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1808

## An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade; Delivered in the African Church in the City of New-York, January 1, 1808

Peter Williams Jr

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# An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade

Delivered in the African Church in the  
City of New-York, January 1, 1808

Peter Williams, Jr.



AN  
ORATION  
ON  
The Abolition of the Slave Trade;  
DELIVERED  
IN  
THE AFRICAN CHURCH,  
IN  
THE CITY OF NEW-YORK,  
JANUARY 1, 1808.

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“Ethiopia shall soon stretch forth her hands unto God.”

*Palm lxxviii. 31.*

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.”

*Isaiab ix. 2.*

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BY PETER WILLIAMS, JUN.

A DESCENDANT OF AFRICA.

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New York:  
PRINTED BY SAMUEL WOOD.  
NO. 362, PEARL-STREET  
.....  
1808.

District of }  
New-York } ss. BE IT REMEMBERED, That on the eleventh day of  
January, in the thirty-second year of the Independence  
of the United States of America, PETER WILLIAMS. JUN. of the said Dis-  
trict, hath deposited in this Office, the Title of a Book, the right whereof  
he claims as Author, in the words and figures following, to wit:

“An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, delivered in the Afri-  
can Church in the City of New-York, Jan. 1st, 1808.” “Ethiopia shall soon  
stretch forth her hands unto God.” *Psalm* lxxviii. 31. “The people that walked  
in darkness have seen a great light.” *Isaiab* ix. 2. By PETER WILLIAMS, JUN.  
A descendant of Africa.

IN CONFORMITY to the Act of the Congress of the United States, en-  
titled, “An Act for the encouragement of Learning, by securing the Copies  
of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the Authors and Proprietors of such Copies,  
during the times therein mentioned;” and also to an Act, entitled, “An Act  
supplementary to an act, entitled, An Act for the encouragement of Learn-  
ing, by securing the Copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the Authors and  
Proprietors of such Copies, during the time therein mentioned, and extend-  
ing the benefits thereof, to the Arts of Designing, Engraving and Etching  
Historical and other prints.”

EDWARD DUNSCOMB,  
Clerk of the District of New-York.



TO  
THE DIFFERENT SOCIETIES,  
FOR  
*THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY,*  
THIS ORATION  
IS HUMBLY INSCRIBED,  
AS A TRIBUTE OF SINCERE GRATITUDE,  
FOR THEIR  
ASSIDUOUS, ENERGETIC, AND BENEVOLENT  
EXERTIONS,  
IN  
THE CAUSE  
OF  
INJURED HUMANITY.





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TO  
PETER WILLIAMS, JUN.



*THE Committee of arrangements are so well satisfied with the Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, that they apprehend a usefulness will arise from its publication. We therefore request a Copy may be furnished for that purpose.*

*We were pleased with the delivery of the Oration, and we hope the orator will have the satisfaction, not only in reflecting that he has done justice to the subject, but that it may be a means of enlightening the minds of some, and of promoting the great work of emancipation, as it relates to the African race in general, who are still held in bondage in the United States, and in other parts of the world.*

ISAAC FORTUNE,  
Chairman, *pro tem.*

*New York, January 8, 1808.*





# ORDER

OF

## *THE CELEBRATION OF THE DAY.*



### FORENOON SERVICE.



1. A solemn address to Almighty God, by the Rev. Mr. Abraham Thompson.
2. An appropriate anthem sung under the direction of William Hamilton.
3. The act read with an introductory address, by Henry Sipkins.
4. The oration delivered by Peter Williams, jun.
5. An appropriate hymn, sung under the direction of William Hamilton.
6. A solemn address to Almighty God, by Mr. Thomas Miller, sen.



### AFTERNOON SERVICE



1. An appropriate hymn, under the direction of William Hamilton.
2. A prayer, by the Rev. Mr. June Scot.
3. An appropriate hymn.
4. A sermon delivered by Mr. James Varick.
5. A hymn.
6. A prayer, by Mr. James Varick.



