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THE NEGRO
IN THE
ABOLITIONIST
MOVEMENT

Herbert Aptheker



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INTRODUCTION

The crusade against the institution of Negro slavery in the United States has received two dominant types of treatment. Yet these have one thing in common: both "forget" the Negro.

One group is made up of chauvinistic, reactionary writers like Ralph V. Harlow, Avery Craven, and Arthur Y. Lloyd, who damn the Abolitionists (white people in every case) as mischievous fanatics, at best. More generally they denounce them as knaves who attacked with lies and falsehoods a lovely, patriarchal civilization, and who thus "forced" the slaveholders to defend that civilization.

These normally aloof academicians become exceedingly heated when they contemplate the Abolitionist movement, for they vaguely grasp the revolutionary implications of that struggle. It had as its aim the overthrow of a vested interest representing billions of dollars' worth of private property, and the realization in life of the Declaration of Independence, with its promise of equality and brotherhood for millions of dark-skinned people whose condition had made a mockery of that declaration. Such anti-Abolitionist writers must be aware that the fight against chattel slavery was but one battle in man's everlasting struggle for independence, justice, and peace; they know that this was a prelude to the next battle which, in the words of Wendell Phillips, one of the leading Abolitionists, was to be "that between the working class and the money kings." Realizing in effect their own alignment with reaction, they deride and slander and falsify the valiant efforts made a few generations ago by American men and women, Negro and white, to destroy the greatest immediate obstacle then existing to the forward march of

humanity; namely, the institution of slavery under which men owned those who were their workers.

The other group, to which belong historians like Albert B. Hart, Gilbert H. Barnes, and Dwight L. Dumond, writes from a liberal, humanitarian angle. The revolutionary implications of the Abolitionist movement are not too clear for these historians, yet they do recognize the brutality and ugliness of slavery and so cannot help but admire those who aided in its destruction. Characteristically, however, they fail to consider the vital importance of the Negro people in breaking their own chains, both by independent work and by work within and through mixed groups.

Because of these authors the Abolitionist movement has been dealt with, when at all sympathetically considered, as a white man's benevolent association. The Negro, when mentioned, has been presented as an alms-taking, passive, humble, meek individual. A striking illustration of this appeared in a recent work by Professor Dwight L. Dumond.* The reader will search the index of that book in vain for the name of a single Negro. He will find there mention of comparatively obscure white anti-slavery people, like Edward Weed and Calvin Waterbury, Hiram Foote and Augustus Wattles, but Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, Henry Highland Garnet, David Ruggles, William Wells Brown, Samuel E. Cornish, Robert Purvis, Richard Allen, David Walker and Sojourner Truth and literally scores more, the activities of any one of whom were infinitely more important than the combined labors of the other four, receive not a word.

Negro scholars themselves, above all the distinguished historian, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, have done much to uncover the truth concerning the vital role of their forebears in this crusade. But even here the work has been largely of a scat-

* Dwight L. Dumond, *Anti-slavery Origins of the Civil War in the United States*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

tered, piecemeal, isolated nature, lacking significant details and, above all, synthesis. It is, however, true that the great body of pioneering spade work has been accomplished, often in spite of severe obstacles, by Negro investigators.

Full glory is to be granted to the dauntless white men and women, William L. Garrison and Susan B. Anthony, Theodore D. Weld and Elizabeth C. Stanton, John Brown and Prudence Crandall, Charles Sumner and Lucretia Mott, who braved the derision of the press and pulpit, faced the taunts and blows of the "respectable" mobs, tasted the abominations of nineteenth-century prisons rather than cease the struggle for the liberation of millions of Negroes in chains. There is no desire to lessen their just claim on our admiration.

But to overlook or neglect in this battle the Negro soldiers who filled these prisons; who felt the whip's lash on their backs; built the Underground Railroad and were its passengers; organized societies long before the American Anti-Slavery Society was born and published newspapers years before the *Liberator* appeared, and made possible by active support and aid both that society and that newspaper—to "forget" all this is as absurd and erroneous as it would be to "forget" Washington, Jefferson, and Sam Adams in writing the history of the American Revolution.

Let us then, briefly, investigate the role of the Negro in the epic contest against human bondage which forms one of the greatest chapters in the history of the United States.

APOLOGETICS OF SLAVOCRACY

There were two main deceptions upon which rested the apologetics for the institution of slavery. On the one hand it was asserted that the system was an eminently beneficial one, with ease, contentment, and happiness as characteristic of the laboring population. And on the other hand it was asserted that the people who were enslaved were innately

inferior to their masters and so their condition represented merely the adaptation in practice of a position predetermined by nature and by God. Thus, in the words of a young slaveholder, "if it could be proved that Negroes are more than a link between man and brute, the rest follows of course, and he must liberate all his."

These basic frauds could be and were most effectively combated only by the Negro people themselves. Contented, were they? Merry in their misery? Delighting in their degradation? If so, whence came these furtive, fleeting figures, half starved and in tatters, forcing their way into every corner of the nation and into Canada and into Mexico? Is it perhaps not true, then, that they came in large numbers to our little Salem, Ohio, or Rochester, New York, or Chester, Pennsylvania, or Worcester, Massachusetts, from Maryland or Virginia or South Carolina or Alabama? Did they, or did they not actually walk or crawl or swim those 300 or 600 or 1,200 miles, confining themselves to the untracked and unmarked forests and wastelands like so many hunted beasts, advertised for like so many stray cattle? We know that they did. Theodore Weld wrote of one who reached New York in 1838: "He has come 1,200 miles from the lower part of Alabama, traveling only at night, feeding on roots and wild berries. He swam *every river* between Tuscaloosa and Pennsylvania."

And is it not true that others among these supposed felicitous inhabitants of a patriarchal paradise fled away to congregate in the swamps and mountains of the South and form their own communities, do their own farming, stand off raiding parties, wage guerrilla warfare? We know that they did; and here are the slaveholders' own newspapers to prove it: the *Wilmington Chronicle* in July, 1795, the *Raleigh Register* in June, 1802, and November, 1818, the *Edenton Gazette* in October, 1811, and May, 1820, the *Charleston City Gazette* in October, 1823, the *Norfolk Herald* in May

and June, 1823, the *Mobile Register* in June, 1827, the *Louisiana Advertiser* in June, 1836, the *New Orleans Picayune* in July, 1837, the *New Orleans Bee* in October, 1841, the *Hanesville Free Press* in March, 1844, the *Vicksburg Whig* in May, 1857, the *Norfolk Day Book* in October, 1859. Did these communities become so numerous that state militia units and even United States Army troops with heavy cannon were sent against them? Yes, time and again, as in Florida in 1816, South Carolina in 1816, North Carolina in 1821 and Virginia in 1823.

And whence come these reports that every so often pierce thick veils of censorship, of conspiracies and rebellions, on sea and land, of slave-created fires and slave-poisoned food? Who are these Gabriels and Peters and Veseys and Turners and Toms and Catos and their thousands of fellow conspirators and insurrectionists? What of the victims of punitive reprisals whose seared flesh perfumes South Carolina's air, whose swaying bodies ornament Louisiana's scenery? Are these the quondam meek, contented, docile people of whom we have heard a word or two? Something of the effect of these things is indicated in these words of an influential contemporary, written in 1856:

Here we have amid all the nonsense about the contented condition of the slave, amid all the lovely Southside portraits of the institution, accounts of a widespread conspiracy—how widespread we know not—in different states, ready to rush forth and deluge the country in blood, evoke a war of mutual extermination, and call for northern interference.

THE BROADENING OF THE STRUGGLE

The last phrase in this quotation brings up another vital factor behind the growth of the Abolitionist movement that flowed, in large part, from the activities of the slaves themselves; namely, the nationalizing of the institution and its

instruments of suppression, the inevitable broadening of the struggle for equality and liberty for the Negro people into one to preserve and extend the rights and freedom of all other Americans.

