

*Unpacking Our  
History Article Packet*

Education Part I

# Colonial and Plantation Era

**THURSDAY, JUNE 13  
7-8:30 PM, ON ZOOM**

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*Describing education in colonial America, this historian concludes that: "What emerged by the end of the colonial period was a peculiar blend of public and private, classical and vocational, religious and secular. Modern 'public education' had not yet been conceived."*

## Before the Public School: Education in Colonial America

BY ROBERT MIDDLEKAUFF

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WHEN AN AMERICAN colonist discussed a "public school," he was not talking about the institution familiar to us since the nineteenth century; usually he simply meant a school open to anyone who wished to attend. The chances were that the school was privately owned and financed. The designation "public" was given to distinguish it from a school catering exclusively to a special group—usually a religious sect.

Indeed, the modern idea of "public education," implying a state-owned system of schools, supported by taxation, and administered by officials chosen by the community, which compels attendance of all children within a certain age group and which carefully separates itself from the educational efforts of private groups, did not exist in the colonial period. To be sure, the state sometimes participated in organizing and financing schools, but its role (outside of New England) was small. Instead, several other agencies assumed the burdens of education; chief among them were the family, apprenticeship, and private schools of various sorts.<sup>1</sup>

Schools in the first years of settlement were scarce in all the colonies. Scattered settlement and scant resources discouraged attempts to maintain schools continuously. Thus in the first years education in schools was largely a temporary, even sporadic affair.

### EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH

If education in the first years of settlement was much alike in all the colonies, it took on regional characteristics as colonial society matured. In the southern colonies—Virginia, the Carolinas, Mary-

land and later Georgia—where population always remained scattered on farms and plantations, geography prevented a neat structure of schools. Yet children were educated. A wealthy planter sent his sons to England to sit in one of the great grammar schools, or brought a tutor to the plantation, where he lived with the family. Smaller planters and farmers, especially in Virginia, sometimes combined their resources to build a "field school"—a building in a tobacco field, hence the name—and to hire a teacher to instruct the children living nearby. Boarding schools usually established by an ambitious college graduate or itinerant schoolmaster appeared late in the colonial period and were usually found only in the larger villages like Williamsburg or Charles Town.<sup>2</sup>

Tutors, field schools, boarding schools, were all maintained without any reference to public authorities. This was not true of most of the endowed schools of the southern colonies. Founded through the generosity of private donors, these schools were usually managed by county or parish officials—or a combination of both. Such officers found a place for the school's meeting, hired its master, and supervised its operation.

The most renowned of these institutions were the Symmes and Eaton schools. Both were founded around the middle of the seventeenth century from bequests of Virginians. Both were controlled by a board of trustees composed from county and parish officers. Symmes school secured incorporation in 1753; Eaton in 1759. During at least a part of its history each offered instruction in the classical languages as well as in reading, writing and arithmetic.<sup>3</sup>

Altogether nine such schools in Virginia survived at least a part of the colonial period. All in all, they were not of great importance for they took root in only seven parishes; eighty-three parishes had none.<sup>4</sup> In the colonial South only the grammar school at the

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), pp. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *Virginians at Home* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1963), pp. 8-32.

<sup>3</sup> G. F. Wells, *Parish Education in Colonial Virginia* (New York: Arno, 1923), pp. 32-39.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.



College of William and Mary consistently received public funds.

### THE MIDDLE COLONIES

The southern colonies were not unique; contributions from public treasuries in the middle colonies—New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey—rarely were given. Even Philadelphia and New York, large cities in the eighteenth century by English standards, did not direct municipal revenues into education.

An energetic and self-conscious denominationalism supplied Philadelphia with schools. First on the scene, the Society of Friends established elementary schools and a single grammar school shortly after Pennsylvania was settled. William Penn gave his encouragement by bestowing a charter on the grammar school in 1701. The Friends apparently needed no official endorsement, and throughout the colonial period they gave the schools vigorous support through private subscriptions and legacies.<sup>5</sup>

Other religious groups as eager as the Friends to preserve their identity and to perpetuate themselves maintained schools in Philadelphia. An Anglican parish school was begun in 1698, and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel supported a charity school for poor children for most of the period before the Revolution. The Lutheran church opened a classical school around the middle of the eighteenth century, and the Baptists followed with the same type in 1755; the Moravians—never a rich group—began an elementary school in 1745.<sup>6</sup>

Besides these efforts—and probably equally important—were the numerous private schoolmasters of Philadelphia. The average private master displayed a variety of skills to Philadelphians. If his newspaper advertisements accurately stated his qualifications, he could teach everything from arithmetic to astronomy—including Latin and Greek, rhetoric, oratory, logic, navigation, surveying, bookkeeping, higher mathematics and natural science. His offerings were necessarily broad; he had to attract students since their tuition provided his sole means of support.<sup>7</sup>

New York, the other city of the middle colonies, could not match Philadelphia's denominational offerings. Still, its religious groups were important agencies of education. Under the Dutch in the first half of the seventeenth century, the Reformed Church maintained a school. After the English took over the colony in 1664, the church opened several more in

an attempt to hold its children to the old ways and to the old language. Though English culture eventually washed out the results, these attempts helped preserve Dutch homogeneity for years. As in Philadelphia, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel also proved active, sponsoring charity schools for children of the poor.<sup>8</sup>

New York could also boast numerous private schools in the eighteenth century with masters, judging from their claims in the newspapers, no less talented than those of Philadelphia. But, on the whole, education was neglected in New York. Perhaps the most auspicious development of the pre-Revolutionary period was the opening of a grammar school by the newly-founded Kings College in 1762. The college and its school promised to renew interest in education beyond the elementary level.<sup>9</sup>

Small towns and villages in the middle colonies lagged badly in education. A few parish schools struggled along in several; private masters taught reading, writing and arithmetic and occasionally vocational subjects like surveying; apprenticeship supplied most of the skilled crafts. If a boy desired advanced training in the languages or higher mathematics, he had to travel to New York or Philadelphia. By the late colonial period apparently there were many boys who sought such instruction, for the city schools were filled with students from the country.

