

Document #4

Slavery, A Poem, by Hannah More. Philadelphia, 1788. First verse included here, page 3.

Hannah More was a poet and ardent abolitionist who supported the efforts of British statesman William Wilberforce to end the slave trade in Great Britain.

If heaven has into being deign'd to call
Thy light, O LIBERTY! to shine on all;
Bright intellectual Sun! why does thy ray
To earth distribute only partial day?
Since no resisting cause from spirit flows
Thy penetrating essence to oppose;
No obstacles by Nature's hand imprest,
Thy subtle and ethereal beams arrest;
Nor motion's laws can speed thy active course,
Nor strong repulsion's powers obstruct thy force;
Since there is no convexity in MIND,
Why are thy genial beams to parts confin'd?
While the chill North with thy bright ray is blest,
Why should fell darkness half the South invest?
Was it decreed, fair Freedom! at thy birth
That thou should'st ne'er irradiate *all* the earth?
While Britain basks in thy full blaze of light,
Why lies sad Afric quench'd in total night?

Questions for Document #4:

1. What is an abolitionist?
2. What is unique about this poem in 1788 with regard to events in America?
3. How would this poem have been received in America at the same time?