THE  
INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

BY HENRY SIPKINS



BRETHREN,

*THE object of our assembling at this time, is attended with many incentives to mutual gratulation and pious gratitude. The prohibition of the slave trade (which on this auspicious day, becomes an effectual law) allows us to indulge the delightful reflection, that justice has not yet forsaken her dominion in this sublunary scene; but that she still pleads with a tone of dignity, and in the spirit of truth, for the violated rights of humanity, we are now enabled to contemplate the heart of man with more philanthropy; and to relinquish our suspicion of its general propensity to wrong and oppression. We are now confident that unmerited injuries may still excite pity, and that the sufferings of innocence can sometimes awaken an active and helpful commiseration. That sinful traffic which has wrested so many of our brethren from their parent country, and doomed them to painful and incessant servitude, has been recently extirpated by the parliament of Great-Britain, and from the ensuing act of the legislature of these United States, we hear those glad tidings, which by divine assistance we may hope will ere long become the unanimous voice of the world.*



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# ORATION.



FATHERS, BRETHREN,  
AND  
FELLOW CITIZENS,

At this auspicious moment, I felicitate you, on the abolition of the Slave-Trade. This inhuman branch of commerce, which, for some centuries past, has been carried on to a considerable extent, is, by the singular interposition of Divine Providence, this day extinguished. An event so important, so pregnant with happy consequences, must be extremely consonant to every philanthropic heart.

But to us, Africans, and descendants of Africans, this period is deeply interesting. We have felt, sensibly felt, the sad effects of this abominable traffic. It has made, if not ourselves, our forefathers and kinsmen its unhappy victims; and pronounced on them, and their posterity, the sentence of perpetual slavery. But benevolent men, have voluntarily stepped forward, to obviate the consequences of this injustice and barbarity. They have striven, assiduously, to restore our natural rights; to guaranty them from fresh innova-

tions; to furnish us with necessary information; and to stop the source from whence our evils have flowed.

The fruits of these laudable endeavors have long been visible; each moment they appear more conspicuous; and this day has produced an event which shall ever be memorable and glorious in the annals of history. We are now assembled to celebrate this momentous era; to recognize the beneficial influences of humane exertions; and by suitable demonstrations of joy, thanksgiving, and gratitude, to return to our heavenly Father, and to our earthly benefactors, our sincere acknowledgements.

Review, for a moment, my brethren, the history of the Slave Trade, engendered in the foul recesses of the sordid mind, the unnatural monster inflicted gross evils on the human race. Its baneful footsteps are marked with blood; its infectious breath spreads war and desolation; and its train is composed of the complicated miseries, of cruel and unceasing bondage.

Before the enterprising spirit of European genius explored the western coast of Africa, the state of our forefathers was a state of simplicity, innocence, and contentment. Unskilled in the arts of dissimulation, their bosoms were the seats of confidence; and their lips were the organs of truth. Strangers to the refinements of civilized society, they followed with implicit obedience, the (simple) dictates of nature. Peculiarly observant of hospitality, they offered a place of refreshment to the weary, and an asylum to the unfortunate. Ardent in their affections, their minds were susceptible of the warmest emotions of love, friendship, and gratitude.

Although unacquainted with the diversified luxuries and amusements of civilized nations, they enjoyed some singular advantages, from the bountiful hand of nature; and from their own innocent and amiable manners, which rendered them a happy people. But, alas! this delightful picture has long since vanished; the angel of bliss has deserted their dwelling; and the demon of indescribable misery, has rioted, uncontrolled, on the fair fields of our ancestors.

After Columbus unfolded to civilized man, the vast treasures of this western world, the desire of gain, which had chiefly induced the first colonists of America, to cross the waters of the Atlantic, surpassing the bounds of reasonable acquisition, violated the sacred injunctions of the gospel, frustrated the designs of the pious and humane; and enslaving the harmless aborigines, compelled them to drudge in the mines.

