

## AMERICANS HISTORY BOOKS FORGOT

# America Is as Much Our Country as Yours

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(Second of 10 articles)

ONCE Virginia legalized slavery in 1661 — 42 years after slaves first landed there — the institution spread to other colonies: Maryland, the Carolinas and Georgia particularly.

Shipment was greatly accelerated by the chartering of the Royal African Company (RAC) in 1672. RAC maintained a strong hold on the trade for more than a century, but several New England merchants took to the trade independently and grew quite wealthy too.

By 1808, there were one million slaves in the country.

New England and the "middle colonies" — New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware — never really took kindly or extensively to slavery. Puritans who had come to the New World looking for religious freedom, and Dutch, Swedish, German and Quaker farmers had some moral scruples about the matter. Such slaves as were in the North were generally domestics, and many learned skilled trades.

## Mainly Needed in South

The preponderance of these million souls were in the South, where they were needed in "gangs" for the demanding field labor of tobacco, rice and cotton plantations.

Nowhere, tho — not even in New England — could it be said Negroes were welcomed hospitably to their new "homes."

Slave insurrections sprang up as early as 1712. In one noteworthy instance, 134 Negroes were brought to trial in New York City in 1741 when fires broke out thruout the city. With no proof but hysteria, 13 slaves were burned alive, 18 hanged, 70 transported to the West Indies.

Fear of further rebellions and resentment of the increasing mulatto population led most colonies to pass harsh slave codes which stayed in force many decades. These called for hanging for murder or rape; 60 lashes and cutting off of the ears, for thievery; and whipping, maiming or branding for associating with whites or free Negroes.

On the other side of the ledger, it is true that a few whites took anti-slavery stands as early as 1688. Germantown, Pa., Friends (Quakers) adopted the first protest against slavery then, and by 1758, Philadelphia Friends withheld membership from anyone who bought or sold slaves.

## There Was Crispus Attacks

A great turning point in sentiment among New Englanders was the Revolutionary War. Over 5000 Negroes — both slaves and freedmen — fought alongside American soldiers for this country's independence. It is typical of the way Negroes were "written out" of American history for years that so few people know the name of the first man killed in the Boston Massacre, March 5, 1770. He was Crispus Attucks, a runaway Negro slave who helped revolutionaries storm the British garrison in Boston. Attucks believed in white freedom too.

At the battle of Breed's Hill (better known as Bunker Hill), 1775, some of the New Englanders who gave a noble account of themselves were named Peter Salem, Salem Poor, Titus Coburn, Cato Howe, Alexander Ames, Seymour Burr, Pomp Fiske and Prince Hall. All Negroes.

Ironically, when the Declaration of Independence asserted the "rights of man" in 1776, it didn't even mention the slavery problem.

Independently, Vermont abolished the slave trade in 1777, and in 1784 Connecticut and Rhode Island adopted laws for the gradual emancipation of slaves. New York formed an abolition society in 1785, and an African Free School in 1787. In that same

year, Congress adopted the Northwest Ordinance, prohibiting slavery in the northwest territory.

## They Bought Freedom

In the relatively "freer" climate of New England, many slaves were permitted to "hire out" part of their time and save their earnings for freedom. Among these was Amos Fortune, a Massachusetts tanner who served a succession of masters from boyhood until he bought his freedom in 1770, at age 60.

Amos must have been as vigorous as determined. He bought and freed one wife who died in 1775; another in 1778, who died a year later; and a third and her daughter in 1779. In 1781, well into old age, he moved to Jaffrey, N. H., set up a tanning business, and became one of the town's leading citizens.

When he died, Amos left bequests to both the church and the local school district. Proceeds from the fund still provide annual prizes for public speaking in Jaffrey's high school.

His tombstone reads:

Sacred to the memory of Amos Fortune, who was born free in Africa. A slave in America, he purchased liberty, professed Christianity, lived respectably and died hopefully, Nov. 17, 1801. Age 91.

Amos was a member of a race proclaimed "inferior" and incapable of education and enterprise . . . the same race which produced such early American poets as the slave-turned-Puritan, Phillis Wheatly. Phillis' master and mistress were more kindly than most, and taught her to read. She was writing widely acclaimed poetry by the age of 20. In refutation of the Puritan notion that her race bore the "mark of Cain," she wrote this verse:

Some view our race with scornful eye:  
Their colour is a diabolic die,  
Remember, Christians—Negroes, black as Cain,  
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

That race also produced a brilliant astronomer, Benjamin Banneker, who wrote a series of scientific almanacs much admired by Thomas Jefferson.

## Under the Constitution

Congress' answer to these early hopes for freedom was to adopt, sanction and protect slavery anew under the United States Constitution, 1789. Representation was apportioned on a three-fifths basis for "other persons" (slaves), the slave trade was extended for 20 years, and strict provisions made for the return of runaway slaves. (Scores of them were fleeing north already.)

This same constitution was defended again by Negroes when America fought the British in 1812. Andrew Jackson might have lost the crucial Battle of New Orleans without the help of an extraordinary — but segregated — regiment of Negro soldiers.

A few white consciences stirred again, but their solution — the American Colonization Society, formed in 1816 to ship free Negroes back to their native Africa — failed dismally. Fewer than 15,000 left for Liberia over a period of many years.

By this time, Negroes had come to consider themselves Americans, for good or ill.

"Tell us no more about colonization," r u n a w a y slave-turned-abolitionist David Walker told citizens in 1829, "for America is as much our country as it is yours."

It was "radical" talk like that which helped the south decide it didn't want to be part of America.

NEXT: Life on the old plantation.

To be sold by HENRY C. BOGART, next Door to Mr. John Vanderpiegle.----He has also Molasses for Sale.

This early Colonial advertisement offered molasses, also.