

Mr. CHAIRMAN: In allowing my name to be published as one of the speakers for this morning, which I have consented to do, at the earnest request of the Committee, it is due to myself to say that I have acted with great reluctance. Not that I am not deeply interested in this cause, nor that I have not clear convictions and strong feelings on the subject. On the contrary, my interest is too intense for expression, and my convictions and feelings are so vivid and overpowering that I cannot trust myself in attempting to give them utterance. Sir, I envy those who, with cooler blood or more mental self-command, can rise before an audience like this, and deliberately choose their words and speak their thoughts in calm, measured phrase. This is a task, sir, to which I am not adequate—I must either say too much or too little. If I let my heart play freely and speak out what I think and feel, I am extravagant, as people call it. If I put a curb on my feelings and try to imitate the cool and unimpassioned manner of others, I cannot speak at all. Sir, how can any man with blood in his veins, and a heart pulsating in his bosom, and especially how can any coloured man, think of the oppression of this country and of the wrongs of his race, and then express himself with calmness and without passion (applause).

Mr. Chairman, look at the facts—here, in a country with a sublimity of impudence that knows no parallel, setting itself up before the world as a *free country*, a *land of liberty*! “the *land of the free*, and the *home of the brave*,” the “*freest country in all the world*”! Gracious God! and yet here are millions of men and women groaning under a bondage the like of which the world has never seen—bought and sold, whipped, manacled, killed all the day long. Yet this is a *free country*! The people have the assurance to talk of their *free institutions*. How can

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I speak of such a country and use language of moderation?
How can I, who, every day, feel the grinding hoof of this
despotism, and who am myself identified with its victims?
Sir, let others, who can, speak coolly on this subject: I
cannot, and I will not (applause).

Mr. Chairman, that I may make sure of expressing the
precise sentiment which I wish to present to this meeting,
I will offer a resolution. It is one which I had the honour
of presenting to a meeting lately held in the City of
Philadelphia, but to which I did not speak as I could
have desired, for the reasons which I have already stated.
The resolution is as follows:

“Resolved, That to attempt, as some do, to prove that
there is no support given to slavery in the Constitution
and essential structure of the American Government is to
argue against reason and common sense, to ignore history
and shut our eyes against palpable facts: and that while
it may suit white men, who do not feel the iron heel, to
please themselves with such theories, it ill becomes the
man of colour, whose daily experience refutes the absur-
dity, to indulge in any such idle phantasies.”

Mr. Chairman, this resolution expresses just what I
think and feel about this new-fangled doctrine of the
anti-slavery character of the American Constitution.
Sir, with all due respect to the Hon. Gerrit Smith, who
is a noble and a good man, and one whom, from my soul,
I honour with all due respect—I say to the noble-minded,
large-hearted Gerrit Smith, I must say, that the doctrine
of the anti-slavery character of the American Constitu-
tion seems to me one of the most absurd and preposterous
that ever was broached. It is so contrary to history and
common sense, so opposite to what we and every man,
and especially every coloured man, feel and know to be
the fact, that I have not patience to argue about it. I
know it is said that the word “slave” or “slavery” is

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not to be found in the document. Neither are these words to be found in the Fugitive Slave law. But will any man pretend, on this account, that that infamous statute is an anti-slavery statute, or that it is not one of the most atrocious and damnable laws that ever disgraced the annals of despotism (applause). I know, sir, that there are some fine phrases in the Preamble about "establishing justice" and "securing to ourselves and our posterity the blessings of liberty." But what does that prove? Does it prove that the Constitution of the United States is an anti-slavery document? Then Mr. Buchanan's late Message was an anti-slavery document, and Mr. Buchanan himself a great Abolitionist. Then were all the Messages of your contemptible President Pierce anti-slavery documents, and your contemptible President Pierce was not contemptible, but a much misunderstood and misrepresented Abolitionist. If these fine phrases make the Constitution anti-slavery, then all the Fourth of July orations delivered by pro-slavery doughfaces at the North, the Democratic slave-breeders at the South, all these are anti-slavery documents. Sir, this talk about the Constitution being anti-slavery seems to me so utterly at variance with common sense and what we know to be facts that, as I have already intimated, I have no patience with it. I have no particular objection, Mr. Chairman, to white men, who have little to feel on this subject, to amuse themselves with such theories; but I must say that when I see them imitated by coloured men, I am disgusted! Sir, have we no self-respect? Are we to clank the chains that have been made for us, and praise the men who did the deed? Are we to be kicked and scouted, trampled upon and judicially declared to "*have no rights which white men are bound to respect*," and then turn

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round and glorify and magnify the laws under which all this is done? Are we such base, soulless, spiritless sycophants as all this? Sir, let others do as they may, I never will stultify or disgrace myself by eulogizing a government that tramples me and all that are dear to me in the dust (applause).

Sir, I treat as an absurdity, an idle phantasy, the idea of the Constitution of this American Union being anti-slavery; on the contrary, I assert that the Constitution is fitting and befitting those who made it—slaveholders and their abettors—and I am free to declare, without any fears of successful contradiction, that the Government of the United States, in its formation and essential structure as well as in its practice, is one of the basest, meanest, most atrocious despotisms that ever say the face of the sun (applause). And I rejoice, sir, that there is a prospect of this atrocious government being overthrown, and a better one built up in its place. I rejoice in the revolution which is now going on. I honour, from the bottom of my soul, I honour this glorious Society for the part, the leading part, it has taken in this noble work. My heart overflows with gratitude to the self-sacrificing men and women of this Society who have been pioneers in this cause—men and women who, from the beginning till this time, in storm and whatever of sunshine they have had, through evil report and good report, have stood by the side of the slave and unfalteringly maintained the rights of free men of colour. Sir, I cannot sufficiently express, the English language has not words strong enough to express, my admiration of the Abolitionists of this country, and my gratitude to them for what they have done for the confessedly oppressed coloured people in it. And in saying this, I believe I utter the

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sentiments of all the true coloured men in the country.

I know, sir, there are coloured men, some of them occupying prominent places before the public, who lose no opportunity of traducing and misrepresenting the character and course of the Garrisonian Abolitionists; but, sir, these are men without principle, men who are actuated by the basest selfishness, and in whose hearts there is not a spark of genuine love for the cause of freedom. They value anti-slavery not for what it is in itself, or for what it is doing for the slave, but for what it does or fails to do for themselves personally. Sir, I would be ashamed and mortified to believe that these men represented truly the views and feelings of the people of colour in this country. They do not.

But, Mr. Chairman, I am getting away from the subject of the resolution; and, as I have occupied more time than I intended, I will bring my remarks to a close at once, making way for one who, though following after, is greatly preferred before us—one upon whom no higher praise can be pronounced than the simple enunciation of his name—Wendell Phillips (applause).

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