

VOICES *of* FREEDOM



**A DOCUMENTARY
HISTORY**

7E

VOL. 2

ERIC FONER ■ KATHLEEN DUVAL ■ LISA MCGIRR

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VOICES OF FREEDOM

A Documentary History

Seventh Edition

EDITED BY

ERIC FONER
KATHLEEN DUVAL
LISA MCGIRR



Volume 2



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Eric Foner is DeWitt Clinton Professor Emeritus of History at Columbia University. In his teaching and scholarship, he focuses on the Civil War and Reconstruction, slavery, and nineteenth-century America. He has served as president of the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association. In 2006, he received the Presidential Award for Outstanding Teaching from Columbia University. His most recent books are *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*, winner of the Bancroft and Lincoln Prizes and the Pulitzer Prize for History; *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad*, winner of the New York Historical Society Book Prize; and *The Second Founding: How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution*.

Kathleen DuVal is Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she teaches early American history. Her research focuses on how various Native American, European, and African people interacted from the sixteenth through the early nineteenth centuries. Her most recent book, *Independence Lost: Lives on the Edge of the American Revolution*, won multiple awards for its rich retelling of the history of the Revolutionary Era as experienced by enslaved people, Native Americans, and women living on Florida's Gulf coast. DuVal has also won the Guggenheim Fellowship in the Humanities, a National Humanities Center Fellowship, and a postdoctoral fellowship from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Lisa McGirr is Professor of History at Harvard University, where she specializes in the history of the twentieth-century United States. Her research and teaching interests bridge the fields of social and political history and focus, in particular, on collective action, state building, reform movements, and politics. Her most recent book, *The War on Alcohol: Prohibition and the Rise of the American State*, won acclaim for excavating the significant but neglected state-building legacies of national Prohibition. Her award-winning first book, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*, investigated the social and regional basis of grassroots conservative politics in the post-World War II United States.

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Preface

Voices of Freedom is a documentary history of American freedom from the earliest interactions between Europeans, Africans, and the Indigenous inhabitants of North America. It has been prepared as a companion to *Give Me Liberty!*, a survey textbook of the history of the United States centered on the theme of freedom. This seventh edition of *Voices of Freedom* is organized in chapters that correspond to those in the seventh edition of the textbook. But it can also stand independently as a documentary introduction to the history of American freedom. The two volumes include over twenty documents not available in the sixth edition.

The most significant change in this edition, however, is the addition of two new coauthors, Professor Kathleen DuVal of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Professor Lisa McGirr of Harvard University. Both are accomplished scholars with national and international reputations. For the initial edition of *Voices of Freedom*, which appeared in 2005, and the five subsequent revised editions, Eric Foner was solely responsible for the choice of documents in each chapter. As time went on, this became more and more difficult for one individual. Professors DuVal and McGirr have now joined the process of revision of both the textbook itself and this accompanying book of documents.

No idea is more fundamental to Americans' sense of themselves as individuals and as a nation than freedom, or liberty, with which it is almost always used interchangeably. The Declaration of Independence lists liberty among mankind's inalienable rights; the Constitution announces as its purpose to secure liberty's blessings. "Every man in the street, white, black, red, or yellow," wrote the educator and statesman Ralph Bunche in 1940, "knows that this is 'the land of the free' . . . 'the cradle of liberty.'"

The very universality of the idea of freedom, however, can be misleading. Freedom is not a fixed, timeless category with a single unchanging definition. Rather, the history of the United States is, in part, a story of debates, disagreements, and struggles over freedom. Crises like the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the Cold War have permanently transformed the idea of freedom. So too have demands by various groups of Americans for greater freedom as they understood it.

In choosing the documents for *Voices of Freedom*, we have attempted to convey the multifaceted history of this compelling and contested idea. The documents reflect how Americans at different points in our history have defined freedom as an overarching idea or have understood some of its many dimensions, including political, religious, economic, and personal freedom. For each chapter, we have tried to select documents that highlight the specific discussions of freedom that occurred during that time period, and some of the divergent interpretations of freedom at each point in our history. We hope that students will gain an appreciation of how the idea of freedom has expanded over time and how it has been extended into more and more areas of Americans' lives. But at the same time, the documents suggest how freedom for some Americans has, at various times in our history, rested on a lack of freedom—for example, slavery, indentured servitude, the subordinate position of women—for others.

