



# EQUAL SUFFRAGE

ADDRESS  
FROM THE  
COLORED CITIZENS OF NORFOLK, VA.,  
TO THE  
PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES.  
ALSO AN  
ACCOUNT OF THE AGITATION  
AMONG THE  
COLORED PEOPLE OF VIRGINIA FOR EQUAL RIGHTS.  
WITH AN APPENDIX CONCERNING  
THE RIGHTS OF COLORED WITNESSES BEFORE  
THE STATE COURTS.

1865 Excerpts

## *Fellow Citizens:*

The undersigned have been appointed a committee, by a public meeting of the colored citizens of Norfolk, held June 5th, 1865, in the Catharine Street Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va., to lay before you a few considerations touching the present position of the colored population of the southern States generally, and with reference to their claim for equal suffrage in particular.

We do not come before the people of the United States asking an impossibility; we simply ask that a Christian and enlightened people shall, at once, concede to us the full enjoyment of those privileges of full citizenship, which, not only, are our undoubted right, but are indispensable to that elevation and prosperity of our people, which must be the desire of every patriot. . . .

. . . The people of the North, owing to the greater interest excited by the war, have heard little or nothing, for the past four years, of the blasphemous and horrible theories formerly propounded for the defence and glorification of human slavery, in the press, the pulpit and legislatures of the southern States; but, though they may have forgotten them, let them be assured that these doctrines have by no means faded from the minds of the people of the South; they cling to these delusions still, and only hug them the closer for their recent defeat. Worse than all, they have returned to their homes, with all their old pride and contempt for the negro transformed into bitter hate for the new-made freeman, who aspires to the exercise of his new-found rights, and who has been fighting for the suppression of their rebellion. That this charge is not unfounded, the manner in which it has been recently attempted to

enforce the laws above referred to proves. In Richmond, during the three days' sway of the rebel Mayor Mayo, over 800 colored people were arrested, simply for walking the streets without a pass; in the neighboring city of Portsmouth, a Mayor has just been elected, on the avowed platform that this is a white man's government, and our enemies have been heard to boast openly, that soon not a colored man shall be left in the city; in the greater number of counties in this State, county meetings have been held, at which resolutions have been adopted *deploring*, while accepting, the abolition of slavery, but going on to pledge the planters composing the meeting, to employ no negroes save such as were formerly owned by themselves, without a written recommendation from their late employers, and threatening violence towards those who should do so, thereby keeping us in a state of serfdom, and preventing our free selection of our employers; they have also pledged themselves, in no event, to pay their late adult slaves more than \$60 per year for their labor, in the future, out of which, with characteristic generosity, they have decided that we are to find clothes for ourselves and families, and pay our taxes and doctors' bills; in many of the more remote districts individual planters are to be found who still refuse to recognize their negroes as free, forcibly retaining the wives and children of their late escaped slaves; cases have occurred, not far from Richmond itself, in which an attempt to leave the plantation has been punished by shooting to death; and finally, there are numbers of cases, known to ourselves, in the immediate vicinity of this city, in which a faithful performance, by colored men, of the duties or labor contracted for, has been met by a contemptuous and violent refusal of the stipulated compensation. These are facts, and yet the men doing these things are, in many cases, loud in their professions of attachment to the restored Union, while committing these outrages on the most faithful friends that Union can ever have. . . .

Fellow citizens, the performance of a simple act of justice on your part will reverse all this; we ask for no expensive aid from military forces, stationed throughout the South, overbearing State action, and rendering our government republican only in name; give us the suffrage, and you may rely upon us to secure justice for ourselves, and all Union men, and to keep the State forever in the Union. . . .

. . . The honor of your country should be dear to you, as it is, but is that honor advanced, in the eyes of the Christian world, when America alone, of all Christian nations, sustains an unjust distinction against four millions and a half of her most loyal people, on the senseless ground of a difference in color? You are anxious that the attention of every man, of every State legislature, and of Congress, should be exclusively directed to redressing the injuries sustained by the country in the late contest; are these objects more likely to be effected amid the political distractions of an embarrassing negro agitation? You are, above all, desirous that no future intestine wars should mar the prosperity and destroy the happiness of the country; will your perfect security from such evils be promoted by the

existence of a colored population of four millions and a half, placed, by your enactments, outside the pale of the Constitution, discontented by oppression, with an army of 200,000 colored soldiers, whom you have drilled, disciplined, and armed, but whose attachment to the State you have failed to secure by refusing them citizenship? You are further anxious that your government should be an example to the world of true Republican institutions; but how can you avoid the charge of inconsistency if you leave one eighth of the population of the whole country without any political rights, while bestowing these rights on every immigrant who comes to these shores, perhaps from a despotism, under which he could never exercise the least political right, and had no means of forming any conception of their proper use? . . .

In conclusion, we wish to advise our colored brethren of the State and nation, that the settlement of this question is to a great extent dependent on them, and that supineness on their part will do as much to delay if not defeat the full recognition of their rights as the open opposition of avowed enemies. Then be up and active, and everywhere let associations be formed having for their object the agitation, discussion and enforcement of your claims to equality before the law, and equal rights of suffrage. Your opponents are active; be prepared, and organize to resist their efforts. . . .

. . . The surest guarantee for the independence and ultimate elevation of the colored people will be found in their becoming the owners of the soil on which they live and labor. To this end, let them form Land Associations, in which, by the regular payment of small instalments, a fund may be created for the purchase at all land sales, of land on behalf of any investing member, in the name of the Association, the Association holding a mortgage on the land until, by the continued payment of a regular subscription, the sum advanced by the Association and the interest upon it are paid off, when the occupier gets a clear title. . . .

