

CONSTITUTION 101

Module 12: Slavery in America: From the Founding to America's Second Founding
12.3 Primary Source

DAVID WALKER, APPEAL TO THE COLORED CITIZENS OF THE WORLD (1829)

View the document on the Constitution Center's website [here](#).

SUMMARY

David Walker was born a free African American in North Carolina. He later moved to Boston and became a part of the vibrant African American community there—joining the anti-slavery movement and writing for the nation's first African American newspaper. In 1829, he published his *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*—a series of essays critiquing the powerful colonization movement and calling for the immediate abolition of slavery. In his *Appeal*, Walker offered a powerful vision that blended Christianity, natural rights, and America's founding creed. Walker argued that slavery violated both the key tenets of Christianity and the Declaration of Independence's promise of freedom and equality. Following the publication of his *Appeal*, Walker then pushed to distribute his pamphlet widely to both free African Americans and enslaved people. Walker's *Appeal* shocked the American conscience and set in motion a burgeoning movement for immediate abolition. It also helped spark a backlash in the white South. Tragically, Walker died as a young man in 1830.

Excerpt

I know that others will attack me for these essays, but I am writing them to inspire the African American community. I am fully aware, in making this appeal to my much afflicted and suffering brethren, that I shall not only be assailed by those whose greatest earthly desires are, to keep us in abject ignorance and wretchedness, and who are of the firm conviction that Heaven has designed us and our children to be slaves and beasts of burden to them and their children. I say, I do not only expect to be held up to the public as an ignorant, impudent and restless disturber of the public peace, by such avaricious creatures, as well as a mover of insubordination—and perhaps put in prison or to death, for giving a superficial exposition of our miseries, and exposing tyrants. . . . But against all accusations which may or can be preferred against me, I appeal to Heaven for my motive in writing—who knows that my object is, if possible, to awaken in the breasts of my afflicted, degraded and slumbering brethren, a spirit of inquiry and investigation respecting our miseries and wretchedness in this Republican Land of Liberty!!!! . . .

Is God a God of justice for all, including African Americans? I ask every man who has a heart, and is blessed with the privilege of believing—Is not God a God of justice to all his creatures? Do you say he is? Then if he gives peace and tranquility to tyrants, and permits them

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to keep our fathers, our mothers, ourselves and our children in eternal ignorance and wretchedness, to support them and their families, would he be to us a God of justice? . . .

All others are called “men,” but we are called “brutes” and told that we should be enslaved forever. My beloved brethren:—The Indians of North and of South America—the Greeks—the Irish, subjected under the king of Great Britain—the Jews, that ancient people of the Lord—the inhabitants of the islands of the sea—in fine, all the inhabitants of the earth, (except however, the sons of Africa) are called men, and of course are, and ought to be free. But we, (colored people) and our children are brutes!! and of course are, and ought to be SLAVES to the American people and their children forever!! to dig their mines and work their farms; and thus go on enriching them, from one generation to another with our blood and our tears!!!! . . .

God is still on our side and will aid us. Never make an attempt to gain our freedom of natural right, from under our cruel oppressors and murderers, until you see your way clear—when that hour arrives and you move, be not afraid or dismayed; for be you assured that Jesus Christ the King of heaven and of earth who is the God of justice and of armies, will surely go before you. And those enemies who have for hundreds of years stolen our rights, and kept us ignorant of Him and His divine worship, he will remove.

We are happy to be just as God made us; and no one has a right to enslave us; how would you like it if we enslaved and murdered you? Millions of whom, are this day, so ignorant and avaricious, that they cannot conceive how God can have an attribute of justice, and show mercy to us because it pleased Him to make us black—which color, Mr. Jefferson calls unfortunate!!!! As though we are not as thankful to our God, for having made us as it pleased himself, as they, (the whites,) are for having made them white. They think because they hold us in their infernal chains of slavery, that we wish to be white, or of their color—but they are dreadfully deceived—we wish to be just as it pleased our Creator to have made us, and no avaricious and unmerciful wretches, have any business to make slaves of, or hold us in slavery. How would they like for us to make slaves of, and hold them in cruel slavery, and murder them as they do us? . . .

Don't be afraid. God is on our side. Fear not the number and education of our enemies, against whom we shall have to contend for our lawful right; guaranteed to us by our Maker; for why should we be afraid, when God is, and will continue, (if we continue humble) to be on our side? . . .

I would rather die than be enslaved. I therefore ask the whole American people, had I not rather die, or be put to death, than to be a slave to any tyrant, who takes not only my own, but my wife and children's lives by the inches? Yea, would I meet death with avidity far! far!! in preference to such servile submission to the murderous hands of tyrants. . . .

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We must prove to Americans and to the world that we are men, not brutes. There is a great work for you to do, as trifling as some of you may think of it. You have to prove to the Americans and the world, that we are MEN, and not brutes, as we have been represented, and by millions treated. Remember, to let the aim of your labors among your brethren, and particularly the youths, be the dissemination of education and religion. . . .

We will be free, whether you like it or not; you may try to continue to hold us in bondage, but God will see to it that we're free; we can either do it peacefully or do it through violence; it's up to you; finally, stop pushing to send us back to Africa; we are Americans. Remember Americans, that we must and shall be free and enlightened as you are, will you wait until we shall, under God, obtain our liberty by the crushing arm of power? Will it not be dreadful for you? I speak Americans for your good. We must and shall be free I say, in spite of you. You may do your best to keep us in wretchedness and misery, to enrich you and your children, but God will deliver us from under you. And wo, wo, will be to you if we have to obtain our freedom by fighting. Throw away your fears and prejudices then, and enlighten us and treat us like men, and we will like you more than we do now hate you, and tell us now no more about colonization, for America is as much our country, as it is yours.—Treat us like men, and there is no danger but we will all live in peace and happiness together. . . .

You have treated us horribly; now is the time to change your ways and live up to the principles of the Declaration of Independence. In conclusion, I ask the candid and unprejudiced of the whole world, to search the pages of historians diligently, and see if the Antideluvians—the Sodomites—the Egyptians—the Babylonians—the Ninevites—the Carthaginians—the Persians—the Macedonians—the Greeks—the Romans—the Mahometans—the Jews—or devils, ever treated a set of human beings, as the white Christians of America do us, the blacks, or Africans. I also ask the attention of the world of mankind to the declaration of these very American people, of the United States. . . . Hear your language, proclaimed to the world, July 4th, 1776—"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!!" Compare your own language above, extracted from your Declaration of Independence, with your cruelties and murders inflicted by your cruel and unmerciful fathers and yourselves on our fathers and on us—men who have never given your fathers or you the least provocation!!!!!!

More from the Declaration. Hear your language further! "But when a long train of abuses and usurpation, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security."



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You have treated us much worse than Great Britain ever treated the American colonists.

Now, Americans! I ask you candidly, was your sufferings under Great Britain, one hundredth part as cruel and tyrannical as you have rendered ours under you? . . .

You can't hide your sins from God. The Americans may be as vigilant as they please, but they cannot be vigilant enough for the Lord, neither can they hide themselves, where he will not find and bring them out.

***Bold sentences give the big idea of the excerpt and are not a part of the primary source.**