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D.C.

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ADDRESS.

The National Equal Rights League Convention of Colored Men to the American Congress:

Speaking in behalf of millions of your fellow-citizens, people of color, we have first of all to express our gratitude that at length the chains of slavery are broken and we are all *free.* Deep in our hearts we feel that we owe our warmest thanks for this boon, first, to the great departed, the ever honored and beloved Abraham Lincoln; next, to the American Congress and its loyal constituents; but most of all to the infinite Father of every race, who has made them all of one blood, and who everywhere shows His hand as the Supreme Disposer of events and the Redeemer of the oppressed.

We have also to thank you for appropriate legislation, designed to secure to us our civil rights as citizens of our common country.

We also thank you for impartial suffrage in the District of Columbia, a boon doubly precious to us as indicating a noble purpose on your part to give to our people the full rights and privileges of American citizens.

This is precisely what we now ask at your hands. Wherever your jurisdiction extends, and especially throughout all the Territories lately in rebellion, where States are in due time to be reconstructed, and the whole subject of the rights and franchises of citizenship is to be adjusted, there we ask you to secure to our people impartial suffrage and all the rights and privileges of American citizens—equality before the laws of our country.

Need we remind you that amid the darkest hours of the late war we came promptly at your call, rallying round the flag of our imperilled Union, and that many of our sons and brothers bravely met death in that fearful struggle to save our common country. You will remember how you then exhorted and encouraged us to take up arms and to bear our part manfully in this struggle for a free and righteous Government, giving us to understand that a just and generous people would surely award to us our share of the fruits of victory—freedom, manhood, all the rights and privileges of citizenship.

That conflict is now past, and the records of your history testify that we fought and suffered nobly, and that on our part we have fulfilled faithfully those conditions. Let us now rely upon the honor and the justice of a great people, acting through its national Government, to bestow upon us without stint those promised civil and political rights and privileges.

Permit us further to remind you that the loyal whites throughout the portion of our country late in rebellion unite with one voice to implore you to make the elective franchise impartial, irrespective of race or color, believing it to be essential to their own safety as well as to ours, and altogether vital to the effective reconstruction of civil government and the ascendency of loyal citizens in its administration. Results so fundamental to the peace and permanence of the Federal Union will certainly be appreciated by your honorable body and by all the loyal people of the nation. You have proved our loyalty; would it not then be wise to put our whole numerical force in the scale of loyalty against treason, of peace and good order against rebellion and national ruin?

Moreover, you will allow us to remind you that ever since you have been a nation among the nations of the earth that class of your fellow-citizens whom we represent has never shrunk from the burdens of taxation, and has never failed to respond to the call to arms for the defence of our common country. When you fought for national independence colored soldiers were by your side; colored regiments swelled your brigades, and shared with you the sufferings, the hardships, and the conflicts unto blood by which you became an independent nation.

In the British war of 1812, colored regiments fought and bled. You will remember the glowing testimony which their heroism drew from the lips and the pen of Andrew Jackson after the great and decisive battle of New Orleans.

Is it not well that the fit reward for such services should be conferred upon our race at last, and all the more so for having been so long delayed?

It may not be amiss to remind you, moreover, that in the days of our revolutionary fathers, and thenceforward, for more than one generation, free colored people were allowed the elective franchise and lay under no political disabilities on account of race or color.

In the articles of confederation of 1778, the word “white,” with its discriminations against persons of African descent, was firmly rejected, Of eleven States voting, eight were against it. only two for it, while the vote of the eleventh was divided.

The celebrated ordinance of '87 afforded another opportunity for the fathers of our country to bear their testimony for impartial political rights, irrespective of color. That document, in defining the

qualifications of electors and of representatives, discarded the word “white,” and recognized men as having equal rights and privileges without regard to color or race.

So, also, the Federal Constitution, adopted in the same year, made no discrimination in respect to the rights and privileges of American citizens on the score of race or color. All were allowed to vote for members of the House of Representatives who had the qualifications of electors in the most numerous branch of their respective State Legislatures. In eleven out of thirteen States, free colored citizens at that time enjoyed the elective franchise.