The documents that follow reflect the kinds of historical developments that have shaped and reshaped the idea of freedom, including war, economic change, territorial expansion, social protest movements, and international involvement. The selections try to convey a sense of the rich cast of characters who have contributed to the history of American freedom. They include presidential proclamations and letters by runaway slaves, famous court cases and obscure manifestos, and ideas dominant in a particular era and those of radicals and dissenters. They range from advertisements in colonial newspapers seeking the return of runaway indentured servants and slaves to debates in the early twentieth century over the definition of economic freedom, the controversy over the proposed Equal Rights Amendment for women, and recent Supreme Court decisions dealing with the right of gay Americans to marry one another.

We have been particularly attentive to how battles at the boundaries of freedom—the efforts of racial minorities, women, and others to secure greater freedom—have deepened and transformed the concept and extended it into new realms. In addition, in this seventh edition, we have included a number of new documents that illustrate how the very definition of American identity—answers to the question “Who is an American?”—have affected the evolution of the idea of freedom. The inclusion of new documents expands on the theme of battles over American identity, including a petition asking for freedom by Massachusetts slaves during the War of Independence and a protest by Black people in Philadelphia against efforts to remove them from the United States in the early nineteenth century. Other new documents embody a heightened attention to Native American history and, in keeping with the overall theme, Native Americans’ ideas about freedom. This reflects both the recent burgeoning of this long-neglected field, which has produced outstanding works that change our understanding of key moments and processes in American history, and the expertise of the two new coauthors, whose own scholarship contributes immensely to this area of study.

As the original inhabitants of the lands that would become the United States, Native Americans have had a unique relationship to other Americans and with the federal government. The Constitution treats them as inhabitants of their own tribal sovereignties, not members of the national body politic. And sovereignty—control over ancestral lands and the ability to govern their own affairs—has been central to Native Americans’ definition of freedom. Over the centuries of American history, of course, Indian sovereignty has eroded considerably, but it has not disappeared. The quests to exercise authority over their own lives and to maintain traditional languages and forms of governance and social organization have been central themes of Indian history, as have the efforts of outsiders to impose their own ideas about freedom, political power, and cultural life on the Indigenous population. Throughout our history, Native Americans’ understanding of freedom via sovereignty has clashed with settlers’ ambitions for their own freedom.

Among the new documents that relate to the history of this theme are a speech by the Oneida leader Scarouady to Pennsylvania’s Provincial Council about mid-eighteenth-century conflict between settlers and Native Americans; an excerpt from the Cherokee Constitution of 1821; a petition to Congress by a group of Ohio women protesting the 1830s policy of Indian Removal; Luther Standing Bear’s account of life at an Indian boarding school in the late nineteenth century; Clyde Warrior’s demand for Native American self-determination in 1964; and David Archambault II’s 2016 article about water protectors opposing the Dakota Access Pipeline.

All of the documents in this collection are “primary sources”—that is, they were written or spoken by men and women enmeshed in the events of the past, rather than by later historians. They therefore offer students the opportunity to encounter ideas about freedom in the actual words of participants in the drama of American history. Some of the documents are reproduced in their entirety. Most are excerpts from longer interviews, articles, or books. In editing the documents, we have tried to remain faithful to the original purpose of the author while highlighting the portion of a text that deals directly with one or another aspect of freedom. In most cases, we have reproduced the wording of the original texts exactly. But we have modernized the spelling and punctuation of some early documents to make them more understandable to the modern reader. Each document is preceded by a brief introduction that places it in historical context and is followed by two questions that highlight key elements of the argument and may help to focus students’ thinking about the issues raised by the author.

A number of these documents were suggested by students in a U.S. history class at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, taught by Professor David Hsiung. We are very grateful to these students, who responded enthusiastically to an assignment by Professor Hsiung that asked them to locate documents that might be included in *Voices of Freedom* and to justify their choices with historical arguments. Some of the documents are included in the online exhibition “Preserving American Freedom” created by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Taken together, the documents in these volumes suggest the ways in which American freedom has changed and expanded over time. But they also remind us that American history is not simply a narrative of continual progress toward greater and greater freedom. While freedom can be achieved, it may also be reduced or rescinded. It can never be taken for granted.

Eric Foner

Kathleen DuVal

Lisa McGirr

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CHAPTER 15

“What Is Freedom?”: Reconstruction, 1865–1877

[99. Petition of Black Residents of Nashville \(1865\).](#)

[100. Petition of Committee on Behalf of the Freedmen to Andrew Johnson \(1865\).](#)

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99. Petition of Black Residents of Nashville (1865)

Source: Newspaper clipping enclosed in Col. R. D. Mussey to Capt. C. P. Brown, January 23, 1865, Letters Received, ser. 925, Department of the Cumberland, U.S. Army Continental Commands, National Archives.

