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Convention of Colored Citizens of the State of Arkansas.

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Little Rock, Ark., November 30th, 1865

On Thursday, November 30th, the Convention met to effect a Permanent Organization and arrange all preliminaries relative to the business and object of the Convention.

On motion, Rev. J. T. White was called to the chair as President of the Convention.

On Motion, Mr. J. W. Denby was called upon to act as Secretary, pro tem. Carried.

On motion, as stated by the Chair, Rev. W. W. Andrews was called upon to act as Vice-President. Carried.

The Chairman, in a short and eloquent address, stated the object of the Convention, and returned his thanks for the honor conferred upon him. He stated that we had met for the purpose of conferring with each other, as to our best interest and future prosperity; also, to memorialize the State Legislature and Congress of the United States, to grant us equality before the law, and the right of suffrage, because he believes we have earned it and, therefore, we deserve it; we have bought it with our blood, and, therefore, it is of priceless value to us—and thus beautifully describes in the language of the poet—

"That some things are worthless, some so good,
That Nations that buy them, pay only in blood."

He then requested the Delegates present to report:

J. T. White, Phillips County,
David Young, Chicot 2
John A. Jones, Pulaski
W. W. Andrews,
A. L. Richmond,
F. W. Armstead,
B. Right,
Wilson Brown, De
Nathan Warren,
Jesse Lawson, Dallas
Yancey Bowlen,
George Sewell, Sebastian

All of which were received, and took seats in the Convention.

On motion, Messrs. Moses Edward, Brutus Jackson and Winfield Scott, were appointed Committee on Invitations and Arrangements. Carried.

On motion, the Committee on Invitations was ordered to request Governor Murphy, General Reynolds and General Sprague to be present and address the Convention. Carried.

On motion, to appoint Committee on Permanent Organization, the following named gentlemen were appointed, viz: J. T. White, President; David Young, John A. Jones, W. W. Andrews, A. L. Richmond, E. W. Armstead, B. Right, Wilson Brown, Nathan Warren, Jesse Lawson, Yancey Bowlen, George Sewell, Brutus Jackson, Winfield Scott and Moses Edwards, Vice-Presidents; J. W. Denby, Secretary, pro tem.

By particular request, Mr. J. W. Denby was called upon to address the House, which call he willingly and cheerfully responded to, in a short, elaborate address, stating that he had espoused our cause, and would tenaciously cling to it until we had equality before the law and the right of citizenship in the several States.

On motion, to adjourn to meet Friday morning, at 10 o'clock, A. M. Carried.
SECOND DAY.
Friday, Morning, December 1st, 1865.

House was called to order at 10 o'clock, A. M. - President in the Chair.
Prayer by Rev. J. T. White.
On motion, the minutes of the previous meeting were read and adopted.
The Committee of Arrangements reported that two Deligates, from Phillipps County, had arrived, and were present. The President requested them to report, be received and take seats in the Convention. Carried.
William H. Grey and Richard E. Wall, from Phillipps County, Ark., reported and were unanimously received.
Mr. Wm. H. Grey moved that Mr. Wall be appointed Corresponding and Recording Secretary of the Convention, stating that his efficiency in chirography peculiarly fitted him for the position. Put in order - yea's, 14; nays, -. The President then requested Mr. Wall to come forward and take his seat, thereby relieving Mr. J. W. Denby, Secretary pro tem.
A short and eloquent address, by Mr. Wm. H. Grey, on duties of Finance Committee, to compose of five, and requested the Convention to endow the President with power to appoint them. Wm. H. Grey, Chairman; W. W. Andrews, John A. Jones, Wilson Brown and A. L. Richmond.
Mr. Grey then moved that the Committee to select Speakers report. Carried. Mr. Brutus, having been honored with the position of Chairman of the Committee, arose and stated that they had waited on the several distinguished gentlemen who were invited to be present and address the Convention, who acquiesced, and considered it a source of supreme gratification to be present at the first Colored Convention ever held in the State of Arkansas. The report was unanimously received.
On motion, Messrs. Owen Vance, Amos Green and Hartwell Furgerson be admitted to seats in the Convention. Carried.

THE PRESENT CONDITION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS OF THE COLORED PEOPLE OF THE SOUTH.

