Slavery in Antebellum United States

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Everyone loves Independence Day. There are happy gatherings, fireworks, and celebrating our people’s freedom from Britain, but not everyone was free after the Revolutionary War. Slavery and prejudice remained in our new nation, continuing the unequal treatment of blacks. African Americans did not receive the same, equal freedoms their white neighbors gained after the war and as written in the US Construction.

*A Letter of A Fugitive Slave*, written by Joseph Taper in 1840, was addressed to his old white acquaintance in Virginia. Joseph Taper told his acquaintance of his freedom and success living in Canada, to point out the differences of rights blacks between the two nations. “Men align themselves as God and they share the land [United States] with brutes.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Now in living in Canada, Taper is satisfied with the life he created for his family. “I am in the land of Liberty [Canada]…where men are free and equal…I have enjoyed my one month living in Canada than in my life as a slave.”[[2]](#footnote-2) He later mentioned how both he and his wife could finally relax, knowing they did not have to worry about being beaten or mistreated again. Taper indirectly addressed how America did not grant freedom to all its inhabitants: both current slaves and free African Americans, and how it was not just.

The *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens*, was written in the book, Philadelphia in 1838. “All men are equally free…yet you have eliminated our ability to vote…by not granting African Americans the right to vote or by preventing us by levying substantial limitations for us to qualify as voters.”[[3]](#footnote-3) The inability for free blacks to vote was brought to light during the Antebellum period. This essay was written to persuade the government to grant African Americans the right to vote and establish true equality. The people explained how these institutions directly opposed the ideals the founding fathers. “The Declaration of Independence states how every man is created equal…there can not be taxation without representation.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The essay provided numerical evidence that blacks pay taxes, yet were still unable to vote. These were the same conditions under which the Revolutionary War was fought: to gain equal rights and the ability to represent themselves. Next, this letter reminded the people that blacks’ fathers fought and bled along whites’ fathers, both fighting together for their freedom, yet a disparity still remained between these two ethnicities. “The founder of Harrisburg was saved by a black man, and the founder allowed black families to settle in his new town, and even granted them land.”[[5]](#footnote-5) This further exemplified how current leaders contradicted the leaders of the past.

Frederick Douglas gave a speech on July 4, 1852. He stated, “Independence Day only shows the difference between the freedoms whites and blacks possess.”[[6]](#footnote-6) He asked, “What do African slaves celebrate on the Fourth of July?”[[7]](#footnote-7) “This nation is a hypocrisy due to the fact the founding fathers fought for freedom, yet slavery and inequality still exists.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Frederick Douglas used these facts to address how the nation was unjust in its principle ideals. He wrote this speech in an attempt to change white citizens’ belief of true equality and granting equal freedoms to all. Frederick Douglas asked difficult questions, not because they were hard to answer, but they went against what his audience believed and ignored because they were unaffected by the treatments African Americans faced. “Can you give an honest answer, to us and to God, why these injustices remain?”[[9]](#footnote-9) He asked how he could celebrate liberty, when the people he represented were enslaved and lacked rights. Frederick Douglas questioned everyone who “exhibits prejudice or is a slaveholder at heart.”[[10]](#footnote-10) He showed how African Americans were equally skilled as whites. “We are planting, building houses, constructing bridges, shipbuilding, smithing metals, reading and writing, are doctors, lawyers, poets, teachers, settling the west and digging for gold, and are husbands, wives, sons, and daughters.” Douglas showed how there was not a difference between the occupations free blacks worked to persuade whites to change their racism towards them, because blacks are the same people that they were. He used these similarities to ask why African Americans were treated differently. “Do I need to argue the unjustness of slavery and how my people are treated?”[[11]](#footnote-11) Frederick Douglas drew his audience’s attention back to the unfairness of his people and again asked them to answer him. He constantly tried to change his audience’s beliefs about African Americans and Slavery. “The conscious of the nation must be awakened.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Only when the public questions their prejudices, can change occur, that is what he argues in this statement.

These sources all address the unfairness African Americans face and how our nation did not execute the principles the founding fathers fought for. *A Letter of a Fugitive Slave* addressed how the United States is not just, as “blacks are enslaved and treated unfairly”[[13]](#footnote-13) *The Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens* addressed how the Revolutionary War was fought because our forefathers were taxed without representation, and that still exists in Antebellum United States. “Even though all men are created equal…we are taxed while our ability to vote has been taken away.”[[14]](#footnote-14) In Frederick Douglas’s speech, he provided several examples of how African Americans cannot celebrate Independence Day because they are still enslaved and experience prejudice. “Independence Day only shows the differences between the rights whites and African Americans have.”[[15]](#footnote-15) These documents show the unequal treatment of blacks, and how that is against what the founding fathers fought for and the democracy they created. These sources are used to have their audience question their beliefs about slavery and their prejudice against African Americans. Only when this happens, change is possible. Additionally, these sources also have another purpose: to rally blacks together to combat this racism and obtain equality.

In Antebellum United States, blacks did not receive the equality they fought for in the Revolutionary War. They continue to fight for their freedoms, whether is through slave rebellions like Nat Turners, Letters to create change, or speeches to directly address the inequality blacks face.[[16]](#footnote-16)[[17]](#footnote-17)[[18]](#footnote-18) African Americans are still enslaved and attempt to flee their slave owners.[[19]](#footnote-19) Blacks are still trying to fight for their right to represent themselves through voting, but will be unsuccessful until the 1965.[[20]](#footnote-20) Whites still exhibited prejudice towards blacks in the Antebellum period, event to this day.[[21]](#footnote-21) Unfortunately, African Americans were still treated unfairly after the Revolutionary War, and still had to fight for their rights for so long.

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1. Joseph Taper, *Letter by a Fugitive Slave*, 1840 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Joseph Taper, *Letter by a Fugitive Slave*, 1840 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Philadelphia, *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens*, 1838 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Philadelphia, *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens*, 1838 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Philadelphia, *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens*, 1838 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Frederick Douglas on the Fourth of July, 1852 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Frederick Douglas on the Fourth of July, 1852 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Frederick Douglas on the Fourth of July, 1852 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Frederick Douglas on the Fourth of July, 1852 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Frederick Douglas on the Fourth of July, 1852 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Frederick Douglas on the Fourth of July, 1852 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Frederick Douglas on the Fourth of July, 1852 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Joseph Taper, *Letter by a Fugitive Slave*, 1840 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Philadelphia, Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, 1838 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Frederick Douglas on the Fourth of July, 1852 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Joseph Taper, *Letter by a Fugitive Slave*, 1840 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Philadelphia, Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, 1838 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Frederick Douglas on the Fourth of July, 1852 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Joseph Taper, *Letter by a Fugitive Slave*, 1840 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Philadelphia, Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, 1838 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Frederick Douglas on the Fourth of July, 1852 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)