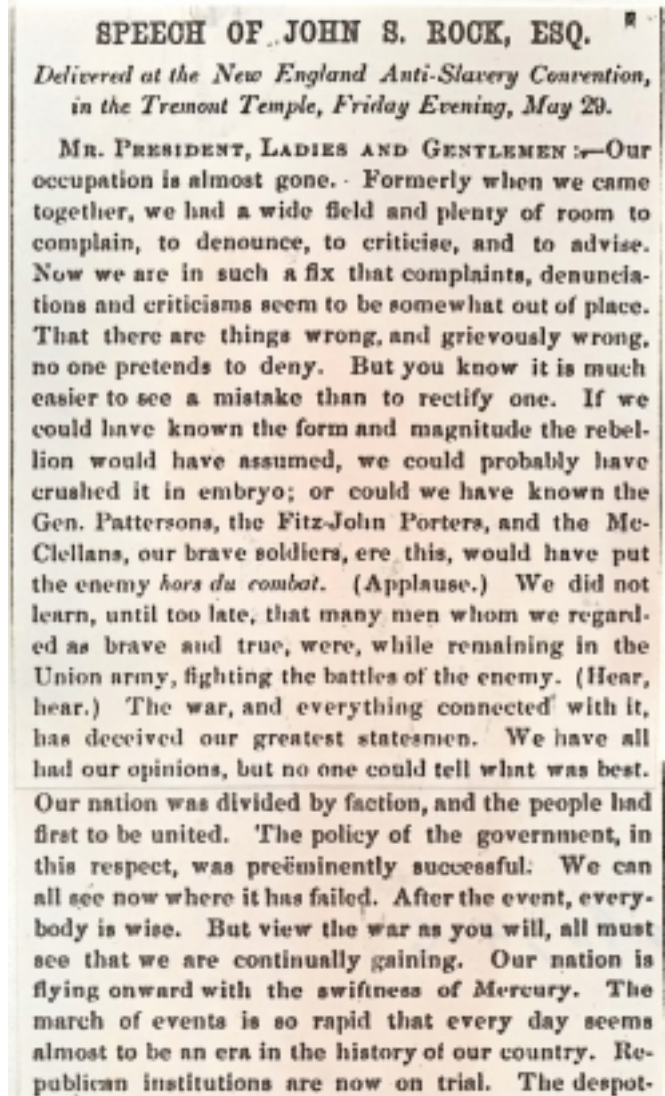


[SPEECH OF JOHN S. ROCK, ESQ.]

*Delivered at the New England Anti-Slavery Convention,
in the Tremont Temple, Friday Evening, May 29.]*

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—Our occupation is almost gone. Formerly when we came together, we had a wide field and plenty of room to complain, to denounce, to criticise, and to advise. Now we are in such a fix that complaints, denunciations and criticisms seem to be somewhat out of place. That there are things wrong, and grievously wrong, no one pretends to deny. But you know it is much easier to see a mistake than to rectify one. If we could have known the form and magnitude the rebellion would have assumed, we could probably have crushed it in embryo; or could we have known the Gen. Pattersons, the Fitz-John Porters, and the McClellans, our brave soldiers, ere this, would have put the enemy *hors du combat*. (Applause.) We did not learn, until too late, that many men whom we regarded as brave and true, were, while remaining in the Union army, fighting the battles of the enemy. (Hear, hear.) The war, and everything connected with it, has deceived our greatest statesmen. We have all had our opinions, but no one could tell what was best. Our nation was divided by faction, and the people had first to be united. The policy of the government, in this respect, was preeminently successful. We can all see now where it has failed. After the event, everybody is wise. But view the war as you will, all must see that we are continually gaining. Our nation is flying onward with the swiftness of Mercury. The march of events is so rapid that every day seems almost to be an era in the history of our country. Republican institutions are now on trial. The despot-



isms of the old world are rejoicing in what they hope will prove the utter fallacy of democratic institutions. You are the jury, and it is for you to say whether or no they shall triumph. I have no doubt that you will render a just verdict. Your civilization, your patriotism, and your Christianity, all tell me that you have already decided in your own minds, that this country must and shall be free. (Applause.) This is truly a trying time, and I have found many stout men wavering. This ought not to be. The misfortunes that thicken around us are so many tests of our manhood, our courage, and our capacity for self-government. (Hear, hear.) Our afflictions try us, and prove us. It is not fair weather and pleasant breezes, but storms and tempests, that give reputation to pilots. Our republic is not yet established; the metal, such as it is, has been put in the crucible, and the refiner's fire is now working upon it. If it prove to be all dross, it will be consumed; but if it is made of the imperishable materials, liberty and justice to all, the gates of hell will not be able to prevail against it. (Applause.)

