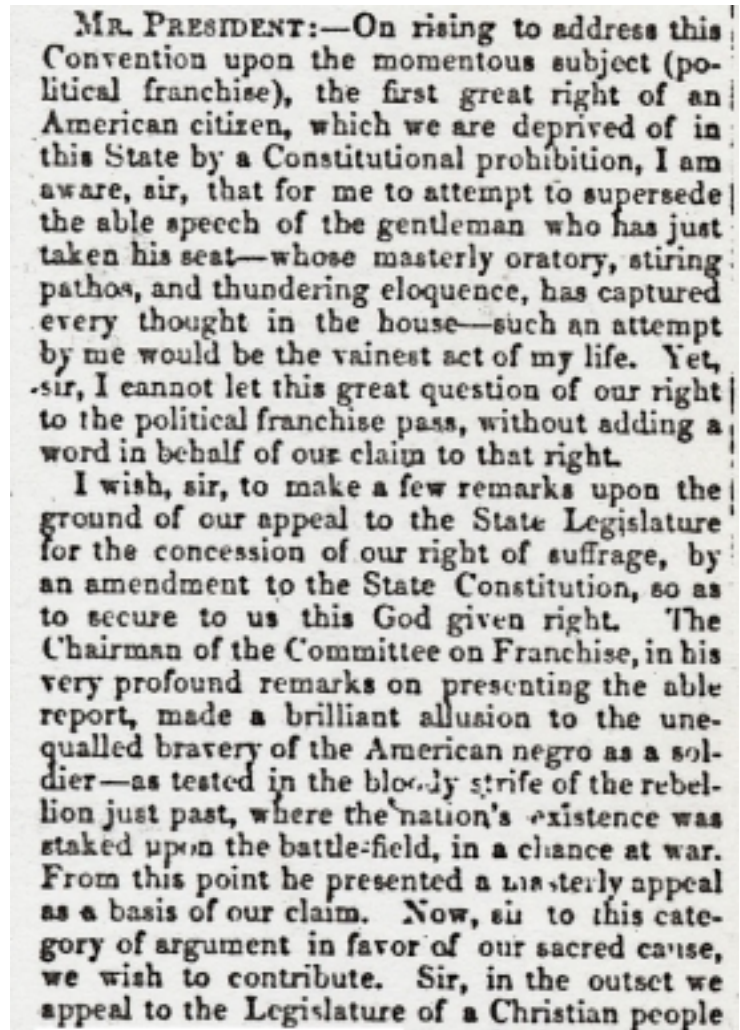


MR. PRESIDENT:—On rising to address this Convention upon the momentous subject (political franchise), the first great right of an American citizen, which we are deprived of in this State by a Constitutional prohibition, I am aware, sir, that for me to attempt to supersede the able speech of the gentleman who has just taken his seat—whose masterly oratory, stirring pathos, and thundering eloquence, has captured every thought in the house—such an attempt by me would be the vainest act of my life. Yet, sir, I cannot let this great question of our right to the political franchise pass, without adding a word in behalf of our claim to that right.

I wish, sir, to make a few remarks upon the ground of our appeal to the State Legislature for the concession of our right of suffrage, by an amendment to the State Constitution, so as to secure to us this God given right. The Chairman of the Committee on Franchise, in his very profound remarks on presenting the able report, made a brilliant allusion to the unequalled bravery of the American negro as a soldier—as tested in the bloody strife of the rebellion just past, where the nation's existence was staked upon the battle-field, in a chance at war. From this point he presented a masterly appeal as a basis of our claim. Now, [sir] to this category of argument in favor of our sacred cause, we wish to contribute. Sir, in the outset we appeal to the Legislature of a Christian people



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for our right to suffrage, upon the broad principle of human justice, as taught by the great rule, "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you." Ask them, if, in our stead, they would be willing to consent to such injustice as we suffer by them. Would they like such treatment at our hands? If honest in their answer, they will tell us no. Ask them if it was wrong for England to impose upon their forefathers "taxation without representation?" They must answer yes, or condemn their revolutionary fathers. Ask them if taxation without representation was any greater injustice imposed upon their forefathers, by England, than as imposed upon us by the law of this State? If candid, they will answer no— Why, then, will a Christian people commit such a flagrant wrong, which they so loudly condemn in others? Why will they perpetrate a knowing wrong upon a people because they know that they have not power to vindicate by force their just rights?

