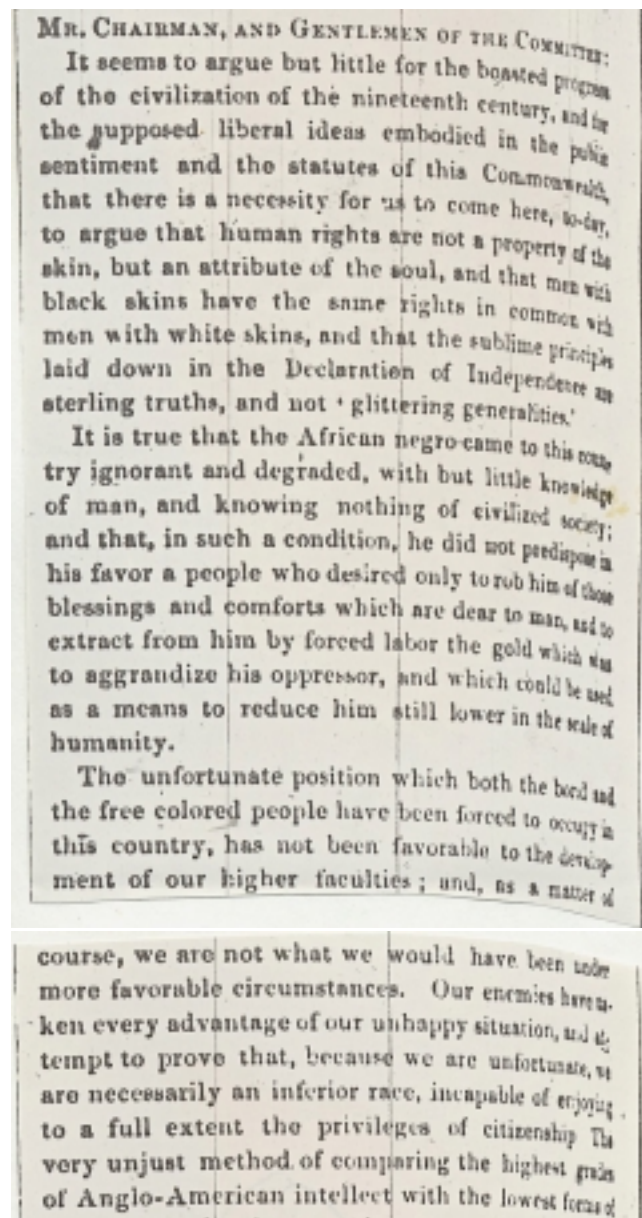


MR. CHAIRMAN, AND GENTLEMEN OF THE COMMITTEE:

It seems to argue but little for the boasted progress of the civilization of the nineteenth century, and for the supposed liberal ideas embodied in the public sentiment and the statutes of this Commonwealth, that there is a necessity for us to come here, to-day, to argue that human rights are not a property of the skin, but an attribute of the soul, and that men with black skins have the same rights in common with men with white skins, and that the sublime principles laid down in the Declaration of Independence are sterling truths, and not 'glittering generalities.'

It is true that the African negro came to this country ignorant and degraded, with but little knowledge of man, and knowing nothing of civilized society; and that, in such a condition, he did not predispose in his favor a people who desired only to rob him of those blessings and comforts which are dear to man, and to extract from him by forced labor the gold which was to aggrandize his oppressor, and which could be used as a means to reduce him still lower in the scale of humanity.

The unfortunate position which both the bond and the free colored people have been forced to occupy in this country, has not been favorable to the development of our higher faculties; and, as a matter of course, we are not what we would have been under more favorable circumstances. Our enemies have taken every advantage of our unhappy situation, and attempt to prove that, because we are unfortunate, we are necessarily an inferior race, incapable of enjoying to a full extent the privileges of citizenship. The very unjust method of comparing the highest grades of Anglo-American intellect with the lowest forms of



negro sensuality is resorted to, to prove our inferiority, and that the blessings of citizenship have been specially reserved by our Heavenly Parent for those men who have white skins and straight hair!

