

A REFUTATION
ANA Opportunity and Impact in Nursing Summit
February 13, 2026
Run of Show

Performance #1: 1:00pm – 3:00pm (in person-only)

- **12:00pm** TOWP actors/staff arrives at venue to conduct sound check.
- **12:45pm** Community panelists arrive and are seated in the front row, where they will watch the performance, and are briefed by Bryan Doerries and Margo Brooks Carthon in their seats.
- **1:00pm** Event begins. Bryan Doerries delivers introductory remarks, setting up the performance and the event.
- **1:05pm** Actors perform *A REFUTATION*.
- **2:00pm** Bryan Doerries thanks the actors as they leave stage and come down to sit in the **first row of the auditorium.**
- **2:00pm** Margo Brooks Carthon + four panelists come up from the audience to take their places in chairs on stage.
- **2:00pm** Bryan Doerries welcomes Margo Brooks Carthon and the panelists to the stage, seeds the audience discussion by asking the audience to think about the first question, and then turns things over to Margo Brooks Carthon.
- **2:00pm** Margo Brooks Carthon introduces the panel of nurse icons and moderates their responses to the performance.
- **2:00pm – 2:15pm four** The nurse icons respond from their hearts and guts to what resonated with them in performance. (3 minutes max/each).
- **2:15pm – 3:00pm** Bryan Doerries and Margo Brooks Carthon lead 45-minute audience discussion, using the performance a point of departure for questions that will elicit dialogue from the audience. During the guided discussion, in-person audience members raise their hands and are handed microphones by mic runners to participate in the discussion.
- **3:00pm** – Bryan Doerries thanks performers, panelists, and Margo Brooks Carthon before closing out the event.

A REFUTATION

1.

MATTHEW CARREY

A Short Account of the Malignant Fever, Lately Prevalent in Philadelphia, With a Statement of the Proceedings That Took Place on the Subject in Different Parts of the United States, by Matthew Carey, First Edition, November 13, 1793.

The symptoms which characterized the first stage of the fever, were, in the greatest number of cases, after a chilly fit of some duration, a quick, tense pulse—hot skin—pain in the head, back, and limbs—flushed countenance—inflamed eye—moist tongue—oppression and sense of soreness at the stomach, especially upon pressure—frequent sick qualms, and retchings to vomit, without discharging anything, except the contents last taken into the stomach—costiveness. And when stools were procured, the first generally showed a defect of bile, or an obstruction to its entrance into the intestines. But brisk purges generally altered this appearance.

These symptoms generally continued with more or less violence from one to three, four, or even five days; and then gradually abating, left the patient free from every complaint, except general debility. On the febrile symptoms suddenly subsiding, they were immediately succeeded by a yellow tinge in the opaque cornea, or whites of the eyes—an increased oppression at the praecordia—a constant puking of everything taken into the stomach, with much straining, accompanied with a hoarse, hollow noise.

If these symptoms were not soon relieved, a vomiting of matter, resembling coffee grounds in colour and consistence, commonly called the black vomit, sometimes accompanied with, or succeeded by haemorrhages from the nose, fauces, gums, and other parts of the body—a yellowish purple colour, and putrescent appearance of the whole body, hiccup, agitations, deep and distressed sighing, comatose delirium, and finally, death. When the disease proved fatal, it was generally between the fifth and eighth days.

This was the most usual progress of this formidable disease, through its several stages. There were, however, very considerable variations in the symptoms, as well as in the duration of its different stages, according to the Constitution and temperment of the patient, the state of the weather, the manner of treatment.

The febrile symptoms, however, as has been already observed, either gave way on the third, fourth, or fifth day; and then the patient recovered; or they were soon after succeeded by a different, but much more dangerous train of symptoms, by debility, low pulse, cold skin, (which assumed a tawny colour, mixed with purple) black vomiting, hemorrhages, hiccup, anxiety, restlessness, coma. Many, who survived the eighth day, though apparently out of danger, died suddenly in consequence of a hemorrhage.

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While affairs were in this deplorable state, and people at the lowest ebb of despair, we cannot be astonished at the frightful scenes that were acted, which seemed to indicate a total dissolution of the bonds of society in the nearest and dearest

connexions. Who, without horror, can reflect on a husband, married perhaps for twenty years, deserting his wife in the last agony—a wife, unfeelingly, abandoning her husband on his death bed—parents forsaking their children—children ungratefully flying from their parents, and resigning them to chance, often without an inquiry after their health or safety—masters hurrying off their faithful servants to Bushhill [Hospital], even on suspicion of the fever, and that at a time, when, almost like Tartarus, it was open to every visitant, but rarely returned any—servants abandoning tender and humane masters, who only wanted a little care to restore them to health and usefulness—who, I say, can think of these things, without horror?

