

Jupiter Hammon: Pro Slavery

Jupiter Hammon (1720-1800?) was born a slave to a wealthy New York merchant family. He spent his lifetime in slavery as a valued and trusted house servant. A convert to Christianity, Hammon also preached and wrote religious poetry. He was the first black to be published. The following viewpoint is excerpted from "An Address to the Negroes of the State of New York," a speech delivered before the African society in 1786. Hammon counsels slaves to be obedient to their masters and to concentrate on gaining freedom through religion rather than rebellion.

Respecting obedience to masters. Now whether it is right, and lawful, in the sight of God, for them to make slaves of us or not. I am certain that while we are slaves, it is our duty to obey our masters, in all their lawful commands, and mind them unless we are bid to do that which we know to be sin, or forbidden in God's word. The apostle Paul says: "Servants be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh..." Here is a plain command of God for us to obey our masters.....He has commanded us to obey, and we ought to do it cheerfully, and freely.....As we depend upon our masters, for what we eat and drink and wear, and for all our comfortable things in this world, we cannot be happy, unless we please them.....If a servant strives to please his master and studies and takes pains to do it, I believe there are but few masters who would use such a servant cruelly.....

Now I acknowledge that liberty is a great thing, and worth seeking for, if we can get it honestly, and by our good conduct prevail on our masters to set us free. Though for my own part I do not wish to be free: yet I should be glad, if others, especially the young negroes were to be free, for many of us who are grown hardly know how to take care of ourselves; and it may be more for our own comfort to remain as we are.....

If you become Christians, you will have reason to bless God forever, that you have been brought into a land where you have heard the gospel, though you have been slaves. If we should ever get to heaven, we shall find nobody to reproach us for being black, or for being slaves. Let me beg of you my dear African brethren, to think very little of your bondage in this life, for your thinking of it will do you no good. If God designs to set us free, he will do it, in his own time, and way; but think of your bondage to sin and satan, and do not rest, until you are delivered from it.

Friendly Questions:

1. As a slave you converted to slavery. How did this affect your view of slavery?
2. Do you wish to be free? Why or why not?

Unfriendly Questions:

1. You encourage slaves to be content with being slaves. You are a house servant. Your job is easy. Do you know what it is like to work in the fields?
2. Do you honestly believe God wants black people to be slaves to white people?

