

Lemuel Haynes, “Liberty Further Extended: Or Free Thoughts on the Illegality of Slave-keeping,” [1776]

“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 happyness.”

Congress

The Preface.

As *tyranny* had its Origin from the infernal regions: so it is the Deuty, and honner of Every son of freedom to repel her first motions. But while we are Engaged in the important struggle, it cannot Be tho’t impertinent for us to turn one Eye into our own Breast, for a little moment, and See, whether thro’ some inadvertency, or a self-contractede Spirit, we Do not find the monster Lurking in our own Bosom; that now while we are inspir’d 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, & freedom, is an innate principle, which is unmovebly placed in the human Species; and to see a man aspire after it, is not Enigmatical, seeing he acts no ways incompatible with his own Nature; consequently, he that would infringe upon a mans Liberty may reasonably Expect to meet with oposision, seeing the Defendant cannot Comply to Non-resistance, unless he Counter-acts the very Laws of nature.

Liberty is a Jewel which was handed Down to man from the cabinet of heaven, and is Coaeval with his Existance. And as it proceed from the Supreme Legislature of the univers, 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.

One man may bost a superorety above another in point of Natural previledg; yet if he can produce no convincive arguments in vindication of this preheminance 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 Evincd, 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 Confin’d to any nation under Heaven; nay, I think it not hyperbolical to affirm, that Even an affrican, has Equally as good a right to his Liberty in common with Englishmen.

I know that those that are concerned in the Slave-trade, Do pretend to Bring arguments in vindication of their practise; yet if we give them a candid Examination, we shall find them (Even those of the most cogent kind) to be Essencilly Dificient. We live in a day wherein Liberty & freedom is the subject of many millions Concern; and the important Struggle hath alread caused great Effusion of Blood; men seem to manifest the most sanguine resolution not to Let their natural rights go without their Lives go with them; a resolution, one would think Every one that has the Least Love to his country, or guter posterity, would fully confide in, yet while we are so zealous to maintain, and foster our own invaded rights, it cannot be tho’t impertinent for us Candidly to reflect on our own conduct, and I doubt not But that we shall find that subsisting in

the midst of us, that may with propriety be stiled Opression, nay, much greater oppression, than that which Englishmen seem so much to spurn at. I mean an oppression which they, themselves, impose upon others. . . .

And the main proposition, which I intend for some Breif 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 practise of Slave-keeping, which so much abounds in this Land is illicit. . . .

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