Of course, I have neither the time nor the disposition to attempt to refute the assertions of such silly men, who do not hesitate to blow hot and cold with the same breath; who, while arguing that we were created inferior, on purpose to be oppressed, at the same time insist on making the most severe laws, punishing us as creatures of the highest intelligence. This method of disposing of us reminds me of Lorenzo Dow's reply, when asked to define Calvinism. He said:

You can and you can't,
You will and you won't,
You'll be damned if you do,
And you'll be damned if you don't.

This is the position of the colored man. You say to him, you shall be free here in this old Puritan Commonwealth; but the moment he begins to walk about as though he would exercise those God-given rights which he feels are common to this country and to humanity, you (surprised at his impudence) say, 'You can't go there.' You give us the right of citizenship in this Commonwealth, and yet the jury-boxes are closed against us; and when we ask for the right to take up arms to defend a Commonwealth which professes to protect us, you 'won't.' Let us be wise or ignorant, brutes or men, our color is our crime, and oppression the penalty.

Now, it is on this theory of the supposed inferiority of our race to yours, that it is argued that the colored man has been denied a citizenship in this country.

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Now, it is on this theory of the supposed inferiority of our race to yours, that it is argued that the colored man has been denied a citizenship in this country.

Of course, this opens a wide range for discussion; but, when viewed in its proper light, it is not difficult to see that it is a mere subterfuge, which is resorted to to bolster up the infamous treatment which greets the colored man everywhere in this slavery-cursed land, where to us patriotism produces no honor, goodness no merit, and intellectual industry no reward.

In claiming for the colored citizen of this Commonwealth the right to bear arms, I am not one of those who believe that the colored man alone will be benefited by it. I believe that the real benefit will fall upon you. To withhold from us a single right is to oppress us; and to do this on account of our color, and because you know that we have neither the numbers nor the means to resist it, is not only outraging us, but degrading yourselves.

Gentlemen, you too well know that the oppression of the blacks in this country has done more to degrade this nation in the eyes of the civilized world, than all other causes combined. There is no American gentleman who has spent six months in Europe, and not felt that his nation is regarded as a band of conspirators who have openly, in the face of civilization and Christianity, sought to degrade and rob a people, who, from their services and position, were eminently entitled to your sympathies and protection.

This is the only civilized and enlightened nation in the world that denies the black man's citizenship. Even Brazil, with her four million slaves, gives the free-born colored man and the emancipated slave equal privileges with others, and opens to him every avenue to wealth and fame. This country alone, I

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repeat it, forms a solitary exception to the civilized world, in withholding from men their God-given rights, simply because they are colored. I tell you, gentlemen, it is to your interests to wipe out this stain.

If you will not do it for yourselves, then we ask you to do it for your posterity. Their interests demand it of you, and the whole civilized world is holding you responsible for quietly submitting to that infamous decision of a court of Supreme Ignoramuses, who have decided that men who have a different complexion from yourselves have no rights. The king of Dahomey would pluck out his tongue sooner than render such a decision. I appeal to you, gentlemen, in the name of your own interests, for the honor of your posterity, and for the credit of your country, to wipe from the statutes of this Commonwealth the last relic of a barbarous age.

