

August 21, 1848
Johnson, H[enry] W.
North Star

MR. PRESIDENT AND FELLOW-CITIZENS:

I do not expect to be heard with any degree of patience, after the able and eloquent address to which all have listened with so much admiration; and perhaps it is the highest degree of vanity in me to claim your attention for one moment, especially while there are others upon this platform who can occupy the time allotted to me to a much better advantage.

However this may be, all will admit that the occasion is one that commands the respect and attention of every friend of human liberty; that should call forth the earnest congratulations of those who have long been laboring for the downfall of tyranny, not only in this land, but throughout the entire world.

I am happy to say, we assemble here to-day under auspices more favorable than those under which we have assembled upon former occasions. We not only commemorate that grand event; properly called Freedom's Jubilee, the birthday of liberty to 800,000 crushed and bleeding victims of oppression, in the British West India Isles; but also rejoice over the progress of liberty abroad—over the fall of thrones, and the destruction of tyranny in other lands.

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Recent events proclaim that the march of liberty is onward; that the mighty struggle which for ages has been going

on between freedom and slavery, must result in the ultimate triumph of the former; that however faint the prospect—however dark and gloomy may be the clouds that for a while obscure the golden hues of the rainbow of hope, the friends of liberty need not despair. Those dark clouds of apprehension that now cover with gloom the fairest prospects of freemen, shall yet be pierced by the broad flash and bright sunlight of truth.

Such are the hopes with which the events which we are this day assembled to commemorate, inspire us. Who, I ask, does not rejoice at the prospect?—One of the events to which I allude, is more particularly distinguished as a great moral triumph—as a victory achieved, not by the sword and the bayonet, but by the force and power of truth.

After the able and eloquent remarks made upon this subject by the distinguished gentleman who preceded me, it may be superfluous for me to say one word in addition; but I ask your indulgence for one moment, while I refer to one or two important effects it had upon the cause of liberty in other countries, especially in our own. In the first place, it swept away that miserable subterfuge behind which the oppressor

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so long found a safe retreat, viz: the danger and impracticability of immediate emancipation. It proclaimed to the world, what every one ought to have known before, that there is no danger in ceasing to do wrong, and commencing immediately to do right; that there is no danger in restoring to every man his God-given rights, but that the peril consists in withholding those rights from him. But there was a time when, with the idea of immediate emancipation, nothing was associated but images of the most frightful nature; of fields uncultivated—property devastated—cities desolated and in ruins—habitants murdered, and the emancipated, actuated by a spirit of revenge, riotting in the blood of their former masters. But this great experiment (if to restore man to the condition in which his Creator designed he should live, can properly be called an experiment,) has falsified the predictions of the enemies of emancipation.

Be it recollected, it was under circumstances the most disadvantageous to the whites that slavery was abolished in those islands—circumstances that rendered it not only possible, but easy, for the emancipated to have dug the grave of every white man upon those islands. So far did the colored popula-

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tion exceed the white, that, in the language of Wendell Phillips, 'One moment's rushing recollection of a century's oppression, would have swept every white man from the face of those islands forever.'

Startle not at this declaration, but listen for a moment to a recital of the facts upon which it is based. Jamaica had 388,000 colored inhabitants, to 37,000 whites; Barbadoes, 87,000 colored to 15,000 whites; Antigua, 33,000 colored, to 21,000 white; and in one of the islands, only 200 white people were to be found in a population of 5,000! It was under circumstances like these, in islands far distant from the protecting arm of the mother country, surrounded on all sides by the waters of a blue and boundless ocean, that the chains were severed from the limbs of 800,000 crushed and bleeding victims of oppression, amid the wildest predictions of ruin, carnage and blood. And yet none of those frightful evils—none of those awful scenes of blood and butchery, which we were told would be the inevitable consequences of this measure, have occurred; but experience, even under such circumstances, proves the safety and practicability of immediate emancipation.

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that great maxim, so cheering to the heart of the reformer, Truth is omnipotent, and must ultimately prevail.—I say ultimately prevail, for let us not forget, fellow-citizens, that this great victory was not achieved in a single day. It was the result of years of long-continued and arduous labors. Mighty, indeed was the great struggle that preceded this event. The enemies of emancipation contested every inch of ground—the subtle foes of liberty resorted to every plan which human ingenuity could suggest, in order to prostrate the designs of the friends of freedom. They even had the effrontery to carry their cause before the people of Britain, and there defended slavery with all the force of an overpowering eloquence. The most frightful stories were conjured up of the awful consequences that would ensue if slavery were abolished—the most foul-mouthed slanders were circulated against the friends of freedom—the vilest epithets in the vocabulary of the English language were applied to the undaunted friends of liberty; and the blackest designs that ever found a lodgment in the human breast, were imputed to them.