The severities of this employment was so insupportable to men who were unaccustomed to fatigue, that, according to Robertson's "History of America," upwards of nine hundred thousand, were destroyed in the space of fifteen years, on the island of Hispaniola. A consumption so rapid, must, in a short period, have deprived them of the instruments of labour; had not the same genius, which first produced it, found out another method to obtain them. This was no other than the importation of slaves, from the coast of Africa.

The Genoese made the first regular importation, in the year 1517, by virtue of a patent granted by Charles, of Austria, to a Flemish favorite; since which, this commerce has increased to an astonishing, and almost incredible degree.



After the manner of ancient piracy, descents were first made on the African coast; the towns bordering on the ocean were surprised, and a number of the inhabitants carried into slavery.

Alarmed at these depredations, the natives fled to the interior; and there united to secure themselves from the common foe. But the subtle invaders, were not easily deterred from their purpose. Their experience, corroborated by historical testimony, convinced them, that this spirit of unity, would baffle every violent attempt; and that the most powerful method to dissolve it, would be to diffuse in them, the same avaricious disposition which they themselves possessed; and to afford them the means of gratifying it, by ruining each other. Fatal engine: fatal thou hast proved to man in all ages: where the greatest violence has proved ineffectual, thy undermining principles have wrought destruction. By thy deadly power, the strong Grecian arm, which bid the world defiance, fell nerveless; by thy potent attacks, the solid pillars of Roman grandeur shook to their base; and, Oh! Africans! by this parent of the Slave Trade, this grandsire of misery, the mortal blow was struck, which crushed the peace and happiness of our country. Affairs now assumed a different aspect; the appearances of war were changed into the most amicable pretensions; presents apparently inestimable were made; and all the bewitching and alluring wiles of the seducer, were practised. The harmless African, taught to believe a friendly countenance, the sure token of a corresponding heart, soon disbanded his fears, and evinced a favourable disposition, towards his flattering enemies.

Thus the foe, obtaining an intercourse, by a dazzling display of European finery, bewildered their simple understandings, and corrupted their morals. Mutual agreements were then made; the Europeans were to supply the Africans, with those gaudy trifles which so strongly affected them; and the Africans in return, were to grant the Europeans, their prisoners of war, and convicts, as slaves. These stipulations naturally tending to delude the mind, answered the two-fold purpose of enlarging their criminal code, and of exciting incessant war, at the same time, that it furnished a specious pretext, for the prosecution of this inhuman traffic. Bad as this may appear, had it prescribed the bounds of injustice, millions of unhappy victims might have still been spared. But, extending widely beyond measure, and without control, large additions of slaves were made, by kidnapping, and the most unpalliated seizures.

Trace the past scenes of Africa, and you will manifestly perceive, these flagrant violations of human rights. The prince who once delighted in the happiness of his people; who felt himself bound by a sacred contract to defend their persons and property; was turned into their tyrant and scourge: he, who once strove to preserve peace, and good understanding with the different nations; who never unsheathed his sword, but in the cause of justice; at the signal of a slave ship, assembled his warriors, and rushed furiously upon his unsuspecting friends. What a scene does that town now present, which a few moments past was the abode of tranquillity. At the approach of the foe, alarm and confusion pervade every part; horror and dismay are depicted on every countenance; the aged chief starting from his

couch, calls forth his men, to repulse the hostile invader: all ages obey the summons; feeble youth, and decrepit age, join the standard; while the foe, to effect his purpose, fires the town.

Now, with unimaginable terror the battle commences: hear now the shrieks of the women; the cries of the children; the shouts of the warriors; and the groans of the dying. See with what desperation the inhabitants fight in defence of their darling joys. But, alas! overpowered by a superior foe, their force is broken; their ablest warriors fall; and the wretched remnant are taken captives.

