

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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# Abolition

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b"

As the American Revolution with its bedrock rhetoric of freedom and inherent rights gained traction, the hypocrisy of slavery was thrown into ever-starker relief. This was especially the case in Massachusetts.

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Massachusetts law deemed enslaved people not only as property, but under certain circumstances as persons. This meant that they could legally challenge enslavers' rights to own them. If an enslaved individual could prove that an enslaver had broken the law for example, by means of an illegal purchase or a rescinded offer of freedom then they could win their freedom in the courts. By 1780, almost 30 individuals had brought such suits against their enslavers.

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Then Massachusetts adopted a new state constitution, which stated that call men are born free and equal. The precedent for lawsuits having been set, an enslaved woman named Elizabeth Freeman successfully sued for her own emancipation. But this case was different. Freeman sued on the grounds that slavery violated the new state constitution. Her victory was the beginning of the end of slavery in Massachusetts. In 1791, the federal census listed zero enslaved persons in the state.

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2. b'

In 1798, Venture Smith published his memoir of enslavement, entitled *A Narrative of The Life And Adventures of Venture, A Native Of Africa: But Resident Above Sixty Years in the United States of America*. In his account, Smith described his kidnapping from a region of West Africa and subsequent enslavement in New England. He also recounted his successful efforts to purchase his own freedom and that of his family members.

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According to the Library of Congress, Smith's book was the first slavery memoir published in the United States. It helped pave the way for a new literary genre of enslavement memoirs. By the end of the Civil War, over 100 works in this genre had been published, including famed orator Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Solomon Northrup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). By exposing the cruelty and violence of slavery, these works challenged the public narrative of the American slavery system and helped fuel the abolition movement. The genre continued to grow and diversify after the Civil War, with memoirs published during Reconstruction and beyond.

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3. b”

By 1804, every northern state had enacted anti-slavery laws. Yet in the decades to come, slavery remained very much alive in the North. The reason for this was that the anti-slavery laws called for a slow phasing out of slavery rather than its immediate abolition.

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The first of these laws was Pennsylvania’s Gradual Abolition Act of 1780. The word “abolition” in its title was a euphemism; the legislation specified that enslaved persons born before the act’s passage would remain enslaved for life. The act also sanctioned the automatic enslavement of children born to enslaved mothers, with eligibility for emancipation not occurring until age 28.

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Other states followed suit with similar legislation. As a result slavery was legal in the North for longer than many people realize, continuing in some areas into the 1840s.

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**Excerpt from Life and Times of Frederick Douglass by Frederick Douglass**

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Tame and docile to a proverb, when well trained, when but half broken to the yoke, the ox is the most sullen and intractable of animals. I saw in my own situation several points of similarity with that of the oxen. They were property; so was I. Covey was to break me\ue2\x80\x94I was to break them. Break and be broken was the order.

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Half of the day was already gone and I had not yet turned my face homeward. It required only two days' experience and observation to teach me that no such apparent waste of time would be lightly overlooked by Covey. I therefore hurried toward home; but in reaching the lane gate I met the crowning disaster of the day. This gate was a fair specimen of southern handicraft. There were two huge posts eighteen inches in diameter, rough hewed and square, and the heavy gate was so hung on one of these that it opened only about half the proper distance. On arriving here it was necessary for me to let go the end of the rope on the horns of the \ue2\x80\x9cin hand ox;\ue2\x80\x9d and now as soon as the gate was open and I let go of it to get the rope again, off went my oxen, making nothing of their load, full tilt; and in so doing they caught the huge gate between the wheel and the cart body, literally crushing it to splinters, and coming only within a few inches of subjecting me to a similar crushing, for I was just in advance of the wheel when it struck the left gate post. With these two hair-breadth escapes I thought I could successfully explain to Mr. Covey the delay and avert punishment\ue2\x80\x94I was not without a faint hope of being commended for the stern resolution which I had displayed in accomplishing the difficult task--a task which I afterwards learned even Covey himself would not have undertaken without first driving the oxen for some time in the open field, preparatory to their going to the woods. But in this hope I was disappointed. On coming to him his countenance assumed an aspect of rigid displeasure, and as I gave him a history of the casualties of my trip, his wolfish face, with his greenish eyes, became intensely ferocious.

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## Excerpt from the first issue of *The Liberator* by William Lloyd Garrison

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Assenting to the self-evident truth maintained in the American Declaration of Independence, that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, I shall strenuously contend for the immediate enfranchisement of our slave population. In Park-street Church, on the Fourth of July, 1829, in an address on slavery, I unreflectingly assented to the popular but pernicious doctrine of gradual abolition. I seize this opportunity to make a full and unequivocal recantation, and thus publicly to ask pardon of my God, of my country, and of my brethren the poor slaves, for having uttered a sentiment so full of timidity, injustice and absurdity. A similar recantation, from my pen, was published in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* at Baltimore, in September, 1829. My conscience is now satisfied.

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I am aware, that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen; but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest! I will not equivocate! I will not excuse! I will not retreat a single inch! AND I WILL BE HEARD.

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**Excerpt from the first issue of *The North Star* by Frederick Douglass**

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It is neither a reflection on the fidelity, nor a disparagement of the ability of our friends and fellow-laborers, to assert what common sense affirms and only folly denies, that the man who has suffered the wrong is the man to demand redress, that the man STRUCK is the man to CRY OUT and that he who has endured the cruel pangs of Slavery is the man to advocate Liberty. It is evident we must be our own representatives and advocates, not exclusively, but peculiarly not distinct from, but in connection with our white friends. In the grand struggle for liberty and equality now waging, it is meet, right and essential that there should arise in our ranks authors and editors, as well as orators, for it is in these capacities that the most permanent good can be rendered to our cause.

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Hitherto the immediate victims of slavery and prejudice, owing to various causes, have had little share in this department of effort: they have frequently undertaken, and almost as frequently failed. This latter fact has often been urged by our friends against our engaging in the present enterprise; but, so far from convincing us of the impolicy of our course, it serves to confirm us in the necessity, if not the wisdom of our undertaking. That others have failed, is a reason for OUR earnestly endeavoring to succeed. Our race must be vindicated from the embarrassing imputations resulting from former non-success. We believe that what ought to be done, can be done.

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