

Your Soul In Their Soul

A Selection of African American Antislavery Writings

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CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Phillis Wheatley from <i>To His Excellency General Washington</i>	10
Lemuel Haynes from <i>Liberty Further Extended: Or Free Thoughts on the Illegality of Slave-Keeping</i>	13
Jupiter Hammon from A Dialogue, intituled, The Kind Master and the Dutiful Servant	16
Benjamin Banneker from <i>Copy of a Letter from Benjamin Banneker to the Secretary of State, with his Answer</i>	19
Absalom Jones from <i>A Thanksgiving Sermon</i>	24
James Forten from <i>Letters from a Man of Colour on a Late Bill Before the Senate of Pennsylvania</i>	27
George Moses Horton On Liberty and Slavery; The Slave's Complaint	29
David Walker from <i>Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World.</i>	31
Henry Highland Garnet An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America	34
Lunsford Lane from <i>The Narrative of Lunsford Lane, Formerly of Raleigh, N.C.</i>	38
Sojourner Truth from <i>The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave, Emancipated from Bodily Servitude by the State of New York, in 1828</i>	39
Frederick Douglass What to the Slave Is the 4 th of July?	42
Bibliography	45

INTRODUCTION

In drafting the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson helped to establish the founding ideals and principles of the United States of America. The concepts of equality, rights, liberty, and opportunity formed the backbone of what would become the American democratic experiment. Despite allusions to slavery in the Declaration of Independence, specifically the list of grievances blaming Great Britain for introducing slavery and “exciting those very people to rise in arms amongst us,” the Founding Fathers chose, whether for personal or political reasons, to omit direct references to the growing system of slavery in the colonies. In an omitted section drafted by Jefferson, the future Secretary of State and President described slavery as against “the most sacred right to life and liberty.” A decade and a half later, a free black man sent a letter to Jefferson using the seminal American document to point out the inherent contradiction in a nation that claimed to uphold the natural rights of man yet at the very same time kept a large population in a situation of servitude.

Benjamin Banneker maintained a deferential tone towards Jefferson throughout the letter but recommended to Jefferson and others “to wean yourselves from those narrow prejudices which you have imbibed with respect to them...” In writing this line, Banneker summarized a great challenge of the antislavery movement; how can one individual or group suggest to another to slowly give up something that they believe in? To further his argument, Banneker quoted biblical scripture to implore Jefferson towards change, noting that “as Job proposed to his friends, ‘put your soul in their souls’ stead.” Requesting that Jefferson live out the religious golden rule to do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Banneker’s appeal, in the early years of the Republic, characterized a number of key components and strategies within the larger antislavery movement. First, the use of American idealism often associated with Enlightenment philosophies and

concepts of natural rights to challenge the moral and political fabric of the nation. Secondly, the remarkable ability of Banneker, a free black man who lacked a great deal of agency to find an act of defiance and activism in his daily life by attaching this letter to an almanac he had written. Third, the somewhat radical interpretation of religion scripture to argue against the continuance of slavery made the peculiar institution a moral sin. Yet ultimately for the end of slavery to occur the population as a whole needed to undergo a major shift in its core beliefs, words and deeds. The country needed, as Banneker suggested, for their collective “hearts (to) be enlarged with kindness and benevolence towards them; and thus shall you need to neither the direction of myself or others, in what manner to proceed herein.” The harsh realities of slavery needed to be exposed and a connection needed to be made between the humanity of one man to that of another. For these ends to be achieved the souls of African Americans had to come to the forefront the discussion and debate over slavery.

The anthology that follows suggests as Professor James G. Basker noted in *American Antislavery Writings: Colonial Beginnings to Emancipation*, “the antislavery movement would always be driven, at its core, by the personal testimony and principled defiance of the black people whom slavery sought to subject.” Designed for use in Advanced Placement United States History classes with 11th grade students, the selections assembled here will examine the following underlying questions from the College Board of how “enslaved and free African Americans, isolated at the bottom of the social hierarchy, created communities and strategies to protect their dignity and their family structures” and how “some launched abolitionist and reform movements aimed at changing their status.” By examining the words of African Americans living and writing from 1775 to 1865 students face the challenge, as the nation did in its early years, of putting their souls into the souls of these incredible advocates for social change. The exercise in empathy and historical understanding would develop active citizens ready to promote positive change in their own communities thus supporting Basker’s idea that “inescapably, this is a literature rooted in and framed by the progress of history.”

The increase in and evolution of African American antislavery writing paralleled the story of the nation's founding from the Revolutionary Era through the Civil War. Just as the entire country debated and fought to define America's identity and values, so too did African-Americans. Ultimately the political and legal changes that resulted from the Civil War created social and legal progress yet at the same time brought about more questions and challenges to face in the ongoing struggle to improve the country. Slavery was at the heart of American survival and the movement to end slavery is integral to a course of study examining the nation's founding.

Some of the earliest known examples of antislavery literature date back to before the American Revolution. Demonstrating the discernible impact of religion, a resolution put forth by Mennonites in Pennsylvania argued slavery a sin. Other early petitions against the evils of slavery introduced how slavery countered American idealism. Founding voices such as Patrick Henry, a slave owner himself, and Samuel Sewall, a penitent magistrate from the Salem Witch Trials offered up other early objections to slavery. By the time of the American Revolution antislavery voices from the African American community appeared. In a poetic verse lauding the accomplishments of General George Washington, Phillis Wheatley discussed the ideals of freedom and glory along with the religious undertones of virtue and grace. In publishing her incredible works, Wheatley served as an example of the inherent equality that was possible between blacks and whites in American society. Similarly, Lemuel Haynes used the language of the revolution to state that "we live in a day wherein liberty and freedom is the subject of millions Concern; and the important struggle hath already caused great Effusion of Blood; men seem to manifest the most sanguine resolution to not Let their natural rights go without their Lives go with them." As noted by Professor Ronald Walters, from Johns Hopkins University, "the legacy of the American Revolution...even when most critical of their government, reformers evoked it." The language, sentiment, and idealism of the American Revolution continued to support the message of the antislavery movement.

As the nation expanded and progressed in the first half of the 19th century the growing sense of nationalism coupled with a spirit of reform to push the abolitionist movement forward. Through territorial expansion the power, prestige and influence of the United States grew at rapid rate yet so too did the power of the slaveholding south. Additionally a rise in slave insurrections, both domestically (Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey) and internationally (Haitian Revolts) caused white intimidation to intensify in the early 1800s. In response, black antislavery writers like David Walker called for more action. While the Second Great Awakening seemed to unlock the belief that individuals could actively change the nation a new spirit of reform accompanied the call for abolition. Once again this national growth in democratic behavior is mirrored in the writings of black abolitionists. Henry Highland Garnet, writing in 1843, noted this change along with the seeming limitations that existed within the black community, “we have been contented in sitting still and mourning over your sorrows, earnestly hoping that before this day, your sacred liberties would have been restored. But we have hoped in vain.” According to Walker and Garnet the time had come for more forceful resistance.

In the decades that led up to the Civil War both sides of the slavery debate positioned themselves for a showdown as new methods and strategies emerged and old techniques evolved to fuel the final push towards abolition. Poets like George Moses Horton worried that the perils of slavery would doom individuals and the nation “forever.” Some writers even sensed the impending crisis of the Civil War such as Frederick Douglass who noted in 1852, that the nation’s “future might be shrouded in gloom and the hope of its prophets go out in sorrow.” But the emergence of slave narratives in the 1840s helped the nation to see into the souls of slaves. The slave narratives also built upon the challenges to American idealism. The significance of the slave narrative is described by Yale professor David W. Blight, maintains “to understand this paradox (of America’s hypocrisy and its promise), to prove the slaves’ own experience in bondage and their quest for freedom, dignity, and human rights, there is no better place to begin than the slave narratives.” The sampling of slave narratives here does not begin to scratch the surface but do

provide a unique perspective and look into the realities and hardships of slavery. In the narrative from Lunsford Lane's one can read the beautiful description of emotion when a slave was freed compared to the recollection of Sojourner Truth who narrated the despair her father had in his final days when the thought of death seemed more liberating than emancipation itself. The impact of these narratives goes beyond the challenges posed to the rest of the nation, but also as David W. Blight states that, "American slaves wrote their personal stories first because they were under such pressure to demonstrate their own humanity in a sea of racial prejudice. They also wrote to prove they could be reliable truth-tellers of their own experience." The act of given testimony proved to be another step towards the realization of independence for former slaves.

