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Anna Julia Cooper Address Accepting Her Diploma From the Sorbonne, University of Paris

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No nation, no race, no individual
in an clime or at any time, can lay claim
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to civilization as its own creation or invention
or exclusive personal possession. The impulse
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of humanity toward social progress is like
the movements in the currents of a great
water system, beating ever onward toward
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its destination—the ocean, & tho at one time or another
there may be little pools or eddies of stagnant
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"shut-ins" that have lost by the accident
of separation the onward sweep of the mighty
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current, these shut-ins, these shut-outs, instructed
than the age demands cannot, must not
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be tolerated or denied their right by
birth to civilization as part of the human
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family. This birthright is sacred & incontestable
being based on the solidarity & undeniable
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value of humanity itself & linked with the universal
value & inalienable right of every individual.

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Civilization has been likened to a divine torch that passes with the alphabet of self-expression from race to race & from age to age.

Phoenicians passed it to Greeks, Greeks to Romans, Romans to the barbarian forebears of the modern world. But who gave it to the Phoenicians, & who to him & who to him? No one knows.

The beginnings of things is always shrouded in mystery, & the guess of one is as good as another. The Greek myth has it that Prometheus stole the spark from Heaven, paying the penalty for his audacity in the service of man by deathless torture in an immortality of pain.

The myth however does not intimate that Prometheus repented of his daring deed. Suffering is not seldom the reward for service, even so the privilege of pushing the car of humanity along its toilsome journey is too precious to heed the cost.

Of all the nations that have borne

the torch in the vanguard of human enlightenment, none, it seems to me, can claim a more liberal spirit, a more cosmopolitan good-will in the reality of its fraternity, equality, & true liberty, than the one to whom we offer a tribute of gratitude tonight, splendid, ^{great} big-hearted, suffering but glorious France. In no land or country whether of the past or present time, is the marvelous culture of the nation so fully & so freely broadcast for the enlightenment & the enjoyment of all peoples & tribes & kindreds that on earth do dwell.

I sat not long ago in Salle des Etrangers at the Hotel de Ville waiting with others to secure the carte d'identite required of all who contemplate spending an extended time in Paris. I was struck by the concourse a motley crowd - Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, South America, & as this stream of humanity

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filed, at the call of a number past the different
clerks charged with examining their passports,
photographs, pedigrees & references, I was
amazed at the end to find the individual
cost was just ten francs - a little less than
half a dollar! Here literally it may be said:
Whoever will, let him come; let him that is
athirst come - yea, let him come & partake
freely of the knowledge, the inspiration, the
achievements & the glory of French culture
& French Civilization.

"Tros Tyrinusque mihi nullo discrimine agetur"
& for myself - if I may be pardoned one personal
word on an occasion so provocative of pride &
vain glory, I can say honestly & truthfully that
my only aim is & has always been to pass the
torch if I may to a group too long exploited
& too frequently disparaged in its struggling
for the light. I have never made capital of my
race never asked a concession or claimed
a gratuity. Nor on the other hand, have I ever

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denied full identification ^{ing} with every
handicap & every limitation that the
checkered history of our native land
imposes. My epitaph may be written today
in the simple praise of the Master for another
nameless one: "She hath done what she could";
& Surely no deeper joy can come to any one
than the pure pleasure of this moment in
the expression of appreciation on the part of
the community in which the best service
of my life has been given. In the language
of my favorite Cicero: "Nothing dumb can delight
me - I ask no memorial in bronze. There is nothing
in life worth striving for but the esteem
of just men founded on a sincere effort to
serve to the best of one's powers in the advancement
of one's day & generation. I take at your hands, therefore,
this diploma, not as a symbol of cold intellectual success
in my achievement at the Sorbonne, but with the
warm pulsing heart throbs of a people's satisfaction
in my humble efforts to serve them.
With all my heart, I thank you.