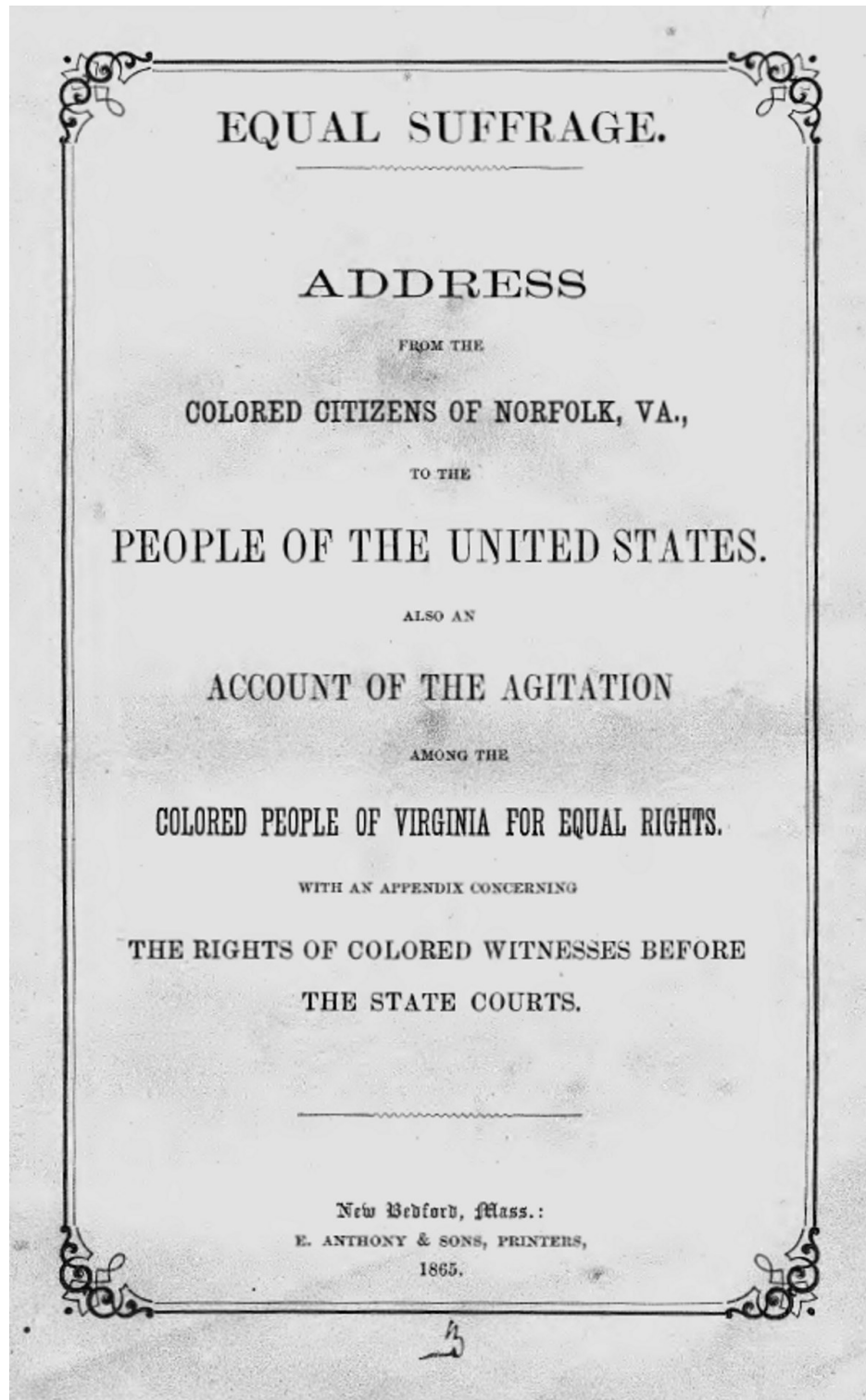


Equal Suffrage Address, Norfolk, 1865



Citation: Excerpt (pp. 1, 6–7) from *Equal Suffrage: Address from the Colored Citizens of Norfolk, Va., to the People of the United States* (1865), reprinted 1969 by Rhistoric Publications, Philadelphia, Library of Virginia.

Equal Suffrage Address, Norfolk, 1865

ADDRESS

From the Colored Citizens of Norfolk, Va., to the People
of the United States.

Fellow Citizens:

The undersigned have been appointed a committee, by a public meeting of the colored citizens of Norfolk, held June 5th, 1865, in the Catharine Street Baptist Church, Norfolk, Va., to lay before you a few considerations touching the present position of the colored population of the southern States generally, and with reference to their claim for equal suffrage in particular.

It is hardly necessary here to refute any of the slanders with which our enemies seek to prove our unfitness for the exercise of the right of suffrage. It is true, that many of our people are ignorant, but for *that* these very men are responsible, and decency should prevent *their* use of such an argument. But if our people are ignorant, no people were ever more orderly and obedient to the laws; and no people ever displayed greater earnestness in the acquisition of knowledge. Among no other people could such a revolution have taken place without scenes of license and bloodshed; but in this

Citation: Excerpt (pp. 1, 6–7) from Equal Suffrage: Address from the Colored Citizens of Norfolk, Va., to the People of the United States (1865), reprinted 1969 by Rhistoric Publications, Philadelphia, Library of Virginia.

Equal Suffrage Address, Norfolk, 1865

7

case, and we say it advisedly, full information of the facts will show that no single disturbance, however slight, has occurred which has not resulted from the unprovoked aggression of white people, and, if any one doubts how fast the ignorance, which has hitherto cursed our people, is disappearing, 'mid the light of freedom, let him visit the colored schools of this city and neighborhood, in which between two and three thousand pupils are being taught, while, in the evening, in colored schools may be seen, after the labors of the day, hundreds of our adult population from budding manhood to hoary age, toiling, with intensest eagerness, to acquire the invaluable arts of reading and writing, and the rudimentary branches of knowledge. One other objection only will we notice; it is that our people are lazy and idle; and, in support of this allegation, the objectors refer to the crowds of colored people subsisting on Government rations, and flocking into the towns. To the first statement we reply that we are poor, and that thousands of our young and able-bodied men, having been enlisted in the army to fight the battles of their country, it is but reasonable that that country should contribute something to the support of those whose natural protectors that country has taken away. With reference to the crowds collected round the military posts and in the cities, we say that though some may have come there under misapprehensions as to the nature of the freedom they have just received, yet this is not the case with the majority; the colored man knows that freedom means freedom to labor, and to enjoy its fruits, and in that respect evinces at least an equal appreciation of his new position with his late owners; if he is not to be found laboring for these late owners, it is because he cannot trust them, and feels safe, in his new-found freedom, nowhere out of the immediate presence of the national forces; if the planters want his labor (and they do,) fair wages and fair treatment will not fail to secure it.

Citation: Excerpt (pp. 1, 6-7) from Equal Suffrage: Address from the Colored Citizens of Norfolk, Va., to the People of the United States (1865), reprinted 1969 by Rhistoric Publications, Philadelphia, Library of Virginia.