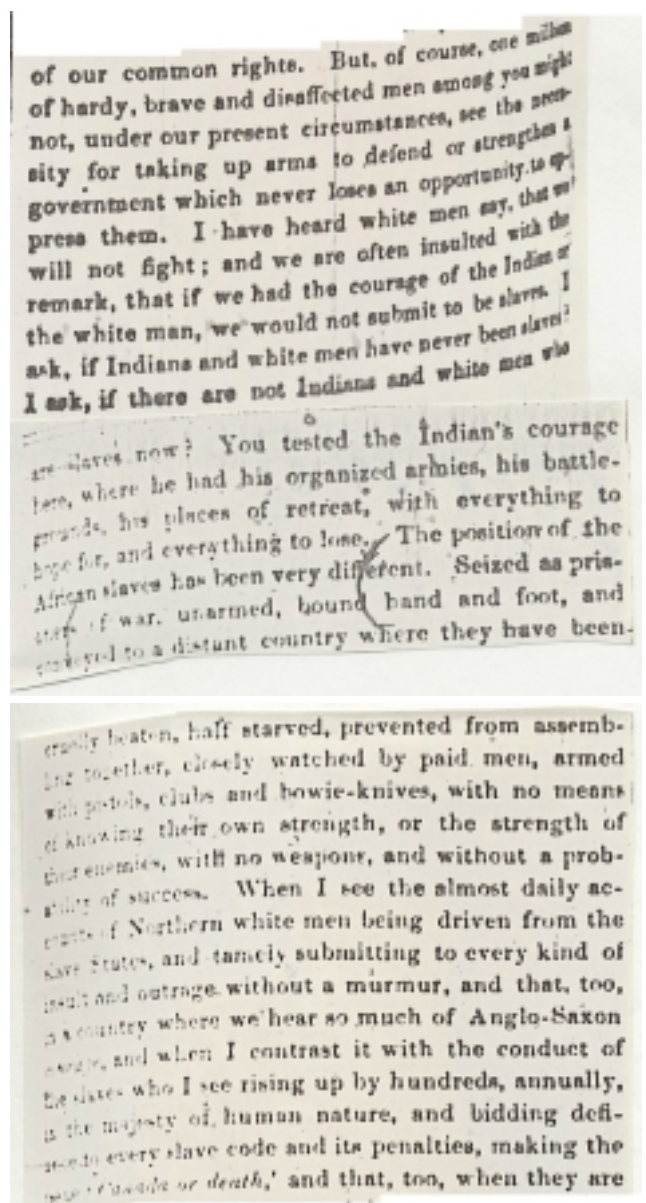
The rights and interests of the colored man are here; this is our native State; our families, friends, and property are here; and we ask that we may have the privilege of training in the art which teaches us how to protect them with our lives and our 'sacred honors.' Colored men have always been patriotic. We would, in case of war, be an important power in this country. We number a third more than the entire population of this country at the time of the Revolution. Will you continue to deny us our rights, and force us to become enemies to our native country? I know that I speak the sentiments of the colored people when I say, that we love our country, and desire to see it prosper, and would not hesitate to mingle our blood in common with yours in defence

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of our common rights. But, of course, one million of hardy, brave and disaffected men among you might not, under our present circumstances, see the necessity for taking up arms to defend or strengthen a government which never loses an opportunity to oppress them. I have heard white men say, that we will not fight; and we are often insulted with the remark, that if we had the courage of the Indian or the white man, we would not submit to be slaves. I ask, if Indians and white men have never been slaves? I ask, if there are not Indians and white men who are slaves now? You tested the Indian's courage here, where he had his organized armies, his battle-grounds, his places of retreat, with everything to hope for, and everything to lose. The position of the African slaves has been very different. Seized as prisoners of war, unarmed, bound hand and foot, and conveyed to a distant country where they have been cruelly beaten, half starved, prevented from assembling together, closely watched by paid men, armed with pistols, clubs and bowie-knives, with no means of knowing their own strength, or the strength of their enemies, with no weapons, and without a probability of success. When I see the almost daily accounts of Northern white men being driven from the slave States, and tamely submitting to every kind of insult and outrage without a murmur, and that, too, in a country where we hear so much of Anglo-Saxon [courage], and when I contrast it with the conduct of the slaves who I see rising up by hundreds, annually, in the majesty of human nature, and bidding defiance to every slave code and its penalties, making the issue '*Canada or death*,' and that, too, when they are