The diversity of literary talent in this collection and the varying backgrounds these writers came from speaks to the amount in which slavery's impact was felt across American society. Professor James G. Basker also remarked, "it is the democratic inclusiveness of this literature, almost as much as its revolutionary content, that marks it as so surprising, so worthy of our attention." The emergence of black writers despite the limitations, not only on political, social, and economic agency, but also the difficulties in obtaining literacy, publishing and acceptance of their works, and of course the threat of violence and intimidation, is remarkable. Their works help us to see today into the causes and underlying dynamics and forces of societal, systematic, and structural change. The power of their voices can be seen in the ultimate realization of emancipation but also can be felt countless number of those people within their own community who were inspired and uplifted by their words, the individuals across the nation and the world who were moved to action or swayed in opinion, and sadly with the violence, censorship and strengthen laws that came from their opposition.

Arguments against slavery used a variety of themes and strategies to connect with their audiences. The most prominent of these are the use of religion, the connection to American idealism and the exposure of the inherent hypocrisy of system of slavery in a democratic society. Professor Robert Abzug, of the University

of Texas at Austin claimed “abolitionists deemed slavery a sin at odds with the Christian mission of saving souls and the progress of humanity promised by the Protestant Reformation and the American Revolution. To them, the redemption of America depended on black freedom.” In an interesting twist the impact of Christianity is qualified in the increasingly literate population of African Americans who learned to read by studying the bible. Another early African American poet, Jupiter Hammon, examined the role of God, the master, and the servant. At the turn of the century, Absalom Jones, the first African American Methodist minister, like Walker and Douglass years later, prophetically foreshadowed the coming Civil War, but also called on God to bear witness to the negative effects of slavery.

As Banneker impressively paved the way with his audacity, boldness, and conviction in showcasing American hypocrisy, other African American abolitionists demonstrated great resolve in their action. In some cases challenging the men at the top of society in addressing prominent and powerful politicians. Lemuel Haynes said “Liberty is Equally as precious to a Black man as it is to a white one, and Bondage equally as intollerable to the one as it is to the other.” James Forten, as nationalism surged after the War of 1812 quoted the Declaration of Independence himself in connecting to both the inequality of the law and the hope for generational progress, “do not then expose us to sale. Let not the spirit of the father behold the son robbed of that Liberty which he died to establish, but let the motto of our Legislators be: the Law knows no distinction.” The efforts of antislavery writers were consistent, relentless, and built on the steps taken and words written by their predecessors.

The topic of abolition is one that is relevant and interesting to today’s students. Ronald Walters write that “abolitionism continues to fascinate because of its place in the sectional conflict leading to the Civil War, its assault on gender and racial inequality, and it’s foreshadowing of the twentieth-century Civil Rights Movement.” By studying this period in American history students will draw stronger connections to their work on the Civil Rights Movement associated with the 1950s and 1960s. In a more contemporary setting, the importance of the themes and strategies of antislavery advocates is even more relevant as the impact of race

relations, injustice and inequality once again grips our nation. While the antislavery movement as Basker writes was “the vanguard of a global movement that by the twentieth century had fundamentally transformed the conditions of life and made human rights an expectation of people throughout the world. It was these writers who shaped the sensibilities and attitudes that made universal freedom imaginable, desirable, and obtainable.”

Despite the constitutional, legal, and national changes brought about in the wake of the Civil War, as Henry Highland Garnet points out in his 1865 address to Congress, *A Memorial Discourse*, much was still to be done in order for the country to live up to its ideals. And today that message rings true.

“With the assurance of God’s favor in all things done in obedience to his righteous will, and guided by day and by night by the pillars of cloud and fire, let us not pause until we have reached the other and safe side of the stormy and crimson sea. Let freemen and patriots mete out complete and equal justice to all men, and thus prove to mankind the superiority of our Democratic, Republican Government. Favored men, and honored of God as his instruments, speedily finish the work which he has given you to do. *Emancipate, Enfranchise, Educate, and give blessings of the gospel to every American citizen.*”

PHILLIS WHEATLEY

(c. 1754 – 1784)

from To His Excellency General Washington (1775)

One of the first African American slave and earliest female writers to be published in the United States, Phillis Wheatley was born in Africa and arrived in Boston on a slave ship around the age of eight. Wheatley was purchased by a Massachusetts merchant and his family. The pro-independence family supported her talent and helped to educate her. She published her first book of poetry in 1773 in London that included a poem that drew parallels between her own experience under slavery and the British treatment of the American colonies in an address to the Earl of Dartmouth. In 1774 she was granted manumission by her owners and returned to America where she continued to advocate for abolition. In 1775 Wheatley, a strong supporter of the colonial causes and inspired by Washington's victory over the British sent the general the following poem. Some historians note that Washington underwent a fundamental shift in his own personal trajectory partly due to the influence of Wheatley as he admitted some black troops, supported a South Carolina effort to free slaves (that ultimately failed), wrote private letters in support of abolition, and freed his own slaves in his last will and testament. Wheatley's use of revolutionary idealism is representative of contemporary founding works such as Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and Thomas Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence*.

SIR,

I Have taken the freedom to address your Excellency in the enclosed poem, and entreat your acceptance, though I am not insensible of its inaccuracies. Your being appointed by the Grand Continental Congress to Generalissimo of the armies of North America, together with the fame of your virtues, excite sensations not easy to suppress. Your generosity, therefore, I presume, will pardon the attempt. Wishing your Excellency all possible success in the great cause you are so generously engaged in, I am,

Your Excellency's most obedient humble

Servant,

PHILLIS WHEATLEY.

Providence, Oct. 26, 1775.

His Excellency Gen. Washington

Celestial choir! enthron'd in realms of light

Columbia's scene of glorious toils I write.

While freedom's cause her anxious breast alarms,

She flashes dreadful in refulgent arms.

See mother earth her offspring's fate bemoan,

And nations gaze at scenes before unknown!

See the bright beams of heaven's revolving light

Involved in sorrows and veil of night!

The goddess comes, she moves divinely fair,

Olive and laurel binds her golden hair:

Wherever shines this native of the skies,

Unnumber'd charms and recent graces rise.

Muse! bow propitious while pen relates

How pour her armies through a thousand gates:

As when Eolus heaven's fair face deforms,

Enwrapp'd in tempest and a night of storms;

Astonish'd ocean feels the wild uproar,

The refluent surges beat the sounding shore;

Or thick as leaves in Autumn's golden reign,

Such, and so many, moves the warrior's train.

In bright array they seek the work of war,

Where high unfurl'd the ensign waves in air.

Shall I to Washington their praise recite?

Enough thou know'st them in the fields of fight.

Thee, first in place and honours, -- we demand

The grace and glory of thy martial band.

Fam'd for thy valour, for thy virtues more,

Hear every tongue thy guardian aid implore!

One century scarce perform'd its destin'd round,

When Gallic powers Columbia's fury found;
And so may you, whoever dares disgrace
The land of freedom's heaven-defended race!
Fix'd are the eyes of the nations on the scales,
For in their hopes Columbia's arm prevails.
Anon Britannia droops the pensive head,
While round increase the rising hills of the dead.
Ah! cruel blindness to Columbia's state!
Lament thy thirst of boundless power too late.
Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side,
Thy ev'ry action let the goddess guide.
A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine,
With gold unfading, WASHINGTON! be thine.

George Washington, Letter to Phillis Wheatley (February 28, 1776)
Cambridge, February 28, 1776

Mrs. Phillis: Your favour of the 26th of October did not reach my hands 'til the middle of December. Time enough, you will say, to have given an answer ere this. Granted. But a variety of important occurrences, continually interposing to distract the mind and withdraw the attention, I hope will apologize for the delay, and please my excuse for the seeming, but not real neglect.

I thank you most sincerely for your polite notice of me, in the elegant Lines you enclosed; and however undeserving I may be of such encomium and panegyric, the style and manner exhibit a striking proof of your great poetical Talents. In honour of which, and as a tribute justly due to you, I would have published the Poem, had I not been apprehensive, that, while I only meant to give the World this new instance of your genius, I might have incurred the imputation of Vanity. This and nothing else, determined me not to give it place in the public Prints.

