



“we shall be called *citizens of the United States and Americans*”

THE CAMPAIGN FOR CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS BY AFRICAN AMERICANS, 1813-1865

The arduous campaign for equal rights waged by free African Americans before the end of the Civil War began with a few futile petitions to colonial assemblies and state legislatures in the late 1700s, expanding exponentially in the 1800s with appeals and declarations issued by black organizations, newspapers, and activist leaders. Presented here are selections from twenty-one documents in this campaign — the “civil rights movement” of its time — spanning half a century before general emancipation. They include letters, speeches, petitions, newspaper articles and editorials, and declarations from state and national “Negro conventions,” asserting that “we shall be called *citizens of the United States and Americans*.”

1813 ___ JAMES FORTEN, LETTER TO PROTEST THE “NEGRO REGISTRATION” BILL, EXCERPTS.

In 1813 *A Series of Letters by a Man of Color* was published in Philadelphia. Its author was James Forten, a well-to-do African American of that city, a veteran of the Revolutionary War and one who was to play a leading role in the early “Negro convention” movement and the abolitionist movement. The proposed legislation against which James Forten here directs his pen entailed the registration of black Americans. It was not passed.

Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 1951

We hold this truth to be self-evident, that God created all men equal, is one of the most prominent features in the Declaration of Independence, and in that glorious fabric of collected wisdom, our noble Constitution. This idea embraces the Indian and the European, the savage and the Saint, the Peruvian and the Laplander, the white man and the African, and whatever measures are adopted subversive of this inestimable privilege, are in direct violation of the letter and spirit of our Constitution

. . . This is almost the only state in the Union wherein the African race have justly boasted of rational liberty and the protection of the laws, and shall it now be said they have been deprived of that liberty and publicly exposed for sale to the highest bidder?¹ Shall colonial inhumanity that has marked many of us with shameful stripes become the practice of the people of Pennsylvania, while Mercy stands weeping at the miserable spectacle? People of Pennsylvania, descendants of the immortal Penn, doom us not to the unhappy fate of thousands of our countrymen in the Southern States and the West Indies; despise the traffic in blood, and the blessing of the African will forever be around you. Many of us are men of property, for the security of which we have hitherto looked to the laws of our blessed state; but should this become a law, our property is jeopardized, since the same power which can expose to sale an unfortunate fellow creature, can wrest from him those estates which years of honest industry have accumulated. Where shall the poor African look for protection, should the people of Pennsylvania consent to oppress him?



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¹ Intending to restrict the number of free blacks in Pennsylvania, the legislature considered a bill requiring new arrivals to register with the state or be fined and jailed. The bill would also allow the state to sell into indentured servitude any free black convicted of a crime (as, for example, not registering with the state and failing to produce the registration certificate on demand). Willard Sterne Randall & Nancy Nahra, *Forgotten Americans: Footnote Figures Who Changed American History* (Da Capo Press, 1999), 156.

1829 _____ DAVID WALKER, *WALKER'S APPEAL*, EXCERPTS.

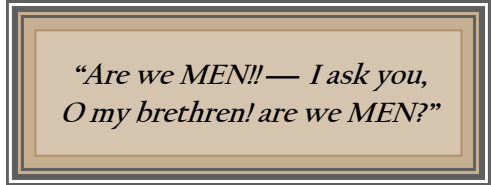
In his well-known appeal for emancipation and, if necessary, mass slave rebellion, David Walker, a freeborn African American, stresses the equivalence of citizenship with “manhood,” i.e., full respect for each person as equal before the law and before God, with no second-class status or inferior designation.

. . . I must observe to my brethren that at the close of the first Revolution in this country with Great Britain, there were but thirteen States in the Union; now there are twenty-four, most of which are slave-holding States, and the whites are dragging us around in chains and in handcuffs to their new States and Territories to work their mines and farms, to enrich them and their children — and millions of them believing firmly that we, being a little darker than they, were made by our Creator to be an inheritance to them and their children for ever — the same as a parcel of brutes.

Are we MEN!! — I ask you, O my brethren! are we MEN? Did our Creator make us to be slaves to dust and ashes like ourselves? Are they not dying worms as well as we? Have they not to make their appearance before the tribunal of Heaven, to answer for the deeds done in the body, as well as we? Have we any other Master but Jesus Christ alone? Is he not their Master as well as ours? —

What right then, have we to obey and call any other Master, but Himself? . . .

There is a great work for you to do, as trifling as some of you may think of it. You have to prove to the Americans and the world, that we are MEN and not *brutes*, as we have been represented, and by millions treated. Remember, to let the aim of your labors among your brethren, and particularly the youths, be the dissemination of education and religion.



*“Are we MEN!! — I ask you,
O my brethren! are we MEN?”*

1831/1841 _____ LETTERS to BLACK NEWSPAPERS ON THE PREFERRED TERM FOR BLACK AMERICANS.

The designation of “citizen” was central in the discussion among black Americans on the preferred term for their national identity.

“A Subscriber” has suggested the appropriateness of the term “Afric-American.” The suggestion is as absurd as the sound of the name is inharmonious. It is true that we should have a distinct appellation — we being the only people in America who feel all the accumulated injury which pride and prejudice can suggest. But sir, since we have been so long distinguished by the title “men of color,” why make this change, so uncouth and jargon-like? A change we do want and a change we will have. When it comes, we shall be called *citizens of the United States and Americans*. *The Liberator*, 1 Sept. 1831

The term “colored” is not a good one. Whenever used, it recalls to mind the offensive distinctions of color. The name “African” is more objectionable yet, and is no more correct than “Englishman” would be to a native-born citizen of the United States.

The colored citizen is an American of African descent. Cannot a name be found that will explain these two facts? I suggest one, and I beg your readers to reflect on it before you reject it as unsuitable. It is “Afric-American” or, written in one word, “Africamerican.” It asserts that most important truth, that the colored citizen is as truly a citizen of the United States as the white. *The Liberator*, 24 Sept. 1831

That we are colored is a fact, an undeniable fact. That we are descendants of Africans is true. We affirm there is nothing in it that we need to be ashamed of, yea, rather much that we may be proud of.

For ourselves we are quite well satisfied. And we intend, in all our public efforts, to go to the power-holding body and tell them, “Colored as we are, *black* though we may be, yet we demand our rights, the same rights other citizens have.” *The Colored American*, 6 or 13 March 1841

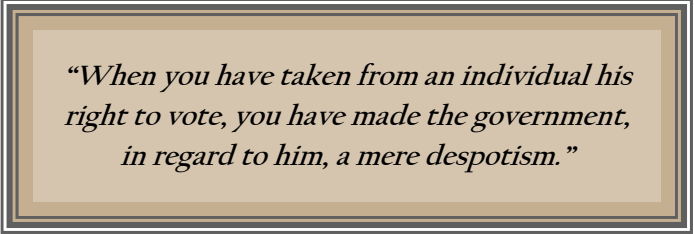
1838 _____ APPEAL OF FORTY THOUSAND, THREATENED WITH DISFRANCHISEMENT, TO THE PEOPLE OF PENNSYLVANIA, PAMPHLET, EXCERPTS.

The Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1837 provided for the disfranchisement of black Americans. Numerous petitions from blacks throughout the state had reached this convention in opposition to the provision, but in vain. A great mass meeting of African Americans was held in Philadelphia on March 14, 1838, as part of a futile effort to defeat its ratification. From this meeting issued the following statement, in pamphlet form, filled with valuable information as well as strong emotion.

Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 1951

FELLOW-CITIZENS: — We appeal to you from the decision of the “Reform Convention,” which has stripped us of a right peaceably enjoyed during forty-seven years under the Constitution of this commonwealth.² We honor Pennsylvania and her noble institutions too much to part with our birth-right, as her free citizens, without a struggle. To all her citizens the right of suffrage is valuable in proportion as she is free; but surely there are none who can so ill afford to spare it as ourselves.

Was it the intention of the people of this commonwealth that the Convention to which the Constitution was committed for revision and amendment, should tear up and cast away its first principles? Was it made the business of the Convention to deny “that all men are born equally free,” by making political rights depend upon the skin in which a man is born? or to divide what our fathers bled to unite, to wit, TAXATION AND REPRESENTATION? We will not allow ourselves for one moment to suppose, that the majority of the people of Pennsylvania are not too respectful of the rights and too liberal towards the feelings of others, as well as too much enlightened to their own interests, to deprive of the right of suffrage a single individual who may safely be trusted with it. And we cannot believe that you have found among those who bear the burdens of taxation any who have proved, by their abuse of the right, that it is not safe in their hands. This is a question, fellow-citizens, in which we plead *your* cause as well as our own. It is the safeguard of the strongest that he lives under a government which is obliged to respect the voice of the weakest. When you have taken from an individual his right to vote, you have made the government, in regard to him, a mere despotism; and you have taken a step towards making it a despotism to all. . . .