Where are now those pleasant dwellings, where peace and harmony reigned incessant? where those beautiful fields, whose smiling crops, and enchanting verdure, enlivened the heart of every beholder? Alas! those tenements are now enveloped in destructive flames; those fair fields are now bedewed with blood, and covered with mangled carcasses. Where are now those sounds of mirth and gladness, which loudly rang throughout the village? where those darling youth, those venerable aged, who mutually animated the festive throng? Alas! those exhilarating peals, are now changed into the dismal groans of inconceivable distress: the survivors of those happy people, are now carried into cruel captivity. Ah! driven from their native soil, they cast their languishing eyes behind, and with aching hearts, bid adieu, to every prospect of joy and comfort.

A spectacle so truly distressing, is sufficient to blow into a blaze, the most latent spark of humanity: but, the adamant heart of avarice, dead to every sensation of pity, re-

gards not the voice of the sufferers, but hastily drives them to market for sale.

Oh, Africa, Africa! to what horrid inhumanities have thy shores been witness; thy shores, which were once the garden of the world, the seat of almost paradisiacal joys, have been transformed into regions of wo: thy sons, who were once the happiest of mortals, are reduced to slavery, and bound in weighty shackles, now fill the trader's ship. But, though defeated in the contest for liberty, their magnanimous souls scorn the gross indignity, and choose death in preference to slavery. Painful; Ah! painful, must be that existence, which the rational mind can deliberately doom to self-destruction. Thus, the poor Africans, robbed of every joy, while they see not the most transient, glimmering, ray of hope, to cheer their saddened hearts, sink into the abyss of consummate misery. Their lives, imbittered by reflection, anticipation, and present sorrows, they feel burthensome; and death, (whose dreary mansions appal the stoutest hearts) they view as their only shelter.

You, my brethren, beloved Africans, who had passed the days of infancy, when you left your country; you best can tell the aggravated sufferings, of our unfortunate race: your memories can bring to view these scenes of bitter grief. What, my brethren, when dragged from your native land, on board the slave ship; what was the anguish which you saw, which you felt? what the pain, what the dreadful forebodings, which filled your throbbing bosoms?

But you, my brethren, descendants of African forefathers, I call upon you, to view a scene of unfathomable dis-

ress. Let your imagination carry you back to former days. Behold a vessel, bearing our forefathers and brethren, from the place of their nativity, to a distant and inhospitable clime: behold their dejected countenances; their streaming eyes; their fettered limbs: hear them, with piercing cries, and pitiful moans, deploring their wretched fate. After their arrival in port, see them separated without regard to the ties of blood or friendship: husband from wife; parent from child; brother from sister; friend from friend. See the parting tear, rolling down their fallen cheeks: hear the parting sigh, die on their quivering lips.

But, let us no longer pursue a theme of boundless affliction. An enchanting sound now demands your attention. Hail! hail! glorious day, whose resplendent rising, disperseth the clouds, which have hovered with destruction over the land of Africa; and illumines it, by the most brilliant rays of future prosperity. Rejoice, Oh! Africans! No longer shall tyranny, war, and injustice, with irresistible sway, desolate your native country: no longer shall torrents of human blood deluge its delightful plains: no longer shall it witness your countrymen, wielding among each other the instruments of death; nor the insidious kidnapper, darting from his midnight haunt, on the feeble and unprotected: no longer shall its shores resound, with the awful howlings of infatuated warriors, the death-like groans of vanquished innocents, nor the clanking fetters of wo-doomed captives. Rejoice, Oh, ye descendants of Africans! No longer shall the United States of America, nor the extensive colonies of Great-Britain, admit the degrading commerce, of the hu-

man species: no longer shall they swell the tide of African misery, by the importation of slaves. Rejoice, my brethren, that the channels are obstructed through which slavery, and its direful concomitants, have been entailed on the African race. But, let incessant strains of gratitude be mingled with your expressions of joy. Through the infinite mercy of the great Jehovah, this day announces the abolition of the Slave-Trade. Let, therefore, the heart that is warmed by the smallest drop of African blood, glow in grateful transports; and cause the lofty arches of the sky to reverberate eternal praise to his boundless goodness.