There are men who talk of compromise and peace. There can be no compromise between right and wrong. There are but two parties in the country to-day; the one is for the republic, and the other is against it. (Applause.) Those who are not for freedom are for slavery. To sit on the fence, and watch which way the current runs, will not answer—there can be no neutral or middle ground in war. The friends and the enemies of the country must be defined, and the one or the other must triumph. It is contrary to common sense to suppose that two systems of government, so

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There are men who talk of compromise and peace. It is now useless to talk either of compromise or peace. There can be no compromise between right and wrong. There are but two parties in the country to-day; the one is for the republic, and the other is against it. (Applause.) Those who are not for freedom are for slavery. To sit on the fence, and watch which way the current runs, will not answer—there can be no neutral or middle ground in war. The friends and the enemies of the country must be defined, and the one or the other must triumph. It is contrary to common sense to suppose that two systems of government, so

innately hostile to each other as those of the North are to those of the South, should occupy the same soil. We should be like the Romans and Carthaginians, among whom, says Paterculus, there always existed either a war, preparations for a war, or a deceitful peace.

I believe the people of the North are in earnest, and mean that this question shall be patched up no more, but finally settled now. There is no use in crying peace. The enemies of the republic must be subdued, or annihilated, and it is of but little consequence which. (Applause.)

You must not look beyond the lines for all the traitors, for they who dip in the dish with you are legion. I do not propose to speak particularly of them now. America is financially controlled by a set of gambling speculators, who go for slavery because it pays, and they go for the war because it pays. They would sacrifice slavery to-day, and end the war to-morrow, if they thought liberty and peace would pay better than slavery and war. While the loyal millions are true to liberty and to right, patriotism has, in my instances, proved to be a scandalous game played by public men for private ends.

This nation, determined to get rich at any cost, has made the negro both lever and fulcrum, and through him a vast amount of wealth has been obtained. They have established and perpetuated slavery—an institution which vilifies honest industry, which is the source of true wealth, and without which there can be neither riches nor social happiness. The enslavement of the African race has opened the gate to every kind of moral confusion, and has let loose the wildest and

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worst passions of man. For the sake of an infamous profit, this nation has been for more than two centuries adding fresh barrels of powder to the mine which has finally exploded, and come near blowing us all up together. The American people, instead of being wise, have been *otherwise*. They have not perceived that, as they sowed, so they must reap. "Men do not gather grapes from thorns." No nation or people can set aside moral virtue and humanity, without entailing upon themselves and their posterity the fearful consequences of their wrong. Jefferson saw this, when he said, "I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, and that his justice cannot sleep forever." (Applause.)

It is argued that, after emancipation is fully established, the freedmen will not work, and that we shall have less cotton and sugar. Suppose it should prove that the blacks of the South are as lazy and worthless as their white masters, when then? Do you believe that it is the chief end of the negro to raise cotton and sugar? On the same principle, burglars and pickpockets may complain, and with equal justice, too, that State's prisons and jails prevent burglars and pickpockets from becoming the richest men in the community. (Applause.)

There are many men who don't desire success to the Union arms, because they say it is a negro war; that Mr. Lincoln's proclamation places the races on a social equality; and that it is nothing more nor less than a grand amalgamation scheme.

Some three or four years ago, I discussed this question before this Convention, and I do not intend to refer to it now farther than to show you how ridiculous

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Some three or four years ago, I discussed this question before this Convention, and I do not intend to refer to it now farther than to show you how ridiculous

and silly these assertions are. So far as the social relation is concerned, that must regulate itself. There may be those colored men who have a morbid desire to mingle socially among the whites; but I do not think the desire is greater on our part than it is on yours. (Laughter and applause.) I have no serious objection to any man's prejudices, because I believe there are legitimate prejudices existing in all communities. (Hear, hear.) These prejudices, however, do not depend on the accidental distinctions of color or race; such prejudices are simply the result of ignorance. They are deeper, and founded on the natural sympathy of mind and morals. If a man feels that I am his inferior, I do not see why he should be expected to associate with me. All men prefer to associate with their equals. The rich prefer to associate together, the learned together, the moral together, and the vicious together. And to attempt to associate the refined with the vulgar, the moral with the vicious, the anti-slavery with the pro-slavery, or the loyal with the disloyal, is to attempt to mix oil with water. (Applause.) Every man has a right to choose his own company, or to fancy this color more than that. If any one is not pleased with my color, that is his business, and I have no right to complain because he lacks good taste. (Laughter.) I desire the society of no one, unless I feel that it is mutual. If a gentleman takes a seat beside me in a lecture-room, a concert, or a rail-road car, before he discovers that I am a colored man, and then shows his ill-breeding by appearing uneasy, and finally seeking a seat elsewhere, we are both pleased—he because he has avoided the presence of a negro, and I that of a blockhead. (Laughter and ap-

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plause.) We are thenceforward kept apart by the force of mutual repulsion. There are both truth and poetry in the remark of Swift, "If a man makes me keep my distance, the comfort is, he keeps his at the same time." (Applause.)

