IV

ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE
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Introductory

On the one hand, by and large and for many years, the religious leaders in Christian Europe regarded slavery as part of a hierarchical social order recognized by Saints Paul, Augustine, Aquinas and other fathers of the Church. On the other hand, certainly by the eighteenth century, dissenting Christian voices disdained the slave trade and other practices and emphasized a return to religious purity, both personal and communal. Dissent widened to include Anglicans, Quakers, philanthropists, and others seeking reform.

Moral Opinion Makers

[Thomas Hayter] Lord Bishop of Norwich. A Sermon Preached before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts; at Their Anniversary Meeting in the Parish Church of St. Mary-le-Bow, on Friday February 21, 1755. London, 1755.

Bishop of Norwich and later London, Hayter (1702–1762) was known in literary circles as scholarly and cultivated. It was these qualities, along with his well-known whig tendencies, that led to his 1751 appointment as preceptor to Princes George and Edward. He often injected political thoughts into his religious sermons, expounding on virtue, fidelity, and duty, and regarding Providence as an unassailable force in both society and the political order.

The proprietors of slaves in our American settlements, those of them I mean from whom the offence cometh, must be presumed to act upon some such reasoning as this—that their slaves are their property by right of purchase, and as they were purchased, that their bodies might be employed in the service of their purchasers, they have no concern with their souls, and therefore are not obliged to take any care of them. This is a plea, of which no human court of judicature can take cognizance; but the evangelical law of kindness, hath, in the clearest and strongest terms decided upon
it, that is, is an excuse, which will heighten our condemnation. The immortal part of us is a property, which we cannot transfer to another; it hath but one master, that is God; it is subject to no slavery, but that of sin, and to redeem it from that slavery, the son of God himself paid the price of its redemption. In this the slave, whom we buy in the market, hath as much a share, as the purchasers, however we may treat him like one of the beasts, that perish at death and are no more (pp. 18–19).


Thomas Day (1748–1789) first published his poem in 1773. To this third edition (1775) he added two important prose texts: (1) a dedication to Jean-Jacques Rousseau and (2) an attack on the American colonies for seeking independence while practicing slavery.

But what has America to boast? What are the graces or the virtues which distinguish its inhabitants? What are their triumphs in war, or their inventions in peace? Inglorious soldiers, yet seditious citizens; sordid merchants, and indolent usurpers; behold the men, whose avarice has been more fatal to the interests of humanity, and has more desolated the world than the ambition of its antient Conquerors! For them the Negro is dragged from his cottage, and his plantane shade;—by them the fury of African tyrants is stimulated by pernicious gold; the rights of nature are invaded; and European faith becomes infamous throughout the globe.... Let the wild inconsistent claims of America prevail, when they shall be unmixed with the clank of chains, and the groans of anguish. Let her aim a dagger at the breast of her milder parent, if she can advance a step without trampling on the dead and dying carcasses of her slaves:—But let her remember, that it is in Britain alone, that laws are equally favourable to liberty and humanity; that it is in Britain the sacred rights of nature have received their most awful ratification (pp. viii–ix).

→→ *The Case of Our Fellow-Creatures, the Oppressed Africans, Respectfully Recommended to the Serious Consideration of the Legislature of Great-Britain, by the People Called Quakers*. London, 1783.

This text was prepared in the fall of 1783 by an ad hoc subcommittee of London Quakers, who were part of the London Meeting for Sufferings. Their aim was to influence Parliamentary action, perhaps anticipated given that elections did occur in the spring of the following year.

We are engaged, under a sense of duty, to bear a public testimony against a species of oppression which, under the sanction of national authority, has long been exercised upon the natives of Africa, is grown up into a system of tyranny, and is unhappily become a considerable branch of the commerce of this kingdom: a oppression which in the injustice of its origin, and the inhumanity of its progress, has not, we apprehend, been exceeded, or even equalled, in the most barbarous ages (p. 3).

Our religious society in these kingdoms, and in North America, have for many years tenderly sympathized with this unhappy
THE DYING NEGRO,
A POEM.

To you this unpolluted blood I pour,
To you that spirit which ye gave restore.

The THIRD EDITION, Corrected and Enlarged.

LONDON:
Printed for W. Flexney, opposite Gray’s-Inn-Gate, Holborn; J. Wilkie, in St. Paul’s Church-Yard; and J. Robson, in New Bond-Street.
M.DCC.LXXV.
[PRICE ONE SHILLING AND SIX-PENCE.]
The Epistle from the Yearly-Meeting, Held in London, by Adjournments, from the 16th of the Fifth Month 1785, to the 23d of the Same Inclusive. [London, 1785.]

Quakers in Philadelphia put pressure on their parent body, the London Yearly Meeting, to censure slave trade and ownership as early as 1696. The first censure occurred in 1721: “It is the sense of this meeting, that the importing of negroes from their native country and relations by friends, is not a commendable nor allowed practice, and is therefore censured by this meeting.” Subsequent annual epistles from London continued renouncement. In the years immediately following this 1785 epistle, the London Quakers became actively engaged in effecting Parliamentary action against the trade.

Among other reasons, Quakers were against slavery on the grounds that it violated the 8th commandment, “Thou shalt not steal.” It was deemed that trafficking in stolen property was tantamount to stealing.

Dear Friends... The late accounts from our brethren in North-America inform us, that our Christian testimony against holding our fellow creatures in bondage, not only continues to prevail and spread among those in religious profession with us, but that some of the governments have gone so far, as to pass laws for the discouragement and gradual abolition of slavery. We therefore find our minds renewedly engaged to refer you to our former advices on this subject; and as the slave trade, whereby such multitudes of the human race are violently subjected to a state so abject and deplorable, is extensively carried on by persons resident in these kingdoms, we earnestly exhort all in profession with us, not to defile themselves by having any concern whatever in this unrighteous traffick; from which, if persisted in, very distressing consequences to this nation and its dependencies may be justly apprehended. We trust that a faithful conscientious discharge of the duties, which a serious consideration of the subject must necessarily suggest to every well disposed mind, may prove the means, under the divine blessing, of exciting those, who have it in their power, to remove an evil so evidently repugnant to every principle of humanity and justice (pp. 1–2).
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Slave Narratives

In retrospect, the following publications by these Black Atlantic authors provide evidence of two themes, one narrow, the other broader. On the one hand, the slave narratives present a story of individual redemption, renewal, and fulfillment through the workings of Providence. Like John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, this was a story familiar to and prized by religious English readers. On the other hand, and more broadly, “the production of literature was taken to be the central arena in which persons of African descent could establish and redefine their status within the human community. Black people, the evidence suggests, had to represent themselves as ‘speaking subjects’ before they could begin to destroy their status as objects, as commodities, within Western culture.” (Henry Louis Gates, “Introduction,” Pioneers of the Black Atlantic [1998], p. 2)

Thomas Bluett. Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon the High Priest of Boonda in Africa; Who Was a Slave about Two Years in Maryland; and Afterwards Being Brought to England, Was Set Free. . . . London, 1734.