Yet they were often exhibited throughout our city; and such was the force of habit, that the parties who were guilty of this cruelty, felt no remorse themselves—nor met with the censure from their fellow citizens, which such conduct would have excited at any other period. Indeed, at this awful crisis, so much did self appear to engross the whole attention of many, that in some cases not more concern was felt for the loss of a parent, a husband, a wife, or an only child, than, on other occasions, would have been caused by the death of a faithful servant.

This kind of conduct produced scenes of distress and misery, of which parallels are rarely to be met with, and which nothing could palliate, but the extraordinary public panic, and the great law of self-preservation, the dominion of which extends over the whole animated world. Men of affluent fortunes, who have given daily employment and sustenance to hundreds, have been abandoned to the care of a negro, after their wives, children,

friends, clerks, and servants, had fled away, and left them to their fate. In some cases, at the commencement of the disorder, no money could procure proper attendance. With the poor, the case was, as might be expected, infinitely worse than with the rich. Many of these have perished, without a human being to hand them a drink of water, to administer medicines, or to perform any charitable office for them. Various instances have occurred, of dead bodies found lying in the streets, of persons who had no house or habitation, and could procure no shelter.

A man and his wife, once in affluent circumstances, were found lying dead in bed, and between them was their child, a little infant, who was sucking its mother's breast. How long they had lain thus, was uncertain.

A woman, whose husband had just died of the fever, was seized with the pains of parturition, and had nobody to assist her, as the women in the neighbourhood were afraid to go into the house. She lay, for a considerable time, in a degree of anguish that will not bear description. At length, she struggled to reach the windows, and cried out for assistance. Two men, passing by, went up stairs; but they came at too late a stage. She was striving with death—and actually, in a few minutes, expired in their arms.

Another woman, whose husband and two children lay dead in the room with her, was in the same situation as the former, without a midwife, or any other person to aid her. Her cries at the window brought up one of the carters employed by the committee for the relief of the sick. With his assistance she was delivered a child, which died in a few minutes, as did the

mother, who was utterly exhausted by her labour, by the disorder, and by the dreadful spectacle before her. And thus lay, in one room, no less than five dead bodies, an entire family, carried off within a few hours. Instances have occurred, of respectable women, who, in their lying-in, have been obliged to depend on their maid-servants, for assistance--and some have had none but from their husbands. Some of the midwives were dead--and others had left the city.

To relate all the frightful cases of this nature that occurred, would fill a volume. To pass them over wholly would have been improper—to dwell on them longer would be painful. Let these few, therefore, suffice.

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Rarely has it happened, that so large a proportion of the gentlemen of the faculty have sunk beneath the labours of their very dangerous profession, as on this occasion. In little more than a month, exclusive of medical students, no less than ten physicians have been swept off. Hardly one of the practicing doctors that remained in the city, escaped sickness— some were three, four, and five times confined.

To the clergy it has likewise proved very fatal. Exposed, in the exercise of the last duties to the dying, to equal danger with the physicians, it is not surprising that so many of them have fallen. Six clergymen have been in the greatest danger from this disorder, but they have all recovered.

Among the women, the mortality has not by any means been so great, as among the men, nor among the old and infirm as

among the middle-aged and robust. To tipplers and drunkards, and to men who lived high, and were of a corpulent habit of body, this disorder was very fatal. Of these, many were seized, and the recoveries were very rare.

To the filles de joie¹, it has been equally fatal. The wretched, debilitated state of their constitutions rendered them an easy prey to this dreadful disorder, which very soon terminated their miserable career.

It has been dreadfully destructive among the poor. It is very probable, that at least seven eighths of the number of the dead, were of that class. The inhabitants of dirty houses have severely expiated their neglect of cleanliness and decency, by the numbers of them that have fallen sacrifices. Whole families in such houses have sunk into one silent, undistinguishing grave.

The mortality in confined streets, small allies, and close houses, debarred of a free circulation of air, has exceeded, in a great proportion, that in the large streets and well-aired houses. In some of the allies, a third or fourth of the whole of the inhabitants are no more. In 30 houses, the whole number in Pewter Platter alley, 32 people died: and in Market-street, in 170 houses, only 39. The streets in the suburbs that had the benefit of the country air, especially towards the west part of the city, have suffered little. Of the wide, airy streets, none lost so many people as Arch, near Water-street, which may be accounted for by its proximity to the original seat of the disorder. It is to be particularly remarked, that in general, the more remote the

¹ Prostitutes.

streets were from Water street, the less they experienced of the calamity.

