

Primary Source Set

How Enslaved People Resisted Slavery

Objectives

- ☐ I can analyze primary sources to identify forms of resistance by enslaved people.
- ☐ I can work collaboratively to interpret and represent historical acts of resistance.

Document List

- Document 1: Runaway slave ad, *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (Goddard), Baltimore, July 4, 1780.
- Document 2: The Petition of Belinda Sutton to The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1783
- Document 3: *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, 1789.
- Document 4: Benjamin Rush to Samuel Bayard, 1810
- Document 5: Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, 1845.

Runaway slave ad, *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser* (Goddard), Baltimore, July 4, 1780.

Background Information

When slaves ran away, slave owners often published classified ads offering rewards for their return. Though the level of detail varies, wanted ads provided small insights into the lives of enslaved individuals, many of whom may have been lost to history otherwise.

Source: <https://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/search/relatedAd.php?adFile=md1780.xml&adId=ml1780070003>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD. Stafford County, June 16, 1780. RAN away, from my plantations, in Loudon, a Negro man, named CHARLES, about 35 years	

of age, and is well known in this and the neighbouring [neighboring] states of Carolina and Maryland, and has waited on me for many years; he is a handsome, **genteel**, sensible fellow, not very black, an excellent waiter in a house, and a good barber, also a good **scythemán**, **cradler**, and **ploughman**.

genteel- a polite manner of acting

scythemán- A worker skilled in cutting grass or grain using a scythe (a long curved blade)

cradler- A person who uses a cradle scythe to harvest grain—an important field job.

ploughman (or plowman)- A farm laborer who used animals and a plow to prepare fields for planting.

It is expected he will attempt to make towards Baltimore, or some other seaport, and **pass** for a freeman, as he has a pass for that purpose.

pass (in slavery context)- A written document enslaved people were sometimes given that allowed them to travel away from their plantation; fake or stolen passes were often used by runaways.

All **masters of vessels and recruiting officers**, are **forewarned** from entertaining him; and the above reward, together with all **reasonable expences**, will be given to any person, who will deliver him to me in Stafford county. THOMSON MASON.

masters of vessels- captains of the ships
recruiting officers- people signing up soldiers for the army
forewarned- strongly warned in advance
reasonable expences (expenses)- travel or effort costs

The Petition of Belinda Sutton to The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1783

Background Information

Belinda Sutton was an enslaved woman who lived in the home of the Royall family, the largest family of slaveholders in Massachusetts. The Royalls became rich by trading sugar, rum, and enslaved people. During the American Revolution, Isaac Royall supported the British. Because of this, he was forced to leave Massachusetts in 1778 under a law called the Act of Banishment.

In 1783, Belinda asked the state of Massachusetts to give her a yearly income from Isaac Royall's estate (property and money). This request is one of the earliest written by an African American woman, and some historians see it as the first demand for payment, or reparations, for slavery. Some scholars believe a free Black abolitionist named Prince Hall helped her write the petition.

That same year, the state agreed to give Belinda a yearly pension of 15 pounds and 12 shillings. However, even though she was promised this money, Belinda had to ask the state five more times over the next ten years because they failed to pay her regularly.

Source: <https://medfordhistorical.org/medford-history/africa-to-medford/the-mark-of-belinda-sutton/>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
The Petition of Belinda an Affrican [African], humbly shews [shows]: that seventy years have rolled away, since she on the banks of the Rio de Valta received her existence – the mountains valleys loaded with the richest fruits,	Petition- formal written request Rio de Valta- a river in present-day Ghana

spontaneously produced; joined to that happy temperature of air to exclude excess; would have yielded her the most compleat [complete] felicity, had not her mind received early impressions of the cruelty of men...	felicity- happiness
For before she had Twelve years enjoyed the fragrance of her native groves, ... an armed band of white men, driving many of her Countrymen in Chains, ran into the hallowed shade! ... She was ravished from the bosom of her Country, from the arms of her friends – while the advanced age of her Parents, rendering them unfit for servitude, cruelly separated her from them forever!	ravished- to be taken violently servitude- In this context, it means forced labor or slavery.
The face of your Petitioner, is now marked with the furrows of time, and her frame bending under the oppression of years, while she, by the Laws of the Land, is denied the employment of one morsel of that immense wealth, apart whereof hath been accumulated by her own industry, and the whole augmented by her servitude.	Belinda is saying that even though her hard work helped build great wealth for others, she is not allowed to have even a small portion of it.
WHEREFORE, casting herself at your feet if your honours [honors]...for the reward of Virtue and the just return of honest industry– she prays, that such allowance may be made her out of the Estate of Colonel Royall, as will prevent her, and her more infirm daughter, from misery in the greatest extreme.	Wherefore- meaning therefore or for this reason industry- hard work allowance- a small amount of money given or granted

The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, 1789

Background Information

Olaudah Equiano grew up in the West African kingdom of Benin in what is now Nigeria. Kidnapped by African slave traders, he was transported to Barbados in 1756, then to colonial Virginia. His autobiography was published in 1789. Here he describes the Middle Passage.

