

Black Activism in the Antebellum North

A Lesson Plan

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The history of free African Americans in the antebellum North is a vital though understudied component of American history. For students, an understanding of black protest in the early nineteenth century contextualizes discussion of the abolitionists, who cannot properly be understood without recourse to those who inspired them, and who they claimed to represent. Additionally, the larger significances of the Civil War and Reconstruction, which brought about a revolution (though an unfulfilled one) in civil rights, are impossible to comprehend without an appreciation of a long tradition of civil rights activism stretching back to the earliest free black communities. Finally, incorporating free blacks into American history erodes stereotypes that continue to linger in textbooks and the popular historical consciousness. Slavery and racism were not southern phenomena but national ones; incorporating free blacks into the national story thus complicates considerably popular narratives of American history predicated on the triumphalism of Northern free market values.

If simply including free blacks into history courses is difficult, it is a much larger challenge to convey to students the subtleties of scholarly debates over the nature of African-American protest in the antebellum period. Few students are prepared for such discussions. College and high school textbooks now generally acknowledge the significance of free black communities in American history, but these still receive precious little analysis amid the huge range of other topics addressed in the standard survey of American history. Unsurprisingly, textbooks specializing in African-American history tend to do a far better job. Still, resources for moving beyond the lecture and textbook remain scarce.

The teaching unit included with this essay is designed to introduce students to basic concepts in the history of free blacks and black protest thought in the antebellum period. It is intended as a resource for teachers as well as an example of how educators might begin to incorporate discussions of antebellum free blacks into their class sessions. A range of historical methodologies has been presented in an effort to engage a similarly broad range of learning styles. For instructors' convenience, I have placed this lesson plan online at <http://academic.bowdoin.edu/faculty/P/prael/>.

Ultimately, the questions raised by studying a relatively small group of marginalized Americans yields intriguing — and disturbing — suggestions about the nature America itself. What do we make of a nation that freed northern slaves as a consequence of the American Revolution, only to deny them equality once freed? How do our views of Jacksonian democracy change when we consider that race relations became more tension-filled at the very time when suffrage restrictions for white men fell? How do we contend with the paradox of a North that provided for the destruction of slavery after the American Revolution, but continued to deny blacks the basic rights

of citizenship and in fact pioneered forms of segregation later used in the South after Reconstruction? How does our view of the coming of the Civil War change when we consider a long tradition of Northern black activists arguing as much against Northern prejudice as against Southern slavery? These questions, once the province of a handful of radical scholars, can now be broached by students in high school and college classrooms.

MATERIALS FOR LESSON PLAN

I. Map exercise

These maps are intended to introduce students to the physical distribution of the antebellum black population, and orient them geographically for the remainder of the lesson. Instructors may show the following maps to the class as a whole (PowerPoint slides are provided in the online version of this assignment), and solicit student reactions.

Download maps from lesson plan website.

Maps:

Map 1: African American population, 1850

Questions:

1. Where did the bulk of the African-American population live in 1850?
2. What might account for these settlement patterns?
3. Where in the Northern states was the African-American population concentrated?

Map 2: Percent of population African American, 1850

Questions:

4. How does this map differ from the last?
5. Where did African Americans comprise the largest percentage of the general population?
6. How concentrated were African Americans in the Northern states?

Map 3: Percent of African-American population free, 1850

Questions:

7. Where did the bulk of free African Americans live in 1850?
8. What factors may account for the distribution of the free black population?
9. What factors may account for the concentration of free African Americans in the southern population?

II. Data Analysis: African Americans on the Eve of the Civil War

These tables offer a range of basic statistics on black life. They are drawn from the federal census of 1860. Every ten years, the government collects basic information on the American population. The

resulting census data offers historians a treasure-trove of information about everyday Americans who might not otherwise have left traces in the historical record.

Instructors may choose to present and discuss these tables with the entire class, or may divide the class up into four groups, each of which may consider its table and questions on its own before reporting back to the class. It is suggested that, because Table 1 is larger, the class as a whole consider it before moving into three groups to analyze the smaller tables.

