



**Smithsonian Institution**

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

## **The Crisis Vol. 13 No. 4**

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THE CRISIS

[[2 Column article]]

[[column one]]  
"O, mother," he cried, clapping his hands with glee, "Is it true?" Did he put down the French and the Spanish and the English? Did he do all that the book says he did?"

"Yes, honey," she replied. "He did that, and more too."

"O, how I would like to be another Toussaint." And the mother kissed her child.

From that day the boy became a hero worshipper, devoutly admiring the personality of Toussaint. Louisville, with her burning red brick and her streets dark with people of African descent, became to him a proper place to nurture one who should destroy the shackles of oppression. When he had read the oration for himself he wondered if Louisville and Haiti were not synonyms and if the dead could return and if within his veins flowed the admirable blood of princes as in the case of the Haitian patriot. Many a night he lay in his little white bed and dreamed of a massive black figure, majestic of poise and speech and born to command, and of a vision prophetic. He saw the cruel orgies of the enraged slaves as they swept before them in their wrath their helpless taskmasters. He saw the old man of the mountains with his fiery eyes and his voice, deep with the music of the Orient, turn them aside from a war of revenge to a war of righteousness. He saw the hero of eighty thousand, crowned with the laurel wreath and wearing the toga of government, pining away in a narrow prison cell overlooking Switzerland, crushed by the treachery of the Little Corporal.

Garrison was imaginative. His mother before him was a woman of keen fancy and many said that under different circumstances she might have been a poet. His father, although wearing his life in the monotony of the barber trade, was of military temperament and hopelessly read the novels of Scott and Dumas with the vain idea that he might appease his longing in the conflict of story-made heroes. "The Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture," by an English author during the days of the abolition movement, was a purchase he had made to find out the exact tactics of the Negro general and he smiled with pleasure when Garrison climbed upon a chair and took it down from the topmost shelf in their little bookcase to devour its contents with youthful ardor.

When the minister, a scholarly man who first took up the work in the West Indies,

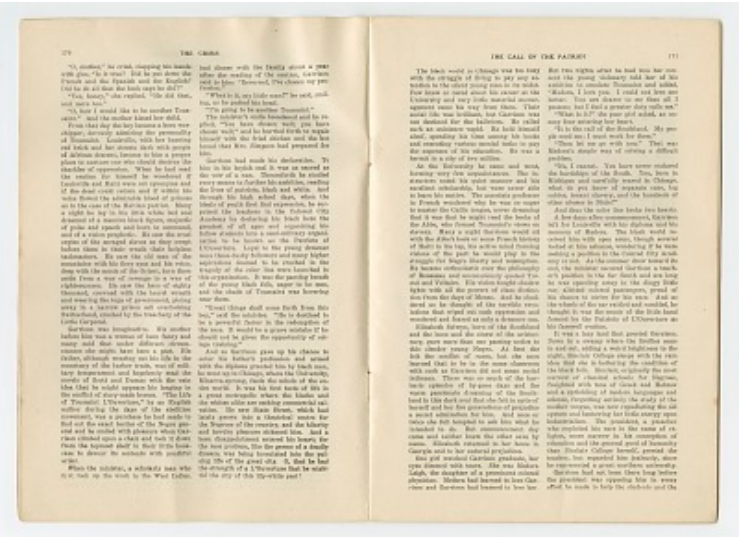
[[column two]]

had dinner with the family about a year after the reading of the oration, Garrison said to him: "Reverend, I've chosen my profession."

"What is it, my little man?" he said, smiling, as he patted his head.

"I'm going to be another Toussaint."

The minister's smile broadened and he replied, "You have chosen well; you have chosen well," and he hurried forth the regale himself with the



fried chicken and the hot bread that Mrs. Simpson had prepared for him.

Garrison had made his declaration. to him in his boyish zeal it was as sacred as the vow of a nun. Thenceforth he studied every means to further his ambition, reading the lives of patriots, black and white. And through his high school days, when the ideals of youth first find expression, he surprised the teachers in the Colored City Academy by declaring his black hero the greatest of all ages and organizing his fellow students into a semi-military organization to be known as the Patriots of L'Ouverture. Loyal to the young dreamer were those dusky followers and many higher aspirations doomed to be crushed in the tragedy of the color line were launched in this organization. It was the panting breath of the young black folk, eager to be men, and the shade of Toussaint was hovering hear them.

"Great things shall come forth from this boy," said the minister. "He is destined to be a powerful factor in the redemption of the race. It would be a grave mistake if he should not be given the opportunity of college training."

