

## “A Miniature Moses”

JOHN MERCER LANGSTON

By PAUL ALLERSMEYER\*

FROM 1814 to 1834 Captain Ralph Quarles' plantation in Louisa County, Virginia, stood out like a chronic sore thumb in the South's social system. Although he owned sufficient slaves to warrant hiring a white overseer, he chose, instead, to remain the only Caucasian on his property. His slaves, or co-workers, labored under the supervision of colored overseers, who, during twenty years' time, administered only one serious punishment for disobedience. Shunned by Virginia society because of his anomalous plantation, he derived social solace as the benevolent father of his own insulated community.

Ralph Quarles married beautiful Lucy Langston, one of his slaves. After her emancipation, Mrs. Quarles became the mother of four children, Maria, Gideon, Charles and John. The last offspring, John Mercer Langston (the mother's name was used because the marriage could not be legalized), was only five when his parents died in 1834. There is no record that the parents had perceived any indication of the extraordinary intelligence and forceful personality of their youngest son, which were to bring him recognition as one of America's most influential Negroes.

John did not forget the poignant experience of watching his parents' burials, while standing beside the slave woman, Lucky, who had cared for him since birth.

Captain Quarles' will freed his principal slaves and bequeathed the remaining property to his children — John's share was to be held in trust until his twenty-first birthday. After consultation among his trustees, John, with his half-brother, William Langston, an Ohio carpenter, journeyed to the home of his new guardian, William Gooch, a wealthy friend of his father in Chillicothe, Ohio.<sup>1</sup>

The trip to Ohio, like Moses' basket ride on the Nile, gave John future access to the vital treasures of an excellent educational and social background, which were as unattainable for the slave in

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the South, as for the enslaved Hebrews in Egypt. Fortunately, free Ohio boasted a number of small Negro communities in addition to Oberlin College, a hot bed for radical abolitionists.<sup>2</sup>

The Gooch family enthusiastically adopted the light brown newcomer as their son, "Johnnie Gooch." They executed Ralph Quarles' will by providing for the boy's education, first through tutoring by Gooch's daughter, Virginia, and then at the age of eight by entering him in a local private school. (The Ohio public schools at this time excluded Negroes.)

When John was ten, the Gooches moved west to Missouri. William Langston with his lawyer, the future Senator Thurman, separated John from his guardian and slave-holding Missouri through an involved legal wrangle that forced Gooch to keep his ward under Ohio's jurisdiction.

John was grief stricken when the Gooches migrated, especially since his next guardian, the puritan abolitionist Richard Long, new owner of Gooch's farm, demanded physical labor in addition to the continuation of his studies, at which he excelled with notable ability in oratory.

Following graduation from the private school, he studied in Cincinnati where he stayed with John Woodson and later with Watson, a colored barber who employed him in his shop. Cincinnati was seething over the racial question which was agitated by Dr. Bailey, an abolitionist editor, and certain colored orators, all of whom profoundly impressed young Langston. Two years after, a vicious anti-Negro mob stalked the streets of the city, but John luckily hid successfully and soon departed to join William Langston, his newly appointed guardian, near Chillicothe. Following some exceptionally provocative tutoring sessions with Mr. Vashon and Mr. Whitehorn, colored Oberlin students, John enrolled at Oberlin with the reluctant consent of his half-brother.<sup>3</sup>

He found the institution's environment to be both intriguing and challenging. His forensic talent catapulted him into prominence as one of the school's top debators and prompted him to try law as a career. Upon graduation, he could not gain admission to law school because of his race. He proudly refused to pose as a foreigner at the suggestion of the dean of admissions of Ballston Spa law school, who agreed to admit him on this condition. Reluctantly he remained at Oberlin acquiring a master's degree and then studying theology for three more years. His academic career was climaxed by the honor of delivering the school's commencement address. During his college vacations, he helped support himself by



teaching at several Ohio colored country schools financed by voluntary contributions.

Langston's remarkable record offered him the choice of numerous pastoral positions, but he resolved to become a lawyer by studying and residing with the co-operative Judge Bliss at Elyria, a town in Lorain County, Ohio. While studying there, he favorably impressed the townspeople as an outstanding orator by doggedly maintaining that the future of the Negro lay in America, not in Africa as a speaker for the American Colonization Society had alleged. His short, thin physique and clean cut face always enhanced his effectiveness as a speaker. Following a year's intensive work, Judge Bliss conferred a certificate on Langston, and the state committee, impressed with his knowledge, granted his admission to the bar, only after construing him to be white because of his mixed parentage and hence not subject to the law's Jim Crow provisions.