Region	White		Free black		Slave		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
NewEngland	3,110,480	99.2%	24,711	0.8%	0	0.0%	3,135,191	100.0%
Mid-Atlantic	7,327,548	98.2%	131,272	1.8%	18	0.0%	7,458,838	100.0%
Midwest	7,833,904	99.2%	65,719	0.8%	17	0.0%	7,899,640	100.0%
Upper South	4,463,501	76.4%	183,369	3.1%	1,195,985	20.5%	5,842,855	100.0%
Lower South	3,573,199	55.9%	67,418	1.1%	2,754,526	43.1%	6,395,143	100.0%
Far West	382,149	98.9%	4,259	1.1%	0	0.0%	386,408	100.0%
United States	26,690,781	85.8%	476,748	1.5%	3,950,546	12.7%	31,118,075	100.0%

Table 1: White and Black Population, 1860

SOURCE: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, "Historical, Demographic, Economic, and Social Data: The United States, 1790-1970" [Computer file] (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 197?).

Questions:

1. In what region of the country did free African Americans constitute the largest percentage of the total population?
2. Where did enslaved African Americans constitute the largest percentage of the total population?

3. What might account for the relative size of free black and slave populations in each area? That is, why were free blacks numerous where they were, and why were enslaved African Americans numerous where they were?
4. Based on this table, make some conjectures about what life might have been like for free African Americans in the northern states. Consider the racial attitudes they may have confronted, their ability to find jobs, and the strength of their communities.

Table 2: Location of African-American Population, 1860

Region	Rural	Urban
New England	36.5%	63.5%
Mid-Atlantic	50.3%	49.7%
Midwest	67.0%	33.0%
Upper South	61.5%	38.5%
Lower South	69.1%	30.9%

SOURCE: "1860 Free Population - Preliminary," Steven Ruggles and Matthew Sobek, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 2.0 (Minneapolis: Historical Census Projects, University of Minnesota, 1997).

Questions:

1. In what region was the African-American population most likely to live in rural settings? In what region was it most likely to live in urban ones?
2. What might account for these differences?
3. This table does not distinguish between free and enslaved African Americans. Given the information in Table 1, can you make some conjectures about the free black population of the South? Do you think free blacks in the South would be more or less likely than slaves to live in urban areas?
4. Imagine the kinds of work free African Americans in the North may have undertaken in rural and urban areas.

Table 3: Percent of Free Population Claiming to Hold Some Property, 1860

Region	White	Free black	Difference
North	18.1%	11.7%	6.4%
Upper South	19.4%	9.8%	9.5%
Lower South	18.8%	17.9%	0.9%

SOURCE: "1860 Free Population - Preliminary," Steven Ruggles and Matthew Sobek, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 2.0 (Minneapolis: Historical Census Projects, University of Minnesota, 1997).

Questions:

1. In which region were free African Americans most likely to claim some property? In which was the free black population least likely?
2. In which region were free African Americans nearly as likely as white Americans to hold property? In which were they the least likely?
3. What general conclusions might we draw from these data about free black life in the three regions of the United States?
4. Based on this information, draw some conjectures about what life might have been like for free black Northerners.

Table 4: Mean Property Claimed by White and Free Black People, 1860

Region	White	Free black	Black as % of White
North	\$583	\$92	16%
Upper South	\$938	\$30	3%
Lower South	\$1,388	\$206	15%
Nation	\$751	\$85	11%

SOURCE: "1860 Free Population - Preliminary," Steven Ruggles and Matthew Sobek, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 2.0 (Minneapolis: Historical Census Projects, University of Minnesota, 1997).

Questions:

1. According to these data, in which region did free African Americans claim the most average property? In which region did they claim the least?
2. In which region did free African Americans own the most property *relative to white Americans*?
3. Based on this information, draw some conjectures about what life might have been like for free black Northerners.
4. The table is useful, but may not portray the complete picture. Can you think of ways that the table may present an incomplete portrait of free black property owning? What additional factors might a more detailed investigation consider?

