

*A Convention
with a Grievance*

Two conventions of
negroes recently held
—the one in Boston,

the other in Baltimore—were in strong contrast with each other. One was the third annual Conference of the Niagara Movement, the other was the meeting of a National association of colored physicians, dentists, and surgeons. The Boston gathering brought together men with a grievance; the Baltimore gathering brought together men with a record. In the one there could be found, of course, men with fine records, as in the other there could be found men with just grievances; but the spirit of the one was that of complaint, while the spirit of the other was that of service. The Niagara Movement, of which Professor W. E. B. Du Bois is the leading spirit, began as a movement of protest at Niagara Falls two years ago. Its membership includes negroes of education. It is based on certain political and social theories: that the ballot is an inherent and inalienable right, rather than an earned responsibility; that equality of treatment (as, for instance, in public conveyances) means identity of treatment; and that a just compensation for past injuries would be the granting of great privileges in the present. Thus, the Niagara Movement does not aim to urge negroes to fit themselves for the requirements of the suffrage as laid down in Southern States, but endeavors to force the Southern States, chiefly by appeal to the Federal Congress, to abandon their suffrage requirements; it does not use its efforts to see that accommodations in cars for blacks are as good as those in cars for whites, but demands the abandonment of race separation—to quote the words of its declaration this year, “We demand Federal legislation forbidding the exclusion of any person from inter-State cars on account of race or color;” it does not stimulate the negroes to supplant their weaknesses by the strength that comes from overcoming obstacles, but instead declares, to quote from the report of its

legal committee, that “the law should lessen . . . the burden of the black man’s life.” The tone of this Conference is expressed in the following portions of its Address to the Country. After declaring that the Inter-State Commerce Commission had “in unseemly haste scurried to uphold social slavery and the vicious Jim Crow car,” the Address continues:

And why not? Has not the man in the White House set them an example by bowing before the brown and armed dignity of Japan and swaggering roughshod over the helpless black regiment whose bravery made him famous? With such examples, why should not the lawless and vicious of the land take courage? Why should not the less civilized part of our country follow this lead and spread the mockery of republican government in the South? But we will not follow. . . . We demand full exoneration and reinstatement of our shamefully libeled soldiers; and, finally, in God’s name, we ask justice; and not only do we ask and pray, but we back our prayers by deeds. We call on the 500,000 free black voters of the North: Use your ballots to defeat Theodore Roosevelt, William Taft, or any man named by the present political dictatorship. Better vote for armed enemies than for false friends.

We wonder how many friends of the negro race believe there is really more promise for the race in this rhetoric than in the simple records of such Hampton graduates as those who told their stories in the August Magazine Number of *The Outlook*. We wonder if many such friends believe that animosity and complaint usually accomplish more than patient, steady work. Those who desire to know what real progress the negroes have made since the days of slavery would find one kind of answer in this Boston Conference; they would find a very different answer in the Convention held at Baltimore.