

Knowledge for Freedom Seminar

2026 Course Book

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2026 Source Book**

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Phillis Wheatley, On Being Brought From Africa (1773)

INTRODUCTION

Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784) was born in Africa, kidnapped and enslaved at the age of seven, and then forced into domestic service for the Boston family of John and Susanna Wheatley. During the 1760s and 1770s, Phillis Wheatley was enslaved in Boston but learned how to read and write and proved to be a true prodigy as a poet. She began publishing poems in local newspapers in the late 1760s and became something of a celebrity by the early 1770s. Her first published collection of 28 poems, Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral (1773) appeared in London and included "On Being Brought From Africa to America," which is presented below and which many now regard as her most famous literary effort. Later, during the American Revolution, Wheatley also achieved additional fame for supporting the patriot cause and for praising George Washington in a poem, which she sent to him directly and which he acknowledged in correspondence. The Wheatley family had a complicated relationship with Phillis Peters (the name she took once she married John Peters, a free black Bostonian). The family, especially Susanna Wheatley, promoted the young black poet, but kept her enslaved until they finally manumitted her in 1774. During her years in freedom, Phillis Peters continued to write poetry in Boston but often struggled with various financial and family difficulties such as losing multiple children to illness and enduring the absences of her husband. She died essentially alone in 1784 at the age of 31, but left behind a legacy of nearly 150 poems that helped define her age while challenging, however subtly, the paradox and injustice of slavery and racism that existed beside the American revolutionary ideals of natural rights and democracy.

SOURCE FORMAT: Poem // WORD COUNT: 58 words

Tw'as mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a Saviour too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic die."
Remember, Christians, Negros, black as Cain,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

CITATION: Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," via Poetry Foundation.org

Abigail and John Adams, Letters (1776)

INTRODUCTION

Abigail Smith Adams and John Adams were married for 54 years, beginning in 1764. By the spring of 1776, when Abigail was in her early thirties and John was in his early forties, the couple had five young children, living in their home in Braintree, Massachusetts. John Adams, a noted lawyer, was then serving as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress and proving to be vital in helping to forge the movement for American independence from Great Britain. The couple exchanged regular letters during this period—though Abigail Adams sometimes complained about her husband’s uneven attention to their correspondence. In this exchange from March and April 1776, Abigail Adams went further and pressed her husband on political matters, urging him to apply the revolutionary principles of freedom and equality to women as well as men. John Adams tried responding in teasing fashion, calling his wife “saucy,” though the details of his reply suggested that he was well aware that the “Masculine systems” of their social hierarchy were more precarious than they may have appeared in such a turbulent age.

SOURCE FORMAT: Private letters // WORD COUNT: 470 words

Abigail Adams to John Adams
Braintree March 31 1776

...I long to hear that you have declared an independancy—and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticular care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.

That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the

Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity. Men of Sense in all Ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your Sex. Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in imitation of the Supream Being make use of that power only for our happiness....

John Adams to Abigail Adams
[PHILADELPHIA] Ap. 14, 1776

...As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government every where. That Children and Apprentices were disobedient — that schools and Colledges were grown turbulent — that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters. But your Letter was the first

Intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerfull than all the rest were grown discontented. — This is rather too coarse a Compliment but you are so saucy, I wont blot it out. Depend upon it, We know better than to repeal our Masculine systems. Altho they are in full Force, you know they are little more than Theory. We dare not exert our Power in its full Latitude. We are obliged to go fair, and softly, and in Practice you know We are the subjects. We have only the Name of Masters, and rather than give up this, which would compleatly subject Us to the Despotism of the Peticoat, I hope General Washington, and all our brave Heroes would fight. I am sure every good Politician would plot, as long as he would against Despotism, Empire, Monarchy, Aristocracy, Oligarchy, or Ochlocracy. — A fine Story indeed. I begin to think the Ministry as deep as they are wicked. After stirring up Tories, Landjobbers, Trimmers, Bigots, Canadians, Indians, Negroes, Hanoverians, Hessians, Russians, Irish Roman Catholicks, Scotch Renegadoes, at last they have stimulated the _____ to demand new Priviledges and threaten to rebell.

CITATION: Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31 – April 5, 1776 and John Adams to Abigail Adams, April 14, 1776, and available [FULL TEXT](#) via Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence (1776)

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Jefferson was only 33 years old when he became the principal author of the Declaration of Independence. He was part of a Committee of Five, appointed by the Second Continental Congress, to prepare the revolutionary statement. Other members of the select drafting committee included John Adams of Massachusetts, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, Robert R. Livingston of New York and Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania. Jefferson was the youngest of this group but already well-regarded for his breadth of learning and his talent as a writer. He began drafting the Declaration in June 1776, claiming afterward that only Adams and Franklin offered him any significant corrections or suggestions before the committee submitted the document to the Congress for final approval. The Congress voted for independence on July 2, 1776 and then debated and approved a handful of further changes to the Declaration, which they formally adopted on July 4. Printer John Dunlap then made the initial copies for distribution, but it was not until a few weeks later that an engrossed parchment copy of the Declaration of Independence was presented to delegates for their official signatures, led by President of the Congress, John Hancock of Massachusetts.

SOURCE FORMAT: Public document // WORD COUNT: 1,400 words

The unanimous Declaration of the thirteen united States of America,

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

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.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, 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.--Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government. The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the

establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.

He has forbidden his Governors to pass Laws of immediate and pressing importance, unless suspended in their operation till his Assent should be obtained; and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them.

He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people, unless those people would relinquish the right of Representation in the Legislature, a right inestimable to them and formidable to tyrants only.

He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures.

He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.

He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.

He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.

He has combined with others to subject us to a jurisdiction foreign to our constitution, and unacknowledged by our laws; giving his Assent to their Acts of pretended Legislation:

For Quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefits of Trial by Jury:

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences

For abolishing the free System of English Laws in a neighbouring Province, establishing therein an Arbitrary government, and enlarging its Boundaries so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same absolute rule into these Colonies:

For taking away our Charters, abolishing our most valuable Laws, and altering fundamentally the Forms of our Governments:

For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.

He has abdicated Government here, by declaring us out of his Protection and waging War against us.

He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.

He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation.

He has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands.

He has excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people. Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We

have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity, and we have conjured them by the ties of our common kindred to disavow these usurpations, which, would inevitably interrupt our connections and correspondence. They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.

We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, 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 totally dissolved; and that as Free and Independent States, they have full Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, establish Commerce, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent States may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.