From the effects of this disorder, the French settled in Philadelphia, have been in a very remarkable degree exempt. To what this may be owing, is a subject deserving particular investigation. By some it has been ascribed to their despising the danger. But, though this may have had some effect, it will not certainly account for it altogether; as it is well known that many of the most courageous persons in Philadelphia, have been among its victims. By many of the French, the prevalence and mortality of the disorder have been attributed to the vast quantities of crude and unwholesome fruits brought to our markets, and consumed by all classes of people.

The effect of fear in predisposing the body for this and other disorders, and increasing their malignance, when taken, is well known. The following exception to the general rule, for the truth of which I pledge myself, is curious and interesting. A young woman, whose fears were so very prevalent, as not only to render her unhappy from the commencement of the disorder, but even to interfere with the happiness of the family with whom she lived, had to attend on seven persons, all of whom were in a very dangerous state, and one of whom died. Her attendance was assiduous and unremitted for nearly three weeks. Yet she has never been in the slightest degree affected.

At an early stage of the disorder, the elders of the African church met, and offered their services to the mayor, to procure nurses for the sick, and to assist in burying the dead. Their offers were accepted; and Absalom Jones and Richard Allen undertook the former department, that of furnishing nurses, and William Gray,

the latter—the interment of the dead. The great demand for nurses afforded an opportunity for imposition, which was eagerly seized by some of the vilest of the blacks. They extorted two, three, four, and even five dollars a night for attendance, which would have been well paid by a single dollar. Some of them were even detected in the houses of the sick. But it is wrong to cast a censure on the whole for this sort of conduct, as many people have done. The services of Jones, Allen, and Gray, and others of their colour, have been very great, and demand public gratitude.

When the yellow fever prevailed in South Carolina, the negroes, according to that accurate observer, Dr. Lining, were wholly free from it. “There is something very singular in the constitution of the negroes, says he, which renders them not liable to this fever; or though many of them were as much exposed as the nurses to this infection; yet I never knew one instance of this fever among them, though they are equally subject with the white people to the bilious fever.”

The same idea prevailed for a considerable time in Philadelphia; but it was erroneous. They did not escape the disorder; however, the number of them that were seized with it, was not great; and, as I am informed by an eminent doctor, “it yielded to the power of medicine in them more easily than whites.”

2.

ABSALOM JONES

A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia In the Year 1793.

RICHARD ALLEN

And **A REFUTATION** of Some Censures Thrown Upon Them in Some Late Publications

ABSALOM JONES

by Absalom Jones

RICHARD ALLEN

and Richard Allen.

ABSALOM JONES

In consequence of a partial representation of the conduct of the people who were employed to nurture the sick, in the late calamitous state of the city of Philadelphia, we are solicited, by a number of those who feel themselves injured thereby, and by the advice of several respectable citizens, to step forward and declare facts as they really were.

RICHARD ALLEN

Seeing that from our situation, on account of the charge we took upon us, we had it more fully and generally in our power, to know and observe the conduct and behavior of those that were so employed.

ABSALOM JONES

Early in September, a solicitation appeared in the public papers, to the people of colour to come forward and assist the distressed, perishing, and neglected sick; with a kind of assurance, that people of our colour were not liable to take the infection.

RICHARD ALLEN

Upon which we and a few others met and consulted how to act on so truly alarming and melancholy an occasion.

ABSALOM JONES

After some conversation, we found a freedom to go forth, confiding in him who can preserve in the midst of a burning fiery furnace, sensible that it was our duty to do all the good we could to our suffering fellow mortals.

RICHARD ALLEN

We set out to see where we could be useful. The first we visited was a man in Emsley's alley, who was dying, and his wife lay dead at the time in the house, there were none to assist but two poor helpless children. We administered what relief we could, and applied to the overseers of the poor to have the woman buried. We visited upwards of twenty families that day—there were scenes of woe indeed! The Lord was pleased to strengthen us, and remove all fear from us, and disposed our hearts to be as useful as possible.

ABSALOM JONES

In order the better to regulate our conduct, we called on the mayor next day, to consult with him how to proceed, so as to be most useful.

RICHARD ALLEN

The first object he recommended was a strict attention to the sick, and the procuring of nurses. This was attended to by Absalom Jones and William Gray; and, in order that the distressed might know where to apply, the mayor advertised the public that upon application to them they would be supplied.

ABSALOM JONES

Soon after; the mortality increasing, the difficulty of getting a corpse taken away, was such, that few were willing to do it, when offered great rewards. The black people were looked to. We then offered our services in the public papers, by advertising that we would remove the dead and procure nurses.