Mr. Grey opened his remarks as follows;
Mr. President and Fellow Citizens: Having but just arrived from a tedious journey of some six days, the latter portion of which was prosecuted on foot, for the purpose of being present at the organization of this honorable body. I find myself wholly unprepared to do justice to the subject under consideration; but as many of us have braved many difficulties to be present at the Convention, to consider these momentous questions, as they relate to us and our State, this is not the time nor place to offer frivolous excuses, as regards our ability to solve them in all their bearings and relations to us. When the angry guns in Charleston harbor told the world that the hand of the paracide had been raised, and the blow directed against the world's best model of good government, we were scarcely awakened in our prison-house of slavery into sufficient attention to suppose that the gathering forces around us had any reference to the bettering of our conditions, though for over two centuries the obedient slaves of the haughty Southron, and as Gen. Blair once said, in a speech in Boston, on the sep­ of the races, "seemingly bound by ties that amounted almost to those of consanguinity." Those ties, even those of consanguinity, were severed, and the haughty, self-willed people declared, in the face of an
enlightened world, that slavery was divine, and accepted it as the
corner-stone of a bastard republic, whose end and aim was to establish
the fact that God had abandoned the negro to the tender mercies of the
modern Egyptian and Apostolic Christians of the nineteenth century.
My friends, I am sorry to say, that except the little leaven that
eventually leavened the whole, the sympathy manifested for us in the
war was not at all of a flattering character; our condition did then
excite the commiseration of the true philanthropist; when on escaping
from rebel masters, we were worked upon Union fortifications, and then
politely returned for fear of exciting to anger the already kindled
ire of "our Southern Brethren." I remember well when the poor negro,
would be, and was, brutally beaten almost to death for innocently
wearing the cast-off clothes of a Union officer whom he served, when
the New York World, Chicago Times, and the Missouri Republican took
the horrors at the idea of a negro disgracing the uniform of a Federal
soldier.

"But Linden saw another sight."

It was found, after disaster brought the nation to sober reflection,
like the ancients who consulted their soothsayers and seers, so those
who were guiding the Ship of State applied to the sages of the nation
in this hour of dire affliction and deep humiliation. It was then
the Robert Dale Owen, in a letter to President Lincoln, declared
that history gave no account of twelve millions of people being con­
quered, when united and fighting for their independence. He then pro­
cceeded to show the relative strength of the two sections—how the one
could be reduced and the other strengthened. Public sentiment began
to change, and from that time the rising star of the negro has been
seen hovering over Washington.

We have since been seen not only in the uniform of the soldier,
but battling for our rights as citizens of the several States in which
we reside. God, in his providence, has permitted the seeming ignorant
stolidity of the negro to be more than a match for the learning of the
Saxon. After an acquaintance of two hundred years, he woke up in '62,
and found the negro not half as big a fool as he thought he was. True,
the had always been accustomed to hear their advice received respect­
fully, in short monosyllables—yes, sir, massa; or no, sir, massa. They
never once dreamed that under this seeming respect there was a human
soul, with a will and a purpose its own. We have now thrown off the
mask, hereafter to do our own talking, and to use all legitimate means
to get and to enjoy our political privileges. We don't want anybody
to swear for us or to vote for us; we want to exercise those privileges
for ourselves; and we have met her, under the new order of things,
to ask of the people of Arkansas—calmly, dispassionately and respect­
fully—to give us those rights, and by giving us those rights they will
give peace and quiet to the State, and at once place her in advance
of her sister States in the march of progress and civilization. We
are not asking that the people should try any new experiment in this
matter; we do not ask them to go outside the great charter of American
liberty—the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence—but rather
that they should strictly conform to the letter and spirit of those
time-honored documents. That we have testified in the civil courts
of nearly all the States, in the early history of the country, is a
fact so well established that it is not necessary to deduce the proof.
We have also voted in very many of the States, without detriment to the commonwealths in which we enjoyed the privilege. We vote in some of the States to-day, and have the satisfaction of knowing that, on several important elections, the negro, standing firm to principle, has saved the people. For instance, in the late election in Ohio, Gen. Cox was elected by just the amount of colored men's votes polled in the State—25,000. Col. B. Gratz declared, in a letter to a friend, on the suffrage question, that the negro vote in the State of New York saved the State to the Union party.

