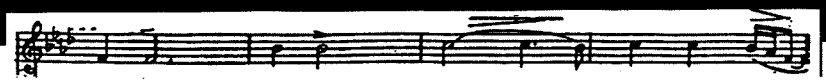
CALL AND RESPONSE



The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition

GENERAL EDITOR

Patricia Liggins Hill
Professor of English
University of San Francisco

EDITORS

Bernard W. Bell
Professor of English
The Pennsylvania State University

Trudier Harris
J. Carlyle Sitterson Professor of English
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

William J. Harris
Associate Professor of English
The Pennsylvania State University

R. Baxter Miller
Professor of English and Director of the Institute for African American Studies
University of Georgia

Sondra A. O'Neale
Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Professor of English
Wayne State University

with Horace Porter
Associate Professor of English and Chair of African American Studies
Stanford University

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY BOSTON NEW YORK

1998

dred and four others. Nineteen struck for liberty or death. But one life was taken, and the whole were emancipated, and the vessel was carried into Nassau, New Providence.

Noble men! Those who have fallen in freedom's conflict, their memories will be cherished by the true-hearted and the God-fearing in all future generations; those who are living, their names are surrounded by a halo of glory.

Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties. Now is the day and the hour. Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered. You cannot be more oppressed than you have been—you cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already. *Rather die freemen than live to be slaves.* Remember that you are FOUR MILLIONS!

It is in your power so to torment the God-cursed slaveholders that they will be glad to let you go free. If the scale was turned, and black men were the masters and white men the slaves, every destructive agent and element would be employed to lay the oppressor low. Danger and death would hang over their heads day and night. Yes, the tyrants would meet with plagues more terrible than those of Pharaoh. But you are a patient people. You act as though you were made for the special use of these devils. You act as though your daughters were born to pamper the lusts of your masters and overseers. And worse than all, you tamely submit while your lords tear your wives from your embraces and defile them before your eyes. In the name of God, we ask, are you men? Where is the blood of your fathers? Has it all run out of your veins? Awake, awake; millions of voices are calling you! Your dead fathers speak to you from their graves. Heaven, as with a voice of thunder, calls on you to arise from the dust.

Let your motto be resistance! *resistance!* RESISTANCE! No oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance. What kind of resistance you had better make you must decide by the circumstances that surround you, and according to the suggestion of expediency. Brethren, adieu! Trust in the living God. Labor for the peace of the human race, and remember that you are FOUR MILLIONS!

FREDERICK DOUGLASS
(1817–1895)

Frederick Douglass was one of the most gifted writers and thinkers in America during the nineteenth century. He was one of the most famous black abolitionists and one of the most talented orators. But even the best of traditional accounts neglect true appreciation for his superb gift of metaphor and symbol. Douglass was one of the first people to propose that the problem of slavery and race in America was a failure of imagination, a failure, in other words, to create new visions of humanity since the European Renaissance of the sixteenth century. He was one of the first to narrate the crisis in a captivating rhetoric exposing the irony of Christian civilization. He wrote with a precise imagery that depicts the American South as a desert of Gothic horror; and, though no real vampires inhabited his slave world, Douglass implied a symbolic connection between them and the slave masters who seemed to suck from others the life's blood of human value.

Though Douglass wrote brilliantly about the slave experience, he suggested that the power of slavery was beyond even his words. He helped restore slavery from the dispassionate recital of sociological fact to the compelling drama of story. His *Narrative* is analytical and subjectively persuasive. It is historical, religious, and political; it portrays excellent types of humans and of historical situations. It reveals patterns of history, dramatic situations, double encounters, and stunning repetitions of

scenes at St. Michael's on the Eastern Shore of Maryland; and it presents one or two other scenes in England more than forty years apart. Indeed, the *Narrative* depicts classical scenes of Egypt and Avignon, France, or Genoa, Italy, against the backdrop of the memory of American slavery, and it reveals brilliantly the capacity of the human race for creativity and destruction. "There are some things and places," Douglass writes, "made sacred by their uses and by the events with which they are associated, especially those which have in any measure changed the current of human taste, thought, and life, or which have revealed new powers and triumphs of the human soul." Frederick Douglass, so aware of the historical limitations imposed on African Americans, refused stubbornly to concede that any outside obstacle could ever deter people from fulfilling their will and from assuming their rightful destiny. Although he was sometimes romantically naive, Douglass was prophetic in his understanding that racial history is cyclical. He understood that the black writer was to define and direct the flow of history.

Frederick Bailey (later Douglass) was born in 1817 of a slave mother and an unknown white father on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. As a youth, he went to Baltimore to learn ship caulking. His mistress taught him to read and write before her husband forbade continuance of the training. At twenty-one, in 1838, Bailey used his literacy to forge some papers. With some other documents provided by a free black seaman, he escaped to freedom. Shortly afterwards, he married Anna Murray, a free black woman from Baltimore. Later, and further north, he began work as an antislavery crusader in New Bedford, Massachusetts. William Lloyd Garrison, having heard him deliver a speech at an antislavery convention in Nantucket in 1841, persuaded Bailey to become a member of the antislavery society. Taking the name of Douglass, Frederick became a leader of African Americans in New England. When the publication of his *Narrative* in 1845 endangered his freedom, he fled to England for two years. There, he began to envision freedom as mental as well as physical, speaking against slavery throughout the British empire from 1845 to 1847. When British associates purchased his freedom in 1847 for 150 pounds, he returned to the United States and broke with Garrison, whose program of Northern secession from the union would have left slavery intact. Douglass avoided open quarrel; rather, he moved away peacefully to Rochester, New York, where he founded his famous newspaper, *The North Star* (1847–1863). In 1848, Douglass championed women's rights by attending the first convention of the kind. In fact, he would collapse and die after participating in a meeting for women's suffrage on February 10, 1895.

At times, Douglass became profoundly disappointed, especially with the passage in 1850 of the Fugitive Slave Law. He lectured widely, using the fees to assist fugitive slaves. Forced by lack of funds to discard his plan of an industrial college for black people, he was at first a member of the Liberty Party. Later, he would become a crucial registrant in the Republican assembly of President Abraham Lincoln. With the help of Sojourner Truth, a fellow abolitionist, he helped to enlist blacks in the Union army. In Massachusetts, he helped recruit the 54th and 55th regiments, both of which earned distinction in the Civil War. Afterwards, he organized blacks to oppose social restrictions based on race. Having campaigned for the Republicans, Douglass was rewarded with appointments as Assistant Secretary of the Santo Domingo Commission (1871) and the United States Marshall for the District of Columbia (1877–1881) under President Grant. Later, he would become Recorder of

Deeds (1881–1886) under President Hayes and Minister to Haiti (1889–1891) under President Arthur.

Douglass helped direct the nation away from the Garrison position on abolitionism. Douglass proposed less emphasis on moral persuasion, Northern secession, and the presumed futility of the Constitution. His considerable dialogue with John Brown, who would soon be a white abolitionist martyr, convinced him in 1847 that only a superior physical force could end slavery. Subsequent consultation with Brown early in 1858, at an "abandoned stone quarry" in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, convinced Douglass that an attack on the Harpers Ferry federal arsenal in Virginia would be senseless. Meanwhile, he opposed colonization of African Americans as a solution to the race problem and helped to convince Abraham Lincoln to sign the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. Finally, with the support of Frances Watkins Harper and other black abolitionists, Douglass led the fight for the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. Hence, he played a vital role in laying a foundation for subsequent challenges by law against what would become institutionalized segregation of the races.

The autobiographies of Frederick Douglass should be read by all Americans and all lovers of freedom worldwide. *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (1845) is factual and popular. In portraying the wonderful garden into which Colonel Lloyd forbids the slave to enter, Douglass has left to posterity the image of some men who have proclaimed themselves God over the hopes and dreams of others. Douglass vindicates his own mission as a romantic writer, who, freed from eighteenth-century conventions of a dead past, holds true to the greater promise of the human spirit. Captain Auld [the master] "was not even a good imitator; he possessed all the disposition to deceive, but wanted the power. Having no resources within himself, he was compelled to be the copyist of many, and being such, he was forever the victim of inconsistency; and of consequence he was an object of contempt, and was held as such even by his slaves." His story turns back on the presumed morality from whence it comes: "I mean, by the religion of this land, that which is revealed in the words, deeds, and actions, of those bodies, north and south, calling themselves Christian churches, and yet in union with slave holders. It is against religion, as presented by these bodies, that I have felt it my duty to testify." Although *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) further developed his ideas, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881) is the classic narrative. Here Douglass, with a precise tone and mood, restores himself from the "winter of his own mind." Telling us the story of slavery, hence reminding us that the experience was ineffable—except through lived and imagined experience—Douglass completes a dramatic reversal from man to brute and from brute back to man.