RICHARD ALLEN

Our services were the production of real sensibility—we sought not fee nor reward, until the increase of the disorder rendered our labour so arduous that we were not adequate to the service we had assumed.

ABSALOM JONES

The mortality increasing rapidly, obliged us to call in the assistance of five hired men, in the awful discharge of interring the dead. They, with great reluctance, were prevailed upon to join us. It was very uncommon at this time, to find any one that would go near, much more, handle, a sick or dead person.

RICHARD ALLEN

Mr. Carey, in page 106 of his third edition, has observed, that "for the honor of human nature, it ought to be recorded, that

some of the convicts in the jail, a part of the term of whose confinement had been remitted as a reward for their peaceable, orderly behavior, voluntarily offered themselves as nurses to attend the sick at Bush-hill; and have, in that capacity, conducted themselves with great fidelity and care.”

ABSALOM JONES

Here it ought to be remarked, (although Mr. Carey hath not done it) that two thirds of the persons, who rendered these essential services, were people of colour, who, on the application of the elders of the African church (who met to consider what they could do for the help of the sick) were liberated, on condition of their doing the duty of nurses at the hospital at Bush-hill; which they as voluntarily accepted to do, as they did faithfully discharge, this severe and disagreeable duty. May the Lord reward them, both temporally and spiritually.

RICHARD ALLEN

When the sickness became general, and several of the physicians died, and most of the survivors were exhausted by sickness or fatigue; that good man, Doctor Rush, called us more immediately to attend upon the sick, knowing we could both bleed; he told us we could increase our utility, by attending to his instructions, and accordingly directed us where to procure medicine duly prepared, with proper directions how to administer them, and at what stages of the disorder to bleed.

ABSALOM JONES

And when we found ourselves incapable of judging what was proper to be done, to apply to him, and he would, if able, attend them himself, or send Edward Fisher, his pupil, which he often

did; and Mr. Fisher manifested his humanity, by an affectionate attention for their relief.

RICHARD ALLEN

This has been no small satisfaction to us; for, we think, that, when a physician was not attainable, we have been the instruments, in the hand of God, for saving the lives of some hundreds of our suffering fellow mortals.

ABSALOM JONES

We feel ourselves sensibly aggrieved by the censorious epithets of many, who did not render the least assistance in the time of necessity, yet are liberal of their censure of us, for the prices paid for our services, when no one knew how to make a proposal to any one they wanted to assist them.

RICHARD ALLEN

At first we made no charge but left it to those we served in removing their dead, to give what they thought fit—we set no price, until the reward was fixed by those we had served. After paying the people we had to assist us, our compensation is much less than many will believe.

ABSALOM JONES

We do assure the public, that all the money we have received, for burying and for coffins which we ourselves purchased and procured, has not defrayed the expense of wages which we had to pay to those whom we employed to assist us.

RICHARD ALLEN

And we repeat our assurance, that this is the fact, and we add another, which will serve the better to explain it: We have buried several hundreds of poor persons and strangers, for which service we have never received, nor never asked any compensation.

ABSALOM JONES

We feel ourselves hurt most by a partial, censorious paragraph in Mr. Carey's second edition, of his account of the sickness in Philadelphia, pages 76 and 77, where he asperses the blacks alone, for having taken the advantage of the distressed situation of the people. That some extravagant prices were paid, we admit; but how came they to be demanded? The reason is plain.

RICHARD ALLEN

It was with difficulty persons could be had to supply the wants of the sick, as nurses; applications became, more and more numerous, the consequence was, when we procured them at six dollars per week, and called upon them to go where they were wanted, we found they were gone elsewhere ; here was a disappointment ; upon enquiring the cause, we found, they had been allured away by others who offered greater wages, until they got from two to four dollars per day. We had no restraint upon the people.

ABSALOM JONES

It was natural for people in low circumstances to accept a voluntary, bounteous reward; especially under the loathsomeness of many of the sick, when nature shuddered at the thoughts of the infection, and the talk assigned was

aggravated by lunacy, and being left much alone with them. Had Mr. Carey been solicited to such an undertaking, for hire, Query, "what would he have demanded?" but Mr. Carey, although chosen a member of that band of worthies who have so eminently distinguished themselves by their labours, for the relief of the sick and helpless - yet, quickly after his election, left them to struggle with their arduous and hazardous task, by leaving the city.

RICHARD ALLEN

'Tis true Mr. Carey was no hireling, and had a right to flee, and upon his return, to plead the cause of those who fled; yet, we think, he was wrong in giving so partial and injurious an account of the black nurses; if they have taken advantage of the public distress? Is it any more than he hath done of its desire for information.