III. Image analysis

The decades before the Civil War witnessed vast changes in the printing industries. New technologies, such as the steam press, made printing cheaper than ever. The expansion of print led to a profusion of new tracts, pamphlets, and books, which spread ideas with hitherto unheard of speed. While the print revolution of the early nineteenth century helped foster democracy in American life, it also furthered racial prejudice. In particular, the new printing technologies permitted the first cheaply made and broadly distributed racial caricatures of African Americans. The following images illustrate the flavor of racism in the antebellum North. Instructors should prepare students to encounter the offensive depictions contained in them, and be sure to discuss students' reactions to them as a class.

Arrange three "stations" in class, one for each image. Divide the class into thirds, with each group assigned to an image. Each group is given a specified time to examine, discuss, and take notes on its image. Then each group moves on to the next image. Once each group has had a chance to examine all images, the class may reconvene as a whole, to consider the questions for class discussion below.

Download images from the lesson plan website.

Images:

Image 1: "How you find yourself?"

Etchings such as this mocked the social pretensions of free black urbanites who, through their habits of consumption and display, were thought to desire social status above their stations. This image was one of a series, entitled "Life in Philadelphia" by political cartoonist Edward Clay, which mocked the behavior of a range of city dwellers, white and black. The text on this image reads:

MR. CEASAR: "How you find yourself did hot weader Miss Chloe?"

MISS CHLOE: "Pretty well I tank you Mr. Cesar[,] only I aspire too much!"

The humor here, such as it is, depends on a malapropism, or a ludicrous misuses of words that signals their speaker's inability to master proper English. This form of parody helped to define stereotypes of free blacks in nineteenth-century America, and continued well into the twentieth century.

SOURCE: Lithograph by Edward Clay, *Life in Philadelphia*, plate 4 (Philadelphia: S. Hart, 1829); courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia.

Image 2: "The Results of Abolitionism!"

This image plays with hierarchies of space and labor to paint a fearful picture of the consequences of racial equality. In it, black workers in the upper reaches of the construction site perform the skilled labor of laying bricks, while white workers — identified as Irish immigrants by the epithet "bog-trotters" — perform unskilled labor at the bottom. Two well-dressed capitalists look on — a black man managing the workers, and a white man who oversees the entire

BLACK WORKER, TOP-LEFT: "Bring up the mortar you white rascals."

BLACK WORKER, TOP-RIGHT: "You bog-trotters, come along with them bricks."

BLACK SUPERVISOR: "White man Hurry up those bricks."

WHITE CAPITALIST: "Sambo hurry up the white laborers."

SOURCE: Wood engraving, artist unknown (Philadelphia, ca. 1835); courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia.

Image 3: Grand Bobalition or 'GREAT ANNIBERSARY FUSSIBLE.'

One of a series of "bobalition" broadsides lampoons the manners and speech of Northern free blacks. The image depicts a black militia troop marching in a public honoring of July 14 (here rendered "Uly 14, 18021"), the date on which African Americans frequently celebrated the abolition of the international slave trade. The text is a parody, consisting of a letter of instruction from "Cesar Crappo" to "Cato Cudjoe, Sheef Marshal" for the ceremonies. The speech is rendered in what was alleged to be black vernacular speech, and seeks to reveal blacks' incapacity to maintain order in their public behavior. A typical bit of the orders reads:

If any out of order, and he no get in agin, when you tell um, you hab de authority of de shochietee for hit him rap on de head. But you muss on no count trike him on de shin, else you make he nose bleed, and so stain he ruffle shirt and he nice white trowsaloon. But from de well known lub of order and good principle which hab always been de character of de members of de Shocietee, I tink you will hab no need to exhort to such displeasant method of dissumpline.

The remainder of the broadside includes parodies of the toasts offered at the public banquet following the parade, and songs to accompany the festivities.

