

LESSON 2

Poetry of Defiance: How the Enslaved Resisted

BY ADAM SANCHEZ

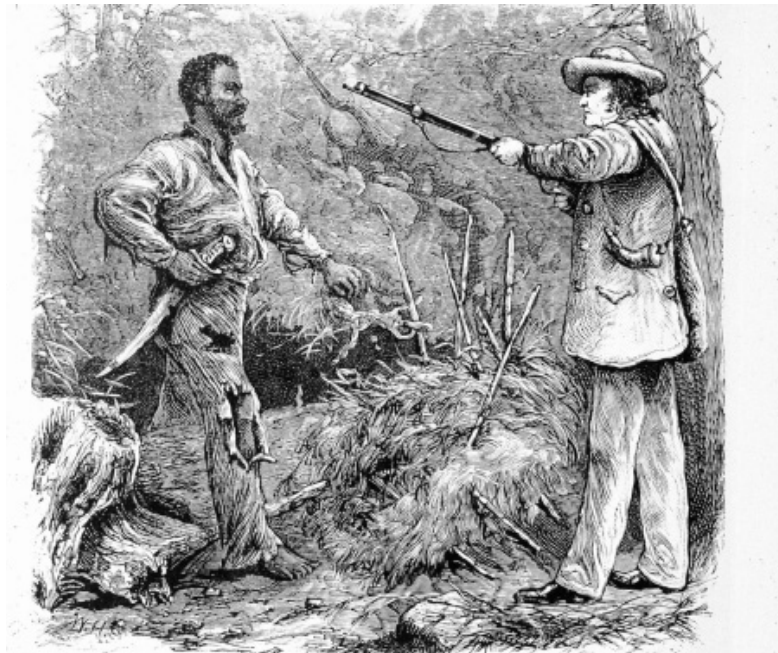
“From the beginning, Black men and women resisted their enslavement . . . under the most difficult conditions, under pain of mutilation and death, throughout their 200 years of enslavement in North America, these Afro-Americans continued to rebel. Only occasionally was there an organized insurrection. More often they showed their refusal to submit by running away. Even more often, they engaged in sabotage, slowdowns, and subtle forms of resistance which asserted, if only to themselves and their brothers and sisters, their dignity as human beings.”

—Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States*

FOR TOO LONG historians painted a picture of the idyllic old U.S. South with paternalistic slave owners and docile and content slaves. Though challenged in the 1930s and ’40s by historians like W. E. B. Du Bois and Herbert Aptheker, this remained the dominant narrative of slavery until the late 1960s and ’70s. Today, any discussion of slavery should be coupled with the myriad

and heroic ways enslaved people resisted their enslavement.

It’s also important to put this resistance in the broader context of how the U.S. economy was built on the backs of enslaved people. While “Lesson 6: Mapping the Slave Economy” further explores how the cotton trade enriched not just slaveholders but also many Northern capitalists, students should also



Though rare, rebellions like the one led by Nat Turner terrified the slaveholding South and encouraged abolitionists.

grapple with how central the labor, knowledge, and skills of enslaved people were to the entire Southern economy. As historian William Loren Katz argues, “Slave labor did far more than bring in Southern crops.” Katz points out that on slaveholders’ estates, African Americans also worked as:

tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, smiths, turners, wheelwrights, weavers, [and] tanners. Slaves built George Washington’s Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello. Slaves constructed the famous balconies of New Orleans, built churches, jails, and the beautiful Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island. Slaves were managers of plantations and rice mills, and a few were architects, civil engineers, and inventors. . . . Slaves were miners, lumber and iron workers. . . . They built Southern canals, railroads, tunnels, ships, turnpikes, and worked for gas and light companies.

Indeed, it is hard to find any part of the economy not somehow connected to the institution of slavery. Therefore, the stakes for maintaining slavery were high and any resistance was often met with brutal retaliation.

Nevertheless, enslaved people, with great courage, engaged in all sorts of resistance. While this pre-Civil War resistance did not ultimately topple the deeply entrenched institution of slavery, it challenged pro-slavery arguments that enslaved people were happy and content and provided fuel for abolitionist denunciations of slavery. Maybe more importantly, it established a tradition of defiance that was built upon during the Civil War and Reconstruction when wider acts of resistance became possible.

The mixer activity, described below, introduces students to several of these concepts, establishes the various ways that enslaved people resisted, and celebrates that resistance, culminating in a collective poem.

Materials Needed

- Copies of “Resisting Slavery Mixer Questions” (Handout 2–A) for every student.
- “Resisting Slavery Quotes” (Handout 2–B), cut up.
- (Optional) Copies of “Write that I” Poem Example (Handout 2–C)
- Copies of “I Freed Myself” (Handout 2–D) for every student.

Time Required

One class period for the mixer and poetry writing. A portion of another class to read and/or discuss “I Freed Myself.”

Suggested Procedure

1. Explain to students that they will be participating in an activity to learn about the various ways that enslaved people resisted slavery. Because we are still facing the legacy and reality of racism today, studying slavery can be painful. But for

this same reason it’s important we examine how Black people resisted their enslavement and kept the hope for abolition alive.

2. First, to provide some context, place this statement on the board:

“By 1860, there were more millionaires (slaveholders all) living in the lower Mississippi Valley than anywhere else in the United States. In the same year, the nearly 4 million American slaves were worth some \$3.5 billion, making them the largest single financial asset in the entire U.S. economy, worth more than all manufacturing and railroads combined.”

— historian David Blight

3. Ask students to read the statement. Ask for their reactions. Is anything about this quote surprising? After ensuring students understand the statement, lead a discussion on the following questions: Why was the labor of enslaved people so important to the economy? What power did enslaved people have? What could they do to resist? What prevented them from resisting?

4. Depending on your students' prior knowledge, during this discussion you might clarify what a labor strike is and how this type of collective action was a potentially powerful weapon against slavery and therefore dangerous. You might also point out that while most enslaved people worked on plantations as farmworkers, this was not the only place where slave labor was used. The knowledge and skills of enslaved people — and the possibility of withholding knowledge or skills — had a profound impact. The main point of the discussion is to have students anticipate some of the forms of resistance that they will encounter during the subsequent mixer activity and to put that resistance in context.

While the pre-Civil War resistance of the enslaved did not end slavery, it did puncture many of the arguments used to justify slavery, thus providing important ideological weapons for abolitionists.

5. Once you've finished this short discussion, explain that in the following activity students will look at several stories to help them understand the many and varied ways enslaved people resisted their enslavement. Distribute one or two resisting slavery quotes to each student (Handout 2–B). If you give a student more than one quote, make sure both quotes are in the same “group.” (Note: Group numbers and themes are listed at the beginning of each quote.) Give students a few minutes to read their quote(s) and help clarify any quote(s) for students who are struggling.
6. Next, distribute “Resisting Slavery Mixer Questions” (Handout 2–A) to each student. Go over the questions as a class and encourage students to note the question or questions their quote(s) answers.
7. Tell students that for this activity they will get up out of their seat and go around the room sharing their quotes with others. They should have one-on-one conversations and aim to fill out the questions on the handout as they go.