ABSALOM JONES

We believe he has made more money by the sale of his "scraps" than a dozen of the greatest extortioners among the black nurses.

RICHARD ALLEN

The great prices paid did not escape the observation of that worthy and vigilant magistrate, Matthew Clarkson, mayor of the city, and president of the committee.

ABSALOM JONES

He sent for us, and requested we would use our influence to lessen the wages of the nurses, but on informing him of the cause, i.e. that of the people overbidding one another, it was

concluded unnecessary to attempt any thing on that head; therefore it was left to the people concerned.

RICHARD ALLEN

That there were some few black people guilty of plundering the distressed, we acknowledge; but in that they only are pointed out, and made mention of, we esteem partial and injurious; we know as many whites who were guilty of it; but this is looked over, while the blacks are held up to censure.

ABSALOM JONES

Is it a greater crime for a black to pilfer, than for a white to privateer?

RICHARD ALLEN

We wish not to offend, but when an unprovoked attempt is made, to make us blacker than we are, it becomes less necessary to be over cautious on that account.

ABSALOM JONES

Therefore, we shall take the liberty to tell of the conduct of some of the whites. We know six pounds was demanded by, and paid, to a white woman, for putting a corpse into a coffin; and forty dollars was demanded, and paid, to four white men, for bringing it down the stairs.

RICHARD ALLEN

Mr. and Mrs. Taylor both died in one night; a white woman had the care of them; after they were dead she called on Jacob Servoss, esq. for her pay, demanding six pounds for laying them out; upon seeing a bundle with her, he suspected she had

pilfered; on searching her, Mr. Taylor's buckles were found in her pocket, with other things.

ABSALOM JONES

An elderly lady, Mrs. Malony, was given into the care of a white woman, she died, we were called to remove the corpse, when we came the woman was laying so drunk that she did not know what we were doing, but we know she had one of Mrs. Malony's rings on her finger, and another in her pocket.

RICHARD ALLEN

Mr. Carey tells us, Bush-hill exhibited as wretched a picture of human misery, as ever existed. A profligate abandoned set of nurses and attendants (hardly any of good character could at that time be procured), rioted on the provisions and comforts, prepared for the sick, who (unless at the hours when the doctors attended) were left almost entirely destitute of every assistance.

ABSALOM JONES

The dying and dead were indiscriminately mingled together. The ordure and other evacuations of the sick, were allowed to remain in the most offensive state imaginable. Not the smallest appearance of order or regularity existed. It was in fact a great human slaughter house, where numerous victims were immolated at the altar of intemperance.

RICHARD ALLEN

It is unpleasant to point out the bad and unfeeling conduct of any colour, yet the defence we have undertaken obliges us to remark, that although "hardly any of good character at that time could be procured" yet only two black women were at this time in the

hospital, and they were retained and the others discharged, when it was reduced to order and good government.

ABSALOM JONES

The bad consequences many of our colour apprehend from a partial relation of our conduct are, that it will prejudice the minds of the people in general against us—because it is impossible that one individual, can have knowledge of all, therefore at some future day, when some of the most virtuous, that were upon most praiseworthy motives, induced to serve the sick, may fall into the service of a family that are strangers to him, or her, and it is discovered that it is one of those stigmatised wretches, what may we suppose will be the consequence? Is it not reasonable to think the person will be abhorred, despised, and perhaps dismissed from employment, to their great disadvantage, would not this be hard? and have we not therefore sufficient reason to seek for redress?

RICHARD ALLEN

We can with certainty assure the public that we have seen more humanity, more real sensibility from the poor blacks, than from the poor whites. When many of the former, of their own accord rendered services where extreme necessity called for it, the general part of the poor white people were so dismayed, that instead of attempting to be useful, they in a manner hid themselves—a remarkable instance of this.

ABSALOM JONES

A poor afflicted dying man, stood at his chamber window, praying and beseeching every one that passed by, to help him to a drink of water; a number of white people passed, and instead

of being moved by the poor man's distress, they hurried as fast as they could out of the sound of his cries - until at length a gentleman, who seemed to be a foreigner came up, he could not pass by, but had not resolution enough to go into the house, he held eight dollars in his hand, and offered it to several as a reward for giving the poor man a drink of water, but was refused by everyone, until a poor black man came up, the gentleman offered the eight dollars to him, if he would relieve the poor man with a little water, "Master" replied the good natured fellow, "I will supply the gentleman with water, but surely I will not take your money for it" nor could he be prevailed upon to accept his bounty, he went in, supplied the poor object with water, and rendered him every service he could.