SOURCE: Woodcut with letterpress (Boston, 1821), Broadside Collection, portfolio 53, no. 11, Rare Book and special Collections Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Questions:

In examining the images, challenge students to think critically about their central messages and how they are conveyed.

- In what ways does the image seem to depart from the likely reality of black life in the antebellum period?
- What is the consequence for the image's argument in these departures? In other words, how does stereotype help further the images' message?
- What specific visual cues help the image make its statement?
- Why might the image have had some impact among its viewers in the antebellum North?
- How might African Americans have countered the arguments contained in the image?

IV. Documents

Here are five important documents written by free black Northerners in the decades before the Civil War. Together, they help capture the range of concerns captured in the antebellum black protest tradition. This exercise will introduce students to some of the central ideas African-American leaders set forth in their writings.

Divide the class into five groups, each of which will be assigned a document. If possible, prepare groups and assign readings before class. Students in each group work together to read through the document and address the five questions listed below. Once groups have had time to discuss their documents, reconvene the class. Each group may then present its document to the class. Time permitting, the class may then consider the larger questions for consideration listed below.

Document questions:

1. Who does the author's audience seem to be? For whom were the words of the document intended?

2. What does the author of the document seem to want? If several things, what seems to be the central thing? Make sure you highlight the parts of the document that suggest the author's central goal.
3. What argument does the author make to go about achieving the goal?
4. Do you think this argument would have worked to convince the author's intended audience? In what ways yes and in what ways no?
5. As a modern reader, what parts of the argument seem persuasive to you and which seem less so? Why?

Questions for consideration:

1. What, according to the documents, were the major problems confronting African Americans?
2. What were some of the ways African Americans wanted to change American society?
3. On what kinds of values did they base their appeals? In other words, how did they hope to change the minds of their audiences?
4. In what ways might their arguments still have power today? In what ways might their message fail to connect to people today? Remember that just as they spoke to different audiences in their own day, they would have to speak to a variety of audiences today.
5. Do these documents reveal any differences among African Americans? If so, about what was there tension? How might these tensions have led to differing ideas on how best to achieve equality?

V. Extension: Group exercise

Starting in 1830, free African Americans in the northern states met periodically in national and state conventions to discuss important matters of interest to them. These conventions spoke boldly on the key issues of the day. Delegates met in committees to formulate statements, and then debated these statements on the floor of the convention.

Hold your own black national convention. Divide the class into five groups. Each will serve as a committee designed to respond to one of the following issues. Groups may be given time outside or inside of class to research their topic. Then the group should prepare a two-page statement on the topic. The statement should take one page to describe the issue and what made it controversial, and the second should offer the group's stance on the issue. How do you think free black Northerners would have responded? The statements may then be read and debated in class, on the "convention" floor.

The issues:

1. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850
2. Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)
3. The guerilla war in "Bleeding Kansas"

4. The rise of the Republican Party
5. The Supreme Court's decisions in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857)
6. John Brown's raid on the federal armory at Harper's Ferry, Virginia (1859)

1. A Free Woman of Color Lectures on Prejudice and Morality, 1832

Maria Stewart was born in 1803 to free black parents in Hartford, Connecticut. Orphaned at an early age, she worked as a domestic for a white family until 1823, when she married James Stewart, who worked in Boston's maritime trade and was active in local African-American affairs. Following her husband's death, she fell under the tutelage of white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, who published several essays of hers in his newspaper, The Liberator. Stewart's essays and speeches combined a concern with moral education with racial activism. The first African-American woman publicly to address a mixed-race audience, Stewart called on all African Americans to uplift the race by uplifting themselves. Her message attracted some followers, but drew fire as well. Criticized by whites who rejected her abolitionism, she also faced the ire of some in Boston's black community who thought that in publicly lecturing black men to work harder for equality this young woman had overstepped the bounds of acceptable female behavior. Disillusioned, Maria Stewart left Boston in 1833. Though she became an educator and continued for work for racial uplift, she never regained the prominence she had earned in the early 1830s.

