

ANTISLAVERY LITERATURE TEACHING GUIDE

**EARLY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
ANTISLAVERY SERMONS**



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## Introduction

The inclusion of early sermons in African American literature and history course syllabi lends a depth of understanding to the roots of African American literary culture in the United States. Coverage of early African American literature tends to leap from Phyllis Wheatley to Frederick Douglass, possibly touching on David Walker along the way. Sermonic literature represents a continuous stream of African American literary production bridging the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Early African American sermons are a major source for understanding antislavery sentiments and themes that developed through the nineteenth century. Their fierce condemnations of slavery and trafficking contrasted sharply with far more complacent attitudes that prevailed even among white citizens who disapproved of or made only tepid opposition to slavery.<sup>1</sup> The calls for immediate emancipation in New Year's sermons were quite different from the gradualist advocacy of most white-authored sermons.

Black abolitionism, as scholarship has increasingly recognized, provided the impetus and ideas for the immediatist abolitionism that William Lloyd Garrison and others began to advocate during the 1830s. Religious and rhetorical language condemning slavery that later was to become common among white reform activists appeared first in these African American sermons. This recognition profoundly alters an older historical narrative that whites initiated the antislavery movement. These sermons evidence the intellectual elaboration of radical antislavery ideas a full generation previous to the growth of political abolitionism among white citizens.

Sermons were a leading vehicle for agitation against slavery within black communities. Print editions of such sermons were at least in part an effort to circulate antislavery expression not only within black communities, but to sympathetic white readers. The church-based African American print culture that developed in the opening decades of the nineteenth century was both an element of church self-establishment and the predecessor of a secular black press. The intertwined print and oral cultures that these sermons represent characterized the emergence of a vibrant African American public sphere.

Beginning in the late Federalist period, African American church life was consolidating and expanding. The 1780s had witnessed new growth in the Baptist and Methodist churches, both of which attracted blacks through promises – often unfulfilled – of equality and participation. African Americans represented significant minorities in white-controlled Baptist and Methodist churches, but at the dawn of the nineteenth

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Jedidiah Morse's July 4, 1808 address to Boston's African American community: [\*A Discourse, Delivered at the African Meeting-House\*](#). The patronizing quality of his address as a well-known white minister visiting for the occasion is clear, and his post-sermon insertion of a note opposing emancipation of slaves certainly angered his mainly-black audience.

century only a very small minority of African Americans was Christian.<sup>2</sup> The Christianization of African American life was underway.

The foundation of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church in Philadelphia in 1816 was of signal importance in creating an autonomous black religious movement that was not controlled by white churches. The Episcopal Church, as one major example, was entirely segregated and controlled its black congregant groups as dependencies administered by volunteer clergy.<sup>3</sup> Resentment at discriminatory treatment together with a desire for autonomy led to a drive for self-determination and independent black churches. Although establishment of the AME Church was a major event, there were many other events in African American religious life during the first decades of the nineteenth century (see African American religious history timeline). New African American congregations constituted themselves throughout the middle Atlantic, New England, and western states (e.g. Ohio, Illinois), and these congregations provided new forums for antislavery sentiments.

Many African American churches developed a tradition of reserving specific annual calendar dates for sermons or orations that addressed the topic of slavery.<sup>4</sup> Not all African American churches were open to such political expression; for varying reasons, including the risk of violence from white mobs, a minority of churches avoided or specifically forbade political speeches that might bring hostile public notice.

These three texts, spanning 1808-1813, represent an early and brief-lived New Year's Day antislavery sermon tradition. This began in the free black communities as a celebration of implementation of the 1807 federal act banning the import of slaves, based on the clause of the U.S. constitution (article 1, sec. 9) permitting Congress to ban the foreign slave traffic twenty years after ratification of the constitution. The legislation took effect on January 1, 1808, although its ban was not well enforced and left in place a clandestine international slave trade. This quite limited step against the slave trade, in which Great Britain preceded the United States by one year, was the first occasion African American communities had to celebrate U.S. government action against slavery. That recognition was heavily tempered and often overwhelmed by condemnations of continued slavery in the United States. This legislation concerned only the transatlantic slave trade and did not ban the domestic slave trade within the United States.