8. When it seems like most students have finished answering the questions, ask them to get into their groups. Group numbers are listed on the quote(s) they have.
9. If you have the time, before moving on to the collective poem, this is a good place to have students reflect on how the resistance of enslaved people challenged the ideology that justified slavery. Write this quote from George Fitzhugh on the board: “The negro slaves of the South are the happiest, and in some sense, the freest people in the world. The children and the aged and infirm work not at all, and yet have all the comforts and necessities of life provided for them. They enjoy liberty, because they are oppressed neither by care or labor. The women do little hard

work, and are protected from the despotism of their husbands by their masters.” Explain to students that this quote is taken from an 1857 book written to justify slavery and was a typical pro-slavery argument that you would hear in both the South and the North. Ask students to identify how the stories of resistance they just learned about challenge this argument.

Although the pre-Civil War resistance of the enslaved did not end slavery, it did puncture many of the arguments used to justify slavery, thus providing important ideological weapons for abolitionists. Furthermore, it created a pattern of resistance that enslaved people drew on during the Civil War and Reconstruction when the opportunity for much wider resistance arose.

10. Explain to students that they will now create a collective “Write that I” poem* based on the quotes that they have. You might also share with them the “Write that I” Poem Example” (Handout 2–C).
11. I start students off by writing the first two lines of the poem on the board for the class:

* The idea and the provided example of a “Write that I” poem comes from *Rhythm and Resistance: Teaching Poetry for Social Justice*, edited by Linda Christensen and Dyan Watson (Rethinking Schools, 2015).

*When you tell the story of slavery,
Write that I resisted. . .*

12. Tell students that a “Write that I” poem, like many other poems, uses repetition to weave the poem together. You might share with them a stanza from the example below. Explain that in this poem, each stanza should start with a phrase that is similar to “Write that I . . .” Give students a few examples of phrases that have a similar meaning — say that I, tell them that I, when you tell my story — and ask them to add phrases to the list. Write all of these phrases on the board so students can access them while writing their portions of the poem.
13. Explain that each group will be tasked with finishing the poem by writing one stanza of the collective “Write that I” poem. Encourage students to begin by reading each other their quotes. When they finish, they should brainstorm ways to express their group’s theme poetically and begin writing their stanza. Encourage students to consider how enslaved people’s resistance challenged not only the brutality of their enslavement, but also the nationwide institution of slavery and the ideology that supported it.
14. When every group is finished, collect their stanzas and read the collective poem to the class (Note: You may want to edit them together and read the collective poem the following day.)
15. Here are a few stanzas, from one of the collective poems my students wrote:

*Write that I broke tools, slowed work,
and plowed his crops too shallow.
When in the fields
I sang slowly and hid messages
in each lyric.
Spiritual words,
with double meanings,
could help you find the way
up North.*

*Tell how I ran,
By the thousands,
to find loved ones,
to find freedom,
with dogs and hunters behind me.
I would not be stopped.*

*Tell how I spoke up and stood up
to the white men
who stood over me
with whips and chains.*

*Write how I trapped their horses,
burned their homes,
defied their curfews,
stole their guns,
protected my people.*

*Let them know you can’t erase the names of
those who were lost
through bloody revolts
against the bloodiest of crimes.*

16. As a follow-up, assign David Williams’ “I Freed Myself” (Handout 2–D). Another reading to consider using is the beginning portion of Howard Zinn’s chapter “Slavery Without Submission, Emancipation Without Freedom,” from *A People’s History of the United States* (included as Handout 10–A in Lesson 10). The beginning of the chapter until the line “While Southern slaves held on . . .,” like the “I Freed Myself” reading, focuses on the resistance of the enslaved and the brutality of the system of slavery.
17. Ask students to take notes while they complete the Williams reading. Have them draw a line down the center of a piece of paper and list on one side the ways enslaved African Americans resisted their enslavement and on the other the ways slave owners and slave catchers tried to prevent resistance. You might also ask students to find material that can connect with the

collective poem they wrote. If you are planning to finish this unit of study by asking students to write an essay on “who freed the slaves?” you might ask them to highlight any quotes they think they could use as evidence in their essay. Also encourage students to raise at least two questions that they would like to discuss with the rest of the class.

18. In addition to students’ own questions, here are some questions for further discussion of or writing about “I Freed Myself” (Handout 2–D):

- Besides punishment from slave owners or slave catchers, what were other reasons some enslaved people might not want to run away? What were some of the reasons enslaved people did run away?
- What were some of the ways those enslaved resisted without running away?
- The author writes, “For some slaves, the ultimate resistance, the only escape, was death.” How could suicide be resistance? Why would some enslaved mothers kill their children?
- What were some of the laws governing what an enslaved person could and could not do?
- Although enslaved people could not legally marry, why did some slaveholders encourage them to do so at an early age?
- According to the author, why did slaveholders begin pushing for the expansion of slavery? What evidence does he give for this?
- The author argues that “collective resistance” was becoming more frequent throughout the 1850s. What evidence does he give for this?
- According to the author, why did the Southern states secede after Lincoln’s election?
- The last paragraph summarizes the author’s main argument. Put this argument in your own words.

Resisting Slavery Mixer Questions

1. Find someone who has a quote or quotes about theft and property destruction. How was theft and property destruction a form of resistance?
2. Find someone who has a quote or quotes about maintaining the family. In what ways did enslaved people maintain families despite hardships? How is this a form of resistance?
3. Find someone who has a quote or quotes about music. How did enslaved people use music as a form of resistance?
4. Find someone who has a quote or quotes about religion and/or education. How did enslaved people use religion and/or education as a form of resistance?
5. Find someone who has a quote or quotes about how enslaved people resisted while working. Why might this kind of resistance have been particularly effective?
6. Find someone who has a quote or quotes about running away. Why and how did enslaved people run away?
7. Find someone who has a quote or quotes about verbal and/or physical confrontation. Why did enslaved people engage in these confrontations despite the risks?
8. Find someone who has information about one of the large slave revolts that took place in the 1800s. Write down information about this revolt.
9. Find someone who has a quote or quotes that discuss the risks enslaved people took when resisting slavery. What were some of those risks?

Resisting Slavery Quotes

Group 1: Theft and Property Destruction

Most of what historians have termed “day to day” resistance involved “crimes” against property. Enslaved people pulled down fences, sabotaged farm equipment, broke implements, damaged boats, vandalized wagons, ruined clothing, and committed various other destructive acts. They set fires to outbuildings, barns, and stables; mistreated horses, mules, cattle, and other livestock. They stole with impunity: sheep, hogs, cattle, poultry, money, watches, produce, liquor, tobacco, flour, cotton, indigo, corn, nearly anything that was not under lock and key — and occasionally found the key.

Adapted from John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger’s *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*

Group 1: Theft and Property Destruction

Since their labor was stolen, slaves justified, and counted as a form of resistance, stealing from slaveholders. A woman found with her mistress’s trinkets said, “Don’t say I’m wicked . . . it’s all right for us poor colored people to appropriate whatever of the white folks’ blessings the Lord puts in our way.”

