

COMPARING THE VIEWS OF DAVID WALKER AND JOHN DAY, TWO NINETEENTH-CENTURY FREE BLACKS

STUDENT HANDOUT 2: JOHN DAY'S LETTER

The following is John Day's letter, published in the *Colonization Herald* in May of 1854.

Dear Brethren:

When I have noticed the prohibitory and oppressive laws enacted in many of the states in special reference to you, I have wept and wondered whether every manly aspiration of soul had been crushed in the colored man, or does he pander to the notion that he belongs to an inferior race . . . Or does he not believe that God has planted a paradise on the western coast of Africa, where the soul of the colored man expands, and imbibes all that is ennobling to human nature . . . Why then cling to a land which whatever it may be to others, to you is a land of oppression?

I have heard objections to emigration to Liberia urged on the ground of benevolence to the poor suffering slaves—of a tenderness towards them which forbid leaving them in chains. This is an old doctrine preached more than twenty years ago, before I left United States. What good has your continuance there done them? None; nor ever will. My dear brethren, you do not know what Liberians are, nor what Liberia is. . . . In America we had nothing to incite us to proper application of mind, nothing to aspire to . . . we knew superficially many things known to our white neighbors . . . but not having any interest in those things, that knowledge was lost on us. But in Liberia we found ourselves an embryo nation, but incapable of filling many of the various important stations requiring real knowledge. Superficiality would not do. We applied ourselves to study, closely and intensely, and acquired in many instances, profound knowledge; that sort which gives power . . . Now, if I understand the logic taught by these circumstances, it is that colored men who breathe a proper atmosphere, surrounded by proper influences, incited by proper objects, will become as learned as noble, and as great every way as any other men on earth, and will stand on a level, and gain equal footing with any people. . . . Did not Africa once blaze in the light of civilization and the arts? In what state was Europe then? As deeply sunken in heathenism as Ethiopia is now . . . May not a reversion take place, and Africa again be the garden of the earth? How comfortable to reflect, that you have contributed not to the downfall of any, but to the building up of poor long neglected, much injured Africa.

I have said you do not know Liberia . . . It is a free and independent Republic and that is the zenith of national government...here is the place which God has blessed and made the happy home of the colored race . . . Come to the land of true liberty, where you and your children may not only be happy yourselves, but where you can assist in making Africa the praise of the whole earth.

I am your old acquaintance and brother,

John Day

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