

*An Oration Delivered at the Fourth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, in the Methodist Episcopal Church, in Second-Street, New-York, January 1, 1811.* By Adam Carman. New York: Printed by John C. Totten, 1811.

### Oration.

Fathers, Brethren, and much respected Friends!

We are again convened to commemorate that auspicious and memorable day: a day on which the *slave trade* was abolished throughout these United States of America. A day which in some degree renovates the primeval tranquility of our forefathers. A day which had been the indefatigable exertions and labours for series of years of many philanthropic characters to effect; and through the interposition of the great fabricator of the universe, they have accomplished their long sought work. An event so laudable, so congenial with every principle of humanity, so essentially necessary for the restoration of happiness to long afflicted Africa and her exile race; the contemplation of which is sufficient to inspire the heart of every African throughout earth's domain with gratitude, and prompt them to venerate the great and adorable architect of the universe, for a providence so essential to their happiness. An act issued from the Congress of America, bearing noble traits of humanity and justice, concurrent with that which issued from the Parliament of Great Britain, which is its only rival. While we viewed this munificent act as taking the pre-eminence of all edicts of legislature in America, it commanded our reverence, seized upon our worthiest affections, and summoned us forth to celebrate its maturity.

This day completes the tripple anniversary of the efficacy of that edict, which announced the subversion of the commerce in human species throughout the jurisdiction of America, which is the great cause of our convention.

The Slave Trade began to exist at the river Senegal in its horrific forms; and its contaminating effects was not confined to the prescincts of Senegal, but were disseminated over the wide-extended continent of Africa; for they were kidnapped and bought from almost every direction through the centre of the country. There began the inhuman practice of forcing the free African into slavery, and the more heinous practice of separating a loving husband and affectionate wife and endearing children, and consigning them to eternal slavery. Humanity revolts at the smallest idea of such dull malignity and sullen cruelty as have been long practised upon an unoffending part of the human family. Let us, my brethren, indulge our minds to take a counter march into the rear of time, and view once happy Africa, not as she now is, ravaged and harrassed from her internal situation to her external extremity, and her inhabitants almost extirpated from her dwellings, and she left in a state of decripitude and languor. But in her present reduced situation she exhibits the wonder of the world. The explorer of nature, and admirer of arts may gratify his most boundless curiosity in contemplating her wonderful productions: notwithstanding all those almost incessant ravages that she has experienced, yet there remains few of her magnificent fabrics, as if to testify to future ages of her original superior genius. But we are to view her in her original situation, or as she was before those picaroons entered her hallowed plains, and impregnated her pure and holy land with deleterious dissensions. She exhibits a vast treasure of everything valuable almost spontaneously, in many respects superior to any in the explored world, redundant with every necessary enjoyment of life; abounding in many parts with varieties of mineral substances the most valuable. There it pleased the munificent hand of Deity to place the sable part of his community, designated Africans, to enjoy that auriferous and feracious country; peace and harmony reigned almost incessantly, from its centre to circumference. There they enjoyed their inherent rights, indulging conjugal affection and parent's

fondness; there the aged father raised his bread from the land that gave him birth, and received it from the hand of her who was most near and dear to him in life; there they witnessed the gladsome smiles of social intercourse, walking through their vernal groves, plucking the ambrosial fruits of their native country uninterrupted. They concerted no scheme of fraud, projected no violence, injured no man’s person or property, violated no law to forfeit their inherent rights. When heaven and earth appeared newly aroused from refreshing sleep, and all animated creation congratulating a new born day; Phoebus making his appearance in the oriental world, and winging his course through the blue ether unobscured, with all his splendid majesty of light, warming the earth, and compelling Aurora’s dews to disappear; they were harmoniously employed in their domestic concerns, when the great luminary of day declined in the western hemisphere and completed his diurnal office, he descended below the horizon; nocturnal shades gradually began to pervade the great theatre of nations, till all was veiled in obscurity. They were hushed and soothed into silence by the twilight musicians, enjoying a comfortable repose after the fatigues of the day; although the sanctuaries in which they slept were fabricated in the model of antiquity, yet they slept in security; no suspicion of foreign invaders procrastinated their refreshing slumbers, no clarion war interrupted them.

How noble, how delightful the situation of our ancestors, when delineated by the pencil of truth, so emblematic of the grandeur of our first parents when in the paradisaical garden, the contemplation of which is sufficient to influence the soul of a grave hermit in his solitary and sequestered retreat in the gloomy forest, and tempt him to leave his cimmerian cell, to participate the almost unutterable joys of Afric’s sons.