Adapted from William Loren Katz’s *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 1: Theft and Property Destruction

Theft was the main way slaves obtained the goods they needed to survive. They took the food and drink they wanted [and that they had produced with their own skilled labor.] They reasoned that it could not be stealing, because “it belongs to massa, and so do we, and we only use one part of his property to benefit another.”

Adapted from Stephanie M. H. Camp’s *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*

Group 1: Theft and Property Destruction

Enslaved people also asked embarrassing questions when they were told not to steal. “Dey allus done tell us it am wrong to lie and steal,” exploded Josephine Howard of Texas, “but why did white folks steal my mammy and her mammy? Dey lives clost to some water, somewhere over in Africy. . . . Dat de sinfulles’ stealin’ dey is.” The whites did the first stealing, sneered another ex-slave, when they stole our people from Africa.

Adapted from Eugene D. Genovese’s *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*

Group 1: Theft and Property Destruction

Planters also found that almost anything used in production could be ruined. There were mysteriously bent hoes, broken plows, toothless rakes, and injured field animals. Slaves deliberately overworked field animals and plowed too shallow for planting of crops. Sabotage by enslaved people was so widespread that planters invented a thick “slave hoe” that could not easily be broken.

Adapted from William Loren Katz’s *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 1: Theft and Property Destruction

Fires that swept through cotton warehouses and gin presses in the South were blamed on Blacks. In November, fire destroyed \$6,000 worth of corn, fodder, and cotton on one Georgia plantation. Another fire burned down a gin house two miles from Columbus. In Virginia, authorities charged two slaves named Jerry and Joe with setting several fires.

Adapted from David Williams’ *I Freed Myself*

Group 2: Maintaining the Family

Historians have shown that while separation was devastating to individuals, families, and even communities, the slave family as an institution adapted to, even as it was ravaged by, personal loss. Naming children for absent family members and the orientation toward extended family were but a few practices that enabled the family, as a valued social institution to survive. When the distance was not too far, separated family members sometimes reunited during nighttime visits.

Adapted from Stephanie M. H. Camp’s *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*

Group 2: Maintaining the Family

Frederick Douglass opened his classic 1845 autobiography with the faint memories he still had of his mother, who lived some 12 miles from him in Maryland. “I never saw my mother or knew her as such,” Douglass wrote, “more than four or five times in my life; and each of these times was very short in duration and at night.” Douglass’ mother ran away from her hirer as often as she could, which was not very often, to visit her son “in the night, traveling the whole distance on foot, after the performance of her day’s work.” She could only stay a short while before returning back to her site of forced labor before daybreak.

Adapted from Stephanie M. H. Camp’s *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*

Group 2: Maintaining the Family

Protecting family unity became the African American community’s first line of defense. A strong, united family provided the love, hope, and courage necessary for survival in a hostile land. In fighting for family, each individual knew he or she was not alone and affirmed a vital sense of identity and self-worth. The family unit’s strength became the psychological base from which other resistance was launched.

Adapted from William Loren Katz’s *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 2: Maintaining the Family

Often enslaved people tried to handle the visits to wives or loved ones with honest bargaining. In one instance, six men asked for a leave, were turned down, and argued for weeks with the overseer of a river improvement project. When he still refused, they picked up and left. The overseer, to head off a complete breakdown of his authority, hastily decided to let the rest visit their wives.

Adapted from William Loren Katz’s *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 2: Maintaining the Family

Moses Grandy escaped to England and dictated his autobiography. He recalled this scene: “I remember well my mother often hid us all in the woods, to prevent master selling us. When we wanted water, she sought for it in any hole or puddle . . . full of tadpoles and insects: she strained it, and gave it round to each of us in hollow of her hand. For food, she gathered berries in the woods, got potatoes, raw corn, etc. After a time the master would send word to her to come in, promising he would not sell us.”

Adapted from William Loren Katz’s *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 3: Culture, Music, Religion, and Education

The oppressor promoted his religion and culture to help instill obedience and conformity. But in the privacy of huts, African traditions and words survived in secret. White owners sought to control the naming process and selected babies’ names from Greek or Roman history or folklore. To assert their power, masters denied the enslaved people any last names but the masters’ own. But in the slave quarter, people used their original first and last names, said enslaved Robert Smalls, a ship pilot who achieved fame in the Civil War.

Adapted from William Loren Katz’s *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 2: Maintaining the Family

In Georgia, Aleck was one enslaved man who asked, “Should each man regard only his own children, and forget all the others?” If parents and relatives were traded away or children sold without their parents, men and women without blood ties stepped in to share parenting responsibilities. The practice of taking in children changed the meaning of the word *parents* in the slave community to mean all adults. “Parents means relations in general . . . family,” explained Robert Smalls. A Black community expression was “If you hurt one of the family, you hurt them all.”

Adapted from William Loren Katz’s *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 3: Culture, Music, Religion, and Education

Southern laws imposed harsh penalties for anyone teaching slaves to read or write. Some Black women daringly conducted secret schools. In Natchez, Louisiana, Lilly Ann Granderson, who learned to read from the children of her Kentucky enslaver, ran a “midnight school” of 12 pupils each term that taught reading and writing between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m. She graduated hundreds. Some pupils soon applied their knowledge by writing passes for runaways fleeing to Canada.

Adapted from William Loren Katz’s *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 3: Culture, Music, Religion, and Education

Planters and slaves fought a long tug of war for control of enslaved people's music, its themes, words, and tempo. Fanny Kemble wrote that "many masters and overseers on these plantations prohibit melancholy [sad] tunes or words and encourage nothing but cheerful music." Some banned "any reference to particular hardships." Masters demanded an accelerated beat in the work songs in order to speed up labor in fields or on docks. When whites manipulated the musical tempo to increase production, African American laborers tried to slow the beat to relieve the strain.

Adapted from William Loren Katz's *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 3: Culture, Music, Religion, and Education

Despite the walls erected by their masters, African Americans creatively employed religion to tear at the chains that bound them. Biblical heroes and a world struggle for liberty masked the real theme of a coming day of liberation. They recast the European's abstract, severe God as one committed to justice, who was willing to drown the pharaoh's army of slaveholders to save the Hebrew children. God and Jesus were portrayed as leaders on freedom's battlefield. As early as 1810, Richard Byrd of Virginia informed the governor that "slave preachers used their religious meetings as veils for revolutionary schemes."

Adapted from William Loren Katz's *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 3: Culture, Music, Religion, and Education

Sometimes songs spread important news. Some lyrics conveyed hidden messages to enslaved people that whites could not decipher. "Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus" encouraged runaways without warning masters. To tell Blacks that one of their number had betrayed them, a song was used: "O Judas he was a 'ceitful man, He went an' betray a most innocent man." "Follow the Drinking Gourd" voiced love for freedom: "The old man is awaiting to carry you to freedom, so follow the drinking gourd." Another stanza detailed directions for runaways, telling them to follow the North Star to Canada.