Some Memoirs on the Life of Job details the journey of Ayuba Suleiman Diallo (1701–1773), also known as Job ben Solomon, a member of the Fulbe family of African Muslims, who was bought by Thomas Bluett in 1733. Job learned to speak English and eventually returned to Gambia, after reaching some notoriety in both America and Britain due to colonial politics of the time. Bluett, a resident of Maryland, portrays himself simply as the amanuensis; however, it is evident that this is a narrative of Job’s life through Bluett’s eyes. While not exactly an authentic narrative, it is still an important precursor to the genre.

Of Job’s Person and Character. Job was about five Feet ten Inches high, strait limb’d, and naturally of a good Constitution; altho’ the religious Abstinence which he observed, and the Fatigues he lately underwent, made him appear something lean and weakly. His Countenance was exceeding pleasant, yet grave and composed; his Hair long, black, and curled, being very different from that of the Negroes commonly brought from Africa.

His natural Parts were remarkably good; and I believe most of the Gentlemen that conversed with him frequently, will remember many Instances of his Ingenuity. On all Occasions he discovered a solid Judgment, a ready Memory, and a clear Head. And, notwithstanding the Prejudices which it was natural for him to have in favour of his own religious Principles, it was very observable with how much Temper and Impartiality he would reason in Conversation upon any Question of that kind, while at the same Time he would frame such Replies, as were calculated at once to support his own Opinion, and to oblige or please his
Opponent. In his Reasonings there appeared nothing trifling, nothing hypocritical or over-strained; but, on the contrary, strong Sense, joined with an innocent Simplicity, a strict Regard to Truth, and a hearty Desire to find it. Tho’ it was a considerable Disadvantage to him in Company, that he was not sufficient Master of our Language; yet those who were used to his Way, by making proper Allowances, always found themselves agreeably entertained by him (pp. 46–47).


Sold into slavery from his native Nigeria, Gronniosaw (1710–1773) was granted freedom in 1748 and soon after entered the British Navy. He married a white weaver, a match protested by his friends not for racial reasons but for class considerations—according to Gronniosaw, “because the person [he] had fixed on was poor” (p. 38).

This account of the life and spiritual experience of James Albert, was taken from his own mouth, and committed to paper by the elegant pen of a young Lady of the town of Leominster, for her own private satisfaction, and without any intention, at first, that it should be made public. But she has now been prevailed on to commit it to the press, both with a view to serve Albert and his distressed family, who have the sole profits arising from the sale of it; and likewise, as it is apprehended, this little history contains matter well worthy the notice and attention of every Christian reader (p. 3).

I was born in the city of Baurnou, my mother was the eldest daughter of the reigning King there. I was the youngest of six children, and particularly loved by my mother, and my grand-father almost doated on me.

I had, from my infancy, a curious turn of mind; was more grave and reserved, in my disposition, than either of my brothers and sisters, I often teased them with questions they could not answer; for which reason they disliked me, as they supposed that I was either foolish or insane. ’Twas certain that I was, at times, very unhappy in myself: It being strongly impressed on my mind that there was some GREAT MAN of power which resided above the sun, moon and stars, the objects of our worship.—My dear, indulgent mother would bear more with me than any of my friends beside.—I often raised my hand to heaven, and asked her who lived there? Was much dissatisfied when she told me the sun, moon and stars, being persuaded, in my own mind, that there must be some SUPERIOR POWER.—I was frequently lost in wonder at the works of the creation: Was afraid, and uneasy, and restless, but could not tell for what. I wanted to be informed of things that no person could tell me; and was always dissatisfied (pp. 7–8).


Born at sea during a journey in the Middle Passage in which neither parent survived, Sancho (1729–1780) was brought up in Greenwich where he eventually
found refuge with the Duke and Duchess of Montague. Sancho wrote music and entertained within literary circles. Although he was not an outspoken abolitionist, preferring to live by example, his letters, published posthumously, were a testament to his sophistication and the humanity of blacks, and as such were widely read in English abolitionist circles.

TO MR. J——W——E. [John Wingrave, London bookseller]

... I am sorry to observe that the practice of your country (which as a resident I love—and for its freedom—and for the many blessings I enjoy in it—shall ever have my warmest wishes—prayers—and blessings); I say it is with reluctance, that I must observe your country’s conduct has been uniformly wicked in the East—West-Indies—and even on the coast of Guinea.—The grand object of English navigators—indeed of all christian navigators—is money—money—money—for which I do not pretend to blame them—Commerce was meant by the goodness of the Deity to diffuse the various goods of the earth into every part—to unite mankind in the blessed chains of brotherly love—society—and mutual dependence:—the enlightened Christian should diffuse the riches of the Gospel of peace—with the commodities of his respective land—Commerce attended with strict honesty—and with Religion for its companion—would be
Cugoano (b. 1757) was one of the earliest known African British abolitionists. Brought to England in 1772 by his owner, Alexander Campbell, he eventually came to be employed by the court painter, an appointment which he would use to his advantage. His *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, first appeared as letters to London newspapers written with Olaudah Equiano. He refuted pro-slavery arguments and demanded immediate emancipation. Around 1791, he wrote to his employer, asking to be sent to Nova Scotia to recruit settlers for a settlement in Sierra Leone; nothing is known of him after that.

It is therefore manifest, that something else ought yet to be done; and what is required, is evidently the incumbent duty of all men of enlightened understanding, and of every man that has any claim or affinity to the name of Christian, that the base treatment which the African Slaves undergo, ought to be abolished; and it is moreover evident, that the whole, or any part of that iniquitous traffic of slavery, can no where, or in any degree, be admitted, but among those who must eventually resign their own claim to any degree of sensibility and humanity, for that of barbarians and ruffians....

But when I meet with those who make no scruple to deal with the human species, as with the beasts of the earth, I must think them not only brutish, but wicked and base; and that their aspersions are insidious and false: And if such men can boast of greater degrees of knowledge, than any African is entitled to, I shall let them enjoy all the advantages of it unenvied, as I fear it consists only in a greater share of infidelity, and that of a blacker kind than only skin deep. And if their complexion be not what I may suppose, it is at least the nearest in resemblance to an infernal hue. A good man will neither speak nor do as a bad man will; but if a man is bad, it makes no difference whether he be a black or a white devil (pp. 3–5).
Equiano (1745–1797), more commonly known by his Anglicized name, Gustavus Vassa, converted to Christianity while serving onboard British ships for seven years. After purchasing his own freedom in 1766, he became well known to Quakers and abolitionists both in Britain and America. According to one authority, his *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* is considered the first African autobiography written entirely by the author’s hand, as Cugoano’s narrative of two years previous was thought to have been heavily edited by the publisher. It is unique among early slave narratives in that, rather than portraying slavery as an unbending institution only able to be overcome through Christianity’s hope, as earlier
narratives tended to show, it presents Equiano taking control of his own destiny, becoming a stepping-stone on the path of social reform.

To the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and the Commons of the Parliament of Great Britain.

