

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen.—I need not inform you that this is the Fourth of July, and that eighty-three years ago this day liberty was proclaimed to this country and to all the inhabitants thereof. I will not exhaust my speech nor tire your patience in the unnecessary attempt to impress upon your minds the great importance of this occasion to the American government, to the citizens of the United States, and to you who are proscribed. You doubtless have heard to-day, as I have, the thunder of the city's artillery, the music of martial and military bands; you have witnessed, as I have, the display of the national ensign; you have seen, as I have, the American flag, the freemen's chosen emblem, floating majestically from the masthead of American vessels in our port; you have seen the same ensign floating above high places; you have met, in passing to this house, hundreds of persons with happy faces and joyous hearts, who throng the thoroughfares, giving vent to those instinctive promptings of nature which accord with the freeman's will, to rejoice at the bare proclamation of liberty; you have heard the chiming of church bells and sacred music discoursed in the consecrated temples of the Lord, and this intimates that even the Divinity Himself was pleased with that truthful Declaration which we have assembled here to celebrate, and that He sanctions and approves what men do when they do rightly and justly.

You, my friends, have seen and heard all this; you have to-day, as you have years before, witnessed these demonstrations of joy, and you need not be informed that it is in commemoration of the fourth day of July, 1776, and it is well that it be commemorated. Now, that the fathers did rightly and justly in signing and issuing the Declaration of Independence, is not to be doubted for a moment, but that the colored people have been deprived of those inestimable rights vouchsafed to all Americans by the letter and spirit of the Declaration of Independence, is evident to all.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen.—I need not inform you that this is the Fourth of July, and that eighty-three years ago this day liberty was proclaimed to this country and to all the inhabitants thereof. I will not exhaust my speech nor tire your patience in the unnecessary attempt to impress upon your minds the great importance of this occasion to the American government, to the citizens of the United States, and to you who are proscribed. You doubtless have heard to-day, as I have, the thunder of the city's artillery, the music of martial and military bands; you have witnessed, as I have, the display of the national ensign; you have seen, as I have, the American flag, the freemen's chosen emblem, floating majestically from the masthead of American vessels in our port; you have seen the same ensign floating above high places; you have met, in passing to this house, hundreds of persons with happy faces and joyous hearts, who throng the thoroughfares, giving vent to those instinctive promptings of nature which accord with the freeman's will, to rejoice at the bare proclamation of liberty; you have heard the chiming of church bells and sacred music discoursed in the consecrated temples of the Lord, and this intimates that even the Divinity Himself was pleased with that truthful Declaration which we have assembled here to celebrate, and that He sanctions and approves what men do when they do rightly and justly.

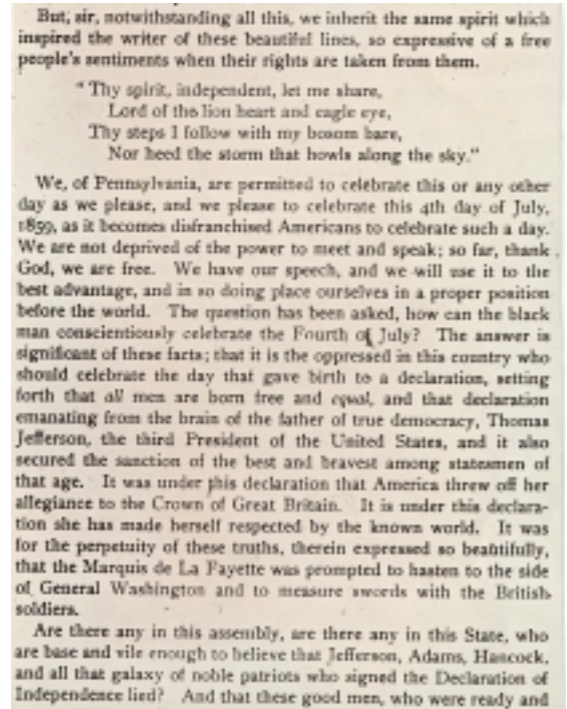
You, my friends, have seen and heard all this; you have to-day, as you have years before, witnessed these demonstrations of joy, and you need not be informed that it is in commemoration of the fourth day of July, 1776, and it is well that it be commemorated. Now, that the fathers did rightly and justly in signing and issuing the Declaration of Independence, is not to be doubted for a moment, but that the colored people have been deprived of those inestimable rights vouchsafed to all Americans by the letter and spirit of the Declaration of Independence, is evident to all.

But, sir, notwithstanding all this, we inherit the same spirit which inspired the writer of these beautiful lines, so expressive of a free people's sentiments when their rights are taken from them.

"Thy spirit, independent, let me share,  
Lord of the lion heart and eagle eye,  
Thy steps I follow with my bosom bare,  
Nor heed the storm that howls along the sky."

We, of Pennsylvania, are permitted to celebrate this or any other day as we please, and we please to celebrate this 4th day of July, 1859, as it becomes disfranchised Americans to celebrate such a day. We are not deprived of the power to meet and speak; so far, thank God, we are free. We have our speech, and we will use it to the best advantage, and in so doing place ourselves in a proper position before the world. The question has been asked, how can the black man conscientiously celebrate the Fourth o[f] July? The answer is significant of these facts; that it is the oppressed in this country who should celebrate the day that gave birth to a declaration, setting forth that *all* men are born free and *equal*, and that declaration emanating from the brain of the father of true democracy, Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States, and it also secured the sanction of the best and bravest among statesmen of that age. It was under this declaration that America threw off her allegiance to the Crown of Great Britain. It is under this declaration she had made herself respected by the known world. It was for the perpetuity of these truths, therein expressed so beautifully, that the Marquis de La Fayette was prompted to hasten to the side of General Washington and to measure swords with the British soldiers.