Adapted from William Loren Katz's *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 3: Culture, Music, Religion, and Education

Spirituals often had double meanings. The song "O Canaan, sweet Canaan, I am bound for the land of Canaan" often meant that slaves planned to get to the North, their Canaan. During the Civil War, enslaved people began to make up new spirituals with bolder messages: "Before I'd be a slave, I'd be buried in my grave, and go home to my Lord and be saved." And the spiritual "Many Thousand Go":

*No more peck o' corn for me,
no more, no more,
No more driver's lash for me,
no more, no more.*

Adapted from Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*

Group 4: Resistance at Work

In the cities, some enslaved people refused to handle dangerous factory jobs. Complaining of beatings, lack of food, overwork, and having to wash their own clothes on Sunday, several enslaved people working for a railroad contractor stopped work. In many factories sickness was so common bosses could not tell when men were ill or faking.

Adapted from William Loren Katz's *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 4: Resistance at Work

Production on some plantations varied as much as 100 percent due to slowdowns and sabotage. Enslaved people pretended to be too sick or lame to work, women pretended they were pregnant, and illness soared when work was hardest. In Mississippi, the Wheelers plantation calculated one working day each week was lost by sickness.

Adapted from William Loren Katz's *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 4: Resistance at Work

Enslaved people pretended to be sick, hid in outbuildings, did not complete their assigned tasks, and refused to perform dangerous work. It was difficult to sneak off for an entire day, but on some plantations slaves did so. An enslaved 18-year-old Louisiana woman managed to slip off and remain in the woods, at least until her overseer found her one morning lying on her stomach. The overseer got off his horse and, holding the reins with his left hand, struck her 30 or 40 stripes across the shoulders. He continued to whip her until she cried for mercy. "She meant to cheat me out of a day's work — and she has done it, too," the overseer complained.

Adapted from John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger's *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*

Group 4: Resistance at Work

Strikes, slowdowns, or what owners called "the danger of a general stampede to the swamp" were common. One manager told reporter Frederick Olmsted that slaves ran away to protest overseers and harsh working conditions: "They hide in the swamp and come into cabins at night to get food." Some lengthy stoppages were only settled when owners agreed to negotiate with the people they enslaved.

Adapted from William Loren Katz's *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 4: Resistance at Work

Enslaved people sometimes refused to work, demanded concessions, rejected orders, threatened whites, and reacted with violence. Verbal and physical confrontations occurred regularly, without regard to time and place. Indeed despite severe punishments — or perhaps because of them — these challenges to white authority remained as much a part of the slavery as the slave trader.

Adapted from John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger's *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*

Group 4: Resistance at Work

While planters dreamed and schemed about the creation of orderly plantations in which the location of enslaved people was neatly determined by laws, curfews, rules, and the demands of crops, enslaved people engaged in truancy, a practice that disturbed and in some cases alarmed slaveholders. When bondpeople engaged in absenteeism, they withdrew their labor, confronting and opposing the authority of their owners and creating a problem of labor discipline in the Old South.

Adapted from Stephanie M. H. Camp's *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*

Group 5: Running Away

Like enslaved people everywhere, Salli Smith was forbidden to leave her plantation home without a pass. But Smith broke the rules and laws that dictated where she ought to be and when she ought to be there. Smith sometimes ran away to nearby woods, eating what she found, burrowing under the leaves and moss to sleep at night, and sneaking to the quarters on a nearby farm for occasional shelter from the cold. When she returned to her owner, he had her tortured inside of “a big barrel he kept to roll us in, with nails drove all through it.” When Smith emerged from the contraption, she “could hardly walk,” but she “did not stay more than a month” before she ran away again.

Adapted from Stephanie M. H. Camp’s *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*

Group 5: Running Away

Most runaways abandoned plantation work on the spur of the moment. These men and women were trying to escape a beating, prevent a sale to a new owner, or to search for nearby relatives and loved ones. Many ran to protest work, whippings, or evil overseers — and tried to remain hidden until they won promises of better conditions. Others carefully planned to reach free land, and some tried to establish their own settlements in remote, hard-to-penetrate swamps or mountains.

Adapted from William Loren Katz’s *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 5: Running Away

Running away was much more realistic than armed insurrection. During the 1850s about 1,000 slaves a year escaped into the North, Canada, and Mexico. Thousands ran away for short periods — despite the terror facing the runaway. The dogs used in tracking fugitives “bit, tore, mutilated, and if not pulled off in time, killed their prey.”

Adapted from Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States*

Group 5: Running Away

Sometimes large numbers fled together. In 1779, the Edings plantation on Edisto Island, South Carolina, lost 36, including 12 women, who left together. In 1826, 27 enslaved people in Kentucky were being transported down the Ohio River by boat when they broke away. Swinging clubs, axes, and knives, they killed five whites, seized and sank the boat, and fled to Indiana. Mass flights to freedom were more common in the border states of Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Maryland, and Delaware than in the Deep South.

Adapted from William Loren Katz’s *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 5: Running Away

Enslaved people found new opportunities for flight in cities, especially ports or rail depots. A great advantage was the number of free Blacks and friendly whites who might write passes and provide cash, directions, or other help. One Black Louisiana carpenter sold forged passes for runaways. Some fugitives took jobs as sailors and then jumped ship at ports in free states.

Adapted from William Loren Katz’s *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 5: Running Away

The dangers that all women and men anticipated if they thought about escape to the North were fearsome: dogs, patrols, unknown directions, cold, heat, lack of food, risk of capture, and in that event, certain horrific punishment. Women, who played a central role in the Black family, typically concluded that permanent escape was impossible or undesirable. Instead, they chose truancy, generally by fleeing to the nearest woods or swamps and occasionally to nearby towns. Women also played an important role by supporting runaways and truants by feeding them meals.

Adapted from Stephanie M. H. Camp’s *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*

Group 6: Verbal and Physical Confrontation

Women were also ready to risk death for their marriages. Jermain Loguen recalled his mother, armed with “all the tiger’s blood in her veins” and a heavy stick, striking a knife from her planter’s hand, and then knocking him out. An enslaved woman named Clarinda swung a hoe that discouraged her master’s interest in her, and Cherry Logue swung a club at a man who made “insulting advances.” In Virginia, Sukie punched her owner, who was trying to rip off her dress and throw her to the floor. Sukie managed to push him, seat first, into a pot of boiling soup. He screamed as he ran, but quietly enough so his wife wouldn’t hear.

Adapted from William Loren Katz’s *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 6: Verbal and Physical Confrontation

Enslaved people often bore particular resentment toward overseers. Enslaved people resented being chided, scolded, chastised, punished, and whipped; they disliked being supervised during their workday by young inexperienced white men; they bitterly resented threats against their families. On some plantations, Blacks attempted to undermine the overseer’s authority by criticizing him openly or complaining to the owner about harsh or unfair treatment. At times, the tensions between enslaved people and overseers erupted into verbal and physical confrontations. On some plantations, such clashes occurred so often that it was difficult for overseers to inflict punishments for every incident and on a few plantations, overseers were even afraid to chastise people under their command.

