NATIONAL CONVENTION
OF
COLORED MEN,
AT
LOUISVILLE, KY.,
SEPTEMBER 24, 1883.

LOUISVILLE:
Courier-Journal Job Printing Company
1883.
OFFICERS OF

NATIONAL CONVENTION OF COLORED MEN.

PRESIDENT:

HON. FREDERICK DOUGLASS, . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Washington, D. C.

VICE-PRESIDENTS:

Alabama . . . . . . . . . . . . . G. W. Washington
Arkansas . . . . . . . . . . . . . S. J. Hollensworth
Delaware . . . . . . . . . . . . . J. B. Maginnis
District of Columbia . . . . . W. C. Chase
Georgia . . . . . . . . . . . . . W. A. Pledger
Indiana . . . . . . . . . . . . . Rev. J. L. Sweres
Illinois . . . . . . . . . . . . . W. T. Scott
Kansas . . . . . . . . . . . . . Alfred Fairfax
Kentucky . . . . . . . . . . . . . Henry Scroff
Louisiana . . . . . . . . . . . . . L. A. Martinet
Maryland . . . . . . . . . . . . . A. V. Cooper
Massachusetts . . . . . . . G. H. Ruffin
Mississippi . . . . . . . . . . . . . J. W. Randolph
Missouri . . . . . . . . . . . . . C. H. Tandy
Minnesota . . . . . . . . . . . . . J. G. Sterrett
New Jersey . . . . . . . . . . . . . Jesse Lawson
North Carolina . . . . . . . Hon. J. E. O'Hara
Ohio . . . . . . . . . . . . . Samuel J. Lewis
Pennsylvania . . . . . . . H. Price Williams
South Carolina . . . . . . . H. L. Shrewsbury
Tennessee . . . . . . . . . . . . . W. H. Young
Texas . . . . . . . . . . . . . Mack Henson
Virginia . . . . . . . . . . . . . G. M. Arnold
West Virginia . . . . . . . G. W. Hollinger
Wisconsin . . . . . . . . . . . . . J. W. Birney

SECRETARY:

J. M. GREGORY. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Washington, D. C.

ASSISTANT SECRETARIES:

W. KEATS. A. S. RICHARDSON. G. H. CLARK. W. G. ROBINSON.
ADDRESS OF HON. FRED. DOUGLASS.

FELLOW CITIZENS—Charged with the responsibility and duty of doing what we may to advance the interest and promote the general welfare of a people lately enslaved, and who, though now free, still suffer many of the disadvantages and evils derived from their former condition, not the least among which is the low and unjust estimate entertained of their abilities and possibilities as men, and their value as citizens of the republic; instructed by these people to make such representations and adopt such measures as in our judgment may help to bring about a better understanding and a more friendly feeling between themselves and their white fellow-citizens, recognizing the great fact as we do, that the relations of the American people and those of civilized nations generally depend more upon prevailing ideas, opinions and long established usages for their qualities of good and evil than upon courts of law or creeds of religion. Allowing the existence of a magnanimous disposition on your part to listen candidly to an honest appeal for fair play, coming from any class of your fellow-citizens, however humble, who may have, or may think they have, rights to assert or wrongs to redress, the members of this National Convention, chosen from all parts of the United States, representing the thoughts, feelings and purposes of colored men generally, would, as one means of advancing the cause committed to them, most respectfully and earnestly ask your attention and favorable consideration to the matters contained in the present paper.

At the outset we very cordially congratulate you upon the altered condition both of ourselves and our common country. Especially do we congratulate you upon the fact that a great reform, which for two centuries had rested on the good name of your country, has been blotted out; that chaste slavery is no longer the burden of the colored man's complaint, and that we now come to rattle no chains, to slack no fetters, to paint no horrors of the plantation to shock your sensibilities, to humble your pride, excite your pity, or to kindle your indignation. We rejoice also that one of the results of this stupendous revolution in our national history, the republic which was before divided and weakened between two hostile and irreconcilable interests, has become united and strong; that from a low plane of life, which bordered upon barbarism, it has risen to the possibility of the highest civilization; that this change has started the American Republic on a new departure, full of promise, although it has also brought you face to face with problems novel and difficult, destined to impose upon us responsibilities and duties, which, plainly enough, will tax our highest mental and moral ability for their happy solution.

Born on American soil in common with yourselves, deriving our bodies and our minds from its dust, centuries having passed away since our ancestors were torn from the shores of Africa, we, like yourselves, hold ourselves to be in every sense Americans, and that we may, therefore, venture to speak to you in a tone not lower than that which becomes earnest men and American citizens. Having watered your soil with our tears, enriched it with our blood, performed its roughest labor in time of peace, defended it against enemy in time of war, and at all times been loyal and true to its best interests, we deem it no arrogance or presumption to manifest now a common concern with you for its welfare, prosperity, honor and glory.

If the claim thus set up by us be admitted, as we think it ought to be, it may be asked what propriety or necessity can there be for the Convention, of which we are members, and why are we now addressing you in some sense as suppliants asking for justice and fair play? These questions are not new to us. From the day the call for this Convention went forth this seeming inconsistency and contradiction has been brought to our attention. From one quarter or another, sometimes with argument and sometimes without argument, sometimes with seeming pity for our ignorance, and at other times with fierce censure for our depravity, these questions have met us. With apparent surprise, astonishment and impatience we have been asked: "What more can the colored people of this country want than they now have, and what more is possible to them?" It is said they were once slaves, they are now free; they were once subjects, they are now sovereigns; they were once outside of all American institutions, they are now inside of all and are a recognized part of the whole American people. Why, then, do they hold colored National Conventions and thus insist upon keeping up the color line between themselves and their white fellow-countrymen? Do we not deny the pertinence and plausibility of these questions, nor do we shrink from a candid answer to the argument which are supposed to contain. For we do not forget that they are not only put to us by those who have no sympathy with us, but by many who wish us well, and that in any case they deserve an answer. Before, however, we proceed to answer them, we dignify this by saying that there is only one element associated with them which excites the least bitterness of feeling in us—a call for special rebuke, and that is when they fall from the lips and pens of colored men who suffer with us and ought to know better. A few such men, well known to us and the country, happening to be more fortunate in the possession of wealth, education and position than their humbler brethren, have found it convenient to chime in with the popular cry against our assembling, on the ground that we have no valid reason for this measure or for any other separate from the whites; that we ought to be satisfied with things as they are. With white men who thus object
the case is different and less painful. For there is a chance for charity. Probably as they are and have been for centuries, taught to look upon colored people as a lower order of humanity than themselves and as having few rights, if any, above domestic animals, regarding them also through the medium of their beneficent religious creeds and just laws—as if law and practice were identical—some allowance can, and perhaps ought to, be made when they misapprehend our real situation and deny our wants and assume a virtue they do not possess. But no such excuse or apology can be properly framed when we are in any way identified with us. What may be errors in others implies either baseness or imbecility in them. Such men, it seems to us, are either deficient in self-respect or too mean, servile and cowardly to assert the dignity of their manhood and that of their race. This habit that their good men among us is a disagreeable and humiliating confession. But in this respect, as in others, we are not without the consolation of company: we are not singular in the production of just such characters. All oppressed people have been thus afflicted.

