

# Alexander Clark's Speech at the "Colored Convention" in Des Moines, Iowa, 1868

*Proceedings of the Iowa State Colored Convention held in the City of Des Moines, Wednesday and Thursday, February 12th and 13th, 1868.*

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## **Address of the Colored State Convention to the People of Iowa in Behalf of their Enfranchisement.**

Prepared and delivered to the convention by A. Clark, Chairman of the Committee on Address, Feb. 13th, 1868.

To the people of Iowa: To every true, honest and liberty-loving citizen of Iowa do the colored men of your proud commonwealth appeal for sympathy and aid in securing these rights and privileges which belong to us as freemen.

Having established our claim to the proud title of American soldiers and shared in the glories won by the deeds of the true men of our own color, will you not heed and hear our appeal?

We appeal to the sense of justice of the Legislature and of the people of our own State, for those rights of citizenship without which our self-earned freedom is but a shadow.

We ask no privilege; we simply ask you to recognize our claim to manhood by giving to us that right without which we have no power to defend ourselves from unjust legislation, and no voice in the government we have endeavored to preserve.

Being men, we claim to be of that number comprehended in the Declaration of Independence, and who are entitled not only to life, but to equal rights in the pursuit and securing of happiness and in the choice of those who are to rule over us.

Deprived of this, we are forced to pay taxes without representation; to submit, without appeal, to laws however offensive, without a single voice in framing them; to bear arms without the right to say whether against friend or foe — against loyalty or disloyalty.

Without suffrage, we are forced into strict subjection to a government whose councils are to us foreign, and are called by our own countrymen to witness a violence upon the primary principles of a

republican government as gross and outrageous as that which justly stirred patriot Americans to throw overboard the tea from English bottoms in a Boston harbor and to wage war for Independence.

Let a consistent support be given to this principle of government, founded only “on the consent of the governed” — to this keystone in the arch of American liberty — and our full rights as freemen are secured.

Our demands are not excessive; we ask not for social equality with the white man, as is often claimed by the shallow demagogue; for a law higher than human must forever govern social relations.

We ask only that privilege which is now given to every white, native-born or adopted, male citizen of our State - the privilege of the ballot-box.

We ask that the word “white” be stricken from the Constitution of our State; that the organic law of our State shall give to suffrage irrevocable guarantees that shall know of no distinction at the polls on account of color; and in this we simply ask that the “two streams of loyal blood which it took to conquer one, mad with treason,” shall not be separated at the ballot-box; that he who can be trusted with an army musket, which makes victory and protects the nation, shall also be trusted with that boon of American liberty, the ballot, to express a preference for his rulers and his laws.

We demand this is native born citizens of the United States, and who have never known other allegiance than to its authority and the laws of our State, and as those who have been true and loyal to our government from its foundation to the present time, and who have never deserted its interest whilst even in the midst of treason and under subjection to its most violent enemies.

We ask, in the honored name of 200,000 colored troops, five hundred of whom were from our own Iowa, who with the first opportunity, enlisted under the flag of our country and the banner of our State, and bared their breasts to the remorseless storm of treason, and by hundreds went down to death in the conflict, whilst the franchised rebels and their cowardly friends, the now bitter enemies of our right to suffrage, remained in quiet at home, safe, and fattened on the fruits of our sacrifice, toil and blood.

We make these demands as one of right and necessity, if not expediency, and are unwilling to believe that a powerful, ruling people, strengthened by new victories with the aid of our hands, could be less magnanimous in purpose and in action, less consistent with the true theory of a sound democracy, than to concede to us our claims.

We believe that with expediency even our demands are not at war, but that with right does public policy strike hands and unite our votes, as it did our muskets, to the maintenance of authority over the disorganizing elements which attend a returning peace.

We have too much faith in the permanency of this government to believe that the extension of the elective franchise to a few loyal colored men could unsettle its foundation or violate a single declaration of its rights.

Therefore we will not believe but that the people of Iowa will be the first to do full justice to the men of color as they have been among the foremost in upholding the flag of our country.

We rejoice in the fact, and congratulate the people our own color in every part of the land that in the recent State election Col. Merrill has been chosen to the gubernatorial chair.

And the entire Republican State ticket elected by the handsome majority of nearly thirty thousand votes, and that they stand as firm on the manhood suffrage issue as did their predecessors.

In this can the colored men of Iowa take courage, and say to our white friends, we are Americans by birth and we assure you that we are Americans in feeling; and in spite of all the wrongs which we have long and silently endured in this our native country, we would yet exclaim, with a full heart, "O America! With all thy faults, we love thee still."

A. Clark,  
P.C. Cooper, Committee  
G. Phelps,