

February 24, 1853  
Watkins, William J.

*Our Rights as Men. An Address Delivered in  
Boston, Before the Legislative Committee on the Militia*  
*Presscopy – Harvard University – Widener Library – Anti-Slavery Pamphlets*

## ADDRESS.

MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN:

It is with unaffected diffidence and extreme reluctance, that I appear before you in the present capacity; and my diffidence and reluctance are induced by a multiplicity of considerations. The arduous duties of my vocation, aside from others of an extraneous nature, have precluded the possibility of that due preparation, I consider necessary for one of my youth and consequent inexperience, to appear before your honorable body. Another consideration, gentlemen, is a consciousness of my inability to bring the subject before you with that force and perspicuity of style, which would, doubtless, elicit in its behalf, an intensity of interest commensurate with its nature and importance.

Laboring, Gentlemen, under those crushing disabilities to which my complexion has made me liable, I have never dived very deeply into the Artesian well of Science; I have never been able to "talk with the thunder as friend to friend, or weave my garland from the lightning's wing;" I have been denied those educational advantages of which the more favored race have been and still are the recipients. But although I cannot bring into requisition that profundity of thought, that logical acumen, that elegance of diction, of which you, gentlemen, are capable, this fact does not, in the least, derogate from the truthfulness of the sentiments I shall endeavor to advance, nor does it detract from their acceptability.

We have come here to-day, to deal not in rhyme and rhetoric, but in plain matter-of-fact, in sober reality. We have come, Mr. Chairman, to tell you what we want: why such a petition as this has been presented to the Honorable Body of whom you form a part, and why, in our opinion, such a petition should be granted. We have come before you, trusting in the inherent righteousness of our cause, and the justice which should, and which doubtless will, characterize your honorable body; and we trust our prayer will be effectual.

Mr. Chairman, I shall endeavor to-day to argue the general merits of this question, according to the measure of my ability. I would not, were I able, intrude upon the vocation of my learned friend, by dis-

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Mr. Chairman,—In addressing you for a few moments, let us inquire,

1st. INTO THE NATURE OF THE PETITION.

2ndly. INTO THE CHARACTER OF THE PETITIONERS.

3rdly. WHY SHOULD THE PETITION BE GRANTED?

4thly. WE WILL NOTICE, BRIEFLY, THE HAPPY RESULTS CONSEQUENT UPON GRANTING IT.

First, then, THE NATURE OF THE PETITION.

“To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives, of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

“We, the undersigned, citizens of Boston and vicinity, respectfully pray for a Charter to form an Independent Military Company.”

Surely, gentlemen, there can be nothing unreasonable in the nature of this Petition. Nothing, absolutely nothing; nothing generally, nothing particularly. If there is, gentlemen, I am utterly unable to discern it. But, possibly, it is for the scriptural reason that “the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not. We merely ask for a Charter to form an Independent Military Company; such a one as has been granted to a company of white citizens. We ask, Sir, that the Old Bay State will throw around us its

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protecting arm. We know that by wishing to be treated as men, we shall elicit the vindictive anathemas of a few, who live daily and hourly on the pap of American prejudice; but none of these things move us, if Massachusetts but gather us together as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings. We might, with propriety, have petitioned your honorable body, that we be enrolled among the General Militia; that the same immunities be extended towards us, that are extended towards other citizens of Massachusetts, irrespective of complexional distinction and physical peculiarities.

But we do not wish you to understand us as acquiescing in the righteousness of the prospective principle, because we ask for your protection in the exercise and enjoyment of a *portion* of our rights as men; for we are entitled to ALL the rights and immunities of CITIZENS OF MASSACHUSETTS. Thank God, this is the Age of Progress, not Retrogression. We are content now, for certain reasons, to ask for a Charter to form an Independent Company; a State Company, if you please. You, gentlemen, certainly cannot consider this as presumption. If you grant us this Petition, there is nothing in the nature of it, that will tend directly or indirectly to the dissolution of the Federal Union. For we are, *de facto*, a State Company, an Independent Company, segregated from the rest of mankind, and not in a position to cause the hair of our loving brethren of the Georgia Fusileers, or the South Carolina Dragoons, to "stand on end like quills upon the fretful porcupine," because, like them, we are enrolled among the General Militia, and liable to be called upon, when they are summoned, to defend our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honors.