It is one of the most conspicuous evils of caste and oppression, that they inevitably tend to make cowards and serviles of their victims, men never ready to bend the knee to pride and power that thrift may follow fawning, willing to buy the cause of the many to serve the ends of their men; too ready to sell a friend when they think they can thereby purchase an enemy. Specimens of this sort may be found everywhere and at all times. There are Northern men with Southern principles in the interests of slavery and Tories in the revolution for independence. There are betrayers and informers to-day in Ireland, ready to kiss the hand that smothers them and strike the arm reached out to save them. Considering our long subjection to servitude and caste, and the many temptations to which we are exposed to betray our race, we have indeed nothing to complain of, to ask or desire. There may be need of legislation, but there is no organic law is sound. Happily for us and for the honor of the republic, the United States Constitution is just, liberal and federal. The amendments to that instrument, adopted in the trying times of reconstruction of the Southern States, are a credit to the courage and statesmanhips of the leading men of that crisis. These amendments are to establish freedom, and abolish all unfair and invidious discriminations against citizens on account of race and color, so far as law can do so. In their view, citizens are neither black nor white, and all are equals. With this admission and this merited reproach to trimmers and traitors, we again come to the question, Why are we here in this National Convention? To this we answer, first, because there is a power in numbers and in union; because there are many more than the few; because the voice of a whole people, oppressed by a common injustice, is far more likely to command attention and exert an influence on the public mind than the voice of single individuals; and organized; because, coming together from all parts of the country, the members of a National convention have the means of a more comprehensive knowledge of the general situation, and may, therefore, more fairly be presumed to conceive more clearly and express more fully and wisely the policy it may be necessary for them to pursue in the premises. Because conventions of the people are in themselves favorable to the means of settling on grievances, whether real or fancied, they are the safety-valves of the Republic, a wise and safe reliance for violence, dynamo and all sorts of revolutionary action against the peace and good order of society. If they are held without sufficient reason, that fact will be manifest in their proceedings, and people will not violate at their weakness and pass on to their usual business without troubling themselves about the empty noise they are able to make. But if held with good cause and by wise, sober and earnest men, that fact will be manifest, and the result will be salutary. That good old maxim, which we have been called to us from revolutionary times, that error may be safely tolerated, while truth is left to depopulate by exposure than by silence. So much we have deemed it fit to say of conventions generally, because our country has been treated by many as if there were something radically wrong in the very idea of a convention. It has been treated as if it were some ghastly, secret conclave, sitting in darkness to devise strife and mischief. This is, however, the only serious feature in the argument against us is the one which respects color. We are asked not only why hold a convention, but, with emphasis, why have a colored convention? Why keep up this odious distinction between the colored citizens of a common country and thus give countenance to the color line? It is argued that, if colored men hold conventions, based upon color, white men may lock, white conventions based upon color, and thus keep open the chasm between one and the other class of citizens, on sufficient reason, that fact which we profess to deplore. We state the argument against us is not likely to receive a very warm, and will answer it candidly and we hope conclusively. By that answer it will be seen that the force of the objection is, after all, in sound, and in substance, no reasonable man will ever object to white men having conventions in their own interests, when they are once in office, and we them, when they are the oppressed and we the oppressors. In point of fact, however, white men are already in convention against us in various ways and at many important points. The practical construction of American life is a convention against us. Human law may know no distinction among men, in respect of rights, but human practice may. Examples are painfully abundant.

The border states hate the Indians; the Californians, the Chilianan; the Mohammedans, the Christians, and vice versa. In spite of a common nature and the equality framed into law, this hate works injustice, of which each in their own name and under their own color may justify our own. The apology for observing the color line in the composition of our State and National conventions is in its necessity and in the fact that we must do this or nothing, for if we move our color is recognized and must be. It has its foundation in the exceptional relation we sustain to the White people of the country. A simple statement of our position vindicates us once our convention and our cause. It is our lot to live among a people whose laws, traditions and prejudices have been against us for centuries, and from these they are not yet free. To assume that they are free from these evils simply because they have changed their laws is to assume what is utterly unreasonable and contrary to fact. Large bodies move slowly. Individuals may be converted on the instant and change their whole course of life. Nations never. Time and events are required for the conversion of nations. Not even the character of a great political organization can be changed by a new platform. It will be the same old snare
though in a new skin. Though we have had war, reconstruction and abolition as a nation, we still linger in the shadow and blight of an extinct institution. Though the colored man is no longer subject to be bought, and sold, he is still sur-
rounded by an adverse sentiment which fetters all his movements. In his downward course he meets with no resistance, but his course upward is re-
sent and resisted at every step of his pro-
grress. If he comes in ignorance, rags and wretch-
edness he conforms to the popular belief of his character, and in that character he is welcome. But if he shall come as a gentleman, a scholar and a statesman he is hailed as a contradiction to the National faith concerning his race, and his coming is resisted as impudence. In the one case he may provoke contempt and derision, but in the other he is an affront to
pride and provokes malice. Let him do what he will there is present, therefore, no escape for
him. The color line meets him everywhere and in a measure shuts him out from all respectable and meditative life. In spite of all your religion and laws he is a rejected man, he is rejected by trade unions, of every trade, and refused work while he lives and with when he dies, and yet he is asked to forget his color and forget that which others will not. He is free, he is free from all the pervading atmosphere of color hate. The one who prescribes the Delty as impartial, no respecter of persons and the other the God-
ess of Justice as blindfolded, with sword by her
side and scales in her hand held evenly between high and low, rich and poor, white and black, but are the images of American imagination, rather than American practice.

Taking advantages of the general disposition in this country to impute crime to color, white men color their faces to commit crimes, they wash off the hated color to escape punishment. In many instances where the commission of crime is alleged against one of our color, the ordinary processes of the law are set aside as too slow for the impetuous justice of the infrequent popu-
larities. They take the law into their own bloody hands and set aside the judicial process, and burn the alleged culprit, without the intervention of courts, judges, juries or wit-
nesses. In such cases, it is not the business of the accusers to prove guilt, but it is for the accused to prove his innocence, a thing far from any man to do, even in a court of law, and even the organized force of the commonwealth is powerless to intervene. The pulp is finally blotted, and the press in the neigh-
borhood is silent. The law, which should be the

law, is peculiarly the law for colored peo-
ple and for no others. Lynch law custom, we should be justified in as-

as we have now done, to expose and denounce it.
But this is not all. Even now, after twenty years
of so-called emancipation, we are subject to aw-
less raids of midnight riders, who, with blackened faces, invade our homes and perpetrate the foul-
est of crimes upon us and our families. This con-
dition of things is too flagrant and notorious
to require specification or proof. Thus in all the
relations of life and death we are met by the
color line. We can not ignore it if we would, and ought not if we could. It hunts us at mid-
night, it denies us accommodation in hotels and
justices in the courts; excludes our children from
schools; refuses our sons the chance to learn
trades and compels us to pursue only such as
will bring the least reward. While we recog-
nize the color line on the basis, we are the
barrier to our progress, wounding our bleeding
feet with its flinty rocks at every step, we do not
despair. We are a hopeful people. This con-
vention is a proof of our faith in you, in reason,
truth and justice—our belief that where there
is, with all it malign accompaniments, may yet
removed by peaceful means; this, assisted by time
and events and the growing enlightenment of
both races, the color line will ultimately become
harmless. When this shall come, we will care for
be used, as it should be, to distinguish one variety of
the human family from the other. It will cease
to have any civil, political or moral significance,
and colored conventions will then be dispensed
with in the anachronisms, wholly out of place, but
not till then. Do not marvel that we are not
discouraged. The faith within us has a rational
basis, and is confirmed by facts. When we mon-
ster how deep-seated this feeling against us is;
the long centuries it has been forming; the forces of
avarice, which have been marshaled to susta-