If you should ever come to Cambridge, or near Head Quarters, I shall be happy to see a person so favoured by the Muses, and to whom Nature has been so liberal and beneficent in her dispensations. I am, with great Respect, etc.

LEMUEL HAYNES

(1753 – 1833)

From Liberty Further Extended: Or Free Thoughts on the Illegality of Slave-Keeping (1776)

Born and then abandoned by his white mother of respectable ancestry and black father in Connecticut, Lemuel Haynes was raised in the home of a Massachusetts Deacon where by law he was an indentured servant. Despite limited access to education, he developed a passion for literature, of note the Bible and other books on theology. Haynes enlisted as a “Minuteman” in 1774, and although he did not fight in the famous battle he penned a ballad about the Battle of Lexington writing ,of the sacrifice and motives of colonial patriots, “Thrice happy they who thus resign into the peacefull Grave, Much there in Death Confin’d Than a Surviving Slave. This Motto may adorn their Tombs (Let tyrants come and view) ‘We rather seek these silent Rooms, Than live as Slaves to You.’” At the height of the Revolutionary war, Haynes, who later went on to become the first ordained black minister in America, latched on to the direction connection between both indentured and African slavery and the idealism and spirit behind the push for American independence. In the text below Lemuel Haynes writes of his time; “We live in a day wherein *Liberty & freedom* is the subject of millions” and in using the language of Enlightenment philosopher John Locke to observe the depths men will go to protect their personal freedom, states that “men seem to manifest the most anguine resolution not to Let their natural rights go without their Lives go with them.” Interestingly this manuscript was not printed until 1983, whether this was done out of fear of how it would have been received during its day or if he was simply caught up in the events of the war is debated.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created Equal, that they are Endowed by their Creator with Certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Congress

I know that those that are concerned in the Slave-trade, Do pretend to Bring arguments in vindication of their practise; yet if we give them a candid Examination, we shall find them (even those of the most cogent kind) to be Essencially Deficient. We live in a day wherein *Liberty & freedom* is the subject of many millions Concern; and the important Struggle hath already cause great Effusion of Blood; men seem to

manifest the most sanguine resolution not to Let their natural rights go without their Lives go with them; a resolution, one would think Every one that has the Least Love to his country, or futer posterity, would fully confide in, yet while we are so zealous to maintain, and foster our own invaded rights, it cannot be tho't impertinent for us Candidly to reflect on our own conduct, and I doubt not But that we shall find that subsisting in the midst of us, that may with propriety be stiled Opression, nay, much greater oppression, than that which Englishmen seem so much to spurn at. I mean an oppression which they themselves, impose upon other.

It is not my Business to Enquire into Every particular practise, that is practised in this Land, that may come under this Odeus Character; But what I have in views, is humbly to offer som free thoughts, on the practise of *Slave-keeping*. Opression, is not spoken of, nor ranked in the sacred oracles, among the Least of those sins, that are the procureing of Caus of those signal Judgments, which god is pleas'd to bring upon the Children of men. Therefor let us attend. I mean to write with freedom, yet with the greatest Submission.

And the main proposition, which I intend for some Breif illustrations is this, Namely, That an *African*, or in other terms, *that a Negro may Justly Challenge, and has an undeniable right to his Liberty; Consequently, the practise of Slave-keeping, which so much abounds in this Land is illicit.*

Every privilege that mankind Enjoy have their Origen from god; and whatever acts are passed in any Earthly Court, which are Derogatory to those Edicts that are passed in the Court of Heaven, the act is *void*. If I have a perticular previledg granted to me by god, and the act is not revoked nor the power that granted the benefit vacated, (as it is imposable but that god should Ever remain immutable) then he that would infringe upon my Benifit, assumes an unreasonable, and tyrannic power.

It hath pleased god to *make of one Blood all nations of men, for to dwell upon the face of the Earth.* Acts 17, 26. And as all are of one Species, so there are the same Laws, and aspiring principles placed in all nations; and the Effect that these Laws will produce, are Similar to Each other. Consequently we may suppose, that what is precious to one man, is precious to another, and what is irksom, or intolarable to

one man, is so to another, consider'd in a Law of Nature. Therefore we may reasonably Conclude, that Liberty is Equally as precious to a *Black man*, as it is to a *white one*, and Bondage Equally as intollarable to the one as it is to the other: Seeing it Effects the Laws of nature Equally as much in the one as it Does in the other. But, as I observed Before, those privileges that are granted to us By the Divine Being, no one has the Least right to take them from us without our consent; and there is Not the Least precept, or practise, in the Sacred Scriptures, that constitutes a Black man a Slave, any more than a white one.

JUPITER HAMMON

(1711 – c. 1800)

from A Dialogue, intitled, The Kind Master and the Dutiful Servant (1782)

Jupiter Hammon spent his entire life as a slave in New York and was a devout Christian and dutiful servant, who, with the support of his permissive owner, became the first published black poet in American history and is considered by many to be the father of African American literature. In 1778 he paid tribute to fellow black writer Phillis Wheatley with *An Address to Miss Phillis Wheatley, Ethiopian Poetess*. In doing so Hammon launched a conscious African literary tradition of public tribute. At a time in history where open defiance of an owner would have proven dangerous if not fatal, Hammon was able to masterfully resist the idea of slavery in the following poem. Hammon uses a poetic conversation between a Master and Servant to carefully weave a refusal of absolute obedience to the master. Basing his argument on Christian faith, Hammon's servant is able to establish a boundary that places his service to God over that of the Master. In addition to finding a moment of personal defiance, Hammon also used the interpretation of religious scripture to equate slavery to sin, as other antislavery writers had done going back to the colonial period. This action equated abolition with a personal and moral decision-making process that would help to break down the barriers of slavery in American society and throughout the western world.

MASTER.

1. Come my servant, follow me,
According to thy place;
And surely God will be with thee,
And send thee heav'nly grace.

SERVANT

2. Dear Master, I will follow thee,
According to thy word,
And pray that God may be with me,
And save thee in the Lord

MASTER

3. My Servant, lovely is the lord,
And blest those servants be,
That truly love his holy word,
And thus will follow me

SERVANT

4. Dear Master, that's my whole delight
Thy pleasure for to do;
As far as grace and truth's in sight,
Thus far I'll surely go.

MASTER

5. My Servant, grace proceeds from God,
And truth should be with thee;
Whence e'er you find it in his word,
Thus far come follow me.

SERVANT

6. Dear Master, now without controul,
I quickly follow thee;
And pray that God would bless thy soul,
His heav'nly place to see.

MASTER

7. My Servant, Heaven is high above,
Yea, higher than the sky;
I pray that God would grant his love,
Come follow me thereby.

SERVANT

8. Dear Master, now I'll follow thee,
And trust upon the Lord;
The only safety that I see,
Is Jesus's holy word.

MASTER

9. My Servant, follow Jesus now,
Our great victorious King;
Who governs all both high and low,
And searches things within.

SERVANT

10. Dear Master I will follow thee,
When praying to our King;
It is the Lamb I plainly see,
Invites the sinner in.

MASTER

11. My Servant, we are sinners all,
But follow after grace;
I pray that God would bless thy soul,
And fill thy heart with grace.

SERVANT

12. Dear Master I shall follow then,
The voice of my great King;
As standing on some distant land,
Inviting sinners in.

MASTER

13. My servant we must all appear,
And follow then our King;
As standing on some distant land,
Inviting sinners in.

SERVANT

14. Dear Master, now if Jesus calls,
And sends his summons in;
We'll follow saints and angels all,
And come unto our King.

MASTER

15. My Servant now come pray to God,
Consider well his call;
Strive to obey his holy word,
That Christ may love us all.
A LINE *on the present WAR*

SERVANT

16. Dear Master, now it is a time,
A time of great distress;
We'll follow after things divine,
And pray for happiness.

MASTER

17. Then will the happy day appear,
That virtue shall increase;
Lay up the sword and drop the spear,
And nations seek for peace.

SERVANT

18. Then shall we see the happy end,
Tho' still in some distress;
That distant foes shall act like friends,
And leave their wickedness.