In order to maintain the institution of human bondage it was necessary to identify the institution with patriotism and the entire social order, and to shun as pariahs and finally to condemn as criminals all who questioned the validity of that identification. The slave-owning class did this first within its own bailiwick so that in the South any sort of freedom—of speech, press, religion, petition, assembly—was a shadow, a name and, with some, a dream. But more was needed to maintain and strengthen that institution than the stultification of the original territory claimed for slavery. It became necessary, or it was declared to be necessary, to expand the bounds of slavery so that on the one hand areas of refuge for fleeing slaves and centers from which disaffection was spread might be destroyed, and on the other so that the density of the slave population within a restricted area might not become so great as to make the control of that population impossible. These considerations were important, to cite but a few examples, in this nation's acquisition of West and East Florida and Texas, and even in a Southern sponsored exploratory trip into the Amazon Valley.

Again, it was necessary to prevent the flight of slaves, and, above all, when that was impossible to recapture those who had fled, so that the practice might not spread so widely as to endanger the institution itself. For this two things were important: first, regulatory measures to control the Negroes, and, second, penalizing measures for those who aided them.

Important, too, was the suppression of articulate anti-slavery sentiment in the nation as a whole as had been done in the South. Let anti-slavery presses be destroyed or boycotted, anti-slavery assemblies broken up or forbidden, anti-slavery agitators stoned and jailed, anti-slavery petitions

treated with contempt and disdain. (The Congress of the United States actually tabled the Declaration of Independence, because of its implicit anti-slavery sentiments, when presented as a petition from American citizens!) Negro seamen were dangerous and could not be allowed to leave their ships, under threat of imprisonment, when in the harbors of the Southern states. If Great Britain protested that such action was harmful to certain of her nationals, that was just too bad; and if Massachusetts also protested and sent a distinguished son, Judge Samuel Hoar, to plead personally for fair treatment to her citizens, that, too, was just too bad. The venerable judge himself was in fact compelled to flee for his life. And, notwithstanding the myriad devices of repression developed within the South, the slaveholders felt it advisable to have the armed forces of the Federal government always available, and these were on several occasions used as either slave-catching agencies or for purposes of suppression.

These things, stemming from the activities of the Negro people, put many pregnant questions before the minds of all Americans: Shall our tax money go to support an armed force used to suppress efforts at liberation? Shall we pay magistrates for the "service" of returning men and women to slavery? Shall we ourselves refuse the call of those who come to our doors hungry and in tatters? Shall we turn them away empty handed? Shall we even lend a hand in capturing these fugitives? And if we do feed and clothe and shelter these men and women and children, are we indeed criminals subject to fine and imprisonment? And may not my neighbor, may not I, speak our mind on this subject, write what we please, read what we wish? Is our country always to be a byword and an abomination in the four corners of the earth? Shall we on July 4 praise liberty and equality and on three hundred and sixty-four other days deny both to millions of our fellows?

The poison of racism received quantities of antidotes from the work of the Negroes themselves; it was not only the magnificent personages prominent in the Abolitionist movement itself who were important cleansing agents. In the birth struggle of the republic had fought some four or five thousand Negroes. They too had crossed the Delaware, shivered at Valley Forge, stormed Stony Point, bled at Monmouth, besieged Savannah, trapped Cornwallis. The farmers of western Massachusetts who rallied under Shays against the aristocrats and parasites of the East had selected "Moses Sash of Worthington . . . a Negro man and Laborer" to be "a Captain and one of Shays' Council." Every sixth man in the navy that held its own against the ships of England in the War of 1812 was a Negro, and of them Commodore Stephen Decatur had said: "They are as brave men as ever fired a gun. There are no stouter hearts in the service." Among those who held off veterans of Wellington's campaigns in New Orleans were scores of Negroes, and their courage won the unstinted praise of their commander, Andrew Jackson.

The achievements of many Negroes in the ante-bellum years gave the lie to the ethnological prop of bourbon theory. Thus Henry Blair, a Maryland Negro, invented machines for harvesting corn and James Forten of Philadelphia (a leader in the anti-slavery fight) invented an improved device for handling sails, while the sugar-refining industry was revolutionized by the evaporating pan conceived by Norbert Rillieux, a Louisiana Negro. As early as the eighteenth century the medical knowledge of the Negro, James Derham, had attracted such national attention that the eminent Dr. Benjamin Rush devoted an article to his work. In the nineteenth century several Negroes, notwithstanding great difficulties, won recognition as excellent physicians, among them James McCune Smith, Martin Delany, James Ulett, Peter Ray, John De Grasse, and David P. Jones.

Dentists, too, like James McCrummell, Joseph Wilson, and Thomas Kennard, and noted lawyers like Robert Morris, Malcolm B. Allen, and George B. Vashon appeared. Excellent mathematicians, like Benjamin Banneker (who helped survey the site for the city of Washington), theologians like Lemuel Haynes, poets like Phyllis Wheatley, George Moses Horton, and Frances E. Harper, actors like Ira Aldridge, artists like Patrick Reason and Robert S. Duncanson contributed to the national culture.

And they disturbed the nation's conscience. For every new device these people conceived, every sick person they restored to health, every case they argued, every sermon delivered, every poem published, every play performed, and every painting executed served to refute the stereotyped view of the Negro people, the existence of which was so important for the slaveholders. It made many people realize that a system, which attempted to degrade a people who, overcoming such barriers, could produce such figures, was wrong and evil and should be destroyed.

Other activities of the Negro people more directly connected with the anti-slavery struggle, but still not part of an organized Abolitionist movement, were important in furthering the cause. Notable among these were the efforts made by Negroes to accumulate enough money to buy freedom for themselves and others near and dear to them. In this way thousands broke away from slavery and many were able actively to enter the field of anti-slavery work. Moreover, the practice itself was a telling blow at the entire ideological base of the system. It evoked the appreciative tribute of persons like Theodore Weld, the Abolitionist, who observed it in action. When he was in Cincinnati in 1834, he discovered that about 75 per cent of the three thousand Negroes in that city had "worked out their own freedom," and that many among them were "toiling to purchase their friends" still in bondage. Said Weld:

I visited this week about thirty families and found that some members of more than half of these families were still in bondage, and the father, mother, and children were struggling to lay up money enough to purchase their freedom. I found one man who had just finished paying for his wife and five children. Another man and wife had bought themselves some years ago and have been working night and day to buy their children; they had just redeemed the last and had paid for themselves and children \$1,400! Another woman had recently paid the last installment of the purchase money for her husband. She had purchased him by taking in washing and working late at night, after going out and performing as help at hard work. But I cannot tell half, and must stop. After spending three or four hours and getting facts, I was forced to stop from sheer heartache and agony.

Some Negroes combined public tours with personal labor in an effort to raise the ransom money, thus bringing the subject of slavery to the doors of thousands of citizens who had hitherto viewed it as a matter which in no way concerned them. Thus, Peter Still obtained his liberty and that of his wife and three children at a total cost of \$5,500, a sum raised in three years by his own work and by speeches delivered throughout New England, New York, and Pennsylvania. Lunsford Lane of North Carolina similarly obtained the freedom of himself, his wife, and seven children (at a cost of \$3,500), by making speeches chiefly in Massachusetts and Ohio. As a final example may be mentioned Noah Davis, a shoemaker of Fredericksburg, Virginia, who was able to raise \$4,000 with which to purchase his own freedom and that of his wife and five children by twelve years of persistent toil, as well as by making public appeals in New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts.

In the words of Levi Coffin, the Quaker, these pleas were "hard to refuse, almost impossible if one brought the case home to himself." They were heard one day in 1849 by James Russell Lowell and, though short of funds, he could not

resist "such an appeal," for "if a man comes and asks us to help him buy a wife or child, what are we to do?" The cry of a son—"Help me *buy my mother!*" and the cry of a mother—"Help me *buy my children!*" were not easily denied or quickly forgotten, and they rang in the ears of many Americans a few generations ago, causing a host to vow that such exhortations must cease.

Of greater significance, however, than the efforts to buy freedom—indeed, probably the most important single item in the entire anti-slavery crusade—was the flight northward of tens of thousands of slaves. This brought the staunchest, most unswerving, and most dramatic individuals into the organized Abolitionist movement. The flight of these slaves produced a keen feeling of insecurity among the slaveowners and thus moved them to severe acts of restriction which, in turn, aroused great opposition to slavery. The very appearance of numerous living testimonials to the "joys" of the patriarchal system, the very act, on the part of Negro and white, of offering the fugitives food and shelter and advice (which through repetition grew into the Underground Railroad system) had a tremendous effect in producing and developing anti-slavery feeling.

