

The Provincial Freeman, Chatham, Canada, March 21, 1857

The Provincial Freeman was founded in 1854 by Mary Ann Shadd Cary. The first Black North American woman editor and publisher, Shadd Cary was an American-Canadian teacher and lawyer.

News of and proceedings from Colored Conventions were published across state, national, and continental lines through the Black press.

We have received the proceedings of a Convention of colored men, held in Muscatine, Jan. 5th, 1857; and regret that the want of space prevents us from giving the Proceedings in full. Mr. Bowser of Henry County was chosen President; Benjamin Matthews of Muscatine, Vice-- President; Wm. Bener of Linn, and Charles Jackson of Muscatine, Secretaries. A. Clark, R.H. Cain, J.T.L. Honer [sic: Hiner], Committee on Declaration of Sentiment reports as follows:

WHEREAS, We, the colored people of the State of Iowa, in convention assembled, feel ourselves deeply aggrieved by reason of cruel prejudice we are compelled to suffer, in this our native land, which is as dear to us as the white man, knowing full well that the blood of our forefathers, in common with that of the white man, was poured out in the open battle--field, in defence of the liberties we now are deprived of, we are compelled to make the following appeal and address. "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness: to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just power from the consent of the governed." Now, if this be a fact, we hope no one will or can deny that, as we are men, we do, and ought of a right, claim the rights of men; and we do claim to be men -- and appeal to you, in the name of God and an oppressed, down--trodden, disfranchised people, for those rights we are deprived of -- holding up in characters of living flames, that immortal instrument, the Declaration of Independence, to your sight, which should teach all men that God is just, and will suffer no inequality among his people without just retribution. We ask in the name of God, how long shall our cries be scanned by an intelligent and civilized people? Behold the blight of the noonday of the nineteenth century! Civilized Christianity chastising suffering humanity -- robbing, disfranchising the colored people of their inalienable rights to liberty and its security! Oh! will you stop and pause for a moment! Remembering that God rules the destiny of men and of nations, we leave our appeal to your consideration trusting in God for the justice of our cause.

Three other Committees were appointed, composed of the following gentlemen:

On form of Petition, -- A. Clark, R.H. Cain and J.P. Prichard.

On Education -- T.C. Mott, R.H. Cain and Noah Tutt.

Select Committees also made reports upon the subject of Colonization and Emigration.

The report on emigration reads as follows:

We, the committee to whom was referred the subject of emigration, beg leave to say that we deem it unnecessary to enter into an elaborate detail on the subject; but we think proper to say that we would recommend to our people that their interests and elevation had better be sought in this our native land, and especially while our enemies are conniving at every scheme to remove us from the soil of our nativity, it behooves us to stand fast and let our cry and our watchword be, by the help of God, we are here and we intend to live and die here, ever trusting in God for the advancement of our cause; believing the patriotism and progress of the American people sufficient to recognize our rights in common with the rest of mankind.

To the report upon Emigration we would especially call the attention of our readers, and we do it because we object to some of their conclusions.

We have never, and our friends will do us the justice to say so, broached the subject of Emigration while lecturing in the States, but carefully refrained from any discussion on the subject. On the other hand, we have always denounced in unmeasured terms, the infernal schemes concocted by the American Colonization Society, to force the free colored people from their native home to a common grave in Africa. We thought it to be our duty to demand in the name of a constitution, that we believe to be capable of an Anti-slavery construction, every right that is guaranteed to the poorest and meanest white man in the land. In this we were sincere, because we believe while colored man consent to remain in the United States, its their duty to battle unceasingly for their rights. But when it comes to the question, where can their interests individually and collectively be best promoted? We answer unhesitatingly CANADA, CANADA, and no splendid declamation or Pompous rhetoric about the land of our nativity, or the patriotism and progress of the American people, can change this conviction in us, so long as one slave remains upon the soil to lift his fettered hands to God. We deny that "our enemies are conniving at every scheme to remove us from the soil of our nativity." The Committee knows as well as we do, that Pro-slavery men in the United States never urge the propriety of the free colored people emigrating to Canada, on the contrary they use every argument against it. The oppressors of our race in the United States are sagacious, they know that in union there is strength. Their dreams of future conquest and plunder are disturbed by visions [sic] of black regiments upon the Canadian frontier, with the red cross of St. George at their back. In emigrating to Canada we cannot possibly make our condition worse, but we have every chance of making it better, to argue otherwise would be fool hardy in any man or set of men. But we are asked if we intend to leave our brethren in bonds? We answer no. The same reasons that induced us to leave slave-holding in Virginia, where many of our own relations are in slavery, has [] us to exchange the partial liberty in one of the so-called free states, for that sure and perfect freed in secured to every man by the genius of the British constitution. The example of successful Lawyers, Doctors, Merchants and Mechanics among the colored people of Canada, must necessarily effect the institution of slavery, especially if the materials used were formerly its victims. These are moral weapons and at the same time effectual ones in over-throwing slavery. Archimedes said that if he had a place whereon to stand, he would turn the world upside down. Colored men in the States need a spot whereon to stand, so that they can get a lever under slavery. We have that spot here in Canada, where all may labor unitedly too for the extinction of American slavery, and if there is not power enough in our fulcrum to raise that bloody system to its very foundation, we will get old England to lean upon it, and slavery will be at an end. - H.F.D.

Delegates frequently drew upon the ideals and rhetoric of the founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, as they made their claims to rights and freedom.

Delegates' attention to emigration reflected local and transnational concerns. A group of mostly newly freed individuals, delegates' resolve to "live and die here" spoke to their commitment to community-building in Iowa.

Delegates' decisive rejection of arguments for colonization did not represent a fixed consensus. Emigration debates and coordinated schemes by the American Colonization Society to remove Black people from the U.S. took place in the decades that followed.

Colored Conventions began with the election of officers and assembly of committees. The 1857 convention focused on ongoing colonization schemes and matters of education and economic self-sufficiency.

The Provincial Freeman issued a response to the 1857 delegates that argued the merits of emigration without vindicating American racism or colonization schemes. The editors presented Canada instead as a site at which Black abolitionists could definitively destroy the institution of slavery.