This brief treatment of the southern and middle colonies suggests, perhaps, that a variety of agencies—each for its own purposes—promoted education. In New England a number of the same forces appeared: the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel sent out masters instructed to bring the dissenters back to the true faith; Baptists, Quakers and other religious groups strove to maintain schools purveying learning and their versions of Christianity; and in large towns and cities, private masters giving classical and vocational training flourished. Although this was in the familiar colonial pattern, New England, in education as in much else, departed from the familiar. The state made the difference by entering the field of education in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and (before it merged with Massachusetts) in Plymouth.

New England was settled by Puritans who, unlike some of the radical sects they left behind in England, valued education. The Puritans came to the New World imbued with a sense of mission. They had left the Old World to complete the Protestant Reformation, to demonstrate that they held the true conception of church polity and religious doctrine. The success of their task depended in large measure, they were convinced, on an educated community. Hence they wished to erect a system of schools equal to the task.

They wasted no time getting started. Six years

<sup>5</sup> Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness* (New York: Putnam, 1955), pp. 123–24; and *Cities in Revolt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 174.

<sup>6</sup> Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness*, p. 284; *Cities in Revolt*, p. 174.

<sup>7</sup> Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness*, pp. 447–448.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 123–26; 287.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287; *Cities in Revolt*, p. 174.

after the Great Migration of the faithful began in 1630, the Massachusetts General Court set Harvard College on its distinguished road. Erecting and financing schools proved a difficult task (as did financing the college for that matter) and after a period in which private contributions were relied upon, the General Court of Massachusetts decided to compel towns to assume the burden.

Towns of at least 50 families, it decreed in 1647, must maintain a reading and writing master, and those of at least 100 families, a grammar master—as one who taught Latin and Greek was often called. Responsibility for enforcement of the law was placed with the county courts which were empowered to fine offending communities.<sup>10</sup>

With the exception of Rhode Island, the other New England colonies followed the Massachusetts example, though requirements and enforcement varied from one to another.

The statutes compelled local authorities to provide education; they did not force parents to send their children. Nor did the laws require communities to support their schools from taxes; finance was left entirely to the community's discretion.

Under the laws a pattern of control and finance appeared among New England villages. In its meeting—the most important institution of local government—the town handled the school in about the same way it did any public business. This was a fact of enormous importance, for, so located, the school could not avoid the impact of local politics and of public financial pressures.

Though the town meeting formulated school policy, it depended upon a committee (chosen in the meeting) or the selectmen (the most important officials chosen by the meeting) to carry it out. School committees and selectmen were usually the best men available—men who had education and political experience.

Committee functions varied little from town to town. Usually the committee hired the schoolmasters, found a place for the school to meet if a regular building was lacking, and handled the finances of the school. In most towns how the committee went about hiring a master was its own business, though it did have to satisfy the meeting. In Massachusetts a statute added another requirement: the local minister with one of his brethren, or any two neighboring ministers together, were supposed to approve the schoolmaster before he was hired. Though evidence

is lacking, towns seems to have observed this statute. Only rarely did cases of noncompliance get into the county courts.<sup>11</sup>

### SCHOOL EXPENSES

As local taxes on polls and property provided most of the money for ordinary expenses, so also they provided school expenses. Only in Connecticut could towns look to the provincial government for consistent financial help. Connecticut towns received an annual contribution out of provincial taxes, but few, if any, found this subsidy large enough to meet the expenses of their schools.

In every New England colony, there were towns which could rely on public lands for part of their school expenses. Donated by individuals, or the colony, or set aside by the towns themselves, these lands could be rented or sold. Shrewdly invested, the income from such lands could often relieve the taxpayers of a large portion of school charges.

One other source of finance for schools existed—the parents of boys who attended. They could be assessed tuition for every child they sent to school and until the middle of the eighteenth century they occasionally were. In Watertown, Massachusetts, in 1700, for example, six pence a week was collected for each Latin scholar, four pence for a “writer,” and three for a “reader.”<sup>12</sup> Few towns required tuition payments but many insisted that parents provide firewood in the winter. Parents also purchased paper, pens and schoolbooks for their children.

Town growth intensified financial problems and created new difficulties. As its once compact population increased and spread out, a village saw its single school become inadequate. Far from the original settlement, children could not attend the once centrally located school. Nothing, of course, prevented a town from providing a second more accessible school—nothing except money. To soften the clamor for education that arose from remote areas, many towns decided to uproot their schools and send them out on the road. The school might “go round with the Sun” as it did in Duxbury, Massachusetts, for many years, meeting successively in the four quarters of the town for three months at a time.<sup>13</sup>

Putting the school on the move had the obvious

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<sup>10</sup> S. E. Morison, *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), pp. 65–78.

<sup>11</sup> This paragraph is based on an examination of manuscript court and town records.

<sup>12</sup> *Watertown Records*, 6 vols (Watertown: 1894–1906), II, 132.

<sup>13</sup> *Records of Duxbury, Mass.* (Plymouth: 1893), p. 320.

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## EDUCATION IN COLONIAL AMERICA

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disadvantage of spreading learning very thin. A boy who had attended the school for nine or ten months out of a year when it was located in one place might only be able to attend the moving school the three or four months that it was near his house. If he was determined he might follow the school as it traveled from one spot to the next. But this was such a difficult and expensive process that probably few boys did it.

If many towns sent their schools into outlying sections, an equal number divided themselves into districts and established a school in each. Usually citizens in each district elected a committee charged with responsibility for hiring a master and providing a place for the school to meet. The authority of the district and its committee rarely included more important matters. Towns continued to hold taxing powers and understandably enough were reluctant to share them. Every town allocated annually a portion of its revenues to districts on the basis of their populations. Such divisions were often contested by jealous districts, but on the whole the system worked well.

The success of the system left Rhode Islanders unimpressed, and their legislature steadfastly refused to establish educational standards for its towns. The results for the colony's intellectual life were obvious: in the seventeenth century only one Rhode Island boy attended college. In the next century more traveled to Harvard and Yale but no college took shape in Rhode Island itself until just before the Revolution.<sup>14</sup>

Yet there were publicly-supported schools in Rhode Island, even a few which offered instruction in Latin and Greek. But most of these schools were in towns which had been transferred from Massachusetts to Rhode Island on the settlement of a boundary dispute in 1747. Thoroughly imbued with the educational tradition of Massachusetts, they probably never considered dropping their schools in removal from the Bay Colony's jurisdiction.