At the request of military governor Andrew Johnson, Lincoln exempted Tennessee from the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 (although many slaves in the state gained their freedom by serving in the Union army). In January 1865, a state convention was held to complete the work of abolition. A group of free Black people of Nashville sent a petition to the delegates, asking for immediate action to end slavery and granting Black men the right to vote (which free Black men had enjoyed in the state until 1835). The document emphasized their loyalty to the Union, their natural right to freedom, and their willingness to take on the responsibilities of citizenship. The document offers a revealing snapshot of Black consciousness at the dawn of Reconstruction.

TO THE UNION CONVENTION of Tennessee Assembled in the Capitol at Nashville, January 9th, 1865:

We the undersigned petitioners, American citizens of African descent, natives and residents of Tennessee, and devoted friends of the great National cause, do most respectfully ask a patient hearing of your honorable body in regard to matters deeply affecting the future condition of our unfortunate and long-suffering race.

First of all, however, we would say that words are too weak to tell how profoundly grateful we are to the Federal Government for the good work of freedom which it is gradually carrying forward; and for the Emancipation Proclamation which has set free all the slaves in some of the rebellious States, as well as many of the slaves in Tennessee.

After two hundred years of bondage and suffering a returning sense of justice has awakened the great body of the American people to make amends for the unprovoked wrongs committed against us for over two hundred years.

Your petitioners would ask you to complete the work begun by the nation at large, and abolish the last vestige of slavery by the express words of your organic law.

Many masters in Tennessee whose slaves have left them, will certainly make every effort to bring them back to bondage after the reorganization of the State government, unless slavery be expressly abolished by the Constitution.

We hold that freedom is the natural right of all men, which they themselves have no more right to give or barter away, than they have to sell their honor, their wives, or their children.

We claim to be men belonging to the great human family, descended from one great God, who is the common Father of all, and who bestowed on all races and tribes the priceless right of freedom. Of this right, for no offence of ours, we have long been cruelly deprived, and the common voice of the wise and good of all countries, has remonstrated against our enslavement, as one of the greatest crimes in all history.

We claim freedom, as our natural right, and ask that in harmony and co-operation with the nation at large, you should cut up by the roots the system of slavery, which is not only a wrong to us, but the source of all the evil which at present afflicts the State. For slavery, corrupt itself, corrupted nearly all, also, around it, so that it has influenced nearly all the slave States to rebel against the Federal Government, in order to set up a government of pirates under which slavery might be perpetrated.

In the contest between the nation and slavery, our unfortunate people have sided, by instinct, with the former. We have little fortune to devote to the national cause, for a hard fate has hitherto forced us to live in poverty, but we do devote to its success, our hopes, our toils, our whole heart, our sacred honor, and our lives. We will work, pray, live, and, if need be, die for the Union, as cheerfully as ever a white patriot died for his country. The color of our skin does not lessen in the least degree, our love either for God or for the land of our birth.

We are proud to point your honorable body to the fact, that so far as our knowledge extends, not a negro traitor has made his appearance since the beginning of this wicked rebellion. . . .

Devoted as we are to the principles of justice, of love to all men, and of equal rights on which our Government is based, and which make it the hope of the world. We know the burdens of citizenship, and are ready to bear them. We know the duties of the good citizen, and are ready to perform them cheerfully, and would ask to be put in a position in which we can discharge them more effectually. We do not ask for the privilege of citizenship, wishing to shun the obligations imposed by it.

Near 200,000 of our brethren are today performing military duty in the ranks of the Union army. Thousands of them have already died in battle, or perished by a cruel martyrdom for the sake of the Union, and we are ready and willing to sacrifice more. But what higher order of citizen is there than the soldier? Or who has a greater trust confided to his hands? If we are called on to do military duty against the rebel armies in the field, why should we be denied the privilege of voting against rebel citizens at the ballot-box? The latter is as necessary to save the Government as the former. . . .

This is not a Democratic Government if a numerous, law-abiding, industrious, and useful class of citizens, born and bred on the soil, are to be treated as aliens and enemies, as an inferior degraded class, who must have no voice in the Government which they support, protect, and defend, with all their heart, soul, mind, and body, both in peace and war.

