We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake ... What to an American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals more to him, more than all the other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy licence; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy – a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of the United States at this very hour.

Frederick Douglass, 'What To The Slave is the Fourth of July?: An Address Delivered in Rochester, New York, on 5 July 1852'

Whilst we are bordering on a future of brighter things, we are also at our danger period, when we
must either accept the right philosophy, or go down
by following deceptive propaganda which has hemmed
us in for many centuries.

Marcus Garvey, 'The Future As I See It' (1923)²

The Black Artist's role in America is to aid in
the destruction of America as he knows it.

LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, 'State/meant' (1965)³

On the faith of an eye-wink, pamphlets were stuffed
into trouser pockets. Pamphlets transported
in the coat linings of itinerant seamen, jackets
ringwormed with salt traded drunkenly to pursers
in the Carolinas, pamphlets ripped out, read aloud:
Men of colour, who are also of sense.
Outrage. Incredulity. Uproar in state legislatures.

We are the most wretched, degraded and abject set
of beings that ever lived since the world began.

Rita Dove, 'David Walker (1785–1830)' (1980)⁴

Frederick Douglass, whose oratory along with his landmark
Narrative (1845) of slave life in and then escape from the plantations
of Maryland made him one of the ascendant black voices of aboli-
tion, implies a Final Reckoning for the slaveholding America just
having celebrated Independence Day 1852.⁵ Marcus Garvey, 1920s
Harlem luminary and prime mover in the 'Back To Africa' nationalist
movement as embodied in his Universal Negro Improvement
Association (UNIA), and then in the ill-fated Black Star Line by
which he thought to take returnee blacks to Liberia and elsewhere in
the 'mother continent', envisages worlds at binary racial opposites.

Imamu Amiri Baraka, his name newly Islamized from the LeRoi
Jones of a Newark, New Jersey upbringing and recent Greenwich
Village Beat phase, publishes 'State/meant' the same year, 1965, as
his arrest by the FBI for allegedly using Federal funds intended for
his Harlem theatre-work to build a gun arsenal in furtherance of
looks back in her biographical poem of 1980 to the black Boston
clothier-author of an 1820s revolutionary pamphlet literally smug-
gled in the pockets and linings of used garmentry into the slave
South and beyond: Walker's Appeal in Four Articles; Together with a
Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular and
Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America (1829).⁶