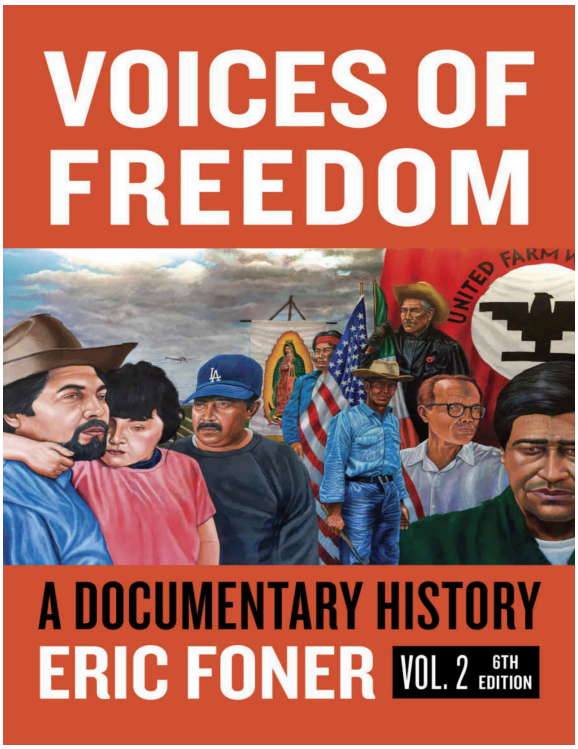


ebookbig.com

or scan the QR code to access the digital study portal.

Preface

Voices of Freedom is a documentary history of American freedom from the earliest days of European exploration and settlement of the Western Hemisphere to the present. I have prepared it as a companion volume to *Give Me Liberty!*, my survey textbook of the history of the United States centered on the theme of freedom. This sixth edition of *Voices of Freedom* is organized in chapters that correspond to those in the sixth edition of the textbook. But it can also stand independently as a documentary introduction to the history of American freedom. The two volumes include more than twenty documents not available in the fifth edition.

No idea is more fundamental to Americans' sense of themselves as individuals and as a nation than freedom, or liberty, with which it is almost always used interchangeably. The Declaration of Independence lists liberty among mankind's inalienable rights; the Constitution announces as its purpose to secure liberty's blessings. "Every man in the street, white, black, red or yellow," wrote the educator and statesman Ralph Bunche in 1940, "knows that this is 'the land of the free' . . . 'the cradle of liberty.' "

The very universality of the idea of freedom, however, can be misleading. Freedom is not a fixed, timeless category with a single unchanging definition. Rather, the history of the United States is, in part, a story of debates, disagreements, and struggles over freedom. Crises like the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the Cold War have permanently transformed the idea of freedom. So too have demands by various groups of Americans for greater freedom as they understood it.

In choosing the documents for *Voices of Freedom*, I have attempted to convey the multifaceted history of this compelling and contested idea. The documents reflect how Americans at different points in our history have defined freedom as an overarching idea, or have understood some of its many dimensions, including political, religious, economic, and personal freedom. For each chapter, I have tried to select documents that highlight the specific discussions of freedom that occurred during that time period, and some of the divergent interpretations of freedom at each point in our history. I hope that students will gain an appreciation of how the idea of freedom has expanded over time, and how it has been extended into more and more areas of Americans' lives. But at the same time, the documents suggest how freedom for some Americans has, at various times in our history, rested on lack of freedom—for example, slavery, indentured servitude, the subordinate position of women—for others.

The documents that follow reflect the kinds of historical developments that have shaped and reshaped the idea of freedom, including war, economic change, territorial expansion, social protest movements, and international involvement. The selections try to convey a sense of the rich cast of characters who have contributed to the history of American freedom. They include presidential proclamations and letters by runaway slaves, famous court cases and obscure manifestos, ideas dominant in a particular era and those of radicals and dissenters. They range from advertisements in colonial newspapers seeking the return of runaway indentured servants and slaves to debates in the early twentieth century over the definition of economic freedom, the controversy over the proposed Equal Rights Amendment for women, and recent Supreme Court decisions dealing with the right of gay Americans to marry one another.

I have been particularly attentive to how battles at the boundaries of freedom—the efforts of racial minorities, women, and others to secure greater freedom—have deepened and transformed the

concept and extended it into new realms. In addition, in this sixth edition I have included a number of new documents that illustrate how the very definition of American identity—answers to the question "Who is an American?"—have affected the evolution of the idea of freedom. These include Benjamin Franklin's argument in 1751 for restricting immigration to English men and women; J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's observations at the time of the War of Independence on the emergence of the American, a "new man," from the diverse peoples of European descent in the new nation; Frederick Douglass's remarkable "Composite Nation" speech soon after the Civil War; Randolph Bourne's 1916 essay "Trans-National America"; and historian Oscar Handlin's critique of the law adopted in 1924 that severely restricted immigration from southern and eastern Europe.