For the most part, Rhode Islanders relied upon private sources for the support of schools. Often this means failed them; and their schools, compared to those of the neighboring colonies, enjoyed a precarious existence.

Rhode Island's educational history obviously parallels much of that of the southern and middle colonies, where no public commitment to education existed and no private source of support was ever entirely reliable. In no colony did one group monopolize education. Rather, variety in support, in sponsors, in

state participation, and in the forms institutions assumed characterized colonial education. Inevitably educational development followed an uneven course.

It did because it was an expression of a colonial society, which was altering at an uneven pace. Education itself, of course, was a force in this process of change. As it helped shape colonial society, so also was it shaped. What emerged by the end of the colonial period was a peculiar blend of public and private, classical and vocational, religious and secular. Modern "public education" had not yet been conceived.

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## AMERICAN EDUCATION AFTER 1800

(Continued from page 285)

but some of the academies received aid from public funds.

As the public school system spread and as more young people completed the eighth grade, there was a growing demand for secondary education. Why should parents be made to pay private tuition to give their children a secondary education? Why should they even be required to pay rate-bills? These and other questions were asked increasingly, and the idea grew that the free public schools should be extended upward through the twelfth grade. The movement to establish public-supported high schools began in Massachusetts and New York in the late 1820's and the early 1830's. In the late 1830's, in the 1840's, and in the 1850's, it spread from these states to other Northern states. It found a ready response in the new Western states. However, in some Northern states, including Rhode Island, Connecticut and New Jersey, the high school movement did not really get under way until after 1865, and in the South it did not come until even later.

The rise of the state university to a place of importance in American education did not occur until after the Civil War. By the end of 1860, there were 246 colleges in the United States, but only 17 were state institutions. Most of the colleges were denominational colleges. Only the University of Michigan foreshadowed the great future that was before the state university, for in 1860 Michigan enrolled over 500 students.

Up to the Civil War, the federal government had shown little concern for education. Aside from its land grants to states admitted to the Union after 1800, the federal government stood aloof. However, with the Morrill Act of 1862 the federal government extended aid to land-grant colleges for agricultural education. In 1867, the office of United States Commissioner of Education would be created. And in 1883, the prophetic Blair bill would raise in a large way the question of federal aid to the states for the common school.

<sup>14</sup> Morison, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

## A BRIEF HISTORY

### Anti-Black Racism and Anti-Black Literacy in Federal and State Laws

The history of anti-Black racism, anti-Black literacy, and educational inequality as experienced by people of African descent in the United States begins this chapter. Woodson (1933) observed: "if a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated" (p. 87). The history linking anti-Black racism and anti-literacy laws in the United States provided context for understanding why and how anti-Black literacy laws were codified, justified, and legalized. For hundreds of years, White people created acts, codes, laws, policies, statutes, and structures to deny, limit, and prevent Black peoples' access to literacy. On the one hand, laws were established that criminalized Black people from acquiring and teaching literacy, attempts to teach and learn literacy, and forbade Black and White children from attending the same school and being taught literacy by the same teacher. And the separate-but-equal doctrine shielded inequities by creating unequal educational institutions for Black and White students. On the other hand, Black people learned to read, and they built, furnished, and financed their own schools, although some were dependent on federal and philanthropic funding (J. D. Anderson, 1988). There were two undeniable outcomes: White supremacists prohibited Black people from learning to read and write to control their thoughts and retain a free source of labor during enslavement and a free or cheap source of labor thereafter, and Black people resisted customs, laws, statutes, and traditions to declare their humanity, intellect, and resistance to White supremacy. Black people learned to read and write as literacy as a form of power and resistance. A review of multiple federal documents and laws (Declaration of Independence, Supreme Court cases, and the US Constitution); state constitutions and laws; as well as local customs, laws, policies, and statutes – the

ever-present unresolved issue of the enslavement of Black people – remains, along with efforts to prohibit their access to literacy.

The never-ending efforts to delimit Black people's access to literacy was one of many forms of oppression used to control Black people. Fueled by an ideology of White supremacy and anti-Black racism, the late 1800s was a time of anti-Black literacy customs, laws, and statutes; Black enslavement, Jim/Jane Crow laws, segregation, and race-based inequalities were ignored or whitewashed to imply ongoing progress. Drawing on negative and stereotypical images of Black people popularized in the customs, laws, and media, this period became one of Black victimization: portrayals of Black people's reading ability were presented as evidence of biological inferiority and low intelligence. White people claimed dominion over literacy by controlling, defining, and limiting who was permitted access and under what conditions. Legal and societal efforts to forestall access to literacy were undertaken with intentionality: "it was not done by well-meaning people muddling into something which they didn't understand. It was a deliberate policy hammered into place" (Baldwin, 1963, p. 2). The concerns of Black parents for their children's education did not abate; they continued to seek legal redress as in the cases of Sarah Roberts in the 1800s, Linda Brown in 1954, and Ruby Bridges in 1960. The Black girls had parents who wanted them to attend elementary schools closer to their homes. Their efforts were followed by White people changing school districts, parents removing their children from schools to attend suburban schools, and building alternative schools (Christian, church-affiliated, charter, elite public, etc.). White power elites chaffed at Black people who articulated, challenged, questioned, and responded to White supremacist assumptions, customs, laws, traditions, and statutes.

Given the history of literacy, anti-Black literacy laws continued to unfold long after the initial laws were seemingly abolished, moves the narrative forward. The role of White supremacy – not as a singular event or moment in time but a continuous evolution and remaking – represents a tapestry of local beliefs and customs about White racial superiority and was foundational to many legal federal, state, and local racist laws and policies established in support. In this chapter, the seeming "placelessness" of Black people within the history of reading has been revised by extending and complicating the history of anti-literacy for Black people in the United States. A goal of this chapter is to expose the assumptions and relationships governing literacy in the United States. The geographical references and locations of place were important to acknowledge as literacy has never been a singularly Western commodity nor do the concepts about literacy belong only to the West or the global North (the discussion of which is beyond this chapter).