And so Garrison gave up his chance to enter his father's profession and armed with the diploma granted him by black men, he went up to Chicago, where the University, Minerva-sprung, feeds the minds of the entire world. It was his first taste of life in a great metropolis where the blacks and the whites alike are seeking commercial salvation. He saw State Street, which had lately grown into a theatrical centre for the Negros of the country, and the hilarity and tawdry pleasure sickened him. And a keen disappointment entered his heart; for the race problem, like the germs of a deadly disease, was being inoculated into the pulsing life of the great city. O, that he had the strength of a L'Ouverture that he might rid the city of this lily-white pest!

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#### THE CALL OF THE PATRIOT

[[Two columned article]] [[column one]]

The black world in Chicago was too busy with the struggle of living to pay any attention to the silent young man in its midst. Few knew or cared about his career at the University and very little material encouragement came his way from them. Their social life was brilliant, but Garrison was not destined for the ballroom. He called such an existence vapid. He held himself aloof, spending his time among his books and executing various menial tasks to pay the expenses of his education. He was a hermit in a city of two million.

At the University he came and went, forming very few acquaintances. The instructors noted his quiet manner and his excellent scholarship, but were never able to learn his motive. The associate professor in French wondered why he was so eager to master the Gallic tongue, never dreaming that it was that he might read the books of the Abbe, who formed Toussaint's views on slavery. Many a night Garrison would sit with the Abbe's book or some French history of Haiti in his lap, his active mind forming visions of the part he would play in the struggle for Negro liberty and redemption. He became enthusiastic over the philosophy of Rousseau and unconsciously quoted Tolstoi and Voltaire. His vision fought shadow fights with all the powers of class distinction from the days of Menes. And he shuddered as he thought of the terrible revolutions that wiped out such oppression and wondered and feared as

only a dreamer can.

Elizabeth Selwyn, born of the Southland and the bone and sinew of the aristocracy, gave more than one passing notice to this slender young Negro. At first she felt the conflict of races, but she soon learned that to be in the same classroom with such as Garrison did not mean social intimacy. There was so much of the barbaric splendor of by-gone days and the warm passionate dreaming of the Southland in this dark soul that she felt in spite of herself and her five generations of prejudice a secret admiration for him. And once or twice she felt tempted to ask him what he intended to do. But commencement day came and neither knew the other save by name. Elizabeth returned to her home in Georgia and to her natural prejudices.

One girl watched Garrison graduate, her eyes dimmed with tears. She was Medora Leigh, the daughter of a prominent colored physician. Medora had learned to love Garrison and Garrison learned to love her.

[[column two]]

But two nights after he had won her consent the young visionary told her of his ambition to emulate Toussaint and added, "Medora, I love you. I could not love one better. You are dearer to me than all I possess; but I feel a greater duty calls me."

"What is it?" the poor girl asked, an uneasy fear entering her heart.

"It is the call of the Southland. My people need me; I must work for them."

"Then let me go with you." That was Medora's simple way of solving a problem.

"No, I cannot. You have never endured the hardships of the South. You, born in Michigan and carefully reared in Chicago, what do you know of separate cars, log cabins, tenant slavery, and the hundreds of other abuses in Dixie?"

And thus the color line broke two hearts.

A few days after commencement, Garrison left for Louisville with his diploma and his memory of Medora. The black world received him with open arms, though several looked at him askance, wondering if he were seeking a position in the Colored City Academy or not. As the summer drew towards its end, the minister secured Garrison a teacher's position in the far South and ere long he was speeding away in the dingy little car, allotted colored passengers, proud of his chance to strive for his race. And as the wheels of the car rattled and rumbled, he thought it was the music of the little band formed by the Patriots of L'Ouverture as his farewell ovation.

It was a lazy land that greeted Garrison. Down in a swamp where the fireflies come in and out, adding a weird brightness to the night, Sinclair College sleeps with the vain idea that she is bettering the condition of the black fold. Sinclair, originally the most narrow of classical schools for Negroes, freighted with tons of Greek and Hebrew and a sprinkling of

modern languages and science, forgetting entirely the study of the mother tongue, was now repudiating the old system and bestowing her little energy upon industrialism. The president, a preacher who exploited his race in the name of religion, more narrow in his conception of education and the general good of humanity than Sinclair College herself, greeted the teacher, but regarded him jealously, since he represented a great northern university.

Garrison had not been there long before the president was opposing him in every effort he made to help the students and the

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