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public mind had begun to be enlightened upon the great and all-absorbing question of human liberty. The gathering storm of public opinion finally overwhelmed all opposition. In vain was every attempt to impede its progress; they might as well have attempted to chain old ocean's waves—to stop the restless torrent of Niagara's thundering cataract. It rolled over them like the huge waves of the broad Atlantic. It moved on its majestic cause, until it had swept slavery from those islands forever!

Fellow-citizens, that was a proud day for liberty!—it was a proud day for the world! It was a glorious day for that noble band of noble-hearted philanthropists who for years had breasted the storms and tempests of an adverse public opinion; it was a glorious consummation of their long-continued and arduous labors. Truth had triumphed—the slave was free!

Fellow-citizens, we are not only here to-day to commemorate the dawn of liberty in the British West India Islands; but also to rejoice over the progress of liberty in other lands—if you please, over the birth of a new republic. Yes, a new republic has sprung into existence. France has demolished her throne, and reared upon its ruins a new

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republic. ‘Liberty—Equality—Fraternity,’ are the words emblazoned upon her proud escutcheon. Her acts seem to correspond with her professions. She has struck off the fetters that bound the limbs of her colonial slaves. She could not consent to establish a partial liberty. Liberty in France could not be confined within such narrow limits as to be based upon the color of the skin.

‘What!’ cried one of the members of her late provisional government—‘Slavery in a Republic?’ The idea could not be entertained for a moment. ‘Slavery cannot exist on French ground.’ No, not a slave can clank his chains on that soil of liberty. What friend of impartial liberty does not hail with joy the rising sun of such a republic? France, to-day, will receive the warmest sympathies of every true friend of human liberty. He will extend to her the right hand of fellowship; he will kneel at the same shrine, and partake of the same waters of liberty that spring from the deep-gushing fountain of freedom!

Here permit me to remark, the world’s history furnishes but few, if any, examples of a revolution of this nature having been accomplished, against such fearful odds, and within

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the same time. Apparently, never was tyranny entrenched behind stronger bulwarks; its triumph over liberty seemed almost complete. The liberty of the press, that great safe-guard of a nation's freedom, was trampled in the dust, and overshadowed by the bloody throne of despotism. Guarded on all sides by batteries, bristling with cannon —surrounded by a wall of bayonet, with one hundred thousand if the very flower of the French army at his command, the 'citizen king' imagined he had triumphed over the liberties of France. But the Genius of Liberty, looking out from her dark dungeon, sighed for a more extended field of operation. Frenchmen heard the cry, and rose, as one man, in defence of expiring liberty. The iron bands of despotism withered, and snapped asunder like the cords that bound the limbs of the strong man of old.

True, France has been enraged in other great struggles for political freedom. The world knows well the result of those efforts. Upon former occasions, the sun of her liberties has risen with great splendor, but as the wheels of her revolution rolled onward, her sky became overcast with clouds, dark and lowering. Too frequently true and genuine liberty is confounded with

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that which has been properly denominated wild and savage ferocity. Such, unfortunately, was once the case in France. Persecution and intolerance prevailed—a reign of terror was established—her noblest sons were cruelly murdered, in the name of liberty, and her sun went down in blood. But from the dust of those murdered patriots rose that great champion of freedom—Lamartine. Yes, Lamartine!—a name not only dear to France, but dear in every land where freedom finds a friend.

As far as the great question of human liberty is concerned, France, to-day, stands on a proud and commanding eminence. The world must look with admiration upon the noble stand she has taken in behalf of ‘Liberty—Equality—Fraternity.’ She bids fair now to become all that her former revolutionary patriots desired; and if the eyes of such men are ever turned back upon their native country, those of her former defenders of liberty must now be looking down from the battlements of heaven with pleasure and delight, upon the proud pinnacle upon which their country this day reposes. If the spirits of great and good men ever revisit their native land, those of her former defenders of liberty must now

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Fellow-citizens, while we are rejoicing over the triumph of truth and justice, and the march of freedom in other lands, permit me for one moment to call your attention to our own country, and see what progress liberty is making here; for can it be that the despotic governments of the old world are in advance of us? Are they such apt scholars that they have learned our lessons of republicanism better than we know them ourselves?