New Year's sermons tend to express a paradoxical relationship with the nation, one that celebrates a legislative accomplishment while condemning a massive national failure in refusing to abolish domestic slavery altogether. This is a paradox that persists in African American literature and rhetoric that expresses both an American identity and a challenge to the United States from the perspective of an oppressed people. In the

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<sup>2</sup> Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003) 117-118.

<sup>3</sup> Craig D. Townsend, *Faith in their Own Color: Black Episcopalians in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) 25ff.

<sup>4</sup> Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

nineteenth century, this was a relationship that was to continue to find expression in alternative communal holidays such as August 1, the 1834 date of British emancipation in the West Indies, in preference to or accompanying Independence Day on July 4. The January 1 celebration had a brief revival in 1863 as the date of the Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>5</sup>

New Year's antislavery sermons lasted in Philadelphia until 1830; they disappeared earlier in New York and Boston. One reason they may have faded was increasing awareness of the law's lax enforcement displaced early optimism that the 1807 Act represented the imminent demise of U.S. slavery. Too, since a procession often accompanied the New Year's sermon, these parades began to attract racial violence.<sup>6</sup> The antislavery sermon tradition that New Year's sermons signaled continued to grow independent of a link to that date.

Additional New Year's sermons available at the Antislavery Literature Project include Russell Parrott, [\*An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade\*](#) (1812) and Jeremiah Gloucester, [\*An Oration, Delivered on January 1, 1823 in Bethel Church: On the Abolition of the Slave Trade\*](#) (1823).

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<sup>5</sup> Leonard Sweet, *The Journal of Negro History* 61 (July 1976) 3:256-275, at 259.

<sup>6</sup> William B. Gravely, "The Dialectic of Double Consciousness in Black American Freedom Celebrations, 1808-1863," *The Journal of Negro History* 67 (Winter 1982) 4: 302-317, at 303.

## Teaching Approaches

In literature, history, or African American studies courses, it is important for an instructor to emphasize that the rationale for including sermons in the syllabus readings lies in the importance of religious oratory in African American history and culture. The rhetoric of Martin Luther King, to cite only one instance, emerged from a generations-long social gospel tradition. African American literature essentially emerges from a religious culture. As Frances Foster Smith observes, “The most consistent and influential element in the first century of African-American literary production was Afro-Protestantism, an organic synthesis of African, European, and new-world theologies, traditions, and exigencies...”<sup>7</sup>

A secular approach to sermonic literature is especially important where the teaching goal is to explicate such texts to a diverse student group and locate them within a continuing stream of African American literature. Each of these sermons employs biblical passages and imagery; it requires careful framing and judicious interpretive balance to discuss these as textual borrowings. While the instructor should be prepared to explain these references, it may be useful towards fostering classroom involvement to open ways for students to share their own Bible literacy in explaining these passages. A dialogic approach may involve careful sharing of classroom authority in order to reach a mutually-informed reading of the text.<sup>8</sup>

Depending on classroom and institutional context, there may be some students who resist these readings solely on grounds that they are religious texts. One possible response is to point to the commonalities between the narrative elements of these sermons and later texts by David Walker, Frederick Douglass, and W.E.B. DuBois. Another might be to expand this observation to the broad sweep of American literature and note the prevalence of biblical themes in the work of authors such as Phyllis Wheatley, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, John Steinbeck, James Baldwin, and many others. It would constitute cultural mischaracterization to ‘read out’ the informing religious themes of early African American literature. Moreover, throughout the nineteenth century the personal histories and religious beliefs of black and white reform writers and activists testified to the social radicalism of evangelical Protestantism. To the extent that students resist religious readings because they identify Christian activism with conservatism, they need historical information on the contributions of evangelical movements to abolitionism, women’s suffrage, prison reform, and other reform causes in the United States.

Another teaching approach is to discuss the biblicism of African American sermonic literature as a model of cultural capital: Bible stories and psalms provided an often-heard and well-known stock that speakers or writers could rely upon to deliver and

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, “A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture,” *American Literary History* 17 (2005) 4: 714-740, at 715.

<sup>8</sup> For discussion of the pedagogical stakes in this approach, see Sheree Meyer, “‘Broadly Representative?’ The MLA’s Approach to Teaching World Literature Series,” *Pedagogy* 3 (2003) 1: 21-51, at 38, 44.

reinforce their messages. A desire to read the Bible, as Douglass and other ex-slave narrators related, drove literacy education in African American communities. Many audience members listening to these sermons had been denied education and were quasi- or entirely illiterate. An oral knowledge of the Bible enabled them to understand and respond to the messages of these antislavery sermons.