The elated new member of the bar purchased a farm in Lorain County at Browhelm township, just nine miles outside Oberlin, and agreed to share it with a white tenant family. His next door neighbor, the noted attorney, Hamilton Perry, asked Langston to join him in preparing a case that Langston later effectively advocated in court. This legal success which assured him an abundance of clients in the future and his increased income probably led him to marry Miss Caroline Wall, an intelligent freed slave from North Carolina.<sup>4</sup>

Because of his legal accomplishments, the Liberty Party nominated him in 1854 for town clerk. In the election he led his victorious party's slate to become the first colored office holder in America—a significant triumph of ability against ingrained prejudice!

In August of 1855, the birth of a son prompted Langston to sell his farm and resettle in a fashionable section of Oberlin. His family finally included not only three sons and two daughters, but also three adopted mulatto sons of white planters, entrusted to his care. After a brief residence, Oberlin elected the newcomer to its city council and later to the school board.

Two memorable events in his legal practice at this time stand out. Once while pleading a case, an opposing lawyer insulted his Negro ancestors and Langston replied with fisticuffs. The ensuing assault suit, filed by the opposing lawyer, was eventually thrown out by a jury that completely exonerated Langston's retaliation. On another occasion he successfully absolved a Negress accused of poisoning—a legal victory which he held significant because she was his first colored client. Negroes during this period generally shun-



ned colored attorneys in order to counteract the inevitable handicap of racial prejudice.

After his first election to office, Langston quickly assumed a prominent place among the pre-war abolitionists, who favored complete racial equality. In 1854, for instance, he presided at an Ohio state convention that presented a memorial to the legislature advocating Negro enfranchisement.<sup>5</sup> In the following year, he travelled to New York to address the American Anti-Slavery Society and shared the platform with Garrison, Phillips and Whittier. The abolitionists were thrilled by his achievements that conclusively proved the Negro's ability to be the white's equal.

Soon thereafter he corresponded with John Brown and John Brown, Jr. The latter subsequently visited him to outline the Harper's Ferry raid. Langston recommended Sheridan Levy and John Copeland for the venture because he believed its publicity would be beneficial, even though its audacity probably would preclude substantial slave support. The formation of the Republican party found Langston an immediate and avid adherent.<sup>6</sup>

At the outset of the Civil War he foresaw slavery's collapse. He proposed arming the Negro and, after the Emancipation Proclamation, became an enthusiastic recruiter for the 54th Massachusetts' colored regiment. Governor Todd of Ohio who had formerly declined Langston's recruiting services now eagerly accepted them. The creation of the 5th Ohio was largely due to his effort—an effort that included contributing his own funds to provide the colored troops with the bounty white volunteers received.

During the war he visited Washington, where he lobbied for equal pay for Negro soldiers and the appointment of colored officers. Secretary of War Stanton gave an awkward, vague answer when Langston asked what the duty of the colored soldier was in view of his lower wages.<sup>7</sup>

Langston also toured Union-controlled sections of the South, such as Nashville, where he complimented 10,000 colored soldiers on their heroism. He repeatedly exhorted numerous Negro audiences throughout the nation to: "Above all things, get education, get money, get character." Once he forcefully advocated equal rights for his race at a Missouri constitutional convention.

After Lincoln's assassination, he was chairman of a colored committee that conferred with Andrew Johnson, who glibly assured them he would look out for the freedmen's welfare. In 1868, Johnson appointed him General Inspector of the Freedmen's Bureau and, shortly thereafter, offered him the Bureau's top position, in



order to replace General Howard whom the chief executive disliked. He declined to replace General Howard and also refused the ambassadorship to Haiti. Later he told Grant about Johnson's aversion to Howard and urged him to seek the presidency.

Langston supervised the arrangement for the unveiling of a statue of Lincoln erected in Washington, D. C. by the donations of appreciative Negroes, which Grant and Frederick Douglass helped consecrate in short speeches.

