

African American Abolitionists Research List

HENRY “BOX” BROWN (c. 1815–c. 1889) was born into slavery in Virginia. After his wife was sold away in 1848, he escaped to Philadelphia by being shipped in a box to an abolitionist. He lectured and published *The Narrative of Henry Box Brown* before fleeing to England in 1850 after passage of the Fugitive Slave Law. Brown returned to the United States in 1875 and spent his later years performing magic.

http://www.virginiamemory.com/online_classroom/shaping_the_constitution/doc/boxbrown

http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Brown_Henry_Box_ca_1815#start_entry

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brownbox/brownbox.html>

SAMUEL CORNISH (1795–1858) was born a free man in Delaware and became an ordained Presbyterian minister in Philadelphia. In New York City, he founded the first black Presbyterian church in Manhattan and owned and edited *Freedom’s Journal*, the first newspaper owned and operated by blacks in the United States. He helped found several antislavery and reform organizations.

<https://www.nyhistory.org/web/africanfreeschool/bios/samuel-cornish.html>

<http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/cornish-samuel-eli-1795-1858>

ELLEN and WILLIAM CRAFT were each enslaved by several owners prior to their marriage and feared that any children they might have would be sold. In 1848, with the lighter-skinned Ellen disguised as a man and impersonating William’s white master, they escaped to freedom in Philadelphia. The Crafts settled in Boston, where they worked until southern slave hunters forced them to relocate to England in 1852. They returned to Georgia 20 years later and established a school for African Americans.

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/The-Great-Escape-From-Slavery-of-Ellen-and-William-Craft.html>

<http://www.learner.org/amerpass/unit07/authors-3.html>

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/craft/menu.html>

JAMES FORTEN (1766–1842) was born a free man in Philadelphia, where he apprenticed to a sailmaker. After 12 years, he owned the sailmaking company. The substantial fortune he accrued allowed him to purchase the freedom of enslaved men and

women and finance the first Convention of Color in 1817 and William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper *the Liberator*. Forten's home served as a depot for the Underground Railroad.

http://www.independenceparkinstitute.com/inp/forten/forten_intro.htm

<http://explorepahistory.com/media.php?audioId=1-5-30>

GABRIEL (aka GABRIEL PROSSER) (1776–1800) was born into slavery on the Virginia plantation of Thomas Prosser and was trained as a blacksmith. He and his brother Solomon planned a slave revolt in 1800 that sought to seize the Virginia State Capitol; they hoped to attract support from poor whites and Native Americans as well as enslaved blacks. The plot was uncovered before any action was taken, and Gabriel was hanged along with 25 other plotters.

<http://www.ushistory.org/us/20f.asp>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3p1576.html>

<http://msuweb.montclair.edu/~furr/spl/gabrielrevolt.html>

LEWIS HAYDEN (1811–1889) was born into slavery in Kentucky. He and his family escaped in 1844 and ultimately settled in Boston. Hayden became a speaker for the abolitionist cause as well as a successful businessman; his home was a primary depot for the Underground Railroad. Hayden played a central role in creating the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment of African American soldiers during the Civil War and served a term in the Massachusetts legislature in 1873.

<http://www.nps.gov/boaf/historyculture/lewis-and-harriet-hayden-house.htm>

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=FA0910FA395E15738DDDA10894DC405B8984F0D3>

<http://www.afroammuseum.org/site6.htm>

HARRIET JACOBS (1813–1897) was born into slavery, but lived a happy and comfortable life with her family until she was six years old. After that, she remained content for six years in the service of a woman who was kind and taught her how to read and sew. Although Jacobs had hoped to be freed upon the woman's death, she was instead sent to work for her mistress's relatives. At 15, she became the target of constant sexual harassment from the man of the house. When she was 21, Jacobs escaped; she then hid for seven years in the tiny, dark crawlspace above a house. She eventually escaped to freedom in the North and became involved in the abolitionist movement. Jacobs wrote a story of her life, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, which was one

of the first narratives to discuss how enslaved women faced the threat of sexual harassment and abuse.

<http://www.harrietjacobs.org/>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2923.html>

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/bio.html>

JOHN PARKER (1827–1900), the son of a free white man and an enslaved woman, was born into slavery in Virginia. While working at a foundry as a teenager, he earned enough money to purchase his freedom. He then moved to Ohio, where he established his own successful foundry. Parker became active in the Underground Railroad, often crossing the border into Kentucky to help fugitive slaves escape to freedom. He also recruited African American soldiers during the Civil War.