Source: http://www.nlj.gov.jm/rai/CSEC/BookTheme2/The_Interesting_Narrative_of_the_Life_of.pdf

Text	Vocabulary and Context
At last, when the ship we were in, had got in all her cargo , they made ready with many fearful noises , and we were all put under deck, so that we could not see how they managed the vessel.	cargo - The enslaved people are being treated like cargo, or goods for transport. fearful noises - Likely refers to yelling, banging, or shouting from the crew as they prepared to sail.
But this disappointment was the least of my sorrow. The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential The air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died. . . .	stench of the hold - "Hold" refers to the lower part of the ship where people were kept; it smelled unbearably bad. pestilential - So foul it seemed disease-ridden; like it could spread deadly illness.

This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable. . . .	galling of the chains- The chains were painfully rubbing against the skin, causing injuries. necessary tubs- buckets or containers used as toilets
One day, when we had a smooth sea and moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen who were chained together (I was near them at the time), preferring death to such a life of misery, somehow made through the nettings and jumped into the sea: immediately another quite dejected fellow, who, on account of his illness, was suffered to be out of irons, also followed their example; and I believe many more would very soon have done the same if they had not been prevented by the ship's crew.	dejected- to feel deeply sad, hopeless

Benjamin Rush to Samuel Bayard, 1810

Background Information

In the early 1800s, free Black people and those who had escaped slavery began forming communities in northern cities like Baltimore, New York, and Philadelphia. One important part of these communities was the Black church. These churches weren't just places to worship—they were also places where people could organize politically, work together to support one another, and work for greater equality and the protection of their natural rights.

The following excerpt is from a letter written in 1810 by Benjamin Rush, a well-known doctor in Philadelphia and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He wrote the letter to a man named Samuel Bayard in Princeton, New Jersey. Rush is introducing Mr. Gloucester, a free Black minister, and recommending him.

Source: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3h469t.html>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
The bearer of this letter, the Reverend Mr. Gloucester, an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church, visits your town in order to obtain pecuniary aid to enable him to purchase the freedom of his wife and children, for which the extravagant sum of 1,500 dollars has been demanded by their master and mistress. The friends of religion and of the poor Africans in Philadelphia have sent 500 dollars to them for that purpose and have subscribed liberally towards building him a church. At present he preaches to crowds of his African brethren in a schoolhouse every Sunday, and to great acceptance. The prospects of his usefulness to them are very great. . . . By the present census it appears that the blacks in our city will amount to more than 2,000 souls. Their late great increase is from migration from the southern states.	pecuniary aid- financial help or money subscribed liberally- donated generously The prospects of his usefulness- He is expected to do a lot of good or have a positive impact on the community.

Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, 1845

Background Information

Frederick Douglass, former slave and celebrated abolitionist, wrote three autobiographies of his life. In his books, he shared powerful stories about what it was like to live as a slave. These stories helped people who had never seen slavery understand how unfair and painful it really was. In the passage below, Douglass described an 1833 incident that changed his view of himself and, therefore, his life.

Source: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/23/23-h/23-h.htm>

Text	Vocabulary and Context
If at any one time of my life more than another, I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery, that time was during the first six months of my stay with Mr. Covey [a White overseer and slave-breaker] ... Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished the disposition, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute! ...	dregs- the most worthless or unpleasant parts of something brute- a person who behaves in a cruel or savage way; someone treated as less than human
Long before daylight, I was called to . . . feed, the horses. . . . Mr. Covey entered the stable with a long rope; and . . . he caught hold of my legs, and was about tying me. . . . I gave a sudden spring, and as I did so, he holding to my legs, I was brought sprawling on the stable floor. Mr. Covey seemed now to think he had me, and could do what he pleased; but at this moment—from whence came the spirit I don't know—I resolved to fight; and . . . I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose. He held on to me, and I to him. My resistance was so entirely unexpected that Covey seemed taken all aback. He trembled like a leaf. This gave me assurance. . . .	assurance- confidence or courage

This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed selfconfidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. . . . It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place.