In 1872 the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Co. elected him to its board of directors where he strove valiantly to forestall the insolvency that closed this Negro bank in 1874. The 1872 Republican national ticket, Langston thought, should be composed of J. G. Blaine for president and Senator Wilson for vice president in order to assure substantial support in the South, but the disregard of his suggestion did not diminish his fervent support for the G.O.P.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to his appointment as General Inspector in 1868, John Langston also joined the faculty of the newly created Howard University as the first head of the legal department. His chairmanship of the two man department at this struggling, infant college was not notable for any outstanding achievements, with the exception of sustaining the department's existence.<sup>10</sup>

During his last two years at Howard, in recognition of his administrative ability and popularity with the students, he was appointed acting president while General Howard was on leave. He finally recommended the permanent appointment of a new president, and, although all the colored trustees favored Langston for the post, the white majority objected. He promptly resigned.

While teaching at Howard, John Mercer Langston was named to the District of Columbia Board of Health and was chairman of its Committee on Ordinances that authored the new sanitary code enacted by Congress. He also served as a delegate to the Colored National Labor Convention where he objected to the admission of two white delegates, whom he alleged were secret emissaries of the Democratic Party. The convention dismissed Langston's charges and, in reply, accused him of tactics not calculated to gain support among the dominant Caucasian race.<sup>11</sup>

In 1875 he accepted the presidency of the Richmond Land & Financial Association, chartered to buy and sell land in small parcels to Negroes. Incidentally this organization, along with others of a similar nature in the South, accomplished practically nothing.<sup>12</sup>

Hayes rewarded this Negro Republican by appointing him minister to Haiti in September of 1877. Langston quickly acquired



a new consulate building for his staff of ten, helped iron out a ship fines controversy, and encouraged the importation of American blue denim cloth which supplanted inferior English products. His wise decision to refuse shelter to Haitian insurgents, his tact which repeatedly settled United States damage claims, and his selection as dean of the diplomatic corps attest to his capable administration.<sup>13</sup> While still minister in 1883, a 286 page book, containing a comprehensive collection of his excellent lectures and addresses on the racial question, was printed with a panegyric introduction by the Reverend R. E. Rankin

After the election of a Democratic president in 1884 caused his resignation, effective in July of 1885, he served briefly as the West Indian attorney for John Wanamaker & Sons and then accepted the presidency of the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute at Farmville despite the paltry annual compensation of \$1,500.<sup>14</sup> The Institute served as both a preparatory school and college for Virginia's colored population. By 1887 the sponsors of Negro education had been permanently supplanted by the Conservative pro-white party that gradually cut the school's appropriations and appointed hostile members to its supervisory board of visitors. Consequently, he resigned in December of 1887, to the disappointment of his students, faculty, and others interested in Negro education. He determined, however, to remain in Prince Edward County and participate actively in politics—a decision destined to lead to the climax of his career.

Virginia politics was in an unnatural state of flux in the eighteen-eighties. Reconstruction had ended by 1870 with the restoration of white home rule that spared the Old Dominion much of the racial friction which paralyzed other Southern governments. The Negroes, however, persisted in electing a few of their race to the state legislature, but the influence of the blacks in politics slowly declined with the continued ascendancy of the Conservative party in Richmond. Nevertheless, the moral and political obligation to pay off the state's high debt with the necessary concomitant curtailment of such state services, as the free public schools, finally divided the dominant white faction in the 1880's and allowed the Negroes to wield the balance of power. William Mahone, leader of the Readjusters or anti-debt payment forces, supported by poorer white and those Negroes who voted, was able to obtain control of the state from 1879 to 1883. Although the Readjusters had the backing of the colored population, they were at all times, a white man's group, disbursing but a small share of their political patron-



age to the Negro to insure his loyalty. Mahone clearly enunciated his party's policy by declaring, "They [the Negroes] have been made to understand that they must take a back seat and let their white bosses and political masters run the machine and have all the offices."<sup>15</sup>

The defeat of the Readjusters in the 1883 state election returned the government and its election machinery to the Conservatives who then took up the label, Democrat. Gerrymandering and other means were utilized to deprive the Negro of his vote and effectively squelched the Readjusters, who by now had allied themselves with the national Republican party.