Having briefly noticed the nature of the Petition, and shown that there is nothing particularly d[r]eadful and alarming about it, we will, in accordance with our arrangement, INQUIRE INTO THE CHARACTER OF THE PETITIONERS.

And who are they, Mr. Chairman? What is their character, gentlemen? In a word, they are among the most respectable men in the community. They are law-abiding, tax-paying, liberty-loving, NATIVE-BORN, AMERICAN CITIZENS; men who love their country, de-

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spite its heinous iniquities; iniquities piled up in dreadful agony to the heavens. I see arrayed in the List of Signers, men of affluence and education, of respectability and moral worth; men, in possession of those great and good qualities, the development of which, exerts a healthy influence throughout the varied ramifications of society. They are men, Sir, that do honor to the State; as respectable in every point of view, as any list ever appended to a Petition, since “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” And more than this, some of them are the descendants of revolution sires, and revolution mothers; the descendants of those, who, in those times that tried men’s souls, counted not their lives dear unto them, but their blood flowed freely in defence of their country; they fought, they bled, they conquered; aye, they died, that we might live as FREEMEN. And shall we be excluded from the pale of humanity, denied those rights, left to us as a legacy by our fathers? Shall we be driven from the festive board, when all the world has been invited to come, and sit around the table? Yes! every nation, kindred, tongue and people! Forbid it Justice, forbid it Humanity, forbid it, ye spirits of our Fathers, now hovering over us, forbid it our country, forbid it Heaven!

Gentlemen, the very fact that some of these who have signed this Petition, are descendants of those who faced the cannon’s mouth, and quaked not when it bellowed forth its dreadful thunders; who quailed not beneath its lurid lightnings, and yet are denied rights and privileges accorded to the descendants of those who shot down the brave patriots of the revolution, should be enough to cause the blood to boil within you, and cause “horror upon horror’s head accumulate.”

In presenting these petitioners before you, Mr. Chairman, in describing their character, gentlemen, I have nothing extenuated, nor set down aught in hyperbolic phrase. They are just the men I represent them to be, and this being the case, your sense of right and your love of Justice forbid any other treatment of their Petition than one which can abide the test of manly criticism, and stand out in the blazing sunlight, eliciting the approbation of God, the admiration of angels, the approval of your own consciences, the plaudits of the

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In the third place, Gentlemen, WHY SHOULD THIS PETITION BE GRANTED?

*It should be granted because the request is a reasonable one, and one emanating from a body of men who have an absolute right to demand it.* We proceed, then, upon the assertion that we have an unrestricted right to the enjoyment of full civil privileges; a right to demand and receive every thing which Massachusetts by her Bill of Rights, grants to her citizens, irrespective of any accidental or fortuitous circumstance, the contingency of birth, education, fortune, or complexion. We are men, and we wish to be treated, as men in the land of the Pilgrims should be treated. Mr. Chairman, the laws of this Commonwealth know no man by the color of his skin, the texture of his hair, or the symmetrical developement of his physical organism. It is too true, sir, that even here, American Prejudice, the inseparable concomitant of American Slavery, stands out in bold relief, the embodiment of Death, Hell, and the Grave; the incarnation of a principle which had its origin in the council chamber of the lost, and one which is fostered only by those affiliated with the Prince of darkness. But, thank God, in the eye of the Law, we all, sir, stand upon one common platform. What have the colored people of this country done, that we should be treated as a hissing and a by-word, a pest and a nuisance, the off-scouring of the earth?

When we cast our eyes abroad this vast Republic, a singular anomaly, a living paradox presents itself. Once, every year, in this land of the free, on Freedom's Natal day, the people assemble in public convocation, and in intonations loud and long, proclaim to the despotism of the world, "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are born free and created equal, and are endowed by their Creator, with certain inalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Yes. Our jubilant anthems roll over the wide waste of waters, o'er hills and valleys, rivers, woods, and plains; and the burden of our song is, "We are free, We are free."

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"Fly swiftly round, ye wheels of Time,  
And bring the welcome day."

You talk about the caste of the Hindoo, &c. Why, the Spirit of caste, lives and breathes in this country, as though it were stamped with the impress of imperishable vitality.