in it; how the language and literature of the
country have been perverted with it; how all the
church, the press, the play-house, and other in-
fluences of the country, have been arrayed in its
support, the progress toward its extinction
must be considered vast and wonderful. If liberty, with us, is yet another
city, and the institutions of the country are sound, just and liberal,
there is hope for a people to benefit by the
righteous, whether for the moment they conform
to their requirements or not. But until this
nation shall make its practice accord with its
Constitution and its righteous laws, it will not
do to reproach the colored people of this country
with keeping up the color line—for that people
would prove themselves scarcely worthy of even
theoretical freedom, to say nothing of practical
freedom, if they settled down in silent, servile
and cowardly submission to the wrongs, from
fear of making their color visible. They are
bound by every element of manhood to hold
conventions, in their own own power, and on their
own behalf, to keep their grievances before the
people and make every organized protest against the
wrongs inflicted upon them within their
powers. They should scorn the counsel of
cowards, and hang their banner with a rope the
northern wall. Who would be free, themselves
must strike the blow. We do not believe, as we are
told, that the negro is the ugly child of the
National family, and the more he is kept out of
sight the better it will be for him. You know
that liberty given is never so precious as liberty
sought for, and fought for. The man outraged
is the man to make the outcry. Depend upon it, men
will not care much for people who do not care for
themselves. Our meeting here was opposed by
some of our members, because it would disturb
the peace of the Republican party. The
question came from coward lips and misapprehended
the character of that party. If the Republican
party can not stand a demand for justice and
fair play, it ought to go down. We were men before that party was born, and our manhood is more sacred than any party can be. Parties were made for men, not men for parties.

If the six millions of colored people of this country, armed with the Constitution of the United States, with a million votes of their own to lean upon, and millions of white men at their back, whose hearts are responsive to the claims of humanity, have not sufficient spirit and wisdom to organize and combine to defend themselves from outrage, discrimination and oppression, it will be idle for them to expect that the Republican party or any other political party will organize and combine for them or care what comes of them. Men may combine to prevent crime, and criminals are dumb, and can not speak for themselves; but we are men and must speak for ourselves, or we shall not be spoken for at all. We have conventions in America for Ireland, but we should have none if Ireland did not speak for herself. It is because she makes a noise and keeps her cause before the people that other people go to her help. It was the same with France thatave independence, the sword of Lafayette. In conclusion upon this color objection, we have to say that we meet here in open daylight. There is nothing sinister about us. The eyes of the nation are upon us. Ten thousand people may tell if they choose of whatever is said and done here. They may condemn our wisdom and condemn our folly, precisely as we shall be wise or foolish.

We put ourselves before them as honest men, and ask their judgment upon our work.

THE LABOR QUESTION.
Not the least important among the subjects to which we invite your earnest attention is the condition of the laboring class at the South. Their cause is one with the laboring classes all over the world. The labor unions of the country should not throw away this colored element of strength. Everywhere there is dissatisfaction with the present relation of labor and capital, and to-day no subject wears an aspect more threatening to civilization than the respective claims of capital and labor, landlords and tenants. In what we have to say for our laboring classes we expect to have and ought to have the sympathy and support of laboring men everywhere and of every color.

It is a great mistake for any class of laborers to isolate itself and thus weaken the bond of brotherhood between those on whom the burdens and hardships of labor fall. The fortunate ones of the earth, who are abundant in land and money and know nothing of anxiety, care and pinching poverty of the laboring classes, may be indifferent to the appeal for justice at this time. But for the laborer who has not affording to be indifferent. What labor everywhere wants is to have and will some day demand and receive, is an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work. As the laborer becomes more intelligent he will develop what capital already possesses—that is the power to organize and combine for its own protection. Experience demonstrates that there may be a wages of slavery only a little less galling and crushing in its effects than chattel slavery, and that this slavery of wages must go down with the other.

There is nothing more common now than the remark that the physical condition of the freedmen of the South is immeasurably worse than in the time of slavery; that in respect to food, clothing and shelter they are wretched, miserable and destitute; that they are worse masters to themselves than their old masters were to them.

To add insult to injury, the reproach of their condition is charged upon themselves. A grandson of John C. Calhoun, an Arkansas landowner, testifying the other day before the Senate Committee of Labor and Education, says the negroses are so indolent that they fail to take advantage of the opportunities offered them that they will only devote so much of their time to work as will enable them to procure the necessities of life; that there is danger of a war of races,” etc., etc.

His testimony proclaims him the grandson of the man whose name he bears. The blame which belongs to his own class he shifts from them to the shoulders of labor. It becomes us to test the truth of that assertion by the light of reason, and by appeals to indubitable facts. Of course the land-owners of the South may be expected to view things differently from the landless. The slaveholders always did look at things a little differently from the slaves, and we therefore insist that, in order that the whole truth shall be brought out, the laborer as well as the capitalist shall be called as witnesses before the Senate Committee of Labor and Education. Experience proves that it takes more than one class of people to tell the whole truth about matters in which they are interested on opposite sides, and we protest against the allowance of only one side, to be heard by the country in this case. Meanwhile, a little reason and reflection will in some measure bring out truth: The colored people of the South are the laboring people of the South. The labor of a country is the source of its wealth; without the colored laborer to-day the South would be surrounded or howling wilderness, given up to bats, owls, savages and bears. He was the source of its wealth before the war, and has been the source of its prosperity since the war. He almost alone is visible in her fields, with implements of toil in his hands and laboriously using them to-day.

Let us look candidly at the matter. While we see and hear that the South is more prosperous than it ever was before the war, and is rapidly recovering from the waste of war, while we read that it raises more cotton, sugar, rice, tobacco, corn and other valuable products than she ever produced before, how happens it, we sternly ask, that the houses of its laborers are miserable huts, that their clothes are rags, and their food the coarsest and scantiest? How happens it that the landlord is becoming richer and the laborer poorer? The implication is irremissible—that where the landlord is prosperous the laborer ought to share his prosperity, and whenever and wherever we find this is not the case there is manifestly wrong somewhere.

This sharp contrast of wealth and poverty, as every thoughtful man knows, can exist only in one way, and from one cause, and that is by one getting more than its proper share of the reward of industry, and the other getting less—and that in some way that has never been determined, or otherwise denied of its due proportion, and we think the facts support this philosophy, will support this view in the present case, and do so conclusively. We utterly deny that the colored people of the South are too lazy to work, or that they are indifferent to their physical wants; as already said, they are the workers of that section. The trouble is not that the colored people of the South are indolent, but that no matter how hard or how persistent may be their labor to support life at the very low point at which we find them. We therefore throw the burden of disgrace and reproach from the laborer where Mr. Calhoun and others of that labor question to be heard by the bond-owner where it belongs. It is the old case over again. The black man does the work and the white man gets the money.

It may be said after all the colored people have themselves to blame for this state of things, because they have not intelligently take n the matter into their own hands and provided a remedy for the evil they suffer.
Some blame may attach at this point. But those who reproach us, should remember that it is hard for labor, however fortunately and favorably surrounded, to cope with the tremendous power of capital in any contest for higher wages or improved condition. A strike for higher wages is seldom successful and is often injurious to the strikers; the losses sustained are seldom compensated by the concessions gained. A case in point is the recent arrest of twelve strike leaders and operators, a more intelligent class can no where be found. It was a contest of brains against money, and the want of money compelled intelligence to surrender to wealth.

An empty sack is not easily made to stand upright. The man who has it in his power to say to a man you must work the land for me, for such wages as I choose to give, has, as a power over him as real, if not as complete, as he who compels toll under the lash. All that a man hath will be given for his life.