Freedom, having for ages maintained a noble struggle for existence in the old world, finally sought a home in the Western [h]emisphere. The American people gave her a welcome reception. They responded to her call for aid, and ran to her relief; and can it be that she only came here to find a grave in the

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The war of the revolution was called a fierce struggle in her defence. In that contest they started out with the broad declaration that 'All men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' The American people were called upon to support the principles contained in this declaration, at the very hazard of their lives. They obeyed the solemn call; they were induced to leave their homes, to forego the pleasures of peace, and sacrificed their lives upon the great altar of their country, in support of these heaven-born principles. Attracted by the sublimity of these truths, many brave foreigners, in whose bosoms glowed the fires of liberty, crossed the blue waters of the broad Atlantic, and poured out their blood freely upon the American soil, to fertilize a land of liberty.

The struggle of the revolution finally terminated in a blaze of glory and the brilliant triumph of American arms.— Many supposed that the great unchanging principles upon which it was based, were also established upon a permanent basis. But how sadly disappointed were they! The seeds of

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oppression had been scattered broadcast over this land—from these seeds sprang up that ‘great tree of oppression’ whose broad branches are extended far and wide over our country, shading out the bright sunbeams of liberty. Yes, this soil, once watered with the life-blood of the martyrs of freedom, is now saturated with the tears and stained with the blood of the slave! And yet this is called a free republic; and Americans call themselves republicans! Oh, is not this inconsistency the most irreconcilable—guilt the most abandoned—hypocrisy the most unblushing! But, I repeat, Americans call themselves republicans, and firm believers in the great principles contained in their Declaration of Independence, they profess to love liberty, and glory in the rights of man. From earliest infancy, they have been rocked in the cradle of liberty, and trained in the great school of republican freedom! Almost the first sounds that awaken emotions in their bosoms, and create gladness in their hearts, are the spirit-stirring songs of liberty, and the loud cry of freedom and equal rights. Notwithstanding all these things, they delight to deal in oppression. Trampling in the dust the great principles explained in their Declaration of Independ-

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North star—that star of hope to the flying bondman—that star which, like the pillar of fire that guided the children of Israel through the wilderness to the promised land—leads him safely from republican slavery to a land where he can sit down and enjoy liberty beneath the grateful shadow of a monarch's throne—that star which slave-holders would gladly see plucked from heaven's bright constellation—if, thro' the guidance of that star, he succeeds in making his escape to what we sometimes call the free hills of the North, there is not one spot on free Columbia's soil where he can repose his weary limbs in safety. No matter whether he be one of the last-born patriots of '76, or one of the sacred veterans of 1812, he finds no protection upon American soil, through the operation of American law. He may go to every battle-ground of the revolution — to every haunted spot where freedom weeps over the fall of her noblest sons—he may go to New England—proud and glorious New England—a land consecrated by the graves of the pilgrim fathers, and watered by the first blood that was shed in the great struggle of the revolution —he may stop at the green of Lexington—he may go to Faneuil Hall, that old cradle of liberty, that once rocked

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with the loud shouts of freedom and equal rights, where once was heard the voice of Adams and Hancock, and their compatriots of revolutionary times—that sacred spot from within whose walls was borne away the mangled form of that brave black man, Benjamin Attucks, from whose veins flowed the first drop of blood that mingled with American soil, in defence of American liberty—even there he finds no protection. He may go to Bunker Hill; as he gazes upon that lofty monument, a smile comes over his countenance, and he thinks beneath its proud shadow he will find that protection for which he has so long searched in vain. But even here he is doomed to be disappointed. The tyrant's stern voice demands him to be given up. In vain does that proud monument of liberty give a groan—in vain do the shades of the revolutionary heroes, whose blood watered the soil upon which it stands, mingle their voices with every shriek that comes forth from that weeping monument, in opposition to this mandate—even then he finds no protection.

