

Volume 2: Chapter 7

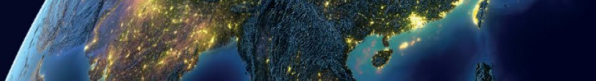
Source 7.1

David Walker's Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World (1829)

David Walker (1796-1830) was born to a free woman of color in Wilmington, North Carolina. His father was enslaved, but he was legally free because the law held that the status of the mother (enslaved or free) determined the status of the child. Walker moved to the free state of Massachusetts and lived in Boston, where he worked in a clothing store and eventually became a store owner. He was an abolitionist, and wrote his Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, one of the earliest African American abolitionist texts in the United States.

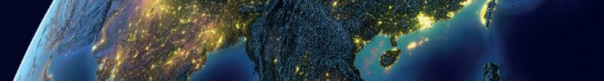
Having travelled over a considerable portion of these United States, and having, in the course of my travels, taken the most accurate observations of things as they exist—the result of my observations has warranted the full and unshaken conviction, that we, (coloured people of these United States,) are the most degraded, wretched, and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began; and I pray God that none like us ever may live again until time shall be no more. They tell us of the Israelites in Egypt, the Helots in Sparta, and of the Roman Slaves, which last were made up from almost every nation under heaven, whose sufferings under those ancient and heathen nations, were, in comparison with ours, under this enlightened and Christian nation, no more than a cypher—or, in other words, those heathen nations of antiquity, had but little more among them than the name and form of slavery; while wretchedness and endless miseries were reserved, apparently in a phial, to be poured out upon our fathers, ourselves and our children, by *Christian* Americans!

These positions I shall endeavour, by the help of the Lord, to demonstrate in the course of this *Appeal*, to the satisfaction of the most incredulous mind--and may God



Almighty, who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, open your hearts to understand and believe the truth. . .

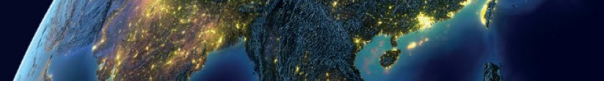
I am fully aware, in making this appeal to my much afflicted and suffering brethren, that I shall not only be assailed by those whose greatest earthly desires are, to keep us in abject ignorance and wretchedness, and who are of the firm conviction that Heaven has designed us and our children to be slaves and *beasts of burden* to them and their children. I say, I do not only expect to be held up to the public as an ignorant, impudent and restless disturber of the public peace, by such avaricious creatures, as well as a mover of insubordination--and perhaps put in prison or to death, for giving a superficial exposition of our miseries, and exposing tyrants. But I am persuaded, that many of my brethren, particularly those who are ignorantly in league with slave-holders or tyrants, who acquire their daily bread by the blood and sweat of their more ignorant brethren--and not a few of those too, who are too ignorant to see an inch beyond their noses, will rise up and call me cursed--Yea, the jealous ones among us will perhaps use more abject subtlety, by affirming that this work is not worth perusing, that we are well situated, and there is no use in trying to better our condition, for we cannot. I will ask one question here.--Can our condition be any worse?--Can it be more mean and abject? If there are any changes, will they not be for the better, though they may appear for the worst at first? Can they get us any lower? Where can they get us? They are afraid to treat us worse, for they know well, the day they do it they are gone. But against all accusations which may or can be preferred against me, I appeal to Heaven for my motive in writing--who knows that my object is, if possible, to awaken in the breasts of my afflicted, degraded and slumbering brethren, a spirit of inquiry and investigation respecting our miseries and wretchedness in this *Republican Land of Liberty!!!!!!* . . .



All persons who are acquainted with history, and particularly the Bible, who are not blinded by the God of this world, and are not actuated solely by avarice--who are able to lay aside prejudice long enough to view candidly and impartially, things as they were, are, and probably will be--who are willing to admit that God made man to serve Him *alone*, and that man should have no other Lord or Lords but Himself--that God Almighty is the *sole proprietor* or *master* of the WHOLE human family, and will not on any consideration admit of a colleague, being unwilling to divide his glory with another--and who can dispense with prejudice long enough to admit that we are *men*, notwithstanding our *improminent noses* and *woolly heads*, and believe that we feel for our fathers, mothers, wives and children, as well as the whites do for theirs. . . .

Remember Americans, that we must and shall be free and enlightened as you are, will you wait until we shall, under God, obtain our liberty by the crushing arm of power? Will it not be dreadful for you? I speak Americans for your good. We must and shall be free I say, in spite of you. You may do your best to keep us in wretchedness and misery, to enrich you and your children, but God will deliver us from under you. And wo, wo, will be to you if we have to obtain our freedom by fighting. Throw away your fears and prejudices then, and enlighten us and treat us like men, and we will like you more than we do now hate you . . .

In conclusion, I ask the candid and unprejudiced of the whole world, to search the pages of historians diligently, and see if the Antideluvians--the Sodomites--the Egyptians--the Babylonians--the Ninevites--the Carthaginians--the Persians--the Macedonians--the Greeks--the Romans--the Mahometans--the Jews--or devils, ever treated a set of human beings, as the white Christians of America do us, the blacks, or Africans. I also ask the attention of the world of mankind to the declaration of these very American people, of the United States. . . .



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

Source: David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles, Together With a Preamble to the Colored Citizens of the World, But in Particular and Very Expressly to Those of the United States of America* (Boston: Printed for the Author, 1829): 3-4, 7, 68-69. 74.

- In your own words, what is Walker's argument about the status of "colored citizens" in the United States?
- What is Walker's message to people of color in the United States? What is his message to Americans more generally?
- In what ways does Walker situate the position of enslaved African Americans in the United States in world historical context?