We must be allowed to save our State from the hands of treacherous friends and open enemies. We ask it for your benefit and our good; we ask it of you because without it you can never have any real peace; without it you cannot resume your proud position in the galaxy of States; without it you cannot definitely settle your vexed labor question; without it, in a word, you cannot have a Republican form of Government—such anyone as the Constitution recognizes, and around which it throws its protection.

There is no use in arguing the abstract question of our fitness to exercise these duties of the citizen—that is simply begging the question. Establish the principle irrevocably and universally, and then reduce us to the restrictions imposed on others. Gen. Sherman says: "The hand that lays down the musket should pick up the ballot." Gen. Palmer asks that the negro be subject to the same laws governing other men, and then let him paddle his own canoe.

Fred Douglas, in his inimitable style, says, "that if a drunken Irishman knows how to vote, surely a sober negro could vote as well." There is nothing now in it; we have voted, and we desire to exercise the privilege granted us heretofore, as our inalienable right; we have won it fairly, honestly and righteously; it was the last feather that broke the camel's back; it was the negro thrown into the scale on the side of the nation that broke the back of the rebellion and saved the nation, and I scout the idea as unworthy the intelligence of the American people, that they fought for his freedom, unless they couple with it the fact that we fought, and saved the Government, for the love we bore it, without bounty, and scarcely any pay, and when the Government could not, or did not, protect us from the halter of the captor. Friends we cannot retrograde. The Government of the United States is pledged to secure our rights; we wrote the contract in blood, when her own children were about to destroy her. The Government cannot recede from its pledged faith in the eyes of the world—she would be execrated. We ask, therefore, that the State do for us what the Government must do eventually. Our future is sure—God has marked it out with his own finger; here we have lived, suffered, fought, bled, and many have died. We will not leave the graves of our fathers, but here we will rear our children; here we will educate them to a higher destiny, here, where we have been degraded, will we be exalted—Americans in America, one and indivisible.

His Excellency, Gov. J. Murphy, was called upon. He arose, with all the dignity and grace of a gentleman of his position, and made few terse remarks of encouragement, &c., and distinctly and openly avowed that he, though he trespassed, advocated the rights of the entire colored race.

One motion of Mr. W. H. Grey, that the Convention return a vote of thanks to His Excellency for his well-timed remarks. Unanimously carried.

The House, on motion, then adjourned, to meet at one and a half o'clock.
HOUSE was called to order at the appointed hour-President in the Chair.

The minutes of the previous meeting were called for, read and adopted.

On motion, the Chairman of Committee on Credentials was called upon to report. Reported the reception of five Delegates from the different counties. Received.

The House was then entertained by Mr. J. A. Jones, who made a short address.

The Chair then introduced Elder Rateliff, who spoke at considerable length on the advancement of the race in the past few years, and the interest he has ever taken to advance, those who come in proximity to him, though he did not consider at that time it would be any material benefit to them.

Rev. Hugh Brady was next called upon, and responded with animation and enthusiasm, and sternly advocated and persisted that we should contend for our rights.

Public collection, $52 00.

Mr. Cobb, a returned Southerner, being present, was called upon. He very reluctantly came forward to the stand, and spoke with feeling, and finally resorted to tears (though they may have been hypocritical ones) to impress upon his auditors' minds the love he has ever had for the negro; said that he felt bitterly the pang; he knew he had been a reb.; had done all he could against the Government and the negro, but he now confessed all, and implored his colored brethren to forgive him, and "let by-gones be by-gones."

The meeting then adjourned, to meet on Saturday morning, at 10 o'clock, A.M.

THIRD DAY

Saturday Morning, December 2d, 1865.

The House was called to order at the appointed hour-President in the Chair.

The House opened with prayer by Rev. J. T. White, after which the roll was called and the House proceeded to business.

Minutes of the previous meetings were read and adopted.

On motion, the Chairman of Committee on Memorials and Resolutions was called upon to report. Mr. W. H. Gray, Chairman of said Committee, came forward and produced Memorials and Resolutions, and handed them to the Secretary to be read. They read as follows:

MEMORIALS AND RESOLUTIONS.

We, the Delegates of the different Counties of the State of Arkansas, in Convention assembled, this, the 2d day of December, A.D. 1865, do adopt the following resolutions memorializing the State Legislature and Congress of the United States, to grant us our oath, before the Civil Courts, and the right of suffrage, etc.