CITATION: Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, via National Archives

Frederick Douglass, Fifth of July speech (1852)

INTRODUCTION

*[Frederick Douglass \(1818-1895\)](#) was born enslaved on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. During most of his youth, Douglass was known as Frederick Bailey. From early on, Douglass was also separated from his mother, Harriet Bailey, and never really knew for certain the identity of his father, though it was always rumored to have been one of his early masters, perhaps Aaron Anthony or Thomas Auld, who was Anthony's son-in-law. Douglass certainly had a complicated lifelong relationship with Auld, who was often cruel to him and other enslaved people, and yet with whom he maintained unusual and intermittent contact until near the end of Auld's life in 1877. During his early years, Douglass spent time in Baltimore and on the Eastern Shore, enslaved as both a house servant and a field hand to various owners. He learned how to read in Baltimore, and famously purchased a copy of *The Columbian Orator*, from money he had earned after being hired out (or rented). Douglass finally escaped from slavery in 1838, with the help of a free black woman from Baltimore named Anna Murray, whom he later married in New York. Following his escape, the couple lived in Massachusetts and the newly renamed Frederick Douglass soon gained renown as an abolitionist orator embedded in the network of radical reformers and antislavery advocates gathered around controversial newspaper editor William Lloyd Garrison. In 1845, with Garrison's support, Douglass published his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave. Written by Himself*. This powerful testimony created an instant sensation and soon transformed Douglass into the nation's best known African American leader. Several years later, Douglass delivered this speech, sometimes called, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" or the Fifth of July speech, on July 5, 1852, in Rochester, New York. The speech, before a local antislavery women's group, began with a sympathetic account of the American Revolution and its great promise for freedom but then pivoted to a second half (partially excerpted below) which detailed the gross hypocrisy of American enslavement on the legacy of that freedom struggle. Many historians consider this effort to be Douglass's finest oration, and arguably one of the most powerful American political speeches ever written.*

SOURCE FORMAT: Public speech (excerpt) // WORD COUNT: 1,660 words

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, lowering 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 judgment 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 anti-slavery creed would you 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 to-day, 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 passed.

At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. O! had I the ability, and could I reach the nation's ear, I would, to-day, 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.

—Excerpted from Frederick Douglass, What to the Slave is the Fourth of July? July 5, 1852, Rochester, New York with [FULL TEXT](#) via TeachingAmericanHistory.org

Frances Harper, “Bury Me in a Free Land” (1858)

INTRODUCTION

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911) was one of the most prolific black writers, poets and activists of nineteenth-century America. She was born free in Maryland in 1825 but orphaned at a young age and raised by her aunt and uncle. Harper began publishing poetry in her early 20s. By the 1850s, she had become a leading abolitionist poet and lecturer, based mostly in Philadelphia. She worked closely with William Still, a leader of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee which coordinated Underground Railroad activities in the region. During the Civil War, Harper married and raised a family in Ohio. After the war, she became involved in a number of reform movements and continued her career as a writer. This poem, “Bury Me in a Free Land,” originally appeared in an abolitionist newspaper from Ohio, Anti-Slavery Bugle, on November 20, 1858, under the byline, Frances Ellen Watkins. The poet was 33 years old. Harper, who died in 1911, was buried in a cemetery near Philadelphia.

SOURCE FORMAT: Poem // WORD COUNT: 246 words

Make me a grave where'er you will,
In a lowly plain, or a lofty hill;
Make it among earth's humblest graves,
But not in a land where men are slaves.

I could not rest if around my grave
I heard the steps of a trembling slave;
His shadow above my silent tomb
Would make it a place of fearful gloom.

I could not rest if I heard the tread
Of a coffle gang to the shambles led,
And the mother's shriek of wild despair
Rise like a curse on the trembling air.

I could not sleep if I saw the lash
Drinking her blood at each fearful gash,
And I saw her babes torn from her breast,
Like trembling doves from their parent nest.

I'd shudder and start if I heard the bay
Of bloodhounds seizing their human prey,
And I heard the captive plead in vain
As they bound afresh his galling chain.

If I saw young girls from their mother's arms
Bartered and sold for their youthful charms,
My eye would flash with a mournful flame,
My death-paled cheek grow red with shame.

I would sleep, dear friends, where bloated might
Can rob no man of his dearest right;
My rest shall be calm in any grave
Where none can call his brother a slave.

I ask no monument, proud and high,
To arrest the gaze of the passers-by;
All that my yearning spirit craves,
Is bury me not in a land of slaves.

CITATION: Frances Ellen Harper, "Bury Me in a Free Land," *Anti-Slavery Bugle* (Lisbon, OH), November 20, 1858

Declaration of Sentiments, Seneca Falls Convention (1848)

INTRODUCTION

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) was the principal author of the Declaration of Sentiments, which emerged from one of the first women's rights gatherings in the United States. Over two days at the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, New York, July 19-20, 1848, a few hundred women and men debated the future of what their official report described as the "social, civil, and religious condition of woman." Stanton had been a driving force behind this early feminist movement, along with noted Pennsylvania abolitionist and Quaker activist, Lucretia Mott, and a few others from among their mutual friends and relatives. Most of these women had been radicalized during the 1840s by their experiences in fighting slavery. In April 1848, the New York state legislature had also begun reforming certain common law doctrines which had limited married women's rights to their own property. Most feminists at Seneca Falls considered this measure as only a first step and that's why they were intent on gathering in upstate New York. When Stanton read the now-famous expression of sentiments at the convention's opening session (for women only), the effect was electrifying. A masterful propaganda document, this "declaration" rewrote the original Declaration of Independence in a fashion designed to highlight the hypocrisy of a country claiming a commitment to natural rights. Male allies such as Frederick Douglass then joined the convention on its second day and the group voted on a series of resolutions, including support for women's suffrage. Ultimately, nearly one hundred attendees signed the new Declaration. Sadly, however, the original handwritten document for this landmark statement on gender equality has never been recovered.

SOURCE FORMAT: Public document (full) // WORD COUNT: 1,000 words

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.

We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly, all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves, by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled.

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men – both natives and foreigners.

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes, with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master – the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes of divorce; in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given, as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women – the law, in all cases, going upon the false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.

After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration.

He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction, which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education – all colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in Church as well as State, but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the Church.

He has created a false public sentiment, by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated but deemed of little account in man.

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and her God.

He has endeavored, in every way that he could to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation, – in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and national Legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions, embracing every part of the country.

Firmly relying upon the final triumph of the Right and the True, we do this day affix our signatures to this declaration.

