

March 1863 at the Cooper Institute (The Rev. Henry Highland Garnet of Shiloh Presbyterian Church presided.)

Responding to the Emancipation Proclamation

Transcript of speech by Frederick Douglass

I congratulate you, upon what may be called the greatest event of our nation's history, if not the greatest event of the century. In the eye of the Constitution, the supreme law of the land, there is not now, and there has not been, since the 1st day of January, a single slave lawfully deprived of Liberty in any of the States now recognized as in Rebellion against the National Government. In all these States Slavery is now in law, as in fact, a system of lawless violence, against which the slave may lawfully defend himself. [Cheers.] In the hurry and excitement of the moment, it is difficult to grasp the full and complete significance of President Lincoln's proclamation. The change in attitude of the Government is vast and startling. For more than sixty years the Federal Government has been little better than a stupendous engine of Slavery and oppression, through which Slavery has ruled us, as with a rod of iron. The boast that Cotton is King was no empty boast. Assuming that our Government and people will sustain the President and the Proclamation, we can scarcely conceive of a more complete revolution in the position of a nation. England, no longer ruled by a king, the Pope turned Protestant, Austria Republic, would not present a greater revolution. I hail it as the doom of Slavery in all the States. I hail it as the end of all that miserable statesmanship, which has for 60 years juggled and deceived the people, by professing to reconcile what is irreconcilable. No politician need now hope to rise to power, by crooking the pregnant binges of the knee to slavery. We part company with that amphibious animal called a Northern man with Southern principles. Color is no longer a crime or a badge of bondage. At last the out-spread wings of the American Eagle afford shelter and protection to men of all colors, all countries and climes, and the long oppressed black man may honorably fall or gloriously flourish under the star-spangled banner. [Applause.] I stand here tonight not only as a colored man and an American, but by the express decision of the Attorney-General of the United States, as a colored citizen, having, in common with all other citizens, a stake in the safety, prosperity, honor, and glory of a common country [Cheering.] We are all liberated by this proclamation. Everybody is liberated. The white man is liberated, the black man is liberated, the brave men now fighting the battles of their country against rebels and traitors are now liberated, and may strike with all their might, even if they do hurt the Rebels, at their most sensitive point. [Applause.] I congratulate you upon this amazing change—the amazing approximation toward the sacred truth of human liberty. All the space between man's mind and God's mind, says Parker, is crowded with truths that wait to be discovered and organized into law for the better government of society. Mr. Lincoln has not exactly discovered a new truth, but he has dared, in this dark hour of national peril, to apply an old truth, long ago acknowledged in theory by the nation—a truth which carried the American people safely through the war for independence, and one which will carry us, as I believe, safely through the present terrible and sanguinary conflict for national life, if we shall but faithfully live up to that great truth. [Cheers]. Born and reared as a slave, as I was, and wearing on my back the marks of the slave-driver's lash, as I do, it is natural that I should value the Emancipation Proclamation for what is destined to do for the slaves. I do value it for that. It is a mighty event for the bondman, but it is a still mightier event for the nation at large, and mighty as it is for the both, the slave and the nation, it is still mightier when viewed in its relation to the cause of truth and justice throughout the world. It is in this last character that I prefer to consider it. There are certain great national acts, which by their relation to universal principles, properly belong to the whole human family, and Abraham Lincoln's Proclamation of the 1st of January, 1863, is one of these acts. Henceforth shall that day take rank with the Fourth of July. [Applause.] Henceforth it becomes the date of a new and glorious era in the history of American liberty. Henceforth it shall stand associated in the minds of men, with all the stately steps of mankind, from the regions of error and oppression, which have lifted the trial by poison and fire to the trial by Jury [Jury]—from the arbitrary will of a despot to the sacred writ of habeas corpus—from abject serfdom to absolute citizenship. It will stand with Catholic Emancipation, with the British Reform Bill, with the Corn Laws, and with that noble act of Russian liberty, by which twenty millions of serfs, against the clamors of haughty tyrants, have been released from servitude. [Loud cheering.] Aye! It will stand with every distinguished event which marks any advance

made by mankind from the thralldom and darkness of error to the glorious liberty of truth. I believe in the millennium—the final perfection of the race, and hail this Proclamation, though wrung out under the goading lash of a stern military necessity, as one reason of the hope that is in me. Men may see in it only a military necessity. To me it has a higher significance. It is a grand moral necessity.

“Thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel just,
And he but naked, though wrapped up in steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.”