No people anywhere in the world have shown greater ingenuity and heroism than have the American Negro people in their efforts to flee the land of sorrow. First come the heroes who started out, often knowing no more than that somewhere North was freedom, with no guide but the North star, no road but the forest and swamp, seeing in every white person a probable enemy, and leaving behind folks whom they loved. They went; thousands of them. Many failed, died in the attempt or were recaptured and suffered lashes or were sold again.

But others succeeded,* and their success was made possible

* At least sixty thousand fugitive slaves reached the North from 1830 to 1860.

originally by the aid of other Negroes, free and slave, an assistance given in spite of the heavy penalties involved. Ship stewards, railroad workers, and teamsters among the Negroes in the southern communities were of great importance in this regard. Several, like Leonard Grimes in Richmond and Samuel D. Burris in Wilmington, were sentenced to many years' imprisonment. Some idea of how widespread this activity was appears from the fact that out of eighty-one free Negroes in the Richmond penitentiary in 1848 ten were serving sentences for the "crime" of aiding or abetting slaves to escape from their masters.

Once beyond the Mason and Dixon line, particularly until about 1835, Negroes again were outstanding, and almost alone, in assisting the fugitives either to find a region within the United States that was relatively safe, or to get into Canada where protection from re-enslavement was practically certain. Thus the Quaker, Levi Coffin, whose splendid service for fugitive slaves over a period of some thirty years earned him the title of president of the Underground Railroad, testified that when he left North Carolina and settled in Newport, Indiana, in 1826 he observed that "fugitives often passed through that place and generally stopped among the colored people." He then offered to assist in this work and so entered upon his career as a leading deliverer of human property. Indeed, as late as 1837 James G. Birney made a similar observation while in Cincinnati. He learned that two fugitive slaves, a man and wife, had recently passed through the town, and that they had been cared for by Negroes. This, he remarked, was typical, since "such matters are almost uniformly managed by the colored people. I know nothing of them generally till they are past."

Later, as the Abolitionist movement grew and expanded and the rails of the Underground Railroad branched through hundreds of homes in scores of communities, embracing thousands of workers on the road, Negroes remained prom-

inent among them. Among those who led in the movement were William Still in Philadelphia, David Ruggles in New York, Stephen Myers in Albany, Frederick Douglass in Rochester, Lewis Hayden in Boston, J. W. Loguen in Syracuse, Martin R. Delany in Pittsburgh, George De Baptist in Madison, Indiana, John Hatfield in Cincinnati, William Goodrich in York, Pennsylvania, Stephen Smith, William Whipper, and Thomas Bessick in Columbia, Pennsylvania, Daniel Ross and John Augusta in Norristown, Pennsylvania, Samuel Bond in Baltimore, Sam Nixon in Norfolk. There were others known only by pseudonyms such as William Penn, and Ham and Eggs, while still others were referred to simply as "a ferryman on the Susquehanna" or "an old seamstress in Baltimore."

This railroad did not have only stationary agents, for some went into the South "to drum up business," that is, to bring the message to the slaves that there were people anxious to see them free and ready to help them escape. Some of the individuals who undertook this exceedingly dangerous work were white people, like Alexander M. Ross, James Redpath, William L. Chaplin, Charles Torrey, Calvin Fairbanks, and Delia Webster. Among these agitators the best known was John Brown who undertook this activity on the urgings of a Missouri slave known only as Jim. In December, 1858, having just recovered from typhoid fever, he and a few comrades led by Jim went from Kansas into Missouri, freed ten slaves, killed a resisting slaveholder, and headed north. Though outlawed, pursued by posses, and with a reward on his head offered by the President of the United States, John Brown led his courageous band of men and women through Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, and Michigan into Canada where he left them in March of 1859.

But the vast majority of those who "carried the war into Africa" were Negroes, the names of a few of whom are known, like Josiah Henson, William Still, Elijah Anderson,

John Mason, and, above all, that heroic woman, Harriet Tubman. About the latter, who was known to her people as Moses, John Brown said in his laconic way that she was "the most of a man, naturally, that I ever met with." She made trip after trip from the land of slavery to the land of freedom, personally leading over three hundred human beings on the long and weary trek from bondage to liberty. Though engaged in this work for years, and with heavy rewards offered for her capture, dead or alive, she was never taken. She served as nurse, spy and guerrilla fighter through the course of the Civil War. Her death on March 10, 1913, in Auburn, New York, closed an almost incredible life wholly devoted to the emancipation of her people.

There were many others who took part in this work; it has been estimated that in 1860 about five hundred Negroes from Canada alone went into the South to rescue their brothers.

BRINGING THE TRUTH TO THE COUNTRY

The flight of slaves did more than deal a direct blow at the structure of the slavocracy, and more than precipitate organized anti-slavery activity. It also put fresh vigor and determination into the hearts of the Abolitionists, for as William Still, the Negro director of the key Philadelphia branch of the Underground, wrote, "the pulse of the four millions of slaves and their desire for freedom" were brought home to them, dramatically and incessantly, by the steady flow of new arrivals.

And it brought slavery to the thresholds of the American people. Early in 1847 a Maryland fugitive arrived at Bronson Alcott's home in Concord, Massachusetts. Alcott's *Journal* for February 9 reads:

Our friend the fugitive, who has shared now a week's hospitality with us, sawing and piling my wood, feels this new taste of freedom

yet unsafe here in New England, and so has left us for Canada. We supplied him with the means of journeying, and bade him a good god-speed to a freer land. . . . He is scarce thirty years of age, athletic, dextrous, sagacious, and self-relying. He has many of the elements of the hero. *His stay with us has given image and a name to the dire entity of slavery* and was an impressive lesson to my children, bringing before them the wrongs of the black man and his tale of woes. [Italics mine—H.A.]

Frequently, spectacular escapes of slaves, or attempts to rescue apprehended fugitives, or legal battles waged by anti-slavery groups to prevent the return of Negroes did for the nation as a whole what these individual visits did for families like the Alcotts. A few examples of cases that attracted great attention may be offered.

In the year 1842 a slave named Nelson Hackett escaped from Arkansas and made his way to Canada, a pilgrimage of some 1,100 miles. The governor of the state started extradition proceedings on the grounds of burglary, since of course Hackett did not own the clothes he wore. The governor-general of Canada returned Nelson Hackett, but he escaped again, and was again captured; a third time this redoubtable Negro fled, and this time he was not retaken.

In 1843, seven slaves got into a small boat in Florida and sailed out to sea, their destination, freedom. For seven weeks they braved the ocean, were finally picked up by a British vessel, and reached the Bahamas, exhausted, famished, but free.

Two Virginia slaves, a man and wife, she almost white in appearance, escaped by traveling as master and slave, the woman disguised as a sickly young man, and the husband as "his" faithful attendant. Thus, in 1849, William and Ellen Craft appeared before the amazed eyes of America to tell their story; they told it also in Canada and in England.

Peculiar freight was hauled in 1848 from Richmond to Philadelphia (a twenty-six-hour trip in those days) by the

Adams Express Company. For in a trunk three feet long, two feet wide, and less than three feet deep lay a man, Henry Brown, with biscuits and water. That trunk had been forwarded by a white man, a shoe dealer named Samuel A. Smith, to a Philadelphia agent of the Underground. Henry "Box" Brown arrived safely, and tremendous gatherings of people in many Northern cities came to hear him explain why he preferred a twenty-six-hour trip in a coffin to remaining contented and happy as a slave.

Not all of these stories end happily. Margaret Garner, her husband, and three children reached a Negro agent's house on the outskirts of Cincinnati, but their trail was picked up, and they were captured after a bitter fight. Mrs. Garner attempted to kill her children and herself, but succeeded only in killing a daughter. She said it was better that way, for the child would now never know what a woman suffers as a slave. She begged to be tried for murder for she "will go singing to the gallows rather than be returned to slavery"; but her wish was denied and the master regained his property.

The masters often had a difficult time trying to recover their fugitive slaves even if they caught up with them. Slaves who had themselves felt the lash were skeptical of mere moral suasion as a means of converting America, slaveholders included, to an anti-slavery viewpoint. They did not share the faith expressed in the public pronouncements of the Garrisonian Abolitionists concerning the efficacy of such an appeal. In the words of one of them, the Reverend J. W. Loguen:

I want you to set me down as a *Liberator* man. Whether you will call me so or not, I am with you in heart. I may not be in hands and head—for my hands will fight a slaveholder—which I suppose the *Liberator* and some of its good friends would not do.... I am a fugitive slave, and you know that we have strange notions about many things.