Lucretia Mott

Harriet Cady Eaton

Margaret Pryor

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

[Signed by an additional 64 other women and 32 men]

CITATION

Declaration of Sentiments, July 19, 1848, Seneca Falls, NY, Reproduced by the [National Park Service](#)

Sojourner Truth, Woman's rights speech (1851)

INTRODUCTION

Born enslaved in New York in 1799 as Isabella, Sojourner Truth changed her name in 1843. Truth grew up speaking a Dutch dialect and probably spoke English with a noticeable Dutch accent. She was enslaved in New York during a period of gradual abolition (which ended in 1827). As a free woman, Truth joined a series of utopian religious communities in New York and Massachusetts. Her stirring 1851 speech to the Woman's Rights convention in Akron, Ohio drew immediate attention, but became even more mythical (and somewhat distorted) by later slight mistranslations of her words and dialect. It was from these later accounts that scholars originally derived the popular title, "Ain't I A Woman?" for these remarks. The version of the speech below was the original transcription recorded by newspapers in 1851. Truth was about six feet tall and imposing presence as a speaker and activist, fighting for both the abolition of slavery and women's rights.

SOURCE FORMAT: News report of public speech (full) // WORD COUNT: 344 words

May I say a few words? I want to say a few words about this matter.

I am a woman's rights. I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that?

I have heard much about the sexes being equal; I can carry as much as any man, and can eat as much too, if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now.

As for intellect, all I can say is, if women have a pint and man a quart - why can't she have her little pint full? You need not be afraid to give us our rights for fear we will take too much, for we cant take more than our pint'll hold.

The poor men seem to be all in confusion, and dont know what to do. Why children, if you have woman's rights, give it to her and you will feel better. You will have your own rights, and they wont be so much trouble.

I cant read, but I can hear. I have heard the bible and have learned that Eve caused man to sin. Well if woman upset the world, do give her a chance to set it right side up again.

The Lady has spoken about Jesus, how he never spurned woman from him, and she was right. When Lazarus died, Mary and Martha came to him with faith and love and besought him to raise their brother. And Jesus wept - and Lazarus came forth.

And how came Jesus into the world? Through God who created him and woman who bore him. Man, where is your part? But the women are coming up blessed be God and a few of the men are coming up with them.

But man is in a tight place, the poor slave is on him, woman is coming on him, and he is surely between-a hawk and a buzzard.

CITATION: Sojourner Truth speech, Woman's Rights Convention, Akron, Ohio, May 29, 1851, published first in Salem Anti-Slavery Bugle (June 21, 1851) reprinted in Sojourner Truth Project

Abraham Lincoln, House Divided speech (1858)

INTRODUCTION

Abraham Lincoln delivered his famous “House Divided” speech on the evening of June 16, 1858 at the Illinois Republican State Convention in Springfield, Illinois. It was, in effect, an acceptance speech. Earlier that day, Illinois Republicans had adopted an unprecedented endorsement for the local attorney and former congressman as their “first and only choice” in the forthcoming campaign to unseat incumbent Senator Stephen A. Douglas. The reason why such an endorsement was unusual was because in those days there was no tradition of public campaigning for US senate seats. Before the ratification of the 17th amendment in 1912, state legislatures always selected US senators and would-be candidates typically conducted their efforts in private and after the fall legislative elections. But Lincoln’s Republican allies believed it was critical to organize an early public campaign with him as the party’s official nominee in order to head off growing pressure on them to support Douglas, a leading Democrat. The pressure was coming because Douglas was in the midst of a bitter feud with President James Buchanan, the more openly pro-slavery leader of his national party. To some Republicans, especially party leaders from New York, this Democratic feud represented a rare opportunity to flip an old political enemy. Yet Lincoln and the Illinois Republicans knew all too well that Douglas was not committed to their core antislavery positions –most notably their firm belief in stopping slavery’s expansion into western territories such as Kansas. That is why Lincoln used his acceptance speech on June 16 to try to explain why Douglas and his controversial doctrine of settling the fate of slavery in the territories by “popular sovereignty” or by a vote of the settlers themselves, represented a mortal threat to the future of the Republican Party and the nation itself.

SOURCE FORMAT: Public speech (excerpt) // WORD COUNT: 672 words

If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could then better judge what to do, and how to do it. We are now far into the fifth year, since a policy was initiated, with the avowed object, and confident promise, of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only, not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion, it will not cease, until a crisis shall have been reached, and passed.

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved --I do not expect the house to fall-- but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.

Either the opponents of slavery, will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new --North as well as South.

...We shall lie down pleasantly dreaming that the people of Missouri are on the verge of making their State free; and we shall awake to the reality, instead, that the Supreme Court has made Illinois a slave State.

To meet and overthrow the power of that dynasty, is the work now before all those who would prevent that consummation.

That is what we have to do. But how can we best do it?

There are those who denounce us openly to their own friends, and yet whisper us softly, that Senator Douglas is the aptest instrument there is, with which to effect that object. They do not tell us, nor has he told us, that he wishes any such object to be effected. They wish us to infer all, from the facts, that he now has a little quarrel with the present head of the dynasty; and that he has regularly voted with us, on a single point, upon which, he and we, have never differed.

They remind us that he is a very great man, and that the largest of us are very small ones. Let this be granted. But "a living dog is better than a dead lion." Judge Douglas, if not a dead lion for this work, is at least a caged and toothless one. How can he oppose the advances of slavery? He don't care anything about it. His avowed mission is impressing the "public heart" to care nothing about it... Now, as ever, I wish to not misrepresent Judge Douglas' position, question his motives, or do ought that can be personally offensive to him.

Whenever, if ever, he and we can come together on principle so that our great cause may have assistance from his great ability, I hope to have interposed no adventitious obstacle.

But clearly, he is not now with us --he does not pretend to be-- he does not promise to ever be.

Our cause, then, must be intrusted to, and conducted by its own undoubted friends---those whose hands are free, whose hearts are in the work---who do care for the result.

Two years ago the Republicans of the nation mustered over thirteen hundred thousand strong. We did this under the single impulse of resistance to a common danger, with every external circumstance against us. Of strange, discordant, and even, hostile elements, we gathered from the four winds, and formed and fought the battle through, under the constant hot fire of a disciplined, proud, and pampered enemy.

Did we brave all then, to falter now? --now when that same enemy is wavering, dissevered and belligerent? The result is not doubtful. We shall not fail --if we stand firm, we shall not fail. Wise councils may accelerate or mistakes delay it, but, sooner or later the victory is sure to come.