The conscience of the North has been troubled during all this war. It has been the inconsistency of fighting for Slavery. It has been the absurdity of killing the Rebel, while asserting the Rebel's right to the slave. It has seen the folly of fighting the Rebels with our soft white hands, and keeping back our iron black hands. [Cheers.] After a general statement relative to truth and error, Mr. Douglass continued: Good old John Brown [loud applause] was a madman at Harper's Ferry. Two years pass away; and the nation is as made as he. [Great cheering.] Every general and every soldier that now goes in good faith to Old Virginia, goes there for the very purpose that led honest John Brown to Harper's Ferry. [Renewed cheers.] After discussing the momentous power of Free Speech, he continued: One of the peculiarities of our times compels notice here. Parties have to some extent changed sides on the subject of free speech. The men who would a few years ago mob and hang Abolitionists for exercising the sacred right of free thought and speech, have all at once become the most urgent for the largest liberty of speech. And I must say, detestable as are the motives that have brought them to defense of free speech, I think they have the right in the controversy. I do not know where I would limit the right of simple utterance of opinion. If any one is base enough to spit upon the grave of his mother, or to shout for Jefferson Davis, let him, and do not lock him up for it. [Cheering.] After that almost inspired announcement of equal rights contained in the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson has left as nothing more worthy of his profound mind than his saying that error may be safely tolerated where truth is left free to combat it. Equally true, though not always equally manifest, is it that error can never be safely tolerated when truth is not left free to combat it. Whence came the terrible conflict which now rocks our land with the thundering tramp of hostile armies? Why does the cold and greedy earth now drink up the warm red blood of our patriot sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers—carrying sorrow and agony into every household! Many answers have been returned to these questions. This, however, is the true one. A stupendous error, long tolerated, and protected even from discussion, held too sacred to be called in question, has at last become belligerent and snatched the sword of treason for permanent dominion. Nothing strange has happened unto us; the result has been reached naturally. Our trouble is a logical part of the conflict of ages, past, present, and future. It will go on. It cannot be stopped. Here, as elsewhere, the fire will go out only when the fuel is exhausted. The moral chemistry of the universe makes peace between Liberty and Slavery impossible. Moral necessity is upon the slaveholders to stand up for Slavery. The dream and delusion of the hour is that of restoring the country to the condition it occupied previous to the war. What good would come of such restoration? What is this tremendous war but ripened fruit of that past condition? Our present, horrible as it is, is the legitimate child of our previous; and to go back to what we were is simply to as us to come back again to what we are. The conflict has changed its form from words to blows, and it may change again for blows to words; but the conflict itself, in one form or the other, will go on till truth is slain or error is driven from the field. [Cheers.] Much as I hate Slavery, and glad as I should be to see it instantly abolished, I would consent gladly to any peace if the right of speech, and the liberty of the peaceably assembling could be secured in every part of the Union. [Applause.] When error consents to reason truth may also consent to reason. But when error take the sword, truth must also take the sword. Not to do this and cry out “peace at any price,” is to desert the truth, and give up the world to the powers of darkness. The man who now preaches peace, preaches treason to his country and the paramount claims of truth and justice. The slaveholders are fighting for Slavery. The boldness with which they avow this object would astonish the world, but that the world knows that cunning, not courage is the cause of their making it. They know that all attempt at concealment would be absurd and fruitless. They are fighting for Slavery—and Slavery being against nature—they are fighting against the eternal laws of nature, and though they should for a time succeed—dissolve the Union, capture a part of our territory, compel the North to sue for peace, and obtain peace upon the usual terms of compromise by which the South gets all and the North nothing. [Laughter and cheers.] Nature would set herself right in the end. Great is truth, great is humanity, and they must prevail. [Cheering.] A great man once said it was useless to re-enact the laws of God, meaning thereby the laws of Nature. But a greater man than he will yet teach the world that it is useless to re-enact any other laws with any hope of their permanence. There are said to be some towns in this country which are finished, nothing more will or can be done for them, and that they might be fenced in without detriment. There are individuals of the

