

*Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,* — My much respected friends: I come before you, indulging the hope that I may be permitted to partake of the crumbs that may fall from the richly intellectual festive board, on this occasion. Rude as I am in speech and manner, and fully sensible of my incompetency and unworthiness to attempt to address you, I solicit your kind indulgence and forbearance for but a few moments; and as the banquet of which we are here to participate is in reserve, I promise you I will intrude upon your patience for but a very few moments.

This most respectable and intelligent audience has been convened on this occasion for the purposes too well known to every individual present, to need a passing comment from a stranger's lips. But, Mr. President, being assembled here, as you are, to urge, to contend for, and to *claim* the rights of man — the inalienable rights of injured man — the long-withheld rights of the much abused descendants of Afric's sons — Can I, an African, be mute on such an occasion as this? Could I, I were indeed recreant to my nature, recreant to my country, whose scorching sands and palmy groves I feel proud to call my own. I cannot! — I *will* not! for I feel the very life blood boil within me, and have now therefore appeared before you, feeling myself bound to you by the common brotherhood of humanity, and claiming affinity to you in owning one common country with the noble sires which gave you birth. I am no orator, my friends — “have neither action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech;” but “I have that within which passeth show,” — and have I a flippant

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fluency of tongue to give those inward feelings utterance, methinks 'twould cause the very stones of Gotham to rise – not to mutiny – but brand America! Brand did I say? – *aye, brand America!* – claiming as she does to be the most enlightened nation on the face of the globe – with such flaming professions of “*liberty and inalienable rights*” in her Declaration of Independence, which she unblushingly belies in her every day practice – proudly styling herself, with lofty emphasis, “the land of the free, and the home of the brave!” but being in reality the home of oppression – the tyrant’s stronghold!!

My friends, the creation of this vast universe, of which the globe that we inhabit is but a part, was not the effect of chance, but was formed by wisdom; it in consequence, then, requires wisdom to understand the frame of it; the more a man increases in wisdom, the more he will understand it – and the more he understands, the more he will approve and admire it – and the more he approves and admires, the more he will be led to love its great Author and Creator. As an illustration of this, we see that the full perfection of a complex machine in all its parts, with their relative and respective bearings, and mutual dependencies on each other, is best comprehended by an artist familiar with its utility. Superficial observers see little of it, and condemn – while deep thinkers see much and commend.

In His infinite wisdom, then, it pleased Almighty God, at the creation of the world, (for we must go tread for awhile the delightful labyrinths of Eden’s

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blissful regions,) it, I say, pleased Omnipotence at the creation, to confer pre-eminence on man – not on any particular man or *class of men*, but on *man* our common ancestor – moulding him after His divine similitude – breathing into his nostrils the eternal life of an immortal soul, and thereby making him the most favored being in the creation. – Jehovah further declared that all other animals should be subservient to his dominion and control. Thus was the earth given to man, and to his seed after him; nor do we find in any one passage of the Sacred Writ – the oracles of God’s holy will – any authority for making any distinctions between the rich and the poor, the white and the black, the learned and the illiterate, merely on account of these differences to trample each the other under foot. – [rent of Society – plainly imperishable from the na-] (sic)  
(Note: line above belongs with text on page 10.)  
But we do find it therein asserted, that God has “made of *one* blood *all* the nations to dwell upon all the face of the earth,” and that “there is no respect of persons with God.” Hence we infer, that each, as man, is entitled to all the rights of man. – *Here*, then, possessing as we all do, all the attributes, all the rationality, the moral agency, the responsibility, and the immortal soul of man, I found our claim to all the rights, privileges and immunities of man. Standing, then, as I do, on such immovable basis, I reiterate in the language of Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock and Thomas Jefferson – those illustrious sires of a power-maddened and degenerate generation – that “all men *have* inalien-

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able rights, including life and liberty, in order that they may pursue happiness." The rights of man then, my brethren, are clearly yours, nor can the circumstances of your oppressors being possessed of power, by which they prevent your exercise of those rights, ever nullify your title to them, until then of your own volition you shall have surrendered them. Demand the exercise of those rights, until by your *importunity* (if not from a sense of rectitude) you compel your proud oppressors to administer justice. And allow me to say, Mr. President, that I scorn, I repudiate with abhorrence the idea of your *ever* surrendering those rights – for next to his immortal soul, were it purchasable, what shall a man give in exchange for his Liberty!