Rescue attempts, apparently spontaneous in origin, but soon resulting from planned organizational work, were frequent and often spectacular enough to capture the entire nation's attention. A very early example of this occurred in Massachusetts in 1793, immediately after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of that year. A Negro was seized by one claiming to be his master and proceedings were instituted under the terms of the act for his return to the South. Josiah Quincy, son of the revolutionary patriot of the same name, a twenty-one year old attorney who had just received his degree, brought what legal lore he had to the assistance of the Negro. He was about to begin his argument before the honorable court when a group of Negroes intent upon action rather than argument entered the room. Mr. Quincy "heard a noise, and turning around he saw the constable lying on the floor, and a passage opening through the crowd, through which the fugitive was taking his departure without stopping to hear the opinion of the court."

Such events continued to recur and to attract attention even before the birth of a nationwide Abolitionist movement in the 1830's. Indeed, there is evidence to show that Negroes had actually formed some sort of machinery for this very purpose, for by 1826 newspapers carried items complaining about the difficulty of returning escaped slaves. This, it was explained, arose because news of such an attempt quickly spread and brought crowds of Negroes who always tried and often succeeded in making off with the captive.

In the generation prior to the Civil War not a year and scarcely a month passed without such an event. This aided in publicizing the Abolitionist movement and in activizing large groups of the population. A few examples will illustrate this:

A Baltimore slaveholder arrived in Boston in 1836 and directed a sheriff to arrest two Negroes who, he said, had fled from him. This was done, but in August of that year a large

number of Negroes, mostly women, succeeded, over the rather inert opposition of the sheriff (who was Charles Sumner's father), in getting at the fugitives and safely spiriting them away.

Six years later another exciting case aroused the populace of the same city and had wide repercussions. A Virginia slave, Latimer, was arrested by state officers and was about to be returned when news of the occurrence spread. Mass meetings were held and when it was learned that the master would manumit Latimer for the sum of \$400 the money was quickly raised, and the Negro became a free man. Latimer became active in subsequent agitational work, and his case was an important factor in bringing about in 1842 the passage by the Massachusetts legislature of a Personal Liberty Law which forbade state officials from taking part in the enforcement of the federal laws concerning rendition of fugitive slaves. During the next six years five other Northern states passed similar legislation which greatly aggravated, in the minds of the slaveholders, the fugitive slave problem, and moved them to pass the drastic and infamous Act of 1850. This in turn was one of the precipitants of the crises that were characteristic of the next decade.

The Act of 1850 provided for the appointment of special Federal commissioners to aid in slave hunting and forced all United States marshals and deputies whom they might appoint to aid in the search. One needed but convince a commissioner of the Negro's identity—and in this process only the white person's testimony was acceptable—in order to have the Negro turned over to the claimant. All citizens were liable to a call to aid in the prosecution of the statute. The decision of the commissioner was final, and his fee was \$5 if he discharged the Negro, and \$10 if he decided he was indeed a fugitive slave!

The first case that arose from this act is indicative of how firm and united was the response of the Negro people to its

challenge. On the day the law became effective a Miss Brown of Baltimore claimed a free Negro, James Hamlet, of New York City as her slave, convinced the commissioner of this, and had the man shipped off to her home before he was able to communicate with anyone. Soon, however, the facts were learned: 1,500 Negroes gathered at a church, subscribed a total of \$500, and with this ransomed Hamlet.

Vigilance committees, made up of Negro and white, sprang up throughout the North. Their purpose was to block the arrest or bring about the rescue of fugitive slaves, thus making the raising of ransom money unnecessary. An action which took place in New Bedford, Massachusetts, was typical: "Between six and seven hundred colored citizens many of whom are fugitives are here and are determined to stand by one another and live or die together. The colored citizens abandoned their separate places of worship and assembled in a body at Liberty Hall," where they let the world in general, and slaveholders and their agents in particular, know that those who sought to enslave them would be faced with unity and militance.

Thousands, Negro and white, were involved in subsequent rescue attempts, many successful, such as those of Shadrach in Boston, Jerry in Syracuse, Johnson in Chicago in 1851, and Glover in Racine, Wisconsin, in 1854. A slaveholder named Gorsuch experienced this unity and militance one day in September, 1851, when he, together with professional man catchers and some United States deputy marshals, arrived in Sadsbury, Pennsylvania, seeking a fugitive slave who was being sheltered at the home of a free Negro named William Parker. The Philadelphia vigilance committee, headed by William Still, had advance notice of Gorsuch's mission and sent an agent, again a Negro, to warn the people at Sadsbury.

Gorsuch arrived, demanded the fugitive, and was refused. The Parker home was then attacked. Its owner sounded a

horn and swarms of Negroes rushed to the scene, armed with clubs, axes, and a few guns. A battle ensued, the slave catchers were routed, several were wounded, and Gorsuch himself was killed. About thirty Negroes, among whom were Susan Clark, Eliza Brown, Harvey Scott, Miller Thompson, and William Parker, and two white friends, Castner Hanway and Elijah Lewis, were arrested and charged with treason and with levying war against the government of the United States. The defense was conducted by two outstanding lawyers, John M. Read and Thaddeus Stevens. These men conducted the defense eloquently. The sympathies of the people were very largely with the defendants, and every one of them was acquitted, a resounding victory for the anti-slavery cause.

At rare intervals in these cases the slaveholders, backed by the might of the Federal government, won, and the slaves were returned. But these were Pyrrhic victories, because the commotion and excitement attending the return of every slave meant that the question of slavery had been brought before the minds of tens of thousands of people.

Outstanding among these were the cases of Thomas Sims in 1851 and Anthony Burns in 1854, both occurring in Boston.

Thomas Sims had fled from Georgia and was living in Boston. In the evening of April 3, 1851, he was arrested on the demand of his master. Tremendous agitation swept the city in the ensuing hours. Deputy marshals, police, and militia swarmed over the city, and huge chains were swung around the courthouse in which the commissioner was deciding Sims's fate. Only these precautions prevented the city's Negroes, aided by their white allies (including Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Theodore Parker), from forcibly rescuing the manacled human offering of appeasement.

The commissioner chose to earn \$10 rather than \$5 in this case, and Thomas Sims, heavily guarded, was sent back

to Savannah and slavery. There he was severely whipped in public, jailed for two months, sold to a slave trader in Charleston, thence shipped to New Orleans and finally bought for work as a mason in Vicksburg. And, not very much later, when Grant's men were besieging Vicksburg in 1863, one of the many slaves who escaped to that army of liberation was Thomas Sims, who was dispatched to the North as a prize of war and as a returning hero.

Characteristic responses to this case were recorded by two individuals in almost the same words at the height of the excitement. Theodore Parker commented bitterly, "A few years ago they used to tell us, 'Slavery is an abstraction.' 'We at the North have nothing to do with it.'" And Bronson Alcott remarked, "The question 'What has the North to do with slavery?' is visibly answered."

The Anthony Burns case was an even greater sensation. This young man escaped from Richmond in February, 1854, and made his way to Boston. Agents of his master traced him and in May, 1854, his case came before the commissioner. Quite by chance, Richard H. Dana who was in the courtroom at the moment came to the defense of the Negro, and sent out the first public word of the affair.

The news spread like wildfire; spontaneous monster protest meetings took place, and militant Abolitionists led by the Negro, Lewis Hayden, and by Thomas Wentworth Higginson, attempted to crash the prison's bars and free Anthony Burns, but they failed. On June 2 a groaning, hissing, straining mass of humanity lined the streets of Boston and watched a lone, handcuffed man being led back to slavery. Twenty-two companies of state militia, four platoons of marines, a battalion of United States artillerymen, and the city's police force were used to ensure the performance of this shameful act, the cost of which, to the Federal government alone, came to \$40,000.

