

Abolitionists Were Tardy in Arriving

(Fourth of 10 articles)

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Negroes, naturally, resisted slavery from its inception, using every available means from suicide to insurrection.

Among white men, however, sluggish consciences were slow to function. There were no noted abolitionists in America prior to 1830.

The vanguard of white liberals who finally began to protest formed the American Anti-Slavery Society. Within a few years, there were more than 2000 chapters of eloquent, tireless agitators for liberation of the black man.

Early white exponents of abolitionism—much written about—were the articulate Boston patrician Wendell Phillips; Quaker Lucretia Mott, founder of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery League; Prudence Crandall, a white teacher who outraged racists by teaching young Negro girls in her private boarding school in Connecticut; the Grimke sisters, Quaker abolitionists from a slave-holding family, who discovered in old age they had Negro nephews; the Beecher family and, of course, wild-eyed John Brown.

They produced voluminous pamphlets, books, tracts, even anti-slavery sculptures for mass distribution. But their "capper" in arousing public indignation, of course, was Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which sold 300,000 copies immediately after it appeared in 1852. ("Uncle Tom", who submitted deferentially, even lovingly to whites, is today used as a Negro term of derision. An 'Uncle Tom' is an

athema to blacks who have developed Afro-pride.)

¶ Focal Point

Focal point of abolitionist action was the "Underground Railroad," also known as "the business of Egypt." It was, quite simply, a network of stopping and hiding points for fugitive slaves heading North, aided by abolitionists "conductors" and "guides."

Some 75,000 slaves fled north in the 1850s along.

It is another irony that history has concentrated on the roles of white abolitionists, while little is known of Negro abolitionists with famous exceptions like Frederick Douglass, the ex-slave who turned into an eloquent fighter against the peculiar institution."

There were also unheralded heroes like Robert Purvis and William Still, Philadelphia Negroes said to have helped 9000 fugitives to freedom; and heroines like Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth.

¶ Union Scout

Harriet, a slave from birth in Maryland, escaped at age 25, she chose not to stay in safety. Instead, she returned South at least 19 times to lead some 300 other slaves northward or into Canada. Later, during the Civil War, she was to serve as a scout for the Union Army, often slipping behind the lines by posing as a Southern slave. Rewards of up to \$40,000 were offered for Harriet, but she was never captured.

Sojourner Truth, who chose that name herself, as a "pilgrim on this earth," was

a tall woman with a gigantic spirit. She took another approach to abolition. She gained her own freedom thru New York's gradual emancipation act, then worked for others' freedom from the lecture platform and in the courts.

Sojourner couldn't read or write, but had great natural wit and lectured well. Long after the war, Sojourner continued her good works by raising funds for freedom. She later took on the cause of women's suffrage, and lectured until her death in 1883 at age 85. "I's not dyin'," she remarked, "I's goin' home like a shootin' star."

Another remarkable contender for Negro rights was Rev. J. W. Loguen, the son of a slave mother and her white owner. Born free in Ohio, his mother was kidnaped and sold to a Tennessee "moonshiner." As a boy, young Loguen stole "the master's" mare and ran away to New York.

¶ Advocated Force

He became a highly respected minister in Syracuse, N. Y., but he was also one of the first Negroes to advocate force—if necessary—to end slavery. ("We must give our physical as well as intellectual powers to the defense of human rights. Freedom cannot be 'bought', as it is only owed to God.") Time after time, Rev. Loguen went armed to rescue runaway slaves captured under the Fugitive Slave Law.

After Rev. Loguen's activities were publicized, he received, in 1860, a letter from the wife of his former master. In it, she asked him for \$1000 in lieu of his body, which he had "stolen." (Not to mention the horse!) She was a cripple, she said, and so

hard up she had been forced to sell some of her land and Rev. Loguen's brother and sister, still slaves.

"You say you're a cripple," Rev. Loguen replied, "and I do pity you from the bottom of my heart. Nevertheless, I am indignant beyond words . . . that you should be willing to impale and crucify us all out of compassion for your foot or leg. Be it known to you that I value my freedom, to say nothing of my mother, brothers and sisters, more than your whole body; more than my own life; more than all the lives of all the slaveholders and tyrants under heaven."

¶ Douglass Spoke

At a Fourth of July picnic in 1852, the city of Rochester, N. Y. asked Frederick Douglass—then editing his abolitionist paper, North Star—to speak. He did.

Mr. Douglass asked his "fellow citizens" what the Fourth of July "could possibly mean to the American slave. It reveals to him more than all other days of the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is a constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing, empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery — a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation of the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than . . . the United States at this very hour."

(NEXT: "The American Negro and the Civil War.")