MASTER

19. We pray that God give us grace,
And make us humble too;
Let ev'ry nation seek for peace,
And virtue make a show.

SERVANT

20. Then we shall see the happy day,
That virtue is in power;
Each holy act shall have its sway,
Extend from shore to shore.

MASTER

21. This is the work of God's own hand,
We see by precepts given;
To relieve distress and save the land,
Must be the pow'r of heav'n.

SERVANT

22. Now glory be unto our God,
Let ev'ry nation sing;
Strive to obey his holy word,
That Christ may take them in.

MASTER

23. Where endless joys shall never
cease,
Blest angels constant sing;
The glory of their God increase,
Hallelujahs to their King.

SERVANT

24. Thus the dialogue shall end,
Strive to obey the word;
When ev'ry nation act like friends,
Shall be the sons of God.
25. Believe now my Christian friends,
Believe your friend call'd H A M M O N;
You cannot to your God attend,
And serve the God of Mammon.

BENJAMIN BANNEKER

(1731 – 1806)

from a Copy of a Letter from Benjamin Banneker to the Secretary of State (1791)

Benjamin Banneker was a free black scientist born in Maryland. While growing up in and around Baltimore he was one of several hundred free blacks among a population of approximately four thousand slaves and thirteen thousand whites, giving him a unique perspective on both the free and slave world that existed in the nation at that time. A seemingly natural intellectual, Banneker was able, through family and self-education, Quaker schooling, and apprentice work, to gain the knowledge and skills, and to create connections in his community in order to find work as a surveyor, mathematician, and astronomer. He was a member of the team, led by Major Andrew Ellicott that carried out the initial survey of the boundaries of the new federal district along the Potomac River. In 1792 Banneker published an almanac and sent a copy along with this accompanying letter to the then Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson. Note the idealistic language, choice of vocabulary, and use of Jefferson's own words to argue against the hypocrisy of slavery. Banneker due to his circumstances of freedom and economic status acquired a sense of literary agency that was not afforded to most African Americans of his era. In addition to demonstrating a strong sense of audacity in writing to Jefferson, Banneker also included other antislavery works in his almanacs, including works by Phillis Wheatley and English antislavery poet William Cowper. Included below, after his letter, is the polite response he received from Jefferson.

Maryland, Baltimore County, August 19, 1791.

SIR,

I AM fully sensible of the greatness of that freedom, which I take with you on the present occasion; a liberty which seemed to me scarcely allowable, when I reflected on that distinguished and dignified station in which you stand, and the almost general prejudice and prepossession, which is so prevalent in the world against those of my complexion.

I suppose it is a truth too well attested to you, to need a proof here, that we are a race of beings, who have long labored under the abuse and censure of the world; that we have long been looked upon with an eye of contempt; and that we have long

been considered rather as brutish than human, and scarcely capable of mental endowments.

Sir, I hope I may safely admit, in consequence of that report which hath reached me, that you are a man far less inflexible in sentiments of this nature, than many others; that you are measurably friendly, and well disposed towards us; and that you are willing and ready to lend your aid and assistance to our relief, from those many distresses, and numerous calamities, to which we are reduced.

Now Sir, if this is founded in truth, I apprehend you will embrace every opportunity, to eradicate that train of absurd and false ideas and opinions, which so generally prevails with respect to us; and that your sentiments are concurrent with mine, which are, that one universal Father hath given being to us all ; and that he hath not only made us all of one flesh, but that he hath also, without partiality, afforded us all the same sensations and endowed us all with the same faculties ; and that however variable we may be in society or religion, however diversified in situation or color, we are all of the same family, and stand in the same relation to him.

Sir, if these are sentiments of which you are fully persuaded, I hope you cannot but acknowledge, that it is the indispensable duty of those, who maintain for themselves the rights of human nature, and who possess the obligations of Christianity, to extend their power and influence to the relief of every part of the human race, from whatever burden or oppression they may unjustly labor under; and this, I apprehend, a full conviction of the truth and obligation of these principles should lead all to.

Sir, I have long been convinced, that if your love for yourselves, and for those inestimable laws, which preserved to you the rights of human nature, was founded on sincerity, you could not but be solicitous, that every individual, of whatever rank or distinction, might with you equally enjoy the blessings thereof; neither could you rest satisfied short of the most active effusion of your exertions, in order to their promotion from any state of degradation, to which the unjustifiable cruelty and barbarism of men may have reduced them.

Sir, I freely and cheerfully acknowledge, that I am of the African race, and in that color which is natural to them of the deepest dye; and it is under a sense of the most profound gratitude to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, that I now confess to you, that I am not under that state of tyrannical thralldom, and inhuman captivity, to which too many of my brethren are doomed, but that I have abundantly tasted of the fruition of those blessings, which proceed from that free and unequalled liberty with which you are favored ; and which, I hope, you will willingly allow you have mercifully received, from the immediate hand of that Being, from whom proceedeth every good and perfect Gift.

Sir, suffer me to recal to your mind that time, in which the arms and tyranny of the British crown were exerted, with every powerful effort, in order to reduce you to a state of servitude: look back, I entreat you, on the variety of dangers to which you were exposed; reflect on that time, in which every human aid appeared unavailable, and in which even hope and fortitude wore the aspect of inability to the conflict, and you cannot but be led to a serious and grateful sense of your miraculous and providential preservation ; you cannot but acknowledge, that the present freedom and tranquility which you enjoy you have mercifully received, and that it is the peculiar blessing of Heaven.

This, Sir, was a time when you clearly saw into the injustice of a state of slavery, and in which you had just apprehensions of the horrors of its condition. It was now that your abhorrence thereof was so excited, that you publicly held forth this true and invaluable doctrine, which is worthy to be recorded and remembered in all succeeding ages: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that among these are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Here was a time, in which your tender feelings for yourselves had engaged you thus to declare, you were then impressed with proper ideas of the great violation of liberty, and the free possession of those blessings, to which you were entitled by nature; but, Sir, how pitiable is it to reflect, that although you were so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of Mankind, and of his equal and impartial distribution of these rights and privileges, which he hath conferred upon them, that you should at the same

time counteract his mercies, in detaining by fraud and violence so numerous a part of my brethren, under groaning captivity and cruel oppression, that you should at the same time be found guilty of that most criminal act, which you professedly detested in others, with respect to yourselves.

I suppose that your knowledge of the situation of my brethren, is too extensive to need a recital here; neither shall I presume to prescribe methods by which they may be relieved, otherwise than by recommending to you and all others, to wean yourselves from those narrow prejudices which you have imbibed with respect to them, and as Job proposed to his friends, ``put your soul in their souls' stead ;" thus shall your hearts be enlarged with kindness and benevolence towards them; and thus shall you need neither the direction of myself or others, in what manner to proceed herein. And now, Sir, although my sympathy and affection for my brethren hath caused my enlargement thus far, I ardently hope, that your candor and generosity will plead with you in my behalf, when I make known to you, that it was not originally my design; but having taken up my pen in order to direct to you, as a present, a copy of an Almanac, which I have calculated for the succeeding year, I was unexpectedly and unavoidably led thereto.

This calculation is the production of my arduous study, in this my advanced stage of life; for having long had unbounded desires to become acquainted with the secrets of nature, I have had to gratify my curiosity herein, through my own assiduous application to Astronomical Study, in which I need not recount to you the many difficulties and disadvantages, which I have had to encounter.

And although I had almost declined to make my calculation for the ensuing year, in consequence of that time which I had allotted therefor, being taken up at the Federal Territory, by the request of Mr. Andrew Ellicott, yet finding myself under several engagements to Printers of this state, to whom I had communicated my design, on my return to my place of residence, I industriously applied myself thereto, which I hope I have accomplished with correctness and accuracy; a copy of which I have taken the liberty to direct to you, and which I humbly request you will favorably receive ; and although you may have the opportunity of perusing it after its publication, yet I choose to send it to you in manuscript previous thereto, that

thereby you might not only have an earlier inspection, but that you might also view it in my own hand writing.

And now, Sir, I shall conclude, and subscribe myself, with the most profound respect, Your most obedient humble servant,

BENJAMIN BANNEKER.

To Mr. BENJAMIN BANNEKER. Philadelphia, August 30, 1791.

