

November 12, 1864 - "The Negro Procession;" black support for Andrew Johnson's vice-residential candidacy ends in turmoil in Nashville



The negroes turned out in large force last night, some of them armed with muskets and other with pistols. They yelled and shouted like demons as the procession moved through the streets, rocks and roman candles, guns and pistols, adding to the fearful forebodings of many who witnessed the turn-out. The procession extended nearly a quarter of a mile. Having reached the front of Governor Johnson's residence, the procession halted, and a dense mass of negroes of all ages and sizes, and of both sexes, filled the street and the front of Capitol grounds, when Lieut. Smith, of New Jersey, addressed them at some length, stating, in the course of his remarks that he had left Atlanta in ruins a few days ago, and asserting that McClellan was "a traitor, a coward, a miserable thief, and a scoundrel." He concluded by introducing Governor Johnson who spoke as follows:

I do not intend to detain you but a few minutes, and am sorry to have interrupted the capital speech of the gentlemen who has preceded me. You are come here to-night not for a frolic, but for the celebration of the great victory of freedom you have gained, and I trust you thoroughly appreciate it. So far as this audience is concerned, be they black, white, grey or yellow, let it be understood distinctly what is the great principle of freedom. You now know who has stood the sneers and brutal insults of the opposing party, for the attainment of this great result—who has struck the blow for your freedom. [Cries of "Yes, yes, Governor, you have been our friend."] Now let me say to you, again, what I have said on a former occasion that in gaining this great boon of liberty, you have not gained the privilege of loafing; but have no an opportunity of taking care of yourselves, and enjoying the fruits of your honest labor in the bosom of your families. And let me say to you black men and women, and some white men too, that you must not, after working industriously for six days, drive around the city in a hack with a bottle of whisky for a companion. ["That's it, Andy!"] The proper way to spend you surplus earnings is to pay for the education of your children, and supply them with decent clothes. Be moral, be industrious, and the great work that is now going on will soon be consummated. And in connection with this let me say to you that there is a great and holy institution with which most of you, I hope, are acquainted, namely the institution of marriage. I want the moralists of the nation to think about it. Here are four millions of human being; listen to me, four millions of human mankind living in a state of open concubinage. We hear of the fearful immorality of the Mormons, but how shall it be told that in our cities, in our villages, and even in our yards, four millions of our fellow-beings are living in open lewdness. A nation to become great, and to sustain that position, must be moral. I assume the prerogative of talking thus to you for your welfare. Has the sacred institution of marriage been recognized among you? No. In proof of this I will relate to you an incident that occurred the other day. A long black woman came to me at the Capitol, and told me that her husband had gone off with another woman, and she wanted to bring him back,

stating at the same time that she was the mother of twenty-two children. I had the man brought up before me, who testified that he had not seen her for six years, and on asking how many children he had had by hers, he said that she accused him with being the father of twenty-five. He added that she was no more his wife than any other woman at the iron works, and that the old master had said that "the more niggers there were the more property." This shows that the morals of this class is in a very loose state; but with a strong resolution you will be able to throw off this state of affairs. We are now engaged in this great work-let it go on. If you are not true to yourselves in this struggle, you do not deserve to be free. In conclusion, I may state that if there is a heart that throbs with the principle of freedom it beats in this bosom. The world is my home, and every honest man, be he white or colored, is my brother. You will please now accept my thanks for this compliment that you have paid me tonight; and I would ask you, how long is it since a white man would be allowed to stand up here and do as I have done [?]

We have copious notes of the Governor's speech, but want of space and the lateness of the hour prevents a more full report.

During the time Col. Muzzy was speaking, some disturbance occurred about the eastern end of the iron railing fronting the Governor's house, which ended by some negroes shooting a white soldier-a pistol and some twenty or twenty-five muskets being fired at him, and several bayonet wounds inflicted, after his death, some say. The stories of the origin of the difficulty are as contradictory as possible, and since we neither saw the murdered man nor hear the language used, we cannot say how much truth there is in the above statement. The stampede which followed baffles all description-whites and negroes were flying in all directions in the most perfect state of disorder; they stood not upon the order of their going, but went-over rocks, and over each other-a huge negro wench with three babies tumbling over our reporter, who arose but a little worse for his mishap, only to fall over heels over head upon a prostrate soldier. Recovering his equilibrium, our representative tried to reach the scene of slaughter, but was forced down the street by the mass of darkies, and was compelled to yield to the force of circumstances, and retire in disgust.

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