In contemplating the little progress made by the colored people in the acquisition of property in the South, and their present wretched condition, the circumstances of their emancipation should not be forgotten. Measurement in their case should not begin from the height yet to be attained by them, but from the depths whence they have come.

If should be remembered by our severe judges that freedom came to us not from the sober dictates of wisdom, or from any normal condition of things, not as a matter of choice on the part of the land-owners of the South, nor from moral considerations on the part of the North. It was born of the fields of smoke and fire, strewn with wounded, bleeding and dying men. Not from the Heaven of Peace amid the morning stars, but from the hell of war—out of the tempest and whirlwind of war—out of the blood of those who had a deadly hate and a spirit of revenge, it came, not so much as a boon to us as a blast to the enemy. Those against whom this measure was directed were the land owners, and they were not angels, but men, and being men, it was to be expected they would resent the blow. They did resent it, and a part of that resentment unhappily fell upon us.

First the land owners drove us out of our old quarters and told us we did not want us in their fields, that they meant to import German, Irish and Chinese laborers. But as the passions of the war gradually subsided we were taken back to our old places; but plainly enough this change of front was not from choice but necessity. Feeling themselves somehow or other entitled to our land without the payment of wages, it was not strange that they should make the hardest bargains for our labor and get it for as little as possible. For them the contest was easy; their tremendous power and our weakness easily gave them the victory.

Against the voice of Stevens, Sumner and Wade, and other far seeing statesmen, the Government by which we were emancipated left us completely in the power of our former owners. They turned us loose to the open sky and left us not a foot of ground from which to get a crust of bread.

It did not do as well by us as Russia did by her serfs, or Pharaoh did by the Hebrews. With freedom Russia gave land and Egypt loaned jewelry.

It may have been best to leave us thus to make terms with those whose wrath it had kindled against us. It does not seem right that we should have been so left, but it fully explains our present poverty and wretchedness.

The marvel is not that we are poor in such circumstances, but rather that we were not exterminated. In view of the circumstances, our extermination was confidently predicted. The facts that we still live and have increased in higher ratio than the native white people of the South are proofs of our vitality, and, in some degree, of our industry.

Nor is it to be wondered at that the standard of morals is not higher among us, that respect for the rights of property is not stronger. The power of life and death held over labor which says you shall work for me on my own terms or starve, is a source of crime, as well as poverty.

Weeds do not more naturally spring out of a manure pile than crime out of our soil. Landlordism is an evil, in its consequences. Out of the misery of Ireland comes murder, assassination, fire and sword. The Irish are by nature no worse than other people, and no better. If oppression makes a wise man mad it may do the same, and worse, to a people who are not reputed wise. The woe pronounced upon those who keep back wages of the laborer by fraud is self acting and self executing and certain as death. The world is full of warnings.

The Order System.

No more crafty and effective device for defrauding the Southern laborers could be conceived than the one that substitutes orders upon shopkeepers for currency in payment of wages. It has the merit of a show of honesty, while it puts the laborer completely at the mercy of the landowner and the shop-keeper. He is between the upper and the nether millstones, and is hence ground to dust. It gives the shop-keeper a customer who can trade with no other storekeeper, and thus leaves the latter no motive for fair dealing except his own moral sense, which is never too strong. While the laborer holding the orders is tempted by their worthlessness as a circulating medium, to get rid of them at any sacrifice, and hence is led into extravagance and consequent destitution.

The merchant puts him off with his poorest commodities at highest prices, and can say to him those are things that cost money. This means the laborer is brought into debt, and hence is kept always in the power of the landowner. When this system is pursued a man's land is rented to the freedman; he is charged more for the use of an acre of land for a single year than the land would bring in the market if offered for sale. On such a system of fraud and wrong one might well invoke a bolt from heaven—red with uncommon wrath.

It is said if the colored people do not like the conditions upon which their labor is demanded and secured, let them leave and go elsewhere. A more heartless suggestion never emanated from an oppressor. Having for years paid them in shop orders, utterly worthless outside the shop to which they are directed, the little money they have in their pockets, bought by this crafty process into bondage to the land-owners, who can and would arrest them if they should attempt to leave when they are told to go.

We commend the whole subject to the Senate Committee of Labor and Education, and urge upon that committee the duty to call before it not only the land-owners and shopkeepers, the laborers of the South, and thus get at the whole truth concerning the labor question of that section.

Education.

On the subject of equal education and educational facilities, mentioned in the call for this convention, we expect little resistance from any quarter. It is everywhere an accepted truth that in a country governed by the people, like ours, education of the youth of all classes is vital to its welfare, prosperity, and to its existence.

In the light of this unquestioned proposition, the patriotism cannot but view with a shudder the widespread and truly alarming illiteracy as revealed by the census of 1880.

The question as to how evil this is to be remedied is an important one. Certain it is that it will not do to trust to the philanthropy of wealthy individuals or benevolent societies to remove it.
The States in which this illiteracy prevails either can not or will not provide adequate systems of education for their own youth. But however this may be, the fact remains that the whole country is directly interested in the education of every child that lives within its borders. The ignorance of any part of the American people so deeply concerns all the rest that there can be no doubt of the right to pass laws compelling the attendance of every child at school. Believing that such is now required and ought to be enacted, we hereby put our names on record in favor of stringent laws to this end.

In the presence of this appalling picture presented by the last census we hold it to be the imperative duty of Congress to take hold of this important subject, and, without waiting for the States to adopt liberal school systems within their respective jurisdictions, to enter vigorously upon the work of universal education.

The National Government, with its immense resources, can see the benefits of a sound common-school education to the door of every poor man from Maine to Texas, and to withhold this boon to neglect the greatest assurance it has of its own perpetuity. As a part of the American people we are most emphatically with others who have already spoken on this subject, in urging Congress to lay the foundation for a great national system of aid to education at its next session.

In this connection, and as germane to the subject of education under national auspices, we would most respectfully and earnestly request Congress to authorize the appointment of a commission of three or more persons of suitable character and qualifications to ascertain the legal claims of those in arms, and set apart as far as they can, to a large fund now in the United States treasury, appropriated for the payment of bounties of colored soldiers and sailors, and to provide by law that at the expiration of three or five years, the balance remaining in the treasury be distributed among the colored colleges of the country, giving the preference as to amounts to the schools that are doing effective work in industrial branches.

FREEDMEN'S BANK.

The colored people have suffered much on account of the failure of the Freedmen's bank. Their loss by this institution was a peculiar hardship, coming as it did upon them in the days of their greatest weakness. It is certain that the depositors in this institution were led to believe that as Congress had chartered it and established its headquarters at the capital the Government in some way was responsible for the safekeeping of their money.

Without the dissemination of this belief it would never have had the confidence of the people as it did nor have secured such an immense deposit. Nobody authorized to speak for the Government ever corrected this deception, but on the contrary, Congress continued to legislate for the bank as if all that had been claimed for it was true.

Under these circumstances, together with much more that might be said in favor of such a measure, we ask Congress to reimburse the unfortunate victims of that institution, and thus carry hope and give to many fresh encouragement in the battle of life.

BOUNTY AND PENSION LAWS.

We desire, also, to call the attention of Congress and the country to the bounty and pension laws, and to the filing of original claims. We ask for the passage of an act extending the time for filing original claims beyond the present limit.

This we do for the reason that many of the soldiers and sailors that served in the war of the rebellion and their heirs, and especially colored claimants living in parts of the country where they have but meagre means of information, have been and still are ignorant of their rights and the methods of enforcing them.

But while we urge these duties on Congress and the country, we must never forget that any race worthy living will live, and whether Congress heeds our request in these and other particulars or not, we must demonstrate our capacity to live by living. We must acquire property and educate the hands and hearts and heads of our children, whether we are helped or not. Races that fail to do these things die politically and socially, and are only fit to die.