Adapted from John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger’s *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*

Group 6: Verbal and Physical Confrontation

Overseers, often known for their abusiveness, sometimes had to fight for their lives. In rural Alabama, reporter Frederick Olmsted was told: “The overseers have to always go about armed; their life wouldn’t be safe if they didn’t. As it is, they very often get cut pretty bad.” Cudjo Lewis was busy working in the field when he saw a group of women overpower and “soundly thrash” an overseer who had insulted one of them.

Adapted from William Loren Katz’s *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 6: Verbal and Physical Confrontation

Whether alone or with others, however, those who challenged the system paid a heavy price. Those who openly defied the owner, plantation manager, or overseer were usually dealt with quickly and ruthlessly. They were whipped, beaten, mutilated, branded, and sometimes tortured. They were sold away from their families or watched as their children were turned over to slave traders. Those found guilty or sometimes merely accused of serious “crimes” were banished or hanged. Despite this, enslaved people confronted overseers with verbal assaults and physical force; they also attempted to intimidate their white managers. While such defiance was more common in some regions than in others, there were few plantations where enslaved people worked diligently and willingly.

Adapted from John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger’s *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*

Group 6: Verbal and Physical Confrontation

An overseer in a sugar mill so outraged one enslaved person, he tried to push the white man into the boiling juice. As hired workers, enslaved people particularly resented sweating for someone else's gain — a person who was not even their owner. Anthony, told to work on Sunday by a furnace manager, said Sunday was “his day and that he was not going to take it up going to your place,” and the two had a fight.

Adapted from William Loren Katz's *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 6: Verbal and Physical Confrontation

As slaves grew old — if they grew old — they asserted the right to retire. “Just come to tell you, Massa,” an old man announced, “that I’ve labored for you for 40 years now. And I done earned my keep. You can sell me, lash me, or kill me. I ain’t caring which but you can’t make me work no more.” The response of the shocked master was: “All right, Jake. I’m retiring you, but for God’s sake, don’t say anything to the others.”

Adapted from Eugene D. Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*

Group 7: Revolt

Four major slave rebellions shook the South during the first half of the 19th century. For African American communities, the leaders became legends. Whites shuddered at the names. The first was in 1800, in Virginia, where Gabriel Prosser plotted for months to capture the capital city of Richmond. With his wife, Nanny, and his brothers, Prosser assembled on his master's estate a force estimated at more than 900. Some carried scythes and clubs, others bayonets, and a few had guns. A sudden storm brought floods that poured over the six miles of roads to Richmond. Convinced heaven had spoken, they went home to wait for a better omen. The conspiracy began to unravel. Prosser and his officers were betrayed, captured, and sentenced to death. One bravely told his captors he had done for African Americans what Washington had done for white Americans: “I have ventured my life . . . to obtain the liberty of my countrymen.”

Adapted from William Loren Katz's *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 7: Revolt

Enslaved people living and working in cities played a leading role in the largest slave plots and rebellions of the 19th century. In 1856, industrial enslaved workers — Louisiana sugar millers, Arkansas salt boilers, Missouri lead and iron miners — were found conspiring for freedom. Scores were arrested and 29 were executed.

Adapted from William Loren Katz's *Breaking the Chains: African-American Slave Resistance*

Group 7: Revolt

Slave revolts in the United States were not as frequent or as large scale as those in the Caribbean islands or in South America. Probably the largest slave revolt in the United States took place near New Orleans in 1811. Led by Haitian Charles Deslondes, many of the participants had participated in the Haitian Revolution. Four hundred to 500 slaves gathered after a rising at the plantation of a Major Andry. Armed with cane knives, axes, and clubs, they wounded Andry, killed his son, and began marching from plantation to plantation, their numbers growing. They were attacked by U.S. Army and militia forces; 66 were killed on the spot, and 16 were tried and shot by a firing squad.

Adapted from Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*

Group 7: Revolt

The conspiracy of Denmark Vesey, himself a free Negro, was thwarted before it could be carried out in 1822. Vesey planned to burn Charleston, South Carolina, then the sixth-largest city in the nation, and to initiate a general revolt of enslaved people in the area. Several witnesses said thousands of Blacks were implicated in one way or another. Blacks had made about 250 pike heads and bayonets and more than 300 daggers. But the plan was betrayed, and 35 Blacks, including Vesey, were hanged. The trial record itself, published in Charleston, was ordered destroyed soon after publication, as too dangerous for slaves to see.

Adapted from Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*

Group 7: Revolt

Nat Turner's rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia, in the summer of 1831, threw the slaveholding South into a panic, and then into a determined effort to bolster the security of the slave system. Turner, claiming religious visions, gathered about 70 enslaved people, who went on a rampage from plantation to plantation, killing at least 55 men, women, and children. They gathered supporters, but were captured as their ammunition ran out. Turner and perhaps 18 others were hanged.

Adapted from Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*

Group 7: Revolt

In 1856, Gov. Henry Wise of Virginia moved arms into Alexandria to head off a feared insurrection. Thirty-two slaves were arrested. In Tennessee, more than 60 slaves belonging to Sen. John Bell were implicated in a rebellion conspiracy. Nine were hanged. In Dover, Tennessee, six slaves were hanged and one was whipped to death on accusations of plotting insurrection.

Adapted from David Williams' *I Freed Myself*

“Write that I” Poem Example (A Frederick Douglass Narrative)

BY ALYSS DIXSON

Write that I started in Freedom
praising my God
feet inscribing the circle of my tribe
Tell how I described paradise
in pounding rhythms
the sting of skin
against drum
and the reassuring heat
rising from the earth

Write that I grew up in chains
praising my Master
with the sweat rolling from my back
humbled by cotton in the field
Tell how I described paradise
in a bowl of rawhide soup
flea-infested hay
and the regular cracks!
Rising and falling from the whip of
the overseer

Write that I reached “Manhood”
less than a man
barely stirring in my sleep
at the sound of my master
taking what was “his” to claim
from my Sisters

Tell how I described Freedom
in a chain
wrapped around a pale wrinkled
neck
the satisfying crunch!
of bone and
the bulging of blue eyes in
a moon-shaped face

Tell how
with fevered brain
I ran north
ran
from bloodhounds
and bounty hunters

blood still
wet upon my fists

I
ran streams forests
through and
the words of slave spirituals
and
the faint sounding of the train whistle
my only guides

Say I was bitter
and disappointed
knowing my children
and their children
would cry out
against these silent chains
another kind of bondage
restricting their lives
binding them
to poverty

Tell how I described Freedom
In pounding syllables of Revolution
Education
Equality

Write that I died
praising my Lord
singing
of Amazing
Grace

and Write
that I was proud.

I Freed Myself

BY DAVID WILLIAMS

GENERATIONS OF AMERICANS have grown up believing that Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves with a stroke of his pen. Lost in this simple portrayal is the role that the enslaved played in forcing the issue. Resistance to slavery took many forms, the most celebrated of which were various escape routes popularly called the Underground Railroad.