Where, then, must he go? Ah! whither shall this heart-broken fugitive fly for refuge? As a last resort, he escapes to the capital of his country—the capital of the freest nation on the

~~with the loud shouts of freedom and equal rights, where once was heard the voice of Adams and Hancock, and their compatriots of revolutionary times—that sacred spot from within whose walls was borne away the mangled form of that brave black man, Benjamin Attucks, from whose veins flowed the first drop of blood that mingled with American soil, in defence of American liberty—even there he finds no protection. He may go to Bunker Hill; as he gazes upon that lofty monument, a smile comes over his countenance, and he thinks beneath its proud shadow he will find that protection for which he has so long searched in vain. But even here he is doomed to be disappointed. The tyrant's stern voice demands him to be given up. In vain does that proud monument of liberty give a groan—in vain do the shades of the revolutionary heroes, whose blood watered the soil upon which it stands, mingle their voices with every shriek that comes forth from that weeping monument, in opposition to this mandate—even then he finds no protection.~~

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face of the entire globe. There he beholds the broad folds of his country's banner waving in triumph; our proud eagle perching high above it, his golden wings dazzling in the sunbeams as he soars aloft, and screams of liberty until our broad, deep forests ring with his piercing cry. But does he there behold the graceful form of the fair Goddess of American Liberty, with her thousand varied charms, her smiling countenance, with outstretched arms, welcoming him to her embrace? No! but, on the contrary, he there sees enthroned the iron-jawed, grim-visaged, and bloody demon of American slavery, with his long black robes dripping with the blood which ages of grinding and crushing despotism have wrung from the veins of his bleeding victims. This is American liberty! This is the equality that exists in this land! Oh, this model republic—this boasted land of freedom, upon which the heroes of the revolution are ever looking down from heaven to bless!

But notwithstanding all these things, loud demonstration are made in this country in favor of freedom. The American people exhaust the great fountain of national sympathy for the oppressed of other lands, but are careful to keep none in reserve for the

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downtrodden and oppressed of their own country. They boast, long and loud, of ‘virtuous liberty;’ and we are told, ‘whenever a human being [pines] in chains, these Americans drop their tears.’

If the oppressed of other lands engage in a noble struggle for liberty, (if they be white,) they receive the warmest sympathies of the American people. When Greece was struggling for liberty, not only did almost every pulpit in our land resound with eloquent pleadings in her behalf, but the whole country was filled with melting [t]ones of sympathy for the oppressed Greeks, and contributions were made to aid them in their noble struggle.

When the South American States endeavored to throw off the yoke of Spanish oppression, and from their encrimsoned fields rose the cry for sympathy and aid, again one spontaneous burst of sympathy gushed forth from our great national fountain.

When Poland attempted to strike off the fetters of tyranny, and the best blood of her children mingled with her green soil—when her patriotic [...]one kissed the statues of their heroes and swore upon the green graves of their venerated sires—Poland shall be free! and when at last, through treachery,

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she again sank beneath the cold iron
grasp of her despotic masters—mark
again, how the tear of sympathy flowed
from every American eye.

When we received intelligence of the late revolution in France, what great rejoicing there was in this country—Resolutions expressing the earnest sympathies for France, were adopted in almost every part of the land. Congress joined the nation in this generous expression of sympathy! and some of those men who, but a short time since, were down upon their Southern plantations, flourishing their whips over the shrinking form of the bleeding slave, were the most eloquent upon that occasion. Well, some of those men who go along with their heads bowed down to the earth, whose tears have bedewed, and whose sighs have embalmed the soil of our national Capitol, having perhaps, heard some of those eloquent speeches upon liberty—thought they would revolutionize themselves—that they would change their form of government—that they would no longer submit to that odious one-man power, but that they would stand up with the dignity of men. Accordingly one night dark and dreary to them, they went on board of a [sloop] lying in the river, and started for a land of liberty! But their

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'guardian angel slept.' They were pursued and brought back by those men, who have so much sympathy for France. And to-day, fellow-citizens, some of those unfortunate victims of oppression, are dragging out a miserable existence among the cotton-fields and rice-swamps of the far South, those dark and dismal abodes that have been the grave of so many of our crushed and bleeding countrymen, there they are left to linger and die a most cruel death, while their sighs for freedom are borne back over the floating waters of the Mississippi, upon every breeze that comes from that slavery accursed region. But this scene does not end here; these men, who but a short time since had so much sympathy for France, were roused to the very highest pitch of fury and madness, because these persons endeavored to obtain their liberty. Members of Congress were threatened with assassination—a mob was raised in the Capitol of our country to put down the freedom of the press; and, when a noble-minded Senator, who having partaken freely of those waters of liberty that spring up among the Granite-hills of New Hampshire, could consent no longer to be a slave; when that man presented a bill in the Senate of the United States, for

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the protection of property in the District of Columbia, against the violence of mobs, he was very politely told, 'if he would only come into a neighboring State in this Republic, his form would soon grace the tallest tree in the forest.' Great God! and has it come to this?—Are now our liberties so far gone, that our Representatives dare not stand up upon the floor of the American Congress, and speak out one sentiment in favor of liberty, without being threatened with a felon's death? Oh, liberty! is this all that is left thee here?