One great source of independence that has been sought by multitudes of our white fellow-citizens is still open to us; we refer to the public lands in the great West. The amazing rapidity with which the public lands are being taken up warns us that we must lay hold of this opportunity soon, or it will be gone forever. The Government gives to every actual settler, under certain conditions, 160 acres of land. By writing a letter to the United States Land Office, Washington, D. C., any person will receive full information in regard to this subject. Thousands of white men have settled on these lands with scarcely any money beyond their immediate wants, and in a few years have found themselves the lords of a 160 acre farm. Let us do likewise.

CIVIL RIGHTS.

The right of every American citizen to select his own society and invite whom he will to his own parlor and table, should be sacrally respected. A man’s house is his castle, and if he has a right to admit or refuse admission to it as he may please, and defend his house from all intruders even with force, if need be. This right belongs to the humblest not less than the highest, and the exercise of it by any of our citizens to ward anybody or class who may presume to intrude, should cause no complaint, for each and all may exercise the same right toward whom he will.

When he quits his home and goes upon the public street, enters a public car or a public house, he has no exclusive right of occupancy. He is only a part of the great public, and while he has the right to walk, ride and be accommodated with food and shelter in public conveyance or hotel, he has no exclusive right to say that another citizen, tall or short, black or white, shall not have the same civil treatment with himself. The argument against equal rights at hotels is very improperly put upon the ground that the exercise of such rights, is it insisted, is social equality. But this ground is unreasonable. It is hard to say what social equality is, but it is certain that going into the same street-car, hotel or steamboat cabin, does not make any man society for another any more than the same air makes all birds of one feather.

Two men may be seated at the same table at a hotel, one may be a Webster in intellect, and the other a Gutenbe in feebleness of mind and morals, and, of course, socially and intellectually, they are as wide apart as are the poles of the moral universe, but their civil rights are the same. This distinction between the two sorts of equality is broad and plain to the understanding of the most limited, and yet, blinded by prejudice, men never cease to confound one with the other, and allow themselves to infringe the civil rights of their fellow-citizens. This is done in some way in violation of their social rights.

That this denial of rights to us is because of our color, only as color, is a fact manifest in the fact that no matter how decently dressed or well-behaved a colored man may be, he is denied civil treatment in the ways thus pointed out, unless he comes as a servant. His color, not his character, determines the place he shall hold and the kind of treatment he shall receive.

This is due to a prejudice and has no rational principle under it, is seen in the fact that...
the presence of colored persons in hotels and rail

cars is only offensive when they are there as guests
and passengers. As servants they are welcome; but
as equal citizens they are not. It is also seen in
the further fact that nowhere else on the globe,
except in the United States, are colored people
subject to insult and outrage on account of color.
The colored traveler in Europe does not
meet it, and we denounce it here as a disgrace to
American civilization and American religion and
as a violation of the spirit and letter of the Con-
stitution of the United States. From those courts
which solemnly sworn to support the Con-
stitution and that yet treat this provision of it
with contempt we appeal to the people, and call
upon our friends to remember our civil rights at
the ballot-box. On the point of the two equal-
ties we are determined to be understood.
We leave social equality where it should be
left, with each individual man and woman. No
law can regulate or control it. It is a matter
with which Governments have nothing what-
soever to do. Each may choose his own friends and
associates without interference or dictation of,
any.

POLITICAL EQUALITY.

Flagrant as have been the outrages com-
mitted upon colored citizens in respect to their
civil rights, more flagrant, shocking and scan-
dalous still have been the outrages committed
upon our political rights, by means of bull-doz-
ing and Kidnapping, Mississippi plans, fraudulent
counts, tissue ballots and the like devices. Three
States in which the colored people outnumber
the white population are without colored rep-
resentation and their political voice suppressed.
The colored citizens in those States are virtually
disfranchised, the Constitution held in utter con-
tempt and its provisions nullified. This has been
done in the face of the Republican party and
successive Republican Administrations.

It was once said by the great O'Connell that
the history of Ireland might be traced like a
wounded man through a crowd by the blood, and
the same may be truly said of the history of the
colonized voters of the South.

They have marched to the ballot-box in face of
guns, clubs, weapons, wounds and death. They
have been abandoned by the Government and left
to the laws of nature. So far as they are con-
cerned, there is no Government or Constitution
of the United States.

They are under control of a foul, haggard and
damning conspiracy against reason, law and con-
stitution. How you can be indifferent, how any
leading colored men can allow themselves to be
silent in presence of this state of things, we can
not see.

"Should tongues be mute while deeds are
wrought which well might shame extremest hell!"
And yet they are mute, and conspire our
assembling here to speak out in manly tones
against the continuance of this infernal reign of
terror.

This is no question of party. It is a question of
law and government. It is a question whether
men shall be protected by law or be left to the
mercy of cyclone of anarchy and bloodshed. It
is whether the Government or the mob shall rule
this land; whether the promises solemnly made
to us in the Constitution be manfully kept or
meantly and disgracefully broken. Upon this vital
point we ask the whole people of the United

States to take notice that whatever of political
power we have shall be exerted for no man of
any party who will not in advance of election
promise to use every power given him by the
Government, State or National, to make the
black man's path to the ballot-box as straight,
smooth and safe as that of any other American
citizen.

POLITICAL AMBITION.

We are as a people often reproached with am-
bitious for political offices and honors. We are
not ashamed of this ambition. Our des-
tination of such ambition would be our real
shame. If the six millions and a half of people
whom we represent could develop no aspirants
to political office and honor under this Govern-
ment, their mental and material wants and
stolidity might well enough be taken as proof of
the usefulness for American citizenship.

It is no crime to seek the highest office. If it were
it would take a larger space than that of Noah's
Ark to hold the white criminals.

One of the charges against this convention is
that it seeks for the colored people a larger share
than they now possess in the offices and emolu-
ments of the Government.

We are now significantly reminded by even one
of our own members that we are only twenty
years out of slavery, and we ought therefore to
be modest in our aspirations. Such leaders should
remember that men will not be religious when
the devil turns preacher.

The honest and persistent office seeker and
office-holder should not be indicted when he pro-
duces high officials and blackboards that virtue to others which he does not himself
practice. Woodsey could not tell Cromwell to
flog away ambition properly only when he had
shung away his own.

We are far from affirming that there may not
be too much zeal among colored men in pursuit
of political preference; but the fault is not
wholly theirs. They are but the victims of a
system which makes them noble and true, who are educated and intell-
ligent—fit to engage in enterprise of "pith and
moment"—who find themselves shut out from
nearly all the avenues of wealth and respectabili-
ty, and hence turn their attention to politics.
They do so because they can find nothing else.
The best cure for the evil is to throw open other
avenues of wealth and respectability.

We shall never cease to be a despised and per-
secuted class while we are known to be excluded
by our color from all important positions under
the Government.

While we do not make offices the one thing im-
portant, nor the one condition of our alliance
with any party, and hold that the welfare, prosp-
erity and happiness of our whole coun-
try is the true criterion of political action for
ourselves and for all men, we can not disguise
from ourselves the fact that our persistent
exclusion from office as a class is a great wrong,
frugted with injury, and ought to be remedied
and opposed by all reasonable and effective
means in our power.