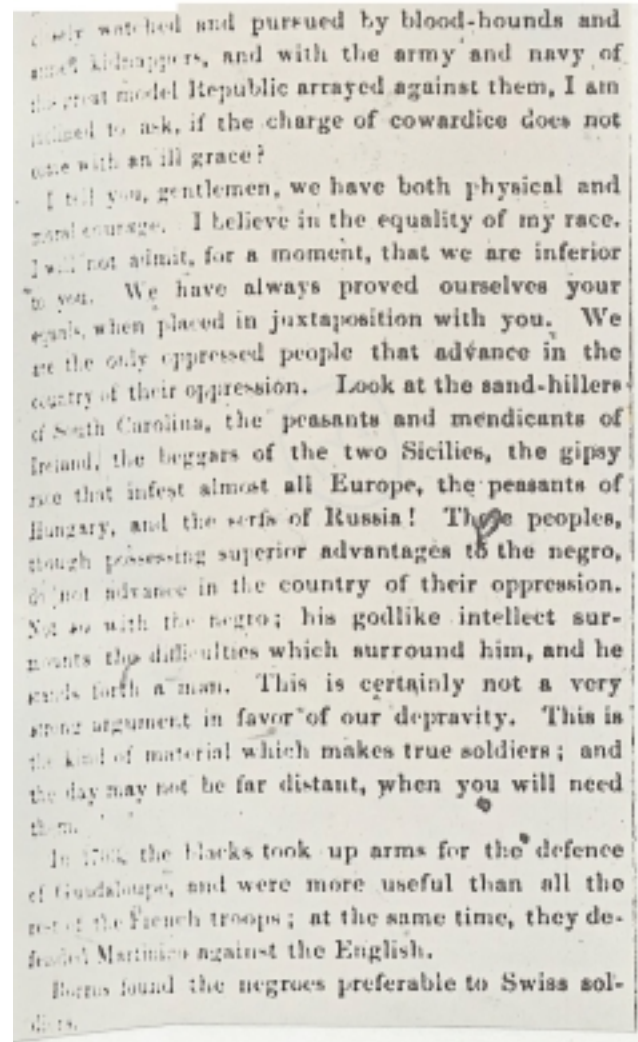


closely watched and pursued by blood-hounds and armed kidnappers, and with the army and navy of this great model Republic arrayed against them, I am inclined to ask, if the charge of cowardice does not come with an ill grace?

I tell you, gentlemen, we have both physical and moral courage. I believe in the equality of my race. I will not admit, for a moment, that we are inferior to you. We have always proved ourselves your equals, when placed in juxtaposition with you. We are the only oppressed people that advance in the country of their oppression. Look at the sand-hillers of South Carolina, the peasants and mendicants of Ireland, the beggars of the two Sicilies, the gipsy race that infest almost all Europe, the peasants of Hungary, and the serfs of Russia! These peoples, though possessing superior advantages to the negro, do not advance in the country of their oppression. Not so with the negro; his godlike intellect surmounts the difficulties which surround him, and he stands forth a man. This is certainly not a very strong argument in favor of our depravity. This is the kind of material which makes true soldiers; and the day may not be far distant, when you will need them.

In 1703, the blacks took up arms for the defence of Guadaloupe, and were more useful than all the rest of the French troops; at the same time, they defended Martinico against the English.

Borros found the negroes preferable to Swiss soldiers.