Are there any in this assembly, are there any in this State, who are base and vile enough to believe that Jefferson, Adams, Hancock, and all that galaxy of noble patriots who signed the Declaration of Independence lied? And that these good men, who were ready and



But, sir, notwithstanding all this, we inherit the same spirit which inspired the writer of these beautiful lines, so expressive of a free people's sentiments when their rights are taken from them.

"Thy spirit, independent, let me share,  
Lord of the lion heart and eagle eye,  
Thy steps I follow with my bosom bare,  
Nor heed the storm that howls along the sky."

We, of Pennsylvania, are permitted to celebrate this or any other day as we please, and we please to celebrate this 4th day of July, 1859, as it becomes disfranchised Americans to celebrate such a day. We are not deprived of the power to meet and speak; so far, thank God, we are free. We have our speech, and we will use it to the best advantage, and in so doing place ourselves in a proper position before the world. The question has been asked, how can the black man conscientiously celebrate the Fourth of July? The answer is significant of these facts; that it is the oppressed in this country who should celebrate the day that gave birth to a declaration, setting forth that all men are born free and equal, and that declaration emanating from the brain of the father of true democracy, Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States, and it also secured the sanction of the best and bravest among statesmen of that age. It was under this declaration that America threw off her allegiance to the Crown of Great Britain. It is under this declaration she has made herself respected by the known world. It was for the perpetuity of these truths, therein expressed so beautifully, that the Marquis de La Fayette was prompted to hasten to the side of General Washington and to measure swords with the British soldiers.

Are there any in this assembly, are there any in this State, who are base and vile enough to believe that Jefferson, Adams, Hancock, and all that galaxy of noble patriots who signed the Declaration of Independence lied? And that these good men, who were ready and

willing to lay down their lives rather than remain in a state of vassalage to a king, were treacherous to the extent that they would deceive? Are you willing to believe that they were base enough to have invoked God's presence whilst they committed perjury? I hope there are no[n]e such here, for if there are, they only at most agree with northern and southern "nigger haters" and Bible defamers. We believe that the revolutionary fathers were too patriotic, too noble, generous, high-minded and philanthropic for such baseness, and that it is libeling their veracity, their good name and their sacred honor to charge them with such duplicity, or attempt to mystify their posterity. The signers of the Declaration were to all intents and purposes, anti-slavery men, and their history will bear me out in this assertion.

Believing, as we do, in the correctness of the Declaration, we are bound in gratitude to its authors, and in respect to the principles there laid down as fundamental basis for this country, to eulogize the day upon which it came to light.

Recognizing the truths therein set forth to be self-evident, we rejoice that they have been declared by the fathers, notwithstanding their good consequences have been withheld from us by selfish and unprincipled administrations. Some gentlemen have suggested the propriety of burning copies of the Declaration on each Fourth of July, instead of giving it our applause. Now, from this suggestion I do most respectfully dissent, and I put these questions to all persons who favor that proposition: Is not the Declaration true? Are not all men born free and equal? Do not they inherit the right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? And if this is so, why shall we burn such a Declaration? I am at a loss to see the justice of the suggestion, but I can readily understand why every pro-scribed American ought to celebrate it. It is because it is true, and that its authors meant just what they wrote and said, and it is not their fault if we do not enjoy our rights as they would have us do.

willing to lay down their lives rather than remain in a state of vassalage to a king, were treacherous to the extent that they would deceive? Are you willing to believe that they were base enough to have invoked God's presence whilst they committed perjury? I hope there are none such here, for if there are, they only at most agree with northern and southern "nigger haters" and Bible defamers. We believe that the revolutionary fathers were too patriotic, too noble, generous, high-minded and philanthropic for such baseness, and that it is libeling their veracity, their good name and their sacred honor to charge them with such duplicity, or attempt to mystify their posterity. The signers of the Declaration were, to all intents and purposes, anti-slavery men, and their history will bear me out in this assertion.

Believing, as we do, in the correctness of the Declaration, we are bound in gratitude to its authors, and in respect to the principles there laid down as fundamental basis for this country, to eulogize the day upon which it came to light.

Recognizing the truths therein set forth to be self-evident, we rejoice that they have been declared by the fathers, notwithstanding their good consequences have been withheld from us by selfish and unprincipled administrations. Some gentlemen have suggested the propriety of burning copies of the Declaration on each Fourth of July, instead of giving it our applause. Now, from this suggestion I do most respectfully dissent, and I put these questions to all persons who favor that proposition: Is not the Declaration true? Are not all men born free, and equal? Do not they inherit the right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? And if this is so, why shall we burn such a Declaration? I am at a loss to see the justice of the suggestion, but I can readily understand why every pro-scribed American ought to celebrate it. It is because it is true, and that its authors meant just what they wrote and said, and it is not their fault if we do not enjoy our rights as they would have us do.

Now, let me ask these incendiary gentlemen, if there are any of them within the sound of my voice, a question upon a supposition. Should it so happen that some millionaire should die, and that afterwards it was found that in his last will and testament he had bequeathed to you a legacy, and it so happened that the administrators of his affairs dishonored his will, and withheld the legacy from you; now, the question is this: Would you, because you failed to get your right, owing to the dishonesty of the administrators, despair of getting it, and abuse the dead, and burn the will, and thus render it impossible for you to obtain it at any future period? No, no; you would do no such silly thing. But you would rather keep the matter before the proper tribunal; you would urge your honest claim, and you would prosecute it to the last moment of your existence. Now, this is analogous to the Declaration of Independence, for we all maintain that the Declaration means black as well as white men, and that it means that the oppressed of all nations, being indifferent as to their place of birth (it might be in Asia, Africa, Europe, or our own America), might fly to these United States, and find refuge and succor under the banner of the red, white and blue.

We believe this and we have assembled here to-day to pay a tribute of respect to the noble men who gave us the Declaration. We honor the instrument, and hold up to the scorn of the wide world those narrow-minded, small-fisted and bullet-headed politicians who have for a number of years traduced and subverted its truths.