We hold it to be self-evident that no class or
color should be the exclusive rulers of this coun-
try. If there is such a ruling class, there must
of course be a subject class, and when this con-
tion is once established this Government of the
people, by the people and for the people, will
have perished from the earth.
Address of the Colored National Convention
To the people of the United States

Fellow Citizens,

Charged with the responsibility and duty of doing what we may to advance the interest and promote the general welfare of a people lately enslaved, and who though now free, still suffer many of the disadvantages and evils derived from their former condition, not the least among which, is the low and unjust estimate entertained of their abilities and possibilities, as men, and their value as citizens of the Republic; induced by these people to make such representations and adopt such measures as in our judgment may help to bring about a better understanding and a more friendly feeling between themselves and their white fellow citizens, recognizing the great fact, as we do, that the relations of the American people and those of civilized nations generally depend more upon prevailing ideas, opinions, and long established usage, for their qualities of good and evil than upon Courts of law, or creeds of religion, allowing a magnanimous disposition on your part to listen candidly to an honest appeal for fair play, coming from any class of your fellow citizens however humble, who may have, or may think they
have, rights to assert, or wrongs to redress, we, the members of this National Convention, chosen from all parts of the United States and as we believe, represent the thoughts, feelings, and purposes of colored men generally, as one means of advancing the Cause committed to us, would most respectfully and earnestly ask your attention and favorable consideration to the matters contained in the present paper.

At the outset we would very cordially congratulate you upon the altered condition both of ourselves and our common country. Especially do we congratulate you upon the fact that a great reproach which rested on the good name of the Republic, has been blotted out and that chattel slavery is no longer the burden of the colored man's complaint; that we come to battle no chains, to clank no fetters, to paint no horrors of the old plantation and of involuntary servitude, to shock your sensibilities, to humble your pride, excite your pity, or to kindle your indignation. We thankfully recognize these as things of the past, which have disappeared and are buried forever. As one of the secrets of this stupendous revolution in our National history, the country which was before divided and
weakened between two hostile and irreconcilable interests, has become united and strong; that from a low plane of life, which bordered upon barbarism, it has risen to the possibility of the highest civilization, that this change, has started the American Republic on a new departure, full of promise, although it has also brought you and ourselves, face to face with problems novel and difficult, destined to impose upon us responsibilities and duties, which plainly enough, will tax our highest mental and moral ability for their happy solution.

Born on American soil in common with yourselves, deriving our bodies and our minds from its dust, Centuries have passed away since our ancestors were born from the shores of Africa, we like yourselves, hold ourselves to be in every sense American, and may therefore, venture to speak to you in a tone, not lower than that which becomes earnest Men and American Citizens. Having watered your soul with our tears, enriched it with our blood, performed its labor in time of peace, defended it against enemies, in time of war, and at all times loyal and true to its highest interests, we deem it no arrogance or presumption...
to manifest a common concern with you, in the welfare, prosperity, honor and glory of our common country.

If the claim thus set up by us is admitted, as we think it ought to be, it may be asked what propriety or necessity can there be for the convention of which we are members? and why are we not addressing you in some sense, as suppliants asking for justice and fair play? These questions are not new; from the day the call for this convention was issued, this seeming incongruity and contradiction was brought to our attention. From one quarter or another, sometimes with argument and sometimes without argument, sometimes with seeming pity for our ignorance, and at other times with censure for our depri vity and ingratitude. These questions have been pressed upon us. With apparent surprise, astonishment and impatience we have been asked, what more can the colored people of this country want than they now have? and what more is possible to them? It is said they were once slaves, they are now free, they were once subjects, they are now sovereigns, they were once outside of all American institutions, they are now inside of all and are a recognized part of...
the whole American people. Why then is asked, do they hold
Colored National Conventions and thus insist upon keeping up
the color line? We do not deny the pertinence and plausibility of these questions, nor do we shrink from a candid answer
answered to the argument which they are supposed to contain.
They are not only put to us by those who have no sympathy
with us, but by many who wish us well. They therefore deserve
the care and attention associated with an answer. The only element in them, which excites the
least bitterness or feeling in us, is where they fall from the lips of
and pens of colored men who ought to know, and we think
we know better. A few such men, happening to be more fortunate
in the possession of wealth, education and position, than
their humble brethren, have found it convenient to chime in
with the popular cry against our assembling, on the ground
that we have no valid reason for this measure. With other
objectives, the case is different. There is some chance for charity toward white men who thus object. Educated as they are,
and have been for centuries, taught to look upon colored people
as a lower order of humanity and as having few rights if any.
to suffering animals at all. Regarding them through the medium of beneficent religious creeds and just laws, as if laws and practice were identical, some allowance can, and ought—-to be made for them when they misapprehend our real situation and, wants. But no such excuse or apology can be properly formed for men, in any way identified with us, that may be erroneous in others, implies baseness or insubordinate likeness, and appears that they must be either deficient in self respect—-or otherwise too servile and cowardly to assert the true dignity of their manhood. To admit that there are such men amongst us may be distressing and disgraceful and humiliating. We are however, in this respect, not without the consolation of company, for we are neither alone nor singular in the production of such characters. All oppressed peoples have been thus afflicted. It is one of the most conspicuous ends of caste and oppression, that they tend to make cowards and serviles of their victims, ever ready to bend the knee to power, that they may follow fawning, ready to betray the cause of the many to serve the ends of the few, and never, heedless, to sell a friend when they think they can buy an enemy.
Specimens of this sort may be found everywhere and at all times. There were northern men with northern principles in the time of slavery, and Tories in the revolt for independence. These are betrayers and informers to day in Ireland, ready to kiss the hand that smiles on them, and strike down the arm reached out to save them. Considering our long subjection to despotism and caste, and the many temptations to which we are exposed to betray our race, the wonder is not, that we have so many traitors amongst us as that we have so few. The most of our people are remarkably sound and true to each other.

To those who think we have no cause to hold this convention we freely admit that so far as the organic law of the land is concerned, we have indeed, nothing to complain of, to ask or desire. Happily for us and for the honor of the Republic the U.S. Constitution is just, liberal, and friendly. The amendments to that instrument adopted in the trying times of reconstruction of the Southern States, are a credit to the courage and statesmanship of the leading men of that crisis. These amendments establish freedom and abolish so far
as the supreme law of the land can abolish all unfair and
invidious discrimination against citizens on account of race
and color. In the view Citizens are neither black nor white
and all are equal.

With this admission, we again come to the question: Why are
we here in this National Convention? To this, we answer first:
Because there is a power in numbers and in union: Because
the many are more than the few: Because the voice of a
whole people opposed by a common injustice, is far more
likely to command attention and exert an influence on
the public mind than the voice of single individuals and
isolated organizations: Because coming together from all
parts of the country, the members of a National Convention
have thus afforded them the means of a more comprehen-
sive knowledge of the general situation, and may therefore:
fairly be presumed to express more fully and wisely, the policy
it may be necessary for them to pursue: Because Conven-
tions of the people are in themselves harmless, and when made
the means of setting forth grievances, whether real or fancied
are the safety values of the Republic, a wise and safe substitute for violence, dynamite and all sorts of revolutionary action against the peace and good order of society.

If they are held without sufficient reason, that fact will be made manifest in their proceedings and people will only smile at their weakness, and pass on to their usual business, without troubling themselves about their empty noise, if noise they make. But if held with good cause and by wise, sober and earnest men, that fact will be made apparent, and the result salutary.

That good old maxim, that error may be safely tolerated, while truth is left free to combat it, applies here. As bad law, is all the sooner repealed by being executed, and error is sooner dispelled by exposure than by silence.

So much we have deemed it fit to say. Of conventions generally: because our reason & this measure has been treated by many as if there were something radically wrong in the very idea of a convention as if it were some secret counsel to sit in darkness to devise mischief.

