

Brief Biography of David Walker

Name _____ Class _____

Teacher _____ Date _____

David Walker was born in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1796. He was the son of a free black woman; his father was a slave. Because his mother was free, he was also free. According to law, he inherited her legal status. Little is known about the first two decades of his life, but from fragmentary records, it is believed that he was an active member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), and that he traveled throughout the coastal regions of the Upper South, staying in towns such as Charleston, South Carolina, a major port with a significant free black population. In his travels, Walker learned much about the inequities of American slavery and the potential of religious evangelicalism to motivate and inspire African Americans throughout the United States.

In 1825, Walker settled in Boston, Massachusetts, and within a few years married Eliza Butler, the daughter of locally prominent free black family. Walker also joined the African Lodge, the local branch of the African Methodist Episcopal Church administered by the Reverend Samuel Snowden, a strong anti-slavery advocate. He became a member of the Massachusetts General Colored Association, an organization that, more than any others, assertively promoted the abolition of slavery. This community helped solidify Walker's strongly held views that slavery could not be tolerated and that African Americans must take an aggressive role in resisting the institution.

In 1829, Walker wrote and published the *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, a document that argued for racial equality and exhorted African Americans to resort to violence if necessary in resisting slavery. Notable for its radicalism, the *Appeal* was written in a manner that suggested Walker intended it to be read aloud as an emotional sermon or speech to groups. In fact, copies of it were located in a number of seaports throughout the South, giving credence to the idea that Walker had hoped it would reach enslaved and free African Americans throughout the country.

Shortly after its publication, Walker died of tuberculosis. Some believe his *Appeal* was the inspiration for a number of slave escapes and insurrections. Furthermore, the document was a harbinger of the incendiary abolitionist rhetoric that would soon stir political and sectional conflict throughout the United States.

Questions

1. According to the first paragraph, what role did religion play in Walker's thinking about slavery?
2. According to the second paragraph, what role did community organizations play in Walker's thinking about slavery?
3. Based on the third paragraph, what is notable about Walker's *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens*?
4. According to the last paragraph, what role did Walker's *Appeal* have on others?