

1808. Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade

Peter Williams, Jr., *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade; delivered in the African Church, in the City of New York, January 1, 1808* (N.Y., 1808). Among the very earliest forms of organized anti-slavery activity was that conducted by Negroes themselves within and through their own societies. Three examples of this type of agitation follow: the first consists of extracts from an address delivered by the Reverend Peter Williams, Jr., in the New York African Church on January 1, 1808, the day when the federal law barring the African slave trade went into effect. Source: H. Aptheker (1973). *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*. Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, v. 1, 51-53.

Oh, God! we thank thee, that thou didst condescend to listen to the cries of Africa's wretched sons; and that thou didst interfere in their behalf. At thy call humanity sprang forth, and espoused the cause of the oppressed: one hand she employed in drawing from their vitals the deadly arrows of injustice; and the other in holding a shield, to defend them from fresh assaults: and at that illustrious moment, when the sons of 76 pronounced these United States free and independent; when the spirit of patriotism, erected a temple sacred to liberty; when the inspired voice of Americans first uttered those noble sentiments, "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain un- alienable rights; among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"; and when the bleeding African, lifting his fetters, exclaimed, "am I not a man and a brother"; then with redoubled efforts, the angel of humanity strove to restore to the African race, the inherent rights of man. .. May the time speedily commence, when Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands; when the sun of liberty shall beam resplendent on the whole African race; and its genial influences, promote the luxuriant growth of knowledge and virtue.