Celebrated and standard lexicographers define politics as the "science of government," and we find, from observation, and a practical knowledge of its working, that it is the motive power and machinery by which governments are propelled. Every form of government has its peculiar character of politics. There is, sir, politics in limited and absolute monarchies, as well as in republics; but the politics of

Now, let me ask these incendiary gentlemen, if there are any of them within the sound of my voice, a question upon a supposition. Should it so happen that some millionaire should die, and that afterwards it was found that in his last will and testament he had bequeathed to you a legacy, and it so happened that the administrators of his affairs dishonored his will, and withheld the legacy from you; now, the question is this: Would you, because you failed to get your right, owing to the dishonesty of the administrators, despair of getting it, and abuse the dead, and burn the will, and thus render it impossible for you to obtain it at any future period? No, no;

you would do no such silly thing. But you would rather keep the matter before the proper tribunal; you would urge your honest claim, and you would prosecute it to the last moment of your existence. Now, this is analogous to the Declaration of Independence, for we all maintain that the Declaration means black as well as white men, and that it means that the oppressed of all nations, being indifferent as to their place of birth (it might be in Asia, Africa, Europe, or our own America), might fly to these United States, and find refuge and succor under the banner of the red, white and blue.

We believe this and we have assembled here to-day to pay a tribute of respect to the noble men who gave us the Declaration. We honor the instrument, and hold up to the scorn of the wide world those narrow-minded, small-fisted and bullet-headed politicians who have for a number of years traduced and subverted its truths.

Celebrated and standard lexicographers define politics as the "science of government," and we find, from observation, and a practical knowledge of its working, that it is the motive power and machinery by which governments are propelled. Every form of government has its peculiar character of politics. There is, sir, politics in limited and absolute monarchies, as well as in republics; but the politics of



nations are materially different in their *modus operandi*; hence, politics which would suit France, England, Russia, and other European nations, will not harmonize and accord with the much boasted republican form in the United States of North America to-day. Proposing, as I do, to treat politics in its broadest and most comprehensive sense, in a series of lectures hereafter to be delivered before the Institute, I shall now volunteer some thoughts on political economy, and its application to the United States, with particular reference to its former and present treatment of the two contending races, formerly equalizing them, and subsequently dividing them, and oppressing the weaker, and this oppression continues down to this day, unwarranted by the established policy of revolutionary date. And to that period we will now turn our attention for a few moments. It is evident to all that there must have been some gross wrong inflicted, and some oppressive and unjustifiable laws imposed upon the sons and daughters of old England, in the colonial settlements in America[,] to have prompted them to hazard their liberties, their lives, and their sacred honor, in rebelling against their king. They were sensible of the dangers and hardships, to say nothing of the almost certain death which awaited them, if they were unsuccessful in the struggle for their independence. I say there must have been something dreadfully degrading and oppressive in the condition of the revolutionary fathers to have sustained, stimulated and borne them up during that trying crisis, and there was. The Puritans, prompted by the love of religious, civil and political liberty, forsook their homes, their fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers in their fatherland and journeyed hither, and settled themselves on the newly-discovered continent, thus placing the broad Atlantic ocean, with its mighty rolling billows and its fathomless sea, between them and their tyrant king. From oppression, they had, by the hardest and most earnest labor and constancy, transferred themselves to an

nations are materially different in their *modus operandi*; hence, politics which would suit France, England, Russia, and other European nations, will not harmonize and accord with the much boasted republican form in the United States of North America to-day. Proposing, as I do, to treat politics in its broadest and most comprehensive sense, in a series of lectures hereafter to be delivered before the Institute, I shall now volunteer some thoughts on political economy, and its application to the United States, with particular reference to its former and present treatment of the two contending races, formerly equalizing them, and subsequently dividing them, and oppressing the weaker, and this oppression continues down to this day, unwarranted by the established policy of revolutionary date. And to that period we will now turn our attention for a few moments. It is evident to all that there must have been some gross wrong inflicted, and some oppressive and unjustifiable laws imposed upon the sons and daughters of old England, in the colonial settlements in America, to have prompted them to hazard their liberties, their lives, and their sacred honor, in rebelling against their king. They were sensible of the dangers and hardships, to say nothing of the almost certain death which awaited them, if they were unsuccessful in the struggle for their independence. I say there must have been

something dreadfully degrading and oppressive in the condition of the revolutionary fathers to have sustained, stimulated and borne them up during that trying crisis, and there was. The Puritans, prompted by the love of religious, civil and political liberty, forsook their homes, their fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers in their fatherland and journeyed hither, and settled themselves on the newly-discovered continent, thus placing the broad Atlantic ocean, with its mighty rolling billows and its fathomless sea, between them and their tyrant king. From oppression, they had, by the hardest and most earnest labor and constancy, transferred themselves to an

uncultivated and barren soil; they encountered savages of a ferocious character, whose jealousies were soon aroused by the invasion of the Puritans and other European emigrants, and, as it was natural to anticipate, a relentless war was the consequence of this hostile meeting. The Puritans bore with Christian fortitude and true, manly heroism, the hardships and the adversities of their new homes, and they preferred that transient state of disorder and rebellion to the more poignant tyranny they suffered in England.

The hope that they would finally overcome the vicissitudes consequent to a new settlement, and that they would be permitted by the government at home to enjoy uninterrupted liberty, and that their domestic institutions would not be invaded; and that they might be permitted to choose from among themselves their rulers and local officers, nerved them and gave them resolution equal to the emergencies, and they mastered the new world. But they were disappointed by the mother country, for English oppression followed them to America, and their condition was made worse here than it had been in the East. All their bright hopes and fond anticipations were at once blasted; the castles they had built in the air were at one fell swoop demolished, and then they were set upon. Act after act of oppression, which challenged condemnation from the honest and indignant world, and which were of that heinous character, revolting and contemptible in the sight of all Christian nations, was imposed upon them. These acts, aye, every one of them, has been specified in blood. The Declaration of Independence, which has been read on this occasion, enumerates them all: hence, it obviates the necessity of my naming them now. It will suffice to say that these acts caused General George Washington and his noble compatriots to sue for their country, their whole country's liberty; to fight and bleed for liberty[,] and to gain it.

uncultivated and barren soil; they encountered savages of a ferocious character, whose jealousies were soon aroused by the invasion of the Puritans and other European emigrants, and, as it was natural to anticipate, a relentless war was the consequence of this hostile meeting. The Puritans bore with Christian fortitude and true, manly heroism, the hardships and the adversities of their new homes, and they preferred that transient state of disorder and rebellion to the more poignant tyranny they suffered in England.