The fact is, the only serious feature, in the argument against us, is the one which respects color. We are asked with emphasis, why hold a colored convention? Why keep up this odious dis-
tinction between citizens of a Common Country. and thus give com-
turance to the color line? It is argued that if colored men hold con-
ventions based upon color, while men may hold while conventions 
based upon color and thus keep open the channels between one and 
the other class of citizens, and keep alive a prejudice which we profess 
to deplore. We state the argument openly, as fairly and forcibly 
and will answer it candidly. By that answer it will be seen that 
the force is more in sound than in substance. No reasonable men 
will ever object to white men, who may deem it wise to hold 
conventions in their own interest, when they are once in our condi-
In point of fact, whitemen are already in convention 
and we in theirs. Human nature is, everywhere the same 
throughout, the colors of men differ. and human nature knows no 
distinction among men in respect of rights, but unfortunately Na-
tions do know and practice such distinctions. Examples are 
painfully abundant. The border men hate the Indians, the Califor-
nian the Chinaman, the Mahometan the Christian, and vice-
and the equality framed into laws 
and in spite of the protests of a common nature, this hate 
works injustice of which each may justly complain. 

The apology for observing the color line, in the composition
Of our State and National Conventions, is complete and conclusive when it is observed that it has its foundation in the exceptional relation we sustain to the white people of the country. A simple statement of our position, vindicates at once our Convention and our cause.

It is our lot to live among a people whose laws, traditions and prejudices, have been against us for centuries, and from these yet they are not free. To assume that they are free from these because they have changed their laws, is to assume what is utterly unreasonable. Large bodies move slowly. Individuals may be converted upon the instant. Nations never. Time and events are required for the conversion of nations and of great political organizations. Though we have had war, reconstruction and abolition, as a nation we still linger in the shadow of an extinct institution and though the colored man is no longer subjected to be bought and sold he is still surrounded by an adverse sentiment which fetters all his movements. In his downward course he meets with no resistance, but his course upward, is resisted and resisted at every step. If he comes in ignorance, vice, and wretchedness, he conforms to the
popular belief of his character, and in that character he is welcome. But if he shall come as a gentleman, a scholar and a statesman, he is hailed as a contradiction to the national faith concerning his race, and his coming is resented as impudence. In the one case, he is contumely and may provoke denunciation. In the other, he is an affront to pride, and provokes malice. Let him do what he will, there is no escape for him. The color line meets him everywhere, and in a measure shuts him out from all respectable and profitable work. He is rejected by trades unions and refused work and opportunities for business, trade and calling.

If he offers himself to a builder, as a mechanic, to a client as a lawyer, to a patient as a physician, to a college as a professor, to a firm as a clerk, to a government Department as an agent, or an officer, he is sternly met on the color line, and his claims to consideration is disputed.

Nor even on churches, whose members profess to follow the despised Nazarene and whose home when on earth was among the lowest have, yet conquered this feeling against us, and what is true of our churches is also true of our courts of law. Neither is free from this all pervading atmosphere. The one describes the
Deity as impartial, no respecter of persons, and the other the
Doves of Justice as blindfolded, with sword by her side and scales
in her hand held evenly between high and low, rich and poor,
white and black, but both are the images of imagination, rather
American than the practice of the nation.

Taking advantage of the general disposition in this country to im-
pute crime to color, white men color their faces, to commit
crime, and wash off the hated color, to escape punishment. In many
places where the commission of crime is alleged, one of our color
the ordinary process of the law set aside, as too slow for the
impeccable justice of the infuriated populace. They take the law in
B their own bloody hands, and proceed to whip, stab, shoot, hang
or burn the alleged culprit without the intervention of courts, coun-
sel, judge, jury or witnesses. In such cases it is not the busi-
ness of the accused to prove guilt, but it is for the accused, to prove
his innocence, a thing hard for any man to do, even in a Court of
law, and utterly impossible to be done in these infernal Lynch
Courts, where surprised and frightened and captured by a March
Crowd, dragged with a rope about his neck in midnight dark.
ness, to the nearest tree and told in the coarsest terms of pro-

in this term, broken connection is more

family to prepare for death. His whole behavior is likely to confirm

suspicions of guilt than the contrary. In the presence of such hell-

black outrages, the pulpit is dumb, and the press in the neighborhood
is silent; a openly takes sides with the mob. There are occasional ca-

cases, in which white men are lynched, but one apparent does not make

a custom, every one knows that what is called lynching law, is pecu-

ularly the law for colored people and for nobody else. If there were no

other grievance, than this horrible and barbarous custom, we should

be justified in assembling, as we have now done, to denounce it.

But this is not all. Even now, after twenty years of so called Eman-

ipation, we are subject to countless raids of midnight riders, who

with blackened faces invade our homes and perpetrate the foulest

of crimes upon us and our families. This condition of things is

too flagrant and notorious to require specifications, or proof.

Thus in all the relations of life, we are met by the color line.

we cannot ignore it, if we would, and night and day we could

It hunts us at midnight, it denies us justice, in the Courts.

excludes our children from schools, refuses our sons the right
to learn trades, and compel us to pursue only such labor as will bring the least reward. While recognizing the color line as a hurtful force, a mountain barrier, to our progress, wounding our bleeding feet with its flinty rocks, at every step, our assembling here and making our appeal to your reason and your justice shows that we are not appalled by it, and our belief that it may yet be removed by peaceful means, that assisted by time and events and the growing enlightenment of both races, that the color line will ultimately become harmless. It will then be only used, as it should be, to distinguish one variety of the human family from another, and cease to have any civil, political, or moral significance. Colored conventions will be dispensed with as anachronisms wholly out of place, but not out of sight.

Do not marvel that we are not discouraged. When we consider how deep seated this feeling against the colored people is, the centuries of time it has been forming, the forces of aversion, which have been marshalled to sustain it, how the language and literature have been perverted with it, how the church and the playhouse, and other influences of the country have been arrayed in its support, the progress towards its ex-
tion must be considered vast and wonderful.

If liberty with us is but a name, our citizenship is but a sham, and our suffrage thus far, only a cruel mockery. We may yet congratulate ourselves upon the fact, that the laws and institutions of the country are constant, just and liberal. There is hope for a people when their laws are righteous, whether for the moment, its people conform to their requirements or not. But until this nation shall make it practise, accord with its constitution and its righteous laws, the colored people of this country will prove themselves worthy of even theoretical freedom, if they settle down in silent, servile, and cowardly submission. They are bound, by every ele-

Conventions, keep their opinions before the people.

The wrongs inflicted upon them. We shall never heed the Councils of cowards, we know that who would be free themselves must strike the blow. We do not believe as we are often told, that the negro is the ugly child of the national family and the more he is kept out of sight the better. It will be for him. Liberty given is never as precious as when sought for and fought for. The man outraged, is the man to make the outcry. Men will not care much
for a people who care not for themselves. Our meeting here, was opposed by some of our number, because it would disturb the peace of the present political party. The suggestion came from and met with the character of that party. Coward lips, we were men before that party was born, and our parties were made for men, not men for parties. Manhood is more sacred than any party can be. If the six millions of colored people in this country, armed with the Constitution of the United States, and with millions of white men, whose hearts are responsive to the claims of humanity, have not sufficient spirit and wisdom to organize and combine to defend themselves from outrage, discrimination and oppression, it will be idle for them to expect that any political party or any body else will organize and combine for them. New may combine to prevent cruelty to animals. for they are dumb and cannot speak for themselves, but we are men and must speak for ourselves, or we shall not be spoken for at all. We have Conventions in America for Ireland, but we should have none, if Ireland did not speak for herself.