But ah, my brethren, this delectable, this tranquil scene of our forefathers has long since been metamorphosed into scenes the most woeful that can be described, for in the year fifteen hundred and three the Portuguese entered those blissful regions, and paved the way for that facinorous trade, by kidnapping a number of the inhabitants and transporting them to the Spanish settlements in America, to be sacrificed to their inhuman wills, for the gratification of their insatiable avarice; and as villany is of a progressive nature, declining from right, step after step, till every regard of probity is lost, and every sense of all moral obligation banished, so was this gross act of villany progressive, for eight years after, Ferdinand the Fifth, king of Spain, enlarged upon the borders of villany by encouraging them to be dragged away in larger numbers- thus it was progressive. In the year fifteen hundred and seventeen, Charles the Fifth having come into power; he gave an exclusive right to transport a vast number into America: thus it ascended towards its climax. But far was it from its summit; for in the year fifteen hundred and sixty-two an event occurred that almost impeaches its own credit; that most wicked, most detestable trade was sanctioned by a nation that have long been distinguished above every nation of the earth for arts, arms, civilization, polished manners and extensive commerce; therefore reason naturally leads us to suppose they would have spurned at such unparalleled scenes of perfidy and infernal cruelty, as was practised then among the Portuguese and Spaniards, and disdain to countenance so gross a violation of nature’s law and would have been stimulated by their civilization and polished principles to put their greatest efforts into action, to restrain or impede their inhuman pursuits; but lamentable to tell, to the sad reverse they confederated with them, heart to heart, hand to hand, in practising such unheard of, unnatural and disgraceful outrages, that takes the detestable pre-eminence of all heinous acts that ever disgraced the page of history.

Thus, my brethren, we became viewed and considered as commercial commodities; thus we became interwoven into the system of commerce, and the revenue of nations: hence the merchant, the planter, the mortgagee, the manufacturer, the politician, the legislators, and the cabinet minister, all strenuously advocated the continuance of the Slave Trade. Therefore the poor unfortunate African was placed in a situation truly deplorable; no one to look to for redress or remedy, no one to

soothe his sorrows; all the artillery in the world apparently against him: the laws of Christendom consigned his fate, and their votaries tore him from his home, his family relative and friends, dragged him on board the slave ship destined to a distant land, from her whom he had lived with for series of years in the utmost reciprocal affection, she that could cheer the gloomy hours of his life, soften his cares and relieve his burdens; the delight of his soul, the first and greatest of all earthly comforts, the greatest and best of all mortal blessings: his life becomes odious, he is inconsolate, his tranquility is murdered, his liberty has come to a period, all his future days are marked out for the most tormenting and degrading despotism that ever existed—and while the stately ship spreads her canvass to the breeze, and was receding from his native land, he takes the last mournful look on the land of his nativity; there he beholds his beloved consort, surrounded with their juvenile posterity, dressed in the gloomy veil of tears, deploring the loss of his protecting arm, exposed to the indignation of the next merciless crew of assassins of tranquility; and while she casts her eyes around her, looking on her juvenile infants with maternal sensibility and sympathetic commiseration, she becomes almost frantic. Avarice has made her a widow, and doomed her progeny to eternal orphanage, while he survives who should be her shield and defence in the hour of dangers. Good God, this tragic scene pierced him to his very heart with a dagger that can never be eradicated, it haunts and preys upon his very vitals through his future existence; although much are his miseries augmented in his transportation from Africa to America, yet far is his sufferings from its maturity. When arrived to their destined land, he is there exposed to the public market, and considered and viewed as a vendible article, and is driven away from thence by the command of the highest bidder, to be assassinated on his plantation; not instantaneously, it would be far less cruel was it the case, but he is not afforded that blessing; he is to be murdered corporally by sure and slow degrees, by three powerful weapons peculiar to the lands of slavery, viz, the lash, extreme hunger, and incessant hard labour, which lengthens out his mangled life, and makes his journey to the emancipating grave a dismal one.