"O Liberty! the prisoner's pleasing dream!  
The poet's muse, his passion, and his theme;  
Genius is thine, and thou art fancy's nurse –  
Lost without thee, th' enobling powers of verse.  
Heroic song from thy free touch acquires  
Its clearest tone – the rapture it inspires.  
Place me where winter breathes his keenest air,  
And I will sing if Liberty be there!  
And I will sing at Liberty's dear feet  
In Afric's torpid clime, or India's fiercest heat.  
Incomparable gem! thy worth untold –  
Cheap, tho' life bought and cast away, when sold.  
May no foes ravish thee, and no false friend  
Betray thee, while professing to defend.  
Prize it, ye ministers, ye monarchs, spare –  
Oh, brethren! guard it with a miser's care!"

I have shown, Mr. President, our right to liberty and its concomitant immunities, to be adduced from the immutable laws of High Heaven: yet, I would remark, that in no part of the world where man is found, is he found without some rule of government of his own, however rude, in order to protect the

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feeble against the violence of the strong, the honest from the schemes and machinations of the dishonest, the temperate, orderly and industrious from the extravagance and indolence of the dissolute and idle. Although, then, we recognize the law of God as supreme, yet the laws of the society in which it may have been our lot to be placed, are for these reasons binding upon us; and as rational beings we ought to submit to them, whenever and wherever they do not conflict with the law of God. Laws being, as I have said, framed to check, and to awe, and to provide for the punishment of the unruly and vicious passions of certain individuals in the community, to abrogate such laws would be the height of fanaticism and rashness. Nor is it our desire it should be so, for an innocent man can have no reason to dread the vengeance of the law; but still, when any laws are framed for the special and sole interest of a part of the community, to the detriment and at the expense of the remainder of the people, such injured party has a right peaceably to remonstrate by petition or otherwise, to the power or powers in authority, for the restoration of any such rights or privileges, which may have been withheld or wrested from them. — Much more, then, shall the injured party be entitled to claim and demand rights which the supreme law of the land recognizes, nay, asserts in language too plain to be misconstrued, as belonging indisputably to every member of the community.

Language, Sir, is, as we all know, but the sign of things, and should be always used and understood agreeable to its general acceptation among men; this, sir, leads me to say, that negative laws condi-

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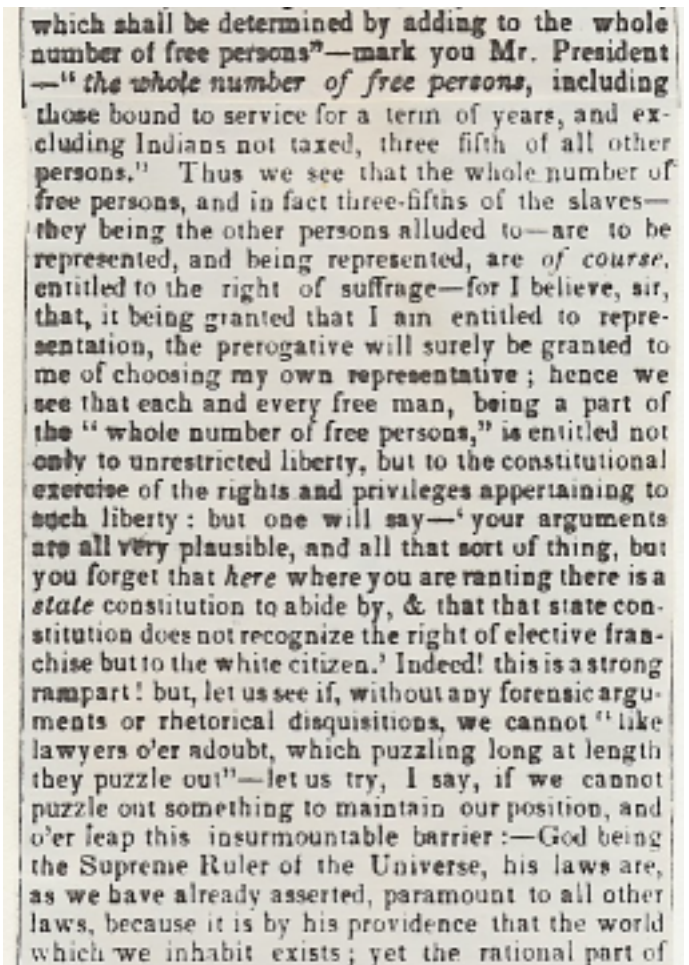
tionally prohibiting or forbidding any act or procedure, do impliedly allow and sanction such act or procedure; for instance, when in the second clause of the 2<sup>nd</sup> section of the 1<sup>st</sup> article of the constitution of the United States, it says, that "no person shall be a representative, who shall not have attained the age of twenty five years, and been seven years a citizen of these United States, and shall not when elected, be an inhabitant of that state where he shall be chosen." It does I contend impliedly say, "That any person shall or may be a representative who shall have attained the age of twenty five years, on condition of having been seven years a citizen of the state, being at the time of election, an inhabitant of that state where he shall be chosen." As the word "person" is too well understood by all, it needs no further definition, and it consequently only remains to be shown, what is meant by the term "citizen," in order that we may ascertain who is or is not eligible to office: — briefly and plainly, then, I say — and I believe all writers and commentators on this point will bear me out — that any person born in any state, province or country, is a citizen of the same — that birth gives the right of citizenship; hence the whole number of persons are constitutionally citizens, entitled to all the rights and privileges of such — consequently in accordance with this definition, we find that in the next clause of the same section of the article before referred to, it says, "Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states of this Union, according to their respective numbers,