*My Lords and Gentlemen,*

Permit me with the greatest deference and respect, to lay at your feet the following genuine Narrative; the chief design of which is to excite in your august assemblies a sense of compassion for the miseries which the Slave-trade has entailed on my unfortunate countrymen. By the horrors of that trade was I first torn away from all the tender connexions that were naturally dear to my heart; but these, through the mysterious ways of Providence, I ought to regard as infinitely more than compensated by the introduction I have thence obtained to the knowledge of the Christian religion, and of a nation which, by its liberal sentiments, its humanity, the glorious freedom of its government, and its proficiency in arts and sciences, has exalted the dignity of human nature.

I am sensible I ought to entreat your pardon for addressing to you a work so wholly devoid of literary merit; but, as the production of an unlettered African, who is actuated by the hope of becoming an instrument towards the relief of his suffering countrymen, I trust that *such a man*, pleading in *such a cause*, will be acquitted of boldness and presumption (pp. iii–iv).

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**Great Britian**

In April 1807, the *Edinburgh Review* reflected on the successful passage of the Parliamentary bill to abolish the slave trade:

The measure has, no doubt, been carried through by the enlightened zeal of the late ministry. But there are predisposing causes to which the ultimate result must be ascribed. This is not, we apprehend, one of the cases where the wisdom of government has gone before the voice of the people,—where great statesmen, out-stripping their age, have introduced changes, barely acquiesced in for the present, and justly appreciated only by after times. The sense of the nation has pressed the abolition upon our rulers.

The question arises then, how did the sense of the nation change? Their answer: “the diffusion of information.” Information had left “few enemies to the sound doctrines which sensible men hold upon them,” The *Review* concluded: “This consideration should both encourage the government to do its duty, independent of the popular feeling, and animate the instructors of the people, whose sense of right may in the end sway their rulers” (April, 1807, pp. 205–206).
Pure and proper Slavery does not, nay cannot, subsist in England; such I mean, whereby an absolute and unlimited Power is given to the Master over the Life and Fortune of the Slave. And indeed it is repugnant to Reason, and the Principles of Natural Law, that such a State should subsist any where.

The Law of England acts upon general and extensive Principles: it gives Liberty, rightly understood, that is, Protection, to a Jew, a Turk, or a Heathen, as well as to those who profess the true Religion of Christ; and it will not dissolve a civil Contract, either express or implied, between Master and Servant, on account of the Alteration of Faith in either of the contracting Parties: But the Slave is intitled to the same Liberty in England before, as after Baptism; and, whatever Service the Heathen Negro owed to his English Master, the same is he bound to render when a Christian (Preface, pp. iii, vii).


Said to be the first major anti-slavery work by a British author, *A Representation of the Injustice of Tolerating Slavery* was written by Sharp (1735–1813) after a meeting with Jonathan Strong, a slave who had been injured by his master. Sharp soon took up the study of British law regarding slaves and civil liberties, and went on to be at the legal forefront of the British abolitionist movement. He played a decisive role in the Somerset decision, which decreed that any slave setting foot in England immediately became free. A prolific writer, he is recorded to have published sixty-one works.

Therefore upon the whole, I think it must appear, that the service of Slaves in England, would be quite as expensive, as that of freemen, and consequently, that there cannot be any real advantages in a toleration of Slavery in this kingdom, at least, I am not able to point them out, though I have carefully considered the subject.

A toleration of Slavery is, in effect, a toleration of inhumanity; for there are wretches in the world, who make no scruple to gain, by wearing out their Slaves with continual labour and a scanty allowance, before they have lived out half their natural days. 'Tis notorious, that this is too often the case, in the unhappy countries where Slavery is tolerated.

The boasted liberty of our American colonies, therefore, has so little right to that sacred name, that it seems to differ from the arbitrary power of despotic monarchies only in one circumstance; viz. that it is a many-headed monster of tyranny, which entirely subverts our most excellent constitution; because liberty and slavery are so opposite to each other, that they cannot subsist in the same community.

"Political liberty (in mild or well regul-
“laced governments) makes civil liberty valuable; and whosoever is deprived of the latter, is deprived of the former.”

This observation of the learned Montesquieu, I hope, sufficiently justifies my censure of the Americans, for their notorious violation of civil liberty (pp. 78–83; footnote omitted).

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**Maurice Morgann.** *A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies.* London, 1772.

Morgann (1725–1802) was both a colonial administrator and a literary scholar. He was widely known for his commentary on the character of Sir John Falstaff from Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*. Based on his work as a ministerial advisor, he published (anonymously) several pamphlets on reform questions, of which *A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies* is one. His personal papers were destroyed after his death by his request, so that not much is known about his education or personal life.

I shall therefore state, without further preparation, the general intention of the proposal which I shall venture to offer. It is, that certain measures, to be presently explained, may be taken for the introduction of free Negroes into an assigned part of Florida; that lands be granted them, and their propagation encouraged in that country....

The consequence of the proposed settlement will be, that the settlers will increase, they will cultivate, they will trade, they will overflow; they will become labourers and artizans in the neighbouring provinces; they will, being freemen, be more industrious, more skilful [sic], and, upon the whole, work cheaper than slaves (the prime cost of slaves and the wages of overseers considered) and slavery will thereupon necessarily cease. They will acquire property in those provinces, they will intermarry with whites; the produce of such marriages, partaking of both climates and both complexions, will possess the middle space; the present prejudices arising from complexion, will wear away, and colour will be no longer opprobrious: the whites will inhabit the northern colonies; and to the south, the complexion will blacken by a regular gradation. The change not being violent and sudden, will on that account, among others, not become the mark of distinction, or the object of hatred and hostility: the middle parts will link the two extremes in union and friendship. They will talk the same language, read the same books, profess the same religion, and be fashioned by the same laws; they will all depend upon the same mother-country, and the blacks, as the children of adoption, perhaps with more gratitude and affection: nor will there, probably, in the remotest times (the variety of climate considered) be any real causes of dissention between them: Nature herself, as it should seem, will necessarily link them in intercourse and concord (pp. 2, 25–26).

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**Reports of Cases Adjudged in the Court of King’s Bench from Easter Term 12 Geo. 3. to Michaelmas 14 Geo. 3.** Contains particulars (pp. 1–19) of *Somerset v. Stewart* (1772).
Somerset v. Stewart is the landmark case in the British anti-slavery movement. Although it came to be known as the case that freed slaves in Great Britain, it was not until 1832 that slavery was legally abolished and not until 1838 that all slaves were emancipated. In Somerset, the deciding judge, Lord Mansfield, determined that there was no law under which a former slave could be claimed in England. Many took the decision to mean the immediate emancipation of all slaves in England, however, the judgment did not declare this unequivocally. Somerset, nonetheless, still represents a turn in the tide of British opinion towards slavery, putting forth the opinion that slavery could not be sustained in the absence of positive law.

The power of a master over his slave has been extremely different, in different countries. The state of slavery is of such a nature, that it is incapable of being introduced on any reasons, moral or political; but only positive law, which preserves it’s [sic] force long after the reasons, occasions, and time itself from whence it was created, is erased from memory: It’s [sic] so odious, that nothing can be suffered to support it, but positive law. Whatever inconveniences, therefore, may follow from a decision, I cannot say this case is allowed or approved by the law of England; and therefore the black [man] must be discharged (Lord Mansfield, p. 19).

