

## The Freedom Fighters

Freedom  
Opportunity  
Representation  
Equality

# Benjamin Banneker, Letter to Secretary Thomas Jefferson (1791)

\*\*\* How does Benjamin Banneker see freedom in America? \*\*\*

*Benjamin Banneker was a free black mathematician and surveyor who helped lay Washington D.C. He also published an astronomical almanac which sold throughout the Middle Atlantic states. This letter was sent to the then Secretary of State.*

Notes

## Annotations

For each fighter, annotate for their efforts to ensure that freedom is actually practiced in America as well as for their effective use of ethos, logos, or pathos which helped persuade change.

SIR,

...I suppose it is a truth too well attested to you, to need a proof here, that we are a race of beings, who have long labored under the abuse and **censure** of the world; that we have long been looked upon with an eye of **contempt**; and that we have long been considered rather as **brutish** than human, and scarcely capable of mental capacity.

Sir, I freely and cheerfully acknowledge, that I am of the African race, and in that color which is natural to them of the deepest dye; and it is under a sense of the most profound gratitude to the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, that I now confess to you, that I am not under that state of tyrannical **despot**, and inhuman captivity, to which too many of my **brethren** are doomed, but that I have abundantly tasted of the fruit of those blessings, which proceed from that free and unequalled liberty with which you are favored....

Sir, suffer me to recall to your mind that time, in which the arms and **tyranny** of the British crown were exerted, with every powerful effort, in order to reduce you to a state of servitude....

This, Sir, was a time when you clearly saw into the injustice of a state of slavery, and in which you had just **apprehensions** of the horrors of its condition. It was then that your **abhorrence** was so excited, that you publicly held forth this true and invaluable doctrine, which is worthy to be recorded and remembered in all succeeding ages: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and that among these are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." ...

I suppose that your knowledge of the situation of my brethren, is too extensive to need a recital here; neither shall I presume to prescribe methods by which they may be relieved, otherwise than by recommending to you and all others, to **wean** yourselves from those narrow prejudices which you have **imbibed** with respect to them...

And now, Sir, I shall conclude, and subscribe myself, with the most profound respect.

Your most obedient humble servant,  
BENJAMIN BANNEKER

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### Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the 4<sup>th</sup> of July?" (1842)

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\*\*\* How does Frederick Douglass see freedom in America? \*\*\*

*Escaping slavery and making a life for himself in the North, Frederick Douglass was the most well-known and influential African American abolitionist in the mid 1800s. His eloquence and grand oratory skills proved effective as he shared his personal stories of being enslaved. He published The North Star, an abolitionist newspaper, and later wrote a best-selling self-titled autobiography of his impressive life story.*

Fellow citizens, pardon me, and allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I or those I represent to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?

I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! The blessings in which you this day rejoice are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity, and independence bequeathed by your fathers is shared by you, not by me. This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems is inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony.

America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future. Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity, which is outraged, in the name of liberty, which is fettered, in the name of the Constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery -- the great sin and shame of America!

Is it not astonishing that, while we are plowing, planting, and reaping, using all kinds of mechanical tools, erecting houses, constructing bridges, building ships, working in metals of brass, iron, copper, silver, and gold; that while we are reading, writing, and ciphering, acting as clerks, merchants, and secretaries, having among us lawyers, doctors, ministers, poets, authors, editors, orators, and teachers; that we are engaged in all the enterprises common to other men -- digging gold in California, capturing the whale in the Pacific, feeding sheep and cattle on the hillside, living, moving, acting, thinking, planning, living in families as husbands, wives, and children, and above all, confessing and worshipping the Christian God, and looking hopefully for life and immortality beyond the grave -- we are called upon to prove that we are men?

The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be denounced.

What to the American slave is your Fourth of July? I answer, a day that reveals to him more than all other days of the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mock; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are to him mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy - a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation of the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of these United States at this very hour.

Go search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the Old World, travel through South America, search out every abuse and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me that, for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.

Notes

## Annotations

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# Jourdon Anderson, "Letter from a Freedman to his Old Master" (1865)

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### \*\*\* How does Jourdon Anderson see freedom in America? \*\*\*

*In his famous letter, Jourdon Anderson dictated his reply through his abolitionist employer to his former master's request to return to his plantation to help restore the farm after the disarray the Civil War left in its path. His letter was published in the Cincinnati Commercial and became an instant media sensation, reprinted in several more newspapers around the North. Historians have authenticated the letter, matching names and locations with census records. Colonel Anderson died two years later, destitute, having had sold his land, as no slaves returned.*

Notes

Dayton, Ohio, August 7, 1865

To My Old Master, Colonel P.H. Anderson, Big Spring, Tennessee

Sir: I got your letter and was glad to find you had not forgotten Jourdon, and that you wanted me to come back and live with you again, promising to do better for me than anybody else can. I have often felt uneasy about you. I thought the Yankees would have hung you long before this for harboring Rebs they found at your house. Although you shot at me twice before I left you, I did not want to hear of your being hurt, and am glad you are still living.