An examination of legal federal and state primary source documents as well as federal, state, and local customs, policies, and statutes exposes how anti-Black racism was/is threaded through legislation that affected access to literacy for Black people. The review of customs, laws, policies, and statutes helped to unmask the



blinding legacy of systemic racism in literacy access. For over four hundred years, White supremacist ideological positioning and legal efforts, coupled with social customs and traditions, prohibited equal and equitable access to literacy for Black people in the United States.

### **A Conscious and Legal Effort to Deny Literacy to People of African Descent**

Black historians (B. Bell, 1987; Franklin & Moss, 1994) drew on knowledge of literacy among the people of Africa and provided an alternative narrative to explain the literacy habits of African people. Importantly, they conceived of literacy in much broader terms than reading and writing by including communication, entertainment, orality, and traditions. B. Bell (1987) provided an extended understanding of literacy to include orality:

various forms of verbal art were used by Africans to transmit knowledge, value, and attitudes from one generation to another, enforce conformity to social norms, validate social institutions and religious rituals, and provide psychological release from the restrictions of society.

(p. 16)

Franklin and Moss (1994) also acknowledged the

literary activities of Africans with their everyday lives. Oral literature, made up of tales, proverbs, epics, histories and laws, served as an educational device, a source of amusement, and a guide for the administration of government and the conduct of religious ceremony.

(p. 25)

People of African descent, primarily from the vast area of West and Central Africa, were brought to the “new world” on the shores of North America. There was not a single language of communication among the African people as “enslaved black people came from regions and ethnic groups throughout Africa. Though they came empty-handed, they carried with them memories of loved ones and communities, moral values, intellectual insight, artistic talents and cultural practices, religious beliefs and skills” (Elliot & Hughes, 2019, n. p.). Black people possessed critical consciousness; that is, they “read” their environment, from landing on the shores of the Americas to the armed resistance against the inhumanity imposed by White enslavers. Through their resistance, they created a new life, a *mélange* of cultures, ethnicities, languages, literacies, and religions.

There were an unknown number of literate African people captured or kidnapped, enslaved, and transported during the transatlantic slave trade throughout the Americas. Diouf (2019) estimates that over one million literate African

Muslims were able to read and write in Arabic before they arrived in the Americas. Biographies about literate African Muslim men from powerful and royal families were produced by White people: Prince Ayuba Suleiman Diallo (aka Job Ben Solomon), and Abdul Rahman (Abd-Al Rahman, Ibrahima abd-Al Rahman). Omar ibn Said (1770–1863), by contrast, was the only enslaved African person to write an autobiography while enslaved. Scholars (Alryyes, 2011; Diouf, 2019; Jameson, 1925), among others, observe there was an extensive legalized educational system throughout the Sengambia region of West Africa where Omar ibn Said spent over two decades studying at the university level, before he was captured, enslaved, and transported to Charleston, South Carolina (please see Omar ibn Said photo, Figure 1.1). After years of chattel enslavement, he escaped from his harsh enslaver and walked 200 miles to North Carolina, before he was recaptured and incarcerated. While imprisoned, he wrote in Arabic on the walls, before being “purchased” by John Owen, the governor of the state. Omar ibn Said’s autobiography included quotations from the Qur’an, apologies as he had forgotten his first language as well as literateness (Alryyes & Said, 2011, p. 61).



FIGURE 1.1 Omar ibn Said, portrait ca. 1850. in Randolph Linsly Simpson African-American collection.

Credit: Wikimedia Commons



When brought to the “new world,” African people were forced to learn the cultures, languages, and values of their oppressors; had to suppress their home languages as well as their literate abilities; and faced dispossession of their languages, personhood, and ways of life. Other African men wrote their autobiographies such as Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa), or dictated their autobiography. Venture Smith (1729–1805), for instance, was born in Guinea, Africa, and dictated his autobiography in 1798 to “Elisha Niles, a Connecticut schoolmaster” (para 2). He detailed his life prior to bondage and enslavement as well as described how he purchased his freedom and the freedom of his wife, children, and other enslaved Black people.

Historians Bly (2011) and Monaghan (2005) proffered that some White Christians were more likely to teach Black people to read than to write, as some believed teaching Black people to write would disprove their theory that Black people were unable to think and reason. Moreover, Black people who were able to write would appear more human (Willis, Thompson-McMillon, & Smith, 2022). In 1740, South Carolina passed a law forbidding teaching literacy to enslaved people:

Whereas, the having slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attended with great inconveniences; Be it enacted, that all and every person and persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe, in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write, every such person or persons shall, for every such offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds, current money.

Simkin, 2014, n.p.

No one living today truly understands the depth of depravity foisted upon one human by another during Black chattel enslavement. We know there were untold human rights abuses as William Wells Brown (1814–1884), a formerly enslaved mixed-race man observed, “slavery has never been represented, slavery never can be represented” (quoted in J. Johnson, 1999, p. 10). Samuel Wood wrote, printed, and disseminated a broadside *Injured Humanity; Being a Representation of What the Unhappy Children of Africa Endure from Those Who Call Themselves Christians* (1805), meant to demystify and shock people through his text and pictures. He shared graphic examples of Black enslavement in the West Indies: affixing mouthpieces, beating, branding, kidnapping, starving, whipping, and separating families.

Zora Neal Hurston, best known as a novelist, was also a trained anthropologist whose research provided counternarratives to inaccurate academic discourses about Black people. Her scholarship included in-depth interviews, extensive field work, and nuanced understandings of the cultures, languages, and ways of Black people. Hurston (1927) published an article in the *Journal of Negro History*, in which she conveyed the cultural and domestic life in an African village, as

shared with her by a formerly enslaved Black man, whose name was changed to Cudjo (Kujjo) Lewis. He recalled, in heart-rending detail, how he was captured and held in Dahomey (Benin), Africa, after a massacre by a rival tribe. The captured people walked from their village to the port, imprisoned before being sold to White slavers, the transport on the *Clotilde*, and experiences once on the US soil where he was enslaved. Hurston's more in-depth portrayal of Mr. Oluale Kossola (his given name) was completed in 1931 amid some controversy, and it was published posthumously in 2018 as *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo."* Hurston's book includes transcriptions of her recorded interviews with Oluale Kossola, the name they both preferred. Importantly, she retained Kossola's language, West African Pidgin English, and refused to alter it as doing so would be an erasure of an integral part of his life. Kossola, for instance, described his experience of learning of his emancipation:

I doan forgit. It April 12, 1865. De Yankee soldiers dey come down to de boat and eatee de mulberries off de trees close to de boat, you unnerstand me. Den dey see us on de boat and dey say "Y'all can't stay dere no mo'. You free, you doan b'long to nobody no mo'." Oh, Lor'! I so glad. We astee de soldiers where we goin'? Dey say dey doan know. Dey told us to go where we feel lak goin', we ain' no mo' slave.