Harriet Tubman, the most famous of the railroad's "conductors," led hundreds of escapees to freedom. Rewards offered for her capture totaled as much as \$40,000 but she was never caught. Neither was Arnold Gragston, an enslaved Kentuckian who ferried hundreds of fellow slaves across the Ohio River before making his own escape. Peter, a "tall, black African" in Petersburg, sheltered escaping

slaves. When his home was searched for refugees, he proclaimed that he "would harbor as many negroes as he d—d well pleased." A local court sentenced him to 20 lashes. Jacob Dill, a Richmond slave, was also whipped for sheltering refugees. Thanks to these men and women, and many others like them, perhaps 100,000 enslaved people escaped north in the first half of the 19th century.

Escaping slavery was dangerous work. Slave catchers and bloodhounds were hot on the heels of nearly every escapee. Captured refugees could have toes or even half a foot cut off to discourage further escapes. Death could also result. One slave was whipped so badly after a failed attempt that he died three days later. For most enslaved people, the



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Enslaved people escaping — a key form of resistance to slavery.

greatest deterrent to escape was the near certainty that they would never see loved ones again. “My pappy tried to get away,” recalled Mary Ella Grandberry, whose family was held in Alabama, “but he couldn’t see how to take all us children with him, so he had to stay with us.”

Those torn between the burdens of slavery and the love of family often resorted to local escapes. Local escapes were more often temporary affairs lasting days or weeks. It was not unusual for slaves to absent themselves overnight, especially on weekends, to visit friends or family, to attend dances or prayer meetings, or simply to get some rest. Slaves caught without a written pass from their owners could be severely whipped by the “paddyrollers,” as the slaves called them. “But us was young and spry,” recalled Virginia freedwoman Sis Shackleford, “an’ could out-run ’em.”

Whipping and other physical abuse was often a reason for temporary escapes. “If they were treated too cruelly,” Virginia Shepard recalled, “our folks would always run and hide in the woods.” Delicia Patterson told of running off after being mistreated by her owner. “He sent everybody he thought knew where I was after me, and told them to tell me if I would only come on home, no one would ever bother me anymore. . . . So I went back home . . . and no one ever bothered me anymore.” Such bargaining was not uncommon. Other reasons slaves might escape temporarily included bargaining for better food, clothing, working conditions, housing, or visiting rights.

Slaves who bargained in such a way walked a fine line. Punishments for unsuccessful attempts, or for other conduct the owner disliked, could be severe. Slaves were defined as property by slave state courts and, in the *Dred Scott* case of 1857, by the U.S. Supreme Court. As such, slaves were subject to the absolute authority of slaveholders and to whatever controls they chose to employ. W. B. Allen, a former Alabama slave, personally knew some in bondage who were beaten, sometimes to

death, for nothing more than being off the plantation without written permission. Other offenses that might result in extreme punishment were lying, loitering, stealing, and talking back to — “sassing” — a white person.

Still, slaves resisted, most often cooperating with each other to do so. They had to balance their efforts, resisting enough to ease their burden but not so much as to bring on punishment. They organized work slowdowns. They played sick. They sabotaged or destroyed equipment to slow the pace of work. They pretended not to understand instructions. Slaves on one plantation rid themselves of an especially cruel overseer by slipping a snake into his cabin. “Put in a snake and out went the overseer,” as Mattie Logan recalled. “Never no more did he whip the slaves on that plantation. . . . He was gone!”

Unfortunately, mitigating cruel treatment was rarely so

simple. Slavery itself was the greatest cruelty of all, and, for some slaves, the ultimate resistance, the only escape, was death. One Georgia slave took her own life by swallowing strychnine. In Covington, Kentucky, two enslaved parents “sent the souls of their children to heaven rather than have them descend to the hell of slavery.” After releasing their children’s souls, they released their own. Another enslaved mother killed all 13 of her children in infancy to spare them a life of suffering as slaves.

Sometimes slaves killed their oppressors instead. Most famous for its violence was Nat Turner’s 1831 Virginia rebellion, in which more than 50 whites died. There were many others who fought back or conspired to do so. In 1800, more than 1,000 slaves marched on Richmond. The governor called out armed militiamen to turn them back. There were similar efforts to gain liberty in Petersburg and Norfolk. When one slave conspirator was asked what he had to say in his defense, he calmly replied, “I have nothing more to offer than what General Washington would have had to offer, had he been taken by the British officers

They had to balance their efforts, resisting enough to ease their burden but not so much as to bring on punishment.

They organized work slowdowns. They played sick. They sabotaged or destroyed equipment to slow the pace of work. They pretended not to understand instructions.

and put on trial by them. I have ventured my life in endeavoring to obtain liberty of my countrymen, and am a willing sacrifice to their cause.” In 1811, 400 Louisiana slaves rose up for freedom. A year later there was a rebellion in New Orleans. In 1837, slaves near that city formed a rebel band and killed several whites before being captured.

Slaves fought back individually too. In 1849, a slave in Chambers County, Alabama, shot his owner. In Macon County, another slave “violently attacked with a knife and cut to pieces” his overseer. After one overseer whipped her, an enslaved Florida woman took a hoe and chopped the man “to a bloody death.” Most who resisted violently were either shot or lynched. Some were burned alive. What laws there were restraining whites from murdering slaves for whatever reason were in fact no restraint at all. State slave codes prevented slaves from testifying against whites in court, and few whites would testify against each other.

Aside from the brutality they sanctioned, slave codes defined legal limits for the late-antebellum South’s 4 million enslaved people far beyond their status as property. No enslaved person could lawfully carry a gun, own property, travel without a written pass, or learn to read and write. Slave gatherings, even for religious services, were forbidden without a white person present.

Slave codes also prevented local governments from issuing marriage licenses. To do so would have established a legally sanctioned bond between members of slave families, implicitly infringing on the “property rights” of slaveholders. Nevertheless, slaveholders allowed and even encouraged slaves to marry at an early age and have many children. This not only increased the slaveholder’s “property” but also provided additional means of control. Besides the constant threat of physical violence, slaveholders found the institution of the family to be an effective means of intimidation. Any slave might be pushed to the point of disregard for his or her own safety and attempt to fight back or escape. But when

slaveholders threatened family members, slaves were more likely to hold their anger in check. It was another way to drive home the point that slaveholder was master. Some did not even allow parents to name their own children, reserving that privilege for themselves.