I want to know particularly what the good chance is you propose to give me. I am doing tolerably well here; I get \$25 a month, with victuals and clothing; have a comfortable home for Mandy, —the folks here call her Mrs. Anderson),—and the children—Milly, Jane and Grundy—go to school and are learning well; the teacher says Grundy has a head for a preacher. We are kindly treated; sometimes we overhear others saying, "Them colored people were slaves" down in Tennessee. The children feel hurt when they hear such remarks, but I tell them it was no disgrace in Tennessee to belong to Col. Anderson. Many darkies would have been proud, as I used to be, to call you master. Now, if you will write and say what wages you will give me, I will be better able to decide whether it would be to my advantage to move back again.

I served you faithfully for thirty-two years and Mandy twenty years. At twenty-five dollars a month for me, and two dollars a week for Mandy, our earnings would amount to eleven thousand six hundred and eighty dollars. Add to this the interest for the time our wages has been kept back and deduct what you paid for our clothing and three doctor's visits to me, and pulling a tooth for Mandy, and the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to. Please send the money by Adams Express, in care of V. Winters, Esq., Dayton, Ohio. If you fail to pay us for faithful labors in the past we can have little faith in your promises in the future. We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes to the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense. Here I draw my wages every Saturday night, but in Tennessee there was never any pay-day for the Negroes any more than for the horses and cows.

If you will also please state if there has been any schools opened for the colored children in your neighborhood, the great desire of my life now is to give my children an education, and have them form virtuous habits.

From your old servant,  
Jourdon Anderson

P.S. —Say howdy to George Carter, and thank him for taking the pistol from you when you were shooting at me.

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*The Freedom Fighters*

## W.E.B. Du Bois, from "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" (1903)

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\*\*\* How does W.E.B. Du Bois see freedom in America? \*\*\*

*W.E.B. Du Bois was a Massachusetts native who received his Ph.D. from Harvard University (the first African American to do so) and made a career as a professor at Atlanta University. He was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).*

*Notes*

## Annotations

For each fighter, annotate for their efforts to ensure that freedom is actually practiced in America as well as for their effective use of ethos, logos, or pathos which helped persuade change.

Easily the most striking thing in the history of the American Negro since 1876 is the ascendancy of Mr. Booker T. Washington. It began at the time when war memories and ideals were rapidly passing; a day of astonishing commercial development was dawning. Mr. Washington came, with a simple definite program. His program of **industrial education, conciliation** of the South, and submission and silence as to civil and political rights, was not wholly original, but Mr. Washington first indissolubly linked these things; he put enthusiasm, unlimited energy, and perfect faith into this program, and changed it from a by-path into a **veritable** Way of Life.

This is an age of unusual economic development, and Mr. Washington's program naturally takes an economic **caste**, becoming a gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life. Moreover, Mr. Washington's program practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro races. Mr. Washington withdraws many of the high demands of Negroes as men and American citizens.

Mr. Washington distinctly asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things, — First, political power. Second, insistence on civil rights. Third, higher education of Negro youth.

This policy has been courageously and insistently advocated for over fifteen years, and has been triumphant for perhaps ten years. As a result of this tender of the palm-branch, what has been the return? In these years there have occurred: the **disfranchisement** of the Negro, the legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro, and the steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro.

Is it possible, and probable, that nine millions of men can make effective progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political rights, made a servile caste, and allowed only the most **meager** chance for developing their exceptional men? If history and reason give any distinct answer to these questions, it is an emphatic No.

So far as Mr. Washington preaches Thrift, Patience, and Industrial Training for the masses, we must hold up his hands and strive with him, rejoicing in his honors and glorying in the strength of this Joshua called of God and of man to lead the headless host. But so far as Mr. Washington apologizes for injustice, North or South, does not rightly value the privilege and duty of voting, belittles the emasculating effects of caste distinctions, and opposes the higher training and ambition of our brighter minds,—so far as he, the South, or the Nation, does this,—we must unceasingly and firmly oppose them.