Granville Sharp. The Law of Retribution: Or, a Serious Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies, Found on Unquestionable Examples of God’s Temporal Vengeance against Tyrants, Slave-Holders, and Oppressors. London, 1776.

Sharp’s resistance to the Revolutionary War led to his resignation from the Ordnance Office; his brothers supported him financially and in 1776 he published at least four anti-slavery pamphlets, of which this is the last.

Can any injury, except that of taking away a man’s life, exceed that of taking away a man’s liberty, who has never offended us! Can any robbery or injustice whatsoever be more atrocious than that of wearing out our poor Brethren in a hard involuntary service, without wages or reward! thereby continually robbing them of the Fruit of their Labours!...

The Inhabitants of Great Britain and the Inhabitants of the Colonies seem to be almost equally guilty of Oppression!

One authority notes that the publication of *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* by Ramsay (1733–1789) was the most important event in the early history of the British anti-slavery movement. It led to a prolonged pamphlet attack from pro-slavery forces, much of which Ramsay bore alone. Having spent time in the Caribbean while serving in the British navy, Ramsay’s account was the first from someone who had spent an extended period of time observing plantation slavery. The Lapidus collection includes two important letters from Ramsay to Catharine Macaulay, regarding her publications and his own persecution by slave owners for his radical views (June 3, 1771 and July 7, 1774). Ramsay’s phrase “the sun of liberty,” explained in this catalogue’s Preface, occurs in his 1774 letter.

I shall first consider the several natural and artificial ranks that take place in social life, and more particularly that of master and slave in the European colonies. I shall shew how much the public would be profited, and how much the master would gain, by advancing slaves in social life. I shall show how this advancement in society, and their improvement in religion, must necessarily go hand in hand, and assist each other, if either one, or both these purposes, be our view respecting them. As extravagance and avarice have begun of late to make sad encroachments on that rest of the sabbath, which hitherto had been reckoned sacred; in addition to your pious reasons for setting it apart for the purposes of religion; I shall prove how much this inconsiderate robbery hurts the master’s own interest. I shall assert the claim of the Negroes to attention from us, by explaining their natural capacity, and proving them to be on a footing of equality in respect of the reception of mental improvement, with the natives of any other country. And in conclusion I shall lay down a plan for their improvement and conversion (Preface, pp. xvi–xvii).

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**[Thomas Clarkson]. An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Particularly the African, Translated from a Latin Dissertation, Which Was Honoured with the First Prize in the University of Cambridge, for the Year 1785, ... London, 1786.**

Clarkson (1760–1846), one of the founding members of the London Committee, was widely known across England due to his position as “traveling agent.” His chief pursuit was spreading the anti-slavery movement to provinces outside of London; to this aim, he published twenty-three pamphlets. His first work, *Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, grew from a Latin essay contest he entered at Cambridge. It was during research for this essay that Clarkson first became aware of the plight of enslaved Africans and decided to dedicate his life to the anti-slavery movement.

Concerning my own work, it seems proper to observe, that when the original Latin Dissertation, as the title page expresses, was honoured by the University of Cam-
bridge with the first of their annual prizes for the year 1785, I was waited upon by some gentlemen of respectability and consequence, who requested me to publish it in English (pp. xxi–xxii).

Let us suppose then, that in consequence of the commerce you were forced into a ship; that you were conveyed to another country; that you were sold there; that you were confined to incessant labour; that you were pinched by continual hunger and thirst; and subject to be whipped, cut, and mangled at discretion, and all this at the hands of those, whom you had never offended; would you not think that you had a right to resist their treatment? Would you not resist it with a safe conscience? And would you not be surprised, if your resistance should be termed rebellion?—By the former premises you must answer, yes.—Such then is the case with the wretched Africans. They have a right to resist your proceedings. They can resist them, and yet they cannot justly be considered as rebellious. For though we suppose them to have been guilty of crimes to one another; though we suppose them to have been the most abandoned and execrable of men, yet are they perfectly innocent with respect to you receivers. You have no right to touch even the hair of their heads without their own consent. It is not your money, that can invest you with a right. Human liberty can neither be bought nor sold. Every lash that you give them is unjust. It is a lash against nature and religion, and will surely stand recorded against you, since they are all, with respect to your impious selves, in a state of nature; in a state of original dissociation; perfectly free (pp. 241–42).

The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, led by the London Committee, was among the first organized anti-slavery movements in Britain. By developing a precise structure and organization, it became a prototype for many reform movements that followed. Later replaced by the African Institution, the Society was a guiding force in turning public opinion against the slave trade.

The principal aim of the Society is to promote amongst the Members of both Houses of Parliament a disposition to inquire into this infamous traffick, and we have the satisfaction already to be able to number amongst the friends of the cause, several men of distinguished character and abilities, who enter with so much zeal into the business, as to give us a reasonable ground to hope for the accomplishment of our design....

We are not without hopes of this trade becoming a subject of Parliamentary Investigation early in the next sessions; and if that should be the case, it is to be wished that the general sense of the nation (which we are persuaded is in favour of liberty, justice, and humanity) may be expressed by Petitions to Parliament, and by applications to their Representatives, in order to procure their assistance. In the distribution of the Tracts, we therefore recommend this purpose
ENCOURAGED by the success which has attended the publication of sundry Tracts against Slavery, a number of persons have formed themselves into a Society for exciting still more the publick attention to the Slave Trade, and for collecting such evidence or information as may tend to its discouragement, and finally its abolition.

For these purposes (which cannot be effected without considerable expense) a subscription has been entered into. Lists of the names of the Subscribers, whose numbers increase daily, and of the Committee appointed to manage the funds, are included.

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We have also the peculiar pleasure of seeing men of different religious denominations, unite with true Christian harmony in the cause of humanity and justice.

The larger Essays written by Clarkson, are intended for those whose situation may give them influence, and whose leisure will permit a more full investigation of the subject, more especially for the Members of either House of Parliament. The smaller ones are calculated to give a concise and summary view of the miserable state of Slavery, and the Slave Trade, and are meant to be distributed more generally amongst those whose exertions or subscriptions may be expected.

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As the purposes of the Society can only be answered by diffusing a knowledge of their intentions, no apology seems necessary for laying before their friends an account of their plan, and requesting their assistance and communications on this subject.
At a Meeting held for the Purpose of taking the SLAVE TRADE into Consideration.

RESOLVED.
That it is the opinion of this Meeting, that the Slave Trade is both impolitic and unjust.

RESOLVED.
That Granville Sharp, John Burton, Thomas Clarkson, William Dillyn, Samuel Hoare, Jun., George Harrison, Joseph Hooper, John Lloyd, James Phillips, Richard Phillips, Philip Sanford, and Joseph Woods, be a Committee for procuring such information and evidence, as may tend to the abolition of that Trade, and for directing the application of such money as are already, or may be hereafter collected for this purpose.

RESOLVED.
That three Members be a quorum.

RESOLVED.
That Samuel Hoare, Jun. be appointed Treasurer to the Society.

LIST of the present Subscribers.

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N. B. The Subscriptions of such as are disposed to contribute towards carrying on the Design of this Society, will be received by the Treasurer, or by any Member of the Committee.
may be kept in view, which, however, being in some degree dependent on contingencies, it would be rather immature to make generally known at present (p. [1]).

