

# Hidden History

The Unsung Saga of the Black Man

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## The Message Is The Same

NO ERA in the history of the Negro has produced as total a commitment and near unanimity of the Negro people in the cause of freedom than existed in the Abolitionist era. Of particular interest is the fact that there were great divisions among white Abolitionists in support of political action to combat slavery, but there is indisputable evidence that Negroes totally supported political action in the struggle.

In 1853, there was a convention call for an assembly of the free colored people from all parts of the United States. Considered the most representative of the pre-Civil War National Negro Conventions, the conclave was held in Rochester, New York, July 6-8.

An address to the American people was prepared for the convention by a committee consisting of Frederick Douglass, J. M. Wagoner, the Rev. A. N. Freeman and George B. Vashon. That address of the Colored National Convention to the People of the United States is reproduced here.

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"Fellow Citizens: Met in convention as delegates, representing the Free Colored people of the United States; charged with the responsibility of inquiring into the general condition of our people, and of devising measures which may, with the blessing of God, tend to our mutual improvement and elevation; conscious of entertaining no motives, ideas, or aspirations, but such as are in accordance with truth and justice, and are compatible with the highest good of our country and the world, with a cause as vital and worthy as that for which (nearly eighty years ago) your fathers and our fathers bravely contended, and in which they gloriously triumphed--we deem it proper, on this occasion, as one method of promoting the honorable ends for which we have met, and of discharging our duty to those in whose name we speak, to present the claims of our common cause to your candid, earnest, and favorable consideration.

AS AN apology for addressing you, fellow-citizens! we cannot announce the discovery of any new principle adapted to ameliorate the condition of mankind. The great truths of moral and political science, upon which we rely and which we press upon your consideration, have been evolved and enunciated by you. We point to your principles, your wisdom, and to your great example for the full justification of our cause this day. That "ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL": that "LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS" ARE THE RIGHT OF ALL; that "TAXATION AND REPRESENTATION" SHOULD GO TOGETHER; that GOVERNMENTS ARE TO PROTECT, NOT TO DESTROY, THE RIGHTS OF MANKIND; that THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES WAS FORMED TO ESTABLISH JUSTICE, PROMOTE THE GENERAL WELFARE, AND SECURE THE BLESSING OF LIBERTY TO ALL THE PEOPLE OF THIS COUNTRY; THAT RESISTANCE TO TYRANTS IS OBEDIENCE TO GOD--are American principles and maxims, and together they form and constitute the constructive elements of the American government. From this elevated platform, provided by the Republic for us, and for all the children of men, we address you. In doing so, we would have our spirit properly discerned. On this point we would gladly free ourselves and our cause from all misconception. We shall affect no especial timidity, nor can we pretend to any great boldness. We know our poverty and weakness, and your wealth and greatness. Yet we will not attempt to repress the spirit of liberty within us, or to conceal, in any wise, our sense of justice and the dignity of our cause.

WE ARE Americans, and as Americans, we would speak to Americans. We address you not as aliens nor as exiles, humbly asking to be permitted to dwell among you in peace; but we address you as American citizens asserting their rights on their own native soil. Neither do

we address you as enemies, (although the recipients of innumerable wrongs;) but in the spirit of patriotic good will. In assembling together as we have done, our object is not to excite pity for ourselves, but to command respect for our cause, and to obtain justice for our people. We are not malefactors imploring mercy; but we trust we are honest men, honestly appealing for righteous judgment, and ready to stand or fall by that judgment. We do not solicit unusual favor, but will be content with rough-handed 'fair play.' We are neither lame nor blind, that we should seek to throw off the responsibility of our own existence, or to cast ourselves upon public charity for support. We would not lay our burdens upon other men's shoulders; but we do ask, in the name of all that is just and magnanimous among men, to be freed from all the unnatural burdens and impediments with which American customs and American legislation have hindered our progress and improvement. We ask to be disencumbered of the load of popular reproach heaped upon us--for no better cause than that we wear the complexion given us by our God and our Creator.

WE ASK that in our native land, we shall not be treated as strangers, and worse than strangers.

We ask that, being friends of America, we should not be treated as enemies of America.

We ask that, speaking the same language, and being of the same religion, worshipping the same God, owing our redemption to the same Savior, and learning our duties from the same Bible, we shall not be treated as barbarians.

We ask that, having the same physical, moral, mental, and spiritual wants, common to other members of the human family, we shall also have the same means which are granted and secured to others to supply those wants.