All of the documents in this collection are "primary sources"—that is, they were written or spoken by men and women enmeshed in the events of the past, rather than by later historians. They therefore offer students the opportunity to encounter ideas about freedom in the actual words of participants in the drama of American history. Some of the documents are reproduced in their entirety. Most are excerpts from longer interviews, articles, or books. In editing the documents, I have tried to remain faithful to the original purpose of the author, while highlighting the portion of a text that deals directly with one or another aspect of freedom. In most cases, I have reproduced the wording of the original texts exactly. But I have modernized the spelling and punctuation of some early documents to make them more understandable to the modern reader. Each document is preceded by a brief introduction that places it in historical context and is followed by two questions that highlight key elements of the argument and may help to focus students' thinking about the issues raised by the author.

A number of these documents were suggested by students in a U.S. history class at Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, taught by Professor David Hsiung. I am very grateful to these students, who responded enthusiastically to an assignment by Professor Hsiung that asked them to locate documents that might be included in *Voices of Freedom* and to justify their choices with historical arguments. Some of the documents are included in the online exhibition "Preserving American Freedom" created by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Taken together, the documents in these volumes suggest the ways in which American freedom has changed and expanded over time. But they also remind us that American history is not simply a narrative of continual progress toward greater and greater freedom. While freedom can be achieved, it may also be reduced or rescinded. It can never be taken for granted.

Eric Foner

Voices of Freedom

A Documentary History

Sixth Edition

Volume 2

CHAPTER 15

“What Is Freedom?”: Reconstruction, 1865–1877

1. **96.** *Petition of Black Residents of Nashville (1865)*
2. **97.** *Petition of Committee on Behalf of the Freedmen to Andrew Johnson (1865)*
3. **98.** *The Mississippi Black Code (1865)*
4. **99.** *A Sharecropping Contract (1866)*
5. **100.** *Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Home Life” (ca. 1875)*
6. **101.** *Frederick Douglass, “The Composite Nation” (1869)*
7. **102.** *Robert B. Elliott on Civil Rights (1874)*

96. Petition of Black Residents of Nashville (1865)

Source: Newspaper clipping enclosed in Col. R. D. Mussey to Capt. C. P. Brown, January 23, 1865, Letters Received, ser. 925, Department of the Cumberland, U.S. Army Continental Commands, National Archives.

At the request of military governor Andrew Johnson, Lincoln exempted Tennessee from the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 (although many slaves in the state gained their freedom by serving in the Union army). In January 1865, a state convention was held to complete the work of abolition. A group of free blacks of Nashville sent a petition to the delegates, asking for immediate action to end slavery and granting black men the right to vote (which free blacks had enjoyed in the state until 1835). The document emphasized their loyalty to the Union, their natural right to freedom, and their willingness to take on the responsibilities of citizenship. The document offers a revealing snapshot of black consciousness at the dawn of Reconstruction.

TO THE UNION CONVENTION OF TENNESSEE ASSEMBLED IN THE CAPITOL AT NASHVILLE, JANUARY 9TH, 1865:

We the undersigned petitioners, American citizens of African descent, natives and residents of Tennessee, and devoted friends of the great National cause, do most respectfully ask a patient hearing of your honorable body in regard to matters deeply affecting the future condition of our unfortunate and long suffering race.

First of all, however, we would say that words are too weak to tell how profoundly grateful we are to the Federal Government for the good work of freedom which it is gradually carrying forward; and for the Emancipation Proclamation which has set free all the slaves in some of the rebellious States, as well as many of the slaves in Tennessee.

After two hundred years of bondage and suffering a returning sense of justice has awakened the great body of the American people to make amends for the unprovoked wrongs committed against us for over two hundred years.

Your petitioners would ask you to complete the work begun by the nation at large, and abolish the last vestige of slavery by the express words of your organic law.

Many masters in Tennessee whose slaves have left them, will certainly make every effort to bring them back to bondage after the reorganization of the State government, unless slavery be expressly abolished by the Constitution.

We hold that freedom is the natural right of all men, which they themselves have no more right to give or barter away, than they have to sell their honor, their wives, or their children.

We claim to be men belonging to the great human family, descended from one great God, who is the common Father of all, and who bestowed on all races and tribes the priceless right of freedom. Of this right, for no offence of ours, we have long been cruelly deprived, and the common voice of the wise and good of all countries, has remonstrated against our enslavement, as one of the greatest crimes in all history.

We claim freedom, as our natural right, and ask that in harmony and co-operation with the nation at large, you should cut up by the roots the system of slavery, which is not only a wrong to us, but the source of all the evil which at present afflicts the State. For slavery, corrupt itself, corrupted nearly all, also, around it, so that it has influenced nearly all the slave States to rebel against the Federal Government, in order to set up a government of pirates under which slavery might be perpetrated.