It is said that emancipation necessarily elevates the black to a social equality with the white man; and some pro-slavery men have a contemptuous way of attempting to silence our friends by saying, "Why, would you be willing to have your daughters marry a nigger?" Just as though your daughters, their daughters, and every other white man's daughters, were crazy to marry niggers; and the moment you gave the black man his rights, that moment they would seize upon and take him, *nolens volens*! (Laughter.) If this is to be the result of freedom to the blacks, it is indeed sad, (continued laughter,) and especially so to the blacks themselves, who are still to be the victims, (laughter,) first, of avarice—then, of mad love. O, I am almost tempted to complain of the Creator for first giving us such a beautiful complexion, and then placing us among a people who are always trying to extract the virtues from it! (Laughter and applause.) Do you not really pity those fathers who have daughters with such strange affections? (Laughter.) Only to think if this outrage were permitted, the prejudice against the race would disappear like dew before the morning sun! The blacks would die out with the first generation; the mulattoes with the second; the quadroons with the third; and in the fourth generation, O, horrible to relate! the twain would be one flesh. (Renewed laughter.) Our *agitating* friends would have no occupation; and you could then say of the negro, what

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we all hope soon to say of Jeff. Davis and his deluded followers, that the time and places that know them now, will shortly know them no more forever. (Laughter and applause.)

It is hardly fair that these men should judge the women by themselves. (Hear, hear.) They tell us that there is a natural repugnance between the white and black races. You may believe this, but they do not believe it. That there are many ignorant white people who believe all they have heard against us, I do not pretend to deny; but the intelligent portion of the people understand this thing pretty well. Pro-slavery men have a strange kind of prejudice against us. The most bitter pro-slavery man in this country, who would send me to the mountains of the moon to-day, would insult my daughter, if I had one, by the time my back was turned. The prejudice is only against the men in freedom. One million of mulattoes in the South, where neither the colored girl, wife, nor mother, dare say her soul is her own, is an unanswerable argument to the men who charge amalgamation to abolitionists. (Applause.) This prejudice is not natural. In the South, where the white children are brought up by colored servants, they always prefer them. You know how common it is there for the white child to call after its black wet nurse, and refuse to be comforted by its mother. The mulatto child is dandled on the knee of its white father until he gets "hard up," then he barbarously sells it! This is our civilization!

If it should prove true that we are sought after by both sexes, I can well understand it. The colored people have been shut out of almost every avenue to

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elevation—our only enjoyments have been those of a social character. Slavery and prejudice have caused us to develop our affectional natures, and we are without doubt kinder and more affectionate than any other race. What lady would not desire to be loved by one who regarded her life as part of his own, rather than as a necessary convenience of his? We are kindly drawn towards animals that show an affection for us; and I kindly caution you that, in spite of what we have said to the contrary, pro-slavery men may, after all, be right when they warn you of the bewitching love of black men! A word to the wise is sufficient. (Laughter.)

Since the commencement of the rebellion, the tone and spirit of the government have been conciliatory towards its enemies. Neither subjugation nor conquest seems to have entered the hearts of our human rulers. The war has really been on the defensive. Important and available substantial aid, that was ready and anxious to serve the government, was declined in deference to the prejudices of race. The black men who were acquainted with the main-spring of the rebellion rushed forward at the commencement, and claimed their right as native-born citizens to lay their lives on the altar of their country. Their power and influence were despised; they were always rejected, and often insulted. After pressing their claims for two years, it ought not to be surprising if many should have become discouraged and disheartened. Many, however, have continued to press on. Some, impatient for the conflict, rushed into the navy; while a considerable number, determined to see the thing done even if they could take no part in it, have gone out

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as servants to officers.

I think the government has made a mistake in checking our patriotism. (Applause.) It needed the help that belonged to it, and desired to come to it, and yet was feeding the rebellion, and giving aid and comfort to the men who were shooting down your fathers and brothers, your relatives and friends. (Hear, hear.) Had you allowed us to have taken hold at first, you would have seen the rebels long since flying in every direction, and calling on the rocks and mountains to hide them from our virtuous anger and wrath. (Applause.)