The hope that they would finally overcome the vicissitudes consequent to a new settlement, and that they would be permitted by the government at home to enjoy uninterrupted liberty, and that their domestic institutions would not be invaded; and that they might be permitted to choose from among themselves their rulers and local officers, nerved them and gave them resolution equal to the emergencies, and they mastered the new world. But they were disappointed by the mother country, for English oppression followed them to America, and their condition was made worse here than it had been in the East. All their bright hopes and fond anticipations were at once blasted; the castles they had built in the air were at one fell swoop demolished, and then they were set upon. Act after act of oppression, which challenged condemnation from the honest and indignant world, and which were of that heinous character, revolting and contemptible in the sight of all Christian nations, was imposed upon them. These acts, aye, every one of them, has been specified in blood. The Declaration of Independence, which has been read on this occasion, enumerates them all: hence, it obviates the necessity of my naming them now. It will suffice to say that these acts caused General George Washington and his noble compatriots to sue for their country, their whole country's liberty; to fight and bleed for liberty, and to gain it.

This leads us to discover the real principles upon which this government was formed and sustained through the revolution, and in so doing, it is essential that we examine and consider the prevailing sentiments of the fathers at the period which gave birth to the Declaration of Independence, and compare them with those which gave the United States a Constitution, and it will be found that the interests of the people were quite different, at that time, to what they were previous to the revolution. The War of the Revolution was over; the battles had been fought; the conflict for freedom was ended; the sword had been replaced in the scabbard, there to remain until another call for its withdrawal; the musket, the weapon of death and destruction, was no more in the field; the soldier was once more the civilian, and peace reigned supreme. The crisis was over, and the American people felt secure, and they came this time for deliberation. All the selfishness, vanity and arrogance consequent upon man's success were then indulged in. The ambition for self-aggrandizement was then unbridled, and, notwithstanding they had themselves been slaves to oppression, they were willing and ready to make slaves of their fellow-men who had made them free.

Yes, sir; thirteen years had rolled around since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Many of the good and patriotic fathers who had figured conspicuously and had played a noble part in the cause of universal liberty, and had acted well the part assigned them in the great tragedy of a seven-years' war, had departed this life of vanity and vexation of heart and soul, and their mortal remains lie buried in the recesses of mother earth, but their immortal names shall live unhurt amid the wreck of matter and the crush of worlds until the end of time, and they shall stand out in bold relief as living monuments to liberty. Hence, they could not frown down as they would have done, the base attempts to pervert the meaning of the Declaration and to enslave one portion of the human family in direct violation of the country's plighted faith.

This leads us to discover the real principles upon which this government was formed and sustained through the revolution, and in so doing, it is essential that we examine and consider the prevailing sentiments of the fathers at the period which gave birth to the Declaration of Independence, and compare them with those which gave the United States a Constitution, and it will be found that the interests of the people were quite different, at that time, to what they were previous to the revolution. The War of the Revolution was over; the battles had been fought; the conflict for freedom was ended; the sword had been replaced in the scabbard, there to remain until another call for its withdrawal; the musket, the weapon of death and destruction, was no more in the field; the soldier was once more the civilian, and peace reigned supreme. The crisis was over, and the American people felt secure, and they came this time for deliberation. All the selfishness, vanity and arrogance consequent upon man's success were then indulged in. The ambition for self-aggrandizement was then unbridled, and, notwithstanding they had themselves been slaves to oppression, they were willing and ready to make slaves of their fellow-men who had made them free.

Yes, sir; thirteen years had rolled around since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Many of the good and patriotic fathers who had figured conspicuously and had played a noble part in the cause of universal liberty, and had acted well the part assigned them in the great tragedy of a seven-years' war, had departed this life of vanity and vexation of heart and soul, and their mortal remains lie buried in the recesses of mother earth, but their immortal names shall live unhurt amid the wreck of matter and the crush of worlds until the end of time, and they shall stand out in bold relief as living monuments to liberty. Hence, they could not frown down as they would have done, the base attempts to pervert the meaning of the Declaration and to enslave one portion of the human family in direct violation of the country's plighted faith.

In this convention the discussion of slavery and oppression was tolerated. It was not so in 1776, when the Declaration was under consideration, when the great Jefferson presented the draft of that document, and it was read in that hall, but a short distance from this spot, whose environs are hallowed by the sacred appellation of liberty. The soldier, the statesman and the Christian, as well as the cunning politician, were startled with the boldness and independence of the Declaration. They were taken by surprise. It spoke more than they anticipated; it demanded more, aye, much more than they had prepared themselves to receive, and every head was bowed to the floor, and the entire assembly were at once occupied in deep thought and profound meditation.

They were men who loved their country, their homes, their families, their lives, liberties and their honor; they looked back, and all was gloom and darkness; they had struggled for years under the yoke of oppression, they had been themselves reduced to a comparative state of slavery; they were watched and tyrannized over like the Russian serfs.

Soldiers had been quartered at their very doors, their streets were barricaded by the British military, and they were forced into seeming subjection. The white and black man both longed and prayed for the day of deliverance, that they might be free.