The portrait of Douglass's battle with the "Negro-breaker" Covey clarifies the artistic development in Douglass's craft from the first draft to the last one. About twenty-five percent longer in the final draft, the scene is much more specific; hence, it accentuates a more positive future. The power of change assumes a much greater value, as does the struggle for manhood. Here, his probe into the psychology of the oppressor becomes intensely more self-conscious: "Dear reader, you can hardly believe the statement, but it is true and therefore I write it down." In Douglass's analysis, the slaves themselves had to be made unthinking; the mental and moral vision had to be darkened; the master's will had to be the highest law for the system to have

worked. In some way, the masters had to convey as quite reasonable their dubious right to someone else's earnings. What had been at first a plain tale about slavery shaped itself into something part story, part folk sermon: "It did not entirely satisfy me to narrate wrongs—I felt like denouncing them." Douglass uses his pen and voice to "renovate" a public mind and "build up" a public sentiment. By the effort, he would "send slavery" to the grave, hence restoring the people with whom he suffered. Never, perhaps, would be express himself more brilliantly than in the rhetorical question raised at Arlington National Cemetery on Decoration Day in 1871: "I ask, in the name of all things sacred, what shall men [and women] remember?"

To Frederick Douglass, black literary art reminds us of our own mortality and also of the imaginative freedom that we can claim even within a painful history. His story suggests a strong spirituality that keeps a dream for freedom alive and that points back to—signifies—the just person who tells the story. The narrative contributes to a communal passage from slavery to freedom, from past to future. The story is the dynamic present, passionately energetic. Douglass helps create a racial aesthetic—a fusion of beauty and communal purpose—that explains our state and explains the cycle 111 years after he wrote the following:

> In further illustration of the reactionary tendencies of public opinion against the black man [and woman] and of the increasing decline, since the war for the Union, in the power of resistance to the onward march of the rebel states to their former control and ascendancy in the councils of the nation, the decision of the United States Supreme Court, declaring the Civil Rights Law of 1875 unconstitutional, is striking and convincing. The strength and activities of the malign elements of the country against equal rights and equality before the law seem to increase in proportion to the increasing distance between that time and the time of the war.

Would the American nation, in other words, ever persist in redressing the grievances of African Americans? Frederick Douglass seemed almost to have been writing about the post–Reagan-Bush era in the twentieth century. His genius was that he was a man for all seasons.

❖❖❖

An indispensable source is Philip Foner's *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass,* 5 vols. (1950–1955; 1975), from which our selection of Douglass's speech titled "What to the American Slave Is Your Fourth of July?" is taken. Biographies include: Arna Bontemps's *Free at Last: The Life of Frederick Douglass* (1971), Philip Foner's *Frederick Douglass: A Biography* (1964), N.I. Huggins's *Slave and Citizen: The Life of Frederick Douglass* (1980), and William S. McFeely's *Frederick Douglass* (1991). More critical studies are David W. Blight's *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (1989), and Eric Sunquist's *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass* (1991). Of the current articles, those by Robert Stepto, James Olney, William L. Andrews, and Donald B. Gibson may prove especially informative.

Many of Douglass's papers, including his diary, are housed at the Frederick Douglass Home Museum, located in Cedar Hill, Washington, D.C. Other valuable documents can be found at the Library of Congress and Yale University.

but simple justice to say that their whole proceedings were characterized by marked ability and dignity. No one present, we think, however much he might be disposed to differ from the views advanced by the leading speakers on that occasion, will fail to give them credit for brilliant talents and excellent dispositions. In this meeting, as in other deliberative assemblies, there were frequent differences of opinion and animated discussion; but in no case was there the slightest absence of good feeling and decorum. Several interesting documents setting forth the rights as well as the grievances of women were read. Among these was a Declaration of Sentiments, to be regarded as the basis of a grand movement for attaining the civil, social, political, and religious rights of women. We should not do justice to our own convictions, or to the excellent persons connected with this infant movement, if we did not in this connection offer a few remarks on the general subject which the Convention met to consider and the objects they seek to attain. In doing so, we are not insensible that the bare mention of this truly important subject in any other than terms of contemptuous ridicule and scornful disfavor, is likely to excite against us the fury of bigotry and the folly of prejudice. A discussion of the rights of animals would be regarded with far more complacency by many of what are called the *wise* and the *good* of our land, than would a discussion of the rights of women. It is, in their estimation, to be guilty of evil thoughts, to think that woman is entitled to equal rights with man. Many who have at last made the discovery that the Negroes have some rights as well as other members of the human family, have yet to be convinced that women are entitled to any. Eight years ago a number of persons of this description actually abandoned the anti-slavery cause, lest by giving their influence in that direction they might possibly be giving countenance to the dangerous heresy that woman, in respect to rights, stands on an equal footing with man. In the judgment of such persons the American slave system, with all its concomitant horrors, is less to be deplored than this *wicked* idea. It is perhaps needless to say, that we cherish little sympathy for such sentiments or respect for such prejudices. Standing as we do upon the watch-tower of human freedom, we cannot be deterred from an expression of our approbation of any movement, however humble, to improve and elevate the character of any members of the human family. While it is impossible for us to go into this subject at length, and dispose of the various objections which are often urged against such a doctrine as that of female equality, we are free to say that in respect to political rights, we hold woman to be justly entitled to all we claim for man. We go farther, and express our conviction that all political rights which it is expedient for man to exercise, it is equally so for woman. All that distinguishes man as an intelligent and accountable being, is equally true of woman, and if that government only is just which governs by the free consent of the governed, there can be no reason in the world for denying to woman the exercise of the elective franchise, or a hand in making and administering the laws of the land. Our doctrine is that "right is of no sex." We therefore bid the women engaged in this movement our humble Godspeed.

The North Star, July 28, 1848

What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?: An Address Delivered in Rochester, New York, on 5 July 1852

Mr. President, Friends and Fellow Citizens: He who could address this audience without a 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 much 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 ease,

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 plantation, 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 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 beginning 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 the 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 impressible 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. They may sometimes rise in quiet and stately majesty, and inundate the land, refreshing and fertilizing the earth with their mysterious properties. They may also rise in wrath and fury, and bear away, on their angry waves, the accumulated wealth of years of toil and hardship. They, however, gradually flow back to the same old channel, and flow on as serenely as ever. But, while the river may not be turned aside, it may dry up, and leave nothing behind but the withered branch, and the unsightly rock, to howl in the abyss-sweeping wind, the sad tale of departed glory. As with rivers so with nations.

Fellow-citizens, I shall not presume to dwell at length on the associations that cluster about this day. The simple story of it is that, 76 years ago, the people of this country were British subjects. The style and title of your "sovereign people" (in which you now glory) was not then born. You were under the British Crown. Your fathers esteemed the English Government as the home government; and England as the fatherland. This home government, you know, although a considerable distance from your home, did, in the exercise of its parental prerogatives, impose upon its colonial children, such restraints, burdens and limitations, as, in its

*Ps. 90:10.

mature judgement, it deemed wise, right and proper.