Fellow-citizens, freedom exists only in name, in this country; its sacred reality is gone. Plough up those hallowed mounds, beneath which lie buried the remains of those sainted martyrs of the revolution, who perilled their all in defence of freedom! Demolish those proud monuments reared in the name of liberty. That immortal banner of freedom, that once animated the heart and nerved up the arm of the patriot—upon whose broad folds were inserted the eternal truths contained in our declaration of independence; that banner which was first unfurled to the breeze, upon the green of Lexington—that waived in triumphed over the field of Saratoga, and was encircled in a bright halo of glory upon the plains of York-

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town—is now trampled beneath the foot of the despot—and in its stead, upon the dark ramparts of oppression, floats in triumph the flag of despotism: upon whose black and bloody folds, are inscribed—down with liberty! Slavery for ever!!

"American liberty, to-day lies before us a bruised and mangled corpse, and before me, seem to rise up the hateful forms of her bloody assassins."

The poet, has truly said, happy is it for mankind, that

"God has wisely hid from human sight,
The dark decrees of future fate:"

For could the fathers of the revolution have foreseen an event like this, the great American arm would have been paralyzed! Their spirits would have sunken, and hope died within their bosoms, without even a faint struggle on their part to be free. They would never have toiled so arduously—bleed so freely and died so willingly, in order to transmit to posterity, the inestimable blessings of liberty—had they known or ever dreamed, that before a century had rolled away—while their uncoffined bones were yet bleaching upon the American soil—before all the great heroes of '76, had departed from among us—before the sound of the great conflict had died upon the American ear,

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and while the triumphant shouts of victory still broke the slumbers of our forests and lingered among the distant hills of our country, the traitorous arms of their degenerate sons, would be reared up to crush that liberty, which they endeavored to establish upon a permanent basis.

Fellow-citizens, if it be not literally true, that liberty to-day lies before us a mangled corpse, I ask if it be not true, that if there be a spark of life lingering in her bosom—if there be a drop of life's-blood flowing in the veins of American liberty, she is a wandering fugitive in this country? Has she not been driven from her last entrenchments within our borders? There is not a spot in all this land, upon which the genius of American liberty can stand and claim it as her own. She may go and rest upon the grave of the immortal Washington, but soon your [reed] eagle, with long beak and sharp talons comes screaming after her! She may go and stand on old Plymouth's rock—that sacred spot where she first landed upon these shores, under the fostering care of the Pilgrim fathers, but soon your bloody clawed vultures of oppression follow in pursuit. Where, then, must she go? She must retrace her steps—she must go back over the waves

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and find a home among the sunny hills of Italy, or among the lillies of France!

At the conclusion of my remarks, in reference to France, I spoke of the happy feelings that would animate the bosoms of her patriots, could they come back and behold the present position of their country upon the great question of human liberty. Think you, fellow-citizens, that your fathers would be animated by similar emotions, could they come back among you and behold the present position of their country upon this question? No! If the shades of your great-hearted ancestry, could come back once more to their native land, they would not contaminate their sacred robes, by suffering them even to touch the soil now stained with the blood of the slave. They might consent for one moment, to hover over their country and drop a tear over her fallen liberties and then bidding her a long farewell, wing their way back to their eternal homes.

Fellow-citizens, what a spectacle is this for an American eye to behold—what a theme for an American mind to contemplate; before a century has rolled away, all the great bulwarks of liberty have been battered down, and that sacred inheritance, bequeathed to us by the fathers of the revolution, has

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been equally wrested from our grasp.

Talk no more of American freedom, but cover with sack-cloth and ashes, the place where Warren fell—plant a weeping willow by the grave of the immortal Washington! cover its branches with crape, then call back your soaring eagle—let him repose upon the branches of that drooping willow—darken his plumage—cover his golden wings with the pall of mourning—muzzle his beak—let him not scream, oh, no, for he will not scream of liberty, but proclaim a deep and solemn requiem over the grave of American freedom.

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