These texts raise important questions concerning the relationship between religious literature and human rights. They contain explicit arguments that slavery is a spiritual offense and implicit assertions that civil and spiritual freedoms enable each other. For these three writers, the justice of emancipation is a precondition for the diffusion of spiritual justice. Given the pervasiveness of slavery, which still existed in some northern states as well as southern states during the early nineteenth-century, this was a radical theology that challenged a national status quo and failure to extend the founding promises of freedom in the United States.

As John Ernest phrases it, early African American writers perceived a fissure between “the secular and the sacred in civil practice” and found in this “the grounds for a reinterpretation of providence, a reinterpretation that joined the ideals associated with the American Revolution to African destiny, political ideals with biblical prophecy—the prophecy represented by one of the most frequently repeated phrases in African-American writing of the nineteenth century: ‘Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God’ (Psalms 68.31).”<sup>9</sup> From this historical standpoint, why was African American religious literature able to frame questions that were not yet common in US political discussions? How or should religion be employed in contemporary human rights discussions?

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<sup>9</sup> Ernest, “Liberation Historiography: African-American Historians before the Civil War,” *American Literary History* 14 (2002) 3: 414-443, at 422.

## Discussion Questions

### Absalom Jones, *A Thanksgiving Sermon* (1808)

1. Absalom Jones begins his text by citing the following verses from Exodus 3:7-8 (New American Standard translation, noting that Jones used the King James version):
  - 7 The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings.
  - 8 So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.

The story of the Hebrew exodus from Egypt has long held powerful appeal in African American literature as a rhetorical instrument. In his 1829 *Appeal*, for example, David Walker relies heavily on a comparison of the ancient Hebrews in Egyptian slavery to the situation of Africans in America.<sup>10</sup> James Weldon Johnson uses it nearly a century later in *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (1927). What does it mean in this sermon to compare conditions of life in the United States to those of biblical slaves in Egypt? Who is Pharaoh, an individual slave-owner or a social system? Consider the implications of comparing the African sojourn in the Americas to the forty years of exile in the Sinai.

2. How does Jones address the despair that generations-long slavery produces? He speaks of "several hundred years" of captivity but assures his listeners that "he [God] was not indifferent to their sufferings." (9) What ideas reconcile captivity and despair with belief in a caring divine presence?
3. The first (italicized) line of quotation on page 10 is Psalm 97:2; the second and third lines are Psalm 98:1-3. An Augustinian reading of these psalms suggests that "Clouds and darkness" surrounding the divine speak to lack of human knowledge of divine purposes, but exhorts faith to replace human blindness. The "new song" is a new life created within Christian faith; in that faith a believer finds mercy.<sup>11</sup> Read Psalms 97 and 98 and explain what Jones attempts to do through selective quotation.

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<sup>10</sup> [Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America, Written in Boston, State of Massachusetts, September 28, 1829](#) (Boston: David Walker, 1829) art. 1, 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Schaff, Phillip (ed.). *St. Augustine: Exposition on the Book of Psalms*, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 8 (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886) 4452-4457, 44502-4499

4. Discuss Jones' invocation of an all-seeing divine witness against slavery. (10-13) How does Jones rhetorically combine his own vision with his statement of a divine vision of slavery? Read aloud passages from page 12, noting their repetition and rhythm. Where Jones repeats the phrase "He *came down...*" (13-14), what concept of legislative process does he propose? Given Jones' description of a legal system of slavery, how does he reconcile that with the rarity of claimed divine intervention against slavery?

5. How does Jones address the problem of education under slavery? (16) How does he deploy Bible-reading as an argument in favor of educating slaves?

6. The third point of social duty that Jones advocates is good behavior by the black community so as "to furnish no cause of regret to the deliverers of our nation, for their kindness to us." (16) Are freedom and social equality contingent upon good behavior? Is Jones making a conservative demand for black self-discipline, or is he suggesting that good behavior will aid the antislavery struggle and liberation? Jones later suggests "Let us be grateful to our benefactors, who, by enlightening the minds of the rulers of the earth, by means of their publications and remonstrances against the trade in our countrymen, have produced the great event we are this day celebrating." (18-19) What does this suggest concerning the sensitivity of race relations when Jones spoke?