The zeal and fidelity with which we have served our country, and are still willing and anxious to serve it, and which have prompted many to go as servants, after having been insultingly thrown aside while pressing their claims as soldiers, ought forever to seal the lip of prejudice, and silence the tongue of slander.

Recently, there has been an effort to raise colored regiments; and there are many who wonder why the colored people have not been more eager to seize this golden opportunity to strike. These are times when it will not do to be too exacting. But if you will consider, for a moment, how reluctantly the government has taken hold of this matter; how nearly every post of honor and profit is denied us; how unwilling our own legislature has been to strike the word "white" from the militia laws; and when you add to all this the fact, that many colored men in the service of the government have been taken prisoners and sold into slavery, without even a protest from the Federal Government, you ought not to be surprised why we have hesitated, and not rushed pell mell into the service, and urged others to follow us.

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It will not, I think, be according to us too large a share of common sense to say, that we know that the man who offers to sacrifice his life on the altar of his country has rights which the government is bound to respect. (Applause.) What are we fighting for? Certainly not for the sake of killing and being killed; we could have done this in a time of peace. It is a noble thing to fight for posterity, but it is sensible to use well the present; the future may never come to us.

I think the proficiency of drill and manly bearing of the soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts regiment, that passed through here yesterday, ought to convince you that the colored man is deserving of something more than promises—though these serve as food for fools, but the man who lives on them has a slim diet; he is always sowing, never reaping. I think it common sense to have a few of the honors as we go along, and to teach our children that we know how to enjoy that which we are hoarding up for them. Many of our grandfathers fought in the revolution, and the battles of the revolution we are obliged to fight over again to-day.

I think it is high time that this deference to the hateful prejudice against the black man were set aside, and men were measured by their merits. I hear a great deal said about all being right in the end. I believe it. But how is it to come right? Certainly, not by forever yielding to the prejudices of those who would sacrifice the country to preserve slavery. This living entirely for posterity sounds well from the rostrum, but a loaf of bread to-day is worth a barrel of flour next year.

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Patriotism is, after all, a selfish thing. We fight for our country because it is our home; we have a pride in it, and love it for its liberty. Ambition and the love of fame are as common to man, black or white, as horns are to the ox. Shakspeare says, "We all hunt after fame." And ambition has, no doubt, played a greater part in the world than any other passion. Indeed, the motive to praiseworthy action has been the germ from which great men have been produced. There is a disposition in man to rise, and to lord it over his fellows. When ten thousand men a year, of all races, press our Governor for places in the army, and many of them for places in the colored regiments, it proves, at least, that the love of power, if not natural, has acquired an iron hold on man. Honorable ambition is an honorable thing. What is a man without ambition? If he is satisfied to remain where he is, he does not deserve promotion. The Germans say, *Wer man sich nicht, macht ist nicht*. "When a man makes himself nothing, he is nothing." I do not blame those Irish gentlemen who have sought and obtained commissions in the colored regiments. The Americans believe that you had "better rule a negro than serve a white man;" or as the maxim has it, "better be the head of a rat than the tail of a lion."

We do not seek commissions as such, but we ask for those rights which belong to us as loyal men; and we would be false to our duty, false to our race, and false to posterity, if we did not contend for them as men, while offering to defend our country with our lives. (Applause.)

We have not been treated right. When you raise regiments among the Irish, you give them Irish officers; and when you raise regiments among the Ger-

Patriotism is, after all, a selfish thing. - We fight for our country because it is our home; we have a pride in it, and love it for its liberty. Ambition and the love of fame are as common to man, black or white, as horns are to the ox. Shakspeare says, "We all hunt after fame." And ambition has, no doubt, played a greater part in the world than any other passion. Indeed, the motive to praiseworthy action has been the germ from which great men have been produced. There is a disposition in man to rise, and to lord it over his fellows. When ten thousand men a year, of all races, press our Governor for places in the

army, and many of them for places in the colored regiments, it proves, at least, that the love of power, if not natural, has acquired an iron hold on man. Honorable ambition is an honorable thing. What is a man without ambition? If he is satisfied to remain where he is, he does not deserve promotion. The German say, *Wer man sich nicht, macht ist nicht*. "When a man makes himself nothing, he is nothing." I do not blame those Irish gentlemen who have sought and obtained commissions in the colored regiments. The Americans believe that you had "better rule a negro than serve a white man;" or as the maxim has it, "better be the head of a rat than the tail of a lion."