CITATION: Abraham Lincoln, Speech to Republican state convention, June 16, 1858,
Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (1953)

Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural (1861)

INTRODUCTION

Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) won election as the nation's sixteenth president in November 1860 after a complicated four-way contest that took place during a period of bitter sectional polarization. Following his victory, seven out of fifteen slave states claimed that they were leaving the union or seceding to form a new government, which they called the Confederate States of America. Most white southerners seemed terrified that once antislavery Republicans held control of the federal government, they would abolish slavery. Lincoln tried to use his Inaugural Address on March 4, 1861, to calm their nerves. In particular, Lincoln appeared to employ this ceremonial speech to try to dissuade Upper South states from joining a rebellion against the nation. Although the new president acknowledged in this excerpt that there was a "substantial dispute" over slavery's morality, he denied that Republicans were planning to attack the institution in states where it had long existed. Instead, he claimed his party would honor longstanding constitutional compromises over slavery, though without allowing any further extension into the western territories. Lincoln also blasted secession, calling it "the essence of anarchy," because he believed it would forever undermine the principles of representative self-government. Lincoln ended by appealing to patriotism and shared national heritage. Nevertheless, just a short six weeks after this powerful speech, Confederate troops fired on US military forces at Fort Sumter in South Carolina and the Civil War began.

SOURCE FORMAT: Public speech (excerpt) // WORD COUNT: 700 words

...Apprehension seems to exist among the people of the Southern States that by the accession of a Republican Administration their property and their peace and personal security are to be endangered. There has never been any reasonable cause for such apprehension. Indeed, the most ample evidence to the contrary has all the while existed and been open to their inspection. It is found in nearly all the published speeches of him who now addresses you. I do but quote from one of those speeches when I declare that:

"I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so."

Those who nominated and elected me did so with full knowledge that I had made this and many similar declarations and had never recanted them; and more than this, they placed in the platform for my acceptance, and as a law to themselves and to me, the clear and emphatic resolution which I now read:

“Resolved, That the maintenance inviolate of the rights of the States, and especially the right of each State to order and control its own domestic institutions according to its own judgment exclusively, is essential to that balance of power on which the perfection and endurance of our political fabric depend; and we denounce the lawless invasion by armed force of the soil of any State or Territory, no matter what pretext, as among the gravest of crimes.”

... Plainly, the central idea of secession, is the essence of anarchy. A majority, held in restraint by constitutional checks, and limitations, and always changing easily, with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people. Whoever rejects it, does, of necessity, fly to anarchy or to despotism. Unanimity is impossible; the rule of a minority, as a permanent arrangement, is wholly inadmissible; so that, rejecting the majority principle, anarchy, or despotism in some form, is all that is left....

...One section of our country believes slavery is right, and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is wrong, and ought not to be extended. This is the only substantial dispute. The fugitive slave clause of the Constitution, and the law for the suppression of the foreign slave trade, are each as well enforced, perhaps, as any law can ever be in a community where the moral sense of the people imperfectly supports the law itself. The great body of the people abide by the dry legal obligation in both cases, and a few break over in each. This, I think, cannot be perfectly cured; and it would be worse in both cases after the separation of the sections, than before. The foreign slave trade, now imperfectly suppressed, would be ultimately revived without restriction, in one section; while fugitive slaves, now only partially surrendered, would not be surrendered at all, by the other.

Physically speaking, we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other, nor build an impassable wall between them. A husband and wife may be divorced, and go out of the presence, and beyond the reach of each other; but the different parts of our country cannot do this. They cannot but remain face to face; and intercourse, either amicable or hostile, must continue between them....In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the Government, while I shall have the most solemn one to “preserve, protect, and defend it.”

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

CITATION: Abraham Lincoln, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (1953)

Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address (1863)

INTRODUCTION

On July 7, 1863, in the immediate aftermath of the news reaching Washington DC that Union forces had not only won a major battle at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, but also had prevailed in a long bloody, siege at Vicksburg, Mississippi, President Abraham Lincoln responded to a “serenade” from a crowd outside the White House with an impromptu speech. Near the beginning of his brief remarks, Lincoln observed, “How long ago was it—eighty odd years—since on the Fourth of July for the first time in the history of the world a nation by its representatives, assembled and declared as a self-evident truth that ‘all men are created equal.’” Of course, while the president did not know it at the time, this passage represented the first draft of the famous, far more poetic, opening of his address delivered at the dedication of the Soldiers’ National Cemetery at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863. Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address was short—a mere ten sentences—but it has become the most famous speech in American history. There are many ways to interpret its meaning, but one of the most powerful insights concerns how Lincoln subtly worked to evoke memories in his audience. He did not name individuals or policies, but instead Lincoln used the language of American politics, culture and religious faith to help inspire his listeners and readers. Such writing, of course, requires careful composition and revision. The version below, for example, was not merely the second draft of Lincoln’s response to the July serenade. This famous text, which now adorns the Lincoln Memorial, actually comes from a version that Lincoln hand wrote in March 1864. It was not that much different than the version which he had delivered in November 1863, but the small differences reflect the brilliance of a writer who knew that every word mattered.

SOURCE FORMAT: Public speech // WORD COUNT: 272 words

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives, that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here, have, thus far, so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for

which they here gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

CITATION: Abraham Lincoln, Address at Soldiers' National Cemetery, Gettysburg, PA, November 19, 1863 [BLISS COPY / FINAL TEXT], FULL TEXT via *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (1953)

Frederick Douglass, Mission of the War speech (1864)

INTRODUCTION

The great abolitionist orator and writer Frederick Douglass delivered this speech, "The Mission of the War," to the Women's Loyal National League at the Cooper Institute in New York on January 13, 1864. At that time, Douglass was about 46 years old and still hoping that President Lincoln would name him as the US army's first black officer. The two men had met for the first time during the previous August at the White House. "I felt big there," Douglass had told audiences during the previous month about his encounter with the president. But Lincoln had not yet named the former antislavery newspaper editor to a military position and would, in fact, not do so before his death in April 1865. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony had founded the Women's Loyal National League in 1863 and were preparing in early 1864 to deliver a massive series of petitions to Congress—from nearly half a million people—calling for the abolition of slavery by constitutional amendment. Douglass was a strong supporter of this abolition amendment and used his speech in New York to explain why he had always considered the Civil War to be "an abolition war," even when some Union generals and politicians had resisted.

SOURCE FORMAT: Public speech (excerpt) // WORD COUNT: 788 words

...Then there is the danger arising from the impatience of the people on account of the prolongation of the war. I know the American people. They are an impulsive people, impatient of delay, clamorous for change, and often look for results out of all proportion to the means employed in attaining them.