Bronson Alcott's entry in his journal indicates clearly

the effect of this upon a broad segment of public opinion, moving some of it to a demand for militant action:

Witness Burns's rendition today sadly, and ashamed of the Union, of New England, of Boston, almost of myself too. I must see to it that my part is done hereafter to give us a Boston, a mayor, a governor and a President—if indeed a single suffrage, or many, can mend matters essentially. So I shall vote as I have never done hitherto, for a municipal government and a state. Possibly a country may yet be rescued from slavery. . . . Yet something besides voting must do it effectually.

That many vowed as did Alcott is demonstrated by the fact that every Massachusetts official who took part in returning Burns was retired from public life at the next election.

Sufficient funds were soon raised by public subscriptions to free Burns. He spent two years at Oberlin College and at the Fairmount Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, and then toured the country making anti-slavery speeches. In his own words, these were illustrated by "a panorama, styled the Grand Moving Mirror—scenes of real life, startling and thrilling incidents, degradation and horrors of American slavery."

ORGANIZED ANTI-SLAVERY EFFORTS

This type of work on the part of Burns is indicative of the organized anti-slavery activities of the Negro people which began long before the 1850's and continued until the battle was won.

We have, hitherto, focused our attention, with the exception of the Underground Railroad, upon the unorganized, spontaneous phases of the anti-slavery struggle, and extraneous factors affecting its strength, rather than upon the movement itself as an organized, disciplined, cohesive force.

Cohesiveness, discipline, organization were vital if the Abolitionist cause was to succeed, for its purpose was of a

profoundly revolutionary nature. Unless the effort is seen in this light its character is but dimly grasped, for the Abolitionists set themselves the task of subverting and destroying a fundamental vested interest whose roots were deep and whose branches were far spread.

It is true that success finally came only after the maturing of a new class, the industrial bourgeoisie, whose interests were opposed to those of its predecessor, but this success was not automatic, did not come of itself. It was produced by men and women, Negro and white, who had for decades been sowing the seed, talking, writing, petitioning, voting, and who finally piloted an aroused America through the maelstrom of a four-year Civil War. How much work had to be done before the nation willingly set itself the task of excising the cancer of slavery from its vitals; before a long-legged Westerner named Lincoln would agree that the operation should continue even though it go on "until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's 250 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword"!

The job was not for the faint-hearted. The slaveholders represented for the first half of the nineteenth century the most closely knit and most important single economic unit in the nation, their millions of bondsmen and millions of acres of land comprising an investment of billions of dollars. This economic might had its counterpart in political power giving its possessors dominance within the nation and predominance within the South. Listen to the words of James Hammond, a rich slaveholder and leading South Carolina politician. Commenting in 1845 on the bitterness of the words passing between the slaveholding and Abolitionist groups, he addressed the latter:

But if your course was wholly different—if you distilled nectar from your lips and discoursed sweetest music, could you reasonably indulge the hope of accomplishing your object by such means? Nay,

supposing that we were all convinced, and thought of Slavery precisely as you do, at what era of "moral suasion" do you imagine you could prevail on us to give up a thousand millions of dollars in the value of our slaves, and a thousand millions of dollars more in the depreciation of our lands, in consequence of the want of laborers to cultivate them?

And the products wrung from these slaves and this land, the rice, sugar, cotton, tobacco, made up the blood and bones of the businesses of the merchant capitalists of the North; they, too, rested finally upon the broad black backs of the slaves, and so they allied themselves with the Negro's immediate exploiters. Thus it was that a partner in a large New York mercantile house summoned Samuel J. May, the Abolitionist, one day in 1835, and said:

Mr. May, we are not such great fools as not to know that slavery is a great evil and a great wrong. But it was consented to by the founders of the Republic. It was provided for in the Constitution of our Union. A great portion of the property of the Southerners is invested under its sanction; and the business of the North as well as of the South, has become adjusted to it. There are millions upon millions of dollars due from the Southerners to the merchants and mechanics of this city alone, the payment of which would be jeopardized by a rupture between the North and the South. We cannot afford, sir, to let you and your associates succeed in your endeavor to overthrow slavery. It is not a matter of principle with us. It is a matter of business necessity. We cannot afford to let you succeed. And I have called you out to let you know, and to let your fellow laborers know, that we do not mean to allow you to succeed. We mean, sir, to put you Abolitionists down—by fair means, if we can, by foul means, if we must.

And if all this were not enough, the slaveholders did not fail to appreciate, and to point out to their Northern class brothers, that the philosophy of Abolitionism—its equalitarianism, its progressivism, and, above all, its attack upon the sanctity of private property—represented an ultimate threat to the interests of all exploiters. As a Virginian wrote

in reply to the questioning of the institution of slavery that flowered following the Nat Turner cataclysm:

This one thing we wish to be understood and remembered—that the Constitution of this state, has made Tom, Dick, and Harry, *property*—it has made Polly, Nancy, and Molly, *property*; and be that property an evil, a curse, or what not, we intend to hold it. Property, which is considered the most valuable by the owners of it, is a nice thing; and for the right thereto, to be called in question by an unphilosophical set of political mountebanks, under the influence of supernatural agency or deceit, is insufferable.

Somewhat later, John W. Underwood, a wealthy Georgian, warned that the “same torch” which, wielded by the Abolitionists, threatened to consume the fabric of the slave South would, one day, “also cause the northeastern horizon to coruscate with the flames of northern palaces.” The essence of the matter was more fully put by a religious and educational leader of South Carolina, Dr. James H. Tornwell, in 1850:

The parties in this conflict are not merely Abolitionists and slaveholders—they are atheists, socialists, communists, red republicans, Jacobins on the one side, and the friends of order and regulated freedom on the other. In one word, the world is the battleground—Christianity and atheism the combatants; and the progress of humanity the stake.

Yes, the Abolitionists were attacking the lords of the lash who controlled the press and pulpit, who represented stability and respectability, and who manipulated the political apparatus. To conquer them required wisdom, level-headedness, energy, organization, and, above all, perfect courage, rooted in deep-seated, overwhelming conviction that human slavery was bad, evil, rotten—a courage and a conviction that scorned compromise, detested opportunism, and gained strength from the enemy’s resistance.

Where would this conviction reside if not in the hearts

and minds of Negro Americans? Who would better know slavery than those whose backs bore its stripes, into whose eyes had been blazoned its indignities and abominations; who, while they spoke and wrote and agitated, were speaking and writing and agitating about that which, even while they labored, was oppressing their own people, often their own children, or their own parents?

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

From the era of the first American Revolution through the years of the second, Negroes were ever in the vanguard of the organized army attacking the slavocracy, seeking out and using to the uttermost whatever possibilities existed to advance the struggle.

Evidence of concerted Abolitionist activity on the part of the Negro people goes back at least to the 1760's when, in Massachusetts, they attempted to challenge the entire legal concept of slavery by bringing an action of trespass against their masters. The next decade was marked by a petition campaign, organized and carried on by Negroes, in which provincial and state governing bodies were urged to destroy slavery, on the ground, as one of the documents put it: "That the God of Nature gave them life and freedom, upon the terms of most perfect equality with other men; That freedom is an inherent right of the human species, not to be surrendered, but by consent, for the sake of social life." There are extant records of eight such petitions, some signed by "a Grate Number of Blackes," in Massachusetts and New Hampshire from 1773 to 1779. One of these, presented in 1775 by Negroes of Bristol and Worcester to the Committee of Correspondence of the latter county, led to the holding of a convention on June 14 of many citizens, which went on record as abhorring Negro slavery and pledging to work for its abolition.

This type of agitation was continued during the remaining years of the eighteenth century and, in addition, one may discern during the same period the beginnings of the Negro's contribution to the vast body of anti-slavery literature and the birth of Negro organizations for emancipation. Particularly to be noted are the petitions of Prince Hall, a Massachusetts Negro, Masonic official, and veteran of the Revolutionary War, and of Absalom Jones, the Pennsylvania religious leader.

The petition signed by Prince Hall alone was presented early in 1788 to the Massachusetts legislature and was aimed at getting that body to outlaw the slave trade. It attracted considerable attention, was the subject of correspondence between such figures as Jeremy Belknap and Ebenezer Hazard, and was printed in full in the Boston *Spy* of April 24, 1788. Other petitions, from white people, followed, and this type of pressure and publicity was influential in bringing about the passage that year of a state ban upon the trade.

