

1827. Freedom's Journal Opening Editorial

Sources: Source: H. Aptheker (1973). *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*. Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, v. 1, 82-88;
<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAScornish.htm>;
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Freedom's Journal was the first African American newspaper published in the United States. It was founded and edited by Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm in New York City in March 16, 1827. Its editorials stressed both the fight against slavery and racial discrimination.

Samuel Cornish was born in Delaware in 1795 and trained for the ministry in Philadelphia at the African Presbyterian Church. After he was ordained in 1822, he became pastor of New York City's first African-American Presbyterian Church. Later he was the editor of *The Rights of All* (1829) and *Colored American* (1837-39). In 1827 and 1828, Cornish was an agent for the New York African Free Schools. In 1833, Cornish joined Arthur and Lewis Tappan, William Lloyd Garrison, and Theodore Weld to form the Anti-Slavery Society. In 1840, Cornish and the Tappans broke with the Anti-Slavery Society in opposition to its support for women's rights and formed a rival organization, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. Cornish died in Brooklyn in 1858.

John Brown Russwurm was born in 1799 in Jamaica. His mother was an enslaved African and his father was a planter who had moved to the Caribbean from Virginia. Russwurm's father sent him to Canada to be educated and he eventually graduated from Bowdoin College in Maine. Russwurm broke with the mainstream of the abolitionist movement became a major advocate of recolonizing former slaves in Africa. In 1829, he migrated to Monrovia, a colony founded by the American Colonization Society that would later become the Republic of Liberia. There he served as superintendent of schools, editor of the *Liberia Herald*, and colonial secretary. He was later appointed governor of Cape Palmas, an independent colony formed by the Maryland Colonization Society.

TO OUR PATRONS

In presenting our first number to our Patrons, we feel all the diffidence of persons entering upon a new and untried line of business. But a moment's reflection upon the noble objects, which we have in view by the publication of this Journal; the expediency of its appearance at this time, when so many schemes are in action concerning our people-encourage us to come boldly before an enlightened publick. For we believe, that a paper devoted to the dissimulation of useful knowledge among our brethren, and to their moral and religious improvement, must meet with the cordial approbation of every friend to humanity.

The peculiarities of this Journal, renders it important that we should advertise to the world our motives by which we are actuated, and the objects which we contemplate.

We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the publick been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us dearly, though in the estimation of some mere trifles; for though there are many in society who exercise towards us benevolent feelings; still (with sorrow we confess it) there are others who make it their business to enlarge upon the least trifle, which tends to the discredit of any person of colour; and pronounce anathemas and denounce our whole body for the misconduct of this guilty one. We are aware that there are many instances of vice among us, but we avow that it is because no one has taught its subjects to be virtuous; many instances of poverty, because no sufficient efforts accommodated to minds contracted by slavery, and deprived of early education have been made, to teach them how to husband their hard earnings, and to secure to themselves comfort.

Education being an object of the highest importance to the welfare of society, we shall endeavour to present just and adequate views of it, and to urge upon our brethren the necessity

and expediency of training their children, while young, to habits of industry, and thus forming them for becoming useful members of society. It is surely time that we should awake from this lethargy of years, and make a concentrated effort for the education of our youth. We form a spoke in the human wheel, and it is necessary that we should understand our pendency on the different parts, and theirs on us, in order to perform our part with propriety.

Though not desiring of dictating, we shall feel it our incumbent duty to dwell occasionally upon the general principles and rules of economy. The world has grown too enlightened, to estimate any man's character by his personal appearance. Though all men acknowledge the excellency of Franklin's maxims, yet comparatively few practise upon them. We may deplore when it is too late, the neglect of these self-evident truths, but it avails little to mourn. Ours will be the task of admonishing our brethren on these points.

The civil rights of a people being of the greatest value, it shall ever be our duty to vindicate our brethren, when oppressed; and to lay the case before the publick. We shall also urge upon our brethren, (who are qualified by the laws of the different states) the expediency of using their elective franchise; and of making an independent use of the same. We wish them not to become the tools of party.

And as much time is frequently lost, and wrong principles instilled, by the perusal of works of trivial importance, we shall consider it a part of our duty to recommend to our young readers, such authors as will not only enlarge their stock of useful knowledge, but such as will also serve to stimulate them to higher attainments in science.

We trust also, that through the columns of the FREEDOM'S JOURNAL, many practical pieces, having for their bases, the improvement of our brethren, will be presented to them, from the pens of many of our respected friends, who have kindly promised their assistance.