same description whose greatest alarm seems to be that things may change after they are dead. [Cheers.] As the nerves of one of your dwellers in a finished tower would be shocked by the sound of a hammer, those of our respectable Hunkers are shocked by the sound of a newly discovered truth. [Laughter and applause.] They recognize it as a disturber of the world's place. But the world, like the fish preached to in the stream, moves on obedience to the laws of its being bearing away all excrescences and imperfections in its progress. It has its periods of illumination as well as of darkness, and often bounds forward a greater distance in a single year than in any age before. The rosy morning light of a great truth breaks upon the vision of some early riser—and straightway he wakes up the drowsy world with the announcement of the day and the work. Sleepy people don't like to be disturbed. They hate the trouble, call him names, draw their curtains, close their blinds, turn their backs to the light—but the sun rises nevertheless, and the most conservative Hunker of them all is compelled in time to acknowledge it. [Cheers.] Less than one hundred years ago it is said that the people on the West Coast of Ireland thought that the proper way to attach a horse to a plow was by the tail. [Laughter.] It seemed to them that that was what the tail was made for. [Laughter and cheers.] Only two hundred years ago, we are told by the pious Godwin, that the Christian people of the British West Indies thought it a sin to baptize persons of color who were slaves. The argument against baptism was quite logical. They said that negroes are property, and it is not right to baptize property; and a learned divine thought it necessary to write a book to prove that it was not a sin to baptize a negro. [Laughter.] At a time less remote than that, even in New-England, now so remarkable for its enlightenment and its liberty, if any aged woman were in any wise distinguished for talent, and a little eccentric withal, as most gifted women are supposed to be, she stood a smart chance of being hanged as a witch. New England has outgrown this folly, and is condemned by some who reproach her, for refusing now to fall in with the barbarism of Slavery. At one time to hate and despise a Jew, simply for being a Jew, was almost a Christian virtue. They were treated with every species of indignity, not allowed to learn trades, nor to live in the same part of the city with other people. Now kings cannot go to war without the contest of a Jew. The Jew has come up, and the negro will come up by and by. The world is not much older than it was when to torture and burn men for a difference of speculative religious belief was deemed simple fidelity to the Christian faith. All the wisdom of Boston could devise no better way to a hundred years ago to cure a woman of Quakerism than the cart-whip. Roger Williams found more toleration among the Indians of Rhode Island than among the Puritans of Massachusetts. It is only thirty years ago when a gentlemen of property and standing in the very Athens of America felt it a patriotic duty to mob Wm. L. Garrison and break up a woman's Anti-Slavery prayer meeting. Only two years ago there remained enough of this brutality and barbarism in Boston to block the streets of that city with a mob of 10,000 men clamoring for the blood of an eminent Boston citizen, for simply daring to speak against Slavery. These facts are notorious and oft repeated. I mention them here not to cast reproach but as part of the struggle between truth and error, and as a proof of progress. Fortunately for mankind, error is a bad reasoner. It can fight better than it can reason. It can make mouths, call names, and fling brickbats, but cannot reason except to damage itself. All the powers of the universe fight steadily against it. Brooks could knock down the Senator, but the whole South in arms could not knock down the Senator's argument. Such is my confidence in the potency of truth, in the power of reason; I hold that had the right of free discussion been preserved during the last thirty years, had the Northern parties and politicians been half so diligent in protecting this high constitutional right, from the first ruthlessly struck down all over the South, as they have been in framing laws for the recapture of poor, toil-worm or foot-sore slaves, we should now have no Slavery to breed Rebellion, nor war, black with dismal terror, to drench our land with blood, and fill our dwellings with sorrow and mourning. Slavery would have fallen as it fell in the West Indies, as it has fallen in the Free States, as it has fallen in Russia and elsewhere, and as it will fall everywhere, when men can assail it with the weapons of reason and the facts of experience. [Applause.] No men better understand the moral weakners of Slavery than the slaveholders themselves. The simple ones among them may think the system strong in reason; but the leading minds at the South know and confess the contrary. The Columbia (S.C.) Telegraph only echoed the sentiment of the whole South when it said thirty years ago:

“Let us declare through the public journals of the country that the question of Slavery is not and shall not be open to discussion, that the moment any private individual shall attempt to lecture upon its evils and immorality, and the necessity of putting means in operation to secure us from them, in that same moment, his tongue shall be cut out and cast upon a dung hill.”

The Augusta (Ga.) Chronicle of the same period, speaking of one who had atrempted [attempted] thus to lecture, says:

“He should have been hanged up as high as Haman to rot till the wind whistled through his bones. The cry of the whole South should be death to the Abolitionists, wherever found.”