You and I know that the mission of this war is national regeneration. We know and consider that a nation is not born in a day. We know that large bodies move slowly—and often seem to move thus when, could we perceive their actual velocity, we should be astonished at its greatness. A great battle lost or won is easily described, understood and appreciated, but the moral growth of a great nation requires reflection, as well as observation, to appreciate it. There are vast numbers of voters, who make no account of the moral growth of a great nation and who only look at the war as a calamity to be endured only so long as they have no power to arrest it. Now, this is just the sort of people whose votes may turn the scale against us in the last event.

Thoughts of this kind tell me that there never was a time when antislavery work was more needed than now. The day that shall see the rebels at our feet, their weapons flung away, will be the day of trial. We have need to prepare for that trial. We have long been saved a proslavery peace by the stubborn, unbending persistence of the rebels. Let them bend as they will bend, there will come the test of our sternest virtues.

I have now given, very briefly, some of the grounds of danger. A word as to the ground of hope. The best that can be offered is that we have made progress—vast and striking progress—within the last two years.

President Lincoln introduced his administration to the country as one which would faithfully catch, hold and return runaway slaves to their masters. He avowed his determination to protect and defend the slaveholder's right to plunder the black laborer of his hard earnings. Europe was assured by Mr. Seward that no slave should gain his freedom by this war. Both the President and the Secretary of State have made progress since then.

Our generals, at the beginning of the war, were horribly proslavery. They took to slave catching and slave killing like ducks to water. They are now very generally and very earnestly in favor of putting an end to slavery. Some of them, like Hunter and Butler, because they hate slavery on its own account, and others, because slavery is in arms against the government.

The rebellion has been a rapid educator. Congress was the first to respond to the instinctive judgment of the people, and fixed the broad brand of its reprobation upon slave hunting in shoulder straps. Then came very temperate talk about confiscation, which soon came to be pretty radical talk. Then came propositions for Border State, gradual, compensated, colonized emancipation. Then came the threat of a proclamation, and then came the Proclamation. Meanwhile the Negro had passed along from a loyal spade and pickax to a Springfield rifle. Haiti and Liberia are recognized. Slavery is humbled in Maryland, threatened in Tennessee, stunned nearly to death in western Kentucky, and gradually melting away before our arms in the rebellious states.

The hour is one of hope as well as danger. But whatever may come to pass, one thing is clear: The principles involved in the contest, the necessities of both sections of the country, the obvious requirements of the age, and every suggestion of enlightened policy demand the utter extirpation of slavery from every foot of American soil, and the enfranchisement of the entire colored population of the country. Elsewhere we may find peace, but it will be a hollow and deceitful peace. Elsewhere we may find prosperity, but it will be a transient prosperity. Elsewhere we may find greatness and renown, but if these are based upon anything less substantial than justice they will vanish, for righteousness alone can permanently exalt a nation.

I end where I began—no war but an Abolition war; no peace but an Abolition peace; liberty for all, chains for none; the black man a soldier in war, a laborer in peace; a voter at the South as well as at the North; America his permanent home, and all Americans his fellow countrymen. Such, fellow citizens, is my idea of the mission of the war. If accomplished, our glory as a nation will be complete, our peace will flow like a river, and our foundation will be the everlasting rocks.

CITATION: *New York Tribune*, January 14, 1864, available FULL TEXT via BlackPast.org

Anna Dickinson, Perils of the Hour speech (1864)

INTRODUCTION

Anna Dickinson (1842-1932) was the first woman ever to offer a political speech in the chamber of the US House of Representatives. The young Pennsylvania native was only 21 years old at the time. Dickinson delivered her speech, “The Perils of the Hour,” on January 16, 1864, not only before members of both the House and Senate, but also with President Lincoln and many of his cabinet in rapt attendance. Despite her age and gender, Dickinson had become a celebrity orator, well known for her effective support of Unionist and Republican candidates. But Dickinson was a radical and had been an occasional critic of the Lincoln Administration’s cautious policies regarding slavery, so there was a real element of drama in her appearance in early 1864. As young 13-year-old girl, Dickinson had published her first writings in William Lloyd Garrison’s abolitionist newspaper, The Liberator. Now, speaking before most of official Washington, the young woman continued to press for emancipation and civil rights, as she had done throughout her life. But Dickinson also used the occasion to provide a kind of endorsement for President Lincoln and his potential second term. Later during the reelection campaign, Dickinson occasionally seemed to regret that endorsement –and never stopped pushing for more progressive policies on race and slavery– but she remained loyal to the Unionist effort. For a few decades after the Civil War, Dickinson remained an orator and writer, but never again achieved the same level of celebrity. She also struggled with poor health and depression. Dickinson never married and ultimately became estranged from her sister who at one point had her committed to an asylum. She then lived quietly for the last forty years of her life with friends in central New York, before her death in 1932.

SOURCE FORMAT: Public speech (excerpt) // WORD COUNT: 1,357 words

...Honor to the gallant defender of his country’s flag, whether he has heard the fearful storm of storm and shell at Antietam, or followed Rosecrans through the fierce and doubtful contests of the two years past – whether he fought at Gettysburg or followed Grant, whose victorious eagles had never yet retreated! [Prolonged applause.] The soil was sacred where our heroes fell. They should be honored while living and their memories revered when dead. They had died that the nation might live.

But for what did they fight and for what had they died? In order that, in the language of the President, “good government might not perish from the earth.” In 1776 our independence was asserted, but 1861 was the beginning of liberty. To-day we were fighting an oligarchy built upon the degradation of four millions of black men and eight millions of white men. Liberty threatened, had seized and wielded the only weapon of attack or defence – liberty. It was for slavery they were contending, we for liberty, and God save the right! [Applause.]

We were told that the war was for the Constitution and the Union, for the Government and the flag. True we were fighting for a Constitution, but for a Constitution whose spirit should be liberty. True we were fighting for a government, but for one which should crush the oppressor and secure freedom and protection to the weak and the oppressed. True, we were fighting for a flag, but for a flag which should welcome and make glad the suffering and oppressed of all the world. To-day we were fighting for a Government too august for any but freemen.

There were those who professed to have doubts that we would win. They said, "Let us control affairs, and a different order of things will prevail." Nobody doubted it! We had tried them. Did not the old time occupants of the seats of power remember that when their standard-bearer, one James Buchanan by name, was President, treason was permitted to arm itself against the nation, our ships scattered to distant seas, our troops far removed, our arms stolen, our Treasury robbed and the Government a beggar in the market at twelve per cent? The former friends and allies of these men who now complain of corruption and fraud are guiding the hosts of rebellion, and the difference between them was, that one stood as perjurers and the other as cowards! [Applause.]

The stone lifted from its long resting-place disclosed a multitude of nameless insects and creeping things which darted in every direction or burrowed straightaway into the earth out of sight. The Democratic party had been over-turned, (but she did not like describing disagreeable things,) and it must be left to imagine what might be found there! [Laughter.]