RICHARD ALLEN

A poor black man, named Sampson, went constantly from house to house where distress was, and no assistance without fee or reward; he was smote with the disorder, and died, after his death his family were neglected by those he had served.

ABSALOM JONES

Sarah Bass, a poor black widow, gave all the assistance she could, in several families, for which she did not receive any thing; and when any thing was offered her, she left it to the option of those she served.

RICHARD ALLEN

A woman of our colour, nursed Richard Mason and son, when they died, Richard's widow considering the risk the poor woman had run, and from observing the fears that sometimes rested on her mind, expected she would have demanded something

considerable, but upon asking what she demanded, her reply was half a dollar per day. Mrs. Mason, intimated it was not sufficient for her attendance, she replied it was enough for what she had done, and would take no more. Mrs. Mason's feelings were such, that she settled an annuity of six pounds a year, on her, for life. Her name is Mary Scott.

ABSALOM JONES

An elderly black woman nursed - with great diligence and attention; when recovered he asked what he must give for her services, she replied "a dinner, master, on a cold winter's day," and thus she went from place to place rendering every service in her power without an eye to reward.

RICHARD ALLEN

A young black woman, was requested to attend one night upon a white man and his wife, who were very ill, no other person could be had; great wages were offered her. She replied, "I will not go for money, if I go for money God will see it, and maybe make me take the disorder and die, but if I go, and take no money, he may spare my life." She went about nine o'clock, and found them both on the floor; she could procure no candle or other light, but stayed with them about two hours, and then left them. They both died that night. She was afterward very ill with the fever. Her life was spared.

ABSALOM JONES

Caesar Cranchal, a black man, offered his services to attend the sick, and said, I will not take your money, I will not sell my life for money. It is said he died with the flu.

RICHARD ALLEN

A black lad, at the Widow Gilpin's was entrusted with his young Master's keys, on his leaving the city and transacted his business, with the greatest honesty, and dispatch, having unloaded a vessel for him in the time, and loaded it again.

ABSALOM JONES

A woman, that nursed David Bacon, charged with exemplary moderation, and said she would not have any more.

RICHARD ALLEN

It may be said, in vindication of the conduct of those, who discovered ignorance or incapacity in nursing, that it is, in itself, a considerable art, derived from experience, as well as the exercise of the finer feelings of humanity—this experience, nine tenths of those employed, it is probable were wholly strangers to.

ABSALOM JONES

We do not recollect such acts of humanity from the poor white people, in all the round we have been engaged in. We could mention many other instances of the like nature, but think it needless.

RICHARD ALLEN

It is unpleasant for us to make these remarks, but justice to our colour, demands it!

ABSALOM JONES

Mr. Carey pays William Gray and us a compliment; he says, our services and others of their colour, have been very great. By naming us, he leaves these others, in the hazardous state of being classed with those who are called the "vilest." The few that were discovered to merit public censure; were brought to justice, which ought to have sufficed, without being canvassed over in his "Trifle" of a pamphlet—which causes us to be more particular, and endeavour to recall the esteem of the public for our friends, and the people of colour, as far as they may be found worthy; for we conceive, and experience proves it, that an ill name is easier given than taken away. We have many unprovoked enemies, who begrudge us the liberty we enjoy, and are glad to hear of any complaint against our colour, be it just or unjust; in consequence of which we are more earnestly endeavouring all in our power, to warn, rebuke, and exhort our African friends, to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and man; and, at the same time, would not be backward to interfere, when stigmas or oppression appear pointed at, or attempted against them, unjustly; and, we are confident, we shall stand justified in the fight of the candid and judicious, for such conduit.

RICHARD ALLEN

Mr. Carey's first, second, and third editions, are gone forth into the world, and in all probability, have been read by thousands that will never read his fourth - consequently, any alteration he may hereafter make, in the paragraph alluded to, cannot have the desired effect, or atone for the past; therefore we apprehend it necessary to publish our thoughts on the occasion. Had Mr. Carey said, a number of white and black Wretches eagerly

seized on the opportunity to extort from the distressed, and some few of both were detected in plundering the sick, it might extenuate, in a great degree, the having made mention of the blacks.

ABSALOM JONES

We can assure the public, there were as many white as black people, detected in pilfering, although the number of the latter, employed as nurses, was twenty times as great as the former, and that there is, in our opinion, as great a proportion of white, as of black, inclined to such practices.

RICHARD ALLEN

It is rather to be admired, that so few instances of pilfering and robbery happened, considering the great opportunities there were for such things: we do not know of more than five black people, suspected of anything clandestine, out of the great number employed; the people were glad to get any person to assist them—a black was preferred, because it was supposed, they were not so likely to take the disorder, the most worthless were acceptable, so that it would have been no cause of wonder, if twenty causes of complaint occurred, for one that hath.

