

## Teaching the U.S. Antislavery Movement through Music

Curriculum created for public use by Rebecca Edwards, Vassar College, under auspices of the Mid-Hudson Antislavery History Project, Poughkeepsie, NY  
[mhantislaveryhistoryproject.org](http://mhantislaveryhistoryproject.org)

### Lesson 2: Protest as Citizenship

**The song:** Have students sing, listen to, or read the lyrics to “America: A Parody.” They were written by “Theta”—a pseudonym, almost certainly of a woman—and appeared in *The Liberator* on May 3, 1839.

See the attached nineteenth-century lyrics of the original version of “America.” Have students compare the two, noting that many words are the same. Have them underline those places where the author of “America: A Parody” *changed* the words.

“America” was the United States’ informal national anthem in the early 1800s. It was sung much more frequently than “The Star Spangled Banner,” which became popular later and was designated the official national anthem in 1931. Why did abolitionists borrow patriotic tunes like this one? To what values did they appeal?

**Creative assignment:** Imagine you were asked to sing “The Star-Spangled Banner” (or “My Country ‘Tis of Thee”) before the Super Bowl and you decided to change the words to call attention to an injustice you think Americans need to address. Write lyrics to make your point. What do you think the response would be? This may help students grasp why abolitionists’ uncompromising moral vision made many people uncomfortable.

**Note:** In 1848, women’s rights advocates (most of whom were also abolitionists) revised the “Declaration of Independence” into the “Declaration of Sentiments” adopted at the Seneca Falls Convention. Students might compare the ways in which each group borrowed a patriotic document and rewrote it to challenge existing limitations on the ideal of freedom.

"Theta," 1839

## 8. America, A Parody

America (trad.)

My coun - try 'tis of thee, Strong- hold of sla - ve - ry,  
My na - tive coun - try! Thee, Where all men are born free,  
Let wail - ing swell the breeze, And ring from all the trees

5  
Of thee I sing; Land where my fa - thers died, Where men man's  
If white their skin: I love thy hills and dales, Thy mounts and  
The black man's wrong: Let ev - every tongue a - wake, Let bond and

10  
rights de - ride, From e - - every moun - tain side Thy deeds shall ring.  
plea - sant vales, But hate thy ne - gro sales, As foul - est sin.  
free par - take, Let rocks their si - lence break, The sound pro - long.

Our father's God! to thee--  
Author of Liberty!  
To thee we sing;  
Soon may our land be bright,  
With holy Freedom's light,  
Protect us by thy might,  
Great God, our King.

*America*  
*My country 'tis of thee*  
**AMERICA.**

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My country! 'tis of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty,  
Of thee I sing;  
Land where my father's died;  
Land of the pilgrim's pride;  
From every mountain-side,  
Let freedom ring.

My native country! thee,  
Land of the noble free,  
Thy name I love;  
I love thy rocks and rills,  
Thy woods and templed hills;  
My heart with rapture thrills,  
Like that above.

Let music swell the breeze,  
And ring from all the trees  
Sweet freedom's song;  
Let mortal tongues awake,  
Let all that breathe partake,  
Let rocks their silence break,  
The sound prolong.

Our father's God! to Thee,  
Author of liberty!  
To Thee we sing;  
Long may our land be bright  
With freedom's holy light,  
Protect us by Thy might,  
Great God, our King.