But ah! The mismanagement of the war! Not much! The day of the shoveling brigades was gone by, [applause and laughter] and the soldier did not now fight and die to win victories to be lost by the incapable, disaffected, and the treacherous commanders. There had been blunders, chief of which was the appointment (according to Gen. Patterson) of 207 Democratic Generals out of 230 to be appointed. What in Heaven's name could be expected but blundering? [Laughter.]

Slavery alike the strength and weakness of the South, and long the stepping-stone to power of northern politicians, had been struck from under them, and they cried out accordingly. The Emancipation Proclamation was a *fact*. They cried out against the "barbarism" of making soldiers of the slaves, and giving them blue coats and muskets. If the masters had rebelled against a good government they must expect their slaves to rebel against them in turn.

We had made soldiers out of them, and had asked them to fight for our country and for freedom for themselves. But while these black men were fighting and falling and dying for the cause, they were chased, mobbed, outlawed and hunted to death by a Union-saving — [drowned in applause.] With what sublime patience these down-trodden people had waited for the tardy justice of the nation. We had heard long the sharp cries of torture coming up from the house of bondage. We had heard this. What was it to us? They had long stretched their hands towards us for help. We cared not and heeded not. Now we needed them — who could say how much! At last we were prepared to say, "You have suffered enough; henceforth we stand out of your way and let you fight for your rights and your race." Dying for the country, they should be recognized as citizens thereof. They should be granted the land rightfully theirs by centuries of labor.

Doing a soldier's duty, the black man should have a soldier's pay. Burdened with a man's responsibilities, he should have a man's rights. No acts of Congress, no proclamation of amnesty

to defeated rebels, should interfere. A constitutional amendment should shield him, from a tribunal which proclaimed that he “had no rights which white men were bound to re-spect.” This was not charity nor generosity; it was simple justice. These slaves were made free, but not men. They were declared liberated, but were held at the mercy of pro-slavery tribunal. It was useless to say that this matter would take care of itself. We should attend to it ourselves. In 1787 slavery was supposed to be almost dying. It did not die, and the little draft then let open had kindled a tempest of consuming fire. This slavery was not to be left dying at the end of the war, but dead and buried, its epitaph written by the point of the sword and the bayonet. [Applause.]

The statesmen of the South had been wiser than ours. The South had proved herself sharper than the sharpest Yankee. The South had had sixty years of Presidents to our twenty four; eighteen Supreme Judges to our eleven; twenty-four presiding of the Senate to our eleven; twenty-three Speakers to our twelve. It had trampled on the Indians, and assailed Mexico, in the interest of slavery. It had grasped the virgin soil of the territories, to be polluted by slavery, and sought to convert the flag of freedom into the emblem of oppression.

It had sustained freedom of speech by rifling the mails and maiming and murdering innocent men for a simple expression of opinion. It had overthrown the rights of the people in the Territories. It had shut out schools and churched, these being incompatible with the accursed system. It had come into our pulpits and made the truth a lie. It had made the Senate-chamber a scene of blood. It had tempted, used, and flung away some of the noblest minds in the North. Cringing, slimy creatures might now or hereafter wriggle their way into the Hall of representatives, but hence-forth slavery would get no more great men – no more majestic souls to ruin.

Compromise! Let no man prate of compromise. Defeated by ballots, the South had appealed to bullets. Now let it stand by that appeal. There was not an arm of compromise in all the North long enough to stretch over the sea of blood and the mound of fallen Northern soldiers to shake hands with their murderers on the other side! (Applause.) These dead he-roes had fought and fallen that the cause might succeed.

Their bodies had been shattered that the body politic might be made perfect. We must continue the work dropped from their nerveless hands. Like the noble Curtius, they had thrown themselves into the black chasm opened by slavery, and as coming ages thread the spot, their voices will say, “Tread lightly, tread lightly, for the martyrs of liberty sleep beneath.”

This was pre-eminently a people’s war. It was guided by the man of the people, who had never been behind the great heart of the people. We had done much, and all was hopeful before us. Granted that we had much yet to do, we had the man to complete the grand and glorious work, *and that work was left for his second term of office.* [Tremendous and long-continued applause.]

CITATION: *Daily National Republican*, January 18, 1864, available FULL TEXT via Chronicling America

Reconstruction Amendments (13th, 14th, 15th) (1865-70)

INTRODUCTION

Today, many historians prefer to describe the Reconstruction Amendments as the “Second Founding” of the country, a period following the Civil War when there were conscious and radical efforts to reframe the American constitutional order. The Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery, adopted by Congress in January 1865 and ratified by the states in December 1865, marked the first time that the word “slavery” appeared in the Constitution itself. Republicans intentionally derived the wording abolishing the institution from the Northwest Ordinance (1787) as a way to help vindicate their position that the original intent of the 1787 framers had always been to secure the “ultimate extinction” of slavery in the United States. President Lincoln eagerly supported the amendment—even signing it though his signature was not required—but his assassination in April 1865 prevented him from seeing through the radical change which the amendment seemed to promise. In fact, Lincoln’s death and the elevation of his anti-black successor, Andrew Johnson of Tennessee, was what propelled Republicans in Congress to push for a more sweeping guarantee of civil and political rights for the formerly enslaved in the Fourteenth Amendment, which they adopted in 1866 and which the states ratified in 1868. The Reconstruction-era battles between more radical and egalitarian Republicans in Congress and the more conservative-minded President Johnson were fierce and unrelenting between 1866 and 1868, when Johnson barely survived an impeachment trial. He escaped removal from office by Congress, but the election of 1868 elevated Gen. Ulysses S. Grant to the presidency. It was during the lame duck period between the two figures that congressional Republicans pushed through one last radical amendment, a voting rights measure designed to protect black men. The exclusion of women from this amendment, adopted in 1869 and ratified in 1870, proved disastrous for the women’s suffrage movement. Over the years, a growing number of states authorized female voting in various elections, but it was not until 1920 and the Nineteenth Amendment that American women finally gained constitutional protection for their right to vote.

SOURCE FORMAT: Government documents // WORD COUNT: 535 words

Thirteenth Amendment (JAN 1865 / DEC 1865)

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

ORIGINS: Northwest Ordinance (1787) Art. 6: There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted...

Fourteenth Amendment (1866 / 1868)

Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Section 2. Representatives shall be apportioned among the several states according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each state, excluding Indians not taxed. But when the right to vote at any election for the choice of electors for President and Vice President of the United States, Representatives in Congress, the executive and judicial officers of a state, or the members of the legislature thereof, is denied to any of the male inhabitants of such state, being twenty-one years of age, and citizens of the United States, or in any way abridged, except for participation in rebellion, or other crime, the basis of representation therein shall be reduced in the proportion which the number of such male citizens shall bear to the whole number of male citizens twenty-one years of age in such state.