ABSALOM JONES

It has been alleged, that many of the sick, were neglected by the nurses; we do not wonder at it, considering their situation, in many instances, up night and day, without any one to relieve them, worn down with fatigue, and want of sleep, they could not in many cases, render that assistance, which was needful: where we visited, the causes of complaint on this score, were not numerous.

RICHARD ALLEN

The case of the nurses, in many instances, were deserving of commiseration, the patient raging and frightful to behold; it has frequently required two persons, to hold them from running away, others have made attempts to jump out of a window, in many chambers they were nailed down, and the door was kept locked, to prevent them from running away, or breaking their necks, others lay vomiting blood, and screaming enough to chill them with horror. Thus were many of the nurses circumstanced, alone, until the patient died, then called away to another scene of distress, and thus have been for a week or ten days left to do the best they could without any sufficient rest, many of them having some of their dearest connections sick at the time, and suffering for want, while their husband, wife, father, mother, [and other family members] have been engaged in the service of the white people.

ABSALOM JONES

We mention this to show the difference between this and nursing in, common cases, we have suffered equally with the whites, our distress hath been very great, but much unknown to the white people. Few have been the whites that paid attention to us while the black were engaged in the other's service. We can assure the public we have taken four and five black people in a day to be buried. In several instances when they have been seized with the sickness while nursing, they have been turned out of the house and, wandering and destitute, until taking shelter wherever they could (as many of them would not be admitted to their former homes) they have languished alone and we know of one who even died in a stable.

RICHARD ALLEN

Others acted with more tenderness, when their nurses were taken sick, they had proper care taken of them at their houses. We know of two instances of this.

ABSALOM JONES

It is even to this day a generally received opinion in this city, that our colour was not so liable to the sickness as the whites. We hope our friends will pardon us for setting this matter in its true state.

RICHARD ALLEN

The public were informed that in the West-Indies and other places where this terrible malady had been, it was observed the blacks were not affected with it. **Happy would it have been for you, and much more so for us, if this observation had been verified by our experience.**

ABSALOM JONES

When the people of colour had the sickness and died, we were imposed upon and told it was not with the prevailing sickness, until it became too notorious to be denied, then we were told some few died but not many.

RICHARD ALLEN

Thus were our services extorted at the peril of our lives, yet you accuse us of extorting a little money from you.

ABSALOM JONES

The bill of mortality for the year 1793, published by Matthew Whitehead, and John Ormrod, clerks, and Joseph Dolby, sexton,

will convince any reasonable man that will examine it, that as many coloured people died in proportion as others. In 1792, there were 67 of our colour buried, and in 1793 it amounted to 305; thus the burials among us have increased more than fourfold, was not this in a great degree the effects of the services of the unjustly vilified black people?

RICHARD ALLEN

Notwithstanding the compliment Mr. Carey hath paid us, we have found reports spread, of our taking between one, and two hundred beds, from houses where people died; such slanderers as these, who propagate such wilful lies are dangerous, although unworthy of notice. We wish if any person hath the least suspicion of us, they would endeavour to bring us to the punishment which such atrocious conduct must deserve and by this means, the innocent will be cleared from reproach, and the guilty known.

ABSALOM JONES

We shall now conclude with the following old proverb, which we think applicable to those of our colour who exposed their lives in the late afflicting dispensation:

RICHARD ALLEN

God and soldier, all men do adore,
In time of war, and not before;

ABSALOM JONES

When the war is over, and all things righted,
God is forgotten, and the soldier slighted.

3.

MATTHEW CAREY

Address of Matthew Carey to the Public. Philadelphia, April 4, 1794.

Since I have taken up the pen, it may not be amiss, to offer a few observations respecting a publication, ushered into the world by Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, two free Africans, in which abuse is very liberally bestowed on me. At the time of its appearance, I judged it undeserving of notice—and was determined, in silence, to let the public decide on the justice of their appeal; from this determination, I should not have departed, had I not engaged in the present to reply to Argus, and thought it might be advisable to touch on the other attack.

The paragraph which has called forth the indignation of Jones and Allen, and afforded them an excuse for no small portion of very indecent, unjust, and ungrateful reflections on me, is the following: “The great demand for nurses afforded an opportunity for imposition, which was eagerly seized, by some of the vilest of the blacks. They extorted two, three four, and even five dollars a night for attendance, which would have been well paid by a single dollar. Some of them were even detected, in plundering the houses of the sick. BUT IT IS UNJUST, TO CAST A CENSURE ON THE WHOLE, FOR THIS SORT OF CONDUCT, AS MANY PEOPLE HAVE DONE. *The services of Jones, Allen, and Gray, and others of their colour, have been very great, and DEMAND PUBLIC GRATITUDE.*”*

I would fain ask the reader, is this the language of an enemy? Is it not rather that of an advocate, endeavoring to palliate facts,

which are not attempted to be denied? Does this deserve railing or reproach? Is it honorable for Jones and Allen to replay evil for good?

