



Excerpt, [Liberty Further Extended: Or Free Thoughts on the Illegality of Slave-Keeping \(1776\)](#)

Historical Background:

Lemuel Haynes is believed to be the first African American ordained as a minister in the United States. He was called to several churches in New England and served the longest in Vermont. Born in Massachusetts in 1753 to an African father and a white mother, Haynes was indentured as a child but later gained his freedom and educated himself in theology.

Haynes delivered this anti-slavery sermon in 1776, declaring that the natural rights celebrated in the Declaration of Independence belong to all people, no matter their race, and linking America's call for freedom with the call to end slavery. Rather than commenting on a passage from the Bible, as was customary, Haynes used an excerpt from the Declaration: "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, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Haynes insisted that the principles of equality and God-given rights applied to everyone, as "even an African, has equally as good a right to his liberty in common with Englishmen." Thus, his sermon one of the earliest statements of racial equality in the new nation. His words challenged Americans to live up to their founding ideals and inspired later generations to continue the struggle for liberty and justice for all.

Haynes took up this theme again in a sermon in 1801, "The Nature and Importance of True Republicanism," which he preached on July 4, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Declaration's signing. On its anniversary, he echoed the Declaration, arguing that the "God of nature" did not make Africans inferior to whites. Slavery, therefore, was the creation only of "cruel hands of oppression."

Consider these questions as you read the document:

1. Haynes wrote "Liberty Further Extended" in 1776, directly responding to the ideals in the Declaration of Independence, and challenged Americans to apply their revolutionary ideals to everyone. How does his sermon test the sincerity of the Declaration's claim that "all men are created equal"?
2. By arguing that a Black man has "an undeniable right to his Liberty," Haynes follows natural rights theory, wherein there are natural rights which are fundamental, inherent, and inalienable. Humans possess these rights simply by being human. Which line in this essay most strongly brings home this argument for you?
3. Haynes blends the political philosophy of natural rights with Christian religious principles. Is this combination of faith and reason effective? Why or why not?

4. Haynes repeats a question he came across recently: “O when shall America be consistently engaged in the Cause of Liberty!” How can we engage in the “Cause of Liberty” with more consistency?

Original Text

As tyranny had its origin from the infernal regions: so it is the duty, and honor of every son of freedom to repel her first motions. But while we are engaged in the important struggle, it cannot be thought impertinent for us to turn one eye into our own breast, for a little moment, and see, whether through some inadvertency, or a self-contracted spirit, we do not find the monster lurking in our own bosom; that now while we are inspired with so noble a spirit and becoming zeal, we may be disposed to tear her from us. If the following would produce such an effect the author should rejoice. [...]

Liberty is a jewel which was handed down to man from the cabinet of Heaven, and is coeval with his existence. And as it proceeds from the Supreme Legislature of the universe, so it is He which hath a sole right to take away; therefore, he that would take away a mans Liberty assumes a prerogative that belongs to another, and acts out of his own domain. Liber

One man may boast a superiority above another in point of Natural privilege; yet if he can produce no convincive arguments in vindication of this preeminence his hypothesis is to be suspected. To affirm, that an Englishman has a right to his Liberty, is a truth which has been so clearly evinced, especially of late, that to spend time in illustrating this, would be but superfluous tautology. But I query, whether Liberty is so contracted a principle as to be confined to any nation under Heaven; nay, I think it not hyperbolical to affirm, that even an African, has equally as good a right to his Liberty in common with Englishmen. [...]

It is not my business to enquire into every particular practice, that is practiced in this land, that may come under this odious character; but, that I have in view, is humbly to offer some free thoughts, on the practice? Slave-keeping. Oppression, is not spoken of, nor ranked in the sacred oracles, among the least of those sins, that are the procuring cause of those signal judgments, which God is pleased to bring upon the children of men. Therefore let us attend. I mean to write with freedom, yet with the greatest submission.

And the main proposition, which I intend for some brief illustration is this, namely, that an African, or, in other terms, that a Negro may justly challenge, and has an undeniable right to his Liberty. Consequently, the practice of Slave-keeping, which so much abounds in this land is illicit.

Every privilege that mankind enjoy have their origin from God; and whatever acts are passed in any earthly court, which are derogatory to those Edicts that are passed in the Court of Heaven, the act is void. If I have a particular privilege granted to me by God, and the act is not revoked nor the power that granted the benefit vacated, (as it is impossible but that God should ever remain immutable) then he that would infringe upon my Benefit, assumes an unreasonable, and tyrannic power.

“It hath pleased God to make of one Blood all nations of men, for to dwell upon the face of the Earth.” Acts 17, 26–23. And as all are of one species, so there are the same laws, and aspiring principles placed in all nations; and the effect that these laws will produce, are similar to each other. Consequently, we may suppose, that what is precious to one man, is precious to another, and what is irksome, or intolerable to one man, is so to another, considered in a law of nature. Therefore, we may reasonably

conclude, that Liberty is equally as precious to a Black man, as it is to a white one, and Bondage equally as intolerable to the one as it is to the other: Seeing it effects the laws of nature equally as much in the one as it does in the other. But, as I observed before, those privileges that are granted to us by the Divine Being, no one has the least right to take them from us without our consent; and there is not the least precept, or practice, in the sacred scriptures, that constitutes a Black man a Slave, any more than a white one.

Shall a mans color be the decisive criterion whereby to judge of his natural right? Or because a man is not of the same color with his neighbour, shall he be deprived of those things that distinguisheth him from the beasts of the field?

I would ask, whence is it that an Englishman is so far distinguished from an African in point natural privilege? Did he receive it in his original constitution? or by some subsequent grant? Or does he boast of some higher descent that gives him this pre-eminence? For my part I can find no such revelation. It is a lamentable consequence of the Fall, that mankind have an insatiable thirst after superiority one over another: So that however common or prevalent the practice may be, it does not amount, even to a circumstance, that the practice is warrantable.

God has been pleased to distinguish some men from others, as to natural abilities, but not as to natural right, as they came out of his hands. [...]

'Twas an excellent note that I lately read in a modern piece, and it was this. "O when shall America be consistently engaged in the Cause of Liberty!" If you have any love to yourselves, or any love to this Land, if you have any love to your fellow-men, break these intolerable yokes, and let their names be remembered no more, lest they be retorted on your own necks, and you sink under them: for God will not hold you guiltless.

Sirs, the important Cause in which you are engaged in is of an excellent nature, 'tis ornamental to your characters, and will, undoubtedly, immortalize your names through the latest posterity. And it is pleasing to behold that patriotic zeal which fires your breast; But it is strange that you should want the least stimulation to further expressions of so noble a spirit. . . .