

Excerpt from “Speech of John Hossack, Convicted of Violating the Fugitive Salve Act: Before Judge Drummond, of the U.S. District Court of Chicago,” 1860.

...It is true, sir; I am a foreigner. I first saw the light among the rugged and free hills of Scotland; a land, sir, that never was conquered, and where a slave never breathed... it is because I am opposed to carrying out wicked and ungodly laws, and love the freedom of my [adopted] country, that I stand before you to-day.

Again, sir, I ought not to be sentenced because, as has been argued by the prosecution, I am an Abolitionist. I have no apologies to make for being an Abolitionist...

As a man who had fled from the crushing aristocracy of my native land, how can I support a worse aristocracy in this land? I was compelled to give my name and influence to a party who proposed, at least, to embrace in its sympathies, all classes of men, from all quarters of the globe. In this choice, I found myself in the company of the Redeemer...who came to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to set at liberty those who were bruised; yea, this very religion binds me to those in bonds... Tell me, sir, with these views, can I be anything but an Abolitionist? Surely for this, I ought not to be sentenced.

Again, sir, I ought not to be sentenced, because the fugitive slave law, under which I am torn from my family and business by the subtle tools of the slave hunter, is at variance with both the spirit and letter of the constitution. Sir, I place myself upon the constitution in the presence of a nation who have the Declaration of Independence read to them every Fourth of July, and profess to believe it... The parties who [support] slavery, are traitors; traitors not only to the liberties of millions of enslaved countrymen, but traitors to the constitution itself, which they have sworn to support... I go, sir, to the constitution of my country; the word slave is not to be found... These were the men that had proclaimed to the world that All men were created equal, that they were endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights – life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and contended even unto death for seven long years. Can it be, sir, that these great men, under cover of those hallowed words, intended to make a government that should outrage justice, and trample upon liberty as no other government under the whole heavens ever done.