *black* reproduces the usage of the source publication.

These edited excerpts from Crummell’s speech are intended for *teaching* purposes only. For *research* purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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