Slavery at that period was not as it is now. It was then only a state dependence. The black slave and his white master were united in opposing English tyranny, the master held his slave more from the force of circumstances than any real desire to oppress him, and the slave felt sure that his was a transitory condition. They both made a common cause of their grievances. The slave was free to go and come when he pleased, but this was not the case with the owner; for, wherever he went, his steps were watched by English spies and American Tories, and, by the way, there are Tories to-day,

In this convention the discussion of slavery and oppression was tolerated. It was not so in 1776, when the Declaration was under consideration, when the great Jefferson presented the draft of that document, and it was read in that hall, but a short distance from this spot, whose environs are hallowed by the sacred appellation of liberty. The soldier, the statesman and the Christian, as well as the cunning politician, were startled with the boldness and independence of the Declaration. They were taken by surprise. It spoke more than they anticipated; it demanded more, aye, much more than they had prepared themselves to receive, and every head was bowed to the floor, and the entire assembly were at once occupied in deep thought and profound meditation.

They were men who loved their country, their homes, their families, their lives, liberties and their honor; they looked back, and all was gloom and darkness; they had struggled for years under the yoke of oppression, they had been themselves reduced to a comparative state of slavery; they were watched and tyrannized over like the Russian serfs.

Soldiers had been quartered at their very doors, their streets were barricaded by the British military, and they were forced into seeming subjection. The white and black man both longed and prayed for the day of deliverance, that they might be free.

Slavery at that period was not as it is now. It was then only a state dependence. The black slave and his white master were united in opposing English tyranny, the master held his slave more from the force of circumstances than any real desire to oppress him, and the slave felt sure that his was a transitory condition. They both made a common cause of their grievances. The slave was free to go and come when he pleased, but this was not the case with the owner; for, wherever he went, his steps were watched by English spies and American Tories, and, by the way, there are Tories to-day.



and their business is to hunt down the poor fugitive Negro, and to handcuff and drag him hundreds of miles from his home to be tried as a slave, and to be remanded, if the commissioner's sense of honor and justice are to be governed by the paltry fee of ten dollars, under the sound of the old State House bell, and within sight of the hall where independence was declared.

But, to return from this digression to the main subject. The state of affairs was intolerant, and all agreed that some decisive step should be taken to counteract the sea of oppression. The white and black men sent forth their best men to represent them in the Continental Congress, and to advise ways and means, by the aid of which the whole people, irrespective of color or kind, should become free, aye, free, indeed. This fact plainly gives the lie to the new dogma, which has just been put forth by the head of the Supreme Court, namely: "That this government was formed upon a white basis, and that black men have no rights which white men are bound to respect."

Now, sir, I make bold to say it here, that any man who endorses such doctrine must be either illiterate, and, in consequence, has never read his country's history, and then he is a fool, indeed, and needs the sympathies of all good people; or, he is mean and knavish perverter of the true principles of this republican government, and such a man is not fit to be respected, much less obeyed. The fathers saw that procrastination would not do—to stand still was to die—to strike was, possibly, to die, also (and there was the rub), yet, in the latter case, there was a ray of hope and bright anticipations—in the first, death was certain. That profound silence was broken, for John Hancock spoke, and spoke with matchless eloquence and force; all bent a listening ear; their hearts were filled and ready to break. One blow, one blow only, and it was done; one step forward, and there was no retreat.

and their business is to hunt down the poor fugitive Negro, and to handcuff and drag him hundreds of miles from his home to be tried as a slave, and to be remanded, if the commissioner's sense of honor and justice are to be governed by the paltry fee of ten dollars, under the sound of the old State House bell, and within sight of the hall where independence was declared.

But, to return from this digression to the main subject. The state of affairs was intolerant, and all agreed that some decisive step should be taken to counteract the sea of oppression. The white and black men sent forth their best men to represent them in the Continental Congress, and to advise ways and means, by the aid of which the whole people, irrespective of color or kind, should become free, aye, free, indeed. This fact plainly gives the lie to the new dogma, which has just been put forth by the head of the Supreme Court, namely: "That this government was formed upon a white basis, and that black men have no rights which white men are bound to respect."

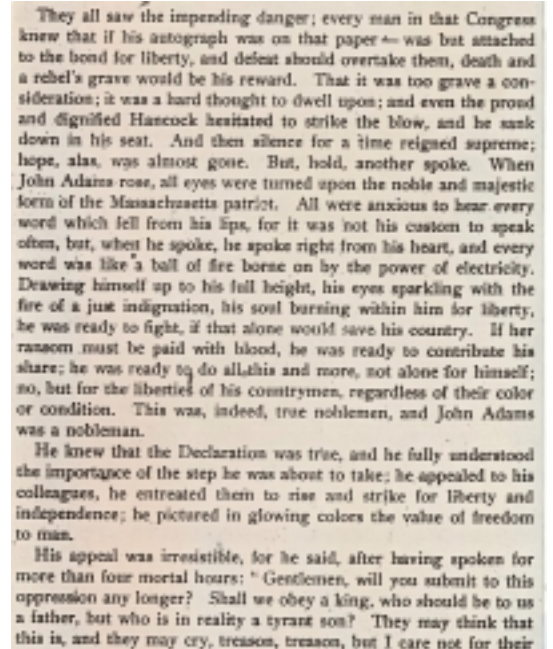
Now, sir, I make bold to say it here, that any man who endorses such doctrine must be either illiterate, and, in consequence, has never read his country's history, and then he is a fool, indeed, and needs the sympathies of all good people; or, he is mean and knavish perverter of the true principles of this republican government, and such a man is not fit to be respected, much less obeyed. The fathers

saw that procrastination would not do—to stand still was to die—to strike was, possibly, to die, also (and there was the rub), yet, in the latter case, there was a ray of hope and bright anticipations—in the first, death was certain. That profound silence was broken, for John Hancock spoke, and spoke with matchless eloquence and force; all bent a listening ear; their hearts were filled and ready to break. One blow, one blow only, and it was done; one step forward, and there was no retreat.