My beloved brethren, this has not been the cruel situation of one individual family! would to God it was; cruel as it would be, I would not have called it into notice on this occasion; but suffer me to say, millions and millions of our forefathers and brethren have been dragged from home in the same or similar way, and sacrificed to the same or similar fate as above delineated, without the least regard to their nuptial rights, or the ties of consanguinity; whilst thousands of others, when arrived into America and the British West-India islands have been shot, hung, drowned in cold blood; although many attempted to escape such horrid tragedies by eloping into the gloomy forests, but were pursued, hunted down, and devoured by blood hounds. Thousands of others doomed to the mines, to end their days in those cimmerician caves, those dreadful recesses from all the world. Such unexampled debasement would have disgraced the most savage nation of antiquity. Good God! when I reflect upon the disorders, confusions, desolations, and havocs, which that nefarious trade has been the sire of, I must exclaim in language unreserved, that it hath not its rivals in all the history that ever came in the range of my observation. Ancient Jerusalem, that city blacken with crimes, and steeped in the blood of martyrs, at which cruel scene the Son of God wept on the mount Olives, is not its rival. All the deleterious effects of superstitious paganism, popery, and mahometanism; or all the enthusiasms of the ecclesiastical impostors, who have spread desolation wherever they have prevailed in any considerable degree, terminating the existence of millions; oft compelling the saints to famish in dungeons and wander in exile, is not its parallel: in a word, it has not its competition in all history, from the inspired Moses to the present day. The greatest symbolation it hath, was in that dread hour when the terrific drapery was thrown around the great theatre of nature for the space of three hours, which signalized great wickedness in the earth.

Think not, my youthful brethren, that I am exaggerating the tragic tale of our wrongs; no, no—I presume I need not enter into any range of argument to identify the validity or cogency of these assertions or sentiments: I therefore, fathers, salute you upon this all important occasion; you can authenticate these assertions, you can substantiate the veracity of what has been said; you can say, All the amplitude of language or phraseology it is possible for a man to be master of, is too weak, too trivial to develop the horrors attendant on the Slave Trade, and may be considered as mere imaginations to its realities; you can exclaim with our noble brother Hamilton, it baffles description.

Then if so full of evils, so replete with miseries as to be void of description, what an inestimable blessing is its annihilation; to Africans and descendants, it ought to be the most copious source of our joy. I know not, my brethren, how we can sufficiently express what we ought to feel on this occasion; it addresses itself to our finest feelings, and commands of us individually a tribute of congratulation. He that has the least drop of African blood flowing through his veins, and does not witness the warm emotions of gratitude on this auspicious and exalted occasion, he is degenerated from his country, and the sable race disowns him.

But to whom do we owe this great blessing: to that immortal character that the bosom of England produced, nominated Granville Sharp, as the secondary cause; who, under the control of the munificent father of nature, espoused our cause; a character splendid with virtues, far superior to envy or the reach of foul calumny. He peculiarly excelled all our original advocates in leading the shining way to emancipation, by his examples and free offers in the cause of violated humanity; therefore his name ought always to be remembered by us with gratitude. He was sensible his abilities was not sufficiently cultivated to be adequate to the great work he had espoused; therefore for his better accomplishment to advocate our cause, he devoted considerable of his time, talents, and substance to the study of the English laws; and by his almost incessant vigilance and attention, accompanied with an uncommon brilliancy of genius or vivacity of wit, the result of his studies was impregnated with the happiest of consequences which immediately flowed to modify the cruel situation of many of our brethren; and happily and judiciously contributed to produce him labourers or coworkers, not only in the metropolis of England, where his labours were more immediately successful, but in America and in different parts of the world he found men, stimulated with the same spirit of magnanimity that prompted him to succour an oppressed fellow-man. They concurred with him in fabricating that great edifice, which he may justly be regarded as the founder; an edifice designed to accelerate the overthrow of that abominable and sanguinary traffic, that had long been exceeding derogatory to our parent country; an edifice whose basis are humanity and justice, therefore more permanent than the foundation of those immane prodigies of Memphis or Africa; more durable than those asterisms or constellations, that revolve and re-revolve in the planetary system. It shall stand a contest with time itself, or make a sacrifice to eternity: the efficacy of its virtues has done away those infamous and long pernicious practices which have been frequented in Africa; it has put an end to the gloomy horrors of the transportation. It is the salvation of myriads and myriads of our brethren in Africa from eternal slavery. What a salutary and inestimable fabric! it stands without a rival in the world; it shines with the most conspicuous lustre; its radiations are witnessed in Asia, Africa, Europe, and America.

My brethren! how pleasing and gratifying it is for us to reflect, that through the instrumentality of those humane souls, so much is done for the diminution of human miseries, in prohibiting a trade that drag'd thousands and thousand of our brethren annually from their native homes; those that never forfeited life or liberty, and doomed them to the most inhuman drudgery that can be described.