I have heard much respecting the horrors of slavery; but may Heaven forbid that the generality of my color throughout these United States should experience any more of its horrors than to be a servant of servants, or hewers of wood and drawers of water! Tell us no more of southern slavery; for with few exceptions, although I may be very erroneous in my opinion, yet I consider our condition but little better than that. Yet, after all, methinks there are no chains so galling as the chains of ignorance--no fetters so binding as those that bind the soul, and exclude it from the vast field of useful and scientific knowledge. O, had I received the advantages of early education, my ideas would, ere now, have expanded far and wide. . . .

And such is the powerful force of prejudice. Let our girls possess what amiable qualities of soul they may; let their characters be fair and spotless as innocence itself; let their natural taste and ingenuity be what they may; it is impossible for scarce an individual of them to rise above the condition of servants. Ah! why is this cruel and unfeeling distinction? Is it merely because God has made our complexion to vary? If it be, O shame to soft, relenting humanity! . . . Yet, after all, methinks were the American free people of color to turn their attention more assiduously to moral worth and intellectual improvement, this would be the result: prejudice would gradually diminish, and the whites would be compelled to say, unloose those fetters! . . .

The whites have so long and so loudly proclaimed the theme of equal rights and privileges, that our souls have caught the flame also, ragged as we are. As far as our merit deserves, we feel a common desire to rise above the condition of servants and drudges. . . .

My beloved brethren, as Christ has died in vain for those who will not accept of offered mercy, so will it be vain for the advocates of freedom to spend their breath in our behalf, unless with united hearts and souls you make some mighty efforts to raise your sons, and daughters from the horrible state of servitude and degradation in which they are placed. . . . As the prayers and tears of Christians will avail the finally impenitent nothing; neither will the prayers and tears of the friends of humanity avail us any thing, unless we possess a spirit of virtuous emulation within our breasts. Did the pilgrims, when they first landed on these shores, quietly compose themselves, and say, "the Britons have all the money and all the power, and we must continue their servants forever?" Did they sluggishly sigh and say, "our lot is hard, the Indians own the soil, and we cannot cultivate it?" No; they first made powerful efforts to raise themselves and then God raised up those illustrious patriots Washington and Lafayette to assist and defend them. And, my brethren, have you made a powerful effort? Have you prayed the Legislature for mercy's sake to grant you all the rights and privileges of free citizens, that your daughters may raise to that degree of respectability which true merit deserves, and your sons above the servile situations which most of them fill?

SOURCE: Maria W. Stewart, "Lecture Delivered At The Franklin Hall, Boston, September 21, 1832."

2. An African-American Bishop Recalls Conflicts over Styles of Worship (1888)

Born in 1811 to free black parents in Charleston, South Carolina, Daniel Alexander Payne educated himself for a position in the ministry. He moved North for seminary training, and in 1841 he joined the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the most important black church in the nineteenth century. He rose quickly, becoming a bishop in 1852. From this position he championed education and a "respectable" piety for African Americans. His Recollections, published well after the Civil War, recall his earlier days, when church work required him to visit parishes throughout the country. This passage reflects on the tensions he encountered in seeking to shape the spiritual practices of everyday black churchgoers.

About this time I attended a "bush meeting," where I went to please the pastor whose circuit I was visiting. After the sermon they formed a ring, and with coats off sung, clapped their hands and stamped their feet in a most ridiculous and heathenish way. I requested the pastor to go and stop their dancing. At his request they stopped their dancing and clapping of hands, but remained singing and rocking their bodies to and fro. This they did for about fifteen minutes. I then went, and taking their leader by the arm requested him to desist and to sit down and sing in a rational manner. I told him also that it was a heathenish way to worship and disgraceful to themselves, the race, and the Christian name. In that instance they broke up their ring; but would not sit down, and walked sullenly away.

