

## Chapter 58 - Black Abolitionist David Walker Cries Out For Justice

Time: 1796-1830

### David Walker Profile



A Free Black Man

While the South is contesting the 1828 Tariff, it receives another tangible threat to its slave-based economy from one David Walker, a free black man living in Boston.

Walker is born in 1796 in Wilmington, Delaware, the son of a slave father who dies before his birth and a white mother, whose “free status” is conferred upon him.

During his early years he becomes literate, moves to Charleston, where he joins the African Episcopal Methodist Church, and eventually to Boston, where he marries, has a daughter, and opens a clothing re-sale shop in the wharf district.

In 1825 he joins the African Grand Lodge #459, now headed by the black abolitionist John T. Hilton. In 1826 he co-founds the Massachusetts’s General Colored Association, along with Hilton and William Guion Nell, whose son will later lead the movement to integrate the Boston public schools.

At this point, Walker is a member of Boston’s free black elites, all pushing for freedom, assimilation and full citizenship for African Americans.

In 1829 he does something extraordinary for the times.

He writes and then self-publishes a 76-page pamphlet that inflames the passions of both blacks and whites toward slavery:

*David Walker’s Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, But in Particular To Those of the United States of America.*

The title itself announces Walker’s aspiration – to insure that blacks achieve “Colored Citizen” status in America and around the world.

His arguments extend beyond the more restrained efforts made by Boston’s black churches and Prince Hall’s Freemason lodges.

They are riveting, both logical and emotional, ranging from despair to hope, from helplessness to mounting fury to bloody resolve.

If whites refuse to accept the olive branch he offers, they will experience the sword.

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Time: September 1829

## Appeal To The Colored Citizens Of The World

Walker begins his *Appeal* by trying to make white men aware of what he calls the daily “wretchedness” of those living as slaves.

*We colored people are the most degraded, wretched, and abject set of beings that ever lived... We are destined to dig (the white man's) mines and work their farms, and thus go on enriching them from one generation to another with our blood and our tears!!!!*

*An observer may see there, a son take his mother, who bore almost the pains of death to give him birth, and by the command of a tyrant, strip her as naked as she came into the world, and apply the cow-hide to her, until she falls a victim to death in the road! He may see a husband take his dear wife, not infrequently in a pregnant state, and perhaps far advanced, and beat her for an unmerciful wretch, until his infant falls a lifeless lump at her feet! Can the Americans escape God Almighty? If they do, can he be to us a God of Justice? I would suffer my life to be taken before I would submit.*

*Oh! my God, I appeal to every man of feeling – is not this insupportable? Oh pity us, we pray thee, Lord Jesus.*

The cause of the black man's suffering is the white man's greed and unmerciful quest for power.

*The whites have always been an unjust, jealous, unmerciful, avaricious and blood-thirsty set of beings, always seeking after power and authority. Ever since we have been among them, they have tried to keep us ignorant, and make us believe that God made us and our children to be slaves to them and theirs. Oh! my God, have mercy on Christian Americans!!!*

Whites have justified their behavior by declaring that blacks are an inherently inferior species.

*They have reduced us to the deplorable condition of slaves under their feet, held us up as descending from ribes of Monkeys or Orang-Outangs.*

*Mr. Jefferson's remarks respecting us – that—the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind”—have sunk deep into the hearts of millions of whites, and never will be removed this side of eternity.*

They have blocked all attempts to provide black access to a basic education.

*It is lamentable, that many of our children go to school, from four until they are eight or ten, and sometimes fifteen years of age, and leave school knowing but a little more about the grammar of their language than a horse does about handling a musket.*

*The school committee say "e" forbid the coloured children learnin' grammar –they"uld" not allow any but the white children "to stuy" it.*

Even the white churches and clergy have stood silent and allowed these abuses to continue.

*The preachers and people of the United States form societies against Free Masonry and Intemperance, and write against Sabbath breaking, Sabbath mails, Infidelity, &c. &c. But the fountain head (slavery and oppression) compared with which, all those other evils are comparatively nothing, is hardly noticed by the Americans.*

*Our divine Lord and Master said, "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even o unto them." But a American minister, with the Bible in is hand, holds us and our children the most abject slavery and wretchedness. Now I ask them, would they like for us to hold them and their children in abject slavery and wretchedness?*

*What kind!! Oh! what kind!!! Of Christianity can be found this day in all the earth!!!!!!*

Instead of trying to elevate blacks into American citizenship, the proposal is to ship them back to Africa.

*Will we adhere to Mr. Clay and his colonizing plan?, Will any of us leave our homes and go to Africa? I hope not. The greatest riches in all America have arisen from our blood and tears:--and will they drive us from our property and homes, which we have earned with our blood?*

Because, they argue, blacks are incapable of caring for themselves.