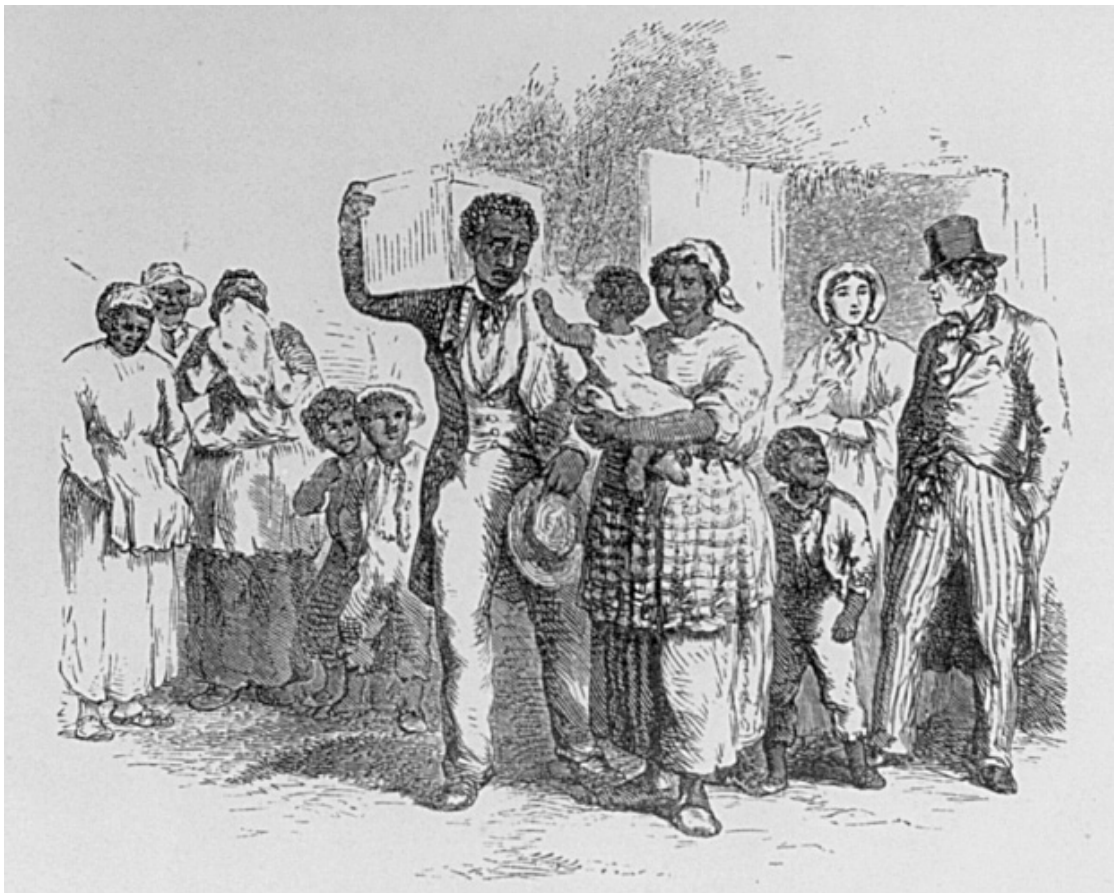
In naming the children of slave women, some slaveholders were actually exercising their own parental rights. For a planter to have any number of mistresses among his slaves was quite common. Slaveholders typically viewed rape as another method of enforcing psychological dominance within the slave community. Others simply viewed slaves as property to be used at their pleasure. The first sexual experience a planter’s son had was usually with a female slave. Pregnancy often followed and more children meant more control.

Not only did slaves fear for family members, there was the additional terror that they might be sold off at any time. That fear helped keep overt resistance in check. Slaves with families were less likely to escape since that would mean permanent separation from their loved ones. Of the many thousands who did escape bondage, most were young, single, and childless.

As slave resistance increased, slaveholders pushed harder for the expansion of slavery to the West. Some did so as part of a wider demand for slavery’s security, others as a means of giving slaves less free territory into which they might escape. Slave escapes — distant and local, temporary and permanent — were on the rise throughout the late antebellum period, reaching perhaps 50,000 annually during the 1850s. To slaveholders, it was clear that slavery must expand or die.

Rising resistance stoked slaveholder fears and pressed the slavery issue to a breaking point. “It is useless to disguise the fact, its truth is undeniable,” wrote a Virginia newspaper editor in 1852, “that a greater degree of insubordination has been manifested by the negro population, within the last few months, than any previous period in our history.” A year later, one observer noticed that newspapers throughout the

As slave resistance increased, slaveholders pushed harder for the expansion of slavery to the West. Some did so as part of a wider demand for slavery’s security, others as a means of giving slaves less free territory into which they might escape.



Library of Congress

Enslaved people fought to maintain family ties in the midst of a system that tore them apart.

South were reporting “complaints of growing insolence and insubordination among the negroes.”

Reports of rising resistance, up to and including murder, became more and more common throughout the 1850s. A Missouri slave stabbed his owner to death in 1853 and escaped to Canada. In 1855, another slave from Missouri slashed his owner nearly in half and fled to Iowa. An Alabama bondsman killed his owner and boasted of the murder. A Georgia slave named Lash, after some “rough handling,” murdered his owner. A Florida woman chopped her overseer’s head off with a hoe. In Maryland, a slave killed his owner with a knife, took flight, and was never seen again. After seeing his sister whipped, a Kentucky slave beat the overseer to death with a club and escaped on the Underground Railroad.

In July 1859, the *Liberator* reported a rash of violence occurring in the spring and early summer. A slave near Grand Cone, Texas, bashed his owner’s brains out with an axe, then burned his body. Another slave in Union County, Kentucky, used an

axe to kill an overseer who was trying to whip him. A slaveholder in Spencer County, Kentucky, was clubbed to death after whipping two of his slaves. In Lincoln County, Missouri, an enslaved man stabbed his owner to death. Commenting on one murder, a St. Louis paper remarked that reports of slaves killing whites had become “alarmingly frequent.”

Collective resistance was also becoming more frequent. In 1856, Gov. Henry Wise of Virginia moved arms into Alexandria to head off a feared insurrection. Thirty-two slaves were arrested. In Tennessee, more than 60 slaves belonging to Sen. John Bell were implicated in a rebellion conspiracy. Nine were hanged. In Dover, Tennessee, six slaves were hanged and one was whipped to death on accusations of plotting insurrection. A newspaper editor in Galveston, Texas, wrote in 1856 that “never has there been a time in our recollection when so many insurrections, or attempts at insurrection, have transpired in rapid succession as during the past six months.”

In 1857, a group of Carter County, Kentucky, slaves were tried on suspicion for plotting insurrection. February 1858 saw a “fearful insurrection” in Arkansas. Blacks were said to have attacked two settlements and killed 23 whites. A newspaper editor in Franklin, Louisiana, reporting the murders of two slaveholders by their slaves, noted that there were “more cases of insubordination among the negro population . . . than ever known before.” In August, more than 50 slaves on a Mississippi plantation declared that “they would die to a man before one of their party should be whipped.” It took 75 armed whites to put down the resistance.

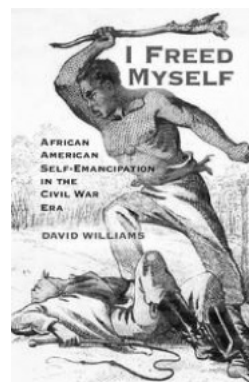
The tide of resistance continued to swell in the winter of 1859–60. Fires that swept through cotton warehouses and gin presses were blamed on Blacks and Northern abolition agents. In November, fire destroyed \$6,000 worth of corn, fodder, and cotton on one Georgia plantation. Another fire razed a gin house two miles from Columbus. In Virginia, authorities charged two slaves named Jerry and Joe with setting several fires. December found Blacks in Bolivar, Missouri, attacking whites with stones and threatening to burn the town.

