

0. FREEDOM - BUT NOT FOR SLAVES - Story Preface

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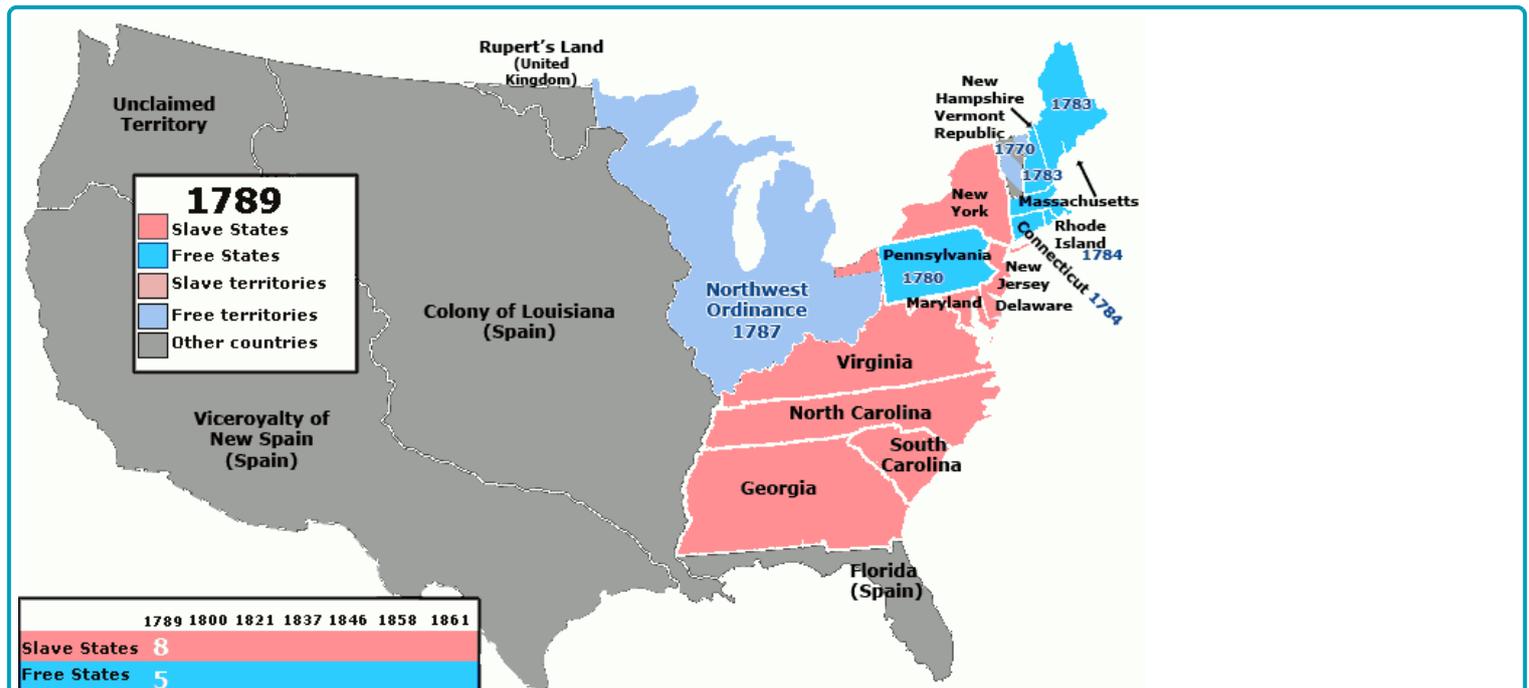
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Animated map depicting the growth of chattel slavery in America between 1789 and 1861. Animated map by Golbez with animation by Kenmayer, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons. License: [CC BY 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)

Before the colonies fought their War of Independence with England, some American families taught their slaves

how to read and write. African-born Phillis Wheatley, captured at a very young age, was sold to such a Boston family.

Although a household servant, Phillis had a gift for writing, especially poetry. Freed as an adult, Phillis Wheatley was the United States' first African-American poet. She could not get her work published in the States, however. She had to go to England for that.

One of her many books, Poems, on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral, highlights her love of freedom. Influential people, like Benjamin Franklin, were among Phillis' supporters.

In 1789, Franklin urged the abolition of slavery and the "relief of free Negroes" who were unlawfully incarcerated. Franklin noted:

Slavery is such an atrocious debasement of human nature...

But instead of ridding the country of slavery, Congress enacted numerous laws that made "owning" people a "legal" American institution. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 is just one example.

When the American Revolutionary War was over, some African-Americans believed *they* would also be free. America's first-published Afro-American poet—Jupiter Hammon—addressed his fellows (in 1786), urging hope and conversion:

...That liberty is a great thing we may know from our own feelings, and we may likewise judge so from the conduct of the white people, in the late war. How much money has been spent, and how many lives have been lost, to defend their liberty.

I must say that I have hoped that God would open their eyes, when they were so much engaged for liberty, to think of the state of the poor blacks, and to pity us. He has done it in some measure, and has raised us up many friends, for which we have reason to be thankful, and to hope in his mercy.

The new nation, however, had other plans for the country's slaves.

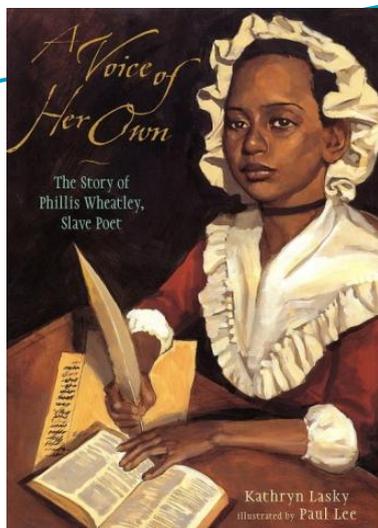
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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/FREEDOM-BUT-NOT-FOR-SLAVES-Slave-Voices>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

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Media Stream

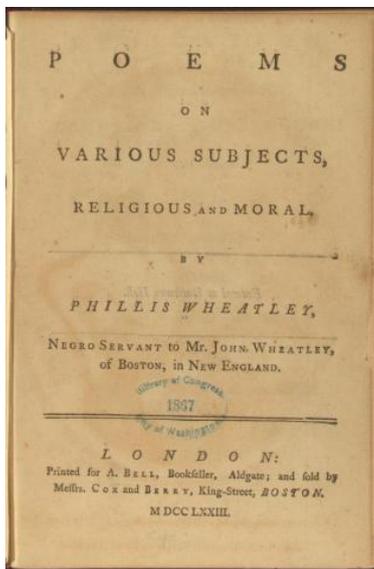


A Voice of Her Own - by Kathryn Lasky

Book-cover image, online courtesy Amazon.com

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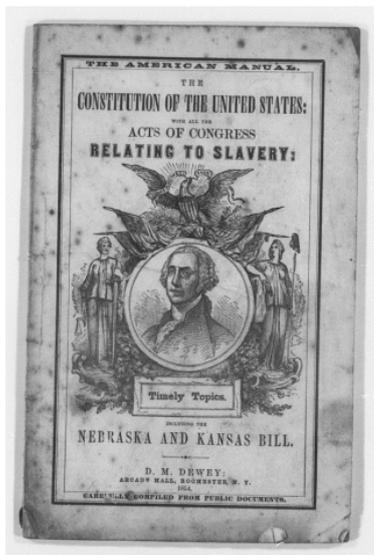
Poems on Various Subjects - by Phillis Wheatley

Image depicting early edition of Wheatley's poems, online courtesy U.S. Library of Congress.

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Acts of Congress Relating to Slavery

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives

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