But, your fathers, who had not adopted the fashionable idea of this day, of the infallibility of government, and the absolute character of its acts, presumed to differ from the home government in respect to the wisdom and the justice of some of those burdens and restraints. They went so far in their excitement as to pronounce the measures of government unjust, unreasonable, and oppressive, and altogether such as ought not to be quietly submitted to. I scarcely need say, fellow-citizens, that my opinion of those measures fully accords with that of your fathers. Such a declaration of agreement on my part would not be worth much to anybody. It would, certainly, prove nothing, as to what part I might have taken, had I lived during the great controversy of 1776. To say *now* that America was right, and England wrong, is exceedingly easy. Everybody can say it; the dastard, not less than the noble brave, can flippantly discant on the tyranny of England towards the American Colonies. It is fashionable to do so; but there was a time when to pronounce against England, and in favor of the cause of the colonies, tried men's souls.* They who did so were accounted in their day, plotters of mischief, agitators and rebels, dangerous men. To side with the right, against the wrong, with the weak against the strong, and with the oppressed against the oppressor! *here* lies the merit, and the one which, of all others, seems unfashionable in our day. The cause of liberty may be stabbed by the men who glory in the deeds of your fathers. But, to proceed.

Feeling themselves harshly and unjustly treated by the home government, your fathers, like men of honesty, and men of spirit, earnestly sought redress. They petitioned and remonstrated; they did so in a decorous, respectful, and loyal manner. Their conduct was wholly unexceptionable. This, however, did not answer the purpose. They saw themselves treated with sovereign indifference, coldness and scorn. Yet they persevered. They were not the men to look back.

As the sheet anchor takes a firmer hold, when the ship is tossed by the storm, so did the cause of your fathers grow stronger, as it breasted the chilling blasts of kingly displeasure. The greatest and best of British statesmen admitted its justice, and the loftiest eloquence of the British Senate came to its support. But, with that blindness which seems to be the unvarying characteristic of tyrants, since Pharoah and his hosts were drowned in the Red Sea, the British Government persisted in the exactions complained of.

The madness of this course, we believe, is admitted now, even by England; but we fear the lesson is wholly lost on our present rulers.

Oppression makes a wise man mad. Your fathers were wise men, and if they did not go mad, they became restive under this treatment. They felt themselves the victims of grievous wrongs, wholly incurable in their colonial capacity. With brave men there is always a remedy for oppression. Just here, the idea of a total separation of the colonies from the crown was born! It was a startling idea, much more so, than we, at this distance of time, regard it. The timid and the prudent (as has been intimated) of that day, were, of course, shocked and alarmed by it.

Such people lived then, had lived before, and will, probably, ever have a place on this planet; and their course, in respect to any great change, (no matter how great the good to be attained, or the wrong to be redressed by it), may be calculated with as much precision as can be the course of the stars. They hate all changes, but silver, gold and copper change! Of this sort of change they are always strongly in favor.

These people were called tories in the days of your fathers; and the appellation, probably, conveyed the same idea that is meant by a more modern, though a somewhat less euphonious

*Douglass paraphrases the opening line of Thomas Paine's first *Crisis* paper, 23 December 1776. *The Political Writings of Thomas Paine*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1859), 1:75.

term, which we often find in our papers, applied to some of our old politicians.*

Their opposition to the then dangerous thought was earnest and powerful; but, amid all their terror and affrighted vociferations against it, the alarming and revolutionary idea moved on, and the country with it.

On the 2d of July, 1776, the old Continental Congress, to the dismay of the lovers of ease, and the worshippers of property, clothed that dreadful idea with all the authority of national sanction. They did so in the form of a resolution; and as we seldom hit upon resolutions, drawn up in our day, whose transparency is at all equal to this, it may refresh your minds and help my story if I read it.

> Resolved, That these united colonies *are*, and of right, ought to be free and Independent States; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown; and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain *is*, and ought to be, dissolved.†

Citizens, your fathers made good that resolution. They succeeded; and to-day you reap the fruits of their success. The freedom gained is yours; and you, therefore, may properly celebrate this anniversary. The 4th of July is the first great fact in your nation's history—the very ring-bolt in the chain of your yet undeveloped destiny.

Pride and patriotism, not less than gratitude, prompt you to celebrate and to hold it in perpetual remembrance. I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the RING-BOLT to the chain of your nation's destiny; so, indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost.

From the round top of your ship of state, dark and threatening clouds may be seen. Heavy billows, like mountains in the distance, disclose to the leeward huge forms of flinty rocks! That *bolt* drawn, that *chain* broken, and all is lost. *Cling to this day—cling to it,* and to its principles, with the grasp of a storm-tossed mariner to a spar at midnight.

The coming into being of a nation, in any circumstances, is an interesting event. But, besides general considerations, there were peculiar circumstances which make the advent of this republic an event of special attractiveness.

The whole scene, as I look back to it, was simple, dignified and sublime.

The population of the country, at the time, stood at the insignificant number of three millions. The country was poor in the munitions of war. The population was weak and scattered, and the country a wilderness unsubdued. There were then no means of concert and combination, such as exist now. Neither steam nor lightning had then been reduced to order and discipline. From the Potomac to the Delaware was a journey of many days. Under these, and innumerable other disadvantages, your fathers declared for liberty and independence and triumphed.

Fellow Citizens, I am not wanting in respect for the fathers of this republic. The signers of the Declaration of Independence were brave men. They were great men too—great enough to give fame to a great age. It does not often happen to a nation to raise, at one time, such a number of truly great men. The point from which I am compelled to view them is not, certainly, the most favorable; and yet I cannot con-

---

*Douglass probably refers to the term *Hunker,* which was applied to conservative Democrats in New York state politics in the late 1840s. The label originally referred to the fiscally conservative faction of the state's Democratic party, but after an 1847 split over the Wilmot Proviso the term also differentiated Unionist followers of William L. Marcy and Daniel S. Dickinson from the antislavery *Barnburners.* A study of the election of 1848 suggests that the word "was used to ridicule the conservatives' strenuous efforts to get a large 'hunk' of the spoils of office; others thought it was a corruption of the Dutch slang word *hanker,* freely translated as 'greedy.'" By the 1850s, the *Hunker* designation was commonly applied to the great conservative Unionist majority of the Democratic party throughout the North. Joseph G. Rayback, *Free Soil,* Lexington University Press of Kentucky (1971), 16n; Nichols, *Democratic Machine,* 18, 198–199.

†A text of the quoted resolution, which indicates that the word "totally" appeared before the word "dissolved," may be found in W.C. Ford et al., eds., *Journal of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789,* 34 vols., National Archives and Records, 1959; vpa. of 1904–1937 (Washington, D.C., 1904–1937), 5:507.

template their great deeds with less than admiration. They were statesmen, patriots and heroes, and for the good they did, and the principles they contended for, I will unite with you to honor their memory.

They loved their country better than their own private interests; and, though this is not the highest form of human excellence, all will concede that it is a rare virtue, and that when it is exhibited, it ought to command respect. He who will, intelligently, lay down his life for his country, is a man whom it is not in human nature to despise. Your fathers staked their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor, on the cause of their country. In their admiration of liberty, they lost sight of all other interests.

They were peace men; but they preferred revolution to peaceful submission to bondage. They were quiet men; but they did not shrink from agitating against oppression. They showed forbearance; but that they knew its limits. They believed in order; but not in the order of tyranny. With them, nothing was "*settled*" that was not right. With them, justice, liberty and humanity were "*final;*" not slavery and oppression. You may well cherish the memory of such men. They were great in their day and generation. Their solid manhood stands out the more as we contrast it with these degenerate times.

How circumspect, exact and proportionate were all their movements! How unlike the politicians of an hour! Their statesmanship looked beyond the passing moment, and stretched away in strength into the distant future. They seized upon eternal principles, and set a glorious example in their defence. Mark them!

Fully appreciating the hardship to be encountered, firmly believing in the right of their cause, honorably inviting the scrutiny of an onlooking world, reverently appealing to heaven to attest their sincerity, soundly comprehending the solemn responsibility they were about to assume, wisely measuring the terrible odds against them, your fathers, the fathers of this republic, did, most deliberately, under the inspiration of a glorious patriotism, and with a sublime faith in the great principles of justice and freedom, lay deep the corner-stone of the national superstructure, which has risen and still rises in grandeur around you.

Of this fundamental work, this day is the anniversary. Our eyes are met with demonstrations of joyous enthusiasm. Banners and pennants wave exultingly on the breeze. The din of business, too, is hushed. Even Mammon seems to have quitted his grasp on this day. The ear-piercing fife and the stirring drum unite their accents with the ascending peal of a thousand church bells. Prayers are made, hymns are sung, and sermons are preached in honor of this day; while the quick martial tramp of a great and multitudinous nation, echoed back by all the hills, valleys and mountains of a vast continent, bespeak the occasion one of thrilling and universal interest—a nation's jubilee.