They all saw the impending danger; every man in that Congress knew that if his autograph was on that paper—was but attached to the bond for liberty, and defeat should overtake them, death and a rebel's grave would be his reward. That it was too grave a consideration; it was a hard thought to dwell upon; and even the proud and dignified Hancock hesitated to strike the blow, and he sank down in his seat. And then silence for a time reigned supreme; hope, alas, was almost gone. But, hold, another spoke. When John Adams rose, all eyes were turned upon the noble and majestic form of the Massachusetts patriot. All were anxious to hear every word which fell from his lips, for it was not his custom to speak often, but, when he spoke, he spoke right from his heart, and every word was like a ball of fire borne on by the power of electricity. Drawing himself up to his full height, his eyes sparkling with the fire of a just indignation, his soul burning within him for liberty, he was ready to fight, if that alone would save his country. If her ransom must be paid with blood, he was ready to contribute his share; he was ready to do all this and more, not alone for himself; no, but for the liberties of his countrymen, regardless of their color or condition. This was, indeed, true noblemen, and John Adams was a nobleman.

He knew that the Declaration was true, and he fully understood the importance of the step he was about to take; he appealed to his colleagues, he entreated them to rise and strike for liberty and independence; he pictured in glowing colors the value of freedom to man.

His appeal was irresistible, for he said, after having spoken for more than four mortal hours: "Gentlemen, will you submit to this oppression any longer? Shall we obey a king, who should be to us a father, but who is in reality a tyrant son? They may think that this is, and they may cry, treason, treason, but I care not for their



They all saw the impending danger; every man in that Congress knew that if his autograph was on that paper—was but attached to the bond for liberty, and defeat should overtake them, death and a rebel's grave would be his reward. That it was too grave a consideration; it was a hard thought to dwell upon; and even the proud and dignified Hancock hesitated to strike the blow, and he sank down in his seat. And then silence for a time reigned supreme; hope, alas, was almost gone. But, hold, another spoke. When John Adams rose, all eyes were turned upon the noble and majestic form of the Massachusetts patriot. All were anxious to hear every word which fell from his lips, for it was not his custom to speak often, but, when he spoke, he spoke right from his heart, and every word was like a ball of fire borne on by the power of electricity. Drawing himself up to his full height, his eyes sparkling with the fire of a just indignation, his soul burning within him for liberty, he was ready to fight, if that alone would save his country. If her ransom must be paid with blood, he was ready to contribute his share; he was ready to do all this and more, not alone for himself; no, but for the liberties of his countrymen, regardless of their color or condition. This was, indeed, true noblemen, and John Adams was a nobleman.

He knew that the Declaration was true, and he fully understood the importance of the step he was about to take; he appealed to his colleagues, he entreated them to rise and strike for liberty and independence; he pictured in glowing colors the value of freedom to man.

His appeal was irresistible, for he said, after having spoken for more than four mortal hours: "Gentlemen, will you submit to this oppression any longer? Shall we obey a king, who should be to us a father, but who is in reality a tyrant son? They may think that this is, and they may cry, treason, treason, but I care not for their

king; he is not mine; I recognize no power greater than that invested in this Congress, and the power of Almighty God, and from this day, I shall be free unto death, and I shall hold the man in my suspicion who shrinks from the responsibility, and refuses to sign, as I shall, this Declaration.”

The speech electrified the Congress. There was no more doubts and fears to overcome, but all rose simultaneously, and rent the hall with one mighty shout for liberty. They were then resolved, and each man affixed his name in letters of living light, to the Declaration of Independence, which declares that all men, not a part, but *all*, are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among those are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This document is extant, and it is, or should be, in every freeman’s library. He should value it next to the Holy Bible. It should console the oppressed of this nation, for it assures him that once, at least, his country was right and just, and its truths are self-evident that there is no material inferiority in the whole human family, but that it is a unity and all mankind are of the same origin, and no part of them were made for slaves by the great Creator.

Upon that Declaration politics for a republican form of government were founded; upon it, the War of the Revolution was fought, and our fathers were successful in that noble enterprise. But thirteen years wrought a fearful change, and men, disregarding their former protestations in favor of universal liberty, sought to rob one portion of their brethren, who had lain down, and had got up with them, in the hour of adversity, of their dearly earned rights, and in framing the Constitution, they were partially successful, but not fully so, for the revolutionary feeling in favor of right and justice prevented them from entirely discarding the established policy of 1776, and this explains the ambiguity of the language of the

king; he is not mine; I recognize no power greater than that invested in this Congress, and the power of Almighty God, and from this day, I shall be free unto death, and I shall hold the man

in my suspicion who shrinks from the responsibility, and refuses to sign, as I shall, this Declaration.”

The speech electrified the Congress. There was no more doubts and fears to overcome, but all rose simultaneously, and rent the hall with one mighty shout for liberty. They were then resolved, and each man affixed his name in letters of living light, to the Declaration of Independence, which declares that all men, not a part, but *all*, are created equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among those are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This document is extant, and it is, or should be, in every freeman’s library. He should value it next to the Holy Bible. It should console the oppressed of this nation, for it assures him that once, at least, his country was right and just, and its truths are self-evident that there is no material inferiority in the whole human family, but that it is a unity and all mankind are of the same origin, and no part of them were made for slaves by the great Creator.

Upon that Declaration politics for a republican form of government were founded; upon it, the War of the Revolution was fought, and our fathers were successful in that noble enterprise. But thirteen years wrought a fearful change, and men, disregarding their former protestations in favor of universal liberty, sought to rob one portion of their brethren, who had lain down, and had got up with them, in the hour of adversity, of their dearly earned rights, and in framing the Constitution, they were partially successful, but not fully so, for the revolutionary feeling in favor of right and justice prevented them from entirely discarding the established policy of 1776, and this explains the ambiguity of the language of the

July 4, 1859

Johnson, William H.

