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HIST 221-03

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The Declaration of Independence states, “all men are created equally,” however this statement is hypocritical as African Americans liberties and freedoms have been denied for decades. African Americans have faced disenfranchisement in their fight for suffrage. Slaves had to flee to Canada so that the “oppressed could go free.”[[1]](#endnote-1) Frederick Douglass argues that men are entitled to liberty so why are African Americans constantly robed of their liberty, beaten into submission, starved into obedience, and disheartened as their families are split apart.[[2]](#endnote-2) The Antebellum United States has failed to represent the countries founding principles of liberty and democracy to free and enslaved African American due to the Fugitive slave act, disenfranchisement, civil injustices and social conflicts.

The Purpose of “Letter by a Fugitive Slave” is many African Americans were forced to escape to the north seeking freedom. Although, many slaves did make it across the northern border a federal law allowed for fugitive slaves to be caught and returned to slavery. African Americans response to the Fugitive Slave Act made them flee to Canada, the “land of liberty.”[[3]](#endnote-3) The authors intent behind creating this document is to show that after African Americans escaped to Canada to have a better lifestyle. Queen Victoria allowed former slaves to have the basic rights that previously had been foreign to them, “enjoyed more pleasure within one month here than in all my life in the land of bondage.”[[4]](#endnote-4) This document is connected to slavery and racism as southerners in the deep south could not let former slaves have the decent life they deserved. This document is also connected to democracy because Queen Victoria allowed for African Americans to have fifty acres of land to settle on, a school system for children to read and write, and a yoke and plough for every two families. Canada allowed for African Americans to have a place were planation owners

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could not “molest us or make us afraid.”[[5]](#endnote-5)

The Purpose of the “Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens,” is African Americans right to vote. The authors are writing to show how democracy was limited for voting participation of African Americans. During 1800-1860 every state that entered the Union with exception of Maine, limited the rights to vote to white men. Also, current states such as Connecticut, New York, and Tennessee, that allowed black men to vote eliminate voting rights by adding high property qualification. In 1837 the Constitutional Convention in Pennsylvania stripped blacks of the right to vote.[[6]](#endnote-6) During this time period Pennsylvania had the largest community of free African Americans.[[7]](#endnote-7) This source is connected to racism and democracy because the democratic process of being able to vote was taken away because of skin color. Also, the only states that still allowed voting participation of African Americans had high restrictions and qualification further disenfranchising the black community.

The purpose of “Frederick Douglass on the 4th of July,” states African Americans cannot participate in fourth of July activities because independence, liberty, and democracy does not extend to the black community. The intent behind this document is to show how an American slave feels on the fourth of July, the “Forth of July is yours not mine… You may rejoice, I must mourn.”[[8]](#endnote-8) The document is connected to democracy as it criticizes the liberties stated in the Declaration of Independence. Frederick Douglass, calls the founders and this nation a hypocrite to its beliefs in liberty, “America is false to the past, false to the present, and bins herself false to the future.”[[9]](#endnote-9)

Altogether, these three documents showcase African Americans fight for their freedom,

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justice, and liberty. Escaped slaves just want to live a life of peace and liberty in the north. African Americans want to be able to vote and voice their opinions without objections due to the color of their skin. Frederick Douglass wants to emphasis that an American slave is not represented in the celebration of the fourth of July. He argues that the fourth of July to an American slave represents the cruelty and injustices that slaves face daily.[[10]](#endnote-10) The principle of the Declaration of Independence are political freedom, liberty, and justice. The Antebellum United States has failed to recognize that African American have yet to receive independence and the rights and freedoms that can lead them to have a prosperous life. African Americans continue to face prejudices, inhumane mockery, and the mournful wail of millions who still carry the heavy grievances yesterday and into the future.

Word Count: 760

1. Joseph Taper, “Letter by a Fugitive Slave (1838)” (New York: W.W. Norton Press, 2014), 221. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Frederick Douglass, “Frederick Douglass on the Fourth of July (1852)” (New York: W.W. Norton Press, 2014), 238. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Joseph Taper, “Letter by a Fugitive Slave (1838)” (New York: W.W. Norton Press, 2014), 221. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., 221. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 221. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. “Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens (1840).” (New York: W.W. Norton Press, 2014), 203. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 204. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Frederick Douglass, “Frederick Douglass on the Fourth of July (1852)” (New York: W. W. Norton Press, 2014), 238. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 240. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., 241.

    4. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)