SIR,

I THANK you, sincerely, for your letter of the 19th instant, and for the Almanac it contained. No body wishes more than I do, to see such proofs as you exhibit, that nature has given to our black brethren talents equal to those of the other colors of men; and that the appearance of the want of them, is owing merely to the degraded condition of their existence, both in Africa and America. I can add with truth, that no body wishes more ardently to see a good system commenced, for raising the condition, both of their body and mind, to what it ought to be, as far as the imbecility of their present existence, and other circumstances, which cannot be neglected, will admit.

I have taken the liberty of sending your Almanac to Monsieur de Condozett, Secretary of the Academy of Sciences at Paris, and Member of the Philanthropic Society, because I considered it as a document, to which your whole color had a right for their justification, against the doubts which have been entertained of them.

I am with great esteem, Sir, Your most obedient Humble Servant,

THOMAS JEFFERSON

ABSALOM JONES

(1746 – 1818)

from A Thanksgiving Sermon (1808)

Absalom Jones was born a slave in Delaware and then later as a teenager sold to a storeowner in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was self educated and married to a slave woman. He was able to purchase his wife's freedom so that their children would be born free, and then seven years later was able to purchase his own freedom. Jones was one of the first African Americans licensed to preach by the Methodist Church and after an incident of segregation, Jones and the church's black members, after completing their prayer, in an early form of civil disobedience, got up and walked out. By 1794 he founded the first black Episcopal Church in the United States. It was here that in 1808, in celebration of the abolition of the foreign slave trade by the United States and Great Britain that Jones gave the following sermon. He begins by connecting the plight of the Israelites at the hand of the Egyptians to that of the African slaves in America. After describing the harsh labor conditions faced by the people of Israel, Jones points out the distress and pain that slavery caused to the family, a sentiment echoed by other American antislavery writers as well. "While the fields resounded with their cries in the day, their huts and hamlets were vocal at night with their lamentations over their sons; who were dragged from the arms of their mothers, and put to death by drowning, in order to prevent such an increase in their population, as to endanger the safety of the state by an insurrection." The excerpt below includes the biblical scripture that was interpreted to begin the sermon, but then picks up with Jones remarking on the role God played amongst the system of slavery. Like earlier antislavery writers, such as Olaudah Equiano, Absalom Jones' description of slave life is one that directly affects the audience, in they way that slave narratives will use to further expose the harsh realities of slave life to the general public.

EXODUS, iii. 7, - 8

And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their task-masters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of Egyptians.

The history of the world shows us, that he deliverance of the children of Israel from their bondage, is not the only instance, in which it has pleased God to appear in behalf of oppressed and distressed nations, as the deliverer of the innocent, and of those who call upon his name. He is as unchangeable in his nature

and character, as he is in his wisdom and power. The great and blessed event, which we have this day met to celebrate, is a striking proof, that the God of heaven and earth is the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Yes, my brethren, the nations from which most of us have descended, and the country in which some of us were born, have been visited by the tender mercy of the Common Father of the human race. He has seen the affliction of our countrymen, with an eye of pity. He has seen the wicked arts, by which wars have been fomented among the different tribes of Africans, in order to procure captives, for the purpose of selling them for slaves. He has seen ships fitted out from different ports in Europe and America, and freighted with trinkets to be exchanged for the bodies and souls of men. He has seen the anguish which has taken place, when parents have been torn from their children, and children from their parents, and conveyed, with their hands and feet bound in fetters, on board ships prepared to receive them. He has seen them thrust in crowds into the holds of those ships, where many of them have perished from the want of air. He has seen such of them as have escaped from that noxious place of confinement, leap into the ocean; with faint hope of swimming back to their native shore, or a determination to seek an early retreat from their impending misery, in a watery grave. He has seen them exposed for sale, like horses and cattle, upon wharves; or, like bales of goods, in warehouses of West India and American seaports. He has seen the pangs of separation between members of the same family. He has seen them driven into the sugar, the rice, and the tobacco fields, and compelled to work – in spite of the habits of ease which they derived from the natural fertility of their own country in the open air, beneath a burning sun, with scarcely as much clothing upon them as modesty required. He has seen them faint beneath the pressure of their labours. He has seen them return to their smoky huts in the evening, with nothing to satisfy their hunger but a scanty allowance of roots; and these, cultivated for themselves, on that day only, which God ordained a day of rest for man and beast. He has seen the neglect with which their masters have treated their immortal souls; not only in withholding religious instruction from them, but, in some instances, depriving them of access to the means of obtaining it. He has seen all the different modes of torture, by means of the whip, the screw, the

pincers, and the red hot iron, which have been exercised upon their bodies, by inhuman overseers: overseers, did I say? Yes: but not by these only. Our God has seen masters and mistresses, educated in fashionable life, sometimes take the instruments of torture into their own hands, and, deaf to the cries and shrieks of their agonizing slaves, exceed even their overseers in cruelty. Inhuman wretches! though You have been deaf to their cries and shrieks, they have been heard in Heaven. His ears of Jehovah have been constantly open to them: He has heard the prayers that have ascended from the hearts of people; and he has, as in the case of his ancient and chosen people the Jews, *come down to deliver* our suffering countrymen from the hands of the oppressors. He came down into the United States, when they declared, in the constitution which they framed in 1788, that the trade in our African fellow-men, should cease in the year 1808. He came down into British Parliament, when they passed a law to put an end to the same iniquitous trade in May, 1807: He came down into the Congress of the United States, the last winter, when they passed a similar law, the operation of which commences on this happy day. Dear land of our ancestors! thou shalt no more be stained with the blood of thy children, she by British and American hands: the ocean shall no more afford a refuge to their bodies, from impending slavery: nor shall the shores of the British West India islands, and of the United States, any more witness the anguish of families, parted for ever by a publick sale. For this signal interposition of the God of mercies, in behalf of our brethren, it comes us this day to offer up our united thanks. Let the song of angels, which was first heard in the air at the birth of our Saviour, be heard this day in our assembly. *Glory to God in the highest, for these fruits of peace upon earth, and good-will to man: O! let us give thanks unto the Lord: let us call upon his name, and make known his deeds among the people. Let us sing psalms unto him and talk of all his wondrous works.*

JAMES FORTEN

(1766 – 1842)

*from Letters from a Man of Colour on a Late Bill Before the Senate of
Pennsylvania (1813)*

James Forten was born to free black parents in Philadelphia. Like Benjamin Banneker previously he found upward social and economic mobility through military service, joining the Continental Navy at the age of 15. After his service he was apprenticed to a sail maker where he rose the economic ladder through promotions. During the War of 1812 he helped to enlist African American volunteers to protect the city of Philadelphia where he had become a leader within the black community. On the heels of the American victory in the War of 1812, Forten's example of political petition, shown here, is characterized by the sense of nationalism and reform spirit that was indicative of this era. The Pennsylvania law in question would have limited the constitutional rights of free blacks described as be "cruel in the extreme." The bill would die without ever being voted on. Later in life he opposed the American Colonization Society and sided with and provided funding for William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*.

We hold this truth to be self-evident, that GOD created all men equal, and is one of the most prominent features in the Declaration of Independence, and in that glorious fabric of collected wisdom, our noble Constitution. This idea embraces the Indian and European, the Savage and the Saint, the Peruvian and the Laplander, the white Man and the African, and whatever measures are adopted subversive of this inestimable privilege, are in direct violation of the latter and spirit of our Constitution, and become subject to the animadversion of all, particularly those who are deeply interested in the measure.

These thoughts were suggested by the promulgation of a later bill, before the Senate of Pennsylvania, to prevent the emigration of people of colour into this state. It was not passed into a law at this session and must in consequence lay over until the next, before when we sincerely hope, the white men, whom we should look upon as our protectors, will have become convinced of the inhumanity and impolicy of such a measure, and forbear to deprive us of those inestimable treasures, Liberty and Independence. This is almost the only state in the Union wherein the African

race have justly boasted of rational liberty and protection of the laws and shall it now be said they have been deprived of that liberty., and publicly exposed for sale to highest bidder? Shall colonial inhumanity that has marked many of us with shameful stripes, become the practice of the people of Pennsylvania, while Mercy stands weeping at the miserable spectacle? People of Pennsylvania, descendants of the immortal Penn, doom us not to the unhappy fate of thousands of our countrymen in the Southern States and the West Indies; despise the traffic in blood, and the blessing of the African will for every be around you.