*The Celebration of the Eighty-Third Anniversary  
of the Declaration of Independence by the Banneker Institute  
Presscopy – Albany Institute of History and Art  
Johnson, William Henry Johnson Autobiography, pp. 219-230*

Constitution.

When the Declaration was put forth, there was but one unanimous sentiment prevailing, and it was for freedom for all men alike. There was no test of color or condition, but every pulsation, every thought, every word spoken, every blow struck for liberty: all the blood spilled was for liberty. Liberty or death were the words that were passed from camp to camp. Liberty was the pass-word for the sentinel, and it ran along the line of the brave volunteers, and every brave soldier drank in the cry, and it bore him on to glory. The mechanic was encouraged and stimulated: he labored with renewed energy. Timber was hewn to the ground, and with unparalleled speed and dispatch it was converted into vessels of war, and within eighteen days after the tree fell, it floated on the high seas, bearing men and the ammunitions of war, with the banner of liberty floating proudly from its masthead, denoting what the sentiments of the country were. The farmer left his plough and abandoned his harvest and his household affairs, and domestic comforts were for a time forgotten, his only thought being liberty.

Washington, Hamilton, Gage, and a host of other self-denying patriots fought with gigantic energies, meeting and overturning every obstacle which was presented. All this was to establish liberty, and a great principle which has since been overturned. That precious word, liberty, was sounded by the trumpeter before day and after night; it was sounded and resounded; it echoed over the sterile mountains of Maine; the sound was heard and borne on from town to town, from city to city, and from colony to colony, until it was caught up and resounded with treble force amid the beautiful and fertile fields of sunny Georgia. All responded to the call, old and young, white and black. They buckled on their armor and, after devoutly praying God to assist them, they sallied forth to fight for their birthright, to gain it or die. The blood of the

Constitution.  
When the Declaration was put forth, there was but one unanimous sentiment prevailing, and it was for freedom for all men alike. There was no test of color or condition, but every pulsation, every thought, every word spoken, every blow struck for liberty: all the blood spilled was for liberty. Liberty or death were the words that were passed from camp to camp. Liberty was the pass-word for the sentinel, and it ran along the line of the brave volunteers, and every brave soldier drank in the cry, and it bore him on to glory. The mechanic was encouraged and stimulated; he labored with renewed energy. Timber was hewn to the ground, and with unparalleled speed and dispatch it was converted into vessels of war, and within eighteen days after the tree fell, it floated on the high seas, bearing men and the ammunitions of war, with the banner of

liberty floating proudly from its masthead, denoting what the sentiments of the country were. The farmer left his plough and abandoned his harvest and his household affairs, and domestic comforts were for a time forgotten, his only thought being liberty.  
Washington, Hamilton, Gage, and a host of other self-denying patriots fought with gigantic energies, meeting and overturning every obstacle which was presented. All this was to establish liberty, and a great principle which has since been overturned. That precious word, liberty, was sounded by the trumpeter before day and after night; it was sounded and resounded; it echoed over the sterile mountains of Maine; the sound was heard and borne on from town to town, from city to city, and from colony to colony, until it was caught up and resounded with treble force amid the beautiful and fertile fields of sunny Georgia. All responded to the call, old and young, white and black. They buckled on their armor and, after devoutly praying God to assist them, they sallied forth to fight for their birthright, to gain it or die. The blood of the



black man was split for his white brother; the bones of the black and the white man bleached together on the deserted field.

After the war, both having suffered in the conflict, the white man's reward was liberty, while that of the black man was chains and slavery, and it is of this we complain. For it is not in keeping with the true spirit of democracy. No, not exactly. For democracy guarantees equal rights, laws and privileges, and universal and continual protection to men of all colors and climes. It is founded upon the everlasting principle of justice and right, its profession and creed receive their sanction from Providence. It has a God-granted dispensation, it is constituted by nature and governed by wisdom; it has the entire sanction of all that is good, and, therefore, it is free from clouds and misgivings. Its policy is honesty, and its counsellors are common sense; it has not partiality, it does not plunder the rich, nor defraud the poor, it does not reserve its smiles for the fortunate, and frown down the unhappy; it does not look with ice indifference on the helpless or enslaved, but it sympathizes with all, it loosens the bands, it severs the fetters, it breaks the chains and the slave is disenthralled and made free. Such is true democracy, such was the democracy of the age of 1776; such were the politics that inspired the noble heroes of revolutionary fame with hope and dispelled their fears, and made their arms invincible. These principles of justice and equity, wide as the universe, and free as the mid-day sun, sustained Washington, and crowned his efforts with a glorious termination at Yorktown. And, then, America was free, but all her inhabitants were not, for the Constitution failed to support the black man in his rights. But he is sensible of this pertinent fact, that the true principles for which he fought and his fathers died, have been perverted and different politics applied to him; and he has hoped and toiled on, and he has been true to his country, and is true to-day. He believes there is a bright day in

black man was split for his white brother; the bones of the black and the white man bleached together on the deserted field.  
After the war, both having suffered in the conflict, the white man's reward was liberty, while that of the black man was chains and slavery, and it is of this we complain. For it is not in keeping with the true spirit of democracy. No, not exactly. For democracy guarantees equal rights, laws and privileges, and universal and continual protection to men of all colors and climes. It is founded upon the everlasting principle of justice and right, its profession and creed receive their sanction from Providence. It has a God-granted dispensation, it is constituted by nature and governed by wisdom; it has the entire sanction of all that is good, and, therefore, it is free from clouds and misgivings. Its policy is honesty, and its counsellors are common sense; it has no partiality, it does not plunder the rich, nor defraud the poor, it does not reserve its smiles for the fortunate, and frown down the unhappy; it does not look with ice indifference on the helpless or enslaved, but it sympathizes with all, it loosens the bands, it severs the fetters, it breaks the chains and the slave is disenthralled and made free. Such is true democracy, such was the democracy of the age of 1776; such were the politics that inspired the noble heroes of revolutionary fame with hope and dispelled their fears, and made their arms invincible. These principles of justice and equity, wide as the universe, and free as the mid-day sun, sustained Washington, and crowned his efforts with a glorious termination at Yorktown. And, then, America was

free, but all her inhabitants were not, for the Constitution failed to support the black man in his rights. But he is sensible of this pertinent fact, that the true principles for which he fought and his fathers died, have been perverted and different politics applied to him; and he has hoped and toiled on, and he has been true to his country, and is true to-day. He believes there is a bright day in

the future; he believes that the same God, who was God to the children of Israel, will yet right his wrongs, and that the time will come when he will cry out: I am an American citizen.