The other petition was drawn up in 1799 and signed by "Absalom Jones and others, free men of color, of the city and county of Philadelphia," and presented on January 2, 1800, to the Congress of the United States by Representative Waln. This asked for a Federal anti-slave-trade law, the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, and "the adoption of such measures as shall in due course emancipate the whole of their brethren from their present situation." It provoked an exceedingly sharp and long debate, lasting two days, and was the means of focusing national attention upon the abomination. The petition was finally accepted and referred (and then buried), but only after the House had added the statement that the petitioners, by their boldness and audacity in asking Congress to abolish slavery, had earned the "disapprobation" of the members—and this by a vote of 85 to 1, Mr. Waln alone having the honor of casting a negative vote.

The pen was also wielded for the cause, even this early in

the nation's history. One of the leading magazines in the country, the *American Museum*, published in Philadelphia by Mathew Carey, ran articles written by Negroes (one signed "Othello," the other "A Free Negro") in 1788 and 1789, denouncing slavery and demanding the realization in practice of the Declaration of Independence. The latter article was especially effective, stressing the fact that while white revolutionists were hailed as heroes and martyrs, Negroes who essayed the same task were greeted with derision and treated like depraved criminals. "Do rights of nature cease to be such when a Negro is to enjoy them?" this writer demanded. "Or does patriotism in the heart of an African rankle into treason?"

Others, including Prince Hall, Benjamin Banneker, Absalom Jones, and Richard Allen, published pamphlets in the 1790's in which every essential argument of the Abolitionist movement was enunciated and developed. These works denied the inferiority of the Negro, gave the lie to assertions that the slaves were happy and docile, and warned that the longer the evil continued, the more costly and catastrophic would be its destruction.

The beginnings of Negro organization likewise go back to these years, and no matter what the ostensible purposes of these groups were—religious, philanthropic, or literary—the very act on the part of these oppressed people of joining together was itself revolutionary, and they all, sooner or later, became part and parcel of the entire anti-slavery crusade. In the spring of 1787 Philadelphia Negroes, including Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, William White, Mark Stevenson, William Gray, and others, formed a Free African Society, whose original stated purpose was largely convivial, but which by 1790 devoted itself to anti-slavery agitation, the prevention of Negro kidnaping, and co-operation with other emancipationist groups, such as state manumission societies and Quakers. Shortly afterward Henry Stewart, a member

of this society, moved to Newport, Rhode Island, and established a similar association there. Another such group was formed in New York City in 1795, and within three years still another African Society sprang up in Boston. The interests of the latter society are sufficiently indicated by the fact that it published, in 1808, a pamphlet entitled, *The Sons of Africa: An Essay on Freedom with Observations on the Origin of Slavery*.

EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

The first generation of the nineteenth century witnessed a significant expansion in the anti-slavery activities of the Negro people which did much to prepare the ground for the tilling and harvesting that was to come from 1830 to the Civil War. Among the individuals who stand out during this formative period was Peter Williams, Jr., a minister in New York City, whose efforts to arouse his countrymen to the iniquities of slavery attracted attention as early as 1806. His work in this field continued for thirty years and led to his appointment in 1834 to the Board of Managers of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Events such as large-scale meetings of Negroes occurred in 1807 and 1808 in various Northern cities, notably Philadelphia and New York, celebrating the passage, and the coming into force, of the federal anti-slave-trade law and contributing toward the publicizing of the cause of freedom.

A few years later another Negro whose career was to continue on into the thirties, James Forten of Philadelphia, made himself felt on behalf of his people's liberation. He gained notice in 1813 by his vigorous denunciation of projected Jim Crow regulations in Pennsylvania and in 1817, together with Russell Parrott, was important in bringing together three thousand Philadelphia Negroes. These people went on record as being decidedly opposed to the purposes

of the recently launched American Colonization Society and as determined to win justice for themselves and their enslaved brethren here in their native land, rather than to seek a doubtful refuge elsewhere and so withdrawing from the struggle for the slaves' emancipation. In the words of the assembled thousands:

Let not a purpose be assisted which will stay the cause of the entire abolition of slavery in the United States, and which may defeat it altogether; which proffers to those who do not ask for them *benefits*, but which they consider *injuries*, and which must insure to the multitudes, whose prayers can only reach through us, *misery, sufferings, and perpetual slavery*.

This early meeting and expression of opinion are indicative of the viewpoint of the Negro people. Their well-nigh unanimous opposition was of the utmost importance in crippling the colonization movement (which received support and money from numerous wealthy individuals and even state legislatures, such as those of Maryland and Virginia), and in winning William Lloyd Garrison away from the snare and toward his unequivocal demand for immediate abolition of slavery.

The next decade was marked by worldwide development of progressivism, the most striking manifestation of which in the United States was the triumph of Jacksonianism and the lusty beginnings of a politically conscious labor movement. The growth of anti-slavery feeling was notable, particularly in Great Britain, and keen observers, such as Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams, prophesied as early as 1820 the speedy crystallization of the struggle between the free and the slave systems.

Negroes, ever in the forefront of those struggling against slavery, anticipated and did vital spade work for the flowering of the Abolitionist movement, which came in the 'thirties. Of importance in the immediately preceding years

were the Reverend Nathaniel Paul of the African Baptist Society in Albany, New York, whose radical speeches began to attract attention in 1827, the Reverend John Gloucester of Philadelphia, and William Whipper of the same city. The latter was influential in starting a Reading Room Society in Philadelphia in 1828, the broad purpose of which was the general education of its Negro members and, specifically, the development of anti-slavery sentiment. Similar groups sprang up elsewhere (sometimes demonstrating their emancipation motive in their names, such as the New York African Clarkson Society, 1829). Thus it was that by the time the national anti-slavery groups were formed early in the 'thirties, there already existed about fifty such Negro organizations spread throughout the country and eager to assist and join forces with the newcomers.

The cause had developed sufficiently among the Negro people for them to be able to create and to support a weekly organ devoted to its enhancement. On March 16, 1827, *Freedom's Journal* was published in New York City under the editorship of Samuel E. Cornish and John Russwurm. The journal had agents throughout New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, the District of Columbia, and even in Virginia and North Carolina, as well as in Haiti, Canada, and England.

One of the Boston agents of *Freedom's Journal* was David Walker, a key figure in the history of the Abolitionist movement. He had been born free in North Carolina on September 28, 1785, but the enslavement of his fellow men disgusted and enraged him and he decided he had to "leave this part of the country." He went to Boston where he earned his bread by dealing in old clothes. Here he became active in anti-slavery work, spoke before the Colored Association of that city in December, 1828, and occasionally contributed to, as well as distributed, *Freedom's Journal*.

In September, 1829, he published his *Appeal*, and from

then, until his mysterious death sometime in 1830,* he supervised the distribution and reprinting of this work, which during the last year of his life went into its third edition. And David Walker, back in 1829, went as far as, and in some respects further than, Abolitionist literature in general was to go for another twenty years. He used the Declaration of Independence with telling effect, flinging its immortal words into the teeth of those who upheld slavery. He denounced the Colonizationists and affirmed the Negro's right to the title of American. He excoriated the traitors among his own people, finding it difficult to find words damning enough with which to express his contempt for them. He waxed sarcastic, and exuded bitterness as he contemplated the prevailing hypocrisy, when everyone *talked* about liberty and equality, while millions of human beings were treated worse than brutes. Rebel, he told the slaves, rebel and when "you commence make sure work—do not trifle, for they will not trifle with you—they want us for their slaves and think nothing of murdering us in order to subject us to that wretched condition—therefore, if there is an *attempt* made by us, kill or be killed."

At only one point did David Walker leave the immediate and the practical, and he did this in order to utter this prophecy:

... for although the destruction of the oppressors God may not effect by the oppressed, yet the Lord our God will bring other destructions upon them—for not infrequently will he cause them to rise up one against another, to be split and divided, and to oppress each other, and sometimes to open hostilities with sword in hand.

Walker's *Appeal* was sent by him, through Negro and white sympathizers, into the South and caused great excitement

* "A colored Bostonian" reported in the *Liberator*, Jan. 22, 1831, that it was believed Walker had been murdered. A rumor was current that some person or persons in the South had offered \$3,000 reward to the individual who would kill him.

when discovered in Georgia, Louisiana, and North Carolina.