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which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons” – mark you Mr. President – “*the whole number of free persons*, including those bound to service for a term of years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifth of all other persons.” Thus we see that the whole number of free persons, and in fact three-fifths of the slaves – they being the other persons alluded to – are to be represented, and being represented, are *of course*, entitled to the right of suffrage – for I believe, sir, that, it being granted that I am entitled to representation, the prerogative will surely be granted to me of choosing my own representative; hence we see that each and every free man, being a part of the “whole number of free persons,” is entitled not only to unrestricted liberty, but to the constitutional exercise of the rights and privileges appertaining to such liberty: but one will say – ‘your arguments are all very plausible, and all that sort of thing, but you forget that *here* where you are ranting there is a *state* constitution to abide by, & that that state constitution does not recognize the right of elective franchise but to the white citizen.’ Indeed! this is a strong rampart! but, let us see if, without any forensic arguments or rhetorical disquisitions, we cannot “like lawyers o’er adoubt, which puzzling long at length they puzzle out” – let us try, I say, if we cannot puzzle out something to maintain our position, and o’er leap this insurmountable barrier: – God being the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, his laws are, as we have already asserted, paramount to all other laws, because it is by his providence that the world which we inhabit exists; yet the rational part of



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this world having, as we before showed, a right to frame laws for the government of society, such laws are binding upon the society whenever and wherever they do not counteract the law of God, but no further – men being responsible to God for their individual conduct. So in like manner, although each state in this Union may have a right to legislate and enact laws for its own self-government; still, as members of the Union, acknowledging the supremacy of its laws, we do, or ought to consider any laws which are counter to the supreme law of the land, viz., the constitution thereof, as null and void: for we, as God's creatures, obey his mandates rather than any human laws; the whole human family itself being subject unto him: So then I maintain, Mr. President, that as citizens of the Union, acknowledging the supremacy of its laws, we ought to obey its constitution over all or any other state laws when the two conflict; because, each individual state is but a member of the Union, and as such only does it exist. I only premised this truth as a text in order to win due credence to what follows next.