We ask that the doors of the school-houses, the work-shop, the church, the college, shall be thrown open as freely to our children as to the children of other members of the community.

We ask that the American government shall be so administered as that beneath the broad shield of the Constitution, the colored American seaman, shall be secure in his life, liberty and property, in every State in the Union.

WE ASK that as justice knows no rich, no poor, no black, no white, but like the government of God, renders alike to every man reward or punishment, according as his works shall be--the white and black may stand upon an equal footing before the laws of the lands.

We ask that (since the right of trial by jury is a safeguard of liberty, against the encroachments of power, only as it is a trial by impartial men, drawn indiscriminately from the country) colored men shall not, in every instance, be tried by white persons; and that colored men shall not be either by custom or enactment excluded from the jury-box.

We ask that (inasmuch as we are, in common with other American citizens, supporters of the State, subject to its laws, interested in its welfare, liable to be called upon to defend it in time of war, contributors to its wealth in time of peace) the complete and unrestricted right of suffrage, which is essential to the dignity even of the white man, be extended to the Free Colored man also.

Whereas, the colored people of the United States have too long been retarded and impeded in the development and improvement of their natural faculties and powers, ever to become dangerous rivals to white men, in the honorable pursuits of life, liberty and happiness; and whereas, the proud Anglo-Saxon can need no arbitrary protection from open and equal competition with any variety of the human family; and whereas, laws have been enacted limiting the aspirations of colored men, as against white men--we respectfully submit that such laws are flagrantly unjust to the man of color, and plainly discreditable to white men; and for these and other reasons, such laws ought to be repealed.

WE ESPECIALLY urge that all laws and usages which preclude the enrollment of colored men in the militia, and prohibit their bearing arms in the navy disallow their rising, agreeable to their merits and attainments--are unconstitutional--the constitution knowing no color--are anti-Democratic, since Democracy respects men as equals--are unmagnanimous, since such laws are made by the many, against the few, and by the strong against the weak.

We ask that all those cruel and oppressive laws, whether enacted at the South or the North, which aim at the expatriation of the free people of color, shall be stamped with national repro-

bation, denounced as contrary to the humanity of the American people, and as an outrage upon the Christianity and civilization of the nineteenth century.

We ask that the right of pre-emption, enjoyed by all white settlers upon the public lands, shall also be enjoyed by colored settlers; and that the word 'white' be struck from the pre-emption act. We ask that no appropriations whatever, state or national, shall be granted to the colonization scheme; and we would have our right to leave or to remain in the United States placed above legislative interference.

We ask that the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, that legislative monster of modern times, by whose atrocious provisions the writ 'of habeas corpus,' the 'right of trial by jury,' have been virtually abolished, shall be repealed.

WE ASK, that the law of 1793 be so construed as to apply only to apprentices, and others really owing service or labor; and not to slaves, who can owe nothing. Finally, we ask that slavery in the United States shall be immediately, unconditionally, and forever abolished.

To accomplish these just and reasonable ends, we solemnly pledge ourselves to God, to each other, to our country, and to the world, to use all and every means consistent with the just rights of our fellow men, and with the precepts of Christianity.

We shall speak, write and publish, organize and combine to accomplish them.

(See HISTORY, page 11)

## THIS WEEK IN NEGRO HISTORY

AN "NPI" FEATURE

- July 20, 1848 World's first Women's Rights Convention held. Women's rights and anti-slavery causes were linked.
- July 21, 1861 The first Battle of Bull Run, significant victory for the Confederacy during the Civil War, was fought.
- July 21, 1939 Judge Jane Bolin, the first Negro woman judge in the U.S., was appointed by Mayor La Guardia in New York.
- July 22, 1847 Quinn Chapel AME church, one of the oldest churches in Chicago, was founded.
- July 23, 1891 Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia and one of the greatest personalities of contemporary Africa, was born. He was host of the historic Addis Ababa Summit Conference, May 22-25, 1963, at which 30 heads of African governments signed a Charter of African Unity.
- July 24, 1804 Ira Aldridge, famed Negro Shakespearean actor, was born.
- July 24, 1893 Dr. Charles S. Johnson, noted sociologist and first Negro president of Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn., was born in Bristol, Va.
- July 24, 1937 Four youths in the famous Scottsboro case were convicted; four were freed.
- July 24, 1944 Edward A. Johnson was elected to the New York legislature.
- July 25, 1966 Ulysses S. Grant was elevated from combat general to full general as result of his victorious leadership of Union forces during Civil War.
- July 26, 1847 Liberia, first all-Negro republic in Africa, declared its independence.

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