

Transcription

Meeting at the Joy Street Church

From *The Liberator* – February 20, 1863

THE NEGRO REGIMENT---MEETING OF THE COLORED CITIZENS

The colored citizens of Boston held a war meeting at the Joy Street church, last evening, for the purpose of awakening an interest in the new enterprise of forming one or more negro regiments in this Commonwealth. The church was crowded, and the object being somewhat novel to this class of our inhabitants, and of peculiar interest and moment to them at this time, considerable enthusiasm was got up, and the exercises were continued till a late hour.

The meeting was organized by the choice of Robert Johnson, Jr., as President, J.R. Sterling, Vice President, and Francis Fletcher, Secretary. The President on taking the chair thanked the audience for the honor of presiding over the meeting, and stated its object to be the procurement of troops for the army of the United States. He thought that a year hence would be shown the necessity of having the black man in arms, and was proud that the time had come when he could feel that he was an American citizen. He besought his hearers, by the love they bore their country, not, by word or act, to deter any, so disposed, from enlisting in the ranks of the 54th regiment. He then introduced Judge Russell as the first speaker.

Judge Russell said he saw no one before him at that time who was not truly an American citizen, for the necessities of the country had reversed the Dred Scott decision. It seemed to him that now was a time when they could do a great deal of good to their country and to themselves. We are all glad indeed to hear and read the last emancipation proclamation, for it was a great and long-desired step in the right direction, and he felt that, in the words of John Hampden—"in the progress of reform there are no steps backward." In the formation of colored regiments there seemed to be a great feeling on one point. You desire to be line officers yourselves.

The speaker thought they had the right to be, and said—"If you want commissions, go earn and get them." (Cheers.) Never let it be said that, when the country called, this reason kept back a single man from the army; but go cheerfully into the ranks, and the day that dawns upon a great battle-field in which your blood is mingled with that of other regiments, fighting side by side with you, that same day will see every prejudice against your race washed out and obliterated.

Edward L. Pierce, Esq., was next introduced. He commenced by reminding his hearers of the many equalities that were now recognized as existing between them and the whites. They had the

same freedom of worship and the same means of education; and he thought that, considering all this, they at least owed us a little. I believe that, when a call is made upon you, there is the same duty to country resting upon you, that there is upon white men, and I call upon you all as citizens to sustain the honor of the State. I call upon you to stand by those who have stood by you for nearly a generation, and by those men who have maintained that you would prove yourselves brave, and noble, and patriotic when you had an opportunity. Men of your color can do more for the cause than white men can do; and those whose deepest sympathies are with you are watching now to see what deeds you will perform. (Cheers.)

Wendell Phillips was next introduced, and he was greeted with great applause. The last time he had met his audience in that place was when he was driven from Tremont Temple by an excited mob. Since then, the feeling towards them had much changed. Some of the men who had pursued and hunted him and them even to that very spot had given up their lives on the battle-fields of Virginia, while others had been converted at New Orleans. [A voice—"Amen!" and laughter.] Then men were for foreign colonization—now they offer you a musket, and say, "Come and help us." In this battle between freedom and slavery—for it is virtually such—one thing I know—God has given the black race its first great historic chance for writing its name high in the history of ages, and in the struggle I know the blacks will bear a great part; that they will fight, and fight well. The question is—will you of Massachusetts take hold? I hear there is some reluctance because you are not to have officers of your own color. This may be wrong, for I think you have as much right to the first commission in a brigade as a white man. No regiment should be raised without a mixture of the races. It is as proper as that Rosecrans, a Catholic, should lead an army not of his creed. But if you cannot have a whole loaf, will you not take a slice? That is the great question for you to decide.

The Government will not let me help it as I would, but it cannot prevent me from aiding it as I can. Act then, so, that if by any chance the banner of liberty for you goes down, you will not have to regret that you were not present to lend to it a helping hand. Men may be unwilling to enlist because they cannot get commissions, but if they do ought to deter others from enlisting, then they are false to their race.

This contest does not, indeed, hang upon the action of three or four thousand of your countrymen in this State, but upon four millions in the country, who have two centuries of wrong for their motive, and the liberty of their wives and children for their aim. It is your honor that hangs in the scale. (Applause.)

The speaker here showed several reasons why white officers will be better for them at present, and among others, the fact that they would be more likely to have justice done them, than if commanded by men of their own race, and the prejudice against them would be more surely overcome.

Your success hangs on the general success. If the Union lives, it will live with equal races. If divided, and you have done your duty, then you will stand upon the same platform with the white race. (Cheers.) Then make use of the offer Government has made you, for if you are not willing to fight your way up to office, you are not worthy of it. Put yourselves under the Stars and Stripes, and fight yourself to the marquee of a general, and you shall come out with a sword. (Cheers.)

Addresses were also made by Lieut. Col. Hollowell, who is to be second in command of the negro regiment, Robert C. Morris, Esq., and others, and the remarks of all were patriotic and generously applauded.

—*Boston Herald of Tuesday.*

A MASSACHUSETTS BLACK REGIMENT. The proposed colored Massachusetts regiment will be numbered the 54th, and will go into camp at Worcester. Captain N.P. Hollowell of the Mass. 20th, and Captain Robert G. Shaw, of the Mass. 2d, are to be field officers in it. Dr. DeGrasse, a colored physician in Boston, it is reported, is to be Assistant Surgeon.

The Washington correspondent of the N.Y. *Independent* says—“The colored people of this District are moving in reference to the decision of the Government to employ colored troops in the prosecution of the war. It is believed that a colored regiment will easily be raised in this city, and already white officers to command it are not lacking.”

TACTICS FOR NEGRO SOLDIERS. Gen. Casey, it is stated, has been requested by the War Department to prepare a system of tactics for use in the negro regiments to be enlisted in the national service.