

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

Lesson 1: Testimony of Slavery

The song: Have students sing, listen to, or read the lyrics of “Gone, Sold and Gone.” Compare the verses here to the full text of the original poem by John Greenleaf Whittier; along with other works in Whittier’s Anti-Slavery Poems, are online at: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/amverse/BAE0044.0001.001/>

Whittier wrote “Gone, Sold and Gone” after reading--probably in an abolitionist newspaper--about an enslaved mother in Virginia whose daughters were all sold away to the Deep South. What was Whittier’s point of view about slavery? How did his poem appeal to white readers’ experiences and emotions?

Students might also use this poem to study the impact of the internal slave trade, through which tens of thousands of enslaved people were sold to the Deep South.

Related Lesson: Have students sing, listen to, or read the lyrics of “Sojourner Truth’s Hymn.” How does Truth identify herself with African Americans still living in slavery? In the last verse, how does she critique white reformers’ priorities? Why do you think she sang hymns like this, in addition to giving speeches and lectures?

Suggested accompanying document: Excerpts from *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (this website includes a helpful summary and contextual information): <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/truth50/summary.html>

The early chapters of this autobiography will help students understand that slavery existed not only in the South but also in the north, including New York until the late 1820s. Students may be interested in the dramatic story of Truth’s legal action to recover her son Peter, illegally sold out of Ulster County into the Deep South.

Advanced assignment: Students may be interested in scholars’ debate over Truth’s legendary speech, “Arn’t I a Woman?” This speech is reprinted all over the place, but there is considerable doubt about what Truth actually said. See Margaret Washington, *Sojourner Truth’s America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009); on the “Arn’t I a Woman” speech, pp. 224-229.

On the music: “Sojourner Truth’s Hymn” is a shape-note hymn, arranged in the traditional way with the melody in the tenor. All singers who had difficulty reading parts sang the tenor line, in different octaves as needed. If just the tenor is sung, students will hear the familiar melody of “Auld Lang Syne.”

Sojourner Truth, 1851

24. Sojourner Truth's Hymn

hymn, Plenary
(Auld Lang Syne)

SOPRANO

I am plead-ing for my peo- ple to have their rights re- stored; For they have long been
While I bear u- pon my bo- dy the scars of many a gash, I'm plead-ing for my
But while your kind-est sym- pa-thies to for- eign lands do roam, I'd ask you to re-

ALTO

TENOR

8

I am plead-ing for my peo- ple to have their rights re- stored; For they have long been
While I bear u- pon my bo- dy the scars of many a gash, I'm plead-ing for my
But while your kind-est sym- pa-thies to for- eign lands do roam, I'd ask you to re-

BASS

6

S.

toil - ing, And yet have no re - ward. They are forced the crops to cul - ture, But
peo - ple Who groan be - neath the lash. I am plead - ing for the moth - ers Who
mem - ber Your own op-pressed at home. I plead with you to sym - pa-thize With

A.

T.

8

toil - ing, And yet have no re - ward. They are forced the crops to cul - ture, But
peo - ple Who groan be - neath the lash. I am plead - ing for the moth - ers Who
mem - ber Your own op-pressed at home. I plead with you to sym - pa-thize With

B.

11

S.

not for them they yield, Al - though but late and ear - ly They la - bor in the field.
gaze in wild de - spair Up - on the hat - ed auc - tion block And see their chil - dren there.
sighs and groans and scars, And note how base the ty - ran - ny Be - neath the stripes and stars.

A.

T.

8

not for them they yield, Al - though but late and ear - ly They la - bor in the field.
gaze in wild de - spair Up - on the hat - ed auc - tion block And see their chil - dren there.
sighs and groans and scars, And note how base the ty - ran - ny Be - neath the stripes and stars.

B.

"The Farewell," 1838
John Greenleaf Whittier

7. Gone, Sold and Gone

George W. Clark, 1844

Gone, gone, sold and gone, To the rice-swamp dank and lone, Where the
There no
By the

7
slave whip cease-less swings, Where the noi - some in-sect stings, Where the fe - ver de - mon
moth - er's eye is near them, There no moth - er's ear can hear them, Ne - ver when the tor-turing
ho - ly love He bear - eth, By the bruise - ed reed he spar - eth, Oh, may He, to whom a -

12
strews Poi - son with the fall - ing dew, Where the sick - ly sun-beams glare— Through the
lash Seams their back with many a gash, Shall a moth - er's kind - ness bless them, Or a
lone, All their cru - el wrongs are known, Still their hope and re - fuge prove, With a

17 *Chorus*
hot and mis - ty air, —
moth - er's arm car - ess them. Gone, gone, sold and gone, To the rice swamp dank and
more than mo - ther's love.

24
lone, From Vir - gin-i-a's hills and wa - ters, Woe is me, my sto - len daugh - ters!