**John Newton.** *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade.* London, 1788.

Newton (1725–1807), author of the hymn “Amazing Grace,” was a former slave trader who experienced a religious conversion while on a slaving voyage in 1748. His autobiography was published in 1764 and brought him renown as a leading evangelical revivalist. As he grew older, he came to regret his involvement in the slave trade and began campaigning against it, publishing *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade.*

If my testimony should not be necessary, or serviceable, yet, perhaps, I am bound, in conscience, to take shame to myself by a public confession, which, however sincere, comes too late to prevent, or repair, the misery and mischief to which I have, formerly, been accessory [sic].

I hope it will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was, once, an active instrument, in a business at which my heart now shudders (p. 2).

**James Ramsay.** *Objections to the Abolition of the Slave Trade, with Answers.* To Which Are Prefixed, Strictures on ... “Considerations on the Emancipation of Negroes, and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, by a West India Planter.” London, 1788.

Ramsay’s *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves* (1784) was viewed by some as obliquely promoting slavery, due to its lack of impassioned rhetoric. Spending much of his later years defending his stance as an abolitionist, Ramsay published this pamphlet dealing with seventy-seven objections, mostly economic and political, shortly before his death.

The following Objections to the Abolition of the Slave Trade, with Answers, were intended to give a summary view of that subject. These objections being collected from various persons and writings, there will be found in them no small degree of contradiction, for which the collector is not answerable. But whatever they may be, they have all been advanced by different people, with a view to produce an effect on persons who have not studied the subject; and they are therefore necessarily brought together here, to be separately examined and weighed. If every answer be not found equally conclusive, the candid reader will remember that it is a single person, who endeavours to give him a view of a very extensive subject, which takes in a variety of considerations (p. [1]).
Peter Peckard was Vice Chancellor of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and selected the topic for the essay competition won by Thomas Clarkson in 1785. (Formally the essay question was: *Anne liceat invitos in servitutem dare? Is it right to make slaves of others against their will?*)

Since the abominable traffick in the Human Species, or according to the common term, The Slave Trade, hath become a Subject of general conversation and enquiry, many sensible productions have appeared from the press, demonstrating the enormity of...
this practice, considered with respect to the Rights of Humanity, the Rules of Morality, and the Spirit of the Christian Dispensation. On all these points it plainly appears that nothing can be said to any effect in defence of this horrid iniquity. But to the eternal disgrace of this nation having received the sanction of Law, one author, in a discourse delivered before the University of Cambridge, has ventured to attack it on this ground, and maintained that even in this view it is not defensible. I freely declare myself of the same opinion. No human institution whatsoever can make it justifiable. Law, by certain permissions, or by its sanctions may procure and may establish, but cannot justify the commission of evil. To make Human Law properly valid, its foundation and object must be in conformity with the Commands of God, and the Common Rights of Human Nature: but the Traffick in the Human Species is destructive of the one, and contradictory to the other, and therefore is not justifiable by any Human Institution (pp. [1]–2).

**Description of a Slave Ship.** London, 1789. (Purchased by the Library with matching funds from Sid Lapidus in 2006.)

Between March and July of 1789, more than 10,000 copies of the plan of the slave ship Brooks, in one form or another, were issued in England and America. The plan makes visually striking what had heretofore been only grasped verbally or by consulting the statistical data gathered by Commons regarding the ships involved in the trade. So forceful was its impact, that the Rev. Thomas Clarkson called it “famous.”

Historical evidence shows that this broadside was by far the most commonly distributed version of the plan of the Brooks. As the years went by and the debate over the slave trade continued, this London version was reprinted time and again. It appeared in the précis of the proceedings of the Commons committee on the slave trade published in 1791. It appeared several times after 1791, most notably in the 1808 *History of the Abolition of the Trade* by the Rev. Thomas Clarkson, a chief agent of the London Committee.

**Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council Appointed for the Consideration of All Matters Relating to Trade and Foreign Plantations … Concerning the Present State of the Trade to Africa, and Particularly the Trade in Slaves.** [London, 1789].

A massive compilation of data including dozens of tables and charts, such as the one exhibited here: Part IV. Population No. 17 *Estimate of the Present Value of the Slaves in the British Islands in the West Indies* … [leaf Zz2]

**An Abstract of the Evidence Delivered before a Select Committee of the House of Commons … on the Part of the Petitioners for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade.** London, 1791. (See images overleaf.)
DESCRIPTION OF A SLAVE SHIP.

FIG. III.

FIG. II.

FIG. VII.

FIG. VI.

FIG. I.

FIG. IV.

FIG. V.

The size and arrangement seem odd, but the ship's layout is quite complex. The diagram shows the various sections of the ship, including the hold, the deck, and the forecastle. The text explains the dimensions and the carrying capacity of the ship, as well as the methods used to transport slaves.

The diagram illustrates the holds, the lifeboats, and the water tight compartments. The text provides a detailed explanation of the ship's design and the precautions taken to ensure the safety of the slaves during the journey.

The ship's structure is designed to withstand the harsh conditions of the ocean, and the slaves are accommodated in a way that minimizes their movement and exposure to the elements.

The text also discusses the legal and ethical implications of the slave trade, and the methods used to justify and rationalize the practice.

In conclusion, the description of the slave ship is a powerful reminder of the brutality and inhumanity of the slave trade, and the need for the international community to work towards the abolition of slavery and the promotion of human rights.
Front cover: *An Abstract of the Evidence ... on the Part of the Petitioners for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade*. London, 1791.
After compiling evidence for the Members of Parliament from hearing transcripts and other sources, anti-slavery activists went on to publish their findings. An authority states that “this was the first book against slavery that, instead of arguing from the Bible, instead relied entirely on a carefully-documented series of eyewitness accounts.”

In consequence of the numerous Petitions which were sent to Parliament from different Counties, Cities, and Towns of Great Britain, in the year 1788, for the ABOLITION of the SLAVE-TRADE, it was determined by the House of Commons to hear Evidence upon that subject.

The Slave-Merchants and Planters accordingly brought forward several persons as witnesses, the first in behalf of the continuance of the Slave-trade, the latter in defense of the Colonial Slavery. These were heard and examined in the years 1789 and 1790.

Several persons were afterwards called on the side of the petitioners of Great Britain, to substantiate the foundation of their several petitions, and to invalidate several points of the evidence which the others had offered. These were examined in the years 1790, and 1791.

This abstract is then made up from the
evidence of the latter, in which little other alteration has been made than that of bringing things on the same point into one chapter, which before lay scattered in different parts of the evidence; and this has been done to enable the reader to see every branch of the subject in a clear and distinct shape (Preface, pp. [iii]–iv).

Report from the Committee of the Whole House, ... to Consider Further of Measures to Be Taken for the Abolition of the Trade Carried on by British Subjects, for the Purpose of Procuring Slaves from Africa. [London, 1792].