In conclusion upon this color objection to our convention we have to say, that we meet here in open daylight, with the...
ere of the Nation upon us, with ten thousand newspapers, to tell if
they choose, of whatever is said and done here. They may commend
our wisdom, or condemn us if we are foolish or wicked,
and we ask only the impartial judgment of all men upon our
work.

The labor Question

Nor the least in importance among the subjects to which we
invite your earnest attention is the condition of the laboring class
at the South. Their cause is one with the laboring classes all over
the world. Every where there is dissatisfaction with the present rela-
tion of labor and Capital and to day no subject wears an aspect
more threatening to civilization than the respective claims of
Capital and Labor—Landlords and Tenants. In what we have to
say for the laboring class of the South, we expect to have the sym-
pathy and support of laboring men everywhere. The differ-
ence of color ought not to weaken the bond of brotherhood be-
tween those on whom the burden and hardships of labor fall.
The fortunate ones of the earth who are abundant in land
and money and know nothing of toilious care and pinching.
Of the laboring classes:
poverty may be indifferent to the appeal for justice at this point
though they of all others ought to be awake to that appeal
but the laboring masses cannot afford to be indifferent
and to respond to its demands. What labor every where wants
and will some day receive, is an honest day's pay, for an honest
day's work. As labor becomes more intelligent it will develop
what capital already possesses that is the power to organize
and combine for its own protection. There may be a wages
slavery only a little less ghastly and crushing than chattel sla-
very and that slavery must go with the other.

There is nothing more common now than the remark that
the physical condition of the freedmen of the South is immeas-
surably worse than in the time of slavery, that in respect to food,
clothing and shelter they are wretched, miserable and destitute:
that they are worse mistresses to themselves than their old masters
were to them. The reproach of this condition is said to be due to the
negroes themselves. A grandson of John B. Calhoun an Ar-
kanas land owner, testifying before the Senate Committee of la-
bor and education, says the "Negroes are so indolent that they
fail to take advantage of the opportunities offered them. That they
will only devote so much of their time to work as will enable them to procure the necessities of life. Thus the landowners shift the blame from themselves to the laborers and it becomes us to test the truth of that assertion, by the light of reason and appeals to indisputable facts. Of course the landowners of the South may be expected to view things differently from the laborers, and we insist that in order that the whole truth shall be brought out, that the laborer as well as the Capitalist shall be called as witnesses before the Senate Committee of labor and education. It takes more than one class of people to tell the whole truth about matters in which they are interested on opposite sides, and we protest against the allowance of only one side to be heard by the country. Meanwhile, a little reason and reflection will bring the truth out. In this case, it may be said that the colored people of the South are the laboring people of the South, and that the labor of a country is the source of its wealth. Without the colored laborers to toil the South would be a howling wilderness, given up to bats, mosquitos, wolves and bears. She was the source of its wealth before the war, and has been the source of its prosperity since the war. The almost-alone is visible
in her fields with implements of toil in his hands and laborious
by using them today.

Now happens it then, that while we see and hear that the
South is prosperous and rapidly recovering from the waste of war
that while we read that it raises more cotton, sugar, rice, tobacco,
corn and other valuable products than it ever produced before, how
we ask, happens it that the owners of its laborers are miserable huts, their
clothes rags, and their food the coarsest and least edible? The im-
plication is irresistible, that where the land lord is prosperous
the laborer ought to share his prosperity, and if this is not the
manifest
case there is wrong somewhere. This is a sharp contrast if
wealth and poverty can exist only in one way, and that is by
one side getting more than its share, and the other getting less.
or otherwise denied of its due,
that in some way labor is debarred and we think facts will sup-
port this view in the present case, as well as philosophy.

We utterly deny that the colored people of the South are too
lazy to work, or that they are indifferent to their physical wants
as already said, they are the workers of that section. The
trouble is, that no matter how hard, or how persistent may
be their industry, they get barely enough for their labor to support
life at the very low point, and throw off the burden of disgrace
and reproach from the laborer to the landowner where it belongs.

It may be said, after all, the colored people have themselves to
blame for this state of things, because they have not taken the mat-
ter into their own hands and provided a remedy for the evils they
suffer. Some blame may attach at this point.

But those who reproach us, thus, should remember, that it is hard
for labor however favoredly surrounded to cope with Capital in any
contest. A strike for higher wages is seldom anything but injuri-
sious to the strikers. The losses sustained are seldom compensated by
money in which is about the strike of the independent operators. The guard of money buys
the concessions gained, an empty sack is not easily made to stand
upright. The man who has it in his power to say work the land for
me, for such wages as I choose to give, has a power of slavery over him
as real as he who compels toil under the lash. But that a man
hath will he give for his life. In contemplating the little progress
made by the colored people in the acquisition of property in the birth
and their present-wretched condition the circumstances of their
emancipation should not be forgotten.
their case should not begin from the height—yet to be attained, but from the depths from which they have come.

It should be remembered by our severe judges that freedom came to us not from the sober dictates of wisdom, as a matter of choice on the part of the landowners of the South. It was born of battle and of blood. It came across fields, strewn with wounded and dying men. Not from the heaven of peace, but from the hell of war, out of the tempest and whirlwind of warlike passion, mingled with hate and revenge. It came, not so much as a boon to us, as a blight to the enemy. Those against whom the measure was directed were the hand owners, and they were no angels, but men, and being men they resented the blow. They did resent it, and a part of that resentment fell upon us.

In fact they drove us out of our old quarters and told us they did not want us in their fields, that they meant to import German and Chinese labor. But as the passions of the war subsided, we were taken back, but plainly enough it was not from choice but necessity. Feeling themselves entitled to our labor without the payment of wages it was not strange that they should make
the hardest bargain for our labor that their tremendous power gave them above and our weaknesses gave them aid to make, against the voice of science, decency, and trade.

The Government—by whom we were emancipated left us completely in the power of our former owners. They turned us loose and to the open sky, but left us not a foot of ground from which we could rise as well by our own toil as Russia did by her vine with freedom growing from it to get bread. It may have been best to leave us thus to make terms with those whose wrath it had kindled against us. It does not seem, we should have been so left; but it fully explains our present poverty and wretchedness.

The marvel is not that we are poor in such circumstances, but rather that we were not exterminated. The fact that we still live and have increased in higher ratio than the native white people of the earth are a proof of our vitality and in some degree of our industry.

Now is it to be wondered at that the standard of morals is not higher amongst us, that respect for the rights of property is not strong. The power of life and death held over labor, which says you shall work for me on my own terms or starve; is a source of crime as well as poverty. Wealth do not more naturally spring out of a manure pile than crime out of
destination. Out of the misery and wretchedness of Ireland, comes murder, assassination, fire and sword. They are by nature no worse than other people and no better. If oppression makes a wise man mad, it may do the same and worse to a people who are not reputed wise. The woe pronounced upon those who keep back wages of the labour by fraud is self-acting and certain and the world is full of warnings.

No more crafty and effective device for defrauding the southern labourers could be adopted than the one that substitutes money for currency with orders upon shopkeepers, in payment of wages. It has the merit of a show of honesty while it puts the labourer completely at the mercy of the landlord and the shopkeeper, he is between the upper and the middle milestone, and is hence ground to dust.

It gives the shopkeeper a customer who can trade with no other than himself, and thus the has no motive for fair dealing except his own moral sense, while the orders tempted the labour by their worthlessness as a circulating medium, to get rid of them at any sacrifice, and hence to extravagances and consequent distress.

The merchant pulls him off with his poorest commodities and...