4.

MATTHEW CAREY

A Short Account of the Malignant Fever, Lately Prevalent in Philadelphia, With a Statement of the Proceedings That Took Place on the Subject in Different Parts of the United States, by Matthew Carey, Final Edition, 1830.

When the yellow fever prevailed in South Carolina, the negroes, according to that accurate observer, Dr. Lining, were wholly free from it. "There is something very singular in the constitution of the negroes," says he, "which renders them not liable to this fever; for though many of them were as much exposed as the nurses to this infection, yet I never knew one instance of this fever among them' though they are equally subject with the white people to the bilious fever." The same idea prevailed for a considerable time in Philadelphia; but it was erroneous. They did not escape the disorder; however, there were scarcely any of them seized at first, and the number that were finally affected, was not great; and it is asserted, by an eminent doctor, "it yielded to the power of medicine in them more easily than in the whites."

The error that prevailed on this subject had a salutary effect; for, at an early period of the disorder, few white nurses could be procured; and, had the negroes been equally terrified, the sufferings of the sick, great as they actually were, would have

been exceedingly aggravated. At the period alluded to, the elders of the African church met, and offered their assistance to the Mayor, to procure nurses for the sick, and aid in burying the dead. Their offers were accepted; and Absalom Jones, Richard Allen, and William undertook the management of these two several services. The great demand for nurses, afforded an opportunity for imposition, which was eagerly seized by some of those who acted in that capacity, **both coloured and white**. They extorted two, three, four, and even five dollars a night for such attendance, as would have been well paid for, by a single dollar. Some of them were even detected in plundering the houses of the sick. On examining the books of the hospital at Bushhill, it appears, that there were nearly twenty coloured people received there, of whom about three-fourths died.

A REFUTATION
Facilitation Questions

1. The pamphlets, letters, advertisements, and rebuttals the actors just performed were written in our nation's capital over 231 years ago, during Philadelphia's Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793. A quote often attributed to Mark Twain is, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." **How do these historic accounts from 1793 rhyme with the experiences of nurses today? In spite of the distance of time, what resonated with you, what touched you, what was true?**
2. In the first edition his popular pamphlet, *A Short Account of the Malignant Fever*, Matthew Carey made distorted claims about the service of African Americans during the Yellow Fever Epidemic in Philadelphia, accusing Black nurses, in particular, of extortion, writing, "The great demand for nurses was eagerly sized by some of the vilest of the blacks. They extorted two, three, four, and even five dollars a night for attendance, which would have been well paid by a single dollar." **Note that Carey, the publicist, wasn't there. The irony of history being written by a publicist who wasn't there vs. first responders who provided care. How do Carey's claims about nurses and frontline workers reverberate today?**
3. Dr. Benjamin Rush employed a false, but widely held, medical theory that African Americans were inherently immune to Yellow Fever to mobilize members of the Black community to care for the sick and afflicted. While Matthew Carey was told that the theory of African American immunity proved erroneous, he observed that fewer African Americans were "seized by the disorder," and that it "yielded to the power of medicine more easily in them than whites." In his description, Carey also minimized and erased the suffering of African Americans during the Yellow Fever, undercounting the deaths of Black nurses at Bush Hill Hospital and ignoring the fatality rate in the Black community—roughly equal to that in the white community. **How do these narratives resonate with health inequities that you may have experienced or seen today?**
4. Matthew Carey was a publicist echoing what he heard, not what he saw. To be clear wasn't there. He simply echoed what he heard. But, like most of the population of Philadelphia with the means, he left town. Absalom Jones and Richard Allen's *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia in the Year 1793* is the first federally copyrighted work by Black authors in the United States. It is also first instance of published protest/anger by African Americans of its kind. At the center of the text is a question I'd like to ask. **Who writes history? What is at stake? And what would we think today if Jones and Allen hadn't written their refutation?**
5. As evidenced in his public address, Carey felt unfairly attacked by Jones and Allen. Nevertheless, he did go on to amend the fourth edition of his text, conceding that medical theory of immunity proved wrong, and that "the great demand for nurses, afforded an opportunity for imposition, which was eagerly seized by some of those who acted in that capacity, both coloured and white." **If you were advising Carey about how best to word his revision, what would you suggest that he write or say?**