The Negroes in the fourth Congressional district, a collection of counties in the black belt including Prince Edward County, had faithfully espoused the Readjuster cause, although they disliked its exclusive white leadership. Since the district's Negroes outnumbered the whites 100,000 to 59,000, they still elected some colored representatives to the state legislature and to county offices. In fact, since 1868, the district's freedmen had attempted to elect a Negro Congressman, but their candidates were repeatedly sidetracked by the white Republicans. In 1884 Joseph Evans, a black man, ran without machine support and lost badly.<sup>16</sup>

Mahone was naturally irate when John Mercer Langston insubordinately announced himself as a candidate for Congress in 1888. Such a candidacy, if successful, would weaken the authority of the G.O.P. machine by encouraging other insurgents and alienating white voters throughout the state whose ballots were essential to Republican success.

Langston's presidency of Virginia Normal had made him one of the most respected and revered men in the area, especially among the Negroes. His previous campaigning experience, his personal fortune, inherited and self-made, and his amazing persuasive ability as a stump speaker assured him the overwhelming support of the Negroes.<sup>17</sup> He organized five hundred campaign workers to combat the Democratic and Republican regular organizations and a small interracial group of lawyers to intervene in case of chicanery by unsympathetic election officials. Langston's selection as a delegate to the 1888 G.O.P. national convention, where he spoke for John Sherman of Ohio, spurred Mahone to all out opposition. After some violent fights the white Republicans and a handful of blacks, who usually were indebted to Mahone, ruthlessly retained control of the party machinery and nominated Judge Archer as the regular Republican Congressional candidate. The Democrat, Venable,



sought to intensify his opposition's division by indirectly offering Langston campaign funds which were refused.<sup>18</sup>

Mahone even induced Frederick Douglass, perhaps the most prominent American Negro, to write a public letter to the fourth district's voters denouncing Langston as responsible for the Freedmen's Bank failure and guilty of self-seeking plots for the presidency of Howard University.

Douglass' stand is not altogether surprising. Although Langston had eulogistically introduced him at the unveiling of Lincoln's statue,<sup>19</sup> campaigned in 1872 with him for the G.O.P., and cordially collaborated with him on other projects,<sup>20</sup> he had opposed the appointment of Douglass as president of the Freedmen's Bank. He also attacked Douglass' views on the Negro migration movement and intimated that his belated approval of Cleveland's inauguration was prompted by a desire to retain his post with the federal government.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps these mutually abusive recriminations stem from the rivalry for the distinction of being the greatest living Negro, as Samuel Smith suggests.<sup>22</sup> Mahone also persuaded the Republican National Committee to intercede as a mediator in an effort to determine the real G.O.P. nominee. Langston, however, refused to submit his candidacy's regularity to the National Committee whose fairness he rightfully doubted.

The white supremacy issue became all pervasive in the campaign. Venable and Archer denounced their opponent as a racist. The small colored faction favoring Judge Archer, most of whom were obligated to Mahone, ostensibly agreed with the Negro Reverend William Walaces' pastoral letter that said in part, "The enunciation made by Mr. Langston of war against every white man in this Congressional district who shall dare to cast his vote against him for Congress, first opened my eyes to the dangers to my race which were sure to follow, if the threat of Mr. Langston was attempted to be carried out."<sup>23</sup>

Such colored leaders as ministers were often bribed by politicians at this time, and the genuineness of Walaces' sentiments may possibly be questioned.

Langston exhorted his race to send one of their number to Congress. He declared that the artificial restrictions on the Negroes imposed by prejudice would eventually end. His mulatto racial composition might one day become commonplace in the South. After all, had not the whites and blacks already intermarried successfully in Latin America. Such pronouncements naturally horrified white people throughout the state.



On election day, in 1888, the whites who controlled the election machinery systematically defrauded Negro voters. Excluding the usual intimidation outside the voting booths, colored citizens cast their ballots separately, subject to arbitrary disqualification and prolonged delays. The conservative election board certified the returns as follows: Venable, 13,298; Langston, 12,657; Arnold, 3,207. Langston immediately challenged Venable's slim plurality of 641, charging the illegal elimination of Negro votes.<sup>24</sup>

The Congressional Committee on Contested Elections seated Venable temporarily and conducted a dillatory investigation into the alleged irregularities. A strong publicity campaign pressured these procrastinating Republicans either to unseat Venable or stigmatize their party as unfriendly to the Negro. President-elect Harrison even received petitions seeking his intervention on Langston's behalf.

