

READING

Wendell Phillips Speaks Out in Support of Reconstruction

In January 1875, Louisiana Democrats, with the help of the party's militia, attempted to take over the Republican-controlled legislature by force. Federal troops entered the Louisiana capitol building to remove the Democrats and protect the elected Republican legislature. This was only the latest in a series of interventions by the military to keep the peace in Louisiana. Most Northerners grew tired of such actions, believing that Southern states should have the right to settle their own affairs. Later in January, citizens assembled in Faneuil Hall in Boston to protest the Grant administration's intervention in Louisiana. Only Wendell Phillips, an aging abolitionist, spoke at the assembly in opposition to the protest. His speech, excerpted here, was interrupted frequently by the shouts and heckles of the protestors. The interruptions are in italics.

If these resolutions are passed — (*Great uproar.*) Men of Boston, men of Boston, if these resolutions are passed, they will carry consternation and terror into the house of every negro in Louisiana. (*A voice, "We will pass them all!" Applause, hisses, groans, laughter, cheers and cries, loud and long.*) They will carry comfort to every assassin (*a voice, "Not a bit of it!"*) in New Orleans. (*"Oh!" and loud hisses and applause.*) My anxiety is not for Washington. I don't care who is President. My anxiety is for the hunted, tortured, robbed, murdered population, white and black, of the Southern States (*a voice, "That's played out!"*) whom you are going to consign to the hands of their oppressors. (Hisses.)

If you pass these resolutions — (*Cries of "We will!" "We will!"*) If you pass these resolutions — (*Renewed cries of "We will!" "We will!"*) If you pass these resolutions, gentlemen (*loud cries of "We will!" "We will!"*) — I say it in the presence of God Almighty (*cries of "Sh!" "Sh!" "Oh, ho!" "Oh, ho!" hisses and voices, "He don't know you!" "Whom you don't believe in!"*) — the blood of hundreds of blacks, and hundreds of whites, will be on your skirts before the first day of January next. (*Loud laughter and hisses.*) . . .

Gentlemen, you know perfectly well, every one of you, that this nation called four millions of negroes into citizenship to save itself. (Applause.) It never

called them for their own sakes. It called them to save itself. (*Cries of "Hear!" "Hear!"*) And today, those resolutions, offered in Faneuil Hall, condemn the President of the United States (*a voice, "Sit down!"*), and would take from him the power to protect the millions you have just lifted into danger. (*Cries of "Played out!" "Sit down!" &c.*) You won't let him protect them. (*Cries of "No!"*) What more contemptible object than a nation which, for its own selfish purpose, summons four millions of negroes to such a position of peril, and then leaves them defenseless? What more pitiable object than the President of such a nation, vested with full power to protect these hunted men (and you will not let him protect them), if he yield to this contemptible clamor, and leave them defenseless? Well, gentlemen, I have done all I intended to do. I only wanted to record the protest of one citizen of Boston (uproarious applause) against that series of resolutions.¹

¹ [Transcripts](#) from Harvard University, Collection Development Department, Widener Library, HCL.