Your laws are founded in caste, conceived in caste, born in caste. Caste is the God whom this great Nation delights to honor. Caste is in your singing, your preaching, your praying; your *beau-ideal* of Heaven is a place of unfading joy, and resplendent magnificence, where you shall play for ever upon your golden harps, and the colored people, if they, like Uncle Tom, submit to your indignities with Christian meekness and becoming resignation, shall be permitted, from the Negro pow, to *peep into* the glory of your third heaven to all eternity!

Gentlemen, only look at the picture. Your schools, and colleges, and stores, and pulpits, are all closed against us; every avenue to hon-

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or and renown is piled up with mountains to obstruct our progress, and if we ever stand forth, a disenthralled people, we must burst a chain as long and broad as the ever grasping arm of this great country, and ten thousand times more solid than the compact which binds you together. *O tempora! O mores!* And then, to add insult to injury, we are gravely told that God has drawn a broad line of demarcation between us; that we are inately inferior to the white man; that we are in the language of a Rev. Colonizationist, “too low in our debasement, to be reached by the Heavenly light.” And this precious divine, *et id omne genus*, tell us in the same breath, that we are the people to evangelize and christianize Africa. Yes! with all our ignorance and degradation, we only are the people, the ordained people of the Lord. Truly “God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.” How is it, that while we remain in this enlightened land, we are buried so low in the abyss of infamy, that the arm of God’s omnipotence cannot resurrect us? But, just go across the water, and be landed upon the shores of Africa, where, as Hon. Edward Everett, tells us, “Death sits portress at the undefended gateways of her mud-built villages, yellow and intermittent fevers, blue plagues, and poisons, that you can see as well as feel, await your approach;” Yes! if we land on these healthy shores, then, we become kings and priests unto God, and thrones and dominions and principalities and powers dance before our vision like dew-drops glittering before the king of day. Colonization does for us in Africa, what God cannot do for us in America. *Mirabile dictu!*

O wonderful efficacy of the Atlantic Ocean!! What wonderful power of transformation!!!

The departed Webster in making a Colonization speech, once said, we, (the whites) imitate the example of Abram and Lot; when a difficulty had arisen between their respective herdsmen, said the former, “Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee. If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right.” But the distinguished statesman did not get more than half way in his illustration. We are perfectly willing to accept from the U. States a similar proposition to the one offered by Abram. Let us read the whole of it. “Let there be no strife between us, we pray thee; between thy

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herdsman, &c., &c., for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself from me, I pray thee: If thou wilt go to the left hand, then I will go to the right; but if thou wilt go to the right hand, then I will go to the left. But, as Mr. Webster related the interesting colloquy, the proposition is of a jug-handle character.

If you will go to Africa, then we will stay in America, says Mr. W., and there stops; but why not imitate the whole example, and say, "But if you will stay in America, then we will go to Africa." This reminds me of an anecdote you have doubtless heard before. A white man and an Indian once went in pursuit of game, and agreed prior to starting, that they would divide whatever game they might catch. When the expedition was over, they found that they had shot a wild goose, and a buzzard. They then proceeded to divide, according to agreement. Said the white man, "goose for me, and turkey buzzard for you, or turkey buzzard for you, and goose for me." "But," said the Indian, "you no say goose for me once."

Now, Mr. Chairman, we know who are our friends and who are our enemies. Yes, Gentlemen, despite our innate inferiority, notwithstanding the obliquity of our mental vision, our perceptions are sufficiently acute to discern iniquity whether we behold it arrayed in the habiliments of legislative wisdom, or enveloped beneath the garb of ministerial sanctity, and missionary zeal, or stalking abroad the land unmasked, in all its native hideousness, its heart-appalling deformity.