In the contest between the nation and slavery, our unfortunate people have sided, by instinct, with the former. We have little fortune to devote to the national cause, for a hard fate has hitherto forced us to live in poverty, but we do devote to its success, our hopes, our toils, our whole heart, our sacred honor, and our lives. We will work, pray, live, and, if need be, die for the Union, as cheerfully as ever a white patriot died for his country. The color of our skin does not lessn in the least degree, our love either for God or for the land of our birth.

We are proud to point your honorable body to the fact, that so far as our knowledge extends, not a

negro traitor has made his appearance since the begining of this wicked rebellion. . . .

Devoted as we are to the principles of justice, of love to all men, and of equal rights on which our Government is based, and which make it the hope of the world. We know the burdens of citizenship, and are ready to bear them. We know the duties of the good citizen, and are ready to perform them cheerfully, and would ask to be put in a position in which we can discharge them more effectually. We do not ask for the privilege of citizenship, wishing to shun the obligations imposed by it.

Near 200,000 of our brethren are to-day performing military duty in the ranks of the Union army. Thousands of them have already died in battle, or perished by a cruel martyrdom for the sake of the Union, and we are ready and willing to sacrifice more. But what higher order of citizen is there than the soldier? or who has a greater trust confided to his hands? If we are called on to do military duty against the rebel armies in the field, why should we be denied the privilege of voting against rebel citizens at the ballot-box? The latter is as necessary to save the Government as the former. . . .

This is not a Democratic Government if a numerous, law-abiding, industrious, and useful class of citizens, born and bred on the soil, are to be treated as aliens and enemies, as an inferior degraded class, who must have no voice in the Government which they support, protect and defend, with all their heart, soul, mind, and body, both in peace and war.

Questions

1. Why do the petitioners place so much emphasis on their loyalty to the Union cause during the war?
2. What understanding of American history and the nation's future do the petitioners convey?

97. Petition of Committee on Behalf of the Freedmen to Andrew Johnson (1865)

Source: Henry Bram et al. to the President of the United States, October 28, 1865, P-27, 1865, Letters Received, ser. 15, Washington Headquarters, Freedmen's Bureau Papers, National Archives.

By June 1865, some 40,000 freedpeople had been settled on "Sherman land" in South Carolina and Georgia, in accordance with Special Field Order 15. That summer, however, President Andrew Johnson, who had succeeded Lincoln, ordered nearly all land in federal hands returned to its former owners. In October, O. O. Howard, head of the Freedmen's Bureau, traveled to the Sea Islands to inform blacks of the new policy.

Howard was greeted with disbelief and protest. A committee drew up petitions to Howard and President Johnson. Their petition to the president pointed out that the government had encouraged them to occupy the land and affirmed that they were ready to purchase it if given the opportunity. Johnson rejected the former slaves' plea. And, throughout the South, because no land distribution took place, the vast majority of rural freedpeople remained poor and without property during Reconstruction.

EDISTO ISLAND S.C. Oct 28th, 1865.

To the President of these United States. We the freedmen of Edisto Island South Carolina have learned From you through Major General O O Howard commissioner of the Freedmans Bureau. with deep sorrow and Painful hearts of the possibility of government restoring These lands to the former owners. We are well aware Of the many perplexing and trying questions that burden Your mind, and do therefore pray to god (the preserver of all and who has through our Late and beloved President (Lincoln) proclamation and the war made Us A free people) that he may guide you in making Your decisions, and give you that wisdom that Cometh from above to settle these great and Important Questions for the best interests of the country and the Colored race: Here is where secession was born and Nurtured Here is were we have toiled nearly all Our lives as slaves and were treated like dumb Driven cattle, This is our home, we have made These lands what they are. we were the only true and Loyal people that were found in posession of these Lands. we have been always ready to strike for Liberty and humanity yea to fight if needs be To preserve this glorious union. Shall not we who Are freedman and have been always true to this Union have the same rights as are enjoyed by Others? Have we broken any Law of these United States? Have we forfieted our rights of property In Land?—If not then! are not our rights as A free people and good citizens of these United States To be considered before the rights of those who were Found in rebellion against this good and just Government (and now being conquered) come (as they Seem) with penitent hearts and beg forgiveness For past offences and also ask if their lands Cannot be restored to them are these rebellious Spirits to be reinstated in their *possessions* And we who have been abused and oppressed For many long years not to be allowed the Privilege of purchasing land But be subject To the will of these large Land owners? God forbid, Land monopoly is injurious to the advancement of the course of freedom, and if Government Does not make some provision by which we as Freedmen can obtain