In 1829 there appeared two other pamphlets from the pens of Negroes. One, called *The Ethiopian Manifesto*, was written by Robert Alexander Young of New York City. Its style is peculiar and mystical, its language biblical, but its message—damning the system of slavery—is clear. A note of militancy appears in the prophesying of the coming of a Negro messiah who shall be invincible and who shall forcibly achieve the liberation of his people. The other, printed in Raleigh (and reissued in Philadelphia in 1837) was the product of a North Carolina slave, George Moses Horton, and consisted of several poems, the essence of which was clearly expressed in the title, *The Hope of Liberty*.

The same year also marks the appearance of the second Negro newspaper, *The Rights of All*, which Samuel E. Cornish brought out in New York shortly after Russwurm's renegacy had forced the *Freedom's Journal* to suspend publication. *The Rights of All* was a radical paper of the highest integrity and quality, and while it lasted but a short time it led the way for a host of other Negro newspapers that shortly followed and that were devoted to, and valued adjuncts of, the Abolitionist movement.

Another major event that antedated the appearance of the *Liberator*, and was a forerunner of similar events which were to play an important part during the years of the pre-Civil War generation, was the assembling of the first national Negro Convention in Philadelphia in September, 1830. This convention denounced the American Colonization Society, called for the slaves' liberation, advocated improved educational and industrial opportunities for Negroes, and formed the American Society for Free Persons of Color to protect and assist such people and to secure a refuge for escaped slaves in Canada. In December of the same year a meeting of several hundred Negroes took place in Richard Allen's Philadelphia church, presided over by Ignatius Beek. A Free

Produce Society was formed here with a membership of about two hundred and thirty people pledged to abstain from the use of slave-produced commodities, a boycott movement which had played and which continued to play a fairly large part in the general anti-slavery struggle, both in the United States and in Europe.

THE PRE-CIVIL WAR GENERATION

These independent efforts of the Negro people continued during the years when large numbers of white people entered into the battle. Thus there existed, in addition to the literary and social organizations, all-Negro Abolitionist societies in many parts of the country. Some, like the Massachusetts General Colored Association, established in 1832 under the leadership of Thomas Dalton and William C. Nell, preceded the formation of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Many such organized bodies existed throughout the nation in cities like New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Newark; Albany, Rochester and Geneva, New York; Middletown, Connecticut; Nantucket, Massachusetts; Lexington, Ohio, and Lexington, Kentucky.

There is also evidence of the existence of Negro societies which had as their objective even more dangerous tasks than the sheltering of fugitives and the spreading of the literature and ideas of Abolitionism. These were dedicated to the aim of overthrowing slavery by every and any possible way, not excepting militant action, and to organizing the rescue of Negroes from slavery by entering the South and helping them escape. The dangerous character of the work of these groups and their illegality demanded secrecy, so that information concerning them is scarce. However there is information that points to the fact that in 1844, the Reverend Moses Dickson of Cincinnati, together with eleven other Negroes, founded an "Order of Twelve of the Knights and

Daughters of Tabor," which had the aims indicated above. In 1846 Dickson started another secret association, the Knights of Liberty, with headquarters in St. Louis. This association aided hundreds of slaves to escape.

In addition to these permanent organizations, conventions of Negroes called to combat slavery, assist Abolitionist societies and publications, fight Jim Crowism and strive for the betterment of conditions for free Negroes, were regular features of America's ante-bellum years. National conventions were held annually from 1830 on, steadily growing in the number of delegates and the areas represented, the chief meeting places being New York and Philadelphia. State conventions also assembled frequently in various parts of the country, while from time to time when such special issues, as colonization, battles against Jim Crowism, or aid to progressive forces, became acute, spontaneous, enthusiastic and well-attended meetings were held.

Characteristic examples may be presented. The fifth annual convention of Negroes of New York state was held September 18-20, 1844, in Schenectady. This was attended by over eighty delegates from eighteen cities and towns in the state, including Albany, Amsterdam, Ballston, Brooklyn, Constantia, Peterstown, Rochester, Syracuse, Troy, and Waterford. Men like the Reverend Henry Highland Garnet, Patrick H. Reason, Stephen Myers, and Dr. James McCune Smith were present. Resolutions demanding absolute equality, immediate emancipation, and total abstinence from slave-produced goods were adopted.

Reference has already been made to anti-colonization meetings held by Negroes soon after the launching of that obnoxious scheme. Similar affairs occurred whenever this movement showed signs of regaining vigor. This was particularly true in 1831 when, as a result of the marked increase of restlessness among the slaves, the master class turned to colonization with heightened ardor.

Typical was the meeting held in African Hall on Nassau Street in Brooklyn, New York, in May, 1831, where the Negroes affirmed, "that we are *men*, that we are *brethren*, that we are *countrymen* and *fellow citizens*" and found it strange indeed that the eminent gentlemen of the Colonization Society "can promise to honor and respect us in Africa, when they are using every effort to exclude us from all rights and privileges at home."

Every Negro meeting and convention attacked chauvinism, but some were wholly devoted to the subject or to some specific manifestation of it. Thus, legal discriminations against the suffrage of New York Negroes moved them to hold repeated meetings in the 1830's with men like Charles L. Reason and Thomas L. Jennings particularly prominent in protesting the disability. A petition campaign was organized, agents tramped through the country and succeeded in getting thousands of signatures, though their efforts were not crowned with success for many years. Similarly, in the 'forties, mass meetings and conventions were organized by Negroes in Ohio in order to secure the repeal of the Black Codes, with John M. Langston, George Carey, David Jenkins, and Dennis Hill leading the battle. This was successful, so that in 1849 the discriminatory legislation of the state of Ohio was repealed.

Others prominent in this never-ending struggle against Jim-Crowism in many different parts of the country were Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Robert Purvis, David Ruggles, Archie P. Webb, Charles L. Remond, Theodore S. Wright, and William C. Nell, the tactics used varying from law suits and petition campaigns to mass demonstrations and physical resistance.

Encouragement and assistance for progressive forces were often the main purposes of Negro meetings. Thus Philadelphia Negroes, led by Frederick Hinton, William Whip-

per, Robert Purvis, James Forten, and Junius C. Morell, met on March 1, 1831, only two months after the launching of the *Liberator*, pledged their support to it, and contributed to its maintenance. Such gatherings were common in various cities throughout the paper's life.

A final and very important contribution made independently by the Negro people to the Abolitionist movement came through their own publications, which included newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and books. Records exist of well over a score of weekly newspapers owned, edited, and published by Negroes and very largely devoted to the anti-slavery effort. New York City was the favorite locale of these organs, but they carried on in several other areas, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Albany, Troy, Rochester, Syracuse, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Baltimore, and San Francisco. Beginning in 1841, there also existed magazines, both monthly and quarterly, produced by Negroes, in which more substantial contributions to the same movement appeared.

Of the anti-slavery books produced by Negroes (largely autobiographical) one can select for notice here only a few of those which were most influential in creating and molding public opinion, for an attempt at compiling a list of all the books that flooded the bookstores would require many pages. Restricting ourselves to a dozen autobiographical works that were not equaled by any other single piece of writing so far as depicting the essence of the institution of slavery is concerned, we may note the narratives of Charles Ball, Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown (this former slave also produced, prior to the Civil War, a travel book, a collection of anti-slavery songs, a novel, and a play); Lewis and Milton Clarke, Josiah Henson (his work so moved a woman named Harriet Beecher Stowe that in 1850 she visited and conversed with him in Boston—an important force behind the production, in 1852, of her epoch-making *Uncle Tom's Cabin*); Jeremiah W. Loguen, Solomon Northup, James

W. C. Pennington (the life of this fugitive slave and militant Abolitionist, who earned the degree of Doctor of Divinity from Heidelberg University sold out its first edition of six thousand copies within the year); Austin Steward, Sojourner Truth, Samuel R. Ward, and, in a class by itself in this literature, the forthright and moving autobiography of Frederick Douglass, first published in Boston in 1845. This classic was bought by eleven thousand people within the United States by the end of 1847; in the same brief period it went through nine editions in Great Britain, was translated into French and German, and throughout the struggle was one of the most widely read works of all ante-bellum writings.