Questions

1. Why do the petitioners place so much emphasis on their loyalty to the Union cause during the war?
2. What understanding of American history and the nation's future do the petitioners convey?



100. Petition of Committee on Behalf of the Freedmen to Andrew Johnson (1865)

Source: Henry Bram et al. to the President of the United States, October 28, 1865, P-27, 1865, Letters Received, ser. 15, Washington Headquarters, Freedmen's Bureau Papers, National Archives.

By June 1865, some 40,000 freedpeople had been settled on “Sherman land” in South Carolina and Georgia, in accordance with Special Field Order 15. That summer, however, President Andrew Johnson, who had succeeded Lincoln, ordered nearly all land in federal hands returned to its former owners. In October, Oliver O. Howard, head of the Freedmen’s Bureau, traveled to the Sea Islands to inform Black people of the new policy.

Howard was greeted with disbelief and protest. A committee drew up petitions to Howard and President Johnson. Their petition to the president pointed out that the government had encouraged them to occupy the land and affirmed that they were ready to purchase it if given the opportunity. Johnson rejected the former slaves’ plea. And, throughout the South, because no land distribution took place, the vast majority of rural freedpeople remained poor and without property during Reconstruction.

EDISTO ISLAND S.C. Oct 28th, 1865.

To the President of these United States. We the freedmen of Edisto Island South Carolina have learned From you through Major General O O Howard commissioner of the Freedmans Bureau, with deep sorrow and Painful hearts of the possibility of government restoring These lands to the former owners. We are well aware Of the many perplexing and trying questions that burden Your mind and do therefore pray to god (the preserver of all and who has through our Late and beloved President (Lincoln) proclamation and the war made Us A free people) that he may guide you in making Your decisions and give you that wisdom that Cometh from above to settle these great and Important Questions for the best interests of the country and the Colored race: here is where secession was born and Nurtured Here is where we have toiled nearly all Our lives as slaves and were treated like dumb Driven cattle. This is our home; we have made These lands what they are. We were the only true and Loyal people that were found in possession of these Lands. We have been always ready to strike for Liberty and humanity yea to fight if needs be To preserve this glorious union. Shall not we who Are freedman and have been always true to this Union have the same rights as are enjoyed by Others? Have we broken any Law of these United States? Have we forfeited our rights of property In Land?—If not then are not our rights as A free people and good citizens of these United States To be considered before the rights of those who were Found in rebellion against this good and just Government (and now being conquered) come (as they Seem) with penitent hearts and beg forgiveness For

past offences and also ask if their lands Cannot be restored to them are these rebellious Spirits to be reinstated in their *possessions* And we who have been abused and oppressed For many long years not to be allowed the Privilege of purchasing land But be subject To the will of these large Land owners? God forbid, Land monopoly is injurious to the advancement of the course of freedom, and if Government Does not make some provision by which we as Freedmen can obtain A Homestead, we have Not bettered our condition.

We have been encouraged by Government to take Up these lands in small tracts, receiving Certificates of the same—we have thus far Taken Sixteen thousand (16000) acres of Land here on This Island. We are ready to pay for this land When Government calls for it. And now after What has been done will the good and just government take from us all this right and make us Subject to the will of those who have cheated and Oppressed us for many years God Forbid!

We the freedmen of this Island and of the State of South Carolina—Do therefore petition to you as the President of these United States, that some provisions be made by which Every colored man can purchase land and Hold it as his own. We wish to have A home if It be but A few acres. Without some provision is Made our future is sad to look upon. Yes our Situation is dangerous. We therefore look to you In this trying hour as A true friend of the poor and Neglected race for protection and Equal Rights with the privilege of purchasing A Homestead —A Homestead right here in the Heart of South Carolina.

We pray that God will direct your heart in Making such provision for us as freedmen which Will tend to unite these states together stronger Than ever before—May God bless you in the Administration of your duties as the President Of these United States is the humble prayer Of us all.—

On behalf of the Freedmen

| | |
|-----------|------------------|
| | Henry Bram |
| Committee | Ishmael Moultrie |
| | Yates Sampson |

Questions

1. How important is it for the petitioners to obtain land on Edisto Island, as opposed to land elsewhere in the country?
2. What do the petitioners think is the relationship between owning land and freedom?



101. A Sharecropping Contract (1866)

Source: Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Tennessee, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, National Archives.

