

Primary Source: Address of The Raleigh Freedmen's Convention ^[1]

Although enslaved North Carolinians were emancipated by the Thirteenth Amendment, they were still not afforded the same rights that were given to white citizens -- neither voting rights nor judicial rights had been extended to black men or women.

A state constitutional convention was planned for October 1865 constitutional convention where legislation was passed reuniting North Carolina with the Union, officially abolishing slavery in the state, and repealing the ordinance of secession. Neither those free prior to the Civil War nor those freed during the Civil War were permitted to serve as delegates to this convention, and so, the first North Carolina Freedmen's convention was held days before the constitutional convention. At the North Carolina Freedmen's convention, more than 100 black men met to discuss the future of free blacks in the state.

A second convention was held in October of 1866. Many of the same delegates were in attendance, but this time the western part of the state was better represented, and [Governor Jonathan Worth](#) ^[2] as well as former [Governor William W. Holden](#) ^[3] were invited and present. Below is an excerpt from the minutes of the second Freedmen's Convention held in Raleigh in October 1866.

Address of the Freedmen's Convention to the White and Colored citizens of North Carolina.

FELLOW-CITIZENS: We, the colored People of North-Carolina, in Convention assembled at Raleigh, on the 2nd, 3d, 4th and 5th days of Oct. 1866, viewing the complex condition of affairs and of public [sentiment](#) ^[4] in our State, [deem](#) ^[5] it our duty to present to you our grievances, our sufferings and the outrages heaped upon us, because of our helpless and disqualified position for self-defence, resulting, as we think we can prove, from no greater cause than our long and unjust political [disfranchisement](#) ^[6].

We ask you, in the spirit of meekness, is taxation without representation just? History and conscience answer no!

We do not come to you in a spirit of [reproach](#) ^[7] or [denunciation](#) ^[8], neither do we feel in pleading for equal rights without regard to complexional differences, that we are in the least degree selfish. Nor do we in any respect seek to lower the standard of refinement, intelligence or honor among the great and loyal people of the commonwealth of North-Carolina, by urging these questions upon your consideration at this time. We would view if possible the brightest side of the picture, which we have to present, and give to our beloved State all the honor and credit deserved for the rapid strides which this great Nation has been taking in the direction of universal [emancipation](#) ^[9] and equality before the law.

You will [acquiesce](#) ^[10] when we say that we can boast a little of our loyalty to the general government, in the bloody struggle through which we have just passed. Our fathers fought shoulder to shoulder with the white man in the Revolutionary war, and in the war of 1812. They did their duty and did it well. In the one just ended, our fathers, brothers and sons bared their breasts to the fiery storm to save the Union.

FELLOW-CITIZENS: You have taught us one good thing, which we cannot forget. It is this: "That all men are born free and equal, and that they are endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed," &c.

FELLOW-CITIZENS:— Can we look to you for protection or not, to shield us from the murderous hand? Oh, humanity, where is thy blush? Our defenceless wives and children, fathers, sons and brothers are beaten with clubs, robbed, shot and killed, in various localities, and the authorities regard it not. We beg you as white men in authority to shield our defenceless heads, and guard our little homes. We appeal to your religion and humanity. We claim by merit the right of [suffrage](#) ^[11], and ask it at your hands. We believe the day has come, when black men have rights which white men are bound to respect. We intend to live and die on the soil which gave us birth. Oh, North-Carolina, the land of our birth, with all thy faults we love thee still. Will you, oh! will you treat us as human beings, with all our rights? It is all we ask.

Your [humble](#) ^[12] servants, in behalf of the State's Equal Rights League,

GEO. A. RUE, Chairman.

J. T. SCHNECK, H. LOCKET, J. A. SYKES

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People:

Delegates of the State Equal Rights League Convention of Freedmen:

- [John Adams Hyman](#) [27]
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