Langston, whose candidacy had severely split the Virginia Republican party, later backed Mahone in his race for governor in return for support in the contested election. The slim Republican majority in Congress, at last assured of Langston's party affiliation, happily agreed to seat him.

The pro-Venable Democrats rested their case on the Election Committee's minority report. In a dramatic gesture, designed to protest Speaker Reed's tyranny, gross partisanship, and Langston's case, they absented themselves from Congress for ninety days in hopes that their absence would hamstring Republican efforts to maintain a quorum. Consequently by a vote of 151-1, 173 not voting, John Langston was belatedly declared a member of Congress on September 23, 1890, before a half empty house and a gallery packed with joyful sable faces. For the first time, Virginia, traditional leader of the South, was represented by a Negro in the national legislature. Of all the twenty-two Reconstruction colored Congressmen, only the Old Dominion could claim a real scholar as their representative.

In the few remaining days of the 51st Congress, Langston was notably active, if not productive. His party assigned him to the Education Committee which pigeonholed his bill to establish a one million dollar National Industrial University for Negroes. His Constitutional amendment proposed the popular election of all Congressmen and the President, a literacy test for voters, and a reduction of state Congressional representation in proportion to those ineligible to vote. Congress was authorized to enact legislation to enforce his amendment, which died in committee. His resolution



calling upon the attorney general to report his efforts at enforcing the Acts of May 31, 1870, and February 23, 1871, that supposedly guaranteed civil rights in the South, was adopted. He also unsuccessfully sponsored legislation setting aside both Lincoln's and Grant's birthdays as national holidays.<sup>25</sup> His oratory persuasively and partisanly supported the Force Bill, or, as he called it, the National Election Law, which was designed to alleviate election frauds such as those he had battled against in his campaign. His speech in favor of a Merchant Marine subsidy, later printed in pamphlet form, forecasted a phenomenal development as a seaport for Virginia's Newport News that might eventually equal New York. He also presented petitions which favored the reimbursement of Freedmen's Bank depositors, an indemnity against Indian depredations, the postponement of the World Fair's opening from Sunday to Monday, and the improvement of the Merchant Marine. His efforts to appoint some Negro youths to West Point and Annapolis failed because Venable's prior nominations had irrevocably filled up his district's rigid quota.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of Mahone's refusal to convoke the fourth district's G.O.P. convention in August, 1890, the local Negroes assembled in a so-called popular convention and endorsed Langston's renomination. His second election campaign provoked a renewed outburst of racial antagonism. The handful of white men who had favored him now joined the opposition which was more adequately determined because of the recent marked upsurge of murders and rapes committed by Negroes. Many freedmen, moreover, were disillusioned by politics and voluntarily abstained from voting. Consequently, Epes, the Democrat candidate, was declared the victor by 3,000 votes.

Langston again charged irregularities but declined formally to challenge the result, since the Democrats now controlled Congress. In 1892 the Republican District Convention chose Langston as a delegate to both state and national conventions. Despite this continued popular support, he sadly rejected nomination to the 53rd Congress in favor of a white candidate.<sup>27</sup>

After moving to Washington, D.C. he published in 1894 a 534 page autobiography of his sixty-four year life, entitled *From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol*. His literary style was as usual accomplished, but the compartmentalized, chronological narrative lacked both thematic unity and well-integrated continuity. His life story unfolded like an Horatio Alger "rags to riches" saga that, at times, seemed arrantly egotistical. Fortunately, the vanity



became less blatant because he avoided the first person, except in a few incongruous instances.

The author also, undoubtedly, hoped his autobiography would inspire other Negroes to triumph over prejudice and attain success—a fact which may help to explain why he painted such a distorted roseate self-portrait. The book ended impressively with a moving personal plea for honesty in Virginia's elections and a striking reaffirmation of the Negroes' inherent equality.