We ask no favors, Mr. Chairman, at the hands of our country; all we demand, is, the unrestricted right to breathe unmolested, the pure, unadulterated atmosphere of Heaven. We are told we cannot rise! Take the millstone from off our necks. We are inferior to the white man! *Give us our rights.* We can't be elevated in the land of our birth! Give us our rights, we ask no more. Treat us like men; carry out the principles of your immortal declaration, "all men are born free, and created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," and then, if we do not equal you in every respect, let us be the recipients of your intensified hate, your

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vituperative anathemas; *then let your ponderous Juggernaut roll on, or, like Nebuchadnezzar, let us be driven beyond the pale of Humanity, to herd with the beasts of the field. But do not blame us for occupying a position in which you have placed us.* And all this Petition demands, is, that you place us in a position that we may command respect. You need not fear the consequences. Pull down the barrier that obstructs our progress; hew down the mountains; fill up the valleys; make the crooked paths straight, and the rough places smooth, and then you may talk as long and loudly as you please, about the incapacity of the colored race. What says the Hon. Edward Everett, concerning our intellectual inferiority?

It would, says he, “be unjust to urge, as a proof of the intellectual inferiority of the civilized men of color in this country, that they have not made much intellectual progress. It appears to me, that they have done quite as much as could be expected under the depressing circumstances in which they have been placed. What branch of the European family, if held in the same condition for three centuries, would not be subject to the same reproach?” And now, Mr. Chairman, are we unworthy to elicit the treatment due to man; man created in the image of God, and stamped with the impress of Immortality? In the language of the Apostle, I would exhort you, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely, and of good report, *think on these things.* I know that the majority of the nation have signed the deed which abrogates the right to speak on these things, but, gentlemen, you are yet at liberty to “*think on these things,*” the requisitions of the compromise, the edict of the Baltimore Inquisition to the contrary notwithstanding. Why, gentlemen, should our Petition be granted? or rather, why should it not be granted? Gentlemen, of the Legislature may advance what ostensible reasons they please; shewing why, in their opinion, it should not be, but to this conclusion they must come at last: “You are colored men, and you must not be elevated, you must not stand on equality with white men.”

But, Sir, if colored men helped achieved *your liberty as well as mine*, if *your fathers and my fathers found one common revolution-*

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"Meanwhile, at Boston, things assumed the most serious aspect. The inhabitants supported with extreme repugnance the presence of the soldiers; and these detested the Bostonians. Hence, mutual insults and provocations occurred.

"1770. Finally, on the morning of the 2d of March, as a soldier was passing by the premises of John Grey, a ropemaker, he was assailed with abusive words, and afterwards beaten severely. He soon returned, accompanied by some of his comrades. An affray ensued between the soldiers and the ropemakers, in which the latter had the worst.

"The *people* became greatly exasperated; and, on the 5th of the same month, between seven and eight o'clock in the evening, a violent tumult broke out. The multitude, armed with clubs, ran towards King street,

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crying, ‘*Let us drive out these ribalds; they have no business here.*’ The soldiers who were lodged in the barracks of Murray, were eager to fall upon the populace; and their officers had the greatest difficulty in restraining them. Meanwhile, it was cried that the town had been set on fire; the bells pealed alarm, and the crowd increased from all parts. The rioters rushed furiously towards the custom house; they approached the sentinel, crying, ‘*Kill him! kill him!*’ They assaulted him with snow balls, pieces of ice, and whatever they could lay their hands upon. The sentinel in this conjuncture, having called the guard, Captain Preston detached a corporal and a few soldiers to protect this man, an the chest of the customs, from the popular fury. They marched with their arms loaded, and the captain himself followed; they encountered a band of the populace, *led by a mulatto named Attucks, who brandished their clubs, and pelted them with snow balls.* The maledictions, the imprecations, the execrations of the multitude, were horrible. In the midst of a torrent of invectives from every quarter, the military was challenged to fire. The detachment was surrounded; and the populace advanced to the points of their bayonets. The soldiers appeared like statues; the cries, the howlings, the menaces, the violent din of bells, still sounding the alarm, increased the confusion and the horrors of these moments; at length the mulatto and twelve of his companions, pressing forward, environed the soldiers, and striking their muskets with their clubs, cried to the multitude; ‘*Be not afraid, they dare not fire; why do you hesitate, why do you not kill them, why not crush them at once?*’ The mulatto lifted his arm against Captain Preston, and having turned one of the muskets, he seized the bayonet with his left hands, as if he intended to execute his threat. At this moment, confused cries were heard, ‘*The wretches dare not fire.*’ Firing succeeds; *Attucks is slain.* Two other discharges follow. Three were killed, five severely wounded; several others slightly; the greater part, persons that were passing by chance; or quiet spectators of this scene. Eight soldiers only fired, and none more than once. The populace dispersed, but returned soon after to carry off the dead and wounded.”

