

1864. Appeal from Executive Board National Equal Rights League

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The National Convention of Colored Citizens of the United States established a National Equal Rights League.

To you, then, the people of the country, belong the duty and responsibility carrying forward on its errand of justice, humanity and freedom the great national enterprise, inaugurated at our late National Convention.

Shall the National Equal Rights League be sustained?

Shall we labor, concentrating our influence and our means in this organization to achieve the objects and purposes which it contemplates? All will agree that we need such an organization among us. All must acknowledge the importance and necessity of doing all in our power, by united and persistent action to obtain a full recognition of our rights as American citizens. And all must admit that this, more than all other periods in our history, is the time to enter upon some well defined, energetic and manly course of action looking to the, attainment of a full recognition by the General and State governments of equality for us before American law.

To-day two hundred thousand choice colored men are clothed in the uniform of the American Union; and already by the brave and gallant use of the musket and sword on many bloody battle-fields, have they challenged the admiration of mankind as they have fought side by side with their white fellow countrymen, to maintain the integrity of the Union and the authority of the government.

While the devotion, the gallantry, and the heroism displayed by our sons, brothers, and fathers at Port Hudson, Fort Wagner, Petersburg, New Market Heights are fresh in the minds of the American people, let us spare no pains, let us not fail to make every effort in our power to secure for ourselves and our children all those rights, natural and political, which belong to us as men and as native-born citizens of America. This we owe to ourselves-certainly, we owe it to our children. Let not theirs be an inheritance of degradation. And who shall say that we do not owe it to the noble men who represent us in the American army and navy? Shall they return, after weary months and years of laborious service, as soldiers and sailors, bearing the scars of hard-earned victories, to tread again the old ways of degradation and wrong! It must not be.

It may not be amiss, in this connection, to remind you that our fathers' were not behind other men in the Revolutionary war and the war of 1812, in exhibitions of patriotism and courage in the defence of this country. . . . It is true that these men and their descendants, if for no other reason, certainly on account of the gallantry, the courage, and the loyalty displayed by them, deserved not only the grateful acknowledgement of the nation, but a full and practical recognition of their rights.

But we know too well by our bitter experience of wrong and degradation, how they were treated after those wars. Wisdom, then, dictates that we should profit by this lesson.

When this our present war shall have ended, it will be our duty to see to it that we have indeed a standing place under American law.

Let us, therefore, proceed at once to call State Conventions and form State Leagues, and with vigor and purpose enter upon the work of accomplishing the objects of our National League. Let our friends and brothers of the Atlantic States vie with those of the far off West in this glorious work. Let New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan lead the way in the prompt and energetic formation of State Leagues, through which we may bring to bear upon the people and legislatures of those States, by appeal and argument and memorial, our united and earnest protest against a further continuance of legislative proscription founded on color.