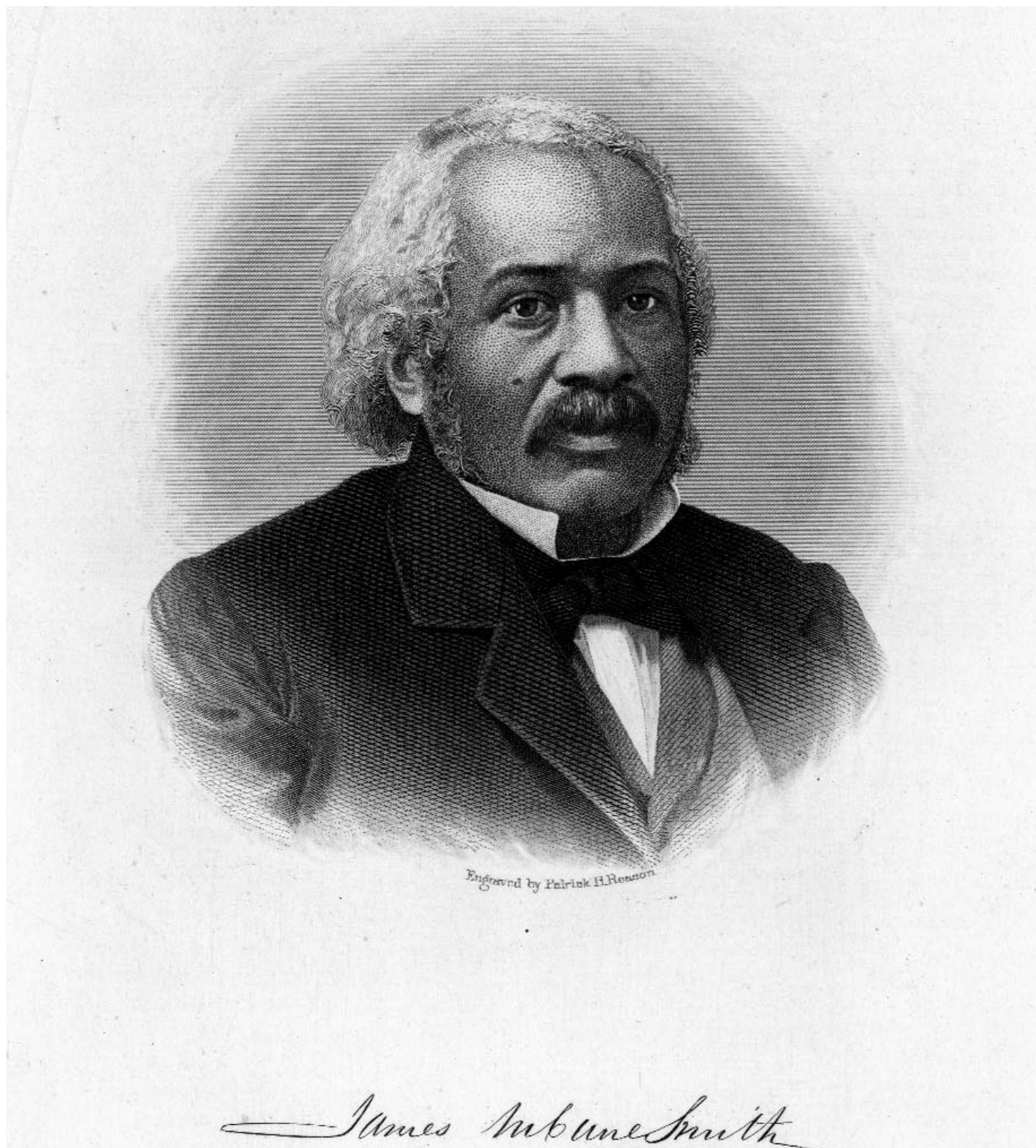


Reflections of James McCune Smith



"James McCune Smith," Engraving. Collection of the New-York Historical Society. Gift of A.D.F. Randolph.

Quotation 1: Remembering the Emancipation Day Parade

Background: On July 4, 1827, legal slavery ended in New York State. The following day, black New Yorkers held a huge parade to mark the momentous occasion. James McCune Smith was fourteen at the time. He wrote this recollection many years later, when he was 52 years old.

“That was a celebration! A real, full-souled, full-voiced shouting for joy, and marching through the crowded streets, with feet jubilant to songs of freedom!...

“First of all, Grand Marshal of the day was Samuel Hardenburgh, a splendid-looking black man, in cocked hat and drawn sword, mounted on a milk-white steed; then his aids on horseback, dashing up and down the line; then the orator of the day, also mounted, with a handsome scroll, appearing like a *baton* in his right hand; then in due order, splendidly dressed in scarfs of silk with gold-edgings, and with colored bands of music, and their banners appropriately lettered and painted, followed, “The New York African Society for Mutual Relief,” “The Wilberforce Benevolent Society,” and “The Clarkson Benevolent Society”; then the people five or six abreast, from grown men to small boys. The side-walks were crowded with the wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers of the celebrants, representing every State in the Union....It was a proud day in the City of New York for our people, that 5th day of July, 1827.”

James McCune Smith, M.D., introduction to *A Memorial Discourse*, by Rev. Henry Highland Garnet (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1865), 24.

Quotation 2: Fighting for Suffrage

Background: *The New York State Constitution, passed in 1821, limited the right to vote to men who owned at least \$250 worth of property, effectively disenfranchising black New Yorkers. The following passage, written in 1860, appeared in a pamphlet that was part of the black community’s long battle against the property requirement. As the Chairman of the New York City and County Suffrage Committee of Colored Citizens, James McCune Smith was the pamphlet’s author. It is interesting that he had published a version of this text in a report of the 1853 National Black Convention in Rochester, New York. The earlier version was used to bolster black claims to be considered American citizens. Dr. Smith’s reuse of these passages for two different aims reflects his awareness of both the power of this language and the depth of the problems he addressed.*

“Our white countrymen do not know us. They are strangers to our characters, ignorant of our capacity, oblivious of our history and progress, and are misinformed as to the principles and ideas that control and guide us, as a people. The great mass of American citizens estimate us a being a characterless and purposeless people; and hence we hold up our heads, if at all, against the withering influence of a nation’s scorn and contempt....

“What stone has been left unturned to degrade us? What hand has refused to fan the flame of popular prejudice against us? What American artist has not caricatured us? What wit has not laughed at us in our wretchedness? What songster has not made merry over our depressed spirits? What press has not ridiculed and condemned us? Few, few, very few; and that we have borne up with it all — that we have tried to be wise, though pronounced by all to be fools — that we have tried to be upright, when all around us have esteemed us to be knaves — that we have striven to be gentlemen, although all around us have been teaching us its impossibility — that we have remained here, when all our neighbors have advised us to leave, proves that we possess qualities of head and heart, such as cannot but be commended by impartial men.”

James McCune Smith, *The Suffrage Question: In Relation to Colored Voters in the State of New York* (New York?: s.n., 1860?), 2. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.