The Lords of the Lash have often boasted of late that discussion has convinced that that Slavery is right. That in this respect they are wiser than Washington, who desired to see Slavery abolished, and would gladly give his vote for such abolition; wiser than Jefferson, who said he trembled for his country when he reflected that God was just, and that his justice could not sleep forever: wiser than Franklin, who was President of the first Abolition Society in America; wiser than Madison, who did not wish to have it said in the Constitution that there could be any such thing [thing] as property in man; wiser than the Congress of 1807, which abolished the Slave Trade, and wiser than the men of 1787, who abolished Slavery in all the Territory then belonging to the United States. They tell us that discussion [discussion] has made them thus wise. Discussion 'inneed [indeed]! Discussion which only permits one side to be heard, and compels the other to remain silent, would be likely to lead to just such a result. The slaveholder has spoken, but the slave has remained dumb. On the other side of the oppressor is power, on the side of the slave weakness. The whole array of Southern lawyers, priests, and politicians—the whole power of Southern press, pulpit, and platform have for 30 years stifled the very groans of the millions in bondage. Valuing itself at \$2,000,000,000—a mountain of gold—it has bribed and bought up all the subtle machinery of religion, science, and law, in favor of Slavery. While denouncing rails, tar and feathers, faggots and fire against any who should dare call in question the accursed system of Slavery, and this they call discussion. Thus the moral eyes of Southern society were put out. They banished from among them every moral antidote for the dreadful evil of Slavery and have chosen to walk blindfolded in to the very jaws of death. I confess that when I consider the common people of the South, especially helpless women and children, who are often startled at midnight, and made to leave their beds and homes, half clad, to find their way to the woods through darkness, rain, mud, and snow. I feel something like pity for these people, while I feel a burning indignation for those who have blinded and deceived them. Under the whole heavens there never was a people more completely given over to believe a he might be destroyed. They are suffering all the horrors of war at this moment, because, deluded by their moral teachers, both at the North and at the South. Look at it! If they went to church where men profess to speak by the authority of God. What did they hear on the subject of Slavery? Why, this: That Jesus Christ and his Apostles, through they walked in the presence of Roman Slavery—which was far more severe than ours—nowhere condemned the system; that the New Testament prescribed and enjoined obedience from slaves to their masters; that even to catch and return runaway slaves was in accordance with apostolic example, and that the main feature of the Fugitive Slave bill was in harmony with Paul's Epistle to Philemon. [Laughter.] They learned from their moral teachers that they might whip, hold, buy, and sell men and women innocently, for slavery was of Divine appointment, established by the law of Moses, and regulated by the law of Christ. Slaveholders are the modern Abrahams, Isaacs, and Jacobs in the Church of God. [Renewed laughter.] Such was the teaching at the South. Was the case much better at the North? You know and I know that even here, the black mantle of Slavery was everywhere flaunted in our faces from Northern pulpits. If at any time during the last thirty years preceding the firing upon Fort Sumter any slaveholder had consulted the leading divines of the North as to the sinfulness of Slavery, he would have found that the teachings of the Northern pulpit differed very little from that of the South. A few heterodox, and still fewer orthodox ministers, filling humble pulpits and living upon small salaries, have espoused the cause of the slave; but the ministers of high standing—the \$5,000 divines—were almost to a man on the side of Slavery, and did their best to defend the system from the assaults of the Abolitionists. They steadily denied the inherent sinfulness of Slavery, and so far from being rebuked as an offender, the slaveholder was received and welcomed as a saint. Every influential pulpit of Rochester, where I live was open to slaveholders so lately as two or three years ago. The old School General Assembly met there—the city survived it—at that time. [Laughter and applause.] The late Dr. Thornwall, a champion, alike of Secession and of Slavery, was there. He was courted and welcomed by every prominent pulpit of the city, while that faithful champion of the rights of human nature, Dr. George B. Cheever, was coldly repulsed from all such pulpits. What was true of Rochester three years ago, and true of the whole North, would become true again if this war were settled on the basis of compromise. Nay, I should expect that the Press would be fettered at the North nearly as heavily as it is at the South. Slavery would be welcomed and honored in Northern pulpits, with a servility more disgusting and shocking than ever before. Why do I make these remarks? I will tell you. Much as I value the present apparent hostility to Slavery at the North, I plainly see that it is less the outgrowth of high and intelligent moral conviction against Slavery, as such, than because of the trouble its friends have brought upon the country. I would have Slavery hated for that and more. A man that hates Slavery for what it does to the white man, stands ready to embrace it the moment its injuries are confined to the black man, and he ceases to feel those injuries to his own person. [Cheers.] I confess, if I could possibly doubt the salvation of this nation, it would not be because the traitors Rebels are strong, but because we are weak at this vital point. There is yet among us a cowardly shrinking from a full and frank acknowledgement of the manhood of the negro, and a whole-souled recognition of his power to help in this great struggle through which we are passing. [Cheers.] But to proceed: The saying that the children of this world are in their day and generation wiser than the children of light, is verified in the history of the conflict between Slavery and Freedom. History will accord to the Abolitionists a large measure of wisdom, and heroic courage and fortitude in assailing Slavery in its strongholds of