Friends and citizens, I need not enter further into the causes which led to this anniversary. Many of you understand them better than I do. You could instruct me in regard to them. That is a branch of knowledge in which you feel, perhaps, a much deeper interest than your speaker. The causes which led to the separation of the colonies from the British crown have never lacked for a tongue. They have all been taught in your common schools, narrated at your firesides, unfolded from your pulpits, and thundered from your legislative halls, and are as familiar to you as household words. They form the staple of your national poetry and eloquence.

I remember, also, that, as a people, Americans are remarkably familiar with all facts which make in their own favor. This is esteemed by some as a national trait—perhaps a national weakness. It is a fact, that whatever makes for the wealth or for the reputation of Americans, and can be had *cheap!* will be found by Americans. I shall not be charged with slandering Americans, if I say I think the American side of any question may be safely left in American hands.

I leave, therefore, the great deeds of your fathers to other gentlemen whose claim to have

been regularly descended will be less likely to be disputed than mine!

The Present

My business, if I have any here to-day, is with the present. The accepted time with God and his cause is the ever-living now.

> "Trust no future, however pleasant,
> Let the dead past bury its dead;
> Act, act in the living present,
> Heart within, and God overhead."*

We have to do with the past only as we can make it useful to the present and to the future. To all inspiring motives, to noble deeds which can be gained from the past, we are welcome. But now is the time, the important time. Your fathers have lived, died, and have done their work, and have done much of it well. You live and must die, and you must do your work. You have no right to enjoy a child's share in the labor of your fathers, unless your children are to be blest by your labors. You have no right to wear out and waste the hard-earned fame of your fathers to cover your indolence. Sydney Smith† tells us that men seldom eulogize the wisdom and virtues of their fathers, but to excuse some folly or wickedness of their own. This truth is not a doubtful one. There are illustrations of it near and remote, ancient and modern. It was fashionable, hundreds of years ago, for the children of Jacob to boast, we have "Abraham to our father," when they had long lost Abraham's faith and spirit.‡ That people contented themselves under the shadow of Abraham's great name, while they repudiated the deeds which made his name great. Need I remind you that a similar thing is being done all over this country to-day? Need I tell you that the Jews are not the only people who built the tombs of the prophets, and garnished the sepulchres of the righteous? Washington could not die till he had broken the chains of his slaves.§ Yet his monument is built up by the price of human blood, and the traders in the bodies and souls of men, shout—"We have Washington to *our father.*" Alas! that it should be so; yet so it is.

> "The evil that men do, lives after them,
> The good is oft' interred with their bones."‖

Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here to-day? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? and am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar, and to confess the benefits and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us?

Would to God, both for your sakes and ours, that an affirmative answer could be truthfully returned to these questions! Then would my task be light, and my burden easy and delightful. For *who* is there so cold, that a nation's sympathy could not warm him? Who so obdurate and dead to the claims of gratitude, that would not thankfully acknowledge such priceless benefits? Who so stolid and selfish, that would not give his voice to swell the hallelujahs of a nation's jubilee, when the chains of servitude had been torn from his limbs? I am not that man. In a case like that, the dumb might

*The stanza quoted is from Henry Wadsworth Longellow's "A Psalm of Life." *Poems*, 22.

†Anglican minister Sydney Smith (1771–1845) was a master satirical essayist and lecturer. A highly partisan Whig, his barbed wit was employed to great effect in the causes of Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform. *DNB*, 18:527–531.

‡Douglass appears to allude to a passage from Luke 3:8: "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."

§At the time of his death, George Washington owned or held claim to over three hundred slaves. His will provided that "upon the decease of my wife it is my . . . desire that all slaves whom I hold in my own right shall receive their freedom." Matthew T. Mellon, *Early American Views on Negro Slavery From the Letters and Papers of the Founders of the Republic*, Meador (Boston, 1934), 29–81; Walter H. Mazyck, *George Washington and the Negro* (Washington, D.C., 1932), 133–138; George Livermore, *An Historical Research Respecting the Opinions of the Founders of the Republic on Negroes as Slaves, as Citizens, and as Soldiers*, 4th ed., J. Wilson (Boston, 1862), 28–31; Paul F. Boller, "Washington, the Quakers, and Slavery," *JNH*, 46 (April 1961): 83–88.

‖*Julius Caesar*, act 3, sc. 2, line 76.

eloquently speak, and the "lame man leap as an hart."

But, such is not the state of the case. I say it with a sad sense of the disparity between us. I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth [of] July is *yours*, not *mine*. *You* may rejoice, *I* must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak to-day? If so, there is a parallel to your conduct. And let me warn you that it is dangerous to copy the example of a nation whose crimes, towering up to heaven, were thrown down by the breath of the Almighty, burying that nation in irrecoverable ruin! I can to-day take up the plaintive lament of a peeled and woe-smitten people!

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yea! we wept when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there, they that carried us away captive, required of us a song; and they who wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth."*

Fellow-citizens; above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them. If I do forget, if I do not faithfully remember those bleeding children of sorrow this day, "may my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!" To forget them, to pass lightly over their wrongs, and to chime in with the popular theme, would be treason most scandalous and shocking, and would make me a reproach before God and the world. My subject, then fellow-citizens, is AMERICAN SLAVERY. I shall see, this day, and its popular characteristics, from the slave's point of view. Standing, there, identified with the American bondman, making his wrongs mine, I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this 4th of July! Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future. Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery—the great sin and shame of America! "I will not equivocate; I will not excuse;"† I will use the severest language I can command; and yet not one word shall escape me that any man, whose judgement is not blinded by prejudice, or who is not at heart a slaveholder, shall not confess to be right and just.

But I fancy I hear some one of my audience say, it is just in this circumstance that you and your brother abolitionists fail to make a favorable impression on the public mind. Would you argue more, and denounce less, would you persuade more, and rebuke less, your cause would be much more likely to succeed. But, I submit, where all is plain there is nothing to be argued. What point in the antislavery creed would you

*Ps. 137:1–6.

†Douglass quotes from the first issue of the *Liberator*, in which William Lloyd Garrison promised, "I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—and *I will be heard.*" *Liberator*, 1 January 1831; John L. Thomas, *The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison*, Little Brown (Boston, 1963), 128.

have me argue? On what branch of the subject do the people of this country need light? Must I undertake to prove that the slave is a man? That point is conceded already. Nobody doubts it. The slaveholders themselves acknowledge it in the enactment of laws for their government. They acknowledge it when they punish disobedience on the part of the slave. There are seventy-two crimes in the State of Virginia, which, if committed by a black man, (no matter how ignorant he be), subject him to the punishment of death; while only two of the same crimes will subject a white man to the like punishment.* What is this but the acknowledgement that the slave is a moral, intellectual and responsible being? The manhood of the slave is conceded. It is admitted in the fact that Southern statute books are covered with enactments forbidding, under severe fines and penalties, the teaching of the slave to read or to write. When you can point to any such laws, in reference to the beasts of the field, then I may consent to argue the manhood of the slave. When the dogs in your streets, when the fowls of the air, when the cattle on your hills, when the fish of the sea, and the reptiles that crawl, shall be unable to distinguish the slave from a brute, *then* will I argue with you that the slave is a man!

For the present, it is enough to affirm the equal manhood of the negro race. Is it not astonishing that, while we are ploughing, planting and reaping, using all kinds of mechanical tools, erecting houses, constructing bridges, building ships, working in metals of brass, iron, copper, silver and gold; that, while we are reading, writing and cyphering, acting as clerks, merchants and secretaries, having among us lawyers, doctors, ministers, poets, authors, editors, orators and teachers; that, while we are engaged in all manner of enterprises common to other men, digging gold in California, capturing the whale in the Pacific, feeding sheep and cattle on the hill-side, living, moving, acting, thinking, planning, living in families as husbands, wives and children, and, above all, confessing and worshipping the Christian's God, and looking hopefully for life and immortality beyond the grave, we are called upon to prove that we are men!

Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty? that he is the rightful owner of his own body? You have already declared it. Must I argue the wrongfulness of slavery? Is that a question for Republicans? Is it to be settled by the rules of logic and argumentation, as a matter beset with great difficulty, involving a doubtful application of the principle of justice, hard to be understood? How should I look today, in the presence of Americans, dividing, and subdividing a discourse, to show that men have a natural right to freedom? speaking of it relatively, and positively, negatively, and affirmatively. To do so, would be to make myself ridiculous, and to offer an insult to your understanding. There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven, that does not know that slavery is wrong *for him.*

What, am I to argue that it is wrong to make men brutes, to rob them of their liberty, to work them without wages, to keep them ignorant of their relations to their fellow men, to beat them with sticks, to flay their flesh with the lash, to load their limbs with irons, to hunt them with dogs, to sell them at auction, to sunder their families, to knock out their teeth, to burn their flesh, to starve them into obedience and submission to their masters? Must I argue that a system thus marked with blood, and stained with pollution, is *wrong?* No! I will not. I have better employments for my time and strength, than such arguments would imply.

What, then, remains to be argued? Is it that slavery is not divine; that God did not establish it; that our doctors of divinity are mistaken? There is blasphemy in the thought. That which is inhuman, cannot be divine! *Who* can reason on such a proposition? They that can, may; I cannot. The time for such argument is past.

At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. O! had I the ability,

*Douglass probably relies on [Weld], *American Slavery*, American Anti-slavery Society (New York, 1839), p. 149, which contrasts capital offenses in Virginia for slaves and whites.

and could I reach the nation's ear, I would, today, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced.

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour.

Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the old world, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.

❖❖❖

The Internal Slave Trade

Take the American slave-trade, which, we are told by the papers, is especially prosperous just now. Ex-Senator Benton* tells us that the price of men was never higher than now. He mentions the fact to show that slavery is in no danger. This trade is one of the pecularities of American institutions. It is carried on in all the large towns and cities in one-half of this confederacy; and millions are pocketed every year, by dealers in this horrid traffic. In several states, this trade is a chief source of wealth. It is called (in contradistinction to the foreign slave-trade) "*the internal slave-trade.*" It is, probably, called so, too, in order to divert from it the horror with which the foreign slave-trade is contemplated. That trade has long since been denounced by this government, as piracy. It has been denounced with burning words, from the high places of the nation, as an execrable traffic. To arrest it, to put an end to it, this nation keeps a squadron, at immense cost, on the coast of Africa. Everywhere, in this country, it is safe to speak of this foreign slave-trade, as a most inhuman traffic, opposed alike to the laws of God and of man. The duty to extirpate and destroy it, is admitted even by our DOCTORS OF DIVIN-

*Thomas Hart Benton (1782–1858) served as a U.S. senator from Missouri from 1821 to 1851. Born near Hillsboro, North Carolina. Benton briefly studied at the University of North Carolina and at William and Mary College. Despite a promising start on a legal and political career in Tennessee, Benton migrated to Missouri after service in the War of 1812. Elected to the Senate upon Missouri's admission to the Union, he became an important Jacksonian Democrat and spokesman for western interests. When he failed to secure reelection to the Senate in 1850, Benton returned to Congress as a representative from 1853 to 1855 but lost his bid for a second term in 1854. Benton probably used his observation on slave prices to bolster his persistent denial that slaveholding interests were insecure in the Union. Although the remark does not appear in his published speeches attacking Calhoun's appeal for southern congressional unity in 1849 or in his major speeches delivered during the Senate debate on the 1850 compromise measures, Benton repeated this observation several years later when criticizing the 1850 secessionist movements in South Carolina and Mississippi: "[T]here is no danger to slavery in any slave State. Property is timid! and slave property above all: and the market is the test of safety and danger to all property. . . . Now, how is it with slave property, tried by this unerring standard? Has it been sinking in price since the year 1835? since the year of the first alarm manifesto in South Carolina, and the first of Mr. Calhoun's twenty years' alarm speeches in the Senate? On the contrary, the price has been constantly rising the whole time—and it is still rising although it has attained a height incredible to have been predicted twenty years ago." Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years' View,* 2 vols., Appleton (New York, 1854–56), 2: 782; Elbert B. Smith, *Magnificent Missourian: The Life of Thomas Hart Benton,* Lippincott (Philadelphia, 1958); William N. Chambers, *Old Bullion Benton: Senator from the West* (Boston, 1956); Theodore Roosevelt, *Thomas H. Benton,* Houghton Mifflin (Boston, 1899); *ACAB,* 1:241–243; *DAB, 2:210–213.*

ITY. In order to put an end to it, some of these last have consented that their colored brethren (nominally free) should leave this country, and establish themselves on the western coast of Africa! It is, however, a notable fact that, while so much execration is poured out by Americans upon those engaged in the foreign slave-trade, the men engaged in the slave-trade between the states pass without condemnation, and their business is deemed honorable.

Behold the practical operation of this internal slave-trade, the American slave-trade, sustained by American politics and American religion. Here you will see men and women reared like swine for the market. You know what is a swine-drover? I will show you a man-drover. They inhabit all our Southern States. They perambulate the country, and crowd the highways of the nation, with droves of human stock. You will see one of these human flesh-jobbers, armed with pistol, whip and bowie-knife, driving a company of a hundred men, women, and children, from the Potomac to the slave market at New Orleans. These wretched people are to be sold singly, or in lots, to suit purchasers. They are food for the cotton-field, and the deadly sugar-mill. Mark the sad procession, as it moves wearily along, and the inhuman wretch who drives them. Hear his savage yells and his blood-chilling oaths, as he hurries on his affrighted captives! There, see the old man, with locks thinned and gray. Cast one glance, if you please, upon that young mother, whose shoulders are bare to the scorching sun, her briny tears falling on the brow of the babe in her arms. See, too, that girl of thirteen, weeping, *yes!* weeping, as she thinks of the mother from whom she has been torn! The drove moves tardily. Heat and sorrow have nearly consumed their strength; suddenly you hear a quick snap, like the discharge of a rifle; the fetters clank, and the chain rattles simultaneously; your ears are saluted with a scream, that seems to have torn its way to the centre of your soul! The crack you heard, was the sound of the slave-whip; the scream you heard, was from the woman you saw with the babe. Her speed had faltered under the weight of her child and her chains! that gash on her shoulder tells her to move on. Follow this drove to New Orleans. Attend the auction; see men examined like horses; see the forms of women rudely and brutally exposed to the shocking gaze of American slave-buyers. See this drove sold and separated forever; and never forget the deep, sad sobs that arose from that scattered multitude. Tell me citizens, WHERE, under the sun, you can witness a spectacle more fiendish and shocking. Yet this is but a glance at the American slave-trade, as it exists, at this moment, in the ruling part of the United States.

I was born amid such sights and scenes. To me the American slave-trade is a terrible reality. When a child, my soul was often pierced with a sense of its horrors. I lived on Philpot Street, Fell's Point, Baltimore, and have watched from the wharves, the slave ships in the Basin, anchored from the shore, with their cargoes of human flesh, waiting for favorable winds to waft them down the Chesapeake. There was, at that time, a grand slave mart kept at the head of Pratt Street, by Austin Woldfolk.* His agents were sent into every town and county in Maryland, announcing their arrival, through the papers, and on flaming "*hand-bills,*" headed CASH FOR NEGROES. These men were generally well dressed men, and very captivating in their manners. Ever ready to drink, to treat, and to gam-

*Actually Austin Woolfolk of Augusta, Georgia, who came to Baltimore in 1819 and became the best-known slave trader in the area in the 1820s and early 1930s. Attracted by the city's commercial shipping facilities, Woolfolk and his relatives made Baltimore the headquarters for their activities and annually transported between 230 and 460 slaves to New Orleans. Agents for Woolfolk were sent into counties throughout Maryland and his advertisements in local newspapers throughout the 1820s indicated that Woolfolk would pay "the highest prices and in cash" for young slaves. In his *Narrative,* Douglass noted that "if a slave was convicted of any high misdemeanor, became unmanageable, or evinced a determination to run away, he was brought immediately here [Lloyd's home plantation], severely whipped, put on board the sloop, carried to Baltimore, and sold to Austin Woolfolk, or some other slave trader, as a warning to the slaves remaining." Woolfolk's slave-trading activities declined in the early 1830s owing to increased competition from larger firms, a decrease in the number of slaves available for sale to traders as owners who left the area took the slaves into the western territories or manumitted them, and the increased opposition of Marylanders to slave trading within the state. Douglass, *Narrative,* 32; William Calderhead, "The Role of the Professional Slave Trader in a Slave Economy: Austin Woolfolk, A Case Study," *Civil War History,* 23 (September 1977):195–211.

ble. The fate of many a slave has depended upon the turn of a single card; and many a child has been snatched from the arms of its mother by bargains arranged in a state of brutal drunkenness.