William Wilberforce (1759–1833) was the key leader in Parliament for the abolition of the slave trade. On May 8, 1789, Wilberforce made his first speech in the House of Commons against the slave trade. His campaign against the trade resulted in a massive collection of information about the trade as well as repeated votes on abolition bills until he was eventually successful in 1807.

This report dates from early in the campaign and contains five highly detailed resolutions designed to end the trade in various ways: prohibitions on import and export, limitations on carrying vessels, and imposition of massive extra monetary costs on those engaged in the trade.

A Summary of the Evidence Produced before the Committee of the Privy Council, and before a Committee of the House of Commons, Relating to the Slave Trade. Leeds, 1792. Broadsheet. (See image facing.)

In Leeds in 1792 there was published a sixty-page anonymous pamphlet with a similar title yet “designed to point out the horrid nature of [the slave] traffic.” Moreover, added to this text were “some observations on the disuse of sugar, rum, &c.” This broadside, hitherto unrecorded, also anonymous, argues against this pamphlet and coldly concludes:

The nature of the Trade for Negroes, their kind Treatment, and happy Situation, being thus ascertained by such incontrovertible evidence; the absurdity of calling by the name of Slaves people who are no more so than Parish Apprentices in England, except as to Duration—and in point of Duration not more so than the Common People in Russia, Poland, and many other parts of Europe—is apparent. How absurd and hypocr...
A Summary of the Evidence produced before the Committee of the Privy Council, and before a Committee of the House of Commons, relating to the Slave-Trade.
The interesting publication of Mr Wilberforce, the distinguished leader in the contest, was the last work of any note that appeared before its termination. As such, it claims our attention ... Mr Wilberforce has exhibited, in the shape of an address to his constituents, a very full and faithful view of the whole arguments which bear upon the question of the slave trade (April, 1807, p. 199).

That the Almighty Creator of the universe governs the world which he has made; that the sufferings of nations are to be regarded as the punishment of national crimes; and their decline and fall, as the execution of His sentence; are truths which I trust are still generally believed among us.... If these truths be admitted, and if it be also true, that fraud, oppression, and cruelty, are crimes of the blackest dye, and that guilt is aggravated in proportion as the criminal acts in defiance of clearer light, and of stronger motives to virtue; ... have we not abundant cause for serious apprehension? ... [I]f the Slave Trade be a national crime, ... to which we cling in defiance of the clearest light, not only in opposition to our own acknowledgments of its guilt, but even of our own declared resolutions to abandon it; is not this then a time in which all who are not perfectly sure that the Providence of God is but a fable, should be strenuous in their endeavours to lighten the vessel of the state, of such a load of guilt and infamy? (pp. 4–6).


Commonly known as the “Slave Trade Act,” the Act abolished the slave trade but not slavery, which was not abolished until the Slavery Abolition Act of 1832.

Thus ended one of the most glorious contests, after a continuance for twenty years, of any ever carried on in any age or country. A contest, not of brutal violence, but of reason. A contest between those, who felt deeply for the happiness and the honour of their fellow-creatures, and those, who, through vicious custom and the impulse of avarice, had trampled under-foot the sacred rights of their nature, and had even attempted to efface all title to the divine image from their minds (Thomas Clarkson, The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament, 2 vols. [London, 1808], vol. 2, pp. 580–81).
United States

During the debate in the Federal Convention in 1787, one delegate declared slavery to be “inconsistent with the principles of the revolution and dishonorable to the American character.” However, the politics of States interests prevailed. In the end, Section Nine of Article I of the Constitution stated “The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person.” Twenty years later, on March 2, 1807, Thomas Jefferson signed legislation outlawing the trade effective January 1, 1808. As in Great Britain, Quakers were instrumental in the effort resulting in abolition.

John Woolman. Considerations on Keeping Negroes; ... Recommended to the Professors of Christianity, of Every Denomination. Part Second. Philadelphia, 1762.

In his Journals, Woolman (1720–1772) shows a wide breadth of knowledge obtained through visits to Philadelphia Quakers. After experiencing unease at drawing up a bill of sale transferring a slave for his first employer, Woolman vowed never to do similar activities again, and instead worked to convince his fellow Quakers that slavery was inherently un-Christian. His Considerations on Keeping Negroes, printed by Benjamin Franklin and his business partner David Hall, was inspired by a 1746 journey through Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina and was one of the most widely circulated pamphlets of the day. It can be said to have opened the door to pamphlets by Benezet, Wesley, Sharpe, and Clarkson.

As some in most religious Societies amongst the English are concerned in importing or purchasing the Inhabitants of Africa as Slaves; and as the Professors of Christianity of several other Nations do the like; these Circumstances tend to make People less apt to examine the Practice so closely as they would, if such a Thing had not been, but was now proposed to be entered upon. It is however our Duty, and what concerns us individually, as Creatures accountable to our Creator, to employ rightly the Understanding which he hath given us, in humbly endeavouring to be acquainted with his Will concerning us, and with the Nature and Tendency of those Things which we practise: For as Justice remains to be Justice, so many People, of Reputation in the World, joining with wrong Things, do not excuse others in joining with them, nor make the Consequence of their Proceedings less dreadful in the final Issue, than it would be otherwise (p. 7).

(continues)
If we seriously consider, that Liberty is the Right of innocent Men; that the Mighty God is a Refuge for the Oppressed; that in Reality we are indebted to them; that they being set free, are still liable to the Penalties of our Laws, and as likely to have Punishment for their Crimes as other People: This may answer all our Objections. And to retain them in perpetual Servitude, without just Cause for it, will produce Effects, in the Event, more grievous than setting them free would do, when a real Love to truth and Equity was the Motive to it (p. 50).

Negroes are our Fellow Creatures, and their present Condition amongst us requires our serious Consideration. We know not the Time when those Scales, in which Mountains are weighed, may turn. The Parent of Mankind is gracious: His Care is over his smallest Creatures; and a Multitude of Men escape not his Notice: And though many of them are trodden down, and despised, yet he remembers them: He seeth their Affliction, and looketh upon the spreading increasing Exaltation of the Oppressor (p. 52).


Benezet (1713–1784), born in France but a naturalized British citizen, was a Quaker educator and abolitionist. In 1750, he founded the School for Black People in Philadelphia, a small endeavor that educated many of the leading Black Philadelphians of the time.

At a time when the general rights and liberties of mankind, and the preservation of those valuable privileges transmitted to us from our ancestors, are become so much the subjects of universal consideration; can it be an inquiry indifferent to any, how many of those who distinguish themselves as the Advocates of Liberty, remain insensible and inattentive to the treatment of thousands and tens of thousands of our fellow-men, who, from motives of avarice, and the inexorable degree [sic] of tyrant custom, are at this very time kept in the most deplorable state of slavery, in many parts of the British Dominions.

The intent of publishing the following sheets, is more fully to make known the aggravated iniquity attending the practice of the Slave-Trade; whereby many thousands of our fellow-creatures, as free as ourselves by nature, and equally with us the subjects of Christ’s redeeming grace, are yearly brought into inextricable and barbarous bondage; and many, very many, to miserable and untimely ends (p. 3).

[Arthur Lee]. *Extract from an Address in the Virginia Gazette, of March 19, 1767.* [Philadelphia, 1770? or 1780?].