Despite the widespread desire for land, few former slaves were able to acquire farms of their own in the post–Civil War South. Most ended up as sharecroppers, working on white-owned land for a share of the crop at the end of the growing season. Sharecropping was a kind of compromise between Black peoples’ desire for independence from white control and planters’ desire for a disciplined labor force. This contract, representative of thousands, originated in Shelby County, Tennessee. The laborers signed with an X, as they were illiterate. Typical of early postwar contracts, it gave the planter the right to supervise the labor of his employees. Later sharecropping contracts afforded former enslaved people greater autonomy. Families would rent parcels of land, work it under their own direction, and divide the crop with the owner at the end of the year. But as the price of cotton fell continuously after the Civil War, workers found it difficult to profit from the sharecropping system.

THOMAS J. ROSS agrees to employ the Freedmen to plant and raise a crop on his Rosstown Plantation . . . on the following Rules, Regulations, and Remunerations.

The said Ross agrees to furnish the land to cultivate, and a sufficient number of mules & horses and feed them to make and house said crop and all necessary farming utensils to carry on the same and to give unto said Freedmen whose names appear below one half of all the cotton, corn, and wheat that is raised on said place for the year 1866 after all the necessary expenses are deducted out that accrues on said crop. Outside of the Freedmen’s labor in harvesting, carrying to market, and selling the same and the said Freedmen whose names appear below covenant and agrees to and with said Thomas J. Ross that for and in consideration of one half of the crop before mentioned that they will plant, cultivate, and raise under the management control and Superintendence of said Ross, in good faith, a cotton, corn, and oat crop under his management for the year 1866. And we the said Freedmen agrees to furnish ourselves & families in provisions, clothing, medicine and medical bills and all, and every kind of other expenses that we may incur on said plantation for the year 1866 free of charge to said Ross. Should the said Ross furnish us any of the above supplies or any other kind of expenses, during said year, are to settle and pay him out of the net proceeds of our part of the crop the retail price of the county at time of sale or any price we may agree upon. The said Ross shall keep a regular book account, against each and every one or the head of every family to be adjusted and settled at the end of the year.

We furthermore bind ourselves to and with said Ross that we will do good work and labor ten hours a day on an average, winter and summer. The time to run from the time we commence to the time we quit. . . . We further agree that we will lose all lost time, or pay at the rate of one dollar per day, rainy days excepted. In sickness and women lying in childbed are to lose the

time and account for it to the other hands out of his or her part of the crop at the same rates that she or he may receive per annum.

We furthermore bind ourselves that we will obey the orders of said Ross in all things in carrying out and managing said crop for said year and be docked for disobedience. All is responsible for all farming utensils that is on hand or may be placed in care of said Freedmen for the year 1866 to said Ross and are also responsible to said Ross if we carelessly, maliciously maltreat any of his stock for said year to said Ross for damages to be assessed out of our wages for said year.

Samuel (X) Johnson, Thomas (X) Richard, Tinny (X) Fitch, Jessie (X) Simmons, Sophe (X) Pruden, Henry (X) Pruden, Frances (X) Pruden, Elijah (X) Smith

Questions

1. In what ways does the contract limit the freedom of the laborers?
2. What kinds of benefits and risks for the freedpeople are associated with a sharecropping arrangement?



102. Frances Harper, “We Are All Bound Up Together” (1866)

Source: Proceedings of the Eleventh National Women’s Rights Convention (New York, 1866), pp. 90–93.

In May 1866, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a leading African American poet, lecturer, and civil rights activist, addressed a National Women’s Rights Convention in New York City, joining on the platform such luminaries as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucretia Mott. She urged white women to cast off inherited prejudices and try to understand the experiences of Black women.

I FEEL I am something of a novice upon this platform. Born of a race whose inheritance has been outrage and wrong, most of my life had been spent in battling against those wrongs. But I did not feel as keenly as others, that I had these rights, in common with other women, which are now demanded. About two years ago, I stood within the shadows of my home. A great sorrow had fallen upon my life. My husband had died suddenly, leaving me a widow, with four children, one my own, and the others step-children. I tried to keep my children together. But my husband died in debt; and before he had been in his grave three months, the administrator had swept the very milk-crocks and wash tubs from my hands. I was a farmer’s wife and made butter for the Columbus market; but what could I do, when they had swept all away? They left me one thing—and that was a looking-glass! Had I died instead of my husband, how different would have been the result! By this time he would have had another wife, it is likely; and no administrator would have gone into his house, broken up his home, and sold his bed, and taken away his means of support.