Oh, God! we thank thee, that thou didst condescend to listen to the cries of Africa's wretched sons; and that thou didst interfere in their behalf. At thy call humanity sprang forth, and espoused the cause of the oppressed: one hand she employed in drawing from their vitals the deadly arrows of injustice; and the other in holding a shield, to defend them from fresh assaults: and at that illustrious moment, when the sons of 76 pronounced these United States free and independent; when the spirit of patriotism, erected a temple sacred to liberty; when the inspired voice of Americans first uttered those noble sentiments, "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; among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness;" and when the bleeding African, lifting his fetters, exclaimed, "am I not a man and a brother;" then with redoubled efforts, the angel of humanity strove to restore to the African race, the inherent rights of man.

To the instruments of divine goodness, those benevolent men, who voluntarily obeyed the dictates of humanity, we owe much. Surrounded with innumerable difficulties, their undaunted spirits, dared to oppose a powerful host of interested men. Heedless to the voice of fame, their independent souls dared to oppose the strong gales of popular prejudice. Actuated by principles of genuine philanthropy, they dared to despise the emoluments of ill gotten wealth, and to sacrifice much of their temporal interests at the shrine of benevolence.

As an American, I glory in informing you, that Columbia boasts the first men, who distinguished themselves eminently, in the vindication of our rights, and the improvement of our state.

Conscious that slavery was unfavourable to the benign influences of christianity, the pious Woolman, loudly declaimed against it; and although destitute of fortune, he resolved to spare neither time nor pains to check its progress. With this view he travelled over several parts of North America on foot, and exhorted his brethren, of the denomination of friends, to abjure the iniquitous custom. These, convinced by the cogency of his arguments, denied the privileges of their society to the slave-holder; and zealously engaged in destroying the aggravated evil. Thus, through the beneficial labours of this pattern of piety and brotherly kindness, commenced a work which has since been promoted, by the humane of every denomination. His memory ought therefore to be deeply engraven on the tablets of our hearts; and ought ever to inspire us with the most ardent esteem.

Nor less to be prized are the useful exertions of Anthony Benezet. This inestimable person, sensible of the equality of mankind, rose superior to the illiberal opinions of the age; and, disallowing an inferiority in the African genius, established the first school to cultivate our understandings, and to better our condition.

Thus, by enlightening the mind, and implanting the seeds of virtue, he banished, in a degree, the mists of prejudice; and laid the foundations of our future happiness. Let, therefore, a due sense of his meritorious actions, ever create in us, a deep reverence of his beloved name. Justice to the occasion, as well as his merits, forbid me to pass in silence over the name of the honorable William Wilberforce. Possessing talents capable of adorning the greatest subjects, his comprehensive mind found none more worthy his constant attention, than the abolition of the Slave-Trade. For this he soared to the zenith of his towering eloquence, and for this he struggled with perpetual ardour. Thus, anxious in defence of our rights, he pledged himself never to desert the cause; and, by his repeated and strenuous exertions, he finally obtained the desirable end. His extensive services have, therefore, entitled him to a large share of our affections, and to a lasting tribute of our unfeigned thanks.

But think not, my brethren, that I pretend to enumerate the persons who have proved our strenuous advocates, or that I have pourtrayed the merits of those I have mentioned. No I have given but a few specimens of a countless



number\*, and no more than the rude outlines of the beneficence of these. Perhaps there never existed a human institution, which has displayed more intrinsic merit, than the societies for the abolition of slavery.