Section 3. No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any state, who, having previously taken an oath, as a member of Congress, or as an officer of the United States, or as a member of any state legislature, or as an executive or judicial officer of any state, to support the Constitution of the United States, shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof. But Congress may by a vote of two-thirds of each House, remove such disability.

Section 4. The validity of the public debt of the United States, authorized by law, including debts incurred for payment of pensions and bounties for services in suppressing insurrection or rebellion, shall not be questioned. But neither the United States nor any state shall assume or pay any debt or obligation incurred in aid of insurrection or rebellion against the United States, or any claim for the loss or emancipation of any slave; but all such debts, obligations and claims shall be held illegal and void.

Section 5. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

ORIGINS: Civil Rights Act of 1866 SEC. 1: That all persons born in the United States and not subject to any foreign power, excluding Indians not taxed, are hereby declared to be citizens of the United States...

Fifteenth Amendment (1869 / 1870)

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

ORIGINS: Reconstruction Act (1867) SEC. 5: And be it further enacted, That when the people of any one of said rebel States shall have formed a constitution of government in conformity with the Constitution of the United States in all respects, framed by a convention of delegates elected by the male citizens of said State, twenty-one years old and upward, of whatever race, color, or previous condition of servitude...

Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus” (1883)

INTRODUCTION

Emma Lazarus (1849-1887) was born into a large and wealthy Jewish family in Manhattan in the 1840s. Some of her ancestors had escaped from religious persecution in Portugal to Dutch-controlled New Amsterdam (later New York) as early as the seventeenth century. Others immigrated to the United States from German provinces in the eighteenth century. But by the time of the American Civil War, Lazarus was well educated and surrounded by social power and influence. Her father helped publish her earliest poetry, while she was still a teenager. The famous public intellectual Ralph Waldo Emerson later became one of her mentors and influences. But by her early thirties, Lazarus also developed a notable commitment to social justice, especially for Jewish refugees and immigrants. Originally asked to write a poem to help raise funds for the pedestal of the new Statue of Liberty (a gift from France honoring the abolition of slavery and dedicated in 1886), Lazarus decided to produce a sonnet (14-line poem) extolling America not just as a free land but also as a beacon for exiles. This 1883 poem, “The New Colossus,” then became popular and later engraved on the Lady Liberty’s pedestal in 1903.

SOURCE FORMAT: Poem // WORD COUNT: 105 words

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

CITATION: Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus” (1883), Poetry Foundation

Frederick Douglass, Emancipation memorial speech (1876)

INTRODUCTION

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) delivered a powerful speech in April 1876 at the dedication of the first public memorial for Abraham Lincoln in Washington, DC—a monument to his role as an emancipator paid for by contributions from ex-slaves. Douglass was then 58 years old, living in the District of Columbia with his family, and widely regarded as one of the country's most distinguished black leaders. During the post-Civil War period, Douglass had been somewhat disappointed in his attempts to obtain high government office, but nonetheless he had received various diplomatic and political appointments, in recognition for his service to the Republican Party. By 1876, however, Douglass was deeply concerned about the rollback of civil rights as the Reconstruction period was ending. It was also a presidential election year, as well as the nation's centennial. The stakes were high. Douglass thus used his dedication speech, on the eleventh anniversary of Lincoln's assassination, to try to mobilize black action and to attempt to rouse greater commitment from white allies. In 1865, Douglass had famously eulogized Lincoln as "emphatically the black man's president," but here he remembered him as "preeminently the white man's President." The full speech put this depressing shift into thoughtful context, but the juxtaposition was still painfully revealing. After the ceremony, Douglass also expressed dissatisfaction with the composition of the statue, urging an additional memorial to black self-emancipation. In 2020, during the explosion of grief following George Floyd's murder, there were multiple Black Lives Matter protests in Washington calling for the removal of the Emancipation Memorial because of its controversial composition. The statue still stands, but the debate continues.

SOURCE FORMAT: Public speech (excerpt) // WORD COUNT: 880 words

It must be admitted, truth compels me to admit, even here in the presence of the monument we have erected to his memory, Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man.

He was preeminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country. In all his education and feeling he was an American of the Americans. He came into the Presidential chair upon one principle alone, namely, opposition to the extension of slavery. His arguments in furtherance of this policy had their motive and mainspring in his patriotic devotion to the interests of his own race. To protect, defend, and perpetuate slavery in the states where it existed Abraham Lincoln was not less ready than any other President to draw the sword of the nation. He was ready to execute all the supposed guarantees of the United States Constitution in favor of the slave system anywhere inside the slave states. He was willing to pursue, recapture, and send back the fugitive slave to his master, and to suppress a slave rising

for liberty, though his guilty master were already in arms against the Government. The race to which we belong were not the special objects of his consideration. Knowing this, I concede to you, my white fellow-citizens, a preeminence in this worship at once full and supreme. First, midst, and last, you and yours were the objects of his deepest affection and his most earnest solicitude. You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his stepchildren; children by adoption, children by forces of circumstances and necessity. To you it especially belongs to sound his praises, to preserve and perpetuate his memory, to multiply his statues, to hang his pictures high upon your walls, and commend his example, for to you he was a great and glorious friend and benefactor. Instead of supplanting you at his altar, we would exhort you to build high his monuments; let them be of the most costly material, of the most cunning workmanship; let their forms be symmetrical, beautiful, and perfect; let their bases be upon solid rocks, and their summits lean against the unchanging blue, overhanging sky, and let them endure forever! But while in the abundance of your wealth, and in the fullness of your just and patriotic devotion, you do all this, we entreat you to despise not the humble offering we this day unveil to view; for while Abraham Lincoln saved for you a country, he delivered us from a bondage, according to Jefferson, one hour of which was worse than ages of the oppression your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose.

...I have said that President Lincoln was a white man, and shared the prejudices common to his countrymen towards the colored race. Looking back to his times and to the condition of his country, we are compelled to admit that this unfriendly feeling on his part may be safely set down as one element of his wonderful success in organizing the loyal American people for the tremendous conflict before them, and bringing them safely through that conflict. His great mission was to accomplish two things: first, to save his country from dismemberment and ruin; and, second, to free his country from the great crime of slavery. To do one or the other, or both, he must have the earnest sympathy and the powerful cooperation of his loyal fellow-countrymen. Without this primary and essential condition to success his efforts must have been vain and utterly fruitless. Had he put the abolition of slavery before the salvation of the Union, he would have inevitably driven from him a powerful class of the American people and rendered resistance to rebellion impossible. Viewed from the genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined.

