

This file is being posted on the Rethinking Schools Web site ([www.rethinkingschools.org](http://www.rethinkingschools.org)) to accompany “Rethinking the U.S. Constitutional Convention: A Role Play,” by Bob Peterson, which appears on p. 63 of *Rethinking Our Classrooms, Volume 2*.

1

### Essay on Slavery, by Caesar Sarter

I. Newburyport, Mass., *The Essex Journal and Merrimack Packet*, August 17, 1774

*Caesar Sarter had been a slave in Newburyport, Massachusetts, near Boston, before the American Revolution, but had gained his freedom before the fighting broke out. He was one of those obscure individuals who suddenly emerged as a spokesman for Africans in America. More than simply attacking slavery, Sarter asked Americans to live by the golden rule and set the enslaved Africans free.*

Please to give the following Address, To those who are Advocates for holding the Africans in Slavery, a place in your next, and you will oblige one, who is a well-wisher to his brethren, who are now in that unhappy state.

As this is a time of great anxiety and distress among you, on account of the infringement not only of your Charter rights; but of the natural rights and privileges of freeborn men; permit a poor, though freeborn, African, who, in his youth, was trappaned into Slavery and who has born the galling yoke of bondage for more than twenty years; though at last, by the blessing of God, has shaken it off, to tell you, and that from experience, that as Slavery is the greatest, and consequently most to be dreaded, of all temporal calamities: So its opposite, Liberty, is the greatest temporal good, with which you can be blest! The importance of which, you can clearly evince to the world you are sensible of, by your manly and resolute struggles to preserve it. Your fore fathers, as I have been often informed, left their native country, together with many dear friends, and came into this country, then a howling wilderness inhabited, only, by savages, rather choosing, under the protection of their God, to risk their lives, among those merciless wretches, than submit to tyranny at home: While, therefore, this conduct gives you their exalted sense of the worth of Liberty, at the same time, it shews their utmost abhorrence of that Curse of Curses, Slavery.--Your Parliament, to their immortal honor be it mentioned, to whom WE feel that gratitude, which so high a favour naturally produces, in an ingenious mind have exerted their utmost abilities, to put a final stop, to so iniquitous a business, as the Slave Trade is: That they have not succeeded in their laudable endeavours was not their fault: But they were defeated by his late Excellency only--Now, if you are sensible, that slavery is in itself, and in its consequences, a great evil; why will you not pity and relieve the poor, distressed, enslaved Africans?--Who, though they are entitled to the same natural rights of mankind that you are, are, nevertheless, groaning in bondage! A bondage which will only terminate with life: To them a shocking consideration indeed! Though too little, I fear, thought of by most of you who enjoy the profits of their labour. As the importation of slaves into this Province, is generally laid aside, I shall not pretend a refutation of the arguments, generally brought in support of it; but request you, to let that excellent rule given by our Saviour, to do to others, as you would, that they should do to you, have its due weight with you. Though the thought be shocking--for a few

minutes, suppose that you were trepanned away.--The husband from the dear wife of his bosom--the wife from her affectionate husband--children from their fond parents--or parents from their tender and beloved offspring, whom, not an hour before, perhaps, they were fondling in their arms, and in whom they were promising themselves much future happiness: Suppose, I say that you were thus ravished from such a blissful situation, and plunged into miserable slavery, in a distant quarter of the globe: Or suppose you were accompanied by your wife and children, parents and brethren, manacled by your side--harrowing thought! And that after having suffered the most amazing hardships, your fetters were knocked from your galled limbs, only to expose you to keener anguish!--Exposed to sale with as little respect to decency, as though you were a brute! And after all this, if you were unwilling to part with all you held dear, even without the privilege of dropping a tear over your dear friends, who were clinging round you; equally dreading the cruel separation, which would probably prove an endless one, you must be plied with that conclusive argument, the cat-o'nine tails, to reduce you to what your inhuman masters would call Reason. Now, are you willing all this should befall you? If you can lay your hand on your breast, and solemnly affirm that you should; Why then go on and prosper! For your treatment of the Africans is an exact compliance with the abovementioned rule: But if, on the other hand, your conscience answers in the negative; Why, in the name of Heaven, will you suffer such a gross violation of that rule by which your conduct must be tried, in that day, in which you must be accountable for all your actions, to that impartial Judge, who hears the groans of the oppressed and who will, sooner or later, avenge them of their oppressors! I need not tell you, who are acquainted with the scriptures that this kind of oppression is discountenanced by them. Many passages, to this purpose, might be adduced, but I shall at present, mention but one, Exod chap 20 ver. 16 "And he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death."

Though we are brought from a land of ignorance, it is as certain, that we are brought from a land of comparative innocence--from a land that flows, as it were, with Milk and Honey--and the greater part of us carried, where we are, not only deprived of every comfort of life: But subjected to all the tortures that a most cruel inquisitor could invent, or a capricious tyrant execute, and where we are likely, from the vicious examples before us, to become tenfold more the children of satan, than we should, probably, have been in our native country. Though 'tis true, that some of our wars proceed from petty discourds among ourselves, it is as true, that the greater part of them, and those the most bloody, are occasioned, in consequence of the Slave trade.--Though many think we are happier here, than there, and will not allow us the privilege of judging for ourselves, they are certainly in an error. Every man is the best judge of his own happiness, and every heart best knows its own bitterness.--While I feel the loss of my country, and my friends, I can, by sad experience, adopt that expression in Prov. 25th Chap. 20 verse. As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to a heavy heart. Let me, who have now no less than eleven relatives suffering in bondage beseech you good people, to attend to the request of a poor African, and consider the evil consequences, and gross heinousness of reducing to, and retaining in slavery a free people. Would you desire the preservation of your own liberty? As the first step let the oppressed Africans be liberated; then, and not till then, may you with confidence and consistency of conduct, look to Heaven for a blessing on your endeavours to knock the shackles with which your task masters are hampering you, from your own feet. On the other hand, if you are still determined to harden your hearts, and turn a deaf ear to our complaints, and the calls of God, in

your present Calamities; Only be pleased to recollect the miserable end of Pharoah, in  
Consequence of his refusal to set those at Liberty, whom he had unjustly reduced to cruel  
servitude. Remember the fate of Miriam for despising an Ethiopian woman, Numb. 12 chap.  
1st and 10th. verses. I need not point out the absurdity of your exertions for liberty, while you  
have slaves in your houses, for one minute's reflection is, methinks, sufficient for that purpose.--  
You who are deterred from liberating your slaves, by the consideration of the ill consequences  
to yourselves must remember, that we were not the cause of our being brought here. If the  
compelling us, against our wills, to come here was a sin; to retain us, without our consent, now  
we are here, is, I think, equally culpable let ever so great inconvenience arising therefrom,  
accrue to you. Not to trespass too much on your patience; would you unite in this generous,  
this noble purpose of granting us liberty; Your honorable assembly, on our humble petition,  
would, I doubt not, free you from the trouble of us by making us grants in some back part of the  
country. If in this attempt to serve my countrymen, I have advanced any thing to the purpose, I  
pray it may not be the less noticed for coming from an African.

\*\*\*