(pp. 62–63)

The Black people in Africatown, Alabama, are descendants of Africans brought to the United States, including Kossola. They held on to the memories of their forebears, who were the human cargo on the last slave ship, the *Clotilda*, in 1860 (currently, the ship is being resurrected using federal and state funds). The ship illegally transported 110 African people — who were sold into enslavement once the ship reached the United States. Black people, who lived in Africatown, Alabama, shared oral histories passed down through generations of their Black enslaved forebears.

### ***Slave Codes***

Gates (2011) noted African people came to the landmass known as the United States as early as 1513, in present-day Florida. Enslaved Africans, kidnapped from their homelands and carried across the Atlantic aboard ships, were also brought by Spanish expeditions in present-day South Carolina in 1525 and 1565. In the United States, people of African descent were considered property, or chattel, and thus confined to a system of oppression that had no end. Chattel slavery centered on enslaving African people, as White settler-colonizers invoked "*partus sequitur ventrem*" or "that is which brought forth follows the womb," defining slavery as a heritable condition from the mother" (Parker, 2020, para 1). In 1662, a Virginia law stated:



*Whereas some doubts have arisen whether children got by any Englishman upon a Negro woman should be slave or free, be it therefore enacted and declared by this present Grand Assembly, that all children born in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother ...*

*(n.p., emphasis in the original)*

In this way, the lives of Black people were firmly severed from racial equality as a racial line had been codified to deny any person with Black blood equal status under the law. As Patrick Wolfe (2007) explained:

Black people's enslavement produced an inclusive taxonomy that automatically enslaved the offspring of a slave and any other parent. In the wake of slavery, this taxonomy became fully racialized in the "one-drop rule," whereby any amount of African ancestry, no matter how remote, and regardless of phenotypical appearance, makes a person Black.

*(quoted in Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 12)*

Similar laws were enacted in other colonies,

declaring that children assume the same status as their mother meant that white male slave owners' rape and sexual exploitation of Black enslaved women was as much an economic model as it was a tactic of psychological and physical torture.

*(Greenidge, 2021, para 6)*

The progeny faced a life of enslavement and an uncertain future as they could be nurtured, taken from their mothers and given away, or sold into enslavement. As laws were enacted to bar the importation of African people, enslaved Black people were bred and bartered across colonies and, later, state lines.

Parker (2020) observed, "one of the legal strategies that Euro-American enslavers devised to control the time, energy, and mobility of enslaved people of African descent were slave codes. Enslavers began to codify these restrictions into laws in the 17th century" (para 1). The Virginia Slave Codes of 1705, the basis for Virginia slave laws, listed dozens of prohibitions for enslaved people that included "an enslaved person carry a pass that authorized travel away from the plantation. Enslaved people could not own guns, *could not learn to read or sing*, beat drums, or gather in groups without their enslaver's permission" (Parker, 2020, para 1, emphasis added). Singing was discouraged as it permitted enslaved Black people to communicate their fears and grief:

They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. The thought that came up, came out – if not in the word, in the

sound – and as frequently in the one as in the other... They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains.

*(Douglass, 1845, p. 14, cited in Greenidge, 2021)*

Enslaved Black people sang to soothe their souls as they toiled in harsh conditions as well as to provide directions to other Black people seeking freedom on the underground railroad. Slave codes prohibited Black people from having access to, acquiring, and teaching literacy, as “literacy constituted one of the terrains on which slaves and slave owners waged a perpetual struggle for control” (H. A. Williams, 2005, p. 13). Chattel slavery dehumanized Black people and had the “negative effect of divesting Africans of a substantial portion of their own culture” (Barksdale & Kinnamon, 1972, p. 2). For Black people, learning to read and write was an act not only of defiance and resistance but also of liberation and survival. Colonies adopted slave codes, although they varied and were constantly revised to justify and legalize White supremacy as well as in response to Black slave uprisings or revolts.

### ***Federal Laws: Citizenship and Equality***

Historians have debated the intentions of the US founding fathers’ discourse in the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution regarding the institution of chattel slavery because the word “slave” was not mentioned in either document. In a draft of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson (1774) included a statement implicating King George as the impetus for slavery in the colonies:

He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life & liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, capturing & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither.

*(para 27)*

For unknown reasons, the statement was deleted in the final version. To be clear, Jefferson did not free the hundreds of enslaved Black people he owned, including his own children. Likewise, many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence (Charles Carroll, Samuel Chase, Benjamin Franklin, Button Gwinnett, John Hancock, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, Richard H. Lee, James Madison, Charles C. Pinckney, Benjamin Rush, Edward Rutledge, and George Washington) were enslavers, including three presidents. These men were aware of the oppressive living conditions of enslaved people. It was assumed,

they enjoyed the economic gain from enslavement and desired the support of Southern politicians; thus, they had no intention of ending slavery.

### ***The Declaration of Independence***

In 1775, John Murray, the Earl of Dunmore and Virginia's governor, voiced concerns about the prospects of revolution by the colonies and threatened to free enslaved people as well as burn Williamsburg, to quell colonists' attempts to defy the British rule. He published a proclamation read throughout the colonies:

I do hereby farther declare all *indentured servants*, *Negroes*, or others (appertaining to rebels) *free*, that are able and willing to bear arms, they *joining his Majesty's troops*, as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing this colony to a proper sense of their duty, to his Majesty's crown and dignity.

*(p. 1, italics in the original)*

Upon learning about a release from chattel enslavement, hundreds of enslaved Black men joined the British Army's Royal Ethiopian Regiment (Gilder Lehrman, 2021).