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highest order. From this Pamphlet, I make the following quotations:

"The late Governor EUSTIS, of Massachusetts, the pride and boast of the democracy of the East, himself an active participant in the War, and therefore a most competent witness, states that the Free Colored Soldiers entered the ranks with the whites. The time of those who were Slaves was purchased of their masters, and they were induced to enter the service, in consequence of a law of Congress, by which, on condition of their serving in the ranks during the War, they were made Freemen. This hope of Liberty inspired them with courage to oppose their breasts to the Hessian bayonet at Red Bank, and enabled them to endure with fortitude the cold and famine of Valley Forge."

"PRIMUS HALL, a native Bostonian, and long known to the citizens as a soap-boiler, served in the revolutionary war, and used to entertain the social circle with various anecdotes of his military experience; among them an instance, where being himself in possession of a blanket, at a time when such a luxury had become scarce, Gen. WASHINGTON entered the tent, having appropriated his own bedding for the worn-out soldiers, HALL immediately tendered his blanket for the General, who replied, that he preferred sharing the privations with his fellow soldiers, and accordingly, Gen. WASHINGTON and PRIMUS HALL reposed for the night together."

The General did not then, Mr. Chairman, feel that instinctive horror; he knew nothing of that irreconcilable repugnance which Colonizationists gravely affirm, is the natural consequence when the white man and his colored brother come in contact. George Washington, the most distinguished man of his time, and Primus Hall, negro soap-boiler! PAR NOBILE FRATRUM! Both reposing under the same blanket, and the moon still walked in her brightness, without blushing at the incongruous spectacle! Not a solitary star ceased its twinkling, in the deep blue vault of heaven!

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"In Rhode Island,' says Governor EUSTIS, in his able speech against Slavery in Missouri, 12th of twelfth month, 1820, 'the blacks formed an entire regiment, and they discharged their duty with zeal and fidelity. The gallant defence of Red Bank, in which the black regiment bore a part, is among the proofs of their valor.' In the contest it will be recollect that four hundred men met and repulsed, after a terrible and sanguinary struggle, fifteen hundred Hessian troops, headed by Count DONOP. The glory of the defence of Red Bank, which has been pronounced one of the most heroic actions of the War, belongs in reality to black men; yet who now hears them spoken of in connection with it? Among the traits which distinguished the black regiment, was devotion to their officers. In the attack made upon the American lines, near Croton river, on the 13th of fifth month, 1781, Colonel GREENE, the commander of the regiment, was cut down and mortally wounded; but the sabres of the enemy only reached him through the bodies of his faithful guard of blacks, who hovered over him to protect him, EVERY ONE OF WHOM WAS KILLED."

"Rev. DR. HARRIS, of Dunbarton, N. H., a revolutionary veteran stated in a speech at Francestown, N.H., some years ago, that on one occasion, the regiment to which he was attached was commanded to defend an important position which the enemy thrice assailed, and from which they were as often repulsed. 'There was,' said the venerable speaker, a Regiment of blacks in the same situation—a regiment of negroes fighting for our liberty and independence, not a white

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"Dr. CLARKE, in the Convention which revised the Constitution of New York, in 1821, speaking of the Colored inhabitants of the State, said: 'My honorable colleague has told us that as the Colored people are not required to contribute to the protection or defence of the State, they are not entitled to an equal participation in the privileges of its citizens. But, Sir, whose fault is this? Have they ever refused to do military duty when called upon? It is haughtily asked, who will stand in the ranks shoulder to shoulder with a negro? I answer, no one in time of peace; no one when your musters and trainings are looked upon as mere pastimes; no one when your militia will shoulder their muskets and march to their trainings with as much unconcern as they would go to a sumptuous entertainment or a splendid ball. But, Sir, when the hour of danger approaches, your 'white' militia are just as willing that the man of Color should be set up as a mark to be shot at by the enemy, as to be set up themselves. In the War of the Revolution, these people helped to fight your battles by land and by sea. Some of your States were glad to turn out corps of Colored men, and to stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with them."