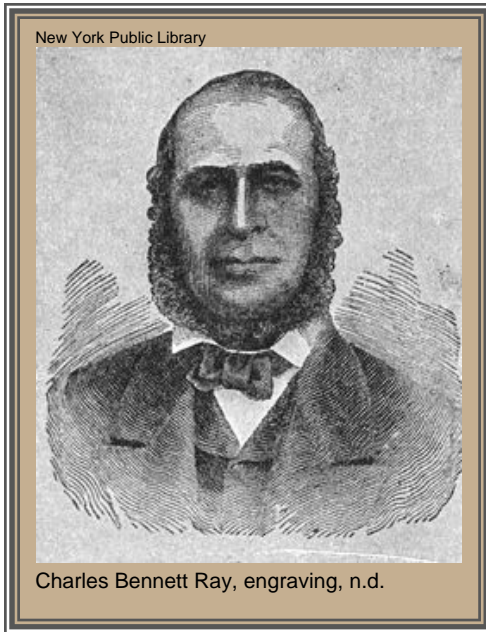
“When you have taken from an individual his right to vote, you have made the government, in regard to him, a mere despotism.”

What have we done to forfeit the inestimable benefits of this charter? Why should tax-paying colored men, any more than other tax-payers, be deprived of the right of voting for their representatives? It was said in the Convention that this government belongs to the *Whites*. We have already shown this to be false, as to the past. Those who established our present government designed it equally for all. . . .

. . . We love our native country, much as it has wronged us; and in the peaceable exercise of our inalienable rights, we will cling to it. The immortal Franklin, and his fellow laborers in the cause of humanity, have bound us to our homes here with the chains of gratitude. We are PENNSYLVANIANS, and we hope to see the day when Pennsylvania will have reason to be proud of us, as we believe she has now none to be ashamed! Will you starve our patriotism?

. . . Firm upon our Pennsylvania BILL OF RIGHTS, and trusting in a God of Truth and justice, we lay our claim before you, with the warning that no amendments of the present Constitution can compensate for the loss of its foundation principle of equal rights, nor for the conversion into enemies of 40,000 friends.

² In its new constitution of 1838, Pennsylvania denied free blacks the right to vote—which they had previously enjoyed although few had dared to exercise—while expanding white men’s access to the ballot. C. Peter Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers* (University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 255.



1838 _____ CHARLES RAY, "OUR BRETHREN IN PHILADELPHIA," *THE COLORED AMERICAN*.

Charles Ray, editor of *The Colored American*, criticizes the black leaders who met to oppose the Pennsylvania "Reform Convention" for arguing over the appropriate term for black Americans while "their enemies are robbing them of diamonds and gold." [15 March 1838]

The good sense of some of our brethren in Philadelphia, seems to have forsaken them. They are quarrelling about trifles while their enemies are robbing them of diamonds and of gold. Nothing can be more ridiculous nor ludicrous, than their contentions about NAMES — if they quarrel it should be about THINGS.

But what caps the climax is, that while these sages are frightened half to death at the idea of being called COLORED, their FRIENDS and their FOES, in the contention in the Assembly and in the Senate through the pulpit and the press, call them nothing but NEGROES, NEGROES, THE NEGROES of Pennsylvania.

To us, and we should think to any one of good sense, laboring under such persecutions as the colored citizens of Philadelphia are, to be called "Colored Americans" would be like a ray of *Heavenly* light, shining amidst the blackness of darkness.

Oppressed Americans! *who are they?* nonsense brethren!! You are COLORED AMERICANS. The Indians are RED AMERICANS, and the white people are WHITE AMERICANS and *you are as good as they, and they are no better than you* — God made all of the same blood. Do not fool away any more of your time nor fill up any more of your papers, with SUCH NONSENSE.

1838 _____ THOMAS VAN RENSELAER, LETTER TO JOSHUA LEAVITT, 26 OCTOBER 1838.

The struggle against segregation has been an individual as well as a collective one. The following letter, dated Boston, October 26, 1838, from Thomas Van Renselaer, a New York black abolitionist, to a white friend, Joshua Leavitt of Boston, is typical of thousands of courageous personal acts of resistance to discrimination.

Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 1951

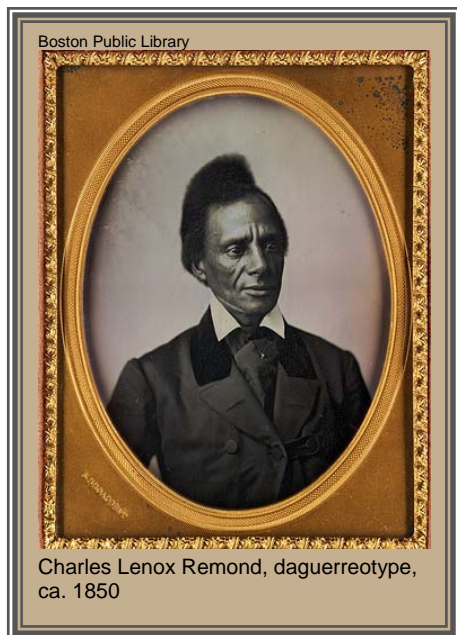
Dear Brother, — I stepped on board the Steamboat *J. W. Richmond* in your city [Boston] yesterday afternoon for Providence [RI]. I had previously understood that *this* being an opposition boat, people were treated irrespective of complexion; so, full of hope of a pleasant entertainment, I went to the office and paid \$3.50 (fifty cents more than regular fare) for my passages and a berth, No. 15, which was assigned me in the after cabin, and obtained my ticket. I walked about until dark when, feeling chilly, I repaired to the cabin in which my berth was.

I had not been there long before a man came up to me in a very abrupt manner and said, "Whose servant are you?" I at first gave no answer; he repeated, and I replied, I am my own, Sir. "Well," said he, "you must go on deck." I asked, why so? "Because you ought to know your place." I said, this is my place. Said he, "Go on deck, I tell you." Said I, I cannot go on deck. Said he with an oath [curse] and running upon deck, "I'll make you." He returned in a moment with the captain, who came trembling and said, "I want you to go on deck immediately." I asked the reason. "Not a word from you, sir." I asked, what offense have I committed? "Not a word, sir," said he, and laid hold of me with violence, and ordering two men to remove me.

But when I saw him in such a rage, and fearing that he might do *himself* harm, I retired, and walked the deck till late at night, when I had another talk with the captain. I then told him he had not treated me well, and that an explanation was due from him; but he refused to allow me to go below or to give me a berth. I then told him I should publish the treatment I had received. He again flew into a passion,

and I saw no more of him. Between 11 and 12 o'clock, one of the waiters invited me to occupy a bed which he had prepared. I accepted it and was rendered comfortable, and feel very grateful to three of the waiters for their sympathy in these trying moments, as well as to some of the passengers. One gentleman in particular, the Rev. Mr. Scudder (Methodist) gave me great consolation by identifying himself with me at the time.

Now dear brother, I have made this communication of facts for the information of the friends of human rights, who, I believe, have patronized *this boat* from principle, that they may act accordingly hereafter.³



1842 _____ CHARLES LENOX REMOND, TESTIMONY TO A COMMITTEE OF THE MASSACHUSETTS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON "THE RIGHTS OF COLORED CITIZENS IN TRAVELLING," 10 FEBRUARY 1842, EXCERPTS.

In 1842 black activists petitioned the Massachusetts legislature to end segregated seating on trains, streetcars, and other modes of public transportation. Testifying before a committee on the issue, Charles Lenox Remond, a black abolitionist who had spent the previous nineteen months lecturing in England and Ireland, described the different treatments he received as a traveller in America and in the British Isles. His testimony was published in *The Liberator* of 25 February 1842. (The legislature did not act on the petition for more than ten years.)⁴

Mr. Chairman, the treatment to which colored Americans are exposed in their own country finds a counterpart in no other; and I am free to declare that, in the course of nineteen months' traveling in England, Ireland, and Scotland, I was received, treated and recognized, in public and private society, without any regard to by complexion. From the moment I left the American packet ship in Liverpool [England], up to the moment I came in contact with it again, I was never reminded of my complexion;

and all that know anything of my usage in the American ship, will testify that it was unfit for a brute, and none but one could inflict it.

But how unlike that afforded in the British steamer *Columbia*! Owing to my limited resources, I took a steerage passage. On the first day out, the second officer came to inquire after my health; and finding me the only passenger in that part of the ship, ordered the steward to give me a berth in the second cabin; and from that hour until by stepping on shore at Boston, every politeness was shown me by the officers, and every kindness and attention by the stewards; and I feel under deep and lasting obligation to them, individually and collectively.