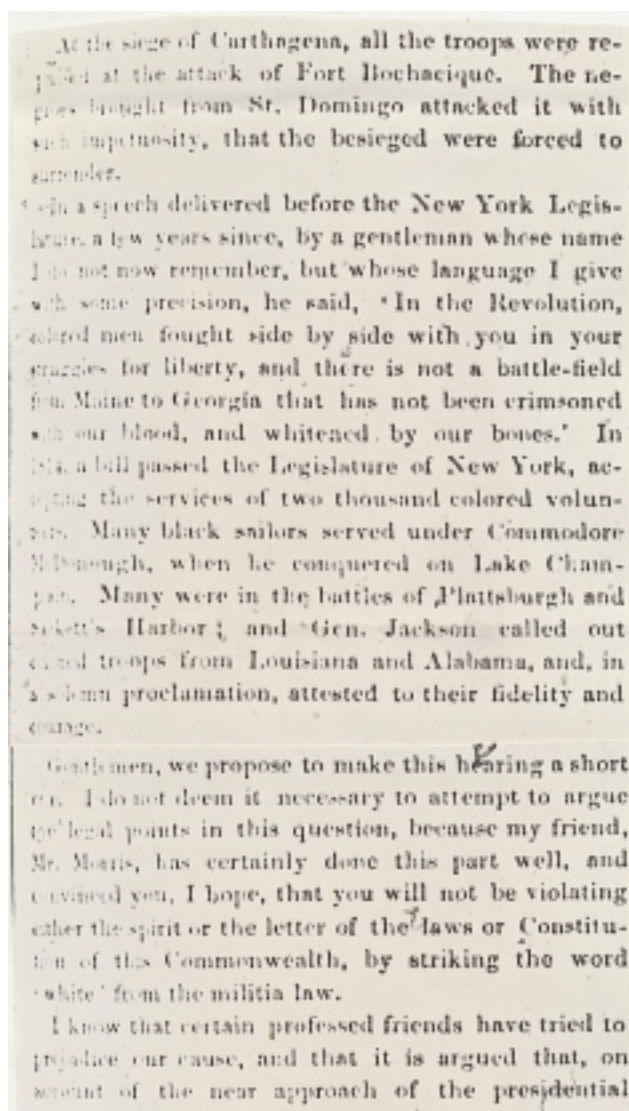


At the siege of Carthagena, all the troops were repulsed at the attack of Fort Bochacique. The negroes brought from St. Domingo attacked it with such impetuosity, that the besieged were forced to surrender.

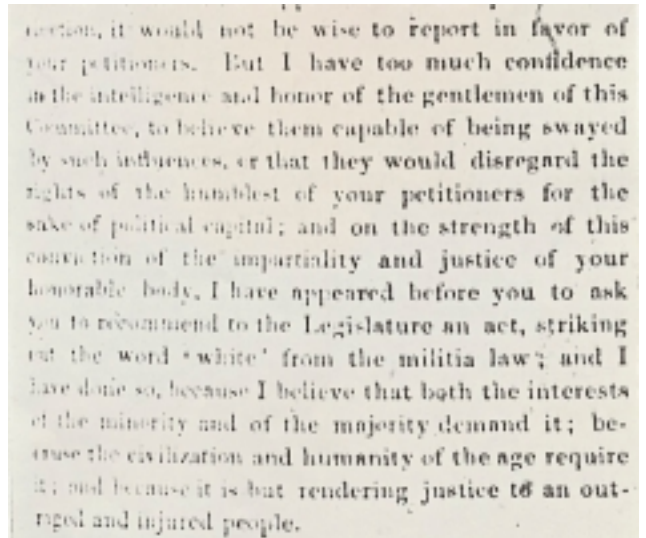
In a speech delivered before the New York Legislature, a few years since, by a gentleman whose name I do not now remember, but whose language I give with some precision, he said, 'In the Revolution, colored men fought side by side with you in your struggles for liberty, and there is not a battle-field from Maine to Georgia that has not been crimsoned with our blood, and whitened by our bones.' In [1814], a bill passed the Legislature of New York, accepting the services of two thousand colored volunteers. Many black sailors served under Commodore McDonough, when he conquered on Lake Champlain. Many were in the battles of Plattsburgh and [Sackett's] Harbor; and Gen. Jackson called out colored troops from Louisiana and Alabama, and, in a solemn proclamation, attested to their fidelity and courage.

Gentlemen, we propose to make this hearing a short one. I do not deem it necessary to attempt to argue the legal points in this question, because my friend, Mr. Morris, has certainly done this part well, and convinced you, I hope, that you will not be violating either the spirit or the letter of the laws or Constitution of this Commonwealth, by striking the word 'white' from the militia law.

I know that certain professed friends have tried to prejudice our cause, and that it is argued that, on account of the near approach of the presidential



election, it would not be wise to report in favor of your petitioners. But I have too much confidence in the intelligence and honor of the gentlemen of this Committee, to believe them capable of being swayed by such influences, or that they would disregard the rights of the humblest of your petitioners for the sake of political capital; and on the strength of this conviction of the impartiality and justice of your honorable body, I have appeared before you to ask you to recommend to the Legislature an act, striking out the word 'white' from the militia law; and I have done so, because I believe that both the interests of the minority and of the majority demand it; because the civilization and humanity of the age require it[;] and because it is but rendering justice to an outraged and injured people.



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