"In your late War, they contributed largely towards some of your most splendid victories. On Lakes Erie and Champlain where your fleets triumphed over a foe superior in numbers and engines of death, they were manned in a large proportion with men of Color. And in this very house, in the fall of 1814, a bill passed, receiving the approbation of all the branches of your Government, authorising the Governor to accept the services of a corps of two thousand of free people of Color. Sir, these were times which tried men's souls. In these times it was no sporting matter to bear arms. These were times when a man who shouldered his musket did not know but he bared

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his bosom to receive a death wound from the enemy ere he laid it aside; and in these times, these people were found as ready and as willing to volunteer in your service as any other. They were not compelled to go; they were not drafted. No; your pride had placed them beyond your compulsory power. But there was no necessity for its exercise; they were volunteers; yes, Sir, volunteers to defend that very country from the inroads and ravages of a ruthless and vindictive foe, which had treated them with insult, degradation, and Slavery."

"Volunteers are the best of Soldiers; give me the men, whatever be their complexion, that willingly volunteer, and not those who are compelled to turn out. Such men do not fight from necessity, nor from mercenary motives, but from principle."

"On the capture of WASHINGTON, by the British forces, it was judged expedient to fortify[,] without delay, the principal towns and cities exposed to similar attacks. The Vigilance Committee of Philadelphia waited upon three of the principal Colored citizens, namely, JAMES FORTEN, BISHOP ALLEN, and ABSALOM JONES, soliciting the aid of the people of Color in erecting suitable defence for the city.

Accordingly, two thousand five hundred Colored men assembled in the State-House yard, and from thence marched to Gray's ferry, where they labored for two days, almost without intermission. Their labors were so faithful and efficient, that a vote of thanks was tendered them by the committee. A battalion of Colored troops were at the same time organized in the city, under an officer of the United States army; and they were on the point of marching to the frontier when peace was proclaimed."

On December 18, 1814, General JACKSON issued in the French language, the following address to the free people of Color:—

"SOLDIERS!—When on the banks of the Mobile I called you to take up arms, inviting you to partake the perils and glory of your *white fellow-citizens*, *I expected much from you*; for I was not ignorant that you possessed qualities most formidable to an invading enemy. I knew with what fortitude you could endure hunger and thirst, and all the fatigues of a campaign. *I knew well how you*

his bosom to receive a death wound from the enemy ere he laid it aside; and in these times, these people were found as ready and as willing to volunteer in your service as any other. They were not compelled to go; they were not drafted. No; your pride had placed them beyond your compulsory power. But there was no necessity for its exercise; they were volunteers; yes, Sir, volunteers to defend that very country from the inroads and ravages of a ruthless and vindictive foe, which had treated them with insult, degradation, and Slavery."

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*loved your native country*, and that you, as well as ourselves, had to defend what MAN holds most dear—his parents, wife, children, and property. YOU HAVE DONE MORE THAN I EXPECTED. In addition to the previous qualities I before knew you to possess, I found among you a noble enthusiasm, which leads to the performance of great things.

“Soldiers! The President of the United States shall hear how praiseworthy was your conduct in the hour of danger, and the representatives of the American people will give you the praise your exploits entitle you to. Your General, anticipates them in applauding your noble ardor.

“The enemy approaches; his vessels cover our lakes; our brave citizens are united, and all contention has ceased among them. Their only dispute is, who shall win the prize of valor, or who the most glory, its noblest reward. By Order,

THOMAS BUTLER, Aid-de-Camp.”

But these quotations must suffice.

And, now, gentlemen, with the broad, blazing sunlight of the Revolution flashing across your souls, and revealing the prowess and patriotism of your colored citizens, in letters of such living brightness, will you, can you refuse the granting of this Petition? No, gentlemen, I see by the light of your eye, and the patriotic crimson that illumines your cheek, that you will report favorably upon this Petition.

This is professedly, a Republican government; we are an integral portion of this Republic. We claim the absolute right, the inalienable, God given right of Freemen. You, gentlemen, have no more right to say we shall not obtain a charter, than you have to monopolize the winds of heaven, or the rain which falls alike upon the just and the unjust. Because the sun hath looked more intensely upon me than on you, I, as a colored man, am doomed to degradation; “hitherto shalt thou come and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.” This is the imperious *dictum* that emanates from the *sanctum sanctorum* of Republican christianity, and Christian Republicanism.