GEORGE MOSES HORTON

(c. 1797 – c. 1883)

The Slave's Complaint (1829)

George Moses Horton was born a slave in North Carolina, taught himself to read, and began composing poetry in his head based on hymns. By the age of 20, Horton began visiting the University of North Carolina. It was here that Horton sold his commissioned love poems to students and later published volumes of his own poetry. His financial goal was to save up enough money to purchase his own freedom and passage to Liberia. The poem below comes from a book funded with the support of journalist Joseph Gales. His plans to move to Liberia fell through and Horton was unable to purchase his freedom, but by 1865 he was emancipated by the Union Army. Foreshadowing the testimony of later slave narratives, Horton's poem below lyrically describes the difficulties facing a slave, repeating the word *forever* in response to the slave questions of fear and hope and final request for respite from slavery.

The Slave's Complaint

Am I sadly cast aside,
On misfortune's rugged tide?
Will the world my pains deride
Forever?

Must I dwell in Slavery's night,
And all pleasure take its flight,
Far beyond my feeble sight,
Forever?

Worst of all, must Hope grow dim,
And withhold her cheering beam?
Rather let me sleep and dream
Forever!

Something still my heart surveys,
Groping through this dreary maze;
Is it Hope? – then burn and blaze
Forever!

Leave me not a wretch confined,
Altogether lame and blind –
Unto gross despair consigned,
Forever!

Heaven! in whom can I confide?
Canst thou not for all provide?
Condescend to be my guide
Forever:

And when this transient life shall end,
Oh, may some kind eternal friend
Bid me from servitude ascend,
Forever!

DAVID WALKER

(1796 – 1830)

from Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World (1829)

David Walker is often seen as the forefather of black nationalism. While earlier writers like Jupiter Hammon found quiet defiance and Benjamin Banneker feared retribution for publishing his antislavery views, Walker's *Appeal* stunned the country. In most Southern states Walker's book was banned completely and a bounty placed on his head. In the work's title alone, and then reinforced by the forceful conviction of the text, Walker called to action the African community of the world at large. Walker was born in North Carolina to a free mother and enslaved father who died before his birth. As Walker's mother was free he was born free. Witness to the evils of slavery in North Carolina he remarked that he could not "remain where I must hear slaves' chains continually and where I must encounter the insults of their hypocritical enslavers." He eventually left for South Carolina, then Philadelphia, before settling in Boston where in he married, became active in a variety of civic and religious organizations, and ultimately published the work below. Walker's *Appeal* was not only a call to action, but also a direct challenge to racism and oppression and an expose on civil and educational rights, topics that would continue to dominate the national landscape in the 20th century through the segregated Jim Crow south up to the Civil Rights Movement and today.

ADDITION, -- Our dear Redeemer said, "Therefore, what soever ye have spoken in darkness, shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets, shall be proclaimed upon the house tops."

How obviously this declaration of our Lord has been shown among Americans of the United States. They have hitherto passed among some nations, who do not know any thing about their internal concerns, for the most enlightened, humane charitable, and merciful people upon earth, when at the same time they treat us, the (coloured people) secretly more cruel and unmerciful than any other nation upon earth. – It is a fact, that in our Southern and Western States, there are millions who hold us in chains or slavery, whose greatest object and glory is centered in keeping us sunk in the most profound ignorance and stupidity, to make us work without remunerations for our services. Many of whom if they catch a

coloured person, whom they hold in unjust ignorance, slavery and degradation, to them and their children, with a book in his hand, will beat him nearly to death. I heard a wretch in the state of North Carolina said, that if any man would teach a black person whom he held in slavery, to spell, read or write, he would prosecute him to the very extent of the law. – Said the ignorant wretch,* “a Nigar ought not to have any more sense than enough to work for his master.” May I not ask to fatten the wretch and his family? – These and similar cruelties these *Christians* have been for hundreds of years inflicting on our fathers and us in the dark. God has however, very recently published some of their secret crimes on the house top, that the world may gaze on their Christianity and see of what kind it is composed. – Georgia for instance, God has completely shown to the world, the *Christianity* among white *inhabitants*. A law recently passed the Legislature of this *republican* State (Georgia) prohibiting all free or slaver persons of colour, from learning to read or write; another law has passed the *republican* House of Delegates, (but not the Senate) in Virginia, to prohibit all persons of colour, (free and slave) from learning to read or write, or even to hinder them from meeting together in order to worship our Maker!!!! – Now, I solemnly appeal, to the most skillful historians in the world, and all those who are mostly acquainted with the histories of the Antedeluvians and of Sodom and Gomorrah, to show me a parallel of barbarity. *Christians!! Christians!!* I dare you to show a parallel of cruelties in the annals of Heathens or of Devils, with those of Ohio, Virginia and of Georgia – know the world that these things were before done in the dark, or in a corner under a garb of humanity and religion. God has however, taken off the fig-leaf covering, and made them expose themselves on the house top. I tell you that God works in many ways his wonders to perform, he will unless they repent, make them expose themselves enough more yet to the world. – See the acts of the *Christians* in FLORIDA, SOUTH CAROLINA, and KENTUCKY – was it not for the reputation of the house of my Lord and Master, I

* It is a fact, that in all of our Slave-holding States (in the countries) there are thousands of whites, who are almost as ignorant in comparison as horses, the most they know, is to beat the coloured people, which some of them shall have their hearts full of yet.

would mention here, an act of cruelty inflicted a few days since on a black man, by the white *Christians* in the PARK STREET CHURCH, in this (CITY) which is almost enough to make Demons themselves quake and tremble in their FIREY HABITATIONS. – Oh! my Lord how refined in iniquity the whites have got to be in consequence of our blood* – what kind!! Oh! what kind!!! of Christianity can be found this day in all the earth!!!!!!

I write without the fear of man, I am writing for my God, and fear none but himself; they may put me to death if they choose – (I fear and esteem a good man however, let him be black or white.) I forbear to comment on the cruelties inflicted on this Black Man by the Whites, in the Park Street MEETING HOUSE, I will leave it in the dark!!!!!! But I declared that they atrocity is really to Heaven daring and infernal, that I must say that God has commenced a course of exposition among the Americans, and the glorious and heavenly work will continue to progress until they learn to do justice.

* The Blood of our fathers who have been murdered by the whites, and the groans of our Brethren, who are now held in cruel ignorance, wretchedness and slavery by them, cry aloud to the Maker of Heaven and of earth, against the whole continent of America, for redress.

HENRY HIGHLAND GARNET

(1815 – 1882)

from An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America (1843)

Henry Highland Garnet was born a slave in Maryland and escaped with his parents and siblings in 1824. Finally settling in New York, Highland Garnet would pursue his education, first at the African Free School, then in service as a cabin boy and cook on a ship, and continuing at various other institutions. He was ordained a Presbyterian minister and became extremely active in the abolition movement. In this speech below in August of 1843, he delivered an address to the National Convention of Colored Citizens in Buffalo, New York. In speaking literally to a convention of freed men yet aiming his words symbolically, as the title suggests, to the current slaves in the United States, Highland Garnet gives support but more notably calls for slaves to take matters into their own hands. In similar fashion to David Walker’s Appeal from a decade and half earlier, he begins by tracing the history of slavery, “Two hundred and twenty-seven years ago, the first of our injured race were brought to the shores of America. They came not with glad spirits to select their homes, in the New World. They came not with their own consent, to find an unmolested enjoyment of the blessings of this fruitful soil.” As others had done before him Highland Garnet points out the hypocrisy of the founding fathers in asking “Were they ignorant of the principles of Liberty?” Picking up midway through his speech, the excerpt below demonstrates the aggressive call to action from his speech. Coming across as a near violent manifesto, Henry Highland Garnet’s address was not endorsed by the convention, which included Frederick Douglass.

SLAVERY! How much misery is comprehended in that single word. What mind is there that does not shrink from its direful effects? Unless the image of God is obliterated from the soul, all men cherish the love of Liberty. The nice discerning political economist does not regard the sacred right, more than the untutored African who roams in the wilds of Congo. Nor has the one more right to the full enjoyment of his freedom than the other. In every man’s mind the good seeds of liberty are planted, and he who brings his fellow down so low, as to make him contented with a condition of slavery, commits the highest crime against God and man. Brethren, your oppressors aim to do this. They endeavor to make you as much like brutes as possible. When they have blinded eyes of your mind – when they have embittered the sweet waters of life – when they have shut out the light which shines

from the word of God – then, and not till then has American slavery done its perfect work.