After the sermon in the afternoon, having another opportunity of speaking alone to this young leader of the singing and clapping ring, he said: "Sinners won't get converted unless there is a ring." Said I: "You might sing till you fell down dead, and you would fail to convert a single sinner, because nothing but the Spirit of God and the word of God can convert sinners." He replied: "The Spirit of God works upon people in different ways. At camp-meeting there must be a ring here, a ring there, a ring over yonder, or sinners will not get converted." This was his idea, and it is also that of many others. . . .

I have remonstrated with a number of pastors for permitting these practices, which vary somewhat in different localities, but have been invariably met with the response that he could not succeed in restraining them, and an attempt to compel them to cease would simply drive them away from our Church. I suppose that with the most stupid and headstrong it is an incurable religious disease, but it is with me a question whether it would not be better to let such people go out of the Church than remain in it to perpetuate their evil practice and thus do two things: disgrace the Christian name and corrupt others. Any one who knows human nature must infer the result after such midnight practices to be that the day after they are unfit for labor, and that at the end of the dance their exhaustion would render them an easy prey to Satan.

How needful it is to have an intelligent ministry to teach these people who hold to this ignorant mode of worship the true method of serving God. . . . The time is at hand when the ministry of the A. M. E. Church must drive out this heathenish mode of worship or drive out all the intelligence, refinement, and practical Christians who may be in her bosom.

SOURCE: Daniel Alexander Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (Nashville, Tenn.: A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1888).

3. Address of the Colored National Convention to the People of the United States, 1853

In 1830, free black leaders throughout the North met in the first of many national conventions. The movement they began continued through the antebellum period, into the Civil War and early period of Reconstruction, and resumed again in the late nineteenth century. Free black Northerners, largely denied access to the mechanisms of formal politics, instead organized themselves into conventions, where they debated the problems they confronted, considered options for their remedy, and addressed a broader public with their concerns. Written appeals to the citizens of the United States were staples of the proceedings produced and published by black conventions. The most powerful of these appeared in minutes of the 1853 national convention. Penned largely by Frederick Douglass, the work represents a master of rhetoric at the height of his game. Douglass's gift was not so much his originality as his ability to concisely and vibrantly express the moral outrage – the moral outrage due a nation which lauded itself on its commitment to freedom while denying liberty to people of African descent. Marshaling potent moral claims and facts drawn from American history, the address exhibited a tension which characterized much of the antebellum black protest tradition – an aggressive demand for redress through appeal to the nation's most cherished principles.

We are Americans, and as Americans, we would speak to Americans. We address you not as aliens nor as exiles, humbly asking to be permitted to dwell among you in peace; but we address you as American citizens asserting their rights on their own native soil. . . .

Notwithstanding the impositions and deprivations which have fettered us- notwithstanding the disabilities and liabilities, pending and impending- notwithstanding the cunning, cruel, and scandalous efforts to blot out that right, we declare that we are, and of right we ought to be *American Citizens*. We claim this right, and we claim all the rights and privileges, and duties which, properly, attach to it. . . .

By birth, we are American citizens; by the principles of the Declaration of Independence, we are American citizens; within the meaning of the United States Constitution, we are American citizens; by the facts of history, and the admissions of American statesmen, we are American citizens; by the hardships and trials endured; by the courage and fidelity displayed by our ancestors in defining the liberties and in achieving the independence of our land, we are American citizens. . . .

As a people, we feel ourselves to be not only deeply injured, but grossly misunderstood. . . . What stone has been left unturned to degrade us? What hand has refused to fan the flame of popular prejudice against us? What American artist has not caricatured us? What wit has not laughed at us in our wretchedness? What songster has not made merry over our depressed spirits? What press has not ridiculed and contemned us? . . .

Now, what is the motive for ignoring and discouraging our improvement in this country? The answer is ready. The intelligent and upright free man of color is an unanswerable argument in favor of liberty, and a killing condemnation of American slavery. It is easily seen that, in proportion to the progress of the free man of color, in knowledge, temperance, industry, and righteousness, in just that proportion will he endanger the stability of slavery; hence, all the powers of slavery are exerted to prevent the elevation of the free people of color.

