

# Songs of Slavery and Emancipation

## Slave Songs

### Nat Turner

(collected by Lawrence Gellert, published in Mainstream Vol.16, No. 2 Feb. 1963)

referred to by Pete Seeger, Russell Ames and John Greenway

Ames contributes an additional verse: pg. 151 Story of American Folksong

“With the tightening of restrictions of all restrictions on them after the rebellion, any singing about ‘Nat Turner’ had to be well disguised. A song about him has survived, in which there was humorous satire on the masters, who allowed it as kings once allowed jokes on themselves by court fools and jesters, mixed with a pun on Nat Turner’s name and veiled references to revolution and change.”

(see additional verse below main verses from Gellert in Mainstream)

You mought be rich as cream,  
And drive you coach and four horse team;  
But you can’t keep the World from moverin’ round,  
Nor Nat Turner from gaining ground.

You mought be reader and writer too  
And wiser’n Old Solomon the Jew  
But you can’t keep the World from moverin’ ‘round,  
Nor Nat Turner from gainin’ ground.

And your name it mought be Ceaser sure  
And got you cannon can shoot a mile or more  
But you can’t keep the World from moverin’ ‘round  
Nor Nat Turner from gainin’ ground.

Virginia 1831

You mought be a Carroll from Carrollton,  
Arrive here night afo’ Lawd make creation,  
But you can’t keep the world from moverin’ around  
And not turn her back from the gaining ground.

### Hymn of Freedom

(1813)

“Sung by the Negroes on the island opposite Charleston, during the late War with Britain composed by one of themselves.”

*Hail! Hail! ye Afric clan  
Hail! ye oppressed, ye Afric band,  
Who toil and sweat in Slavery bound;*

*(Repeated)*

And when your health & strength are gone  
Are left to hunger & to mourn.  
Let *Independence* be your aim,  
Ever mindful what 'tis worth.  
Pledge your bodies for the prize  
Pile them even to the skies!

*Chorus*

Firm, united let us be,  
Resolved on death or liberty  
As a band of Patriots joined  
Peace & Plenty we shall find.

*Look to Heaven with manly trust  
And swear by Him that's always just  
That no white foe with impious hand  
(Repeated)*

Shall slave your wives & daughters more  
Or rob them of their virtue dear.  
Be armed with valor firm & true,  
Their hopes are fixed on Heaven & you  
That truth & justice will prevail  
And every scheme of bondage fail.

*Chorus*

Firm, united &c...

*Arise! Arise! shake off your chains  
Your cause is just, so Heaven ordains  
to you shall Freedom be proclaimed.  
(Repeated)*

Raise your arms & bare your breasts,  
Almighty God will do the rest.  
Blow the clarion! a warlike blast!  
Call every Negro from his task!  
Wrest the scourge from Buckra's hand,  
And drive each tyrant from the land,

*Chorus*

Firm, united &c..

## **Songs of the Abolitionists**

### **A Song For Freedom**

from the Anti-Slavery Harp-air-Dandy Jim

Come all ye bondmen far and near,  
Let's put a song in massa's ear,  
It is a song for our poor race,  
Who're whipped and trampled with disgrace.

Chorus: My old massa tells me O  
This is a land of freedom O;  
Let's look about and see if 'tis so,  
Just as massa tells me O

He tells us of that glorious one,  
I think his name is Washington,  
How he did fight for liberty,  
To save a threepence tax on tea.

Chorus:

And then he tells us that there was  
A Constitution, with this clause,  
That all men equal are created,  
How often have we heard it stated.

Chorus:

But now we look about and see,  
That we poor blacks are not so free;  
We're whipped and thrashed about like fools,  
And have no chance at common schools.

Chorus: Still, my old massa &

They take our wives, insult and mock,  
And sell our children on the block,  
Then choke us if we say a word,  
And say that "niggers" shan't be heard.  
Chorus: Still, my old massa &

## Right On

from The Anti-Slavery Harp-Air-"*Lenox*"

Ho! children of the brave,  
Ho! freemen of the land,  
That hurl'd into the grave  
Oppression's bloody band;  
Come on, come on, and joined be we  
To make the fettered bondman free.

Let coward vassals sneak  
From freedom's battle still,  
Poltroons that dare not speak  
But a their priests may will;  
Come on, come on, and joined be we  
To make the fettered bondman free.

On parchment, scroll and creed,  
With human life blood red,  
Untrembling at the deed,

Plant firm your manly tread;  
The priest may howl, the jurist rave,  
But we will free the fettered slave.

The tyrant's scorn is vain,  
In vain the slanderer's breath,  
We'll rush to break the chain,  
E'en on the jaws of death;  
Hurrah! Hurrah! right on go we,  
The fettered slave shall yet be free.

Right on, in freedom's name,  
And in the strength of God,  
Wipe out the damning stain,  
And break the oppressor's rod;  
Hurrah! Hurrah! right on go we,  
The fettered slave shall yet be free.