Here, my brethren, we cannot refrain from manifesting our unqualified sentiments of respect due to those who so magnanimously braved all the vexations—all the unavoidable difficulties that obstructed the progression of their most laudable plan, for the diminution of human miseries, although opposed by one of the most unprincipled, detestable, and villainous combination of antagonists that ever was formed to prohibit a plan of its nature, which naturally occasioned them to be filled many times with apprehensions, lest by so incomparable a number of advocates they should lose ground, or be compelled to retreat from the field of philanthropy. But when they reflected upon the purity of their motives, they persevered, influenced and animated by the cheering dictates of religion, they felt potent, bid all opposition defiance, once advocating our cause, ever remaining unchanged amid the revolutions and convulsions of kingdoms, states, and empires, uncontaminated by the polluting streams of the political dissensions of those days, surrounded with adversaries who continually vented calumnies the most vile, and even persecution. Yet they never apostatized from our cause, but firmly and nobly encountered all with matchless clemency, triumphed over all their deep laid schemes of opposition, and magnanimously achieved their long sought abolition. To shrink back from their demon fronts or dreadful execrations, and defamatory expressions, which they continually vented, would have been pusillanimity.

But such spirits never disgraced the sages of philanthropy. Among the most exalted of those worthies of humanity and freedom is that people denominated Friends, a peculiar people, zealous in good works; many of their lives have been energetically devoted in the cause of emancipation. It has long been the zenith of their delight to sooth the afflicted, and diffuse comfort though the gloomy mansions of slavery, and provide remedies for the miseries of their oppressed fellow-creatures.

Although many of our original advocates have been compelled to quit the theatre of action by the destroying angel, introduced by the apostacy of our first parents, yet their virtues flourish among us; for in their last agonies of dissolving nature, they expressed their earnest desires for the promotion of that great work, which they had long laboured in, and expired martyrs to philanthropy and freedom: left behind them exalted and permanent monuments of beneficence, for examples to their descendants. Their honors, virtues, and revered names are the glory of humanity and justice, and shall ever demand a conspicuous place in the page of history, which shall transmit them to the latest posterity, and receive from them their sincere thanks.

It is to them and their descendants we owe in a measure those temples erected by the exiles of Africa in different parts of the world, which are dedicated to the service of the living God; under whose roofs many of the poor Africans may hear the gladsome sound of the true gospel, which a few years ago was prohibited from their ears. It is to them and their descendants we owe those seminaries of education, where many of the indigent and orphan African's genius may be aroused and stimulated to energies. It is to them and their descendants we owe those exalted and ascendant glories, which many of us now enjoy, which we believe are preliminaries of what we eagerly anticipate to realize ere long, if not ourselves, our descendants.

Pardon me, my brethren, if I weary your patience; for the field in which I labour is so boundless, I hardly know how to conclude: for we have long laboured under an unmerited reproach by those perfidious men, those butchers of our fathers. That reproach does no less than brand us as an inferior species of human beings, and extends its contumelious assertions still farther, and tells us plainly we are incapable of reason and virtue.

My brethren, nothing possible could have admitted a charge, so inconsistent with every thing rational, so defamatory, but a depravity of mind or profligacy of morals inferior to that imputed to us; for the whole tenor of our lives forcibly contradict a charge so ungenerous, so fallacious. Our being held in slavery, a system of total degradation that keeps down all the noble faculties of the soul, debases and corrupts human nature, and reduces man to be a mere instrument in the hand of

his fellow-man, to be used at his discretion. I appeal to every intelligent character, whose mind is not swayed by that monster prejudice, whether this does not plead more powerful in our behalf than mortal eloquence or elocution. My brethren, all such censures as we have long laboured under, are the first-born of absurdities; for our mental faculties are as large or as capacious, and just as open to impression from precept and example as any nation that ever breathed the vital air; and with equal tuition will dilate equally to the most consummate abilities or great erudition, and when properly dilated by a judicious and liberal course of education, are equally capable of the most exalted station in life. He that abnegates these assertions, is enveloped in the grossest of ignorance and prejudice; and may be considered as a common enemy to mankind.

Now, my brethren, as we are emerging from the depth of obscurity to the regions of light and knowledge, let us not forget our grateful homage due to the great first cause of our transition; for how long should we have remained in that horrible state of despondency, and how many of our brethren would have been added to the countless number which are this day in the most servile bondage, had it not pleased kind providence to send us deliverance! Oh, thou munificent God, we are this day exulting in thy benedictions! wilt thou be pleased to shower down uniting and brotherly love, and may its sacred influence visit the heart of every African within these walls, that we may all be as one man aiding the confederated friends of humanity to accelerate that desirable period, when despotism shall be hurled from the theatre of nations into the abyss of contempt; and humanity and justice take the first seat of power, and control the empire of the world, sway her equivalent scepter from pole to pole, from hemisphere to hemisphere.