1st. FELLOW-CITIZENS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA: We, the members of the Colored Convention, assembled at Little Rock, this the 2d day of December, to confer with each other as to the best means of completing the Emancipation Enfranchisement and elevation of our race, so signally begun amid the throes of revolution and the most stupendous internal strife the world ever witnessed. We sincerely thank God for the events of the past four years, and whilst we congratulate you upon the success of your arms, we also thank you, like St. Paul, for the first time in our existence we can answer for ourselves.
2d. By an Act of the Convention of '64, neither slavery nor involuntary servitude can hereafter exist in this State (Arkansas) otherwise than for the punishment of crime whereof the parties shall have been convicted by due process of Law.

This is emancipation as it now stands, without the protection of law or guarantee of its future existence in fact; therefore, we, your humble petitioners, as an earnest of our future liberties, pray that the Legislature grant us equality before the law.

When great and terrible calamities are abroad in the land, men are said to learn righteousness. It would be a mark of unspeakable national depravity if neither the horrors of war, nor the dawning prospects of returning peace, should soften the hearts of the American people and dispose them to do a partial justice to a down-trodden and helpless race.

The preaeccutions of two and a half centuries have not been enabled to destroy our confidence in the eventual justice of the American people. We believe the time has come when wisdom again asserts her sway in the councils of the nation.

We dream no more—our country wakes at last
And reads wise lesson from the stormy past.
The spirit of the nation, proud and free,
Might err and wander, rest of memory;
But linked to truth, magnetic poles of yore,
The dead sense weakens and she sins no more.
The drama moves— the people fill the stage,
And virtue will restore the golden age.

We, your humble petitioners, do most earnestly desire and pray that you clothe us with the power of self protection, by giving us our equality before the law and the right of suffrage, so we may become bona fide citizens of the State in which we live. Therefore,

Resolved, That we, the colored citizens of the State of Arkansas, deem it essential to the peace and dignity of the State of Arkansas, and the only method of obviating the superintendency of the Freedmen's Bureau, to grant us equality before the law. Therefore,

Resolved, That it is a fundamental principle of American politics, as old as the Government, that taxation and representation are inseparable, and as we are taxed to support the Government of the State of Arkansas, we respectfully claim the right to be represented in the Government of the State, amenable to its laws and sheltered by its protection. Therefore,

Resolved, That we are the substrata, the foundation on which the future power and wealth of the State of Arkansas must be built, and as the future prosperity of the State cannot afford to rest upon ignorant labor, therefore, we respectfully ask the Legislature to provide for the education of our children. Therefore,

Resolved, That we ask for the foregoing resolution for the following reason, viz:

1st. That the loyal element of the State may become united, having a common interest and a common aim.

2nd. Because we believe it to be the best interest to all concerned; that as we are subject to law, we should be protected by law.

3rd. We consider the quantity of the world's great staple, cotton, produced by the freedmen of Arkansas, under the most disadvantageous circumstances, a sufficient refutation of the charge of the indolence.
4th. Believing, as we do, that we are destined in the future, as in the past, to cultivate your cotton fields, we claim for Arkansas the first to deal justly and equitably for her laborers. Therefore,

Resolved, That our thanks are due to, and are hereby respectfully tendered to, Gen. Reynolds, Gen. Carr, Dr. Granger, and other distinguished gentlemen, for their kind sympathies and gentlemanly courtesies toward us. Therefore,

Resolved, That we return our thanks to his Excellency, Gov. J. Murphy, of the State of Arkansas, for his excellent and well-timed remarks, in which he pledged himself to our future interest. On motion of Mr. W. W. Andrews, the memorials and resolution be adopted. Unanimously carried.

The House then adjourned, to meet at 2 o'clock, P.M.

AFTERNOON SESSION

The House was called to order at 2 o'clock-President in Chair. The House opened with prayer, by Rev. Nathan Warren.

On motion of Mr. W. H. Grey, we return a vote of thanks to the citizens of Little Rock for their generous hospitalities and courtesies that the various Delegates have received at their hands.

Many distinguished guest being present, the remainder of the afternoon was very agreeably spent, among which were Major Gen. J. J. Reynolds, Robt. J. T. White, Secretary of State, &c.

On motion, the House then adjourned, sine die.

RICHARD E. WALL,
Corresponding and Recording Secretary.

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