Church and State; but it cannot award to them that prophetic vision that sees the end from the beginning. It is fortunate, I think, that they did not see it—fortunate that they walked by faith and not by sight. Could they have foreseen their country torn and rent by the giant footsteps of this terrible rebellion—could they have seen a million of men, confronting each other, discussing the question of Slavery with cannon—could they have seen the rivers red with blood, the fields whitened with human bones, they might have shrunk back from the moral contest, and thus only have postponed this physical contest to a future day, and upon a more dreadful scale than the one now going on. From the very first the enemies of Abolitionism comprehended one feature in the nature of the contest between Freedom and Slavery. They saw at least the evils attendant on that conflict. Merchants saw their trade with the South embarrassed and ruined. Churches saw their denominations divided. The old political parties saw their organizations broken up. Statesmen saw the Union dissolved and terrible border wars inaugurated. Worshipping at mammon's altar themselves they knew the mighty hold which mammon held upon its Southern worshippers. They said that the slaveholders would strike down the Government before they would give up Slavery. They predicted that the South would secede if we did not stop talking and voting against slavery. By their very predictions, they helped on the fulfillment. The South was flattered and encouraged by what was thus expected of her by leading men at the North. She doubtless expected that those who said she would dissolve her connection with Union without once denouncing her doing so as a crime, recognized her right to do so, and would rather think her wanting in spirit if she did not do so. Foreseeing the evils thus predicted, these men cried with one accord: "Give us the Union; give us Slavery and prosperity; give us Slavery and peace; give us error, if Slavery be an error; and as for what you call [call] truth and human liberty, crucify them." The world has been [seen] no greater example of patience and perseverance than that exhibited by the Abolitionists in meeting the objections of their opponents. Weapons of war they had cast from the battle. No Abolitionist every drew sworn [sword] against Slavery until Slavery drew its exterminating sword against Liberty on the soil of Kansas. It was only after he saw his brave sons hunted like felons and shot down like wolves, that noble old John Brown went to Harper's Ferry. [Cheers.] Until this, Anti-Slavery men, of all shades of opinion were eminently peaceful. The grand mistake of the Abolitionists was in supposing the American people better than they were. They did not see that an evil so gigantic as Slavery, so interwoven with the social arrangements, manners, and morals of the country, could not be removed without something like the social earthquake now upon us. They ought to have known that the huge Leviathan would cause the deep to boil—aye, to howl, and hiss, and foam in sevenfold agony. Great, however, as was our mistake, incomparably greater and vastly more harmful was the mistake of those who flattered themselves and the nation that all was peace and prosperity, and that the nation had nothing to fear from anything but Abolitionists. They thought that this nation could go on year after year and century after century, outraging and trampling upon the sacred rights of human nature, and they could still enjoy peace and prosperity. To them the world was without a moral Government and might was right. The war now on our hands is sometimes described as a school for the moral education of the nation. I like the designation. It certainly is a school, and a very severe and costly one. But who will say that it will not be worth all it costs if it shall correct our errors concerning Slavery and free us from that barbarism. [Applause.] Slavery from the first has not only been our great national crime, but our great national scandal and mistake. The first grand error of which this war is likely to cure us is: That a nation can outlaw one part of its people without endangering the rights and liberties of all the people. They will learn that they cannot put a chain on the ankle of the bondmen without finding the other end of it about their own necks. Hitherto the white laborer has been deluded into the belief that to degrade the black laborer is to elevate the white. We shall learn by-and-by that labor will always [always] be degraded where idleness if [is] the badge of respectability. Hence came the degrading phrases, fast growing popular before the war, "hireling labor," "greasy mechanics," "mudsills of society." The laborer should be "doomed by the capitalists."—Poor "white trash"—and a dozen others of the same class: They come from Slavery. I think I never saw anywhere such contempt for poor white people as in the South. [Loud Cheers.] Gen. Butler has made a discovery which any man having two eyes could not fail to make in the South, that the war of the Rebels—is a war of the rich against the poor. Let Slavery go down with the war, and let labor cease to be fettered, chained, flogged, and branded. Let it be paid honest wages for honest work, and then we shall see as never before, the laborers in all sections of this country rising to respectability and power. [Cheers.] That this war is to abolish Slavery I have no manner of doubt. The process may be long and tedious, but the event will come at last. It is among the undoubted certainties of the future. [Cheering.] It is objected to the Proclamation of Freedom, that it only abolishes Slavery in the Rebel States. To me it seems a blunder that Slavery was not declared abolished everywhere in the Republic. Slavery everywhere endangers the National cause, and should perish everywhere. [Loud applause.] But even in this emission of the Proclamation the evil is more seeming than real. When Virginia is a free States, Maryland cannot be a slave State. When Missouri is a free State, Kentucky cannot be a slave State. [Cheers.] Slavery must stand or fall together. Strike it at either extreme—either on the head or at the heel, and it dies. A brick knocked down at either end of the row brings every brick in it to the ground. [Applause.] You have heard the story of the Irishman who paid the price of two spurs—but refused to carry away but one; on the ground, as he said, that if he could make