*They tell us that we the (blacks) are an inferior race of beings! Incapable of self-government!!—We would be injurious to society and ourselves, if tyrants should lose their unjust hold on us!!! That if we were free we would not work, but would live on plunder or theft!!!! That we are the meanest and laziest set of beings in the world!!!!!! That they are obliged to keep us in bondage to do us good!!!!!!—That –are satisfied to rest in slavery to them and their children!!!!!!—That – ought not to be set free in America, but ought to be sent away to Africa!!!!!!!!*

*This land which we have watered with our tears and our blood, is now our mother country, and we are well satisfied to stay where wisdom abounds and the gospel is free.*

Blacks must and shall be free in the end, the only question is how this will be achieved.

*Now let us reason—I mean you of the United States, whom I believe God designs to save from destruction, if you will hear. 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; you are not astonished at my saying we hate you, for if we are men we cannot but hate you, while you are treating us like dogs.*

*And tell us now no more about colonization, for America is as much our country, as it is yours.*

Abandon slavery and treat blacks with dignity and peace and happiness will follow.

*Treat us like men, and there is no danger but we will all live in peace and happiness together. For we are not like you, hard hearted, unmerciful, and unforgiving; what a happy country this will be, if the whites will listen.*

*But Americans, I declare to you, while you keep us and our children in bondage, and treat us like brutes, to make us support you and your families, we cannot be your friends. You do not look for it, do you? Treat us then like men, and we will be your friends. And there is not a doubt in my mind, but that the whole of the past will be sunk into oblivion, and we yet, under God, will become a united and happy people. The whites may say it is impossible, but remember that nothing is impossible with God.*

But fail to change and America will be destroyed.

*I tell you Americans! That unless you speedily alter your course, you and your Country are gone!!!!!! For God Almighty will tear up the very face of the earth!!!*

*I call God, I call Angels, I call men to witness, that the destruction of the Americans is at hand, and will be speedily consummated unless they repent.*

The time for action is now and it depends on black men standing up against white injustices.

*Are we men!—I ask—ou, O my brethren! Are we men? Did our Creator make us to be slaves to dust and ashes like ourselves?*

*The man who would not fight under our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in the glorious and heavenly cause of freedom and of God—ought—to be kept with all of his children or family, in slavery, or in chains, to be butchered by his cruel enemies.*

*You have to prove to the Americans and the world, that we are MEN, and not brutes, as we have been represented, and by millions treated.*

Once armed with conviction and courage, the black man will be a ferocious fighter in battle.

*If you can only get courage into the blacks, I do declare it, that one good black man can put to death six white men; and I give it as a fact, let twelve black men get well armed for battle, and they will kill and put to flight fifty whites. The reason is, the blacks, once you get them started, they glory in death.*

*The whites have had us under them for more than three centuries, murdering, and treating us like brutes; and, as Mr. Jefferson wisely said, they have never found us out—they – do not know, indeed, that there is an unconquerable disposition in the breasts of the blacks, which, when it is fully awakened and put in motion, will be subdued, only with the destruction of the animal existence.*

If whites must be put to death to secure black freedom, then so be it.

*(The time has come) to take it away from them, and put everything before us to death, in order to gain our freedom which God has given us. The whites want slaves, and want us for their slaves, but some of them will curse the day they ever saw us. As true as the sun ever shown in its meridian splendor, my colour will root some of them out of the very face of the earth.*

He ends in sadness with a question: “what is the use of living, when in fact I (as a slave) am dead?”

*If any are anxious to ascertain who I am, know the world, that I am one of the oppressed, degraded and wretched sons of Africa, rendered so by the avaricious and unmerciful, among the whites.*

*If any wish to plunge me into the wretched incapacity of a slave, or murder me for the truth, know ye, that I am in the hand of God, and at your disposal. I count my life not dear unto me, but I am ready to be offered at any moment. For what is the use of living, when in fact I am dead.*

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Time: 1829 Forward

### **The *Appeal* Strikes Recognition And Fear Among White Readers**

Once published, *Walker’s Appeal* represents a watershed moment in the relationship of free blacks to whites in America.

The dismissal of all Africans as ignorant and inferior evaporates in the presence of his powerful logic and prose. Here stands a full Man, making his case against the injustices of slavery in a nation predicated on freedom – and pleading “let right be done.”

But what really registers among whites, especially in the South, is Walker’s move beyond mere pleading to “demanding” – and outright “threatening.”

On one hand he offers peace – abandon slavery, treat us fairly as “colored citizens” of America, and we will live together in tranquility and happiness.

On the other, he issues fatalistic warnings – to root out white enemies, to put them to death, to rain down destruction on the nation.

When Walker’s pamphlets appear in Georgia, the state offers a \$10,000 reward for anyone who hands him over alive or \$1,000 to anyone who murders him. Other slave states follow suit, confiscating copies of the Appeal when found and often arresting those who possess them.

Just as the turmoil surrounding him mounts, David Walker is dead.

On June 28, 1830 – nine months to the day after his pamphlet is published – he falls victim to tuberculosis, which also kills his daughter.

But Walker has lit a torch that will not be extinguished, the torch of black freedom and citizenship. It is a torch that will soon be picked up by others, including heroic whites who will risk their lives for his cause.