Until his death in November 1897, he continued to be a proficient, vocal opponent of racial discrimination. He was buried in the Nation's Capitol at Woodlawn cemetery, where, a few months before, another great Negro, Frederick Douglass had been interred.<sup>28</sup>

Luther Jackson, a Negro writer, maintains Langston's political success "led to repercussions which were unfortunate both for the Republicans and the Negro race. He drove a wedge between Mahone and his former Negro supporters which only served to hasten the disintegration of the G.O.P. and to foreshadow the disenfranchisement of the entire race."<sup>29</sup> White commentators likewise emphasized the alarming increase in Negro raping of white women and of other colored lawlessness that they alleged Langston incited by his advocacy of racial amalgamation and racial equality. Undoubtedly, the ethnic ferment in the fourth district's politics stimulated additional interracial crime, but this increase was duplicated throughout the South, as the younger Negro generations came of age, free from the restraining condition of slavery.<sup>30</sup>

Another Negro writer believes that Mahone, without the existence of Langston, could have kept the G.O.P. alive for many years as an effective force. After all Cleveland barely carried Virginia by 1,000 votes in 1888 despite voting irregularities and Langston's candidacy. The maintenance of Mahone's efficient organization, he feels, would have provided an example to the South of a sustained and successful Negro political participation.<sup>31</sup>

This viewpoint fails to consider adequately, I believe, the rising strength of the white supremacy forces caused by Mahone's espousal of the detested Republican party, the elimination of the debt issue, the Negro's disaffection with political activity, and the rise in racial turbulence shown in the Danville and Roanoke riots. As in the rest of the South, the course of events in Virginia seemed destined to eliminate the Negro and his allies from the political scene. Luther Jackson agrees, observing that, "The final passing of the old line Republican party and the disenfranchisement of the



negro cannot, however, be attributed solely to the campaign of Langston; but it is reasonable to assert that his effort did nothing to improve race relations and party relations in Virginia."<sup>32</sup>

Langston's causal role in Mahone's eclipse is further minimized by the omission of any direct reference to Langston's political activity in Blake's biography of Mahone. In addition, the three large tomes devoted to biography in R. C. Morton's *History of Virginia* do not include a resume of Langston's life. (Racial prejudice may furnish a possible explanation here.)

His congressional service characterized by a "scholarly and forceful oratory on important questions"<sup>33</sup> furnished him no new backers. He epitomized opposition to white supremacy, and the voters were for or against him on this issue alone. His repudiation by Mahone and the G.O.P. hierarchy disillusioned and dismayed most colored Republicans. On the other hand, whites, appalled by Langston's success and intermarriage ideas, blamed Mahone whose wholesale use of colored votes, they felt, made Langston possible. Thus Langston helped accelerate, but was not responsible for, Mahone's collapse. In essence, he acted as a catalyst in the disbanding of Mahone's inherently unstable, interracial political alliance.

Over the next few years, the dominant forces of white supremacy, spurred on by Langston's legacy, eliminated the black man as a political factor in Virginia through a series of legislative enactments and subterfuges, climaxed by the constitution of 1901.<sup>34</sup>

Although Langston may have hastened the Negro's exit from Virginia politics, he also is historically important as a prominent proponent of civil and social rights for the colored American. His cogent, logical, and masterful oratory helped publicize the arguments for the Negro's integration into white society. His utterances are more apropos today, perhaps, than in the immediate post-Civil War period. His following plea for integration of the schools, made in 1874, is quite timely: "Schools which tend to separate the children of the country in their feelings, aspirations and purposes, which foster and perpetuate sentiments of caste, hatred, and ill-will, which breed a sense of degradation, on the one part, and of superiority on the other, which beget clannish notions rather than teach and impress an omnipresent and living principle and faith that we are all Americans, in no wise realize our ideal of common schools, while they are contrary to the spirit of our laws and institutions."<sup>35</sup>

His two books and numerous magazine articles in such journals as the *Afro-American* increased his influence particularly among the Negro public.<sup>36</sup> He realized that the ex-slaves were not immediately



entitled to social equality and consequently goaded his race to get education, money and character. His prominence in Negro education at Howard University and Virginia Normal stands out significantly as an altruistic attempt to uplift his people. Langston University, Oklahoma's Negro college, exists today as an appropriate memorial to his labors.<sup>37</sup>

Langston's accomplishments made him one of the greatest Negroes in Reconstruction America. His name became a colored household word especially among the younger generation.<sup>38</sup> Countless colored Americans, who chafed at their inferior social position, were inspired by his attainments to industrious self-improvement.<sup>39</sup>

Bereft of his parents at the age of four, shunted from guardian to guardian, and stigmatized by his inheritance, he was molded in an environment that normally would produce a warped neurotic. Nevertheless, an eager, capable intellect, a gregarious personality, and good fortune combined with a prodigious yearning for success to produce an outstanding Negro spokesman. He devoted his life to the crusade for racial equality. Throughout his adult years, he endeavored to elevate his race as an instructor, college president, lecturer, and writer. He was not stupid, but perhaps a bit credulous or visionary to believe the Negro could rapidly attain equality with the white, yet his crusade and its growing number of adherents still excites acrid controversy. When he bitingly lashed out at biased whites, he was probably too impatient and regrettably tended to aggravate racial tension.