one side of the horse go, he would risk the other. [Laughter and cheering.] So I say, if we can strike down Slavery in the Rebel States, I will risk the downfall of Slavery in the Border States. [Cheering.] It is again objected to this proclamation that it is only an ink and paper proclamation. I admit it. The objector might go a step further, and assert that there was a time when this Proclamation was only a thought, a sentiment, an idea—a hope of some radical Abolitionist—for such it truly was. But what of it? The world has never advanced a single inch in the right direction, when the movement could not be traced to some such small beginning. The bill abolishing Slavery, and giving freedom to eight hundred thousand people in the West Indies, was a paper bill. The Reform bill, that broke up to rotten borough system in England, was a paper bill. The act of Catholic Emancipation was a paper act, and so was the bill repealing the Corn Laws. Greater than all, our own Declaration of Independence was at one time but ink and paper. [Cheering.] The freedom of the American colonies date from no particular battle during the war. No man can tell upon what particular day we won our nation independence. But the birth of our freedom is fixed on the day of the going forth of the Declaration of Independence. In like manner after coming generations will celebrate the first of January as the day which brought liberty and manhood to American slaves. [Loud cheers.] How shall this be done? I answer: That paper Proclamation must now be made iron, lead and fire, by the prompt employment of the negro's arm in this contest. [Great applause.] I hold that the Proclamation, good as it is, will be worthless—a miserable mockery—unless the nation shall so far conquer its prejudice as to welcome into the army full-grown black men to help fight the battles of the Republic. [Renewed applause.] I know it is said that the negroes won't fight. But I distrust the accuser. In one breathe the Copperheads tell you the slaves won't fight, and in the next they tell you that the only effect of the Proclamation is to make the slaves cut their masters' throats [laughter] and stir up insurrections all over the South. The same men tell you that the negroes are lazy and good for nothing, and in the next breath they tell you that they will all come North and take the labor away from the laboring white men here. [Laughter and cheers.] In one breath they tell you that the negro can never learn the military art, and in the next they tell you that there is danger that white men may be outranked by colored men. [Continued laughter.] I may be pardoned if I leave these objections to their own contradictions and absurdities. They are like the Kilkenny cats, and there is a fair probability of the same result. [Great Laughter.] But we are asked why have the negroes remained silent spectators of the dreadful struggle now going on? I am not annoyed by this question. The course pursued by them is creditable to their wisdom [wisdom]. The negro has proved that he is meek, like the white man. He will fight, but he must have a reasonable prospect of whipping somebody. Up to the first day of the last month there was no earthly chance of success in a rising among the slaves. Both the Union and the Confederate armies were in the field against the negro. Madness itself could not counsel the slaves to rise in such circumstances. Their not doing so should be charged not to their cowardice, but to their good sense. But who are those who are now opposing the measure of putting arms in the hands of colored men? Who are those who are opposed to raising colored troops. They are the men who would gladly disarm every white soldier now fighting for their country, and hand the country over, bound hand and foot, into the hands of Jefferson Davis. You know the men, and ought to know how much weight should be given to the counsels of such men. Would these men rather drown than be saved by a black man? Would they prefer to see their dwellings burnt to ashes than to have the flames extinguished by colored men? If they would not, then are they traitors in disguise, and very little disguise at that, when they refuse to the country, now in its peril, what they would gladly claim for themselves. They exhibit their unmitigated hollowness by opposing the enrolment of colored troops. [Cheers.] Do you ask me whether black men will freely enlist in the service of the country? I tell you that that depends upon the white men of the country. The Government must assure them of protection as soldiers, and give them a fair chance of winning distinction and glory in common with other soldiers. [Cheers.] They must not be made the mere hewers of wood and drawers of water for the army. When a man leaves home, family, and security, to risk his limbs and life in the field of battle, for God's sake let him have all the honor which he may achieve, let his color be what it may. If, by the fortunes of war he is flung into the hands of the Rebels, let him be assured that the loyal Government will not desert him, but will hold the Confederate Government strictly responsible, as much for a black as for a white soldier. [Applause.] Give is fair play, and open here your recruiting offices, and their doors shall be crowded with black recruits to fight the battles of the country. [Loud cheers.] Do your part, my white fellow-countrymen, and we will do ours.

Oh! Where's the slave so lowly,
Condemned to chains unholy,
Who, could he burst his chains at fight,
Would pine beneath them slowly?

The colored man only waits for honorable admission into the service of the country. They know that who would be free,