We appeal to them upon the principle of man's natural equal rights, as vindicated and set forth in the "Declaration of American Independence"—upon which rests the foundation of the Republic. That declaration sets forth that "All men are created equal" in human rights, or have the same natural rights, which man cannot justly invade or take away; and that to secure these rights equally to all men, "Governments are established among men, deriving

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their just powers from the consent of the governed." This is the doctrine of the Declaration of Independence; if this sentiment is wrong, why do not the American people blot it from their political creed? If it is right, then we appeal for our natural right to "Equality before the Law," as it sets forth. We appeal to them as friends of their own Republican principles, which they violate when they refuse us the right of suffrage.

We ask for our rights, upon the principle of our loyalty; we have never sworn falsely to the Government; we have never taken up arms against it,—we have never attempted to betray it into the hands of foreign powers. This is what no other race of men can truthfully assert in America. We have prayed for it—fought for it—bled for it, and perished by thousands in its defence.

We make our appeal upon the principle of our patriotism. We have consecrated every battle-field of the country with our blood, to maintain its existence, from our love to the country, while it thrusts us with a cold heart and villainous hand from all its political rights and immunities. We rallied around its only standard of hope and fought in, deadly battle, the countries worst foes, foreign and domestic. He who doubts this, let him read the history of the death warrants of the battle grounds from

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Bunker Hill to Richmond, where black American warriors now sleep in their bloody winding sheets, in thousands. No race on American soil, has given such proof of patriotism as the black race; without boasting, we challenge a refutation of this position. We ask history, has any other nation on earth, under the light of Christianity, (but America), disfranchised its most loyal and patriotic citizens; preferring to grant franchise to those that have desired and aimed to destroy the Government? We ask our Government to be as Republican as England, though pronounced a tyrannical monarchy. She gives her *black* and her *white* citizens alike privileges in political franchise; while in Republican America, white citizens only have the universal privilege of suffrage. We ask for our right to "Equality before the Law" upon the principle, that, if it does not degrade the white man to fight along side of the negro on the battle-field to save the country, or save the lives of white American citizens, it will not degrade white men, to vote side by side with negroes, to preserve a Republican form of Government, and preserve the country from another war, which it does not require inspiration to predict, if the claims of justice are not meted out in Government affairs. We claim our rights of suffrage upon the ground that the opponents of our right to "Equality before the Law," have never adduced a single sound argument to prove what they raise as an objection

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to our right of suffrage; that is, that it will degrade the white man, deteriorate the Saxon race, amalgamate the two races, and take the country out of the white men's hands. We can prove by calling the history of the country to our support that the spirit that opposes the black man's right to "Equality before the Law," has been baptised by the very institution of the country, (slavery), that has been fostering for two and a half centuries, the very evils of which our enemies pretend to fear.

The thirteen original States, at one period of their history, (all but South Carolina), allowed their colored citizens to vote; and history does not place a single fact upon record, showing that granting the negroes the right of suffrage in any of those States engendered amalgamation of the black and white races, or that it caused a deterioration of the Saxon race, nor was the Government ever threatened with black sovereignty. No! this was not the fear of political power in the black man's hand; it was slavery looking out for its own interest, feared the free negro in political power; because he was of the enslaved race, and in stronger sympathy with the slave; it took its stand-point in South Carolina, and swept from the negro's hand the ballot box in every State it could influence politically; and it is the spirit of slavery that now opposes negro suffrage throughout the land.

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We hurl back with scorn and contempt the frequent intimation of scurrilous newspapers that granting us "Equality before the Law," would induce us to thrust ourselves into the society of the whites. Notwithstanding they, through their beloved institution of slavery, have thrust their race upon us,—we want it to be particularly understood, we never have had and are not likely to have, any particular fondness for the Saxon race above our own. Whatever isolated cases of amalgamation of the two races have occurred in any part of the country, on marriage principles, on the part of the whites it has been mostly the Irish, who pretend to be the most violent enemies of negro rights; and what is a remarkable truth, that where such conjugal unity takes place, while the party of the Celtic race retains his caste or social standing, the party of the African race looses his caste or social standing generally among his sable brethren, of the higher order of society. We appeal to every true American whose voice shall resound in the proud capital over which the glorious stars and stripes shall float, to give us our rights in the name and spirit of the murdered and immortal Lincoln, who sealed our rights with his hallowed blood, who said this people, (the colored), ought to have "Equality before the Law."

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