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6232/>

<http://people.duke.edu/~njb2/history391/parker/parker.html>

<http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/underground/oh2.htm>

JAMES W. C. PENNINGTON (1809–1870) was born into slavery in Maryland under the name Jim Pembroke. At age 20, he escaped to freedom, was captured by slave catchers and escaped again, eventually settling in Connecticut. Equally devoted to Christianity and the abolitionist movement, Pennington became a minister as well as a speaker in the antislavery movement. His 1841 *Text Book of the Origin and History...of the Colored People* was considered the first history of African America. His 1850 biography, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, revealed the background he had kept hidden. After passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, Pennington purchased his freedom from his former master's estate.

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/penning49/support1.html>

http://www.germany.info/Vertretung/usa/en/06_Foreign_Policy_State/01_Ger_US/00/Pennington_Heidelberg.html

ROBERT PURVIS (1810–1898) was born a free man in South Carolina to a mother of mixed race and a white father from England. After helping to found the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, he embarked on a fund-raising tour in England. When Pennsylvania passed a law that barred African Americans from voting, Purvis published *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens Threatened with Disenfranchisement* (1838). Purvis claimed to house an average of one runaway slave per day in his home over the course of

30 years, an effort that led to his unofficial title of “President of the Underground Railroad.”

<http://www.nps.gov/resources/person.htm?id=38>

<http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aah/purvis-robert-1810-1898>

WILLIAM STILL (1819–1902) was born a free man in New Jersey. While supposedly serving as a janitor and clerk of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery, he was actually devoting his activities to the Underground Railroad. Still detailed the experiences of 649 escaped slaves who passed through his house in Philadelphia in an 1872 book. Through his efforts, he earned the title “Father of the Underground Railroad.”

<http://www.pbs.org/wned/underground-railroad/>

<http://stillfamily.library.temple.edu/historical-perspective/william-still-significance>

MARIA STEWART (1803–1879) was born a free woman in Connecticut but became an indentured servant at age five when both of her parents died. Widowed at the age of 26, Stewart turned to religion and social activism. She was an early contributor to *The Liberator*, and a collection of her essays and speeches earned her the title of “America’s first black woman political writer.” Her speeches on abolition and women’s rights were among the first delivered by a woman to a “promiscuous” audience, made up of men and women.

<http://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/stewartmason.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/experience/education/spotlight.html>

http://wps.prenhall.com/hss_mcmichael_literature_9/59/15226/3897901.cw/index.html

SOJOURNER TRUTH (aka ISABELLA BAUMFREE) (1797–1883) was born into slavery on a plantation in Upstate New York. A family that sheltered her and her infant daughter after they escaped slavery in 1826 purchased her freedom. She became an itinerant preacher in 1829 and changed her name to Sojourner Truth in 1843. *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave* was published in 1850, and four years later she delivered her famous “Ain’t I a Woman” speech at the Ohio Woman’s Rights Convention.

http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/sojourner_truth.html

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp>

<http://www.lkwdpl.org/wihohio/trut-soj.htm>

DENMARK VESEY (c. 1757–1822) was born a free man, probably in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, but was captured and sold into slavery as a teenager and taken to South Carolina. He was able to purchase his own freedom in 1799, while his wife and children remained enslaved. In 1817, Vesey became active in Charleston’s African Methodist Episcopal Church, which became the target of white mob violence and was closed shortly thereafter. In 1822, he plotted a rebellion of enslaved people with other church leaders. The plot was revealed several weeks before it was to take place, and Vesey was executed along with 34 other plotters.

http://www.pbs.org/thisfarbyfaith/people/denmark_vesey.html

<http://teachinghistory.org/history-content/beyond-the-textbook/24126>

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/12/denmark-vesey-forgotten-hero/305673/>

DAVID WALKER (1796–1830), the son of an enslaved father and a free black mother, was born into freedom according to the laws of North Carolina. He settled in Boston as an adult and began contributing to *Freedom’s Journal*, the first African American newspaper. He wrote *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* in 1829; it was called “the most notorious document in America” at the time. Walker relied upon sailors he met in his clothing business on the Boston waterfront to smuggle copies of the *Appeal* into southern ports.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2930.html>

<https://sites.google.com/site/davidwalkermemorial/home>

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/walker/bio.html>

Additional websites for research:

University of Virginia: American Slave Narratives: An Online Anthology:
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/%7Ehyper/wpa/wpahome.html>

Library of Congress: American Memory Collection:
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: North American Slave Narratives:
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh>

Documenting the American South: <http://docsouth.unc.edu/>

History Matters: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/search.php?function=find%E2%80%A6>

American Experience: "The Abolitionists" Further Reading:
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/further-reading/abolitionists-further-reading/>

PBS: Africans in America: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/home.html>

PBS: African American World: Early Slavery Days Timeline:
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/timeline/early_01.html

University of Minnesota: Voices from the Gaps: <http://voices.cla.umn.edu/artistpages/>