Reared on the pure basis of philanthropy, they extend to different quarters of the globe; and comprise a considerable number of humane and respectable men. These, greatly impressed with the importance of the work, entered into it with such disinterestedness, engagedness, and prudence, as does honour to their wisdom and virtue. To effect the purposes of these societies no legal means were left untried, which afforded the smallest prospects of success. Books were disseminated, and discourses delivered, wherein every argument was employed which the penetrating mind could adduce, from religion, justice or reason, to prove the turpitude of slavery, and numerous instances related, calculated to awaken sentiments of compassion. To further their charitable inten-



\*Among the many eminent defenders of African rights, the reader cannot fail to recognize the Rev. Mr. Thomas Clarkson, whose extensive capacities and unremitting zeal, have classed him with the most conspicuous and useful advocates of the cause. In his essays in defence of injured humanity, he displays a power of argument, which silences every objector. Thus, while Mr. Wilberforce arrested the attention of the national councils on this important subject, the excellent Mr. Clarkson strongly seconded his endeavours, by addressing the community at large; and penetrating the flimsy garb in which sophistry had veiled the evils of slavery, he exploded all its fallacious arguments, exposed this monster of deformity in all its nakedness, and confirmed the principle, that it is not only our duty, but our temporal and eternal interest to “do good unto all men.”

tions, applications were constantly made, to different bodies of legislature, and every concession improved to our best possible advantage. Taught by preceding occurrences, that the waves of oppression are ever ready to overwhelm the defenceless, they became the vigilant guardians of all our reinstated joys. Sensible that the inexperienced mind, is greatly exposed to the allurements of vice, they cautioned us, by the most salutary precepts, and virtuous examples, against its fatal encroachments: and the better to establish us, in the paths of rectitude they instituted schools to instruct us in the knowledge of letters, and the principles of virtue.

By these, and similar methods, with divine assistance they assailed the dark dungeon of slavery; shattered its rugged wall, and enlarging thousands of the captives, bestowed on them the blessings of civil society. Yes, my brethren, through their efficiency, numbers of us now enjoy the invaluable gem of liberty; numbers have been secured from a relapse into bondage; and numbers have attained an useful education.

I need not, my brethren, take a farther view of our present circumstances, to convince you of the providential benefits which we have derived from our patrons; for if you take a retrospect of the past situation of Africans, and descendants of Africans, in this and other countries, to your observation our advancements must be obvious. From these considerations, added to the happy event, which we now celebrate, let us ever entertain the profoundest veneration for our munificent benefactors, and return to them from the altars of our hearts, the fragrant incense of incessant grati-

tude. But let not, my brethren, our demonstrations of gratitude, be confined to the mere expressions of our lips.

The active part which the friends of humanity have taken to ameliorate our sufferings, has rendered them in a measure, the pledges of our integrity. You must be well aware that notwithstanding their endeavours, they have yet remaining, from interest and prejudice, a number of opposers. These, carefully watching for every opportunity to injure the cause, will not fail to augment the smallest defects in our lives and conversation; and reproach our benefactors with them, as the fruits of their actions.

Let us, therefore, by a steady and upright deportment, by a strict obedience and respect to the laws of the land, form an invulnerable bulwark against the shafts of malice. Thus, evincing to the world that our garments are unpolluted by the stains of ingratitude, we shall reap increasing advantages from the favours conferred; the spirits of our departed ancestors shall smile with complacency on the change of our state; and posterity shall exult in the pleasing remembrance.

May the time speedily commence, when Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands; when the sun of liberty shall beam resplendent on the whole African race; and its genial influences, promote the luxuriant growth of knowledge and virtue.

FINIS.

*HAVING understood, that some persons doubt my being the author of this Oration, and thinking it probable, that a like sentiment may be entertained, by others who may honour this publication with a perusal; I have thought proper to authenticate the fact, by subjoining the following certificates.*

*PETER WILLIAMS, Jun.*



*New-York, January 16, 1808.*

THIS is to certify, all whom it may concern, that the Oration on the Abolition of the Slave-Trade, delivered by PETER WILLIAMS, Jun. in the African Church, was submitted to my inspection while it was in manuscript; that I have every reason to believe it was composed by him, the said Peter Williams; and that it now comes from the press, with only a few immaterial verbal alterations.