That slavery then is a violation of justice, will plainly appear, when we consider what justice is.... Now, as freedom is unquestionably the birth-right of all mankind, Africans as well as Europeans, to keep the former in a state of slavery is a constant violation of that right and therefore of justice (page 1).
The Lapidus Collection contains two editions with intriguing textual changes. One contains the sentence “The British merchants obtain them from Africa by violence, artifice and treachery, with a few trinkets to prompt those unfortunate and detestable people to enslave one another by force or stratagem.” Another edition prints this sentence “The British merchants obtain them from Africa by violence, artifice and treachery, with a few trinkets to prompt those unfortunate ******** people to enslave one another by force or stratagem.” No copy is extant of the *Virginia Gazette* printed by Rind at Williamsburg, so it is impossible to check the original printing of this text.

[David Cooper]. *A Mite Cast into the Treasury: Or, Observations on Slave-Keeping*. Philadelphia, [1772].

Cooper (1725–1795) was a New Jersey farmer of Quaker affiliation. He visited Congress on three occasions in order to urge the abolition of slavery. In 1785, he petitioned the New Jersey legislature to abolish slavery. In 1789, he appealed to the newly elected president, George Washington. In a publication of 1783, he argued “Ye rulers of America beware! Let it appear to future ages, from the records of this day, that you not only professed to be advocates for freedom, but really were inspired by the love of mankind, and wished to secure the invaluable blessing to all; that, as you disdained to submit to the unlimited control of others, you equally abhorred the crying crime of holding your fellow men, as much entitled to freedom as yourselves, the subjects of your undisputed will and pleasure.”

The power of prejudice over the minds of mankind is very extraordinary; hardly any extremes too distant, or absurdities too glaring for it to unite or reconcile, if it tends to promote or justify a favourite pursuit. It is thus we are to account for the fallacious reasonings and absurd sentiments used and entertained concerning negroes, and the lawfulness of keeping them slaves. The low contempt with which they are generally treated by the whites, lead children from the first dawn of reason, to consider people with a black skin, on a footing with domestic animals, form’d to serve and obey, whom they may kick, beat, and treat as they please, without their having any right to complain; and when they attain the age of maturity, can scarce be brought to believe that creatures they have always looked upon so vastly below themselves, can stand on the same footing in the sight of the Universal Father, or that justice requires the same conduct to them as to whites; and those prejudices having been generally countenanced in time past, are become so riveted, that too few even of the sober and religious, can hear the voice of impartial justice, in favour of that abused people, with a proper degree of patience and attention. I therefore request all such into whose hands this may fall, to divest themselves of every bias arising either from prejudice, or temporal views, and coolly weigh the following hints, and, if any thing is met with, that tends to promote christian rectitude, embrace it; without regarding the hand from whence it comes, ever bearing in mind who it was that declared,—“Such measure as you mete, shall be measured to you again.” *Mat*. vii. 2 (Introduction, pp. [iii]–iv).
Benjamin Rush (1746–1813), son of a Pennsylvanian gunsmith and descendant of roundhead Quakers, was at once doctor, polemicist, writer and radical. At fourteen, Rush was the youngest graduate of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton), and despite his gift for oratory, he turned to medicine and not the bar after completing his A.B. in 1760. In 1773, incensed by the justifications self-termed Christian gentleman of the West Indies had given for slavery, he wrote this, an attack against the institution that he saw with a doctor’s eyes, eating away at the moral constitution of the colonies. He was a friend of Paine, Franklin, and later Jefferson.

The Reader will here pardon my saying a Word or two of myself. I am called upon by the Author of the Defence to answer a Question.—Should I become “an Owner of a West-India Estate by the Death of a Relation, or some other unexpected Means,” he desires to know “whether I could lay my Hand on my Heart, and say, with a safe Conscience, that I would instantly free all my Slaves, and destroy my Sugar Works.” Suppose I should refuse to do this, the Subject remains where it did,—I should then commit a Crime for which I should justly "loose [sic] the Esteem of Men of Sense, and of a rational Way of thinking."

And now my West-India Friend, give me leave in my turn to ask you a few Questions. Lay your Hand upon your Heart, and tell me; would you like to be sold, for no fault, or torn against your will from your Sisters and Brothers, and carried into a foreign Country, to be subjected to the absolute dominion of a Master; to be obliged to labor without intermission, to cease to make any further improvements in Virtue or Knowledge; to be fed and clothed scantily; to be tempted by your situation to all the low Vices of Slavery, to be punished in the most cruel manner if you attempted to regain your Liberty; Would you like to be told, if you should complain of your hard fate, that the “Imperfection of Human Society” required that you should be a Slave (pp. 50–51).

Then Sir pause a few Minutes, and reflect upon what you have done. You have called in question the Justice and goodness of the Supreme Being. You have charged the Father of Mankind with being the Author of the greatest Evils to his Children. You have aimed to establish Principles, which justify the most extensive and cruel Depradations which have been made by Conquerors and Tyrants, upon the Liberties and Lives of Mankind, and which at the same time condemn those glorious Events, and illustrious Men, that Britain and her Colonies, are indebted to for their Liberty and Prosperity. You have misrepresented the true Interests of our Mother Country. You have attempted to palliate Crimes which are founded on a Pride and Depravity of Soul, unavoidable in Masters and Slaves in the West-Indies. You have thrown a Veil over the true Causes which destroy so many Thousands of your fellow Creatures every year (p. 52).
Acts and Laws, Made and Passed by the General Court or Assembly of His Majesty’s English Colony of Connecticut, … [New London, 1774]. (This includes, on pp. 403–4, “An Act for Prohibiting the Importation of Indian, Negro, or Molatto Slaves.”)

This was the first successful anti-slavery legislation in Connecticut. Ten years later the state passed a gradual emancipation law.

Whereas the Increase of Slaves in this colony is injurious to the Poor, and inconvenient:

Be it enacted, by the Governor, Council and Representatives, in General Court assembled, and by the Authority of the same, That no Indian, Negro, or Molatto Slave, shall, at any Time hereafter, be brought or imported into this Colony, by Sea or Land, from any Place or Places whatsoever, to be disposed of, left, or sold within this Colony (p. 403).


The Slavery which now so largely subsists in the American Colonies, is another mighty evil, which proceeds from the same corrupt root as War; for, however, it may be granted that some, otherwise, well disposed people in different places, particularly in these provinces, at first fell into the practice of buying and keeping Slaves, thro’ inadvertency, or by the example of others; yet in the generality it sprang from an unwarrantable desire of gain, a lust for amassing wealth, and in the pride of their heart, holding an uncontrollable power over their fellow-men. The observation which the Apostle makes on War, may well be applied to those who compelled their fellow-men to become their slaves, they lusted, for wealth and power and desired to have, that they might consume it upon their lusts.