The flesh-mongers gather up their victims by dozens, and drive them, chained, to the general depot at Baltimore. When a sufficient number have been collected here, a ship is chartered, for the purpose of conveying the forlorn crew to Mobile, or to New Orleans. From the slave prison to the ship, they are usually driven in the darkness of night; for since the anti-slavery agitation, a certain caution is observed.

In the deep still darkness of midnight, I have been often aroused by the dead heavy footsteps, and the piteous cries of the chained gangs that passed our door. The anguish of my boyish heart was intense; and I was often consoled, when speaking to my mistress in the morning, to hear her say that the custom was very wicked; that she hated to hear the rattle of the chains, and the heart-rending cries. I was glad to find one who sympathised with me in my horror.

Fellow-citizens, this murderous traffic is, today, in active operation in this boasted republic. In the solitude of my spirit, I see clouds of dust raised on the highways of the South; I see the bleeding footsteps; I hear the doleful wail of fettered humanity, on the way to the slave-markets, where the victims are to be sold like *horses, sheep,* and *swine,* knocked off to the highest bidder. There I see the tenderest ties ruthlessly broken, to gratify the lust, caprice and rapicity of the buyers and sellers of men. My soul sickens at the sight.

> "Is this the land your Fathers loved,
> The freedom which they toiled to win?
> Is this the earth whereon they moved?
> Are these the graves they slumber in?"*

But a still more inhuman, disgraceful, and scandalous state of things remains to be presented.

By an act of the American Congress, not yet two years old, slavery has been nationalized in its most horrible and revolting form. By that act, Mason & Dixon's line has been obliterated; New York has become as Virginia; and the power to hold, hunt, and sell men, women, and children as slaves remains no longer a mere state institution, but is now an institution of the whole United States. The power is co-extensive with the star-spangled banner and American Christianity. Where these go, may also go the merciless slave-hunter. Where these are, man is not sacred. He is a bird for the sportsman's gun. By that most foul and fiendish of all human decrees, the liberty and person of every man are put in peril. Your broad republican domain is hunting ground for *men. Not* for thieves and robbers, enemies of society, merely, but for men guilty of no crime. Your lawmakers have commanded all good citizens to engage in this hellish sport. Your President, your Secretary of State, your *lords, nobles,* and ecclesiastics, enforce, as a duty you owe to your free and glorious country, and to your God, that you do this accursed thing. Not fewer than forty Americans have, within the past two years, been hunted down and, without a moment's warning, hurried away in chains, and consigned to slavery and excruciating torture. Some of these have had wives and children, dependent on them for bread; but of this, no account was made. The right of the hunter to his prey stands superior to the right of marriage, and to *all* rights in this republic, the rights of God included! For black men there are neither law, justice, humanity, nor religion. The Fugitive Slave *Law* makes MERCY TO THEM, A CRIME; and bribes the judge who tries them. An American JUDGE GETS TEN DOLLARS FOR EVERY VICTIM HE CONSIGNS to slavery, and five, when he fails to do so. The oath of any two villains is sufficient, under this hell-black enactment, to send the most pious and exemplary black man into the remorseless jaws of slavery! His own testimony is nothing. He can bring no witnesses for himself. The minister of American justice is bound by the law to hear but *one* side; and *that* side, is the side of the

*Douglass slightly alters the first four lines of John Greenleaf Whittier's "Stanzas for the Times." Whittier, *Poetical Works,* 3:35.

oppressor.* Let this damning fact be perpetually told. Let it be thundered around the world, that, in tyrant-killing, king-hating, people-loving, democratic, Christian America, the seats of justice are filled with judges, who hold their offices under an open and palpable *bribe,* and are bound, in deciding in the case of a man's liberty, *to hear only his accusers!*

In glaring violation of justice, in shameless disregard of the forms of administering law, in cunning arrangement to entrap the defenceless, and in diabolical intent, this Fugitive Slave Law stands alone in the annals of tyrannical legislation. I doubt if there be another nation on the globe, having the brass and the baseness to put such a law on the statute-book. If any man in this assembly thinks differently from me in this matter, and feels able to disprove my statements, I will gladly confront him at any suitable time and place he may select.

❖❖❖

Religion in England and Religion in America

One is struck with the difference between the attitude of the American church towards the anti-slavery movement, and that occupied by the churches in England towards a similar movement in that country. There, the church, true to its mission of ameliorating, elevating, and improving the condition of mankind, came forward promptly, bound up the wounds of the West Indian slave, and restored him to his liberty. There, the question of emancipation was a high[ly] religious question. It was demanded, in the name of humanity, and according to the law of the living God. The Sharps.† the Clarksons,‡ the Wilberforces,§ the Buxtons,‖ and Burchells¶ and the Knibbs,** were alike famous for their piety, and for their philanthropy. The anti-slavery movement *there* was not an anti-church movement, for the reason that the church took its full share in prosecuting that movement: and the anti-slavery movement in this country will cease to be an anti-church movement, when the church of this country shall assume a favorable, instead of a hostile position towards that movement.

Americans! your republican politics, not less than your republican religion, are flagrantly inconsistent. You boast of your love of liberty, your superior civilization, and your pure Christianity, while the whole political power of the nation (as embodied in the two great political parties), is solemnly pledged to support and perpetuate the enslavement of three millions of your countrymen. You hurl your anathemas at the crowned headed tyrants of Russia and Austria, and pride yourselves on your Democratic institutions, while you yourselves consent to be the mere *tools* and *bodyguards* of the tyrants of Virginia and Carolina. You invite to your shores fugitives of oppression from abroad, honor them with banquets, greet them with ovations, cheer them, toast them, salute theme, protect them, and pour out your money to them like water; but the fugi-

*Although the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law did not specify the number of witnesses needed to establish that an individual was a fugitive slave, it did provide that "in no trial or hearing . . . shall the testimony of such alleged fugitive be admitted in evidence." No provision was made for the alleged fugitive to bring forth witnesses who might dispute the claims of the court transcript or warrant, but the commissioner or judge did have to be convinced that the person brought before him was indeed the escaped slave described in the transcript. *The Public Statutes at Large and Treaties of the United States of America, 1789–1873,* 17 vols., Little, Brown (Boston, 1845–1873), 9:462–465; Stanley W. Campbell, *Slave Catchers,* University of North Carolinia Press (Chapel Hill, NC, 1970), 110–115.

†Granville Sharp.

‡Thomas Clarkson.

§William Wilberforce.

‖Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786–1845), politician, philanthropist, and successor to Wilberforce in the parliamentary struggle to end British slavery and the slave trade, was born in Essex County, England, and educated at Trinity College, Dublin. Buxton entered Parliament in 1818 and achieved prominence for his support of various reform measures, including education of the poor and equitable criminal laws. In the late 1820s, he exposed the practice of slave trading in Mauritius, Trinidad, and Jamaica, and between 1831 and 1833 led the abolition campaign in Parliament. Buxton wrote *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1839) and supported several unsuccessful explorations of the Niger River. William L. Mathieson, *British Slavery and its Abolition* (London: Longmans, 1926), 115–127, 194–198, 222–224; Klingberg, *Anti-Slavery Movement in England,* 187–212; Clare Taylor, *British and American Abolitionists,* 33–34, 73–74; *DNB,* 3: 559–561.

¶Thomas Burchell.