themselves must strike the blow, and they long for the opportunity to strike that blow. Thus far, however, the colored men of the Free States, and for the most part, of the Slave States, have had their military ardor chilled by the contempt with which their offer to serve their country has been refused. We asked the Governor of New York if he would accept colored troops, and he said it would be impossible for him to receive them. We asked Gov. Curtin of Pennsylvania, and he would not receive colored soldiers at any rate. So that an ardor was chilled. But I know colored men now in the army passing for white, not much whiter than I, but by shaving their heads very closely they manage to get in. I have one from my own town who has been promoted recently. [Laughter and cheers.] If I could speak loud enough to be heard by the Government at Washington I should say, have a care, have a care, lest you let slip the last moment when your call for help can be answered. You have wronged us long and wronged us greatly, but it is not yet too late to retrieve the past. We still stand ready to serve you, and will do it with a will, at the first sound of your war-trumpet. [Cheers.] I know the colored men of the North; I know the colored men of the South. They are ready to rally under the stars and stripes at the first tap of the drum. Give them a chance; stop calling them “niggers,” and call them soldiers. [Applause.] Give them a chance to seek the bauble reputation at the cannon’s mouth. Stop telling them they can’t fight, and tell them they can fight and shall fight, and they will fight and fight with vengeance. Give them a chance. The most delicate lady in the city of New-York can ride by the side of a blackman, if he is there is [as] a servant. Even the most fastidious of our Generals can be waited [waited] on by colored men. Why should they object to our fighting? We were with you on the banks of the Mobile, good enough to fight with under Gen. Jackson. Why not let us fight by your side under Gen. Hooker. [Loud cheering.] We shall have a chance yet, and I tell you to whom I am looking for this. I have great faith, as I told you more than a year ago, in the virtue of the people of the North; I have none in the villainy of the South. [Laughter and applause.] I tell you that under their direction we shall yet be able to accept the aid of the colored man. Away with prejudice, away with folly, and in this death struggle for liberty, country, and permanent security, let the black, iron hand of the colored man fall heavily on the head of the slaveholding traitors and rebels and lay them low. Give them a chance! Give them a chance. I don't say they are great fighters. I don't say they will fight better than other men. All I say is, give them a chance. I feel that we are living in a glorious time. I felt so [so] on the first of January, and have been feeling so ever since. I felt whiter, and I have my hair with less difficulty. [Cheers and laughter.] You had a grand time here, and we had a grand time at Boston. We had two machines running—at Musical Hall and Tremont Temple—more than three thousand at each. You want to know what the colored people think. I will tell you how joyfully they received the Proclamation of Abraham Lincoln. We were not all colored either; but we all seemed to be about of one color that day. We met in good spirits at 10 o'clock expecting before the adjournment to have the Proclamation [Proclamation]. We waited on each speaker keeping our eyes on the door. No Proclamation. The president said we would meet again [again] at two when he had no doubt we read to Proclamation. We met again but no Proclamation. We did not know whether to shout or hold our peace but we adjourned again with the understanding that it was on the wires and we should certainly [have?] it in the evening. But no Proclamation came. We went on until 11 o'clock and I said, we won't go home till morning. By and by Judge Russell went to one of the newspaper offices [sic] and obtained a slip containing the Proclamation. I never saw enthusiasm before. I never saw joy before. Men, women, young and old, were up; hats and bonnets were in the air, and we have three cheers for Abraham Lincoln and three cheers for about everybody else. Some prayed and some sang, and finally we adjourned from the place to meet in the Rev. Mr. Graves Church; that good old soul [laughter] and we continued greeting them till 3 o'clock. There was shouting and saying, “Glory, Hallelujah,” “Old John Brown,” “Marching On,” and “Blow Ye, the Trumpet Blow!”—till we got up such a state of enthusiasm that almost anything seemed to be witty. There was one black man who stood in a corner, and I thought I never saw a blacker man, and I think I never saw whiter teeth. Occasionally he would bound up like a fish out of water, and, as he was standing in a dark place, you could see nothing going up but a little white streak. [Loud laughter.] About the last he said he must speak, and I will make you his speech. It was all in place. We were up to the point when everything was in order. “Brethren,” said he, “I was born in North Carolina, where my brother Douglass was born, thank God!” I didn't happen to be born there, but I could not for the life of me interrupt him. Said he, “I was born there, and was born and held a slave there, thank God! [Laughter.] I grew up from childhood to manhood there, thank God!” And the audience shouted. And said he: “When I got to be grown up to man's estate I wanted to marry a wife, thank God! [Laughter.] And said he: “I counted no less than sixteen women, thank God!” [Great laughter.] And said he: “The woman I married is here tonight, thank God!” We all rose up to see this little woman, and she was told to get up, and we looked at her, and she was nothing extraordinary [laughter]; but still it was all in place. The whole of this black congregation—for it was mainly black—was that they were ready to offer their services at any moment for this Government should call for them. And I was to assure you, and the Government, and everybody, that we are ready, and we only ask to be called into this service. What a glorious day when Slavery shall be no more in this country, when we have blotted out this system of wrong, and made this United States in fact and in truth what it is in theory—The Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave. [Loud applause.]

Mr. Robert Hamilton sang the new John Brown [Brown] song, and Mr. Theodore Tilton made a few remarks, contrasting the manner in which the name and deeds of John Brown were received in New-York two years ago to-day.

For the first two years of the Civil War black and white abolitionists urged both the liberation of the slaves and the recruitment of African American men in defense of the Union. Barely three months after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, Frederick Douglass gave a speech in Rochester, New York on March 2, 1863, titled "Men of Color, To Arms!" which urged African American men to join what was increasingly a war to make real what the Proclamation only promised—complete freedom.