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We are all bound up together in one great bundle of humanity, and society cannot trample on the weakest and feeblest of its members without receiving the curse in its own soul. You tried that in the case of the Negro. You pressed him down for two centuries; and in so doing you crippled the moral strength and paralyzed the spiritual energies of the white men of the country. When the hands of the black were fettered, white men were deprived of the liberty of speech and the freedom of the press. Society cannot afford to neglect the enlightenment of any class of its members. At the South, the legislation of the country was in behalf of the rich slaveholders, while the poor white man was neglected. What is the consequence today? From that very class of neglected poor white men, comes the man who stands today with his hand upon the helm of the nation. He fails to catch the watchword of the hour, and throws himself, the incarnation of meanness, across the pathway of the nation. My objection to Andrew Johnson is not that he has been a poor white man; my objection is that he keeps “poor whits” all the way through. (Applause.) That is the trouble with him.

This grand and glorious revolution which has commenced, will fail to reach its climax of success, until throughout the length and breadth of the American Republic, the nation shall be so color-blind, as to know no man by the color of his skin or the curl of his hair. It will then have no privileged class, trampling upon and outraging the unprivileged classes, but will be then one great privileged nation, whose privilege will be to produce the loftiest manhood and womanhood that humanity can attain.

I do not believe that giving the woman the ballot is immediately going to cure all the ills of life. I do not believe that white women are dewdrops just exhaled from the skies. I think that like men they may be divided into three classes, the good, the bad, and the indifferent. The good would vote according to their convictions and principles; the bad, as dictated by prejudice or malice; and the indifferent will vote on the strongest side of the question, with the winning party.

You white women speak here of rights. I speak of wrongs. I, as a colored woman, have had in this country an education which has made me feel as if I were in the situation of Ishmael, my hand against every man, and every man's hand against me. Let me go tomorrow morning and take my seat in one of your street cars—I do not know that they will do it in New York, but they will in Philadelphia—and the conductor will put up his hand and stop the car rather than let me ride.

A LADY—They will not do that here.

MRS. HARPER—They do in Philadelphia. Going from Washington to Baltimore this Spring, they put me in the smoking car. (Loud Voices—"Shame.") Aye, in the capital of the nation, where the black man consecrated himself to the nation's defence, faithful when the white man was faithless, they put me in the smoking car! They did it once; but the next time they tried it, they failed; for I would not go in. I felt the fight in me; but I don't want to have to fight all the time. Today I am puzzled where to make my home. I would like to make it in Philadelphia, near my own friends and relations. But if I want to ride in the streets of Philadelphia, they send me to ride on the platform with the driver. (Cries of "Shame.") Have women nothing to do with this? Not long since, a colored woman took her seat in an Eleventh street car in Philadelphia, and the conductor stopped the car, and told the rest of the passengers to get out, and left the car with her in it alone, when they took it back to the station. One day I took my seat in a car, and the conductor came to me and told me to take another seat. I just screamed "murder." The man said if I was black I ought to behave myself. I knew that if he was white he was not behaving himself. Are there not wrongs to be righted?

In advocating the cause of the colored man, since the Dred Scott decision, I have sometimes said I thought the nation had touched bottom. But let me tell you there is a depth of infamy lower than that. It is when the nation, standing upon the threshold of a great peril, reached out its hands to a feebler race, and asked that race to help it, and when the peril was over, said, You are good enough for soldiers, but not good enough for citizens. When Judge Taney said that the men of my race had no rights which the white man was bound to respect, he had not seen the bones of the black man bleaching outside of Richmond. He had not seen the thinned ranks and the thickened graves of the Louisiana Second, a regiment which went into battle nine hundred strong, and came out with three hundred. He had not stood at Olustee and seen defeat and disaster crushing down the pride of our banner, until word was brought to Col. Hallowell, "The

day is lost; go in and save it;” and black men stood in the gap, beat back the enemy, and saved your army. (Applause.)

We have a woman in our country who has received the name of “Moses,” not by lying about it, but by acting it out (applause)—a woman who has gone down into the Egypt of slavery and brought out hundreds of our people into liberty. The last time I saw that woman, her hands were swollen. That woman who had led one of Montgomery’s most successful expeditions, who was brave enough and secretive enough to act as a scout for the American army, had her hands all swollen from a conflict with a brutal conductor, who undertook to eject her from her place. That woman, whose courage and bravery won a recognition from our army and from every black man in the land, is excluded from every thoroughfare of travel. Talk of giving women the ballot-box? Go on. It is a normal school, and the white women of this country need it. While there exists this brutal element in society which tramples upon the feeble and treads down the weak, I tell you that if there is any class of people who need to be lifted out of their airy nothings and selfishness, it is the white women of America.