7. Jones provides a classic theodicy<sup>12</sup> of slavery where he states "It has always been a mystery, Why the impartial Father of the human race should have permitted...all the miseries of slavery. Perhaps his design was, that a knowledge of the gospel might be acquired by some of their descendants, in order that they might become qualified to be messengers of it, to the land of their fathers." (18) That is, the benefit of slavery was to be the Christianization of Africa. Remembering the history of the Middle Passage and the millions of Africans who died in transit to the New World, what is your opinion of this argument? Why would it appeal to Absalom Jones? Why might it appeal to his audience?

8. Jones concludes his sermon with an apostrophe that is an extraordinary *mélange* of biblical citations woven into utopian vision and request for divine protection. Among the Bible references are the following:

"thou art no respecter of persons" — *Acts 10:34*

"hast made of one blood all nations of men" — *Acts 17:26*

"Rend thy heavens" — *Isaiah 64:1*

"May Ethiopia soon stretch out her hands unto thee" — *Psalms 68:31*

"cast their idols, to the moles and the bats of the wilderness" — *Isaiah 2:20*

"the wolf shall dwell with the lamb" — *Isaiah 11:6-9*

"instead of the thorn, shall come up the fir tree" — *Isaiah 55:13*

Briefly trace out the meanings of these phrases. Why does the phrase "thou art no respecter of persons" have such a powerful presence in early American political thought? Why would John Brown before receiving a death sentence for his 1859 Harper's Ferry

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<sup>12</sup> Argument justifying a divine order in the face of evil.

raid declare that “I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons”? How do this phrase and its idea inform antislavery argument? Given the prevalence of popular belief in polygenesis (i.e. the claim that races represent different human origins), what does it mean to employ Acts 17:26 in an antislavery sermon? How does the ‘Ethiopia’ reference in Psalm 68 refer to a prophecy of conversion? Note a similar use of the psalm in Miller’s *Sermon*. (6) To what do the last two citations in Isaiah refer?

9. Absalom Jones’ 1808 ‘Thanksgiving Sermon’ can be accounted the first New Year’s sermon. After reading the other two sermons discussed next, what are the differences between this text and the others?

### **William Miller, *A Sermon on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1810)**

1. Note the opening paragraph and William Miller’s references to African identity. What does this suggest concerning the cultural proximity of Africa to the speaker and his audience? Why does Miller prefer to refer to Africans rather than Americans?

2. Almost as a first matter Miller emphasizes “the idea of our being acknowledged men.” (4) He links this questioning of black masculinity to white contempt for black intelligence. Why does he use this as the opening theme of a sermon?

3. Miller quotes Isaiah 20:3 – “Like as my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and barefoot for three years, for a sign and wonder upon Egypt and Ethiopia...” (5) In this passage, Isaiah’s nakedness is mortification for sin. Discuss the implication that Africa sinned, and that slavery is the result. Is this a theology that simply views sin as the cause of all worldly travail, or has it absorbed a Euro-american transfer of responsibility for race slavery onto Africans and their culture? Consider the multiplicity of views that Miller expresses concerning Africa. He also writes “Ancient history, as well as holy writ, informs us of the national greatness of our progenitors. That the inhabitants of Africa are descended from the ancient inhabitants of Egypt, a people once famous for science of every description, is a truth verified by a number of writers.” (4) Miller also embraces “the hope of seeing the psalmist’s prediction fulfilled, that ‘Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hand and come unto God,’” (6) or that is, that Africa will and is already rising again. What if any contradictions are there in Miller’s view of Africa, and how does he resolve them? How does Miller express pride in his African heritage?

4. How does Miller deploy Isaiah 19:2 to depict the transatlantic slave trade as the consequence of an African civil war? (7) He also employs Isaiah 59:1 – “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened...” (8) – to suggest that African iniquity of Africans rendered them subject to captivity, and salvation could be had upon appeal to God. In your opinion is this technique for historical analysis of European imperialism and colonialism via the Bible viable in retrospect? Why did Miller use the Bible in this fashion? What does Miller’s blame of Africans mean for his judgment of “the oppressors of Africa,” who he says are not “less culpable for their savage treatment to the unoffending Africans”? (8) Note the phrase “unoffending Africans” suggests that

Africans who are not guilty must suffer as part of the judgment on the continent. How do you respond to that view, and how might Miller's audience respond?