Section 4 of the 4<sup>th</sup> article of the constitution, shows us that at the formation of this Union, the United States having assumed a republican form of government on the ground of their belief that all men were of right free and equal, and had rights of which no human power could justly deprive them, “guaranteed to each several state in this Union, alike republican form of government” – any other is unconstitutional, in consequence of such not being sanctioned by the general government; altho’ now

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the several states are entitled to their respective legislation and constitution, and although at any time two-thirds of the representatives, when they may think it necessary, may propose amendments, which shall be deemed valid to all intents and purposes, when ratified by three fourth of the representation; yet, "the Constitution," so says the 2d clause of the 6<sup>th</sup> article of said constitution; "the constitution and laws of the United States, which shall be made in pursuance of the constitution, &c. &c. shall be the supreme law of the land, and the judges in every state shall be bound thereby, any thing in the constitution or laws of any state to the contrary notwithstanding." From this then it clearly appears that any such amendment proposed at any time by any sovereign state legislature, must be in strict conformance with the national constitution, hence it clearly appears, Mr. President, that the word *white* which has been nefariously inserted into that part of this state's (New York) constitution, relating to the right of suffrage, is a piece of *flagrant* injustice, is unconstitutional as conflicting with that part of the 2d clause of the 6<sup>th</sup> article of the constitution before mentioned, and ought in the names of justice, and consistency, and common sense, to be forthwith stricken out.

Now, what is this republican form of government which we said was guarantied by the general government to the several states? The task of answering devolving upon myself, I reply – That a republican form of government, is that in which all its members have equal rights and privileges, in which the pervading acknowledged principle is the

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right of the whole community, and in which the predominate authority of any hereditary ruler is not acknowledged. The very derivation of the term will show this to be the true and literal definition, coming from the Latin "Res" a thing, and "Publica" public – meaning plainly, public things, or common weal. Thus we see that every individual is equally interested, and has (or is entitled to) equal rights and privileges with his fellows in such a form of government, for the plain reason that he is a citizen of that community. Says a celebrated writer – "In all the writers of public law, there is one ancient and universal classification of the people of a country – 'all who are born within the jurisdiction of a state are citizens – all others are aliens.' This 'classification' continues our author, 'grows out of the doctrine of natural allegiance, a tie created by birth.'" Now allegiance is not peculiar to any government or country, but is held to exist in every government or country where there are any pretensions to civil government and social order; – it reaches the man of one complexion as well as him of another – it is an ordinance of the Great Parent of Society – plainly imperishable from the nature of

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[ture] and necessity of human government. If sir, allegiance is due from you, its collateral and correlative, viz. the protection, and benefit, and advantages of the laws are due from your government. If my friends allegiance, is as I have said, an ordinance of Heaven, it reaches, and binds, and confers rights upon every man within its range and rightful sway.

Here then, Mr. President, I repeat, is your ground,

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for right is always independent of force. Violence *cannot* confer the title of and to property. The thief who appropriates to himself by cunning or force the property of another, acquires indeed the *possession* of it, but not the rightful title to hold it: for the right to property involves a legal right. Justice would compel the restitution of property so acquired, and should be made to do so in every case where it can be brought to bear. Upon the immutable principles then of Justice and Truth, claim and demand your political rights from that government which is bound to aid and protect you.

Believing faithfully as I do, Mr. President, that all men are born free and equal" — still I am no "Agrarian," and I know that

"Order is heaven's first law, and this confest,  
Some are and must be greater than the rest;  
More rich, more wise, but who infers from hence,  
That such are "better" shocks all common sense."

For I believe that equality depends upon principles that are just and equitable, and suited to the actual wants of men; — one man *must* labor, while another being affluent, lives luxuriously upon his means; one man has leisure and opportunity to cultivate his tastes, increase his information, and refine his habits; while another must toil in order that he may live — with the poet then say —

"Know then this truth, enough for man to know,  
Virtue alone is happiness below,  
The only point where human bliss stands still,  
And taste the good without the fall to ill!"

While then, Mr. President, and Ladies and Gentlemen, my much respected friends, I know you feel

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Believing faithfully as I do, Mr. President, that all men are born free and equal"—still I am no "Agrarian," and I know that  
"Order is heaven's first law, and this confest,  
Some are and must be greater than the rest;  
More rich, more wise, but who infers from hence,  
That such are "better" shocks all common sense."  
For I believe that equality depends upon principles that are just and equitable, and suited to the actual wants of men;—one man *must* labor, while another being affluent, lives luxuriously upon his means; one man has leisure and opportunity to cultivate his tastes, increase his information, and refine his habits; while another must toil in order that he may live—with the poet then say—  
"Know then this truth, enough for man to know,  
Virtue alone is happiness below,  
The only point where human bliss stands still,  
And taste the good without the fall to ill!"  
While then, Mr. President, and Ladies and Gentlemen, my much respected friends, I know you feel