The force of fifteen hundred million dollars is arrayed against us; hence, the *press*, the pulpit, and the platform, against all the natural promptings of uncontaminated manhood, point their deadly missiles of ridicule, scorn and contempt at us; and bid us, on pain of being pierced through and through, to remain in our degradation.

SOURCE: *Proceedings of the Colored National Convention Held in Rochester, July 6th, 7th, and 8th 1853* (Rochester, N.Y.: Printed at the Office of Frederick Douglass' Paper, 1853).

4. A Black Nationalist Manifesto, 1854

In 1854, a group of African Americans met in Cleveland, Ohio to discuss options for leaving America. The force behind the convention was Martin Delany (1820-1876), who many scholars call the foremost black nationalist of his day. Born into a free black family in Charleston, West Virginia, Delany moved to western Pennsylvania. There he learned the newspaper business, eventually becoming Frederick Douglass's co-editor for a time. He also attended medical school at Harvard University, where white students rejected the presence of a black student, and forced him out. The black nationalism of the 1850s, which is expressed in this excerpt from Delany's address to the convention, grew out of frustration with such prejudice. The new ideas stressed the need for black people to protect themselves from racism through the exercise of political power — in America, if possible, but elsewhere, if need be.

No people can be free who themselves do not constitute an essential part of the ruling element of the country in which they live. . . . The liberty of no man is secure, who controls not his own political destiny. . . . A people, to be free, must necessarily be *their own rulers*. . . .

But we have fully discovered and comprehended the great political disease with which we are affected, the cause of its origin and continuance; and what is now left for us to do, is to discover and apply a sovereign remedy—a healing balm to a sorely diseased body—a wrecked but not entirely shattered system. We propose for this disease a remedy. That remedy is Emigration. . . .

Our friends in this and other countries, anxious for our elevation, have for years been erroneously urging us to lose our identity as a distinct race, declaring that we were the same as other people; while at the very same time their own representative was traversing the world and propagating the doctrine in favor of *a universal Anglo-Saxon predominance*. . . . The truth is, we are not identical with the Anglo-Saxon or any other race of the Caucasian or pure white type of the human family, and the sooner we know and acknowledge this truth, the better for ourselves and posterity. . . . We have then inherent traits, attributes—so to speak—and native characteristics, peculiar to our race—whether pure or mixed blood—and all that is required of us is to cultivate these and develop them in their purity, to make them desirable and emulated by the rest of the world.

. . . The great issue, sooner or later, upon which must be disputed the world's destiny, will be a question of black and white; and every individual will be called upon for his identity with one or the other. The blacks and colored races are four-sixths of all the population of the world; and these people are fast tending to a common cause with each other. The white races are but one-third of the population of the globe—or one of them to two of us—and it cannot much longer continue, that two-thirds will passively submit to the universal domination of this one-third. And it is notorious that the only progress made in territorial domain, in the last three centuries, by the whites, has been a usurpation and encroachment on the rights and native soil of some of the colored races. . . .

For more than two thousands years, the determined aim of the whites has been to crush the colored races wherever found. With a determined will, they have sought and pursued them in every quarter of the globe. The Anglo-Saxon has taken the lead in this work of universal subjugation. But the Anglo-American stands pre-eminent for deeds of injustice and acts of oppression, unparalleled perhaps in the annals of modern history. . . .

Should we encounter an enemy with artillery, a prayer will not stay the cannon shot; neither will the kind words nor smiles of philanthropy shield his spear from piercing us through the heart. We must meet mankind, then, as they meet us—prepared for the worst, though we may hope for the best. Our submission does not gain for us an increase of friends nor respectability—as the white race will only respect those who oppose their usurpation, and acknowledge as equals those who will not submit to their rule. This may be no new discovery in political economy, but it certainly is a subject worthy the consideration of the black race. . . .