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But you might as well command the morning star to leap from its azure home, or command us what we shall eat and drink, or where-withal we shall be clothed. It cannot be denied, that if we are men, we are entitled to all the rights of men every where; and no one has a right gentlemen, morally speaking, either natural or acquired, to de-humanize and segregate us from the rest of mankind. You may withhold our right, but you can't annihilate it. The very word Right pre-supposes the idea of Obligation. The words are, in fact, reciprocal. We then, gentlemen, have the right; where rests the obligation? It rests somewhere! Where; I ask, with increased emphasis, rests the obligation? I pause that you may reflect. But I will merely touch on another point, a point upon which, I suppose my learned friend, Robert Morris, Esq., will dwell at full length.

It has been affirmed, sir, that colored men cannot legally b[e] enrolled among the General Militia; that we are among the absolute exempts. But this is an egregious error. What is the language of the Law, Sir, relative to enrollment, exemption, &c. Let us read the Third Section.

"Every able bodied white male citizen, resident in the Commonwealth, who is, or shall be of the age of 18, and under the age of 45 years, except persons enrolled in Volunteer Companies; persons belonging to the religious denominations of Quakers, or Shakers, who shall procure to the assessors a certificate, as provided in the Second Section; idiots, lunatics, common drunkards, vagabonds, paupers, and persons convicted of any infamous crimes in this, or any other State, shall be enrolled in the General Militia."

Now, gentlemen, who are the absolute exempts? Are the 65 gentlemen who have signed this Petition, embraced in the category? No, for the simple yet conclusive reason that they are not Quakers nor Shakers; (although the intonations of the thunder's voice, and the lurid lightnings of the wrath of man are sufficient to induce a general paralysis throughout our body-politic, and compel us to be Quakers and Shakers against our will;) we are not able to produce to the assessors a certificate, as provided in the second section, proving that we are idiots, or lunatics, or drunkards, common or uncommon,

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or vagabonds, or paupers, or persons convicted of any infamous crime. But gentlemen, although you do not place us in this honorable company by name, YET YOU VIRTUALLY "NUMBER US AMONG THE TRANSGRESSORS."

Gentlemen, do we deserve to be placed in this category? If we do, we should be taken care of; for lunatics and idiots are not able to take care of themselves, and criminals should be looked after especially. If we do not, we have a right to demand that you withdraw us from the company with whom we find ourselves involuntarily associated. You will perceive that we are not literally among the absolute exempts, although prejudice may so construe it. For although able bodied white male citizens shall be enrolled among the general militia, there is nothing here which says able-bodied colored citizens shall NOT. It seems to be left optional with us. Our fathers were not able-bodied white male citizens; but they were able enough to face British cannon, in 1776 and 1812.

So, gentlemen, you perceive that we base our petition upon the grand, fundamental, eternal, Heaven-approving principle of RIGHT; OUR ABSOLUTE RIGHT TO ENJOY FULL CIVIL PRIVILEGES. If it can be proved we are not able-bodied MEN; if it can be proved we are incapable of performing every honorable duty, you should consider our petition as a gross insult to your body, but if not, there is no alternative but to treat us as citizens of this Commonwealth should be treated; as able-bodied, honorable men.

In the fourth and last place, Mr. Chairman, I WILL BRIEFLY NOTICE SOME OF THE BENEFICIAL RESULTS WHICH WILL ACCRUE FROM THE GRANTING OF THIS PETITION.

And allow me to remark that these results will be reciprocally beneficial. I am conscious, gentlemen, there are some men in the country, foreigners especially, who would not sleep very soundly, unless your report were adverse to our Petition. There are some so peculiarly sensitive, that were they to behold an able-bodied colored company parading down State street, where fell the noble Crispus Attucks, they would be almost ready to proclaim the hour of God's judgment come; or, what is about the same thing in their estimation,

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we would be upon the eve of a dissolution of the Union. They would not shut their eyes, but to dream of miserable hobgoblins; and black regiments of soldiers would so harrow up their little, narrow, contracted souls, that with mournful and elongated visage they would feel called on to walk up and down our streets, and proclaim, "Woe, woe, woe" unto Massachusetts, and to the inhabitants thereof; "for the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?"