I say to you, my fellow, disfranchised Americans, go on. The pure doctrines of our fathers must and will eventually prevail. The principle upon which American independence was declared and sustained will yet ride out of the darkness which has for a number of years hung over it. The day is not far distant when the proper spirit will actuate the American people and render universal emancipation a matter of necessity, and slavery will be known only in history. All the civilized nations in the world are now acknowledging the right of freedom to all mankind, and America must sooner or later follow in their wake. This is encouraging to the American slave, for he is a man, endowed by his Creator with all the attributes that other men have, and should be free. So says the declaration of our independence.

I have reviewed, in a hurried manner, the past history of political America. I have shown that the revolutionary fathers were actuated by feelings of true Democracy and love for their fellow-men, when, by the sacrifice of their precious lives, they dedicated the western contingent of the Goddess of Liberty. I have shown that the principles of democracy and equality, as enunciated by them, have been most shamefully perverted, and it is patent to all who are familiar with the history of our country, that the time was when the unity of the human family was acknowledged, and then justice was awarded to the black man as well as to the white by legislators in American Congresses; and to that period in the existence of this nation, we turn our thoughts to-day with mingled emotions of joy and pride.

Happily, for this country's honor and fame, that period will never, never be forgotten. Happily, for you and for me, who labor under

the future; he believes that the same God, who was God to the children of Israel, will yet right his wrongs, and that the time will come when he will cry out: I am an American citizen.

I say to you, my fellow, disfranchised Americans, go on. The pure doctrines of our fathers must and will eventually prevail. The principle upon which American independence was declared and sustained will yet ride out of the darkness which has for a number of years hung over it. The day is not far distant when the proper spirit will actuate the American people and render universal emancipation a matter of necessity, and slavery will be known only in history. All the civilized nations in the world are now acknowledging the right of freedom to all mankind, and America must sooner or later follow in their wake. This is encouraging to the American slave, for he is a man, endowed by his Creator with all the attributes that other men have, and should be free. So says the declaration of our independence.

I have reviewed, in a hurried manner, the past history of political America. I have shown that the revolutionary fathers were actuated by feelings of true Democracy and love for their fellow-men, when, by the sacrifice of their precious lives, they dedicated the western contingent of the Goddess of Liberty. I have shown that the principles of democracy and equality, as enunciated by them, have been most shamefully perverted, and it is patent to all who are familiar with the history of our country, that the time was when the unity of the human family was acknowledged, and then justice was awarded to the black man as well as to the white by legislators in American Congresses; and to that period in the existence of this nation, we turn our thoughts to-day with mingled emotions of joy and pride.

Happily, for this country's honor and fame, that period will never, never be forgotten. Happily, for you and for me, who labor under

the disadvantages of a color, proscription and abuse, the Declaration of Independence is extant, and will never, no, never be obliterated, but it bears us up and gives us hope, and makes firm the faith we have in the justice of an overruling Providence. It encourages us to live and to labor zealously for our rights here in America, and to turn a deaf ear to all the entreaties with which we may be importuned to seek homes in a foreign land unknown to us.

Yes, let this Declaration, so true, so frank, so honest and promising, be our Rock of Ages, and on it we must anchor. It is our guide. Around it we will rally. Eighty-three years it has sustained the down-trodden and oppressed. It has been our only consolation. It teaches us that we are Americans, and as such we have rights which ought to be respected. Then, let us resolve this day never to leave our fatherland and that we will raise up a posterity, and teach them that, in accordance with the Declaration of "76," they are free, and if we need must die bereft of our dearest hopes, let us die like wronged Americans, with the Declaration of American Independence in one hand, and with the other we will unfold to the wide world a scroll containing the history of the wrongs, the oppressions and the enslavement imposed upon us by this bogus republican government; then, laying bare our breast, we will bravely receive the envenomed arrow from the bow in the hands of the Shepherd, who should be our succorer; and in the death struggle may our last, last sad dimmed gaze rest upon the flag—the stars and stripes, the red, white and blue—which should have been true, but was false, false to us.

the disadvantages of a color, proscription and abuse, the Declaration of Independence is extant, and will never, no, never be obliterated, but it bears us up and gives us hope, and makes firm the faith we have in the justice of an overruling Providence. It encourages us to live and to labor zealously for our rights here in America, and

to turn a deaf ear to all the entreaties with which we may be importuned to seek homes in a foreign land unknown to us.  
Yes, let this Declaration, so true, so frank, so honest and promising, be our Rock of Ages, and on it we must anchor. It is our guide. Around it we will rally. Eighty-three years it has sustained the down-trodden and oppressed. It has been our only consolation. It teaches us that we are Americans, and as such we have rights which ought to be respected. Then, let us resolve this day never to leave our fatherland and that we will raise up a posterity, and teach them that, in accordance with the Declaration of "76," they are free, and if we need must die bereft of our dearest hopes, let us die like wronged Americans, with the Declaration of American Independence in one hand, and with the other we will unfold to the wide world a scroll containing the history of the wrongs, the oppressions and the enslavement imposed upon us by this bogus republican government; then, laying bare our breast, we will bravely receive the envenomed arrow from the bow in the hands of the Shepherd, who should be our succorer; and in the death struggle may our last, last sad dimmed gaze rest upon the flag—the stars and stripes, the red, white and blue—which should have been true, but was false, false to us.