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Questions

1. Why does Harper place so much emphasis on unequal treatment on city streetcars?
2. Why does Harper refer to the service of Black soldiers in the Civil War?



103. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Home Life” (ca. 1875)

Source: “Home Life,” manuscript, ca. 1875, Elizabeth Cady Stanton Papers, Library of Congress.

Women activists saw Reconstruction as the moment for women to claim their own emancipation. With Black people guaranteed equality before the law by the Fourteenth Amendment and Black men given the right to vote by the Fifteenth, women demanded that the boundaries of American democracy be expanded to include them as well. Other feminists debated how to achieve “liberty for married women.” In 1875, Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted an essay demanding that the idea of equality, which had “revolutionized” American politics, be extended into private life. Genuine liberty for women, she insisted, required an overhaul of divorce laws (which generally required evidence of adultery, desertion, or extreme abuse to terminate a marriage) and an end to the authority men exercised over their wives.

Women’s demand for the right to vote found few sympathetic male listeners. Even fewer supported liberalized divorce laws. But Stanton’s extension of the idea of “liberty for women” into the most intimate areas of private life identified a question that would become a central concern of later generations of feminists.

WE ARE IN the midst of a social revolution, greater than any political or religious revolution, that the world has ever seen, because it goes deep down to the very foundations of society. . . . A question of magnitude presses on our consideration, whether man and woman are equal, joint heirs to all the richness and joy of earth and Heaven, or whether they were eternally ordained, one to be sovereign, the other slave. . . . Here is a question with half the human family, and that the stronger half, on one side, who are in possession of the citadel, hold the key to the treasury and make the laws and public sentiment to suit their own purposes. Can all this be made to change base without prolonged discussion, upheavings, heartburnings, violence, and war? Will man yield what he considers to be his legitimate authority over woman with less struggle than have Popes and Kings their supposed rights over their subjects, or slaveholders over their slaves? No, no. John Stuart Mill says the generality of the male sex cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal at the fireside; and here is the secret of the opposition to woman’s equality in the state and the church—men are not ready to recognize it in the home. This is the real danger apprehended in giving woman the ballot, for as long as man makes, interprets, and executes the laws for himself, he holds the power under any system. Hence when he expresses the fear that liberty for woman would upset the family relation, he acknowledges that her present condition of subjection is not of her own choosing, and that if she had the power the whole relation would be essentially changed. And this is just what is coming to pass, the kernel of the struggle we witness today.

This is woman's transition period from slavery to freedom and all these social upheavings, before which the wisest and bravest stand appalled, are but necessary incidents in her progress to equality. Conservatism cries out we are going to destroy the family. Timid reformers answer, the political equality of woman will not change it. They are both wrong. It will entirely revolutionize it. When woman is man's equal the marriage relation cannot stand on the basis it is today. But this change will not destroy it; as state constitutions and statute laws did not create conjugal and maternal love, they cannot annul them. . . . We shall have the family, that great conservator of national strength and morals, after the present idea of man's headship is repudiated and woman set free. To establish a republican form of government [and] the right of individual judgment in the family must of necessity involve discussion, dissension, division, but the purer, higher, holier marriage will be evolved by the very evils we now see and deplore. This same law of equality that has revolutionized the state and the church is now knocking at the door of our homes and sooner or later there too it must do its work. Let us one and all wisely bring ourselves into line with this great law for man will gain as much as woman by an equal companionship in the nearest and holiest relations of life. . . . So long as people marry from considerations of policy, from every possible motive but the true one, discord and division must be the result. So long as the State provides no education for youth on the questions and throws no safeguards around the formation of marriage ties, it is in honor bound to open wide the door of escape. From a woman's standpoint, I see that marriage as an indissoluble tie is slavery for woman, because law, religion, and public sentiment all combine under this idea to hold her true to this relation, whatever it may be and there is no other human slavery that knows such depths of degradations as a wife chained to a man whom she neither loves nor respects, no other slavery so disastrous in its consequences on the race, or to individual respect, growth, and development. . . .

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By the laws of several states in this republic made by Christian representatives of the people divorces are granted today for . . . seventeen reasons. . . . By this kind of legislation in the several states we have practically decided two important points: 1st That marriage is a dissoluble tie that may be sundered by a decree of the courts. 2nd That it is a civil contract and not a sacrament of the church, and the one involves the other. . . .

