

## Meeting of Black Citizens and an Appeal to the Mayor, *The Liberator*, 10 August 1849

Source: [The liberator. v.19:no.32\(1849:Aug.10\) - Digital Commonwealth](#)

*In this article, published in the antislavery newspaper The Liberator, Black Bostonians argue for the Smith school to be closed and for all public schools in the city to be integrated. The citizens, including Benjamin Roberts, who had already filed a lawsuit on behalf of his five-year-old daughter, Sarah, appealed directly to Boston's mayor to help them. They published the results of the meeting in The Liberator to gain more support for their cause.*

### MEETING OF COLORED CITIZENS.

Agreeably to a call, a meeting was held on Monday evening, July 23d, 1849, for the purpose of obtaining the opinions of the colored people relative to the 'Continuance of the Smith School as a *separate* School for the instruction of Colored Youth.' A large number were present, and great interest was manifested. The meeting was organized in the choice of J. W. Butler for the President, George Washington, Vice President, and E.B. Lawton and Isaac H. Snowden as Secretaries.

A committee of three was appointed to prepare business for the meeting—John T. Hilton, B. F. Roberts, and Lemuel Burr. They presented the following Resolutions:

*Resolved*, That *common rights* are the undisputed claims of every inhabitant of this Commonwealth.

*Resolved*, That when a portion of the people, in consequence of a long established custom, are deprived of the enjoyment of their rights, it is their duty to use every effort to obtain an unqualified and an uncompromising possession of them.

*Resolved*, That as common school instruction is refused to all persons who differ in complexion from the whites, in the city of Boston, we regard the sufferance of such a distinction a disgrace to civilization.

*Resolved*, That all '*exclusive schools*' are injurious to the welfare of the country, and therefore should be discountenanced.

*Resolved*, That the school known as the 'Smith School,' located in Belknap street, in this city, being a *caste*, an *exclusive school*, we regard it as a GREAT PUBLIC NUISANCE, which should be immediately annihilated.

*Resolved*, That we will not regard with confidence, any contrivance to quiet our efforts in relation to its abolition.

*Resolved*, That it is our hope, that no individual who is identified with us in complexion, will suffer himself to be used as a TOOL, to prolong the existence of that school.

The above Resolutions were unanimously passed. The Committee then presented the following 'Appeal to the Mayor and Aldermen,' which was also adopted:

APPEAL OF THE COLORED PEOPLE OF THE CITY OF BOSTON, TO THE HONORABLE, THE MAYOR AND ALDERMEN OF SAID CITY.

*Gentlemen* : – A portion of the people of your city take this method to solicit your influence in regard to a subject of great importance; that of *Public School Instruction*.

It is no less than true, that in the great Emporium of New England, the headquarters of learning and civilization, the city of the Pilgrims, a portion of your constituents are refused common school privileges, *solely on account of complexion*. It is rather annoying to our feelings, when we perceive not only *all other* citizens in enjoyment of the right of common schools, but foreigners of all kinds, too, who are *white*, are not rejected. This is to us a serious grievance, as many among us can refer to the services of our ancestors, who felt in the times which ‘tried men’s souls,’ that *their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honors* were nought in comparison to the enjoyment of certain ‘inalienable rights.’

It is with feelings of amazement that we witness Englishmen, Frenchmen Irishmen, Germans, Scotchmen, and others, in our community, who enjoy all the local privileges, and are not ignorant of the fact that we are shut out from the institutions of learning in *the land of our nativity*. These foreigners, in *their native country*, see nothing of this kind of injustice; but on the contrary, they know that a colored man enjoys the same rights as another.

We ask your honorable body to aid us in the possession of our rights. We have ever been in favor of a due observance of the government of our city. We have ever been ready to support the institutions of our city. We are not in the background in relation to reform in the community. We have endeavored to gain for ourselves the appellation of good citizens.

There has been established in this city, partially by private donation, an ‘exclusive school’ for the education of colored youth. That school is located in Belknap street. On account of its existence, whenever application is made to the district schools for the admission of our children, we are referred to that school. This is a great inconvenience to many on account of the scattered state of our residences. This inconvenience is *small*, when compared to the injury that separate schools create in the community. Their existence strengthens a feeling of prejudice between white and colored children, while their abolition will foster a regard for each other. Our city is the only place in this Commonwealth where ‘exclusive schools’ are in existence. And we do not learn that any bad results have grown out of the consequences.

As citizens we ask *our rights* in the premises. It is our desire that this ‘exclusive school’ be abolished and *free* access to schools for the education of the young, be the privilege of *all*. The unanimous feeling of the colored people in opposition to the school, is the consequent cause of the very small attendance at that school; its abolition, therefore, as the expenditure for its support is a useless appropriation, will be a great saving to the city. Nothing short of the full enjoyment of our rights as citizens is it our duty to be contented with.

In behalf of the colored citizens of Boston,

John T. Hilton

B. F. Roberts

Lemuel Burr

Committee

The above appeal was adopted by the meeting, and the whole proceedings were marked with a degree of unanimity seldom witnessed in public meetings.

Voted, That this appeal be sent to the Mayor and Aldermen, asking their influence in favor of our rights to common school instruction.

Voted, That the proceedings be published.

J.W. BUTLER, President.

GEORGE WASHINGTON, V. Pres.

E.B. LAWTON,

ISAAC H. SNOWDEN

Secretaries.