

EXCERPTS FROM ROPER'S ANTISLAVERY WRITINGS AND SPEECHES
STUDENT HANDOUT 2

Each passage below states or implies how the institution of slavery undermined, perverted, and/or made a mockery of one or more of the defining American institutions: Capitalism, Marriage and the Family, Representative Democracy and Protestant Christianity. Read the excerpts below and then answer the questions that follow each excerpt.

Excerpt 1 – from *The Cambridge Independent Press*, 15 August 1840.

Moses Roper: "I have found people in this country [Great Britain] much interested with the 'revival meetings' in America, in both the free and the slave states. Those meetings, in the South, are the greatest slave markets the slave breeders have (hear, hear). I do not stand here to speak against religion or revivals, but against hypocrites. A man who can make merchandise of his fellow man, cannot be a New Testament Christian. This is saying a great deal; but if you had felt what I have, you would say so, too. I have attended revival meetings – not exactly – 'attended' them but have been taken to them for sale! They are held in the woods. Perhaps 30, 40 or 50 thousand whites will attend one of these meetings. Four of the thirteen slave states, viz., North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware, are the states in which slaves are reared to supply the markets. In addition to those who rear slaves, there are slave merchants, who get rich by buying and selling them, as people do horses in this country. Some persons have called me irreligious, and an infidel, for making this statement; and if I judged of Christianity by the slave holders of America, I should be an infidel; but I judge of Christianity from the purity and benevolence of the New Testament." (applause)

- 1) Which two of the five American institutions is Roper addressing here?
- 2) Why does Roper say he'd be judged to be as an infidel if judged by slaveholders in America?
- 3) Who are the "hypocrites" Roper references in the excerpt?
- 4) What is your reaction to learning that slave markets were sometimes held at the same time and place as religious revival meetings?

Excerpt 2 – From *The Cambridge Independent Press*, 15 August 1840,

Moses Roper: "Since I have been in this country, I have read a book written by a learned man in America, to prove that Negroes are not human beings. Its title is, *The History of the Negro Race*. A slaveholder in Charlestown, U.S, publishes it. [Charleston, South Carolina]. I wrote a letter to the author, telling him that I am partly Indian, partly African, and partly white, and that there are about a million persons of the same color, being the descendants of planters by their slaves. I asked him, as a learned and religious man, for such he professes to be, if he thought I, and all like me, of mixed race had only a half or a quarter of a soul apiece, for he must admit that we had some part of a soul, through the mixture of the blood. But he has never answered that letter. Among the arguments, which the author uses to prove, that Negroes are not human beings is this: 'Where will you find the Africans? Why, worshipping wood, stones, and serpents! You do not find them building churches or raising monuments, like the English or Americans.' He must have read very little of the history of Africa, or he would find that they there built the most magnificent temples and pyramids. Did he ever hear of Egypt or Carthage?"

- 1) Which defining American institution is Roper addressing here?

- 2) What evidence does Roper tell us the author uses to support his belief that "negroes are not human beings?" How does Moses Roper respond to the evidence the author uses to support his argument?
- 3) How would you describe the "tone" of Roper's last question: "Did he ever hear of Egypt or Carthage?"

Excerpt 3 – from *The Cambridge Independent Press*, 15 August 1840

Moses Roper: "When I escaped from Florida, and got to New York, I was in the midst of more enemies, ready to take me and send me back to bondage, than even in the Southern states. I found that my old master had sent a distance of 2,000 miles in search of me, and that rewards for my apprehension were published in the newspapers. At length, being nearly detected, and my employer for his own safety obliged to send me away, as he would have been punished for concealing me, I determined on having the opinion of an attorney, as to whether I could be taken up and carried back to the slave states (applause). So, I left the colored man's shop, and walked down Washington Street, one of the crowded public thoroughfares, having made up my mind, that if anyone recognized me under my disguise, I would resist, and be murdered in the street, rather than return to slavery (loud applause). Having arrived at the lawyer's, and explained the object of my visit to him, he looked into a large book, which I could not then read, but in which I have since read these words: "We hold that all men are created equal: that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This is part of the Declaration of American Independence. The attorney also read to me these words: "A man may take his property wherever he finds it." He said it meant that my master might take me back, wherever he could catch me; but I said it was a good law, for that it meant – I, being my own property, might take myself wherever I liked; and so, I made my way for England." (great applause)

- 1) What defining American institution/s is this excerpt referring to?
- 2) What kind of tone is Roper using with this line? "... I, being my own property, might take myself wherever I liked; and so, I made my way for England."
- 3) Why was Roper willing to "be murdered in the street" rather than return to slavery?
- 4) Is it an "inalienable right" for one person to enslave another?

Excerpt 4 – from *The Leicestershire Mercury and General Advertiser for the Midland Counties*, Saturday, May 19, 1838, p. 2

Roper: "Many will say 'This is the slaves' side of the question. The slaveholders would tell a different story.' You have heard the slaveholders' story 250 years ago. Now, I think it is time for the slaves to speak. I have published an account of my sufferings and escape, and I have sent a copy of that book to every slaveholder whose name is there mentioned. The other night, at the house where I stopped at Mansfield, there was a large dog chained in the yard, and in the night, I dreamed I was at Mr. Gooch's [a former South Carolina enslaver of Roper's]. Since I have come to this country and felt the power of that religion which can change even the slaveholder's heart, I would not wish to injure anyone; but as Mr. Gooch is a professor of that religion which teaches men to "do as they would be done by," I could willingly give him 100 lashes, that he might know what it is to suffer such things. These things are done in the land of republican freedom. On the 4th of July, they hoist the flag of liberty over 3,000,000 slaves, - the greatest burlesque on freedom that can possibly be. I say these things here, which I dare not say in that pretended land of liberty."

- 1) What institutions does Roper refer to in this excerpt?

- 2) How does Roper use the "golden rule" ("Do as they would be done by") to underscore the actions of enslavers?
- 3) What does Roper mean by "burlesque on freedom" and "pretended land of liberty"?
- 4) Why does Roper use the 4th of July to make his point about slavery?

Excerpt 5 – from *Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, 1837*

At last I got to my mother's house! My mother was at home. I asked her if she knew me? She said, no. I told her, I knew her very well, and thought that if she looked at me a little, she would know me, but this had no effect. I then asked her if she had any sons? She said, yes; but none so large as me. I then waited a few minutes, and narrated some circumstances to her, attending my being sold into slavery, and how she grieved at my loss. Here the mother's feelings on that dire occasion, and which a mother can only know, rushed to her mind; she saw her own son before her, for whom she had so often wept; and, in an instant, we were clasped in each other's arms, amidst the ardent interchange of caresses and tears of joy. Ten years had elapsed since I had seen my dear mother.

- 1) What institutions does Roper refer to in this excerpt?
- 2) Why doesn't Moses Roper's mother recognize him at first?
- 3) Identify words and phrases in the paragraph that express feelings and/or emotions.
- 4) What kinds of feelings and or emotions does this excerpt stir in the reader?