**William Knibb.

tives from your own land you advertise, hunt, arrest, shoot and kill. You glory in your refinement and your universal education; yet you maintain a system as barbarous and dreadful as ever stained the character of a nation—a system begun in avarice, supported in pride, and perpetuated in cruelty. You shed tears over fallen Hungary, and make the sad story of her wrongs the theme of your poets, statesmen and orators, till your gallant sons are ready to fly to arms to vindicate her cause against her oppressors;* but, in regard to the ten thousand wrongs of the American slave, you would enforce the strictest silence, and would hail him as an enemy of the nation who dares to make those wrongs the subject of public discourse! You are all on fire at the mention of liberty for France or for Ireland; but are as cold as an iceberg at the thought of liberty for the enslaved of America. You discourse eloquently on the dignity of labor; yet, you sustain a system which, in its very essence, casts a stigma upon labor. You can bare your bosom to the storm of British artillery to throw off a threepenny tax on tea; and yet wring the last hard-earned farthing from the grasp of the black laborers of your country. You profess to believe "that, of one blood, God made all nations of men to dwell on the face of all the earth,"† and hath commanded all men, everywhere to love one another; yet you notoriously hate, (and glory in your hatred), all men whose skins are not colored like your own. You declare, before the world, and are understood by the world to declare, that you "*hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal; and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; and that, among these are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;*"‡ and yet, you hold securely, in a bondage which, according to your own Thomas Jefferson, "*is worse than ages of that which your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose,*"§ *a seventh part* of the inhabitants of your country.

Fellow-citizens! I will not enlarge further on your national inconsistencies. The existence of slavery in this country brands your republicanism as a sham, your humanity as a base pretence, and your Christianity as a lie. It destroys your moral power abroad; it corrupts your politicians at home. It saps the foundation of religion; it makes your name a hissing, and a byword to a mocking earth. It is the antagonistic force in your government, the only thing that seriously disturbs and endangers your *Union.* It fetters your progress; it is the enemy of improvement, the deadly foe of education; it fosters pride; it breeds insolence; it promotes vice; it shelters crime; it is a curse to the earth that supports it; and yet, you cling to it, as if it were the sheet anchor of all your hopes. Oh! be warned! be warned! a horrible reptile is coiled up in your nation's bosom; the venomous creature is nursing at the tender breast of your youthful republic; *for the love of God, tear away,* and fling from you the hideous monster, and *let*

*Douglass here refers to the turmoil in Hungary following the invasion of the country by Russian and Austrian troops in August 1849. The Magyar-dominated Hungarian Diet in the spring of 1848, after the outbreak of revolution in Austria, seized the opportunity to enact a series of internal reforms, the "April Laws," which among other things created an independent Hungarian ministry. The ministry, however, was viewed as a direct threat to Austrian control, and, in September 1848, with the support of Austrian King Ferdinand, Croatian troops invaded Hungary under the leadership of Josip Jelacic. The new ministry fled, leaving in charge Magyar nationalist Louis Kossuth, who was eventually able to rout the Croatian forces. Francis Joseph, nephew of King Ferdinand of Austria, assumed the throne of Hungary in December 1848 and revoked the "April Laws." At this point, the Hungarian Diet proclaimed its independence and Louis Kossuth became governor. The Hungarian republic was short-lived, however, and Francis Joseph, with the assistance of Russian troops, marched on Hungary and defeated the republican army in August 1849. The country was dismembered and brought under the control of Vienna. Janos Pragay, *The Hungarian Revolution: Outlines of the Prominent Circumstances Attending the Hungarian Struggle for Freedom* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1850); B. F. Tefft, *Hungary and Kossuth: An American Exposition of the late Hungarian Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1852); Edwin L. Godkin, *The History of Hungary and the Magyars From the Earliest Period to the Close of the Late War* (London: W. Kent, 1856), 324–369.

†A paraphrase of Acts 17:26: "And [God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth."

‡Douglass quotes the American Declaration of Independence.

§Writing to Jean Nicholas Demeunier on 26 June 1786, Thomas Jefferson observed: "What a stupendous, what an incomprehensible machine is man! Who can endure toil, famine, stripes, imprisonment or death itself in vindication of his own liberty, and the next moment be deaf to all those motives whose power supported him thro' his trial, and inflict on his fellow men a bondage, one hour of which is fraught with more misery than ages of that which he rose in rebellion to oppose." Boyd, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson,* 10:63.

the weight of twenty millions crush and destroy it forever!

The Constitution

But it is answered in reply to all this, that precisely what I have now denounced is, in fact, guaranteed and sanctioned by the Constitution of the United States; that the right to hold and to hunt slaves is a part of that Constitution framed by the illustrious Fathers of this Republic.

Then, I dare to affirm, notwithstanding all I have said before, your fathers stooped, basely stooped

> "To palter with us in a double sense:
> And keep the word of promise to the ear,
> But break it to the heart."*

And instead of being the honest men I have before declared them to be, they were the veriest imposters that ever practised on mankind. *This* is the inevitable conclusion, and from it there is no escape. But I differ from those who charge this baseness on the framers of the Constitution of the United States. *It is a slander upon their memory,* at least, so I believe. There is not time now to argue the constitutional question at length; nor have I the ability to discuss it as it ought to be discussed. The subject has been handled with masterly power by Lysander Spooner, Esq.,† by William Goodell,‡ by Samuel E. Sewall, Esq.,§ and last, though not least, by Gerritt Smith, Esq.‖ These gentlemen have, as I think, fully and clearly vindicated the Constitution from any design to support slavery for an hour.

Fellow-citizens! there is no matter in respect to which, the people of the North have allowed themselves to be so ruinously imposed upon, as that of the pro-slavery character of the Constitution. In *that* instrument I hold there is neither warrant, license, nor sanction of the hateful thing; but, interpreted as it *ought* to be interpreted, the Constitution is a GLORIOUS LIBERTY DOCUMENT. Read its preamble, consider its purposes. Is slavery among them? Is it at the gateway? or is it in the temple? It is neither. While I do not intend to argue this question on the present occasion, let me ask, if it be not somewhat singular that, if the Constitution were intended to be, by its framers and adopters, a slave-holding instrument, why neither *slavery, slaveholding,* nor *slave* can anywhere be found in it. What would be thought of an instrument, drawn up, *legally* drawn up, for the purpose of entitling the city of Rochester to a track of land, in which no mention of land was made? Now, there are certain rules of interpretation, for the proper understanding of all legal instruments. These rules are well established. They are plain, common-sense rules, such as you and I, and all of us, can understand and apply, without having passed years in the study of law. I scout the idea that the question of the constitutionality or unconstitutionality of slavery is not a question for the people. I hold that every American citizen has a right to form an opinion of the constitution, and to propagate that opinion, and to use all honorable means to make his opinion the prevailing one. Without this right, the liberty of an American citizen would be as insecure as that of a French-

*Douglass paraphrases *Macbeth,* act 5, sc. 8, lines 20–22.

†Lysander Spooner (1808–1887), lawyer, writer, and uncompromising foe of slavery, first published his famous work. *The Unconstitutionality of Slavery,* in Boston, in 1845. An expanded version appeared in 1847, and it became one of the major sources of campaign literature used by the Liberty party in the 1840s, *ACAB,* 5:634–635; *DAB,* 17: 466–467.

‡Douglass probably refers to William Goodell, *Views of American Constitutional Law, Its Bearing upon American Slavery* (Books for Libraries 1844 Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries, 1971), and idem., *Slavery and Anti-Slavery.*

§Attorney Samuel E. Sewall (1799–1888) published in 1827 his *Remarks on Slavery in the United States,* which had first appeared in the *Christian Examiner.* Although he wrote no lengthy legal analysis of American slavery, Sewall was active in the defense of fugitive slaves captured in Massachusetts and in 1843 ran for governor of the state on the Liberty party ticket. Nina Moore Tiffany, *Samuel E. Sewall: A Memoir* (Boston, Wiggin & Lunt, 1898), 33–81.