Anti-Black racism fueled pervasive ideas about Black people as inferior to White people and in need of oversight by White people. Historians (Allen, 1983; Bogin, 1983; Morse, 1919; Quarles, 1961; Sailant, 2002; Woodson, 1937a) provided insight into Lemuel Haynes's (1776) text "Liberty Further Extended: Or Free Thoughts on the Illegality of Slave-keeping." Haynes, the son of a man of African descent and a former White indentured servant, described the hypocrisy of chattel slavery:

We hold these truths to be self-Evident, that all men are created Equal, that they are Endowed By their Creator with Ceertain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happyness.

Haynes's pamphlet reminded the world of the humanity of people of African descent as he called for equality between Black and White people (the exact date of the document is unclear; given the language used, it is likely written before the Declaration of Independence) (see Bogin, 1983). Later, the Declaration of Independence (1776) also stated, "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights."

Another Black author, Benjamin Banneker (1793–1806), born to free Black parents, was taught to read by his White grandmother, a Quaker, Mary Bannaky. In his *Almanacs*, he called for racial equity, and in 1791, he published a letter he had written to Thomas Jefferson, then Secretary of State. He implored Jefferson and his counterparts to acknowledge that the absurdity of "the almost general prejudice and prepossession" of Black people was "so prevalent in the world against

those of my complexion" (n.p.). He demanded the authors of the Declaration of Independence uphold its claim "that all men are created equal" (n.p.) and submitted that White people must "wean yourselves from those narrow prejudices which you have imbibed with respect" to people of African descent. Unfortunately, his lofty words were unheeded as the Congressional Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 empowered local governments to apprehend runaway enslaved Black people and return them to their enslaver as well as to capture and enslave free Black people.

David Walker (1829) also challenged the text of the Declaration of Independence in his broadside, *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* (McHenry, 1996), that "illustrated the ability of Black people to articulate their thoughts with clarity and exposed their equal status as fellow humans" (Willis, 2022, n.p.). His document also was written as a critique of equality described in the Declaration of Independence (McHenry, 1996). Walker made several strong assertions, including White people were mistaken to call themselves Christian as they supported slavery and Black people were the true Americans as they built the country with their unpaid labor.

Black enslaved people refused to be thought of as the property of another person, or chattel, and believed the promises outlined in the Declaration of Independence extended to them as people living in the United States. Among the many human rights abuses (emotional, physical, psychological, and sexual) used during the enslavement of Black people, family separation was especially feared. Faced with an uncertain future and inspired by the ideas of the Declaration of Independence (used for impetus), William Craft (1860/1969), and his wife, Ellen, developed a plan of escape from enslavement in Georgia (p. iii). They ingeniously escaped when Ellen pretended to be a young White man traveling with an enslaved Black man, William. Ellen's disguise included bandages and a sling to avoid suspicion as neither could read or write. Once they reached Philadelphia, with the help of abolitionists, they were taught to read and write. The Crafts learned quickly, although they lived under constant fear of being caught and returned to Georgia. Eventually, they moved to England, then returned to the United States and opened a school for Black people (see Woodson, 1937b and Woo, 2023).

As part of the 1850 Compromise, the law extended the 1793 Fugitive Slave Law to include the federal government in the capture and enslavement of Black people. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, Section 5, referenced the Constitution as extending authority to commissioners to permit "any one or more suitable persons, from time to time, to execute all such warrants and other process as may be issued by them in the lawful performance of their respective duties" (para 5). The commissioners were encouraged to request "all good citizens are hereby commanded to aid and assist in the prompt and efficient execution of this law, whenever their services may be required ..." (para 6) to help secure runaway Black enslaved people or face penalties.

Claims of equality were not extended to the hundreds of thousands of enslaved Black people, as Frederick Douglass (1852), a formerly enslaved Black man.



remarked: "the rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me" (p. 4). He decried the hypocrisy of national celebrations and observed, "America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future ... slavery – the great sin and shame of America!" (p. 5). Douglass acknowledged the ongoing anti-Black racism caused White people to declare – Black people were not human:

the manhood of the slave is conceded. It is admitted in the fact that Southern statute books are covered with enactments forbidding, under severe fines and penalties, the teaching of the slave to read or to write ... it is enough to affirm the equal manhood of the Negro race. Is it not astonishing that, while we are ploughing, planting, and reaping, using all kinds of mechanical tools, erecting houses, constructing bridges, building ships, working in metals of brass, iron, copper, silver and gold; that, while we are reading, writing and ciphering, acting as clerks, merchants and secretaries, having among us lawyers, doctors, ministers, poets, authors, editors, orators and teachers; ...

(p. 5)

Further, he observed the hypocrisy surrounding celebrations of the Declaration of Independence and revised the US notions of exceptionalism:

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to Him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy – a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour.

(p. 6)

As a new nation and a federal government emerged, White supremacy influenced the laws for all citizens, who were only White people, and embedded these ideas within the Declaration of Independence (1776), US Constitution (1787), as well as H. R. 40, Naturalization Bill (1790), a series of slave trade acts (1794, 1800, 1803, 1807, 1808), and the 1857 *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (60 US 393).

## ***The US Constitution and Naturalization Bill***

These documents sought to rest economic and political power in the hands of White men, conceal the enslavement of Black people within federal laws, as well as codify and legalize White supremacy while simultaneously justifying the enslavement of Black people. The founding fathers were not fumbling toward some evolutionary course to end chattel slavery; they made conscious choices to retain chattel slavery and secure the wealth of White men at the cost of the lives of enslaved Black people. Under the US Constitution (1788), Black people were considered people, albeit only three-fifths of a (White) person, as noted in Article 1 §§ 2-9:

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.

Further, Article 1, Section 9, Clause 1, was a provision in the Constitution that addressed slavery. The word "slave" was not used but implied as African people were imported for the purpose of enslavement:

The Migration or Importation of such Persons as any of the States now existing shall think proper to admit, shall not be prohibited by the Congress prior to the Year one thousand eight hundred and eight, but a Tax or duty may be imposed on such Importation, not exceeding ten dollars for each Person.

*(n.p.)*

Thus, protecting the slave trade for 20 years in a concession to Southerners, "where slavery was pivotal to the economy, and states where the abolition of slavery had been accomplished or was contemplated" (Lloyd & Martinez, 2021, para 1). Perea (2016) also noted Article I, Section 2, discounted the personhood of Black enslaved persons in support of greater Southern state representation. P. Williams (1987) summarized the era by noting Black people "were, by constitutional mandated, outlawed from the hopeful, loving expectations that being treated as a whole, rather than three-fifths of human being can bring" (p. 138).