Any of our white friends in this State, favorable to the views set forth in this address, would do us a great benefit by signing the pledge forming the cover of this pamphlet<sup>1</sup> and forwarding it with their names and addresses to either of the Recording Secretaries of the Democratic Republican Association, described in Appendix "A," Messrs. C. E. Johnson, or T. L. R. Baker, both of Norfolk.

In concluding this address, we would now make a last appeal to our fellow-citizens of all classes throughout the nation. Every Christian and humane man must feel that our demands are just; we have shown you that their concession is, for us, necessary, and for you expedient. We are Americans, we know no other country, we love the land of our birth and our fathers, we thank God for the glorious prospect before our country, and we believe that if we do but obey His laws He will yet enthrone her

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<sup>1</sup> See last page for text of the pledge.

high o'er all the nations of the earth, in glory, wealth and happiness; . . . With these reflections we leave our case in the hands of God, and to the consideration of our countrymen.

Signed, on behalf of the colored people of Norfolk and vicinity, June 26th, 1865.

DR. THOMAS BAYNE, Norfolk, Chairman of Committee.

JNO. M. BROWN, Pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Bute Street, Norfolk, Va.

90 THOMAS HENSON, Pastor of the Catharine Street Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va.

WM. KEELING, 96 Church street, Norfolk, Va.

GEO. W. COOKE, 21 Fox Lane, Norfolk, Va.

JOSEPH T. WILSON, 26 Hawk street, Norfolk, Va.

THOS. F. PAIGE, Jr., 27 Hawk street, Norfolk, Va.

H. HIGHLAND GARNET, Pastor 15th St. Presbyterian

Church, Washington, D.C., Honorary Member.

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## Equal Suffrage in Norfolk, Virginia.

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. . . [A] mass meeting was held May 11th, at the Bute Street Baptist Church (colored). The church was crowded, and Dr. Thomas Bayne was chosen president, and A. Portlock, Secretary. After prayer by the President, a committee on business was appointed, who reported the following resolutions, to wit:

1st. *Resolved*, That the rights and interests of the colored citizens of Virginia are more directly, immediately and deeply affected in the restoration of the State to the Federal Union than any other class of citizens; and hence, that we have peculiar claims to be heard in regard to the question of its reconstruction, and that we cannot keep silence without dereliction of duty to ourselves, to our country, and to our God.

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2d. *Resolved*, That personal servitude having been abolished in Virginia, it behooves us, and is demanded of us, by every consideration of right and duty, to speak and act as freemen, and as such to claim and insist upon equality before the law, and equal rights of suffrage at the "ballot box."

3d. *Resolved*, That it is a wretched policy and most unwise statesmanship that would withhold from the laboring population of the country any of the rights of citizenship essential to their well-being and to their advancement and improvement as citizens.

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4th. *Resolved*, That invidious, political, or legal distinctions, on account of color merely, if acquiesced in, or voluntarily submitted to, is inconsistent with our own self-respect, or the respect of others, placing us at great disadvantages, and seriously retards our advancement or progress in improvement, and that the removal of such disabilities and distinctions are alike demanded by sound political economy, by patriotism, humanity and religion.

5th. *Resolved*, That we will prove ourselves worthy of the elective franchise, by insisting upon it as a right, by not tamely submitting to its deprivation, by never abusing it by voting the State out of the Union, and never using it for purposes of rebellion, treason or oppression.

6th. *Resolved*, That the safety of all loyal men, black and white, in the midst of the recently slaveholding States, requires that all loyal men, black or white, should have equal political and civil rights, and that this is a necessity as a protection against the votes of secessionists and disloyal men.

7th. *Resolved*, That traitors shall not dictate or prescribe to us the terms or conditions of our citizenship, so help us God.

130 8th. *Resolved*, That as far as in us lies, we will not patronize or hold business relations with those who would deny to us our equal rights.

9th. *Resolved*, That we recommend that a Delegate Convention be held for the purpose of carrying out the foregoing objects and designs, and that, this meeting appoint a committee of seven to aid in getting up said Convention. . . .

. . . This agitation has been peaceful and moderate, because, even in the absence of the right of suffrage, the people of Norfolk felt safe under the protection of the national authorities, and that the justice of their demands was so clear that they cannot fail in obtaining a speedy recognition at the hands of an enlightened and liberty-loving people. How far that hope will be justified by events the coming time will soon reveal; God grant they may never have to say that they appealed to the patriotism, justice and humanity of the American people and—appealed in vain.

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#### Pledge to the Democratic Republican Association (see page 3)

“We, the undersigned, mutually pledge ourselves to support no candidate for any office, National, State, or Municipal, who is not in favor of the immediate concession to *all men* of equal rights before the law, and equal rights of Suffrage to all loyal men without distinction of birth or color.

150 For the purpose of carrying out the principles of the foregoing Pledge, and as preliminary to organized and systematic political action, we hereby form ourselves into an Association to be called the “Democratic Republican Association,” and appoint provisionally, President, C. E. Johnson, T. L. R. Baker, and J.A. Dear, Secretaries, and P. F. Schliecker, Treasurer, of the Association, and will at once inaugurate a series of public meetings and publications, and memorialize the President and Congress, and invoke the aid of the friends of freedom throughout the State and Nation. Every person signing the declaration of principles will be regarded as a member of the Association.

Name (in full.) Occupation. Residence.

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