‖Among Gerrit Smith's many letters, tracts, and pamphlets denying the constitutionality of slavery are *Letter of Gerrit Smith to Henry Clay* (New York: J. A. Gray, 1839); *Letter of Gerrit Smith to S. P. Chase on the Unconstitutionality of Every Part of American Slavery* (Albany, 1847); *Abstract of the Argument on the Fugitive Slave Law, Made by Gerrit Smith in Syracuse, June, 1852 on the Trial of Henry W. Allen, U.S. Deputy Marshal, for Kidnapping* (Syracuse: John A. Gray, 1852).

man. Ex-Vice-President Dallas* tells us that the constitution is an object to which no American mind can be too attentive, and no American heart too devoted. He further says, the constitution, in its words, is plain and intelligible, and is meant for the home-bred, unsophisticated understandings of our fellow-citizens. Senator Berrien† tells us that the Constitution is the fundamental law, that which controls all others. The charter of our liberties, which every citizen has a personal interest in understanding thoroughly. The testimony of Senator Breese,‡ Lewis Cass, and many others that might be named, who are everywhere esteemed as sound lawyers, so regard the Constitution. I take it, therefore, that it is not presumption in a private citizen to form an opinion of that instrument.

Now, take the constitution according to its plain reading, and I defy the presentation of a single pro-slavery clause in it. On the other hand, it will be found to contain principles and purposes, entirely hostile to the existence of slavery.

I have detained my audience entirely too long already. At some future period I will gladly avail myself of an opportunity to give this subject a full and fair discussion.

Allow me to say, in conclusion, notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented of the state of the nation, I do not despair of this country. There are forces in operation, which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery. "*The arm of the Lord is not shortened,*"§ and the doom of slavery is certain. I, therefore, leave off where I began, with *hope.* While drawing encouragement from the Declaration of Independence, the great principles it contains, and the genius of American Institutions, my spirit is also cheered by the obvious tendencies of the age. Nations do not now stand in the same relation to each other that they did ages ago. No nation can now shut itself up from the surrounding world, and trot round in the same old path of its fathers without interference. The time *was* when such could be done. Long established customs of hurtful character could formerly fence themselves in, and do their evil work with social impunity. Knowledge was then confined and enjoyed by the privi-

*George Mifflin Dallas (1792–1864), Philadelphia-born lawyer and Democratic politician, served as U.S. vice-president (1845–1849) under James Polk. Other political offices Dallas held during his public career included U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania (1829–1831), U.S. senator (1831–1833), Pennsylvania attorney general (1833–1835), and U.S. minister to Russia (1837–1839). Although retired to private law practice in 1849, he expressed his support for the Compromise of 1850 and its provisions for the return of fugitive slaves in a letter to Guy M. Bryan published in the New York *Daily Times,* 13 October 1851. Denouncing "the self-slaughter of intermeddling with the institutions and rights exclusively of state creation, state responsibility, and state control," Dallas observed that "the act for the extradition of fugitives is the pretext for protracted and persevering war upon the guarantees of the Constitution." As a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1852, Dallas was asked whether he would enforce the Fugitive Slave Law and he answered unequivocally "Yes, I would!" George Mifflin Dallas to Guy M. Bryan, 25 July 1851, in New York *Daily Times,* 13 October 1851; New York *Daily Times,* 31 May 1852; John M. Belohlavek, *George Mifflin Dallas: Jacksonian Patrician* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University, 1977), 138–143; *NCAB,* 6:268; *BDAC,* 772; *DAB,* 5:38–39.

†Georgia senator John MacPherson Berrien (1781–1856), known as the "American Cicero" because of his magnificent oratory, was also regarded as one of the ablest constitutional lawyers in the U.S. Senate during the 1840s. Born near Princeton, New Jersey, in 1781, he grew up in Savannah, Georgia, was graduated from Princeton at age fourteen, returned to Savannah to study law, and was admitted to the bar in 1798. From 1809 until 1821 he served as solicitor and then as judge of the eastern circuit. A member of the Georgia state senate (1822–1823) and the U.S. Senate (1823–1825) and U.S. attorney general under Andrew Jackson in 1829, Berrien was returned to the Senate as a Whig in 1841 after a decade's retirement from public life. In 1849, Berrien's *Address to the People of the United States* pleaded for compromise on the slavery question. He later voted in favor of the Fugitive Slave Law and opposed the abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia and the admission of California as a free state. Defeated in his bid for reelection in November 1851, he spent his final years organizing the American or Know-Nothing party. Josephine Mellichamp, *Senators from Georgia* (Huntsville, Ala.: Strode Publishers, 1976), 99–103; Richard H. Shryock, *Georgia and the Union in 1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1926), 157–163, 267–269, 358; *BDAC,* 548; *DAB,* 2:225–226.

‡Sidney Breese (1800–1878), Democrat from Illinois, served in the U.S. Senate for only one term (1843–1849) and generally supported the positions of his fellow midwestern senator, Lewis Cass, of Michigan, on such issues as the constitutionality of slavery, popular sovereignty, and limited congressional authority over slavery. Born into a wealthy family in Whitesboro, New York, and a graduate of Union College, Breese headed west to study in Illinois and was admitted to the bar in 1820. In 1857, he was elected to the Illinois Supreme Court and was reelected in 1861 and 1870, from which position he gained a reputation as one of the leading American jurists of the era. Melville W. Fuller, "Biographical Memoir of Sidney Breese," in Sidney Breese, *The Early History of Illinois, From Its Discovery by the French, in 1763* . . . , ed. Thomas Hoyne (Chicago: E. B. Myers, 1884), 3–60; *ACAB,* 1:367; *NCAB,* 8:122; *DAB,* 3: 14–16.

§Douglass paraphrases Isa. 59:1: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear."

leged few, and the multitude walked on in mental darkness. But a change has now come over the affairs of mankind. Walled cities and empires have become unfashionable. The arm of commerce has borne away the gates of the strong city. Intelligence is penetrating the darkest corners of the globe. It makes its pathway over and under the sea, as well as on the earth. Wind, steam, and lightning are its chartered agents. Oceans no longer divide, but link nations together. From Boston to London is now a holiday excursion. Space is comparatively annihilated. Thoughts expressed on one side of the Atlantic are distinctly heard on the other.

The far off and almost fabulous Pacific rolls in grandeur at our feet. The Celestial Empire, the mystery of ages, is being solved. The fiat of the Almighty, "*Let there be Light,*"* has not yet spent its force. No abuse, no outrage whether in taste, sport or avarice, can now hide itself from the all-pervading light. The iron shoe, and crippled foot of China must be seen, in contrast with nature. *Africa must rise and put on her yet unwoven garment. "Ethiopia shall stretch out her hand unto God."*† In the fervent aspirations of William Lloyd Garrison, I say, and let every heart join in saying it:

God speed the year of jubilee
  The wide world o'er!
When from their galling chains set free,
Th' oppress'd shall vilely bend the knee,
And wear the yoke of tyranny
  Like brutes no more.
That year will come, and freedom's reign,
To man his plundered rights again
  Restore.

God speed the day when human blood
  Shall cease to flow!
In every clime he understood,
The claims of human brotherhood,
And each return for evil, good,
  Not blow for blow;
That day will come all feuds to end,
And change into a faithful friend
  Each foe.

God speed the hour, the glorious hour,
  When none on earth
Shall exercise a lordly power,
Nor in a tyrant's presence cower;
But all to manhood's stature tower,
  By equal birth!
THAT HOUR WILL COME, to each, to all,
And from his prison-house, the thrall
  Go forth.

Until that year, day, hour, arrive,
With head, and heart, and hand I'll strive,
To break the rod, and rend the gyve,
The spoiler of his prey deprive—
  So witness Heaven!
And never from my chosen post,
Whate'er the peril or the cost,
  Be driven.‡

*Gen. 1:3.

†An allusion to Ps. 68:31: "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God."

‡William Lloyd Garrison, "The Triumph of Freedom," in *Liberator*, 10 January 1845.

ALEXANDER CRUMMELL
(1819–1898)

With the exception of W.E.B. Du Bois, the religious leader Alexander Crummell was possibly the most impressive black scholar of the nineteenth century. Crummell documented precisely the classification or taxonomy of various kinds of minerals and natural wealth in West Africa. As a proponent of African American commerce in America, he achieved a natural balance between what would become the self-help policy of Booker T. Washington and the kind of intellectual inquiry posed by