It is a very afflictive consideration, that notwithstanding the rights and liberties of mankind have been so much the object of publick notice, yet the same corrupt principles still maintain their power in the minds of most Slave Holders. Indeed nothing can more clearly and positively militate against the slavery of the Negroes, than the several declarations lately published, with so great an appearance of solemnity, thro’ all the colonies, viz: “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.” And “That all men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, of which when they enter into a state of society they cannot by any compact, deprive or divert their property; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.” That after these, and other declarations of the same kind, have been so publicly made to the world, Slavery should continue in its full force in the Colonies; and even in some cases, its bands should, by Law, be farther established, is a great aggravation of that guilt which has so long lain upon America (pp. [27]–29; footnote omitted).
The Constitution of the Pennsylvania Society, for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, Unlawfully Held in Bondage.... Philadelphia, 1787.

Founded in Philadelphia in 1775 as the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society encouraged increased social, educational, and employment opportunities for free Blacks as well as an end to slavery, an issue which they asked then-President Benjamin Franklin to take to the 1787 Constitutional Convention (and which he ultimately chose not to do).

It having pleased the Creator of the world, to make of one flesh, all the children of men—it becomes them to consult and promote each other's happiness, as members of the same family, however diversified they may be, by colour, situation, religion, or different states of society. It is more especially the duty of those persons, who profess to maintain for themselves the rights of human nature, and who acknowledge the obligations of Christianity, to use such means as are in their power, to extend the blessings of freedom to every part of the human race; and in a more particular manner, to such of their fellow-creatures, as are entitled to freedom by the laws and constitutions of any of the United States, and who, notwithstanding, are detained in bondage, by fraud or violence.—From a full conviction of the truth and obligation of these principles—from a desire to diffuse them, wherever the miseries and vices of slavery exist, and in humble confidence of the favour and support of the Father of Mankind, the subscribers have associated themselves, under the title of the “Pennsylvania Society for promoting the abolition of slavery, and the relief of free Negroes unlawfully held in Bondage” (p. 5).


Graduate of Yale and trained as a lawyer, Baldwin (1761–1851) briefly owned a slave inherited from his father's estate before turning to the abolitionist movement. He was involved in a number of social action movements, including leading a public protest against the Cherokee removal of 1830.

The labours of the patriot and the friend of humanity are not yet completed. It is their task to remove those blemishes which have hitherto sullied the glory of these States. We may feed our vanity with the pompous recital of noble achievements—we may pride ourselves in the excellency of our government—we may boast of the anticipated glories of the western continent:—But virtue will mourn that injustice and ingratitude have, in too many instances, had the countenance of law—Humanity will mourn that an odious slavery, cruel in itself, degrading to the dignity of man, and shocking to
human nature, is tolerated, and in many instances practised with barbarian cruelty.—Yes, even in this land of boasted freedom, this asylum for the oppressed, that inhuman practice has lost its horrors by the sanction of custom (pp. 15–16).


Early in his career, Maryland lawyer William Pinkney (1764–1822) represented two slaves suing for their freedom; he won one case but lost the other. He nevertheless continued working for the anti-slavery movement, as seen in this speech, in which he argued for the repeal of a Maryland statute that prohibited emancipation. He later came to great prominence in the legal field, participating in such landmark cases as *McCulloch v. Maryland* and *Cohens v. Virginia*.

But lest character should have no more than its usual weight with us, let us examine into the policy of thus perpetuating slavery among us, and also consider this regulation in particular, with the objections applicable to each. That the result will be favorable to us I have no doubt.

That the dangerous consequences of this system of bondage have not as yet been felt, does not prove they never will be. At least the experiment has not been sufficiently made to preclude speculation and conjecture. To me, Sir, nothing for which I have not the evidence of my senses is more clear, than that it will one day destroy that reverence for liberty, which is the vital principle of a republic (pp. 8–9).

**[Benjamin Banneker].** *Bannaker’s Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, Kentucky, and North Carolina Almanack and Ephemeris, for the Year of Our Lord 1796; ...* Baltimore, [1795].

Born free in Maryland, Banneker (1731–1806) was known as an astronomer and mathematician, despite having no advanced education. At least twenty-eight editions of his almanac were printed over several years, many through abolitionist societies. He sent a copy of his first almanac to Thomas Jefferson, in hope of enlisting Jefferson’s aid in countervailing prejudice. On August 12, 1791, Jefferson replied with esteem and stated he had forwarded the almanac to an official in Paris “because I considered it as a document, to which your whole color had a right for their justification, against the doubts which have been entertained of them.”

*But there is one dish we invite you to partake of, and we are prouder of it than all of the rest put together; and to whom do you think we are indebted for this part of our entertainment? Why, to a Black Man—Strange! Is a Black capable of composing an Almanac? Indeed, it is no less strange than true; and a clever wise long headed Black he is: It would be telling some whites if*

Native of Bermuda, St. George Tucker (1752–1828) settled in Virginia in 1771 for education, having married into the Randolph family, and stayed for his career as jurist, essayist, playwright, and poet. He presented this “dissertation” as part of a course of lectures on law at the College of William and Mary.

**ON THE STATE OF SLAVERY IN VIRGINIA**

In the preceding Enquiry into the absolute rights of the citizens of united America, we must not be understood as if those rights were equally and universally the privilege of all the inhabitants of the United States, or even of all those, who may challenge this land of freedom as their native country.

Among the blessings which the Almighty hath showered down on these states, there is a large portion of the bitterest draught that ever flowed from the cup of affliction. Whilst America hath been the land of promise to Europeans, and their descendants, it hath been the vale of death to millions of the wretched sons of Africa (p. [9]).

Peter Williams, Junior, (1780?–1840) was the son of a free black patriot Revolutionary war soldier. He was about twenty-eight years old when he gave this oration. In later life, an ordained cleric of the Episcopal Church, he was a strong leader in black reform efforts during the 1820s and 30s. He founded one of the earliest African American newspapers, *Freedom’s Journal.*

**FATHERS, BRETHREN, AND FELLOW CITIZENS,**

At this auspicious moment, I felicitate you, on the abolition of the Slave-Trade. This inhuman branch of commerce, which, for some centuries past, has been carried on to a considerable extent, is, by the singular interposition of Divine Providence, this day extinguished. An event so important, so pregnant with happy consequences, must be extremely consonant to every philanthropic heart (p. [11]).

Oh, God! we thank thee, that thou didst condescend to listen to the cries of Africa’s wretched sons; and that thou didst
TO
THE DIFFERENT SOCIETIES,
FOR
THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY,
THIS ORATION
IS HUMBLY INSCRIBED,
AS A TRIBUTE OF SINCERE GRATITUDE,
FOR THEIR
ASSIDUOUS, ENERGETIC, AND BENEVOLENT
EXERTIONS,
IN
THE CAUSE
OF
INJURED HUMANITY.
interfere in their behalf. At thy call humanity sprang forth, and espoused the cause of the oppressed: one hand she employed in drawing from their vitals the deadly arrows of injustice; and the other in holding a shield, to defend them from fresh assaults: and at that illustrious moment, when the sons of 76 pronounced these United States free and independent; when the spirit of patriotism, erected a temple sacred to liberty; when the inspired voice of Americans first uttered those noble sentiments, “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; among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;” and when the bleeding African, lifting his fetters, exclaimed, “am I not a man and a brother;” then with redoubled efforts, the angel of humanity strove to restore to the African race, the inherent rights of man (pp. 20–21).