Why, gentlemen, if you grant us a charter, the soap bubble gasconade, and characteristic rhodomontade of Southern bullyism, would be launched forth against you with fearful power. Think you South Carolina would then stay in the Union, IF SHE COULD BY ANY MEANS EXIST OUT OF IT?

But, Mr. Chairman, to be serious; if any one dreams of any evil consequences inevitably flowing from the granting of this Petition, we should charitably attribute all to the hallucination of a moonstruck imagination. In the first place, grant our petition, and you evince to the world, that Massachusetts careth for her colored citizens; that she does not repudiate them as vagrants or criminals, but is disposed to help those who help themselves. It shews forth to the world, that Massachusetts knows no man by the color of his skin, but all, irrespective of accidental circumstances, stand upon one broad, common, and ever enduring platform, on which the whole world may stand and it will not fall.

We love Massachusetts; if she reciprocates that love, let her shew forth her love by her works. Let her throw around us the mantle of her protection, and then, O Massachusetts, if we forget thee, "may our right hand forget its cunning, and our tongue cleave to the roof of our mouth." Yes! Let the old Bay State treat us as men, and she shall elicit our undying, indissoluble attachment. And neither height, nor depth, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, shall ever be able to alienate our affection from her. We will be with her in the sixth trouble, and in the seventh, we will neither leave nor forsake her. Amid the angry howling of the tempest, as well as in the cheering sunshine, we shall be ever

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found, a faithful few, indomitable, unterrified, who know their friends to love them[,] with that affection which nought but the Destroying Angel can annihilate.

Again, grant us this petition, and it will induce in us a determination to surmount every obstacle calculated to impede our progress; to rise higher and *higher*, and *HIGHER*, until we scale the Mount of Heaven, and look down from our lofty and commanding position upon our revilers and persecutors. Yes, sir; it will incite us to renewed diligence, and cause our arid desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose. It will inspire us with confidence, and encourage us to hope amid the almost tangible darkness that envelopes us. We care not for the hoarse, rough thunder's voice, nor the lightning's lurid gleamings, if we are yet to be a people; if we are yet to behold the superstructure of our liberties, consummated amid paens of thanksgiving, and shouts from millions, redeemed, regenerated, and disenthralled.

You can to-day, gentlemen, either bid us hope on, hope ever, or contribute towards smothering those irrepressible aspirations after freedom which God has placed in our hearts, and stamped with His own eternity. Again, grant us our petition, and you shall be consoled with the reflection that you have done your duty; you shall elicit the approbation of Heaven, the admiration of every lover of truth, justice, and humanity. Yes, gentlemen, when Death, with his icy and attenuated fingers, shall begin to feel around your heart, your mind shall revert to the present hour, and the consciousness of having done your duty will send a thrill of joy through every avenue of your soul. It is needless, gentlemen, for me to exhort you to do your duty, regardless of the smiles and frowns of an ever-fluctuating public opinion. Finally, grant us our petition, and you perform a work upon which your children shall look with smiles of approval. I know a prophet has no honor in his own country. It is said, the evil that men do generally lives after them, while the good is often interred with their bones.

But I look down the vista of time, and I behold the faithful historian holding up to the gaze and admiration of the then living world

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Gentlemen, will you show this day, that you are among the faithful few, and cause the wheels of the car of freedom to revolve with accelerated impetus. Our cause is onward. Our enemies might as well attempt to mesmerize an earthquake, or rock the whirlwind to sleep, or command the ocean, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther," with the expectation of eliciting obedience to the mandate, as to attempt to crush the immortal aspirations of a people determined to be free.

Truth, Justice, Humanity, God, are on our side. They that are for us, are more than all that are against us. "*Magna est veritas, est prevalebet.*" "Lift up your eye toward the heavens; look also upon the earth; the heavens shall vanish like smoke; the earth shall be removed, and they that dwell therein shall die; but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished." Thus saith the Lord. "Let the rains descend, and the winds blow, and the floods come, and beat upon this house; it shall stand, being founded upon a rock."

And now, Mr. Chairman, I have done. Pardon me for trespassing so long upon your kind indulgence. I hope I have not spoken in vain. May you discharge your duty to your God, to yourselves, and to bleeding humanity, and ultimately attain to light, life and immortality.

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