When first the rebel cannon shattered the walls of Sumter and drove away its starving garrison, I predicted that the war then and there inaugurated would not be fought out entirely by white men. Every month's experience during these dreary years has confirmed that opinion. A war undertaken and brazenly carried on for the perpetual enslavement of colored men, calls logically and loudly for colored men to help suppress it. Only a moderate share of sagacity was needed to see that the arm of the slave was the best defense against the arm of the slaveholder. Hence with every reverse to the national arms, with every exulting shout of victory raised by the slaveholding rebels, I have implored the imperiled nation to unchain against her foes, her powerful black hand. Slowly and reluctantly that appeal is beginning to be heeded. Stop not now to complain that it was not heeded sooner. It may or it may not have been best that it should not. This is not the time to discuss that question. Leave it to the future. When the war is over, the country is saved, peace is established, and the black man's rights are secured, as they will be, history with an impartial hand will dispose of that and sundry other questions. Action! Action! not criticism is the plain duty of this hour. Words are now useful only as they stimulate to blows. The office of speech now is only to point out when, where, and how to strike to the best advantage. There is no time to delay. The tide is at its flood that leads on to fortune. From East to West, from North to South, the sky is written all over, "Now or never." Liberty won by white men would lose half its luster. "Who would be free themselves must strike the blow." "Better even die free, than to live slaves." This is the sentiment of every brave colored man amongst us. There are weak and cowardly men in all nations. We have them amongst us. They tell you this is the "white man's war"; that you will be no "better off after than before the war;" that the getting of you into the army is to "sacrifice you on the first opportunity." Believe them not; cowards themselves, they do not wish to have their cowardice shamed by your brave example. Leave them to their timidity, or to whatever motive may hold them back. I have not their timidity, or to whatever motive may hold them back. I have not thought lightly of the words I am now addressing you. The counsel I give comes of close observation of the great struggle now in progress, and of the deep conviction that this is your hour and mine. In good earnest then, and after the best deliberation, I now for the first time during this war feel at liberty to call and counsel you to arms. By every consideration which binds you to your enslaved fellow countrymen, and the peace and welfare of your country; by every aspiration which you cherish for the freedom and equality of yourselves and your children; by all the ties of blood and identity which make us one with the brave black men now fighting our battles in Louisiana and in South Carolina, I urge you to fly to arms, and smite with death the power that would bury the government and your liberty in the same hopeless grave. I wish I could tell you that the State of New York calls you to this high honor. For the moment her constituted authorities are silent on the subject. They will speak by and by, and doubtless on the right side; but we are not compelled to wait for her. We can get at the throat of treason and slavery through the State of Massachusetts. She was first in the War of Independence; first to break the chains of her slaves; first to make the black man equal before the law; first to admit colored children to her common schools, and she was first to answer with her blood the alarm cry of the nation, when its capital was menaced by rebels. You know her patriotic governor, and you know Charles Sumner. I need not add more.

Massachusetts now welcomes you to arms as soldiers. She has but a small colored population from which to recruit. She has full leave of the general government to send one regiment to the war, and she has undertaken to do it. Go quickly and help fill up the first colored regiment from the North. I am authorized to assure you that you will receive the same wages, the same rations, the same equipments, the same protection, the same treatment, and the same bounty, secured to the white soldiers. You will be led by able and skillful officers, men who will take special pride in your efficiency and success. They will be quick to accord to you all the honor you shall merit by your valor, and see that your rights and feelings are respected by other soldiers. I have assured myself on these points, and can speak with authority. More than twenty years of unswerving devotion to our common cause may give me some humble claim to be trusted at this momentous crisis. I will not argue. To do so implies hesitation and doubt, and you do not hesitate. You do not doubt. The day dawns; the morning star is bright upon the horizon! The iron gate

of our prison stands half open. One gallant rush from the North will fling it wide open, while four millions of our brothers and sisters shall march out into liberty. The chance is now given you to end in a day the bondage of centuries, and to rise in one bound from social degradation to the plane of common equality with all other varieties of men. Remember Denmark Vesey of Charleston; remember Nathaniel Turner of Southampton; remember Shields Green and Cope land, who followed noble John Brown, and fell as glorious martyrs for the cause of the slave. Remember that in a contest with oppression, the Almighty has no attribute which can take sides with oppressors. The case is before you. This is our golden opportunity. Let us accept it, and forever wipe out the dark reproaches unsparingly hurled against us by our enemies. Let us win for ourselves the gratitude of our country, and the best blessings of our posterity through all time. The nucleus of this first regiment is now in camp at Readville, a short distance from Boston. I will undertake to forward to Boston all persons adjudged fit to be mustered into the regiment who shall apply to me at any time within the next two weeks.