TO SUCH DEGRADATION IT IS SINFUL IN THE EXTREME FOR YOU TO MAKE VOLUNTARY SUBMISSION. The divine commandments, you are in duty bound to reverence, and obey. If you do not obey them you will surely meet with the displeasure of the Almighty. He requires you to love him supremely, and your neighbor as yourself – to keep the Sabbath day holy – to search the Scriptures – and bring up your children with respect for his laws, and to worship no other God but him. But slavery sets all these at naught, and hurls defiance in the face of Jehovah. The forlorn condition in which you are placed does not destroy your moral obligation to God. You are not certain of Heaven, because you suffer yourselves to remain in a state of slavery, where you cannot obey the commandments of the Sovereign of the universe. If the ignorance of slavery is a passport to heaven, then it is a blessing, and no curse, and you should rather desire its perpetuity than its abolition. God will not receive slavery, nor ignorance, nor any other state of mind, for love, and obedience to him. Your condition does not absolve you from your moral obligation. The diabolical injustice by which your liberties are cloven down. NEITHER GOD, NOR ANGELS, OR JUST MEN, COMMAND YOU TO SUFFER FOR A SINGLE MOMENT. THEREFORE IT IS YOUR SOLEMN AND IMPERATIVE DUTY TO USE EVERY MEANS, BOTH MORAL, INTELLECTUAL, AND PHYSICAL, THAT PROMISE SUCCESS. It a band of heathen men should attempt to enslave a race of Christians, and to place their children under the influence of some false religion, surely, heaven would frown upon the men who would not resist such aggression, even to death. If, on the other hand, a band of Christians should attempt to enslave a race of heathen men and to entail slavery upon them, and to keep them in heathenism in the midst of Christianity, the God of heaven would smile upon every effort which the injured might make to disenthral themselves.

Brethren, it is as wrong for your lordly oppressors to keep you in slavery, as it was for the man thief to steal our ancestors from the coast of Africa. You should therefore now use the same manner of resistance, as would have been just in our ancestors, when the bloody foot prints of the first remorseless soul thief was placed

upon the shores of our fatherland. The humblest peasant is as free in the sight of God, as the proudest monarch that ever swayed a scepter. Liberty is a spirit sent out from God and like its great Author, is no respecter of persons.

Brethren, the time has come when you must act for yourself. It is an old and true saying, that if "if hereditary bondmen would be free, they must themselves strike the blow." You can please your own cause, and do the work of emancipation better than others. The nations of the old world are moving in the great cause of universal freedom, and some of them at least, will ere long, do you justice. The combined powers of Europe have placed their broad seal of disapprobation upon the African slave trade. But in the slave holding parts of the United States, the trade is as brisk as ever. They buy and sell you as though you were brute beasts. The north has done much – her opinion of slavery in the abstract is known. But in regard to the South, we adopt the opinion of the New York Evangelist – "We have advanced so far, that the cause apparently waits for a more effectual door to be thrown open than has been yet." We are about to point you to that more effectual door. Look around you, and behold the bosoms of your loving wives, heaving with untold agonies! Hear the cries of your poor children! Remember the stripes your father bore. Think of the torture and disgrace of your noble mothers. Think of your wretched sisters, living virtue and purity, as they are driven into concubinage, and are exposed to the unbridled lusts of incarnate devils. Think of the undying glory that hands around the ancient name of Africa: - and forget not that you are native-born American citizens, and as such, you are justly entitled to all the rights that are granted to the freest. Think how many years you have poured out upon the soil which you have cultivated with unrequited toiled, and enriched with your blood; and then go to your lordly enslavers, and tell them plainly, that YOU ARE DETERMINED TO BE FREE. Appeal to their sense of justice, and tell them that they have no more right to oppress you, than you have to enslave them. Entreat them to remove the grievous burdens which they have imposed upon you, and to remunerate you for your labor. Promise them renewed diligence in the cultivation of the soil, if they will render to you an equivalent for your services. Point them to the increase of happiness and prosperity in the British West Indies, since the act of Emancipation. Tell them in language which

they cannot misunderstand, or of the exceeding sinfulness of slavery, and of a future judgment, and of the righteous retributions of an indignant God. Inform them that all you desire is, for FREEDOM, and that nothing else will suffice. Do this, and for ever after cease to toil for the heartless tyrants, who give you no other reward but stripes and abuse. If they then commence the work of death, they, and not you, will be responsible for the consequences. You had far better all die – *die immediately*, then live slaves, and entail your wretchedness upon your prosperity. If you would be free in this generation, here is your only hope. However much you and all of us may desire to, there is not much hope of Redemption without the shedding of blood. If you must bleed, let it all come at once – rather, *die freemen, than live to be slaves...*

LUNSFORD LANE

(1803 – 1879)

From The Narrative of Lunsford Lane, Formerly of Raleigh, NC (1848)

Lunsford Lane was born in North Carolina as a slave. Through a variety of enterprises and entrepreneurial activities Lane was able to buy his freedom and the freedom of his family. Among the many economic endeavors he embarked upon Lane sold fruit, marbles, and tobacco (most successfully even keeping local legislators as clients.) along with working as a handyman and a messenger. Despite saving enough to purchase his own freedom, it would take years and several setbacks before Lane was able to reunite his family. He ultimately became a strong abolitionist and his narrative, excerpted here, tells the incredible story of his journey towards manumission. More interestingly, Lunsford Lane gave tremendous insight into the feeling and emotion a freed slave felt upon finally gaining his freedom. Lane's narrative is an example of the humanizing power of the personal testimonies recorded from the perspective of countless slaves. Despite attempts by pro-slavery voices to discredit narratives such as these as being fictitious or exaggerated, the first-hand accounts of slavery's barbarity would have a tremendous impact on the growing tensions that characterized the country.

But I am going too rapidly over my story. When the money was paid to my mistress and the conveyance fairly made to Mr. Smith, I felt that I was free. And a queer and joyous feeling it is to one who has been a slave. I cannot describe it, only it seemed as though I was in heaven. I used to lie awake whole nights thinking of it. And oh, the strange thoughts that passed through my soul, like so many rivers of light; deep and rich were their waves as they rolled; these were more to me than sleep, more than soft slumber after long months of watching over the decaying, fading frame of a friend, and the loved one laid to rest in the dust. But I cannot describe my feelings to those who have never been slaves; then why should I attempt it? He who has passed from spiritual death to life, and received the witness within his soul that his sins are forgiven, may possibly form some distant idea, like the ray of the setting sun from the far off mountain top, of the emotions of an emancipated slave. That opens heaven. To break the bonds of slavery, opens up at once both earth and heaven. Neither can be truly seen by us while we are slaves.

SOJOURNER TRUTH

(c. 1799 – 1883)

from The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave, Emancipated from Bodily Servitude by the State of New York, in 1828 (1850)

Sojourner Truth was one of the most notable black abolitionist and women's rights advocates in American history. She was born a slave named Isabella in New York, and after a turning point in her own life in 1843 renamed herself. She was emancipated in 1827 and converted to evangelical Methodism in 1843. While she was known as a gifted orator and public speaker, Sojourner Truth was illiterate and dictated her narrative in 1850 (a fact her opponents would use in an attempt to discredit her narrative). In the passage below the young Sojourner, still Isabella, retells the story of her aged father's final moments. In this recollection the generational pain and impact of slavery's hardship is noted in Bomefree's words to his daughter. He, and other elderly slaves, who for most of their arduous life had dreamed of freedom could not fully enjoy the potential thought of upcoming emancipation because, due to health concerns, life's end was too near.