This volatile atmosphere framed the 1860 presidential campaign. Although Lincoln was no threat to slavery where it existed, and said so often during the campaign, the secessionists rallied against him as a radical abolitionist with a secret agenda to foment slave rebellion. Such overheated rhetoric was intended to stir up support for secession among Southern whites, but Southern Blacks heard the message too. What Blacks heard was what slaveholders generally feared — that Lincoln was a direct threat to slavery.

Slaves increasingly acted on their hopes for freedom in the summer and fall of 1860. Resistance and rumors of resistance pervaded the South that year and drove slaveholder fears to a fever pitch. Slave control had never been easy. By the 1850s, it was getting more difficult. A Lincoln presidency could only make it harder. If the slave states remained in the Union, most slaveholders feared that their “property” would be nearly impossible to control. Slaveholders’ fear of their slaves was a primary force driving secession during the weeks after Lincoln’s election.

South Carolina was the first to go on Dec. 20, 1860. In its “Declaration of Immediate Causes” justifying its move, the state’s secession convention frankly admitted its fear of “servile insurrection.” Everywhere justifications for secession were much the same. Mississippi blamed Northerners for promoting “insurrection and incendiarism in our midst.” Georgia’s excuse was that Northerners were trying to “excite insurrection and servile war among us.” Underlying slaveholders’ fear was the certain knowledge that slaves wanted freedom. It was that certainty, born of many decades of slave resistance that led to secession, war, and slavery’s downfall.

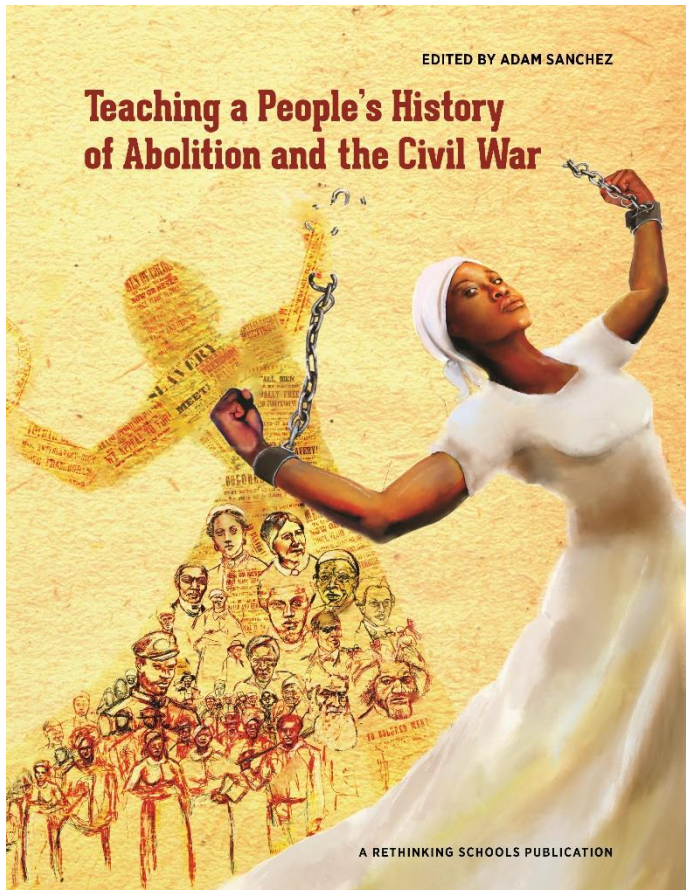
Slaveholders’ doubts about their ability to maintain slavery indefinitely had a long history. The need to justify slavery had for decades occupied their brightest minds. Blacks had never submitted to slavery willingly or completely. They did little more than what they had to do and took liberties where they could. They resisted in so many ways that the slaveholders’ need to exercise control was constant and all-consuming. Had Blacks been content to remain enslaved, slaveholders would have had no cause for alarm. Nor would abolitionist arguments have inspired such panic among them. As it was, slaveholder fears of threats to slavery led them to insist on guarantees for slavery’s future and the means to control that future. And that fear led them to secede when those guarantees seemed at risk. It was then, at the heart of it all, the unrelenting resistance to slavery among slaves themselves that was the essential condition, the one thing without which the sectional crisis, secession, and the Civil War would not have happened.



Adapted from David Williams, *I Freed Myself* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

David Williams is a professor at Valdosta State University in Georgia, and the author of several books on slavery and the Civil War.

Lesson originally published by
rethinking schools



The “Poetry of Defiance” lesson comes from the Rethinking Schools teaching guide, *Teaching a People’s History of Abolition and the Civil War* edited by Adam Sanchez. The book offers a collection of 10 classroom-tested lessons on one of the most transformative periods in U.S. history.

These lessons encourage students to take a critical look at the popular narrative that centers Abraham Lincoln as the Great Emancipator and ignores the resistance of abolitionists and enslaved people.

To preview the book’s introduction, table of contents, and order direct from the publisher, please visit:

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“By debunking the false history of lone great men and restoring the role of diverse coalitions of ordinary people working together to make extraordinary change, these lessons provide a factual basis for hope and inspiration amid oppressive circumstances.”

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Use the online role assignment template and mixer questions handout for remote instruction.

[Click here](#) to make a copy of the Google Doc, pictured below, with links to the online materials. Copy the Google Doc “Role Assignments for Remote Instruction Template,” enter your students’ names in the left column, and the class will be able to access their roles online by clicking on the linked names to the right.



ZINN EDUCATION PROJECT

A collaboration between Rethinking Schools and Teaching for Change.

Poetry of Defiance: How the Enslaved Resisted
By Adam Sanchez
Lesson: <https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/poetry-of-defiance/>

**Remote Instruction
Role Assignments Template**

Teacher Instructions: Assign your students their respective readings and groups by entering each of their names into the left-hand column. The template here comes with spaces for 42 students. Add or remove spaces to fit your classroom size. Delete these instructions, delete “Template,” and share this sheet with your students.

→ Handout with [Mixer Questions](#) for this activity.

Students'/Participants' Names	Links to Readings
1. Student name	Group 1 A: Theft and property destruction
2. Student name	Group 1 B: Theft and property destruction
3. Student name	Group 1 C: Theft and property destruction
4. Student name	Group 1 D: Theft and property destruction
5. Student name	Group 1 E: Theft and property destruction
6. Student name	Group 1 F: Theft and property destruction
7. Student name	Group 2 A: Maintaining the Family
8. Student name	Group 2 B: Maintaining the Family
9. Student name	Group 2 C: Maintaining the Family
10. Student name	Group 2 D: Maintaining the Family
11. Student name	Group 2 E: Maintaining the Family
12. Student name	Group 2 F: Maintaining the Family
13. Student name	Group 3 A: Culture, Music, Religion, and Education
14. Student name	Group 3 B: Culture, Music, Religion, and Education
15. Student name	Group 3 C: Culture, Music, Religion, and Education
16. Student name	Group 3 D: Culture, Music, Religion, and Education

Role Assignment Sheet for “Poetry of Defiance” © Rethinking Schools

Then, share the documents with your students for synchronous or asynchronous learning.