BENJAMIN MOORE

*Bishop of the P. E. Church  
in the State of New-York.*



TO whom it may concern: These presents are to certify, that the "Oration on the Abolition of the Slave-Trade; delivered in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, in the City of New-York, January 1, 1808; by PETER WILLIAMS, Jun. a descendant of Africa," was inspected by me, while in manuscript, and I was present when he delivered the same; and I have satisfactory assurance, and sufficient reason to believe, that the said Oration was composed by the said Peter Williams.

EZEKIEL COOPER,

*Minister of the  
Methodist Episcopal Church.*

*New-York, January 16, 1808.*

PETER WILLIAMS, Jun. a young man of the African race, having delivered on the first of this month, "An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave-Trade," These are therefore to certify, that from my knowledge of him, I believe the production to be his own; though in the revisal of it, he received some small aid.

JOHN MURRAY, Jun.

*New-York, 1st. mo. 18, 1808.*



FROM my knowledge of PETER WILLIAMS, Jun. (a descendant of the African race) and of several of his essays at composition, I have no doubt, but that he composed the Oration, which he delivered on the 1st inst. on the subject of the Abolition of the Slave-Trade.

WILLIAM T. SLOCUM.

*New-York, 1st. mo. 18, 1808.*

## *Editor's Note*

The United States Constitution, Article 1, Section 9, prohibited Congress from banning the importation of slaves until the year 1808. A bill to do this was first introduced in Congress by Senator Stephen Roe Bradley of Vermont in December 1805, and its passage was recommended by President Jefferson in his annual message to Congress in December 1806. In March 1807, Congress passed the legislation, and President Thomas Jefferson signed it into law on March 3, 1807. Subsequently, on March 25, 1807, the British Parliament also passed an act banning the slave trade aboard British ships.

The effective date of the new federal law (January 1, 1808) was celebrated in New York City by the oration and program reprinted here. The state of New York had banned the importation of slaves in 1788; and it pursued a policy of gradual abolition that freed all slaves in New York by 1827, although outsiders were legally entitled to hold slaves temporarily under a “nine-months” law in effect until 1841. The 1807 Act applied only to the importation of slaves from abroad, and did not end the domestic slave trade, which remained legal until the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 (for the seceded states) or the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 (for the slave states that remained in the Union). The text of the 1807 Act is online at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/statutes/slavery/slo04.htm>

The *Oration* by Peter Williams, Jr., is among the earliest publications by an African American on the subject of abolition. Williams (c.1780-1840) was born in Brunswick, New Jersey, and attended the African Free School in New York. His mother was an indentured servant from St. Kitts, and his father was a veteran of the Revolutionary War who had helped establish the first African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in 1796. Williams, Jr., later organized St. Philip's African Church in Harlem in 1818, and in 1826 he became an Episcopal clergyman. He was active in the New York African So-

ciety for Mutual Relief and the American Anti-Slavery Society. A brief biography of him is online at the New-York Historical Society: [http://www.slaveryinnewyork.org/PDFs/Life\\_Stories.pdf](http://www.slaveryinnewyork.org/PDFs/Life_Stories.pdf)

This electronic edition of Peter Williams' *Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* is based on the first edition, published in New York in January of 1808. The text was transcribed from a digitized version of the microprint in the Early American imprints, Second series, no. 16741, which reproduces the copy held by the American Antiquarian Society. The spelling, punctuation, orthography, capitalization, and italics of the original have been preserved. Variant nineteenth-century spellings—such as wo, defence, favour, etc.—have been preserved. Only the following typographical error has been corrected:

<i>Page.line</i>	<i>1808 edition</i>	<i>emended to</i>
12.16	spresds	spreads

The design and page layout reflect those of the 1808 edition. The text typeface is IM Fell English, probably cut by Christoffel van Dijck (roman) and Robert Granjon (italic), and digitized and furnished by Iginò Marini (<http://iginomarini.com/fell.html>). The dividers and decorative ends are from the Adobe Wood Type Ornaments set.

Paul Royster  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
February 2, 2007