In no instance was I insulted or treated in any way distinct or dissimilar from other passengers or travelers, either in coaches, railroads, steampackets, or hotels; and if the feeling was entertained, in no case did I discover its existence. . . .

Bear with me while I relate an additional occurrence. On the morning after my return home, I was obliged to go to Boston again, and on going to the Salem station I met two friends, who enquired if I had any objection to their taking seats with me. I answered I should be most happy. They took their seats accordingly, and soon afterwards one of them remarked to me — "Charles, I don't know if they will allow us to ride with you." It was some time before I could understand what they meant, and, on doing so, I laughed — feeling it to be a climax to every absurdity I had heard attributed to Americans. To say nothing of the wrong done those friends, and the insult and indignity offered me by the appearance of the conductor, who ordered the friends from the car in a somewhat harsh manner — they immediately left the carriage.

³ The letter was published in *The Liberator*, 30 November 1838.

⁴ Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, 368.

On returning to Salem some few evenings afterwards, Mr. Chase, the superintendent on this road, made himself known to me by recalling bygone days and scenes, and then enquired if I was not glad to get home after so long an absence in Europe. I told him I was glad to see my parents and family again, and this was the only object I could have, unless he thought I should be glad to take a hermit's life in the great pasture; inasmuch as I never felt to loathe my American name so much as since my arrival. He wished to know my reasons for the remark. I immediately gave them, and wished to know of him, if, in the event of his having a brother with red hair, he should find himself separated while traveling because of this difference, he should deem it just. He could make no reply. I then wished to know if the principle was not the same; and if so, there was an insult implied by his question. . . .

Sir, it happens to be my lot to have a sister a few shades lighter than myself; and who knows, if this state of things is encouraged, whether I may not on some future occasion be mobbed in Washington Street, on the supposition of walking with a white young lady! (Suppressed indications of sympathy and applause.)

1843 _____ REV. SAMUEL H. DAVIS, ADDRESS TO THE NATIONAL CONVENTION OF COLORED CITIZENS, BUFFALO, NEW YORK, EXCERPTS.

To propel the campaign for citizenship rights, just economic conditions, and the abolition of slavery, the "Negro convention" movement began in 1830 as a single national meeting and expanded to incorporate numerous state and national meetings convened in northern states. In the keynote address of the August 1843 national convention, Samuel H. Davis, a black Baptist clergyman and abolitionist, asserts that the time has come for African Americans to "plead their own cause" and cease depending on white churches, political parties, and abolitionists.

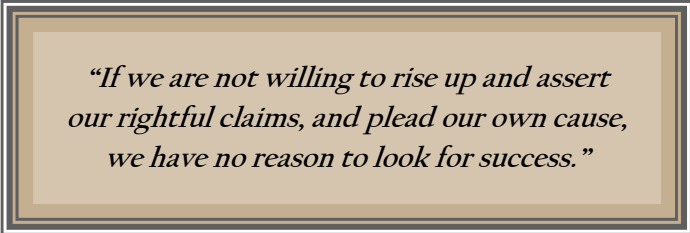
Is the question asked, what shall we do? Shall we petition for our rights? I do not pretend to dictate the course that should be pursued; but I have very little hope in petitioning longer. We have petitioned again and again, and what has been the result? Our humblest prayers have not been permitted a hearing. We could not even state our grievances. Our petitions were disregarded, our applications slighted, and we spurned from the mercy seat, insulted, abused and slandered. And this day finds us in the same unhappy and hopeless condition in which we have been for our whole lives; no other hope is left us, but in our own exertions and an "appeal to the god of armies."

From what other source can we expect that help will come? Shall we appeal to the Christian community — to the church of our own land? What is her position? Behold her gigantic form, with hands upraised to heaven! See her increased and made rich by the toil and sweat and blood of slaves! View her arrayed in her pontifical robes, screening the horrid monster, slavery . . .

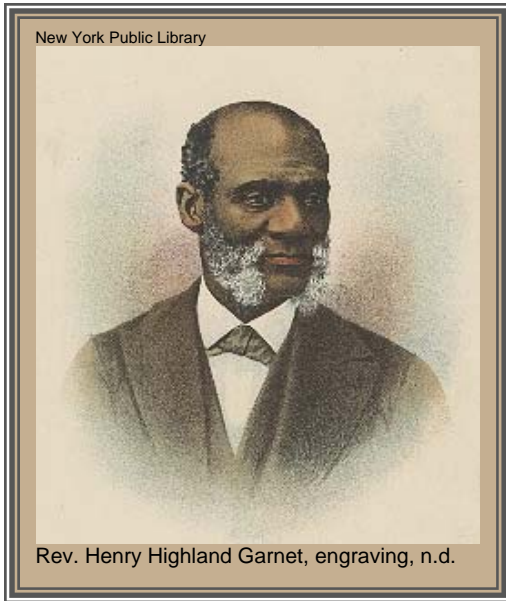
Shall we turn to either of the great political parties of the day? What are our prospects there? Is there any hope of help? No, they are but the slaves of slavery, too, contending which shall be most faithful in supporting the foul system of slavery, that they may secure the vote of the slaveholder himself, and of his scores of human cattle.

Shall we, then, look to the abolitionists and wait for them to give us our rights? I would not say a word that would have a tendency to discourage them in their noble efforts in behalf of the poor slave, or their exertions to advance the cause of truth and humanity. Some of them have made great sacrifices and have labored with a zeal and fidelity that justly entitle them to our confidence and gratitude. But if we sit down in idleness and sloth, waiting for them — or any other class of men — to do our own work, I fear it will never be done.

If we are not willing to rise up and assert our rightful claims, and plead our own cause, we have no reason to look for success. We ourselves must be willing to contend for the rich boon of freedom and equal rights, or we shall never enjoy that boon. It is found only of them that seek.



"If we are not willing to rise up and assert our rightful claims, and plead our own cause, we have no reason to look for success."



1848 "ATROCIOUS OUTRAGE ON HENRY H. GARNET," *NORTH STAR*, 7 JULY 1848.

Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, a Presbyterian clergyman and leading black abolitionist, recounts his experience with violent discrimination while travelling by train to Niagara Falls, New York.

I attempted to take the cars for Niagara Falls this morning, but the conductor insultingly ordered me to leave. He said, "Colored people cannot be permitted to ride with the whites, for Southern ladies and gentlemen will not tolerate it." Not being accustomed to yield up my rights without making at least a semblance of lawful resistance, I quietly returned to my seat. I was prevented by the conductor who seized me violently by the throat and choked me severely. I have been for many years a cripple.⁵ I made no resistance further than was necessary to save myself from injury, but nevertheless this conductor and another person continued to choke and to assault me. A part of the time my leg was under

the cars, near the wheel, and several persons were crying out — "Don't kill him — don't kill him."

An officer of the road said that they would put me or any other person out whenever they pleased and no law could interfere and that I might as well attempt to sue the state of New York as to prosecute that company. I am suffering greatly from my wounds and bruises, so much so that I called in a physician.

1849 DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS, OHIO CONVENTION OF COLORED CITIZENS, COLUMBUS, OHIO, EXCERPTS.

From January 10 to 13, 1849, a state convention of Ohio black Americans, with forty-one delegates from twelve counties, met in Columbus. Guided by such leaders as Dr. Charles Henry Langston, William Howard Day, David Jenkins, and James Poindexter, the deliberations of this convention were of great significance as may be seen by the following extracts from its proceedings.

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OHIO DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS

Whereas, we the free colored people of the State of Ohio are cursed by the blighting influence of oppression in this professedly free State, to which many of us have fled for refuge and protection; and

Whereas, the history of the political world as well as the history of nations clearly shows that "who would be free, himself must strike the blow," and

Whereas, both the old and new worlds are shaken throughout their length and breadth by the uprising of oppressed millions who are erecting firm foundations and stupendous platforms on which they may unitedly battle for that liberty which God has benignantly given to all his creatures, and which will be wrested from them only by vampire despots, therefore,

RESOLVED, That we adopt the following as our DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS, as to State and National policy, and in harmony with these we will ever fight, until our rights are regained. It is our purpose:

- I. To sternly resist, by all means which the God of Nations has placed in our power, every form of oppression or proscription attempted to be imposed upon us, in consequence of our condition or color.

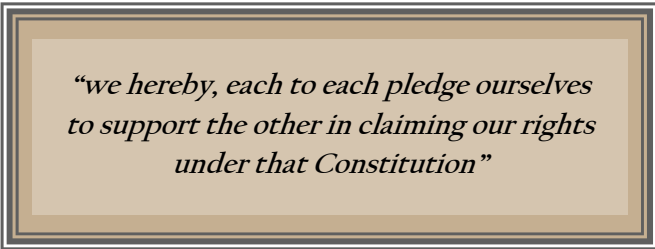
⁵ Garnet's right leg had been amputated in 1840, about thirteen years after a knee injury failed to heal properly and forced Garnet to use crutches.