From that time onward to 1812 ten Territories had risen to the rank of States, yet in no one of them had Congress recognized any discrimination on the score of color or race. In Missouri first during that year, and then under the growing assumptions and demands of the slave power, Congress yielded and first began to abjure the free and righteous principles of the immortal declaration of '76. In admitting Missouri they tolerated discriminations on the score of color. This, you will note, was not of the fathers of the Revolution. They had chiefly gone to their graves, bearing no such stigma of injustice toward an oppressed race. Those great men who had founded their claim to become a self-governing nation upon the doctrine of inalienable rights, conferred upon them by their Creator in their very manhood, could not ignore the claim of their fellow-citizens who might be tinged with African blood. They attempted no such thing. It was not in their noble hearts to do it. With admirable consistency, such as the world delights to honor, they accorded to their free colored fellow-citizens the same inalienable rights, given of God, which they claimed for themselves. The existence of slavery in some of the States was in their view a sad anomaly—an outrage on those natural rights of man which they had so nobly asserted before the world. They endured it for the time as a fact to be deplored, yet one which perhaps lay outside of their national responsibilities, and moreover as one which the principles of freedom and equal rights, then asserting their legitimate sway on the public heart and conscience, must in their view soon undermine and destroy. The sequel showed that they had not estimated the strength which American slavery would draw from the lust of gain and the lust of irresponsible power. Hence they did not at once accord these equal rights to the enslaved, partly because in their view it was not clear that they had legitimately the power to do so, and partly because they were sanguine that the recently developed ideas of human rights would surely pervade the public mind, and shortly put an end to slavery by their legitimate moral force. That they recognized these rights as inhering by nature in the freedmen of their time is due to their principles, to their moral courage, and to their consequent self-consistency.

It should excite no surprise that the slave power has sought to bespatter, mystify, and traduce the immortal principles of the Declaration of Independence. The glory of those principles lies in their “generality”—in their impartial application to all men by virtue of their manhood. The assumption

which they meant to oppose was that God had made men *in classes* —one dominant, another subject; a class of lords and another of serviles. They had a point to carry in their appeal to the fundamental truths of that declaration, and beyond a question, like sensible men, they held those truths in such a form as to meet their point. They meant to deny that the aristocrats of England were born to rule, and the plebeians of America, equally intelligent and virtuous, were born to be ruled. They meant to deny that one class could rightly tax another and make them pay for being governed without their own consent or participation. These points were undeniably before their minds, and they held what have been sneeringly called the "glittering generalities" of the Declaration of Independence in the practical form which precisely met and established them.

The burden of our request to-day is that you apply those same immortal principles in essentially the same way to your colored fellow-citizens. Place us on the ground of our common manhood. Concede that we are men, born with those inalienable rights.

We urge this request with the more confidence because we are sure you will admit that, as a class, we have proved ourselves thoroughly loyal to the Union, and ready to make promptly all the sacrifices which our country ever calls on her citizens to make for her welfare and defence. If, as a class, we are not enlightened, you cannot but see that this is far more our misfortune than our fault, for we come to you with the amplest evidence that, in so far as we have had the means of education since freedom came, no people on earth have improved it more eagerly or made progress more rapidly. Would it not now be both wise and noble on your part to place before our people the appropriate stimulus to self-education and culture, giving us the elective franchise on judicious and impartial terms, and inspiring us to self improvement under a sense of these new responsibilities?

We invite you to consider that the wise and good of every nation applaud you for making America the asylum for the overborne and oppressed of other lands. So much more will they honor you if you make your country an asylum and a home for those whom American slavery has far more cruelly oppressed. To the former you give soon enough all the franchises of a free democratic Government. Why should you not give the same franchises with equal readiness and on equal terms to your fellow-citizens of African descent?

Permit us to say to you that we have long since accepted the obvious ordinations of Divine Providence as to our location, and therefore account this country as our own—our real *home.* Most of us have been here for many successive generations. The bones of our fathers and of our fathers' fathers lie here. Our sweat has moistened this soil; our hands have felled your Southern forests, and made the wealth of your cotton, rice, and sugar plantations. Our physical constitutions have attempered themselves to your climate. We purpose, therefore, to remain here and cast ourselves upon your generosity and justice, awaiting from your hand the recognition of those rights and

privileges of which the first instalments have already come in the form of personal freedom and acknowledged civil rights; and the balance of which you will certainly see should, in wisdom as to yourselves and in justice as to us, be granted us without longer delay.