Though Mr. Lincoln shared the prejudices of his white fellow-countrymen against the Negro, it is hardly necessary to say that in his heart of hearts he loathed and hated slavery. . . . The man who could say, "Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war shall soon pass away, yet if God wills it continue till all the wealth piled by two hundred years of bondage shall have been wasted, and each drop of blood drawn by the lash shall have been paid for by one drawn by the sword, the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether," gives all needed proof of his feeling on the subject of slavery. He was willing, while the South was loyal, that it should have its pound of flesh, because he thought that it was so nominated in the bond; but farther than this no earthly power could make him go.

CITATION: ORATION IN MEMORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN, delivered at the unveiling of the Freedmen's Monument in Memory of Abraham Lincoln, in Lincoln Park, Washington, DC

Martin Luther King, Jr., I Have a Dream Speech (1963)

INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) was a Baptist minister and world-famous civil rights activist. King grew up in Georgia, the son of a well-known pastor, graduated from Morehouse College as a teenager and then studied theology in Pennsylvania before receiving a doctorate from Boston University. He married Coretta Scott, whom he met in Boston, they started a family, and he began his ministry in Montgomery, Alabama. He became a national celebrity following his public role during the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott. In 1963, King's grassroots organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, teamed up with local civil rights groups in nearby Birmingham to initiate a protest campaign against one of the South's most notoriously segregated cities. State and local government officials tried to stop these protests, arresting several campaign organizers. While detained in the Birmingham city jail for leading a march without a permit, King responded to criticism from eight white local clergymen who had denounced "outside" activism, while appealing for patience in what they termed, "A Call for Unity." King's now well-known response, dated April 16, 1963, made the case for nonviolent confrontation. King also expressed sharp disappointment with white moderates, whom he called "the Negro's great stumbling block" in the fight for racial equality. This was not a sentiment that he repeated in his even more famous "I Have a Dream Speech" during the March on Washington just four months later. In 1964, at the age of 35, King became the youngest-ever winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. He was assassinated four years later in Memphis, Tennessee.

SOURCE FORMAT: Speech (Excerpt) // WORD COUNT: (1,100 words)

August 28, 1963, Steps of Lincoln Memorial, March on Washington

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.: Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

But 100 years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. And so we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition. In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check.

When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was

to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men — yes, Black men as well as white men — would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked insufficient funds.

But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt.

We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism.

Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quick sands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children...

...I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to South Carolina, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our Northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

So even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, one day right down in Alabama little Black boys and Black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning: My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrims' pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true. And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heighthening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. But not only that, let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, Black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last. Free at last. Thank God almighty, we are free at last.

—Excerpted from Martin Luther King, Jr., *I Have a Dream Speech* (1963), [FULL TEXT](#) via NPR

Amanda Gorman, “The Hill We Climb” (2021)

INTRODUCTION

Amanda Gorman was only 22 years old when she created a sensation by reading the poem, “The Hill We Climb” at Joe Biden’s presidential inauguration ceremony on January 20, 2021. Gorman had been publishing her poetry since the age of 16. In 2017, at the age of 19, Gorman became the first National Youth Poet Laureate. Only three presidents before Biden had ever asked poets to recite at their inaugural ceremony: John F. Kennedy (Robert Frost in 1961), Bill Clinton (Maya Angelou in 1993 and Miller Williams in 1997), Barack Obama (Elizabeth Anderson in 2009 and Richard Blanco in 2013). Gorman told interviewers afterward that she was still writing the poem for the Biden inaugural when the January 6th insurrection had erupted. She says stayed up late that night and finished in a frenzy of determination.

SOURCE FORMAT: Poem // WORD COUNT: 715 words

When day comes, we ask ourselves, where can we find light in this never-ending shade?

The loss we carry. A sea we must wade.

We braved the belly of the beast.

We’ve learned that quiet isn’t always peace, and the norms and notions of what “just” is isn’t always justice.

And yet the dawn is ours before we knew it.

Somehow we do it.

Somehow we weathered and witnessed a nation that isn’t broken, but simply unfinished.

We, the successors of a country and a time where a skinny Black girl descended from slaves and raised by a single mother can dream of becoming president, only to find herself reciting for one.

And, yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine, but that doesn’t mean we are striving to form a union that is perfect.

We are striving to forge our union with purpose.

To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and conditions of man.

And so we lift our gaze, not to what stands between us, but what stands before us.

We close the divide because we know to put our future first, we must first put our differences aside.

We lay down our arms so we can reach out our arms to one another.

We seek harm to none and harmony for all.

Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true.

That even as we grieved, we grew.

That even as we hurt, we hoped.

That even as we tired, we tried.

That we'll forever be tied together, victorious.

Not because we will never again know defeat, but because we will never again sow division.

Scripture tells us to envision that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid.

If we're to live up to our own time, then victory won't lie in the blade, but in all the bridges we've made.

That is the promise to glade, the hill we climb, if only we dare.

It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit.

It's the past we step into and how we repair it.

We've seen a force that would shatter our nation, rather than share it.

Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy.

And this effort very nearly succeeded.

But while democracy can be periodically delayed, it can never be permanently defeated.

In this truth, in this faith we trust, for while we have our eyes on the future, history has its eyes on us.

This is the era of just redemption.

We feared at its inception.

We did not feel prepared to be the heirs of such a terrifying hour.

But within it we found the power to author a new chapter, to offer hope and laughter to ourselves.

So, while once we asked, how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe, now we assert, how could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?

We will not march back to what was, but move to what shall be: a country that is bruised but whole, benevolent but bold, fierce and free.

We will not be turned around or interrupted by intimidation because we know our inaction and inertia will be the inheritance of the next generation, become the future.

Our blunders become their burdens.

But one thing is certain.

If we merge mercy with might, and might with right, then love becomes our legacy and change our children's birthright.

So let us leave behind a country better than the one we were left.

Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest, we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one.

We will rise from the golden hills of the West.

We will rise from the windswept Northeast where our forefathers first realized revolution.

We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the Midwestern states.

We will rise from the sun-baked South.

We will rebuild, reconcile, and recover.

And every known nook of our nation and every corner called our country, our people diverse and beautiful, will emerge battered and beautiful.

When day comes, we step out of the shade of flame and unafraid.

The new dawn balloons as we free it.

For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it.

If only we're brave enough to be it.

CITATION: Amanda Gorman, "The Hill We Climb," (2021), FULL TEXT via CNBC