We do not seek commissions as such, but we ask for those rights which belong to us as loyal men; and we would be false to our duty, false to our race, and false to posterity, if we did not contend for them as men, while offering to defend our country with our lives. (Applause.)

We have not been treated right. When you raise regiments among the Irish, you give them Irish officers; and when you raise regiments among the Ger-

mans, you give them German officers; but when it comes to the colored people, their men of talent are disregarded so much that they are not even consulted. And this, I assure you, is a modest statement of our case.

I have not one word to say against colored men enlisting now. I think we *must* fill the ranks, and learn the art of war. All I ask is, that the avenues to elevation shall be open to us as to white men—our honors we are willing to fight for.

I have advised, and do advise, all those colored men who can conscientiously go into the army to go. There is to be a great harvest, and those who sow first must reap first. We cannot get all at once. Some things may be had by asking, some by working for, and some only by fighting. Bullets are wonderful things to bring men around, and, I confess, my faith is that great miracles may be wrought by gunpowder and lead. (Applause.) I say to my people, if we cannot get what we want, we must get what we can, keeping our rights uppermost and always in view. If Providence will not send turkeys already roasted, we will take them as they are, and roast them ourselves. If the mountain will not go to Mahomet, let Mahomet go to the mountain; that is, if the government will not come to us, we will go to it. We will leave no excuse for those who would deprive us of our rights. We ask, in return, that the government receive us as its loyal friends, and treat us accordingly.

We are not indifferent observers of this contest. Every bone in our bodies is loyal. We are not lukewarm. Who dares be lukewarm when the liberty of his country is in danger? To be moderate is to be

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little better than a coward. The rebels dread a black army; we will be a terror to them, and realize all their fears. (Applause.) Some fear an insurrection. All I fear is, that the slaves have been so long repulsed, and so often thrust back, that they have become so disheartened that we shall have no insurrection. (Hear, hear.) Insurrection! I tell you, fellow-citizens, there is magic in that word; and if ever the slaves do take hold, you will soon see the rebellion crushed. They will hang on like badgers, and never give over until they feel their teeth meet, and the bones crack. (Applause.)

I am greatly encouraged. The National Capital is free—the colored man is recognized as a citizen—and slavery is declared forever abolished in all places in open rebellion. This is glory enough for one day. For all this, I thank you, and all others who have contributed their influence to make this a free country. (Applause.)

We are passing through terrible times. Two years ago, our country, hitherto regarded as stable and steady, was found rocking and shaking on its ancient foundations. We all seemed to be in doubt as to whether or no we had a government. The enemies of this country had become violent and insolent, and it seemed as though the Constitution, if not overthrown, must be written again, and with the sword in blood. Old and tried patriotic soldiers and statesmen, affrighted at the apparition of a true republican government, precipitated themselves into the torrent, and stretched forth their arms, giant-like, for the purpose of guiding it, so that it might the more surely sweep away this, the brightest hope of democratic institu-

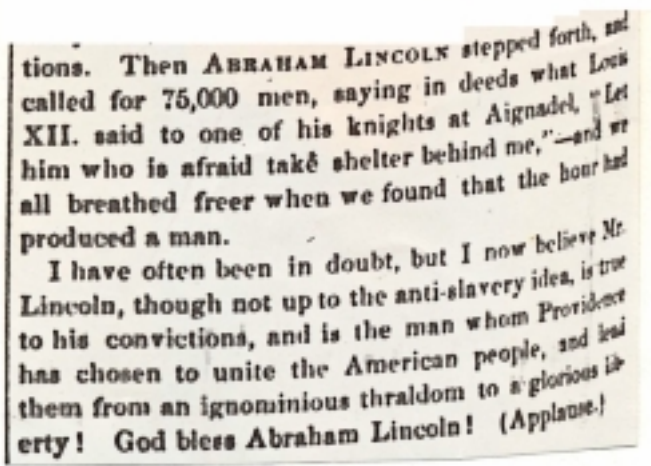
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tions. Then ABRAHAM LINCOLN stepped forth, and called for 75,000 men, saying in deeds what Louis XII. said to one of his knights at Aignadel, "Let him who is afraid take shelter behind me,"—and we all breathed freer when we found that the hour had produced a man.

I have often been in doubt, but I now believe Mr. Lincoln, though not up to the anti-slavery idea, is true to his convictions, and is the man whom Providence has chosen to unite the American people, and lead them from an ignominious thralldom to a glorious liberty! God *bless* Abraham Lincoln! (Applause.)



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