5. Miller fiercely criticizes the contradiction between Europe's claims of civilization and its behavior. He condemns "nations at large losing sight of the laws of God and of nature, sanctioning a trade so disgraceful to the human species..." (9) Yet immediately afterwards he also quotes William Cowper's antislavery poem "Charity" (lines 180-183), a quote to which Fanny Price also alludes in Jane Austen's novel *Mansfield Park* published four years after this sermon. Contradictions were on both sides, European and African. Miller, like many other Africans affected by the European slave trade, manifested profoundly contradicted reactions towards Europe in citing both its hypocrisy and its affirmations of human rights. Discuss the cultural contradictions in this text, possibly using Miller's citation of Psalm 119:71 (13) as a starting point.

6. Miller refers to "the hydra from which issued all our sufferings..." (11) To what does he refer in both mythological and political terms? How does the nation-state both create the problem of slavery and promise to solve it? What was the Sereleon (Sierra Leone) colonization project? Based on the sermon, what was Miller's attitude towards this project?

7. The sermon concludes with calls for a church militant (14), evangelical conversions (15), piety and virtue (15), and three citations of Isaiah (6:3, 9:2, 11:14) promising divine reward for the righteous. How does Miller cross-identify Christian evangelization and the anti-slavery cause?

### **George Lawrence, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1813)**

1. George Lawrence begins his sermon with an affirmation of a transatlantic alliance between African Americans and British political figures supporting the antislavery struggle, such as Granville Sharp, William Pitt the Younger, and Charles James Fox. (5) Sharp led the parliamentary fight against slavery; Pitt was twice prime minister; Fox was foreign minister. Lawrence casts the support of these figures as an alliance against evil. What does Lawrence accomplish rhetorically by opening with the citation of such political authority?

2. Discuss the concept of national progress that Lawrence advances. (6) How does abolition of the slave trade contribute towards progress? Nationalist rhetoric frequently characterizes the nation as an epochal creation leading towards realization of a collective 'genius' or destiny. In which passages does Lawrence participate in this rhetoric?

3. Lawrence portrays Africa as having lived in a happy and free state of nature, one that slave-trafficking invaded and destroyed. As he imagines Africa, "Nature there caused the wild desert to be more fruitful and fragrant than the best cultivated gardens...Her inhabitants were happy seated in the very temples of bliss and with nature for their guide..." (7) Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued in *Discourse on Inequality* (1754)

that social inequality arises from the imposition of ‘civilization’ on humanity’s natural state, and that it was organized society rather than humanity in nature that was immoral. Might Lawrence have agreed with such an argument in reference to relations between Africa and Europe? Lawrence divides African history into a pre-historical utopia followed by post-contact entry into ‘civilization’ and true history. Why might this be problematic? How might the romanticization of Africa as having been inhabited by ‘noble savages’ create difficulties for advocates of human equality?

4. The purpose of this New Year’s celebration, Lawrence argues, is enable African Americans to rise above their current situation, to “soar aloft as the towering eagle to an eminence commanding a view of the world, and three fourths we behold drenched in human gore...” (9) From this perspective, the Africa of their ancestors is in ruins and the African diaspora in the Americas is a new source of social strength. How does this sense of separate fates differentiate Lawrence from William Miller?

5. Discuss Lawrence’s belief in love as a source of political action (10) and the gradual positive effect of good works (11)? How do these concepts reinforce the founding US political project of creating “a more perfect Union”?

6. Note Lawrence’s defense of black intelligence and capacities. (12) Why were such defenses common among African American orators? Relate this to the cultural background expressed in Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781) and its contempt towards blacks.

7. The *Oration*’s final pages contain a sense of imminent freedom – “the time is fast approaching when the iron hand of oppression must cease to tyrannize over injured innocence” (13) – and the approaching triumph of rationalism and liberty. The African American appears as a dauntless romantic hero “climb[ing] the rough and craggy mount” towards freedom. (14) Lawrence expresses great optimism, but only fifty years later on New Year’s Day of 1863 did the Emancipation Proclamation go into effect. How did such sermons as those of Jones, Miller and Lawrence sustain and uplift African American communities during this historical period and after?

