

Mary Church Terrell Papers: Speeches and Writings, 1866-1953; 1920, June 24 , Remarks Made at the Dunbar High School in Complimenting Mrs. Coralie Franklin Cook

Mrs. Cook, some of the citizens of the District of Columbia have had what they consider a very bright thought. And bright thoughts in these days of the high cost of living are very rare. Many of us are so busy chasing the almighty dollar, so as to secure the bare necessities of life, we really haven't the time to think. But some of us have taken a few hours off, so to speak, we have let our brains work a while and we have conceived what is really a capital idea.

We have been thinking about the invaluable service you have rendered this community ever since you were appointed a member of the Board of Education four years ago. And we want to thank you in a tangible, concrete way. We want you to know that we think you are a brilliant, a magnificent success, that we put you in a class all by your dear little self and we think you are a very rare bird indeed. We congratulate ourselves that we have as our representative a woman who is so well fitted by nature, education, training and experience as you are to perform the duties devolving upon you as a member of the Board of Education.

You have not only been able to decide intelligently what it was best to do with reference to all matters pertaining to our public schools, but you have had the courage of your convictions as well. We admire your intrepid spirit and your indomitable will. Even those who do not agree with you, if there are any, must admire the strength of character which you have displayed. You have many qualities of head and heart which fit you admirably for the responsible position which you have so admirably filled, qualities of which I have the inclination, but not the time to speak.

First, I want to thank you for the brilliant manner in which you represented us at the Senate Investigation which was held a short time ago. It is impossible for me to see how you could have rendered

more intelligent and effective service than you did. The clear, concise, and forceful manner in which you answered all the questions you were asked must have made a deep and lasting impression upon all who came within sound of your voice. If there were any in that room who had previously entertained a low opinion of the race as a whole, they must certainly have placed a much higher estimate upon some of its representatives, after they saw you and heard you talk.

It is difficult for me adequately to express the gratitude I feel for the magnificent defense of the womanhood of the race which you so fearlessly made. I want to thank you personally for refusing to cast a stone at one of our women teachers whose life and whose character in this community have been without blemish and above reproach for many years.

I congratulate you, of course upon receiving your third consecutive appointment, but the District of Columbia is to be congratulated more than you yourself. As a race we have frequently suffered, because unworthy or unfit representatives have occupied positions of honor or trust which they either would not or could not acceptably fill. Our progress has been greatly retarded thereby and we have been seriously injured by the egregious and unpardonable blunders which they have made. And so, it means a great deal to the colored people of this city to have a woman of your superior intellectual attainments, your irreproachable/character and your general integrity and worth represent us on the Board of Education. We know that the highest best interests of our children, the highest, best interests not only of the colored public schools but of the whole public school system are absolutely safe in your hands.

I am particularly glad to show publicly our appreciation of your services, because, sometimes, as a race, we criticize too severely and condemn too strongly our representatives who show some slight defect or who may make inconsequential mistakes. If our public servants were absolutely perfect, the Good Father of us all would not allow them to associate with

us wicked mortals on this sinful earth here below. Some fine day they would be snatched up in a whirlwind or they would be taken up in a chariot of fire, and we would never see them any more.

But, while we criticize severely and condemn strongly our own representatives for any little mistake they may make, we sometimes allow other people to subject us to any humiliation they may choose or degrade us in any way, shape or form without lifting a finger saying a word.

Or, if we do screw our courage up to the sticking point, our protest is so ladylike and mild that it can scarcely be heard. I am also glad to express this acknowledgement of our indebtedness to you as a community, because while the list of those who have rendered distinguished service is comparatively long, the list of those who have been similarly honored is comparatively short. It is always a hopeful sign, when [a group of] human beings express gratitude to those who serve them well. and, you certainly have served us well.

We thank you heartily and sincerely for all the good work you have done. We bespeak for you greater and ever increasing success in discharging the duties and obligations which rest upon you as a member of the Board of Education. We hope you will accept these flowers and this gift which we are presenting to you to night as a token of our genuine affection and our highest esteem.

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Mrs Coralie Franklin Cook, June 24, 1920.

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