LAST DAYS OF BOMEFREE

Isabella and Peter were permitted to see the remains of their mother laid in their last narrow dwelling, and to make their bereaved father a little visit, ere they returned to servitude. And most piteous were the lamentations of the poor old man, when, as last, *they* also were obliged to bid him 'Farewell!' Juan Fernandes, on his desolate island, was not so pitiable an object as this poor lame man. Blind and crippled, he was too superannuated to think for a moment of taking care of himself, and he greatly feared no persons would interest themselves in his behalf. 'Oh,' he would exclaim, 'I am *so old*, and *so helpless*. What *is* to become of me? I can't do anything more – my children are all gone, and here I am left helpless and alone.' 'And then, as I was taking leave of him,' said his daughter, in relating it, 'he raised his voice, and cried aloud like a child – *Oh, how he DID cry!* I HEAR it *now* – and remember it as well as if it were but yesterday – *poor old man!!!* He thought *God* had done it all – and my heart bled within me at the sight of his misery. He begged me to get permission to come and see him sometimes, which I readily and heartily promised him.' But when all had left him, the Ardinburghs, having some feeling left

for their faithful and favorite slave, 'took turns about' in keeping him – permitting him to stay a few weeks at one house, and then awhile at another, and so around. If, when he made a removal, the place where he was going was not too far off, he took up his line of march, staff in hand, and asked for no assistance. If it was twelve or twenty miles, they gave him a ride. While he was living in this way, Isabella was twice permitted to visit him. Another time she walked twelve miles, and carried her infant in her arms to see him but when she reached the place where she hoped to find him, he had just left for a place some twenty miles distant, and she never saw him more. The last time she *did* see him, she found him seated on a rock, by the road-side, alone, and far from any house. He was then migrating from the house of one Ardinburgh to that of another, several miles distant. His hair was white like wool – he was almost blind – and his gait was more a creep than walk – but the weather was warm and pleasant, and he did not dislike the journey. When Isabella addressed him, he recognized her voice, and was exceeding glad to see her. He was assisted to mount the wagon, was carried back to the famous cellar of which we have spoken, and there they held their last earthly conversation. He again, as usual, bewailed his loneliness, - spoke in tones of anguish of his many children, saying, 'they are all taken away from me! I have now none to give me a cup of cold water – why should I live and not die?' Isabella, whose heart yearned over her father, and who would have made any sacrifice to have been able to be with, and take care of him, tried to comfort, by telling him that 'she had heard the white folks say, that all the slaves in the State would be freed in ten years, and that then she would come and take care of him.' 'I would take just as good care of you as Mau-mau would, if she was here' – continued Isabel. 'Oh, my child,' replied he, 'I cannot *live* that long.' 'Oh *do*, daddy, do live, and I will take such *good* care of you,' was her rejoinder. She now says, 'Why, I thought then, in my ignorance, that he *could* live, if he *would*. I just as much thought so, as I ever thought *any* thing in my life – and I *insisted* on his living: but he shook his head, and insisted he could not.'

But, before Bomefree's good constitution would yield either to age, exposure, or a strong desire to die, the Ardinburghs again tired of him, and offered freedom to two old slaves – Caesar, brother of Mau-mau Bett, and his wife Betsey – on condition

that they should take care of James. (I was about to say, 'their brother-in-law' – but as slaves are neither *husbands* nor *wives* in law, the idea of their being brothers-in-law is truly ludicrous.) And although they were too old and infirm to take care of themselves (Caesar having been afflicted for a long time with fever-sores, and his wife with jaundice,) they eagerly accepted the boon of freedom, which had been the life-long desire of their souls – though at a time when emancipation was to them little more than destitution, and was a freedom more to be desired by the master than the slave. Sojourner declares of the slave in their ignorance, that 'their thoughts are no longer than her finger.'

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

(1818 – 1895)

from What to the Slave is the 4th of July? (1852)

Frederick Douglass is arguable the most notable African American abolitionist. Born to a slave woman and white father who he never knew, Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey began life on Maryland's eastern shore. Living with family members, including his grandparents and aunt, and only seeing his mother a few times before her death when he was seven, Douglass was exposed to the harsh realities of slavery. Douglass gained his education first as an apprentice to a ship carpenter in Baltimore where he was first introduced to the inspirational words of abolitionists. A moment Douglass described his going to live in Baltimore and the impact of education saying that it "laid the foundation, and opened the gateway, to all my subsequent prosperity." After returning to the country as a slave, Douglass vowed to escape, and at one point was imprisoned after his plan was discovered. By 1838 he was successful in realizing his dream and he fled first to New York City before settling in Massachusetts. It was here in New England where Douglass joined various religious and political organizations, and was introduced to William Lloyd Garrison who after one particular Douglass oration asked the crowd in attendance, "Have we been listening to a thing, a piece of property, or to a man?" Garrison's words can be viewed as a gross understatement, in the fact that to the black community and the abolition movement at large, Douglass was much more than a man. He would become a symbol for the power of education and the impact of education along with written and spoken word. His role during the Civil War as a recruiter of troops and confidant to President Lincoln and his involvement in the postwar Reconstruction and Freedmen's Bureau would demonstrate his leadership abilities and political acumen. Although countless texts could be included from Douglass, the speech below delivered in Rochester, New York in 1852 demonstrates his ability to be, as Garrison wrote, simply a man, at times nervous and self-deprecating and then rising above humanity to another sphere, Douglass challenges the meaning of the 4th of July and even why he would be invited to speak at a celebration for a holiday to which he was not truly a part of. The selection below begins with his opening remarks, which show the anger welling up; yet at the same time Douglass maintains an air of hope for the young nation. His speech continues on to examine the contemporary state of the country, prophesizes about the future, and ultimately hits a cadence and rhythm that would be mimicked for generations to come. Ultimately a full reading of this speech in its entirety is recommended, as is a thorough examination of Douglass's works.

MR. PRESIDENT, FRIENDS AND FELLOW CITIZENS: He who could address this audience without quailing sensation, has stronger nerves than I have. I do not remember ever to have appeared as a speaker before any assembly more shrinkingly, nor with greater distrust of my ability, than I do this day. A feeling has crept over me, quite unfavorable to the exercise of my limited powers of speech. The task before me is one which requires must previous thought and study for its proper performance. I know that apologies of this sort are generally considered flat and unmeaning. I trust, however, that mine will not be so considered. Should I seem at east, my appearance would much misrepresent me. The little experience I have had in addressing public meetings, in country school houses, avails me nothing on the present occasion.

The papers and placards say, that I am to deliver a 4th of July oration. This certainly sounds large, and out of the common way, for me. It is true that I have often had the privilege to speak in this beautiful Hall, and to address many who now honor me with their presence. But neither their familiar faces, nor the perfect gage I think I have of Corinthian Hall, seems to free me from embarrassment.

The fact is, ladies and gentlemen, the distance between this platform and the slave plantations, from which I escaped, is considerable – and the difficulties to be overcome in getting from the latter to the former, are by no means slight. That I am here from to-day is, to me, a matter of astonishment as well as of gratitude. You will not, therefore, be surprised, if in what I have to say, I evince no elaborate preparation, nor grace my speech with any high sounding exordium. With little experience and with less learning, I have been able to throw my thoughts hastily and imperfectly together; and trusting to your patient and generous indulgence, I will proceed to lay them before you.

This, for the purpose of this celebration, is the 4th of July. It is the birthday of your National Independence, and of your political freedom. This, to you, is what the Passover was to the emancipated people of God. It carries your minds back to the day, and to the act of your great deliverance; and to the signs, and to the wonders, associated with that act, and that day. This celebration also marks the begging of another year of your national life; and reminds you that the Republic of America is

now 76 years old. I am glad, fellow-citizens, that your nation is so young. Seventy-six years, though a good old age for a man is but a mere speck in the life of a nation. Three score years and ten is the allotted time for individual men; but nations number their years by thousands. According to this fact, you are, even now, only in the beginning of your national career, still lingering in the period of childhood. I repeat, I am glad this is so. There is hope in the thought, and hope is much needed, under dark clouds which lower above the horizon. The eye of the reformer is met with angry flashes, portending disastrous times; but his heart may well beat lighter at the thought that America is young, and that she is still in the impressive stage of her existence. May he not hope that high lessons of wisdom, of justice and of truth, will yet give direction to her destiny? Were the nation older, the patriot's heart might be sadder, and the reformer's brow heavier. Its future might be shrouded in gloom and the hope of its prophets go out in sorrow. There is consolation in the thought that America is young. Great streams are not easily turned from channels, worn deep in the course of ages.

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