- II. To acknowledge no enactment honored with the name of the law, as binding upon us, the object of which is in any way to curtail the natural rights of man.
- III. To give our earnest attention to the universal education of our people.
- IV. To sustain the cause of Temperance in our midst, and advocate the formation of societies for its promotion.
- V. To leave what are called menial occupations, and aspire to mechanical, agricultural and professional pursuits.
- VI. To respect and love that as the religion of Jesus Christ, and that alone, which, in its practical bearings, is not excitement merely, but that which loves God, loves humanity, and thereby preaches deliverance to the captive, the opening of the prison-doors to them that are bound, and teaches us to do unto others as we would have them do to us.

RESOLUTIONS.

- 1. *Resolved*, That the Convention appoint a committee of three to request the General Assembly of this State to allow a hearing from some member of the Convention before their body, respecting the disabilities of the colored people of Ohio.
- 2. *Resolved*, That we are the colored citizens of Ohio, in Convention assembled, petition the Legislature now in session, to repeal all laws making distinction on account of color, and that we urge the duty of petitioning upon our brethren throughout the State.
- 3. *Resolved*, That we petition Congress to repeal all laws of the United States making distinction on account of color.
- 4. *Resolved*, That to elevate ourselves as a people — to toss from our shoulders the dead weight in the way of our religious, political and social elevation, concerted action is necessary.
- 5. *Resolved*, That the Convention makes it obligatory on its members to persuade men to put in practice the acts passed in the Convention.
- 6. *Resolved*, That we will never submit to the system of Colonization to any part of the world, in or out of the United States; and we say once for all, to those soliciting us, that all their appeals to us are in vain; our minds are made up to remain in the United States, and contend for our rights at all hazards. . . .

Resolutions 7 and 8 recommend that an African American lecturer be funded to travel the state to “enlighten the public mind” of black citizens, and that a committee be appointed to compose an “Address to the People of this State.”



- 9. *Resolved*, That we are the colored citizens of the State of Ohio, hereby declare that whereas the Constitution of our common country gives us citizenship, we hereby, each to each pledge ourselves to support the other in claiming our rights under that Constitution, and in having the law oppressing us tested.
- 10. *Resolved*, That we hereby, now and forever, refuse to vote for or support any man for office, who will not go for us and ours in common with others.
- 11. *Whereas*, we believe with the “Fathers of ’76,” that taxation and representation ought to go together.
Resolved, That we are very much in doubt about paying any tax upon which representation is based, until we are permitted to be represented.
- 12. *Resolved*, That we still adhere to the doctrine of urging the slave to leave immediately with his hoe on his shoulder, for the land of liberty, and would accordingly recommend that

- five hundred copies of Walker's Appeal, and Henry H. Garnet's Address to the Slaves be obtained in the name of the Convention, and gratuitously circulated.
13. *Resolved*, That we urge all colored persons and their friends to keep a sharp lookout for men-thieves and their abettors, and warn them that no person claimed as a slave shall be taken from our midst without trouble.
 14. *Resolved*, That we recommend to the colored inhabitants throughout this State, immediate and energetic action on their part, in aiding our brothers and sisters in fleeing from the prison-house of bondage to the land of freedom; and furthermore we declare that he who would not aid our brothers and sisters in this most glorious cause, should by every community be published to the world as a bitter enemy to the cause of justice and humanity.
 15. *Resolved*, That the attempt to establish churches or schools for the benefit of colored persons EXCLUSIVELY, where we can enter either upon equal terms with whites, is in our humble opinion reprehensible.
 16. *Resolved*, That a committee of five be appointed to recommend a school system which may be used until school privileges are granted us in this State.
 17. *Resolved*, That we hereby recommend to our people throughout the State to give their children mechanical trades, and encourage them to engage in the agricultural, professional and other elevating pursuits of the day. And furthermore,
Resolved, That every Clergyman who feels the importance of this Resolution be hereby requested to read it or lecture upon it once to his congregation.
 18. *Resolved*, That we establish a Parent Anti-Slavery Society at this Convention; and appoint State offices, and recommend County Societies as auxiliary to said Parent Society.
 [For want of time amended by appointing a committee of three to draft a Constitution for the government of a Parent Society — the committee to report at the next Convention.]
 19. *Resolved*, That this Convention take measure to establish a Newspaper, in some of the towns in this State, which paper shall be the organ of the people.
 20. *Resolved*, That the Conference of colored men or association that is afraid to speak out against the monster, SLAVERY, when they have an opportunity so to do, and while their own brethren are in bonds, is not only undeserving of our confidence, but deserving of our deepest reprobation. And we further believe that the man, be he white or colored, who wrapped in ecclesiastical dignity, shuts his pulpit against the claims of God's suffering poor, whether these claims be presented in the anti-slavery, temperance of other causes, is not unworthy only of the name of the minister, but of the honored appellation, MAN.
 21. *Resolved*, That we regard the conduct of that portion of our people who fellowships those men who treat them as things and not as men, or encourage those that do, and who will not encourage in their churches the elevation of the colored people, and who vote for men-stealers to fill the highest offices in the gift of the people, thereby tightening the chain upon three millions of our brethren in the South, as highly detrimental to our elevation, at war with the injunctions of the Bible, and contrary to the progressive light of the age.
 22. *Resolved*, That we are determined to consider all colored men who do not treat other colored men on terms of perfect equality with the whites in all cases, as recreant to their dearest cause, and should be esteemed outcasts.
 23. *Resolved*, That we consider the treatment of the "Ohio Stage Company" towards colored persons unjust — a species of slavery of the blackest die — emanating from the blackest hearts — therefore deserving the contempt and reprobation of every colored man and his true friend; and we further believe that the State Houses and other hotels in Ohio, that will not accommodate respectable colored persons, ought

not to be patronized by our professed friends, where they know of other houses of different principles.

24. *Whereas* the ladies of England, Scotland, Ireland and France have made strenuous efforts in behalf of right, liberty and equality, in giving their burning rebuke to the God-defying institution of American slavery, and protesting against the contemptible conduct of that miserable wretch, H. G. Warner, in excluding from the Seminary in Rochester the child of the far-famed Frederick Douglass, therefore

Resolved, that the conduct of those ladies and gentlemen in this respect has our hearty approbation and united concurrence, and we hail it as an omen of the time when the world of mankind will be engaged on the side of outraged and oppressed humanity.

Resolutions 25-28 define plans for the next state convention.

29. *Whereas* we believe in the principle that who would be free, himself must strike the blow; and *Whereas*, Liberty is comparatively worth nothing to the oppressed, without effort on their part, therefore

Resolved, That we recommend to our brethren throughout the Union, that they, thanking their white friends for all action put forth in our behalf, pursue an independent course, relying only on the right of their cause and the God of Freedom.

30. *Resolved*, That the course of Messrs. Hale, Giddings, Root and others who have advocated our claims in the United States Congress, merits our sincere thanks and highest approbation.

31. *Resolved*, That we in our efforts for elevation, recognize no such word as FAIL.

32. *Resolved*, That we contemplate with joy the successful career of the *North Star*, thus far, and recommend that the colored people in particular and all friends of humanity in general, give it the best support in their power, until the ends for which it is designed shall have been accomplished. . . .

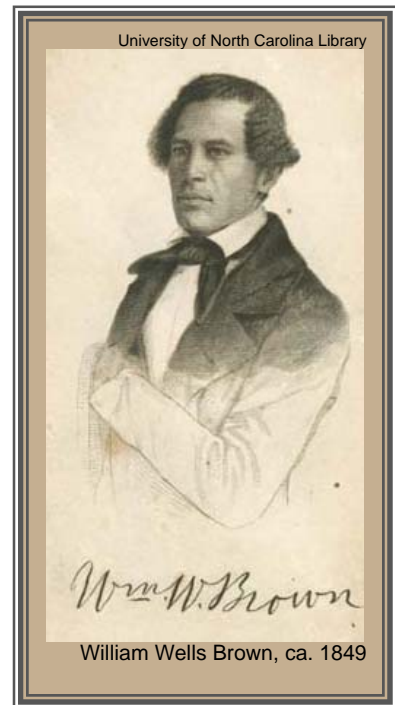
1849 _____ WILLIAM WELLS BROWN, LONDON, LETTER TO WENDELL PHILLIPS, 22 NOV. 1849.

William Wells Brown was one of several fugitive slaves who carried the abolitionist message to Europe. . . The letter to Phillips is of interest because of the light it sheds on the antebellum black's persistent efforts to establish his United States citizenship.

Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 1951

Dear Friend, — I observe in the American papers an elaborate discussion upon the subject of passports for colored men. What must the inhabitants of other countries think of the people of the United States, when they read, as they do, the editorials of some of the Southern papers against recognizing colored Americans as citizens?

In looking over some of these articles, I have felt ashamed that I had the misfortune to be born in such a country. We may search history in vain to find a people who have sunk themselves as low, and made themselves appear as infamous by their treatment of their fellow men, as have the people of the United States. If colored men make their appearance in the slave States as seamen, they are imprisoned until the departure of the vessel. If they make their appearance at the capital of the country, unless provided with free papers, they are sold for the benefit of the Government. In most of the States we are disfranchised, our children are shut out from the public schools, and embarrassments are thrown in the way of every attempt to elevate ourselves. And after they have degraded us, sold



us, mobbed us, and done everything in their power to oppress us, then, if we wish to leave the country, they refuse us passports, upon the ground that we are not citizens.

“When will the Americans learn that if they would encourage liberty in other countries, they must practice it at home?”

This is emphatically an age of discoveries; but I will venture the assertion, that none but an American slaveholder could have discovered that a man born in a country was not a citizen of it. Their chosen motto, that “all men are created equal,” when compared with their treatment of the colored people of the country, sinks them lower and lower in the estimation of the good and wise of all lands. In your letter of the 15th ult.,⁶ you ask if I succeeded in getting a passport from the American Minister in London, previous to going to Paris to attend the Peace Congress. Through the magnanimity of the French Government, all delegates to the Congress were permitted to pass freely without passports. I did not, therefore, apply for one.

But as I intend soon to visit the Continent and shall then need one, I called a few days since on the American Minister and was furnished with a passport, of which the following’s a copy. If it will be of any service in the discussion upon that subject, you are at perfect liberty to use it.

LEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN ENGLAND
PASSPORT NO. 33

The undersigned, Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the United States of America at the Court of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, begs all whom it may concern to allow safely and freely to pass, and in case of need, to give aid and protection to

MR. WILLIAM W. BROWN

a citizen of the United States, going on the Continent.

Given under my signature, and the imprint of the seal of the legation in London,
October 31, 1849, the 74th year of the independence of the United States.

For the Minister,

John C. B. Davis, *Secretary of the Legation*

So you see, my friend, that though we are denied citizenship in America, and refused passports at home when wishing to visit foreign countries, they dare not refuse us a passport when we apply for it in Old England. There is a public sentiment here, that, hard-hearted as the Americans are, they fear. When will the Americans learn that if they would encourage liberty in other countries, they must practice it at home? If they would inspire the hearts of the struggling spirits in Europe, they should not allow one human being to wear chains upon their own soil. If they would welcome the martyrs of freedom from the banks of the Danube, the Tiber, and the Seine,⁷ let them liberate their own slaves on the banks of the Mississippi and the Potomac. If they would welcome the Hungarian flying from the hungry talons of the Austrian eagle, they must wrest the three millions of slaves from the talons of their own. They cannot welcome the wanderer from the battlefields of freedom in the Old World as long as the New World is the battlefield of slavery. Should the Kossuths and Wimmers visit America, they would be reminded of their friends they left in Austria by the clanking chains of the American slave.

I was asked a few days since, at a meeting, if I was not afraid that the abolitionists would become tired and give up the cause as hopeless. My answer was that the slave’s cause was in the hands of men and women who intended to agitate and agitate, until the iron hand of slavery should melt away, drop by drop, before a fiery public sentiment.

WM. W. BROWN⁸

⁶ ult., last month (Latin: ultimo mense).

⁷ Brown alludes to the many European refugees fleeing to America after the 1848 revolutions against despotic rulers in France, the Austrian empire, German states, and other sections of Europe.

⁸ Published in *The Liberator*, 30 November 1849.

1851 ABNER H. FRANCIS, OREGON TERRITORY, LETTER TO FREDERICK DOUGLASS,
PUBL. 13 NOVEMBER 1851.

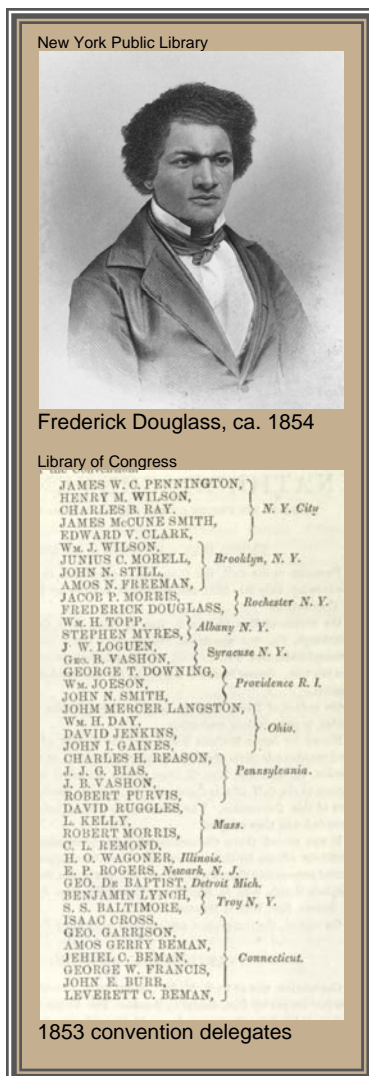
Abner H. Francis, a free black businessman and anti-slavery activist in Buffalo, New York, migrated to Portland in Oregon Territory and opened a retail clothing store, later moving to San Francisco. His series of letters to Frederick Douglass was published in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.

My Dear Friend: After a two months' tour from New York I concluded, in connection with my brother, to locate in Oregon. We rented a store and commenced business. I was called away for three weeks. Shortly after my departure, my brother was arrested. And what do you suppose was the crime? That he was a Negro and that one of the laws forbid any colored person who had a preponderance of African blood from settling in the territory. He was tried before a Justice of the Peace and, I must say, very generously given six months to leave the territory. The law says thirty days.

The people declare that we shall not leave whether the Legislature repeal the law or not. Petitions are now being circulated for its repeal.⁹ Thus you see, my dear sir, that even in the so-called *free* territory of Oregon, the colored American citizen is driven out like a beast in the forest.

Yours for equal rights, equal laws and equal justice to all men.

A. H. Francis



1853 FREDERICK DOUGLASS, ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLES
OF THE UNITED STATES, COLORED NATIONAL CONVENTION,
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK, JULY 1853, EXCERPTS.

Primarily written by Frederick Douglass, this address asserts more fervently and directly the growing impatience of African Americans for their rights as citizens.

We are Americans, and as Americans, we should speak to Americans. We address you not as aliens nor as exiles, humbly asking to be permitted to dwell among you in peace; but we address you as American citizens asserting their rights on their own native soil. Neither do we address you as enemies (although the recipients of innumerable wrongs), but in the spirit of patriotic good will. In assembling together as we have done, our object is not to excite pity for ourselves, but to command respect for our cause, and to obtain justice for our people. . . .

To be still more explicit: we would, first of all, be understood to range ourselves no lower among our fellow-countrymen than is implied in the high appellation of "citizen."

Notwithstanding the impositions and deprivations which have fettered us — notwithstanding the disabilities and liabilities, pending and impending — notwithstanding the cunning, cruel and scandalous efforts to blot out that right, we declare that we are, and of right we ought to be *American citizens*. We claim this right, and we claim all the rights and privileges and duties which properly attach to it.

It may, and it will, probably, be disputed that we are citizens, We may and probably shall be denounced for the declaration, as making an inconsiderate, impertinent and absurd claim to citizenship; but a very little reflection will vindicate the position we have assumed from so unfavorable a judgment. Justice is never inconsiderate; truth is never impertinent; right is never absurd. If the claim we set up be just, true and right, it will not be deemed improper or ridiculous in us to declare it. Nor is it disrespectful to our fellow-citizens who repudiate the aristocratic

⁹ The 1849 exclusion law of the Oregon Territory was repealed in 1854.

notions of the old world that we range ourselves with them in respect to all the rights and prerogatives belonging to American citizens. Indeed, we believe, when you have duly considered this subject, you will com-mend us for the mildness and modesty with which we have taken our ground.

By birth, we are American citizens; by the principles of the Declaration of Independence, we are American citizens; within the meaning of the United States Constitution, we are American citizens; by the facts of history and the admissions of American statesmen, we are American citizens; by the hardships and trials endured; by the courage and fidelity displayed by our ancestors in defending the liberties and in achieving the independence of our land, we are American citizens.

1855 _____ NOTICE TO BLACK CITIZENS VISITING NEW YORK CITY, *FREDERICK DOUGLASS' PAPER*, 11 MAY 1855.

In 1954 Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white person on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. A century earlier in 1854, Elizabeth Jennings, a free African American in New York City, was forcibly thrown off of a white-only streetcar by the conductor when she attempted to board. (The city ran a few marked buses that allowed black riders.) Jennings successfully sued the city for damages, and her victory led to the following notice to black visitors in 1855. Several other lawsuits were brought against the city, and by 1860 most of the city streetcars permitted black passengers.¹⁰

Elizabeth Jennings sued the Third Ave. Railroad Company after she was told by a conductor to leave a horse-drawn streetcar. She won damages of \$225. Judge ruled that black people who were “sober, well-behaved, and free from disease” had the same rights as others on the horsecars. Later, a black group, Legal Rights League, of New York, had this notice by James W. C. Pennington¹¹ printed in the newspapers, to be printed in May when many “antislavery societies, women’s rights, and temperance groups” held meetings in New York City.

To the numerous colored ladies and gentlemen who may visit this city during the coming anniversary week, let me say:

1. That all our public carrier-conveyances are now open to them upon equal terms.
2. No policeman will now, as formerly, assist in assaulting you.
3. If any driver or conductor molests you, by laying the weight of his finger upon your person, have him arrested, or call upon Dr. Smith, 55 West Broadway, Mr. T. L. Jennings, 167 Church St., or myself, 29 Sixth-Av., and we will enter your complaint at the Mayor’s office.
4. You can take the conveyances at any of the Ferries or stopping places. Ask no questions, but get in and have your five cents ready to pay. Don’t let them frighten you with words; the law is right and so is the public sentiment

James W. C. Pennington

1855 _____ INTERVIEWS WITH FREE AND FUGITIVE AFRICAN AMERICANS IN CANADA, 1855.

In interviews conducted in 1855 with African Americans who had fled or emigrated to Canada, many emphasized the contrast between their rights in Canada and in the U.S. The interviews were conducted by a white Boston journalist, Benjamin Drew, who published them in 1856 in *A North-Side View of Slavery. The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada*.

WILLIAM GROSE, St. Catherines, Ontario, Canada [excerpt]_____

I served twenty-five years in slavery, and about five I have been free. I feel now like a man, while before I felt more as though I were but a brute. When in the United States, if a white man spoke to me, I would feel frightened, whether I were in the right or wrong; but now it is quite a different thing — if a white man speaks to me, I can look him right in the eyes — if he were to insult me, I could give him an answer. I have the rights and privileges of any other man. I am now

¹⁰ Katherine Greider, “The Schoolteacher on the Streetcar,” *The New York Times*, 13 November 2005; online at www.nytimes.com/2005/11/13/nyregion/thecity/13jenn.html?pagewanted=all.

¹¹ Note that James W. C. Pennington is the first delegate on the list of 1853 convention delegates.

living with my wife and children, and doing very well. When I lie down at night, I do not feel afraid of oversleeping, so that my employer might jump on me if he pleased.

I am a true British subject, and I have a vote every year as much as any other man. I often used to wonder in the United States, when I saw carriages going round for voters, why they never asked me to vote. But I have since found out the reason — I know they were using my vote instead of my using it — now I use it myself. Now I feel like a man, and I wish to God that all my fellow-

creatures could feel the same freedom that I feel. I am not prejudiced against all the white race in the United States — it is only the portion that sustain the cursed laws of slavery.

Here's something I want to say to the colored people in the United States: You think you are free there, but you are very much mistaken: if you wish to be free men, I hope you will all come to Canada as soon as possible. There is plenty of land here, and schools to educate your children.

THOMAS HEDGEPEETH, Chatham, Ontario, Canada

I was born free, in Halifax Co. North Carolina, where I lived thirty-five years. About ten years ago, I removed to Indiana. My father was a farmer, half white, who ran through his farm. If a white man there brings a great account, the white man would carry it against the colored — the law there does not favor colored people. I cannot read or write. A free-born man in North Carolina is as much oppressed, in one sense, as the slave: I was not allowed to go to school. I recollect when I was a boy, a colored man came from Ohio and opened a school, but it was broken up. I was in the field ploughing with my father — he said he wished we could go and learn. I think it an outrageous sin and shame, that a free colored man could not be taught. My ignorance has a very injurious effect on my prospects and success. I blame the State of North Carolina — the white people of that State — for it. I am now engaged in a troublesome lawsuit, about the title to my estate, which I would not have got into, had I known how to read and write. . . .

When I was twenty-one, I went to vote, supposing it would be allowed. The Squire who held the box objected, and said no colored man was allowed to vote. I felt very badly about it — I felt cheap and I felt vexed: but I knew better than to make an answer — I would have been knocked down certain. Unless I took off my hat, and made a bow to a white man, when I met him, he would rip out an oath — “d—n you, you mulatto, ain't you got no politeness? don't you know enough to take off your hat to a white man?” On going into a store, I was required to take off my hat. . . .

On removing to Indiana, the white people did not seem so hostile altogether, nor want the colored people to knuckle quite so low. There were more white people who were friendly than in North Carolina. I was not allowed my vote nor my oath. There were more who wished colored people to have their rights than in North Carolina — I mean there were abolitionists in Indiana. . . .

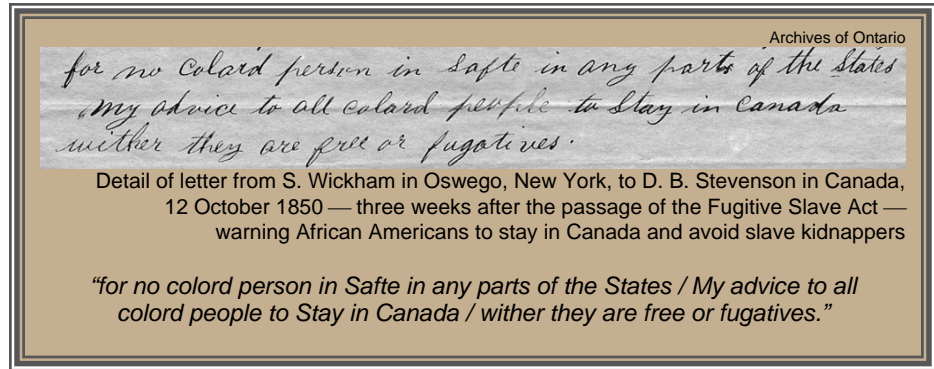
I came here a year last spring, to escape the oppression of the laws upon the colored men. After the fugitive slave bill was passed, a man came into Indianapolis and claimed John Freeman, a free colored man, an industrious, respectable man, as his slave. He brought *proofs* enough. Freeman was kept in jail several weeks — but at last it turned out that the slave sought was not Freeman but a colored man in Canada, and F. was released. The danger of being taken as Freeman was, and suffering from a different decision, worked on my mind. I came away into Canada in consequence,



as did many others. There were colored people who could have testified to Freeman's being free from his birth, but their oath [i.e., testimony in court] would not be taken in Indiana.

In regard to

Canada, I like the country, the soil, as well as any country I ever saw. I like the laws, which leave a man as much freedom as a man can have — still there is prejudice here. The colored people are trying to remove this by improving and educating themselves, and by industry, to show that they are a people who have minds, and that all they want is cultivating.



1857 _____ RESPONSES TO THE DRED SCOTT DECISION.

The infamous Supreme Court decision, *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), relegated enslaved African Americans to a seemingly hopeless status in the republic — non-citizens with no constitutional protections and no right to sue in court; persons deemed no more than the chattel property of slaveholders. The response from black and white abolitionists was immediate and intense, exemplified by these remarks of two free-born northern black activists, Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Charles Lenox Remond.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary, writing from her home in Canada, responding to a meeting of black leaders to protest the Court's decision _____

We beg to call attention to the proceedings of a meeting held in Philadelphia lately to express condemnation of the Dred Scott decision, &c. Mrs. Mott, Messrs. [messieurs; misters] Still, Remon[d], Purvis, McKimm and many others, white and colored participated.

The resolutions are strong and pointed, but why not go farther? This is not the time for strong words only; when all realize the yoke so forcibly as now, why not act? Protests are well enough in their way, but to be of effect, they must point to determined action. Do the Purvises, Remonds, and others who took part in the meeting intend to stay in the U. States? If so, the resolutions amount to nothing; if not, why not say so, friends? Your national ship is rotten sinking; why not leave it, and why not say so boldly, manfully?

Canada is a good country—we have British freedom and an abundance of it—equal political rights, of course, and if you covet it, social intercourse with those in your position in life. We here give you facts. If Canada should be distasteful, British Europe, or the Isles may be more to your mind; at all events, leave that slavery-cursed republic. Another meeting of respectable free and independent colored citizens was held previously; as they claim to believe in the United States Constitution, we shall wait with patience to see what it will do for them. We hope, however, that they too will look at facts instead of everlastingly theorizing.¹²

Charles Lenox Remond, July Fourth address to the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society _____

I look at Massachusetts, and I see our State, as an entire State, silently acquiescing in the recent disgraceful decision given by Judge Taney in the United States Supreme Court, whereby it declared that the black man in the United States has no rights which the white man is bound to respect! Shame on Judge Taney! Shame on the United States Supreme Court! Shame on Massachusetts, that she does not vindicate herself from the insult cast upon her through my own body, and through the body of every colored man in the State! My God and Creator has given me rights which you are as

¹² Published in the *Provincial Freeman*, 8 April 1857, entitled "Meetings at Philadelphia."

much bound to respect as those of the whitest man among you, if I make the exhibitions of a man. And black men *did* make the exhibition of manhood at Bunker Hill, and Lexington and Concord, as I can well testify. But in view of the ingratitude of the American people, in view of the baseness of such men as Judge Taney, in view of the dough-face character that degrades our State, I regret exceedingly that there is one single drop in my own veins that mingled with the blood of the men who engaged in the strife on Bunker Hill and at Lexington. Better than any such man had folded his hands and crossed his knees during the American Revolution if this is the reward we are to derive from such hypocrites, such cowards, such panders to American slavery as Judge Taney and his co-operators.¹³

1861 _____ APPEAL TO ALLOW BLACK CITIZENS IN THE UNION ARMY, BOSTON, 20 MAY 1861.

African Americans did not confine themselves to letters to public officials in their efforts to fully participate in the suppression of the Confederate assault. On the contrary, through correspondence in the press, mass meetings, petitions, and public addresses, they made the points that slavery was the main force behind that assault, that the sooner the Federal government conducted its military efforts in accordance with this truth the quicker would come victory, and that to help gain such a victory the strength of the black American must be harnessed.

Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 1951

Whereas, the traitors of the South have assailed the United States Government with the intention of overthrowing it for the purpose of perpetrating slavery; and
Whereas, in such a contest between the North and South — believing, as we do, that it is a contest between liberty and despotism — it is as important for each class of citizens to declare, as it is for the rules of the Government to know, their sentiments and position; therefore,
 RESOLVED, That our feelings urge us to say to our countrymen that we are ready to stand by and defend the Government as the equals of its white defenders — to do so with “our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor” for the sake of freedom and as good citizens; and we ask you to modify your laws that we may enlist — that full scope may be given to the patriotic feelings burning in the colored man’s breast — and we pledge ourselves to raise an army in the country of fifty thousand colored men. . . .¹⁴

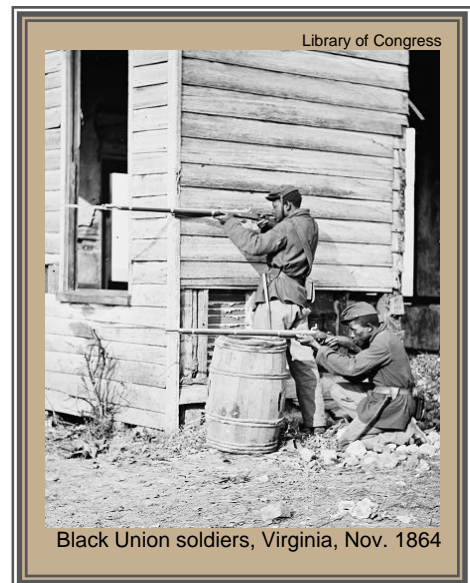
1864 _____ ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES, NATIONAL CONVENTION OF COLORED MEN, SYRACUSE, NEW YORK, 4-7 OCTOBER 1864, EXCERPT.

By the end of 1862, black men could enlist in the Union army in “colored regiments” with white commanding officers. The right to fight was central to this appeal for the right to vote.

Are we good enough to use bullets, and not good enough to use ballots? May we defend rights in time of war, and yet be denied the exercise of those rights in time of peace? Are we citizens when the nation is in peril, and aliens when the nation is in safety? May we shed our blood under the star-spangled banner on the battle-field, and yet be debarred from marching under it to the ballot-box? Will the brave white soldiers, bronzed by the hardships and exposures of repeated campaigns, men who have fought by the side of black men, be ashamed to cast their ballots by the side of their companions-in-arms? May we give our lives, but not our votes, for the good of the republic? Shall we toil with you to win the prize of free government, while you alone shall monopolize all its valued privileges? Against such a conclusion, every sentiment of honor and manly fraternity utters an indignant protest.

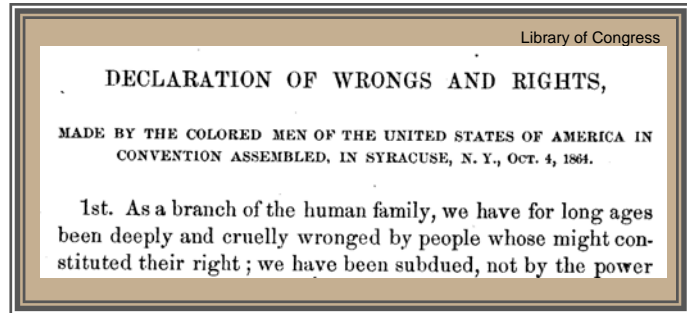
¹³ Published in *The Liberator*, 10 July 1857.

¹⁴ Published in *The Liberator*, 31 May 1861.



1864 _____ DECLARATION OF WRONGS
AND RIGHTS, NATIONAL CONVENTION OF
COLORED MEN, SYRACUSE, NEW YORK,
OCTOBER 1864, EXCERPTS.

Also from the 1864 national convention came this Declaration of Wrongs and Rights that encapsulates with clarity and self-possessed dignity the long campaign of African Americans for citizenship rights.



- 1st. As a branch of the human family, we have for long ages been deeply and cruelly wronged by people whose might constituted their right. We have been subdued, not by the power of ideas, but by brute force, and have been unjustly deprived not only of many of our natural rights, but debarred the privileges and advantages freely accorded to other men.
- 2d. We have been made to suffer well-nigh every cruelty and indignity possible to be heaped upon human beings, and for no fault of our own.
- 3d. We have been taunted with our inferiority by people whose statute-books contained laws inflicting the severest penalties on whomsoever dared teach us the art of reading God's word. We have been denounced as incurably ignorant, and at the same time have been, by stern enactments, debarred from taking even the first step toward self-enlightenment and personal and national elevation. We have been declared incapable of self-government by those who refused us the right of experiment in that direction, and we have been denounced as cowards by men who refused at first to trust us with a musket on the battlefield.
- 4th. As a people, we have been denied the ownership of our bodies, our wives, homes, children, and the products of our own labor. We have been compelled, under pain of death, to submit to wrongs deeper and darker than the earth ever witnessed in the case of any other people. We have been forced to silence and inaction in full presence of the infernal spectacle of our sons groaning under the lash, our daughters ravished, our wives violated, and our firesides desolated, while we ourselves have been led to the shambles and sold like beasts of the field.
- 5th. When the nation in her trial hour called her sable sons to arms, we gladly went to fight her battles, but were denied the pay accorded to others, until public opinion demanded it; and then it was tardily granted. We have fought and conquered, but have been denied the laurels of victory. We have fought where victory gave us no glory, and where captivity meant cool murder on the field, by fire, sword, and halter, and yet no black man ever flinched.
- 6th. We are taxed, but denied the right of representation. We are practically debarred the right of trial by jury, and institutions of learning which we help to support are closed against us.

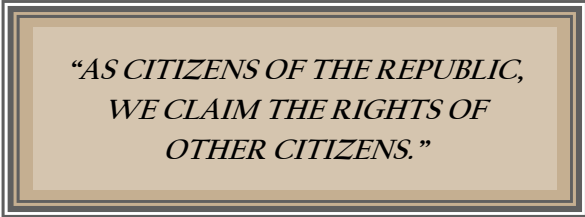
WE SUBMIT TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND WORLD THE FOLLOWING DECLARATION OF OUR RIGHTS, ASKING A CALM CONSIDERATION THEREOF:

- 1st. WE DECLARE THAT ALL MEN ARE BORN FREE AND EQUAL; that no man or government has a right to annul, repeal, abrogate, contravene, or render inoperative this fundamental principle, except it be for crime; therefore we demand the immediate and unconditional abolition of slavery.
- 2d. THAT, AS NATIVES OF AMERICAN SOIL, WE CLAIM THE RIGHT TO REMAIN UPON IT; and that any attempt to deport, remove, expatriate, or colonize us to any other land, or to mass us here against our will, is unjust; for here were we born; for this country our fathers and our brothers have fought, and here we hope to remain in the full enjoyment of enfranchised manhood and its dignities.
- 3d. THAT, AS CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC, WE CLAIM THE RIGHTS OF OTHER CITIZENS. We claim that we are, by right, entitled to respect; that due attention should be given to our needs;

that proper rewards should be given for our services; and that the immunities and privileges of all other citizens and defenders of the nation's honor should be conceded to us. We claim the right to be heard in the halls of Congress; and we claim our fair share of the public domain, whether acquired by purchase, treaty, confiscation, or military conquest.

4th. THAT, EMERGING AS WE ARE FROM THE LONG NIGHT OF GLOOM AND SORROW, WE ARE ENTITLED TO, AND CLAIM, THE SYMPATHY AND AID OF THE ENTIRE CHRISTIAN WORLD; and we invoke the considerate aid of mankind in this crisis of our history, and in this hour of sacrifice, suffering and trial.

Those are our wrongs; these a portion of what we deem to be our rights as men, as patriots, as citizens, and as children of the common Father. To realize and attain these rights, and their practical recognition, is our purpose. We confide our cause to the just God, whose benign aid we solemnly invoke. To him we appeal.



*“AS CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC,
WE CLAIM THE RIGHTS OF
OTHER CITIZENS.”*

1865 _____ “COLORED MEN OF THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA,” LETTER TO PRESIDENT ANDREW JOHNSON ON THE RIGHT TO VOTE, 10 MAY 1865.

Through the year 1865 economic and political power in the South still remained in the hands of the shaken, but far from crushed, former slaveholding class. Under the Johnsonian Reconstruction governments, an attempt was made by this class to firmly established the subjugation of the African American people and to make this approximate as closely as possible the situation during chattel slavery. Faced by this threat, the black people—often in unity with the poorer whites—acted vigorously and collectively in an effort to secure and make real their liberation. . . This petition, dated Newbern, North Carolina, May 10 . . . [was] widely circulated through the state, numerous signed, and presented to President Johnson, and thereafter extensively reprinted in the nation's press.

Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 1951

To his Excellency, Andrew Johnson, President of the United States:

We, the undersigned, your Petitioners, are colored men of the State of North Carolina, of the age of twenty-one years and upward — and we humbly come to you with our request, and yet in great confidence, because you are occupying a place so recently filled by a man who had proved himself indeed our friend — and it must be that some of his great and good spirit lingers to bless his successor; and then we are assured that you are a man who gives kind attention to all Petitioners, and never turns a deaf ear to any one because he may be in poor or humble circumstances.

In many respects we are poor, and greatly despised by our fellowmen; but we are rich in the possession of the liberty brought us, and our wives and our little ones, by your noble predecessor; secured to us by the armies of the United States, and promised to be permanent by that victorious flag which now flies in triumph in every State of the Union.

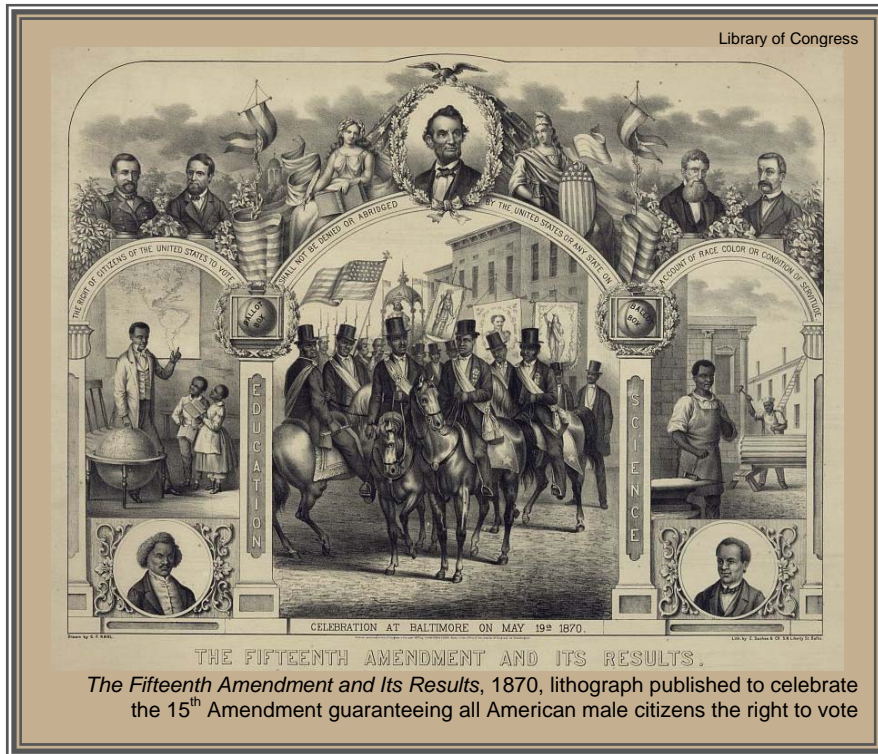
We accept this great boon of Freedom with truly thankful hearts, and shall try by our lives to prove our worthiness.

We always loved the old flag, and we have stood by it and tried to help those who upheld it through all this Rebellion, and now that it has brought us liberty, we love it more than ever; and in all future time we and our sons will be ready to defend it by our blood, and we may be permitted to say that such blood as that shed at Fort Wagner and Port Hudson is not altogether unworthy of such service. Some of us are soldiers and have had the privilege of fighting for our country in this war. Since we have become Freemen, and been permitted the honor of being soldiers, we begin to feel that we are men, and are anxious to show our countrymen that we can and will fit ourselves for the creditable discharge of the duties of citizenship. We want the privilege of voting. It seems to us that men who are willing on the field of danger to carry the muskets of Republics in the days of Peace ought to be permitted to carry its ballots; and certainly we cannot understand the justice of denying the elective franchise to men who have been fighting for the country, while it is freely given to men who

have just returned from four years fighting against it.

As you were once a citizen of North Carolina, we need not remind you that up to the year 1835 free colored men voted in this State, and never as we have heard, with any detriment to its interests. What we desire is, that preliminary to elections in the returning States, you would order the enrollment of all loyal men, without regard to color. But the whole subject we humbly submit to your better judgment, and we submit it with full belief in your impartial integrity, and in the fond hope that the mantle of our murdered friend and father may have fallen upon your shoulders.

May God bless and ever protect you and our beloved country from all assassins, shall be the constant prayer of your faithful friend and humble petitioners.



1813, 1838 (<i>Appeal</i>), 1838 (<i>Renselaer</i>), 1849 (Ohio), 1861, 1865	Herbert Aptheker, ed., <i>A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States</i> (Citadel Press, 1951), 59-60, 176-178, 185-186, 188-189, 278-283, 293-294, 462, 464-465, 533-535. Copyright © 1969 by Herbert Aptheker. Reproduced by permission of Dr. Bettina Aptheker. Word <i>Negro</i> in 1951 introductory notes modernized by permission.
1838 (Ray & Vogelsang) 1842, 1843, 1857	Black Abolitionist Archive, University of Detroit–Mercy, online collection at www.dalnet.lib.mi.us/gsd/cgi-bin/library?p=about&c=baa . Courtesy of University of Detroit–Mercy.
1831/1841, 1848 (<i>North Star</i>), 1851, 1855 (Jennings)	Dorothy Sterling, ed., <i>Speak Out in Thunder Tones: Letters and Other Writings by Black Northerners, 1787-1865</i> (Doubleday, 1973), 60-61, 65, 118, 140, 142-143; permission pending.
1829 (Walker)	Documenting the American South, online collection, University of North Carolina Library, at docsouth.unc.edu/nc/walker/menu.html . Courtesy of the University of North Carolina Library.
1849 (Brown)	William C. Nell, ed., <i>The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution . . . to Which Is Added a Brief Survey of the Conditions and Prospects of Colored Americans</i> (Boston: 1855), 325-326.
1855	Benjamin Drew, <i>A North-Side View of Slavery. The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada</i> . (Boston, 1856). Full text in Documenting the American South at http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/drew/menu.html .
1853	African American Odyssey, online exhibition, Library of Congress: <i>Proceedings of the Colored National Convention Held in Rochester July 6th, 7th, and 8th, 1853</i> , at lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/exhibit/aopart2b.html . Courtesy of the Library of Congress.
1864	Slavery to Freedom: The African American Pamphlet Collection, 1822-1909, Library of Congress: <i>Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored Men, Held in the City of Syracuse, N. Y., October 4, 5, 6, and 7, 1864</i> , at lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/aaphtml/aapchome.html . Courtesy of the Library of Congress.