



Interview with Caroline R. Le Count

New National Era, May 22, 1873

Color Prejudice

The Difficulty Between the White and Colored ladies of the Philadelphia Centennial Committee – An Intelligent Colored lady Interviewed by a “Times” reporter – Her Version of the Affair – What she Thinks of the Imperious Mrs. Aubrey Smith.

A short time ago the executive committee of the women’s branch of the centennial commission invited a number of colored ladies to meet with them at No. 904 Walnut Street. In response to the invitation about a dozen colored women attended. Certain work was assigned them, which, they declining to perform, a misunderstanding arose at the outset which has since called forth an explanation on the part of the white ladies.

It being the established practice of the *Sunday Times* to give all sides a fair and impartial hearing, one of our reporters last week “interviewed” Miss Le Count, an exceedingly intelligent and affable young lady, who is perhaps most familiar with the subject. All the questions were answered promptly, frankly, and in a manner which indicated that the handsome young lady felt the indignity under which she was placed.

Reporter – Miss Le Count, learning that you are principal of the Ohio Street public schools, seventh section, I therefore regard you as one of our representative women and your opinion will be highly esteemed; therefore I have called to interview you with the hope of hearing a full statement of all concerned with the organization of the so called colored branch of the centennial. Will you please state, Miss Le Count, in your own way, all that occurred?

Miss Le Count – I was one of those ladies solicited at the request of Mrs. Aubrey H. Smith to cooperate with the women’s branch of the commission. The first meeting was convened at 904 Walnut Street, at which Dr. Rebecca J. Cole was appointed chairwoman. The committee was organized in presence of Mrs. Smith, Gilespie, Cohen, Miss McHenry – books and all things necessary to complete the organization being received from Mrs. Smith. Now, sir, I wish you to understand that I did not attend this meeting but what I am saying to you is substantially what occurred there. The manner of Mrs. Smith was so dictatorial and the orders so humiliating that a meeting was called the same evening to protest against the character of the organization.

Reporter – Miss Le Count, did the ladies assembled at the first meeting consent to perform the work assigned them.

Miss Le Count – I understand that the ladies listened quietly, astonished as Mrs. Smith proceeded to tell them who and what they were, and to inform them of the duties to be performed. Their education forbade their discussing with this refined and model exponent of the elevated

sentiments entertained by the "women of the land" wishing rather to reply thereto after a calm ... coming from the great representative of the "women of the land."

Reporter – Miss Le Count, what was the tenor of Mrs. Smith's remarks at that meeting which you said was held at the house of Dr. Cole?

Miss Le Count – Mrs. Smith stated that we could not be accepted on any other conditions than those originally stated that is we must work as a separate committee based upon color; that we solicit subscriptions from and our whole work be confined to colored people alone; that we had no right to work among white people; that we were solicited as a matter of courtesy, the right being confined to those whom she represented.

Mrs. Smith also irrelevantly touched upon the social question and even went so far as to speak of "remanding" us to Africa if we were not satisfied with the laws of the land, a statement, which, in my opinion, needs no reply from intelligent persons. To be plain, the entire sentiments of Mrs. Smith were but a reiteration of those sentiments which have always characterized the opponents of justice. They were a revival of the bitterest color prejudices.

Reporter – Miss le Count, will your committee act, should other arrangements be made?

Miss Le Count – I think no sir. In fact I feel certain that we will take no part in the commission whatever. Having been placed in a false position in an article in the *Press* of April 17th and there the entire affair rests.

Reporter – Miss Le Count, you emphasize the word "remand" very bitterly. Was there anything in the manner in which that sentence was used that caused you to do so?

Miss Le Count – I did it, sit, because the word is fraught with the most painful associations and it is only those who have suffered as we have that can fully understand it. It was a term used when the dealers in the bodies and souls of men succeeded in putting their prey and consigning them to interminable bondage. It was the legal term that belonged to the fugitive-slave-law days and I should have thought this lady would have hesitated to have used such a word before eleven American women, whose only crime in her eyes was that their complexions were less fair than hers. From historic associations the word should have been as unpleasant to her as painful to us.

Reporter – You said that the statement of Mrs. Smith in volunteering to "remand" you back to Africa if you were not satisfied with the laws of the land, needed no reply from intelligent people. Why so?

Miss Le Count – To be intelligent is to understand the laws of the land and the great feature of our laws is that they make no distinction by reason of color and are therefore in direct conflict with this movement of Mrs. Smith's. To produce so grand a result which the truly intelligent can comprehend has cost our nation thousands of lives and millions of money and we laugh to scorn this attempt to repudiate the sacrifices and sufferings of true Americans. In them we participated not to the exclusion of Mrs. Smith and her "Women of America," but to the common inheritance of all.