## Timeline of Early African American Religious History to 1830

This timeline aids in understanding the African American church history that produced these sermon texts. It emphasizes the importance of Baptism and Methodism in early African American religious history; the emergence of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and its reasons; and the contribution of religious figures to African American community life.

- 1758 The first African American church in North America, the African Baptist or 'Bluestone Church' founded on the William Byrd plantation near the Bluestone River, in Mecklenburg, Virginia.
- 1773 George Liste and Andrew Bryan establish the first Baptist church in Georgia for African Americans.
- 1774 John Wesley, founder of Methodism, publishes *Thoughts upon Slavery* condemning slavery and calling for repentance by slave-owners.
- 1776 African Baptist Church organized in Williamsburg, Virginia.
- 1786 Blacks in Baltimore began gathering for prayer separate from the white-controlled Methodist Church. Richard Allen, a young Methodist and ex-slave, begins preaching and organizing in Philadelphia's African American community.
- 1787<sup>13</sup> Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and others leave St. George Methodist Church in Philadelphia after they were asked to move from the gallery during a prayer.<sup>14</sup> Most, under the direction of Jones, choose to affiliate with the Episcopal Church. A minority, led by Allen, remained with the Methodists although they began to worship separately from the whites.
- 1788 Andrew Bryan, a slave, founds the Colored Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia.
- 1789 The Baptist Church declares slavery a violation of the rights of nature.
- 1791 Absalom Jones and others organize St. Thomas Episcopal Church. Jones receives ordination and becomes the first African American minister in the United States.
- 1794 Richard Allen establishes the 'Mother Bethel' African Methodist Church in Philadelphia.

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<sup>13</sup> There is scholarly disagreement concerning whether this walk-out took place in 1787. Gary Nash argues that it occurred in 1792. See Nash, *Forging Freedom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) 118-119, 310.

<sup>14</sup> For Allen's account, see *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen* (Philadelphia: Martin & Boden, 1833), available via <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/allen/allen.html>, at 13ff.

- 1795 The Pennsylvania diocese of the Episcopal Convention votes that St. Thomas Episcopal Church may not send a representative, excluding blacks.
- 1809 In Philadelphia, first African Baptist Church established; in Boston, another independent African American Baptist church organized.
- 1812 General Conference of the Methodist Church resolves that no slave-owner could be a church elder if he was able to but did not emancipate his slaves.
- 1815 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church declines to take a stand on the issue of slavery, believing it too divisive.
- 1816 Bethel Church in Philadelphia separates from the Methodist Episcopal Church; the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church movement is formed. Sixteen independent churches join the new movement. African Methodists in Baltimore, led by Daniel Coker, also separate from the white Methodists.
- 1817 AME establishes a publishing arm, the African Methodist Episcopal Book Concern; it is the first African American publishing company.
- 1820 African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church declares its independence from the AME movement; elects James Varick and Abraham Thompson as its elders.
- 1821 Samuel Cornish founds First Colored Presbyterian Church of New York.
- 1822 AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, has 3,000 members.
- 1823 African Americans in Richmond, Virginia, petition the state legislature for a permit to build their own Baptist church because there was not enough room for them in the white Baptist church; the legislature refuses.
- 1826 The first congregation of black Baptists in New Orleans, Louisiana, organizes.
- 1827 John Russwurm and Samuel Cornish found *Freedom's Journal*, the first African American newspaper. They print it in the basement of an AMEZ church.
- 1829 Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first African American religious order, founded in Baltimore, Maryland. They establish St. Francis Academy for Colored Girls.
- 1830 Richard Allen presides at the first National Negro Convention which convenes in Philadelphia.
- 1830 In Jamaica, a slave revolt led by enslaved Baptist minister Samuel Sharpe breaks out; British militias suppress the uprising and hang Sharpe together with hundreds

of insurrectionists. The Christmas Rebellion, also known as the Baptist War, contributed to Great Britain's abolition of slavery in 1833.

Source: Peter M. Bergman [ed.], *The Chronological History of the Negro in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969). See also Carol V. R. George, *Segregated Sabbaths: Richard Allen and the Emergence of Independent Black Churches* (Oxford University Press, 1973).

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The Antislavery Literature Project