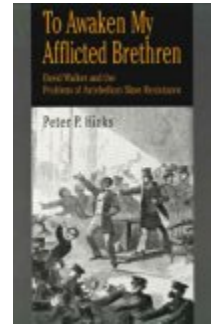


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Peter P. Hinks.** *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997. xvii + 301 pp. \$22.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-271-01579-8; \$71.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-271-01578-1.

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## Walker's *Appeal* Revisted

In *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, Peter Hinks effectively blends the various elements that constituted black protest before the Civil War. Part biography of David Walker, part analysis of the *Appeal*, part examination of antebellum black resistance, this book is well-written, engaging and thoroughly researched.

While Walker's *Appeal* generally has been acknowledged by scholars, few have done more than use the work as an example of how far some black abolitionists were willing to go to end slavery. Hinks strives to bring Walker out of historiographical isolation, giving him not only a personal life, but also showing his efforts as deeply rooted in events of the time. The period 1800-1830 was a volatile one for American race relations, and Walker's ideas clearly arose from the context of southern slave rebellions as well as northern organizational resistance. Unlike earlier historians who have viewed Walker as atypical because of his call for violence, Hinks sees the *Appeal's* attempt to educate and uplift blacks as equally if not more important. Violence was a last resort, but one that had to be considered. Hinks does not see Walker as merely one of many, though, calling the *Appeal* "by far the most sophisticated and extensive form such plans attained in antebellum America."

David Walker was born free in Wilmington, North Carolina, in about 1796. After living for some time in Charleston, he left the South and by 1825 had established a clothing business in Boston, where he became part of a network of black activists. In 1829, he published his sole

work, the *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*. In it, he exhorted the slave population to free itself, physically and psychologically.

In the absence of much direct information concerning Walker's life, Hinks adequately fills in the gaps, making judgments based on conditions of black life in particular places and times as well as indications found in the *Appeal*. The author sets Walker and the *Appeal* in historical context, connecting them to myriad subjects: black seamen and restrictions they faced in the South, various black leaders and their philosophies, slave rebellions. His comparison of the ideas of Denmark Vesey and Walker is especially enlightening albeit without an accompanying explanation of the Vesey conspiracy, in which Walker may have participated. (While many readers will no doubt be familiar with the event, it is surprising given the author's in-depth evaluation of so many other related topics.) Both leaders delivered an "unrestrained" depiction of the pervasiveness of racism, accepted violence as a possible tactic, and exhorted blacks to join together in fighting back.

Hinks argues persuasively for recognition of Walker as a major force in Black anti-slavery philosophy. Some may feel he does so excessively, and at the expense of other black abolitionists—his comparison of Walker and Henry Highland Garnet, for example, leaves the latter extremely battered. But in raising Walker above others, Hinks doesn't fall into the trap of oversimplifying Walker's work. On the contrary, the author is par-

ticularly good at dealing with such complex issues as Walker's concern that blacks were partially complicit in allowing slavery to continue.

The book ends with publication and banning of the *Appeal*. Walker's death soon after is covered only very briefly, and only an appendix. This is a problem for several reasons:

1. While the focus of this work is on the *Appeal*, the book also serves as a biography. Early chapters especially concentrate on Walker's life. Thus, the reader is left hanging when the book ends with the printing of the *Appeal*. What happened to Walker after his work's publication? Granted his post-*Appeal* life was short; he died less than a year later, but surely some attention is due this event.

2. Walker's death is especially important considering the rumors surrounding it: he has been widely considered a victim of murder, possibly by a defender of slavery

incensed by the *Appeal*. Even if this claim is unfounded, as Hinks believes, the existence of the rumor should be discussed. How did it arise, and why? In a book so thoroughly researched and carefully thought out as this one, the lack of discussion of the murder theory is surprising.

3. If, as Hinks suggests, Walker died of tuberculosis less than a year after the *Appeal*'s publication, what impact did his illness have on his writing? Tuberculosis is not a sudden killer. Walker must have known he was ill and been contemplating his mortality.

This abrupt treatment of Walker's demise is my only real criticism of the work. Otherwise, it is an excellent addition to the literature on antebellum black protest.

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