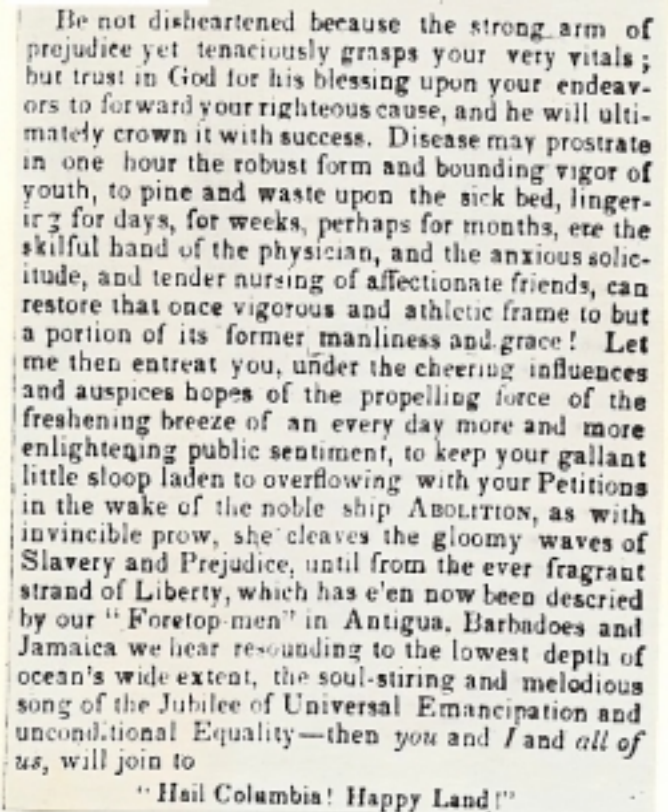
sensibly, and heaven knows I feel for you, while I say I know you feel sensibly as colored Americans, the cruel, unprincipled, unparalleled, and unprecedented prejudices and disabilities existing against you in this "*your own, your native land*" – merely on account of the color of your skins – the workmanship of God's hands, let me entreat you to advocate your rights, which the laws of God and man accede to you, boldly and fearlessly as *men*, tincturing and softening the "*fortiter in re*" with the "*Suaviter in modo*" – and mildly, firmly, and consistently as christians, in view of your accountability to God, with an eye single to the glory of God; ever seeking to obtain that imperishable and incorruptible wealth, which the world can neither give nor take away. Treading with unswerving perseverance in the straight path which leads to those blissful regions where all is peace and fullness of joy; "where the wicked cease from troubling; and the weary are at rest!" In this manner continue in the constitutional exercise of the right of Petition in demanding those privileges of which you have been deprived; demanding them in the name of your common country, in the name of the constitution, in the name of the illustrious framers of that noble deed, aye noble *indeed* were t[he] exalted principles but carried into practice! that truly noble deed second not even to that glorious charter of old England's rights, extorted by the stern Barons at Runemede; in the name of the laws of God and man, persevering that you may be successful!

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Be not disheartened because the strong arm of prejudice yet tenaciously grasps your very vitals; but trust in God for his blessing upon your endeavors to forward your righteous cause, and he will ultimately crown it with success. Disease may prostrate in one hour the robust form and bounding vigor of youth, to pine and waste upon the sick bed, lingering for days, for weeks, perhaps for months, ere the skillful hand of the physician, and the anxious solicitude, and tender nursing of affectionate friends, can restore that once vigorous and athletic frame to but a portion of its former manliness and grace! Let me then entreat you, under the cheering influences and auspices hopes of the propelling force of the freshening breeze of an every day more and more enlightening public sentiment, to keep your gallant little sloop laden to overflowing with your Petitions in the wake of the noble ship ABOLITION, as with invincible prow, she cleaves the gloomy waves of Slavery and Prejudice, until from the ever fragrant strand of Liberty, which has e'en now been descried by our "Foretop men" in Antigua, Barbadoes and Jamaica we hear resounding to the lowest depth of ocean's wide extent, the soul-stirring and melodious song of the Jubilee of Universal Emancipation and unconditional Equality – then *you and I and all of us*, will join to

"Hail Columbia! Happy Land!"



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