The US Congress also created and established H. R. 40, Naturalization Bill, on March 4, 1790, outlining naturalization procedures and limiting

access to US citizenship to white immigrants—in effect, to people from Western Europe—who had resided in the US at least two years and their children under 21 years of age. It also granted citizenship to children born abroad to US citizens.

*(Records of the US Senate, National Archives and Records Administration)*

Under this law, only White people could claim citizenship, reinforcing the ideology of White supremacy and setting a precedent for all future laws requiring citizenship status. Importantly, the clause permitted states to continue importing “persons” (knowingly Black people) until the expiration of the Clause in 1808 (although in 1790, President George Washington forbade the importation of slaves to the United States). Subsequent acts (1800, 1803, and 1807) increasingly prohibited US citizens from importing (Black) people to the United States for the purpose of enslavement, with accompanying fines, but did not address the trading of enslaved Black people living in the United States. Together, these federal laws provided “a shield behind which to avoid responsibility for the human repercussions of both governmental and public harmful private activity” (P. Williams, 1987, p. 134). White men of wealth continued to transport enslaved Black people from Africa to the United States, as “human cargo,” as 500 enslaved Africans were loaded on to the *Wanderer* in 1858.

The federal government’s practice was followed by states like Missouri, the 24th state in the Union, that passed several laws to restrict the lives of enslaved Black people (please see Appendix A, page 273). This law made clear the intent to deny the humanity of Black people and to prohibit Black enslaved people from learning literacy.

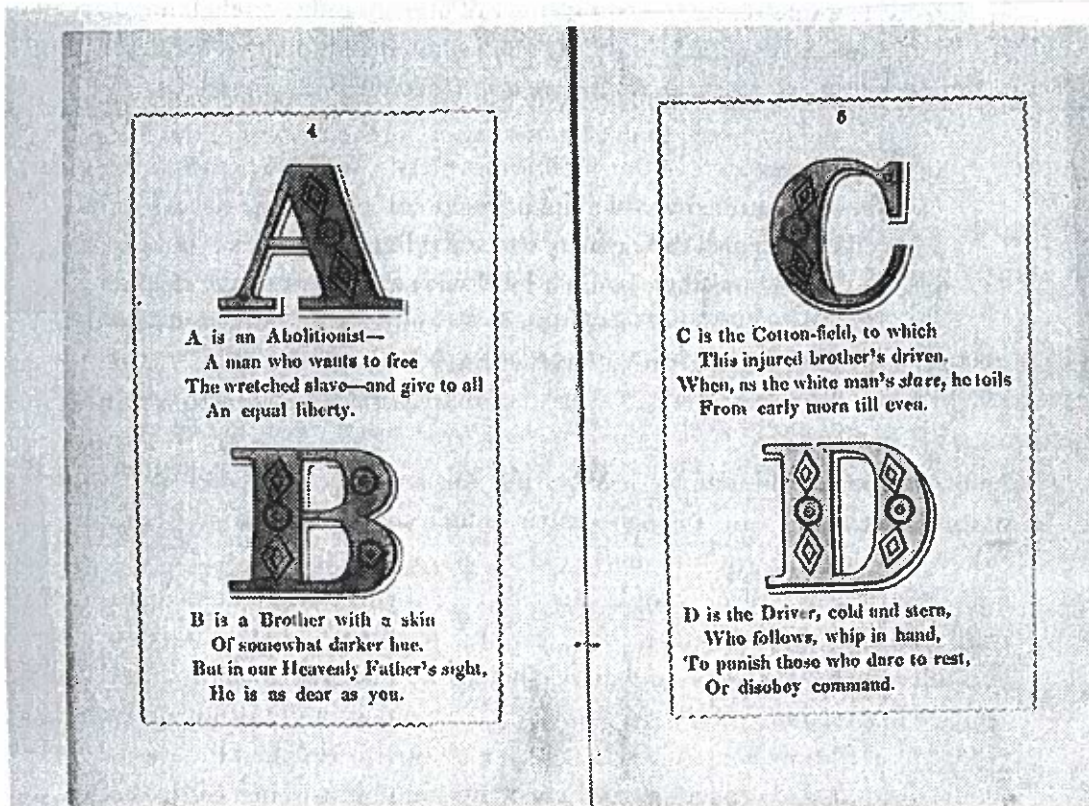


FIGURE 1.3 The Anti-Slavery Alphabet.

Credit: Wikimedia Commons



## Anti-Black Literacy Laws

Black children in Boston, Massachusetts, had access to literacy and attended public schools with White children. They faced racial harassment and “physical and emotional discrimination that led to the creation in 1798 of the Smith School, a private school for Blacks” (Browne-Marshall, 2013, p. 20). Sarah Paul

(1809–1841) was born to free Black parents, the Reverend Thomas Paul and Catherine Waterhouse Paul, a teacher. Like her parents, she valued education and taught at two neighborhood primary schools, Boston Primary School No. 6 and Abiel Smith School. She was a stalwart supporter of the anti-slavery movement and made a special effort to inform her students about Black chattel enslavement and the abolitionist movement (Blain, 2022; the National Park Service, 2022).

Later, in 1850, a lawsuit was brought against the City of Boston’s School Committee by printer Benjamin F. Roberts on behalf of his five-year-old daughter, Sarah. In the *Roberts v. Boston* (1850) case, the plaintiffs argued she should be permitted to attend the White school near their home. Chief Justice, Lemuel Shaw, however, ruled in favor of the Boston School Committee, by suggesting how people perceive racial differences are “not created by law, and probably cannot be changed by law” (Massachusetts Historical Society, 1848, n.p.). The case, however, was used as a legal precedent to justify unequal access to education for Black students (Browne-Marshall, 2013).

In most of the country, slave codes included anti-literacy customs, laws, and traditions that set a pattern for denying literacy access to Black people. White enslavers were aware of the liberating effect of literacy and severely limited access and opportunity to acquire literacy. Goodell quoted an unnamed legislator from 1832 who summarized the prevailing reasoning to establish these laws:

It was well reported in the abolitionist press: “We have, as far as possible, closed every avenue by which light might enter their [the slaves’] minds. If we could extinguish the capacity to see the light, our work would be completed; they would then be on a level with the beasts of the field, and we should be safe! Denying education to an entire race was indeed an attempt to reduce its members to ‘a level with the beasts of the field.’”

