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*Frederick Douglass*

*Published Joseph M. Wilson, Philadelphia.*

“LET THE  
MONSTER PERISH”

*The Historic Address to  
Congress of Henry Highland Garnet*

HENRY HIGHLAND GARNET

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

THE 223<sup>RD</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN Church (U.S.A.) in 2018 approved an overture to recognize the Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, an abolitionist, educator, and Presbyterian pastor who had escaped slavery as a child. The overture recognized Garnet's prophetic witness, encouraged Presbyterians to study his life and Presbyterian seminaries to include the study of Garnet's

legacy in their curricula, and authorized this publication of the address “A Memorial Discourse,” which Garnet delivered to the U.S. Congress on February 12, 1865, making him the first African American to address Congress. The address later came to be known as “Let the Monster Perish,” based on a refrain from the sermon.

The overture concludes, “Having ordained Garnet, still a fugitive slave, as an elder and then a pastor in the Presbytery of Troy, the PC(USA) has a responsibility to history and to the Creator to witness his prophetic voice and to let his words speak not only for those in bondage but for the spirit of unity and moral righteousness displayed by the American people in 1865 with the passage of the 13th Amendment. Garnet tells us today that the tough issues can be addressed, that right can prevail and that justice only awaits our courage to speak as God would have us to do.”

This publication includes the text of his speech, now in the public domain, as well as a time line of his life. Punctuation and spelling are reproduced as they were in the original publication.

## TIME LINE OF REV. HENRY HIGHLAND GARNET'S LIFE

- 1815 Born on December 23 as an enslaved person in Chesterville, Kent County, Maryland.
- 1824 Escaped with his family to New York City.
- 1826–28 Attended the African Free School in New York City.

- 1828–31 Worked on ships as a cook and steward during several sea voyages to Cuba and along the U.S. coast.
- 1831 Began high school in New York City.
- 1835 Began religious studies at the Noyes Academy in Canaan, New Hampshire.
- 1836–40 Studied at the Oneida Institute in Whitesboro, New York, graduating in September 1840.
- 1841 Had one leg amputated below the knee due to a sports injury suffered two years earlier.
- 1841 Married fellow abolitionist Julia Ward Williams. They had three children together, only one of whom survived to adulthood: Mary Garnet Barboza.
- 1840–48 Served as the first pastor of Liberty Street Presbyterian Church in Troy, New York.



- 1843 Gave one of his most famous speeches, “An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America,” at the National Negro Convention in Buffalo, New York. The central theme of the speech of encouraging slaves to rebel against their owners was opposed by Frederick Douglass and rejected by the Convention by a single vote.
- 1850–52 Lived in England from where he spoke widely against slavery in the United Kingdom and Europe.
- 1852 Began serving as a missionary in Jamaica.
- 1857–64 Served as a pastor at Shiloh Presbyterian Church in New York City (now St. James Presbyterian Church).
- 1863 During the three-day draft riots in New York City in July, a white mob sought to attack Garnet, but he and his family escaped.

- 1864–66 Served as pastor of Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C.
- 1865 On February 12, Garnet became the first African American to give an address, “A Memorial Discourse (Let the Monster Perish),” in the U.S. House of Representatives.
- 1868–69 Served as president of Avery College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. While there, helped organize what became Grace Memorial Presbyterian Church.
- 1869 Returned to Shiloh Presbyterian Church as pastor.
- 1872 Helped organize the Cuban Anti-Slavery Committee to fight slavery’s continued existence in Spanish-ruled Cuba.
- 1879 After the death of his first wife, he married Sarah Smith Tompkins, a teacher, school principal, and suffragist.

- 1881 Appointed United States Minister and Counsel General to Liberia by President James Garfield.
- 1882 Died on February 13 of malaria in Liberia. Was buried in Palm Grove Cemetery in Monrovia, Liberia.

## SOURCES

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