A legal contract for a section of land requires that the parties be of age, of sound mind, [and] that there be no flaw in the title. . . . But a legal marriage in many states in the Union may be contracted between a boy of fourteen and a girl of twelve without the consent of parents or guardians, without publication of banns. . . . Now what person of common sense, or conscience, can endorse laws as wise or prudent that sanction acts such as these. Let the state be logical: if marriage is a civil contract, it should be subject to the laws of all other contracts, carefully made, the parties of age, and all agreements faithfully observed. . . .

Let us now glance at a few of the popular objections to liberal divorce laws. It is said that to make divorce respectable by law, gospel and public sentiment is to break up all family relations. Which is to say that human affections are the result and not the foundation of the canons of the church and statutes of the state. . . . To open the doors of escape to those who dwell in continual antagonism, to the unhappy wives of drunkards, libertines, knaves, lunatics, and tyrants, need not necessarily embitter the relations of those who *are* contented and happy, but on the contrary the very fact of freedom strengthens and purifies the bond of union. When

husbands and wives do not own each other as property, but are bound together only by affection, marriage will be a lifelong friendship and not a heavy yoke, from which both may sometimes long for deliverance. The freer the relations are between human beings, the happier.

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Home life to the best of us has its shadows and sorrows, and because of our ignorance this must needs be. . . . The day is breaking. It is something to know that life's ills are not showered upon us by the Good Father from a kind of Pandora's box, but are the results of causes that we have the power to control. By a knowledge and observance of law the road to health and happiness opens before [us]: a joy and peace that passeth all understanding shall yet be ours and Paradise regained on earth. When marriage results from a true union of intellect and spirit and when Mothers and Fathers give to their holy offices even that preparation of soul and body that the artist gives to the conception of his poem, statue, or landscape, then will marriage, maternity, and paternity acquire a new sacredness and dignity and a nobler type of manhood and womanhood will glorify the race!!

Questions

1. How does Stanton define the "social revolution" the United States underwent after the Civil War?
2. How does Stanton believe that individual freedom within the family can be established?



104. Frederick Douglass, “The Composite Nation” (1869)

Source: Philip S. Foner and Daniel Rosenberg, eds., Racism, Dissent, and Asian Americans from 1850 to the Present (Westport, Conn., 1993), pp. 217–30.

Another group that did not share fully in the expansion of rights inspired by the Civil War and Reconstruction was Asian Americans. Prejudices against Asians were deeply entrenched, especially on the West Coast, where most immigrants from Asia lived. When the Radical Republican Charles Sumner, a senator from Massachusetts, moved to allow Asians to become naturalized citizens (a right that had been barred to them since 1790), senators from California and Oregon objected vociferously, and the proposal was defeated.

Another advocate of equal rights for Asian Americans was Frederick Douglass. In his remarkable “Composite Nation” speech, delivered in Boston in 1869, Douglass condemned anti-Asian discrimination and called for giving Asian Americans all the rights of other Americans, including the right to vote. Douglass’s comprehensive vision of a country made up of people of all races and national origins enjoying equal rights was too radical for the time, but it would win greater and greater acceptance during the twentieth century.

THERE WAS A time when even brave men might look fearfully at the destiny of the Republic. When our country was involved in a tangled network of contradictions; when vast and irreconcilable social forces fiercely disputed for ascendancy and control; when a heavy curse rested upon our very soil, defying alike the wisdom and the virtue of the people to remove it; when our professions were loudly mocked by our practice and our name was a reproach and a byword to a mocking earth; when our good ship of state, freighted with the best hopes of the oppressed of all nations, was furiously hurled against the hard and flinty rocks of derision, and every cord, bolt, beam, and bend in her body quivered beneath the shock, there was some apology for doubt and despair. But that day has happily passed away. The storm has been weathered, and the portents are nearly all in our favor.

There are clouds, wind, smoke and dust and noise, overhead and around, and there will always be; but no genuine thunder, with destructive bolt, menaces from any quarter of the sky.

The real trouble with us was never our system or form of Government, or the principles underlying it; but the peculiar composition of our people; the relations existing between them and the compromising spirit which controlled the ruling power of the country.

We have for a long time hesitated to adopt and may yet refuse to adopt, and carry out, the only principle which can solve that difficulty and give peace, strength, and security to the Republic, *and that is the principle of absolute equality.*