(quoted in Monaghan, 1998, p. 323)

As Black people endured the horrors and mistreatment of chattel slavery, they were “characterized as less-than-human, intellectually and morally inferior to White people, and without independent actions or thoughts” (Willis, 2022, n.p.). Nonetheless, Black people learned to read and write: “literacy was more than a symbol of freedom: it was freedom. It affirmed their humanity, their personhood. To be able to read and right was ... a mighty weapon in the slave’s struggle for freedom” (T. Perry, 2003, p. 13, emphasis in the original). Douglass (1845) recalled how Mr. Auld scolded his wife once he learned she was teaching Douglass to read. “a nigger should know nothing but to obey his master — to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world” (p. 47). Douglass recalled,

If you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself,



it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy.

(p. 47)

David Walker's (1829) *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* was among the reasons given for a rush of anti-literacy laws (McHenry, 1996). Several states passed laws specifically prohibiting the teaching of reading; others prohibited the teaching of writing. Moreover, earlier anti-literacy laws were revised to prohibit the teaching of literacy to enslaved Black people.

Enslaved Black people brought a unique understanding to literacy acquisition: "while learning to read was an individual achievement, it was fundamentally a communal act ... literacy was something to share" (T. Perry, 2003, p. 14). Learning to read and write became a collective effort among Black people, and when one person learned to read and write, no matter how minimally, it was shared with others. Black people who were literate read to others as well as taught one another to read and write. Francis E. W. Harper (1825–1911), a poet, captured the desire to learn to read in her poem:

...  
Our masters always tried to hide  
Book learning from our eyes;  
Knowledge did'nt agree with slavery—  
'Twould make us all too wise.  
But some of us would try to steal  
A little from the book.  
And put the words together,  
And learn by hook or crook.

(F. E. W. Harper, 1893)

Harper was born to free Black parents in Philadelphia, and she became an abolitionist, activist, author, lecturer, and poet. She poignantly captured the inhumanity of enslavement in her poem "Slave Auction," describing defenseless Black people (men, women, and children), couples, and families who, again, were mercilessly torn apart. After enduring the lingering trauma of the transatlantic voyage – forcibly removed from their cultures, families, and way of life – people constantly fought to reunite with their families, searching for and posting ads in local newspapers, seeking to reunite with their family members.

In a unique tactic, Hannah and Mary Townsend, Quaker sisters and members of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, wrote and published the *Anti-slavery Alphabet* in 1846. The book was displayed as part of a fair to raise funding for the abolitionist cause. Sledge (2008) recorded it as one of two published

books during the antebellum period and proffered the abolitionist's alphabet "was a clever strategy ... to convert the next generation of citizens and potential activists at a very young age and connecting to reading" (p. 69). She observed the books were written in the abolitionist style focusing on the "horrors of slavery and the abuses of slaveholders" (p. 73). Abolitionist literature was written for an audience of White people, not for Black enslaved people, the primary audience of this book was young impressionable White children although the adult readers were also likely to be informed. Sledge (2008) acknowledged the irony in young White children learning to read about the horrors of enslavement, while Black enslaved people about whom they read were prohibited from learning to read and write. She also recognized that Black people envisaged literacy as a source of physical and psychological freedom (please see Figure 1.3).

Anti-literacy laws were enacted in Alabama (1831, 1832), Georgia (1770, 1829, 1833), North Carolina (1818, 1830, 1835), South Carolina (1740), and Virginia (1819, 1832) (see Table 1.1). Anti-literacy laws were enacted for several reasons: to portray enslaved Black people as unhuman, retain chattel slavery and increase White people's economic wealth, retain power in the hands of White people, and curtail violent revolt. On April 12, 1860, Senator Jefferson Davis

argued, in part, "this Government was not founded by negroes nor for negroes ... but by white men and for white men" (p. 1682), before voting against tax dollars to support public education.

Despite state laws and local customs, several slave narratives provided autobiographical details of enslaved people being taught to read and write by abolitionists, a benevolent White person, or free or enslaved Black people. As more Black people learned to read and write and as they taught other Black people, literacy among Black people spread and was shared with those who were illiterate so the Black community could thrive.

The Civil War was a turning point in the US history for Black people. President Lincoln, who in debates with Stephen A. Douglas expressed White supremacist ideas, met frequently with Frederick Douglass. As Lincoln began to question his assumptions about Black people and slavery, he abandoned plans to deport Black people to Haiti and Liberia. Douglass (1864) was unrelenting in his pursuit of racial justice, as he observed (much like Haynes, 1776) the Declaration of Independence was not extended to Black people and (much like D. Walker, 1829) the US Constitution was broken. He declared the Civil War was "an Abolition war" (para 13). Speaking after the war, in his second inaugural address, Lincoln (1865) observed:

Ye, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

(para 5)

Following the Civil War, the education of Black people was debated in Congress and federal support of Black education was extended to Black people living in Washington, DC.

The state of Missouri, in 1865, passed an emancipation resolution freeing all enslaved Black people in the state. Sheals (2018) described the history of the Neosho Colored School (1872–1891) founded in Neosho, Missouri, after the state required all students be educated. Now a historic landmark, the school was attended (1876–1878) by George Washington Carver (1864–1943), before pursuing additional education. Once literate, Black people often taught other enslaved people to read and write, some of whom wrote slave narratives about their experiences, although some slave narratives were orally dictated and others were written by White imposters. Typically, slave narratives (a) had to be authenticated by Whites and (b) were tempered as to not offend Whites, while appealing to abolition. Harriet Jacobs (1813–1897) narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861),

replicates a pattern within slave narratives meant to endear the reader to (a) the plight of the enslaved Black women, (b) a description of the horrors of slavery, (c) temperate descriptions of sexual abuse, (d) pacification of White guilt and sensibilities, (e) a strong pronouncement of Christian beliefs, and (f) the importance and value of literacy.

(Willis et al., 2022, p. 25)

Being literate allowed Black enslaved people to challenge the hypocrisy of US laws denying Black people citizenship status and equal rights.