You will not deem it unreasonable that, in respect to all the franchises of citizenship, we ask you to place us not lower than the strangers who come among you from the poverty and perhaps the serfdom of Europe. Surely you will not discriminate against us because our oppressions have been longer protracted and more cruel than theirs. You will not take advantage of the nations' wrong inflicted upon us, and make it the apology for inflicting yet more and other wrongs. You will not discriminate against us because the system of slavery created a necessity for a cruel prejudice against our race, and demanded that we should be thrust down to the lowest point in society possible to human beings. To make one wrong the reason and vindication for another can never seem to you noble or even just. Before the eyes of mankind and in the face of high heaven, you cannot suffer your record to go down to history as that of a nation ignoring its noblest principles of equality, justice, and right in the very case when those principles most loudly demand a bold, consistent, and truly noble application. You will not single out for special disabilities to be discriminated against in the matter of political rights and privileges the very class most wronged heretofore, and mainly because they have been so grievously wronged during the whole course of your national life. Especially you will not do this when it is obvious that the first step in this direction imperils the safety of loyal white men, the peace of our common country, and the perpetuity of our Union. You will not do it in the face of the record which our people have wrought out for themselves during the war of the rebellion to their loyalty, their patriotism, and their trustworthiness, as well with the ballot as the bullet. You will not do it in the near presence of those agencies of Divine Providence which brought us into your armies, which gave us freedom, and which witness so cogently to the retributions of justice for the wrongs of American slavery. You will not do it under the eye of the Great Father, who holds nations in every age to a solemn responsibility to deal justly and humanely toward the defenceless, as they hope for peace and prosperity at His hand.

We ask a reconstruction, therefore, gentlemen, which, founded on impartial justice, brings safety and peace to the loyal white American, happiness and prosperity to our common country, while it is the shield and buckler, the strong defence of the American freedmen. Our plea is before you.

RESOLUTIONS.

Resolved, That the right to vote is an essential and inseparable part of self-government, and therefore natural and inalienable; and that while Government may regulate its exercise, it has no more right to

deprive a citizen of its use than it has to deprive him of his right to an impartial trial by a jury of his legal peers.

Resolved , That the feature which distinguishes the American Government more than any other is its ample and positive recognition of the doctrine of self-government; it is therefore in the name of this doctrine that we, an integral portion of the American population, make our claim to equality before the law, believing that all laws and parts of laws which discriminate against us by reason of our race or color are unconstitutional and void.

Resolved , That "taxation without representation is tyranny;" especially is this true in a Government whose foundation principle is the equality of its people; and especially also is this true when those are compelled to pay taxes and yet denied representation who have proved their loyalty and devotion to the Government by heroic and manly deeds in hotly-contested but victorious battle. This is indeed tyranny intensified, and not unmingled with dastardly meanness and cold-hearted ingratitude. We claim, therefore,

First. The right to wield the ballot, because we are American citizens, and as such entitled to it.

Secondly. Because we are tax-payers, and as such justly entitled to full representation in the State and Federal Governments.

Thirdly. Because we are patriots, and as such have proved our loyalty to the country by our self-sacrificing behavior in the hour of her sorest trial.

Fourthly. Because it is a natural and inherent right, pertaining to every native-born American citizen, whether white or black, who has reached his majority.

Resolved , That we believe in the constitutional doctrine that "in all prosecutions the accused shall enjoy the right of a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed," and "in suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved;" hence we claim for the colored American throughout the country a fair and impartial jury trial by his legal equals, and this is only attainable by his complete enfranchisement.

Resolved, That we believe in the sentiment of the Constitution, that "the citizens of each State shall be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States;" and that this doctrine may be made practical in our case, we ask the establishment of a national standard of qualifications of electors which shall be uniform and universal.

Resolved , That we approve of no reconstruction of the seceded States which is not founded in equal justice and impartial suffrage; we are opposed, therefore, to the constitutional amendment now pending for adoption by the several States as the basis of reconstruction, for in so far forth as it permits our disfranchisement it is undemocratic, illegitimate, and unjust.

Resolved , That we are opposed to the admission of Nebraska or any other Territory to the position of a State in the Federal Union upon a constitution which, by the use of the word “white,” discriminates against persons of African descent; for this is not a “white man's Government” any more than it is a black man's Government, nor was it ordained to establish the policy implied in such phraseology; but it is the Government of the American people, and was adopted by them to secure to all the inhabitants of our common country and their posterity the blessings of equal freedom and justice.

Resolved , That we tender our hearty thanks to our tried and true friends in Congress for the untiring and uncompromising efforts which they have made to carry out the principles embodied in the above resolutions in the congressional enactments pertaining to the freedmen, and especially do we thank them for the enactment which, in the removal of certain illegal and unconstitutional obstructions, enfranchises our colored fellow-citizens of the District of Columbia.

Resolved , That we hereby express our gratitude to the American Missionary Association and kindred organizations for the philanthropic and disinterested efforts which they are carrying forward, at great expense both of labor and means, for the education and elevation of the freedmen of the country.

Resolved , That this is our home, doubly dear to us by reason of our past labors given to secure the development of its resources and prosperity, as well as the sacrifices made by us by land and sea in the army and navy in those struggles through which she wrought out her independence and established her position among the nations of the earth; and here we intend to remain, hoping under God to be able to commend ourselves to the judgment and conscience of all our fellow-countrymen by the cultivation among us of all those things which pertain to a well-ordered and dignified life.