

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Lewis Clarke (dates unknown)

From *Leaves from a Slave's Journal of Life*

One of the most stirring moments at anti-slavery meetings was when recently escaped slaves told their own stories. Their testimony was specific and fresh, and anti-slavery writers often reported it in abolitionist papers. As a result, there are actually far more of these shorter, oral or dictated autobiographies than there are book-length slave narratives, making them an important source of information about slavery. They also provide insight into the interests and attitudes of abolitionists.

This speech has all these values. First, it was written by Lydia Maria Child, a long-time white abolitionist who was later the editor of Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Her opening description of Lewis Tappan, a founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society, reveals some of his mannerisms as well as her differences from him. Yet both she and Tappan are directly concerned with the credibility of Clarke, which builds up to Clarke's still more emphatic points about slavery, manhood, and truth. "A SLAVE CAN'T BE A MAN!"—because "He daren't tell what's in him," because "slavery's the father of lies." In turn, these points not only justify Clarke's testimony, they underscore the great importance of testimony to Clarke in establishing his freedom and manhood.

Clarke's speech and Child's account also reveal many other features of slavery and the southern and northern white interests in it, such as the treatment of women and girls, the vicious "patter-rollers," the prurience of some anti-slavery "boys," and the misery of slave children.

Child's report of Clarke's speech was originally printed in two issues of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 20 and 27, 1842. We have cut most of the second part, except for Clarke's memories of his childhood experiences.

For a complete text of "Leaves from a Slave's Journal of Life," see John W. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 151-64. Blassingame also supplies further information about general conditions and about the conventions of speeches by ex-slaves.

Reading

Narrative of the Sufferings of Lewis Clarke, During a Captivity of More Than Twenty-Five Years, Among the Algerines of Kentucky, One of the So Called Christian States of America. Dictated by Himself
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/clarke/clarke.html>