

Anthony Burns to Richard Henry Dana, Jr., 23 August 1854

Charles Suttle, Anthony Burns' enslaver, had Burns held in jail after he was forced back to Virginia from Boston. Suttle may have thought Burns would run away again. Burns valued his freedom and himself as a person. Suttle only valued him for the free labor (work) that he gave him. In the past, Suttle had also profited (earned money) from Burns when other men paid Suttle for Burns to work for them.

In this letter, Burns writes to his former lawyer, the white abolitionist Richard Henry Dana, Jr., from jail. Burns urges his Massachusetts supporters to buy his freedom. In Boston, abolitionists had offered to pay Suttle \$1,200 for Burns' freedom, but Suttle refused. Now, Burns believes Suttle will take less money for him, as long as he doesn't know the buyers are Burns' friends. The language in this letter has been simplified and the spelling and grammar have been standardized.

Richmond, Virginia
August 23rd, 1854

My dear Mr. Dana,

I take this opportunity to write you a short note and I hope my letter finds you in good health. I am glad to say that I am still alive through the mercy of God and the Lord Jesus Christ who have protected me through much suffering. I am glad you and all my friends in Boston tried to protect me even though you could not keep me from returning to slavery. My suffering would have been one thousand times worse than it is now if no one had tried to help me.

But I am yet bound in jail and am wearing my chains night and day. I am waiting for some kind person to come rescue me. The man or men that brought me to this jail said that they were going to buy me, but they haven't, and I don't think they will. They told Mr. Suttle, my owner, not to let my friends in Boston have me, but I am for sale. If you all will please buy my freedom I will be a friend to you for the rest of my life. Please arrange for some of your friends to come to Alexandria, Virginia. Don't say that you come from Boston. Find Mr. Suttle and ask him if has sold me. If he has not, ask how much it will cost to buy me. You can get me for a low price--he would take \$800 for me now. I pray in the name of the Lord that you will help me out of my suffering this one time, please.

Anthony Burns

P.S. Don't write to me until I tell you to.

Cite this letter: Letter from Anthony Burns to Richard Henry Dana, Jr., 23 August 1854, From Dana Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.