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SOURCE: Martin R. Delany, "Political Destiny of the Colored Race, on the American Continent," *Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People, held at Cleveland, Ohio, August 24, 1854* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: A. A. Anderson, Printer, 1854).

5. A Call for Morality over Money, 1859

Born to free black parents in Baltimore, Maryland in 1825, Frances Ellen Watkins spent her early years in the school of her uncle William Watkins, a renowned black activist, educator, and essayist. It was little surprise when she herself took up the mantle of black activism in the 1850s, using her training and literary talents to argue on behalf of emancipation and equality. The following excerpt from an essay Watkins published shortly before the Civil War reflects her thinking at this time. In it, she illustrates a style of protest that was radical, but which nonetheless fell within prescribed roles for middle-class Northern women. These roles, as suggested by nineteenth-century America's "cult of true womanhood," stressed women's roles as moral nurturers. Women such as Watkins boldly applied this largely domestic ideal to matters of public concern, such as the fate of African Americans.

. . . Leading ideas impress themselves upon communities and countries. A thought is evolved and thrown out among the masses, they receive it and it becomes inter-woven with their mental and moral life--if the thought be good the receivers are benefited, and helped onward to the truer life; if it is not, the reception of the idea is a detriment. . . .

In America, where public opinion exerts such a sway, a leading is success. The politician who chooses for his candidate not the best man but the most available one.--The money getter, who virtually says let me make money, though I coin it from blood and extract it from tears-- The minister, who stoops from his high position to the slave power, and in a word all who barter principle for expediency, the true and right for the available and convenient, are worshipers at the shrine of success. And we, or at least some of us, upon whose faculties the rust of centuries has lain, are beginning to awake and worship at the same altar, and bow to the idols.

The idea if I understand it aright, that is interweaving itself with our thoughts, is that the greatest need of our people at present is money, and that as money is a symbol of power, the possession of it will gain for us the rights which power and prejudice now deny us.--And it may be true that the richer we are the nearer we are to social and political equality; but somehow, (and I may not fully comprehend the idea,) it does not seem to me that money, as little as we possess of it, is our greatest want. Neither do I think that the possession of intelligence and talent is our greatest want. If I understand our greatest wants aright they strike deeper than any want that gold or knowledge can supply. We want more soul, a higher cultivation of all our spiritual faculties. We need more unselfishness, earnestness and integrity. Our greatest need is not gold or silver, talent or genius, but true men and true women. We have millions of our race in the prison house of slavery, but have we yet a single Moses in freedom. And if we had who among us would be led by him? . . .

We need men and women whose hearts are the homes of a high and lofty enthusiasm, and a noble devotion to the cause of emancipation, who are ready and willing to lay time, talent and money on the altar of universal freedom. We have money among us, but how much of it is spent to bring deliverance to our captive brethren? Are our wealthiest men the most liberal sustainers of the Anti-slavery enterprise? Or does the bare fact of their having money, really help mould public opinion and reverse its sentiments? We need what money cannot buy and what affluence is too beggarly to purchase. Earnest, self sacrificing souls that will stamp themselves not only on the present but the future.

Let us not then defer all our noble opportunities till we get rich. And here I am, not aiming to enlist a fanatical crusade against the desire for riches, but I do protest against chaining down the soul, with its Heaven endowed faculties and God given attributes to the one idea of getting money as stepping into power or even gaining our rights in common with others. The respect that is only bought by gold is not worth much. It is no honor to shake hands politically with men who whip women and steal babies. If this government has no call for our services, no aim for your children, we have the greater need of them to build up a true manhood and womanhood for ourselves. The important lesson we should learn and be able to teach, is how to make every gift, whether gold or talent, fortune or genius, subserve the cause of crushed humanity and carry out the greatest idea of the present age, the glorious idea of human brotherhood.

SOURCE: Frances Ellen Watkins, "Our Greatest Want," *The Anglo-African Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (May 1859).