Langston, however, uniformly decried inhumanity in all its forms. He admired the exploited, rebellious Irish and the enslaved, but insurgent Cubans, as if they were his own people.<sup>40</sup> Although he never formally joined a church, despite theological training, he had a fervent belief in the ultimate, God-given wisdom of the Golden Rule.

John Mercer Langston had helped raise colored troops during the Civil War and, later, energetically sought to establish inter-racial brotherhood through his work in the Freedmen's Bureau, Howard University, Virginia Normal Institute, and the United States Congress. But just as the Exodus from Egypt did not give the Hebrews Palestine, the Civil War and reconstruction did not really emancipate the Negro. Moses led his faithless tribes through the hardships of the wilderness for forty years but was destined himself never to reach the promise land. Langston, together with many other colored Americans, battled for emancipation and equal social status. Unfortunately, he died before his people could span the Jordan and enter the-to-this day unrealized Utopia that he believed was there.



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2. Booker T. Washington, *The Story of the Negro* (New York, 1909), II, 235.
3. Langston, *Virginia Plantation*, pp. 68-84.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-135.
5. "Negro Suffrage in the Period of Constitution Making, 1787-1865" *Journal of Negro History* XXXII, (Washington, 1947), 166.
6. Langston, *Virginia Plantation*, pp. 130-200.
7. Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (Boston, 1953), p. 201.
8. Langston, *Virginia Plantation*, pp. 185-295.
9. John Mercer Langston, "Letter to Gerrit Smith," *Journal of Negro History*, XXVII, (Washington, 1942), 449-450.
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13. James A. Padgett, "Diplomats to Haiti and their Diplomacy," *Journal of Negro History*, XXV, (Washington, 1940), 283-286.
14. Langston, *Virginia Plantation*, pp. 350-415.
15. Charles E. Wynes, "Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1901," U. of Va., M. A., Thesis 224, 1956, pp. 53-129.
16. Luther P. Jackson, *Negro Office-Holders in Virginia, 1865-1895* (Norfolk, 1945), p. 46.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Langston, *Virginia Plantation*, pp. 409-480.
19. Benjamin Quarles, *Frederick Douglas* (Washington, 1948), pp. 318-319.
20. Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (New York, 1941), p. 459.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Samuel Denny Smith, *The Negro in Congress, 1870-1901* (New York, 1940), pp. 116-117.
23. James Hugo Johnson, "Negroes in the Government of Virginia," *Journal of Negro History* XIV, (Washington, 1929), 268-271.
24. Langston, *Virginia Plantation*, pp. 450-510.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 510-534.
28. Smith, *Negro in Congress*, p. 40.
29. Jackson, *Negro Office-Holders*, p. 46.
30. Richard L. Morton, *History of Virginia Since 1861* (Chicago, 1924), III, 304.
31. Johnson, *Negro in the Government of Virginia*, pp. 268-271.
32. Jackson, *Negro Office-Holders*, p. 46.
33. Taylor, *Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia*, p. 284.
34. Richard L. Morton, *The Negro in Virginia Politics, 1865-1902*, U. of Virginia Doctoral Dissertation 71, 1918, pp. 127-142.
35. John Mercer Langston, *Lectures and Addresses* (Washington, 1883), p. 154.
36. Charles S. Johnson, "Rise of the Negro Magazine," *Journal of Negro History* XIII, 37.
37. Mozeill C. Hill, "The All Negro Communities of Oklahoma," *Journal of Negro History* XXXI, (Washington, 1946), 205-207.
38. W. J. Simmons, *Men of Mark, 1887* (Cleveland, 1887), pp. 510-524.
39. L. W. Kyles, "What the Negro Church Has Done," *Journal of Negro History* XI, (Washington, 1926), 4.
40. Langston, *Lectures*, pp. 68-98.