

Excerpt from *Why Ye Sit Here And Die?*

Written and presented by Maria W. Stewart

First African Baptist Church, Boston, MA, 1832

My beloved brethren, as Christ has died in vain for those who will not accept of offered mercy, so will it be vain for the advocates of freedom to spend their breath in our behalf, unless with united hearts and souls you make some mighty efforts to raise your sons and daughters from the horrible state of servitude and degradation in which they are placed.

It is upon you that woman depends; she can do but little beside using her influence; and it is for her sake and yours that I have come forward and made myself a hissing and a reproach among the people; for I am also one of the wretched and miserable daughters of the descendants of Africa. Do you ask: "Why are you wretched and miserable?" I reply: Look at many of the most worthy and interesting of us doomed to spend our lives in gentlemen's kitchens. Look at our young men – smart, active and energetic, with souls filled with ambitious fire; if they look forward, alas! what are their prospects? They can be nothing but the humblest laborer, on account of their dark complexion; hence many of them lose their ambition, and become worthless.

Look at our middle-aged men, clad in their rusty plaids and coats. In winter, every cent they earn goes to buy their wood and pay their rent; their poor wives also toil beyond their strength, to help support their families. Look at our aged sires, whose heads are whitened with the frosts of seventy winters, with their old wood-saws on their backs.

Alas, what keeps us so? Prejudice, ignorance, and poverty. But ah! methinks our oppression is soon to come to an end...

Source:

Stewart, M. W. (1879). *Meditations from the pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart*