

October 4-7, 1864

Rock, John S.

*Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored  
Men Held in the City of Syracuse, N. Y. ...  
Presscopy – Boston Athenaeum – Pamphlet Collection*

John S. Rock, Esq., of Boston, was the next speaker. He said, "I come from Massachusetts, where we are jealous of every right. I received information a few days ago that a sergeant in the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Regiment, who is a splendid penman, had been detailed by his captain as a clerk in his department; and that, when the officer in command learned this, he immediately ordered the sergeant back to his regiment, saying in his order, that 'no negro will be allowed to hold any position in this department except that of a cook or a laborer.' A copy of this order was forwarded to me; and I immediately presented the case to our most excellent Governor, who was going to Washington that evening. The result is, the sergeant is restored back to his position as clerk, and the officer who made the order has suddenly left for the North. [Applause.] This result was at once forwarded to me; and I immediately communicated it to his Excellency the Governor, when he sent me this noble reply:—

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS,  
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT,  
BOSTON, Oct. 4, 1864.

JOHN S. ROCK, ESQ.

DEAR SIR,—I am glad to hear of the favorable result in the case referred to. I had no doubt what the result would be; but it is through you that I first learn it definitely. I thank you for your kind expressions of acknowledgement to me personally; and with a constant willingness to do my part, always, to insure equal opportunities for usefulness and success in all the occupations and duties of life, to men of equal intelligence, industry, and integrity, whether they be white or black,

I am, very truly, yours,  
JOHN A. ANDREW.

[Great applause.]

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“All we ask is equal opportunities and equal rights. This is what our brave men are fighting for. They have not gone to the battle-field for the sake of killing and being killed; but they are fighting for liberty and equality. [Applause.] We ask the same for the black man that is asked for the white man; nothing more, and nothing less. When our men fight bravely, as they always do, they don’t like to be cheated out of the glory and the positions they so dearly earn. Many of our grandfathers fought in the Revolution, and they thought they were fighting for liberty; but they made a sad mistake, and we are now obliged to fight those battles over again, and I hope, this time, to a better purpose. We are all loyal. Why are we not treated as friends? This nation spurned our offers to rally around it, for two long years, and then, without any guaranties, called upon us at a time when the loyal white men of the North hesitated. We buried the terrible outrages of the past, and came magnanimously and gallantly forward. In the heroism displayed at Milliken’s Bend, Port Hudson, Fort Wagner, Olustee, in the battles now going on before Richmond, and everywhere our men have faced the foe, they have covered themselves all over with glory. [Applause.] They have nobly written with their blood the declaration of their right to have their names recorded on the pages of history among the true patriots of this American Revolution for Liberty. [Applause.] Witness, if you please, the moral heroism of the Massachusetts soldiers, spurning the offers of seven dollars a month, which the Government insultingly tempted them with for eighteen months, when it was known that they were without means, and that many of them had wives at home and children crying to them for bread when there was none to give them. But they bore it manfully, and have lived to see the right triumph. [Applause.] My friends,

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we owe much to the colored soldiers; not only to the Massachusetts men, but to every brave man who has taken up the musket in defence of liberty. [Applause.] They have done wonders for the race. Let us stand by them and their families, and be ready at any and at all times to assist them, and to give them a word of cheer.

“Though we are unfortunately situated, I am not discouraged. Our cause is flying onward with the swiftness of Mercury. Every day seems almost to be an era in the history of our country. We have at last reached the dividing-line. There are but two parties in the country to-day. The one headed by Lincoln is for Freedom and the Republic; and the other, by McClellan, is for Despotism and Slavery. There can be no middle ground in war. The friends and the enemies of the country are defined, and the one or the other must triumph. We are to have but one government throughout the broad territory of the United States. Two systems of government so innately hostile to each other as that of the North is to that of the South could not exist on the same soil. We should be like the Romans and Carthaginians; among whom, says Patercules, ‘there always existed either a war, preparations for a war, or a deceitful peace.’ The fate of this Republic will be settled in this contest; and its enemies must either be subdued or annihilated, and it is of but little consequence which.” [Applause.]

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