



Slavery and Emancipation in Western Culture
David Brion Davis

The Negro's Complaint (1788)
by William Cowper

Forced from home and all its pleasures
Afric's coast I left forlorn,
To increase a stranger's treasures
O'er the raging billows borne.
Men from England bought and sold me,
Paid my price in paltry gold;
But, though slave they have enrolled me,
Minds are never to be sold.

Still in thought as free as ever,
What are England's rights, I ask,
Me from my delights to sever,
Me to torture, me to task ?
Fleecy locks and black complexion
Cannot forfeit nature's claim;
Skins may differ, but affection
Dwells in white and black the same.

Why did all-creating nature
Make the plant for which we toil?
Sighs must fan it, tears must water,
Sweat of ours must dress the soil.
Think, ye masters iron-hearted,
Lolling at your jovial boards,
Think how many backs have smarted
For the sweets your cane affords.

Is there, as ye sometimes tell us,
Is there One who reigns on high?

Has He bid you buy and sell us,
 Speaking from his throne, the sky?
Ask him, if your knotted scourges,
 Matches, blood-extorting screws,
Are the means that duty urges
 Agents of his will to use?

Hark! He answers!--Wild tornadoes
 Strewing yonder sea with wrecks,
Wasting towns, plantations, meadows,
 Are the voice with which he speaks.
He, foreseeing what vexations
 Afric's sons should undergo,
Fixed their tyrants' habitations
 Where his whirlwinds answer--"No."

By our blood in Afric wasted
 Ere our necks received the chain;
By the miseries that we tasted,
 Crossing in your barks the main;
By our sufferings, since ye brought us
 To the man-degrading mart,
All sustained by patience, taught us
 Only by a broken heart;

Deem our nation brutes no longer,
 Till some reason ye shall find
Worthier of regard and stronger
 Than the colour of our kind.
Slaves of gold, whose sordid dealings
 Tarnish all your boasted powers,
Prove that you have human feelings,
 Ere you proudly question ours!