

“VOX AFRICANORUM” (fl. 1783)

Letter to the *Maryland Gazette* (May 15, 1783)

———*Libertas suam vocem edidi*

To a people whose characteristic virtues are *justice* and *fortitude*, in the exercise of which they have become the wonder and astonishment of the universe, We, the black inhabitants of these United States, humbly submit the following address.

When Great Britain essayed to make her first unjust and wicked attempts to forge chains to enslave America, the noble spirit of liberty and freedom uttered her voice. America, with the meekness of a lamb, remonstrated against the wickedness of the attempt; but Britain, lost to every sentiment of justice and virtue, and sunk in every vice, obstinately persisted in the rash attempt. America then, nobly animated with the love of liberty, assuming the fortitude of a lion, stepped forth, and proclaimed, “We will be free.” The world beheld with admiration mingled with applause, and heaven smiled approbation.

Determined in her resolutions, America has borne the storms and complicated pressures of an eight years war; purchased at the price of her blood and treasure, and even at the risque of her existence, she has at length obtained her liberty, the darling object of her soul; universal joy has diffused itself through all her borders; acclamations of gratitude on this occasion, from the lips of her every free-born son have ascended to the throne on high; the glorious deeds of America are recorded in the court of heaven.

When an address is made to men, who have been born free—to Americans, who have been alarmed, and nobly roused into virtuous activity at the first dawns of slavery—to men whose hearts are warm—whose minds are expanded with the *recent acquisition of their own liberty and freedom*—to men whose actions and whose sufferings have been unparalleled in the annals of mankind during a conflict of many years, to retain, and to transmit, without diminution, the rights of humanity and blessings of liberty to their posterity—When an address, I say, is made to *such men*, by fellow creatures groaning under the chains of slavery and oppression, can we doubt of their becoming the friends and advocates of the enslaved and oppressed? Can we doubt the touching of their feelings, and exciting of their attention?—No—to doubt would be wickedness in the abstract—it would be sinning against the solemn declarations of a brave and virtuous people.

We have lately beheld, with anxious concern, your infant struggles in the glorious cause of liberty—We attend to your solemn declaration of the rights of mankind—to your appeals, for the rectitude of your principles, to the Almighty, who regards men of every condition, and admits them to a participation of his benefits—We admired your wisdom, justice, piety, and fortitude.

To that wisdom, justice, piety, and fortitude, which has led you to freedom and true greatness, we now appeal. Freedom is the object of our humble address.

Our abject state of slavery, a state of all others the most degrading to human nature, is known to every American: We shall not, therefore, descend to the disagreeable task of wounding the feelings of any by a description. In the language of your humble addresses to the inexorable throne of Britain, permit us humbly to address you. Liberty is our claim. Reverence for our Great Creator, principles of humanity, and the dictates of common sense, all convince us that we have an indubitable right to liberty. Has not the wisdom of America solemnly declared it? Attend to your own declarations—“These truths are self-evident—all men are created equal; they are

endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” We shall offer no arguments—nay, it would be insulting to the understanding of America at this enlightened period, to suppose she stood in need of arguments to prove our right to liberty. It would be to suppose she has already forgot those exalted principles she has so lately asserted with her blood.

Though our bodies differ in colour from yours, yet our souls are similar in a desire for freedom. Disparity in colour, we conceive, can never constitute a disparity in rights. Reason is shocked at the absurdity! Humanity revolts at the idea!

Let America cease to exult—she has yet obtained but partial freedom. Thousands are yet groaning under their chains; slavery and oppression are not yet banished from this land; the appellation of master and slave, an appellation of all others the most depressing to humanity, have still an existence. We are slaves! To whom? Is it to abandoned Britons?—Permit us to refer you to facts; let them make the reply. A people who have fought—who have bled—who have purchased their own freedom by a sacrifice of their choicest heroes—will never continue the advocates for slavery.

Pride, insolence, interest, avarice, and maxims of false policy, have marked the conduct of Britain—but shall pride, insolence, considerations of interest, avarice, or maxims of false policy, lead America to conduct inconsistent with her principles?—Forbid it Justice—forbid it Wisdom—forbid it sound Policy—Every principle which has led America to freedom and greatness forbid it. Has the laws of Nature doomed us to this abject state—shut out, as it were, from the benign influences of religion, knowledge, arts, and science—excluded from every refinement which renders human nature happy! Reverence to our God forbids the impious thought! Why then are we held in slavery? Is it by any municipal laws? If so, YE fathers of your country; friends of liberty and of mankind, behold our chains! Lend an ear to the voice of oppression—commiserate the afflictions of a helpless and abused part of the human species. To you we look up for justice—deny it not—it is our right.