Important works of a historical and sociological nature aiding the cause of Abolitionism were also produced by Negroes. Especially noteworthy were two sharp and biting pamphlets published in New York in 1834 and 1838 by David Ruggles; a pioneer historical work by James W. C. Pennington; an excellent brief work on Toussaint L'Ouverture by Dr. James McCune Smith; a full-length and still very useful study of the Negro's role in American history by William C. Nell; and a detailed socio-economic monograph by Martin R. Delany. Near the end of the ante-bellum era an "Afric-American Printing Company" was established in New Haven, this being "an association for the publication of Negro literature," which has to its credit the issuance of at least one good short historical work.*

UNITED STRUGGLES

Negroes did not, of course, restrict themselves to independent work, but struggled side by side with white people in the common effort. Thus, for example, the production

* James T. Holly, *A Vindication of the Capacity of the Negro Race for Self-Government*, New Haven, 1857.

and sustenance of the chief organ of the Abolitionist movement, the *Liberator*, published in Boston from 1831 to 1865 by William Lloyd Garrison, were made possible by the encouragement and aid of Negroes. From 1830 on, they wrote many letters to Garrison, giving not only moral stimulation, but also that kind of stimulation without which any publication perishes, money and subscriptions. Indeed, in the earliest and most trying years the number of Negro subscribers far outweighed that of white, so that in 1831 out of 450 subscribers, fully 400 were Negroes, and in 1834 "of the whole number of subscribers [2,300] to the *Liberator*, only about one-fourth are white."

Contributions by Negroes to that paper and other Abolitionist publications were exceedingly common. The *Liberator* for February 12, 1831, furnishes an example. About a third of the paper's space is taken up by articles by two Philadelphia Negroes, a call to an anti-colonization mass meeting of Negroes in Boston, signed by James G. Barbadoes, Robert Roberts, Coffin Pitts, James T. Hilton, and Thomas Cole, and an account of a similar meeting recently held in New York under the leadership of Samuel Ennals and Philip Bell. This is fairly typical of the entire thirty-five volumes of the paper. Again, in the first issue of a popular annual called *Autographs for Freedom* one finds a biographical sketch of a Scottish Abolitionist, John Murray, by James McCune Smith and a sixty-seven page history of the slave rebellion aboard the domestic slave trader *Creole*, by Frederick Douglass. And in the second issue of this work there are five articles on every phase of the movement by the Negro leaders, Charles L. Reason, John M. Langston, William W. Brown, James M. Smith, and Frederick Douglass, and two poems by Charles Reason and George B. Vashon.

Organizational work shows the same characteristics of joint participation. Three of the original signers of the

declaration of the National Anti-Slavery Convention, held in Philadelphia in December, 1833, at which the American Anti-Slavery Society was formed, were Negroes: James G. Barbadoes, Robert Purvis, and James McCrummell; the committee which drew up this document included John G. Whittier, Samuel J. May, and William L. Garrison, who performed their task at the home of Frederick A. Hinton, a Philadelphia Negro. It is also an arresting fact that the first presiding officer of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society was a Negro and a man, James McCrummell, a dentist. None of the ladies forming that organization felt competent to preside at a public meeting, and the only man they could find courageous enough to associate himself with two such slandered causes as Abolition and the active participation of women in public affairs was Dr. McCrummell.

Four of the original members of the Board of Managers of the American Anti-Slavery Society were Negroes: Peter Williams, Samuel E. Cornish, Theodore S. Wright, and Christopher Rush; the last three were members of its Executive Committee. In the later, more politically minded American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society five Negroes were members of the Executive Committee: Samuel E. Cornish, Christopher Rush, George Whipple, Charles B. Ray, and James W. C. Pennington. In the organizational setup of the Abolitionist movement, Vigilance Committees on a local and state basis were key bodies since they protected fugitive slaves, aided free Negroes, and organized mass demonstrations. The directors of these committees in the most important centers, New York and Philadelphia, were both Negroes, Theodore S. Wright and William Still, respectively, while the corresponding secretary of the New York State Vigilance Committee was Charles B. Ray. Finally it is noteworthy that in 1847 Frederick Douglass was appointed president of the New England Anti-Slavery Society.

The record of the proceedings of any one of these Abolitionist organizations is studded with accounts of, or contributions by, Negroes. To take a few random examples: The 1849 meeting of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, held in New York City, was opened with an invocation by the Reverend Samuel R. Ward, a featured speaker was Henry Bibb, recently fled from Kentucky, and the entertainment was furnished by the four Luca boys, Negro youngsters, who sang an anti-slavery song called *Car of Emancipation*.

Again, at the 1853 meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, held in Philadelphia, the audience heard a Negro gentleman of New Bedford, Massachusetts, the Reverend John J. Kelley, denounce slavery "with great earnestness" using "the plainest and most uncompromising language," and was then privileged to listen while Sojourner Truth sang "a plaintive song, touching the wrongs of the slave" and followed this with a speech, in her inimitably colorful manner, concerning "the wrong slavery had done to herself and others." And as an invigorating surprise a Negro lady, introduced as Mrs. Williams, said a few words. She lived in Wilmington, Delaware, and, though free herself, had seen slavery at first hand. She had heard and read of the terrible Abolitionists, inciters of violence, knaves, fools, fanatics, and decided to see these monsters for herself. Well, she had been sitting and listening, and she knew the Lord would bless them, for they were good and righteous folk. That is what she thought, and she did not care who knew it. Keep up the good fight, she said—and with this Mrs. Williams passes from history's pages.

Another rank-and-filer, whose very name is unknown, arranged an anti-slavery meeting all his own in the city of New York in 1833. In October, at Clinton Hall, the New York City Anti-Slavery Society was formed. The members of this meeting just managed to get out of the hall before

a newspaper- and Tammany-incited pro-slavery mob arrived intent upon rooting out this subversive element. Frustrated by the emptiness of the hall, the mob pounced upon a passing Negro, constituted itself a mock Abolitionist meeting, placed the man on the platform, and demanded a speech. They got one, or as much of one as they would permit.

I am called upon to make a speech—said this unknown hero—You doubtless know that I am a poor, ignorant man, not accustomed to make speeches. But I have heard of the Declaration of Independence, and have read the Bible. The Declaration says all men are created equal, and the Bible says God has made us all of one blood. I think, therefore, we are entitled to good treatment, that it is wrong to hold men in slavery, and that—

but here shouts and blows stopped him. Yet, they had had their speech, had they not?

But thus far we have only *touched* upon the most vital part of the story. For the fate of the Abolitionist movement rested essentially on the backs of those who followed the sublime profession of agitators of the people, those who personified the heart and the conscience of the masses, those who, in the words of one of them, Sojourner Truth, served as fleas, mosquitoes, biting and stinging away at the vast giant of America—and Canada and Europe—until it was aroused to its obligation and duty and interest, and acted accordingly.

Contemporaries were keenly aware of the significance of these itinerant Negro arousers and probers. Back in 1839 a paper had aptly remarked of them:

They have men enough in action now to maintain the anti-slavery enterprise and to win their liberty and that of their enslaved brethren—if every white Abolitionist were drawn from the field: McCune Smith, and Cornish, and Wright, and Ray, and a host of others—not to mention our eloquent brother, Remond of Maine, and Brother Lewis who is stay and staff of field anti-slavery in New Hampshire.

William Lloyd Garrison gave similar testimony: "Who are among our ablest speakers? Who are the best qualified to address the public mind on the subject of slavery? Your fugitive slaves—your Douglasses, Browns and Bibbs—who are astonishing all with the cogency of their words and the power of their reasoning."

This cogency, and power, and eloquence were present because the speakers talked about that which they knew, that which they had seen and felt, that which affected them more directly and more forcefully than it did anyone else. And the very facts of their appearance, their bearing, courage, and intelligence were devastating anti-slavery forces.

They scoured the nation, visiting every state north of the Mason-Dixon Line, searching out every nook and cranny, with the incessant cry—Let my people go! The list of these valiant fighters for freedom includes all those who have already been mentioned and many others—like William Jones, Frances E. W. Harper, Henry Foster, Lunsford Lane, Charles Gardner, Andrew Harris, Abraham D. Shadd, David Nickens, and James Bradley.

Had none of these people existed but one, his existence and participation in the Abolitionist movement would justify the assertion that the Negro's role therein was decisive. That man is Frederick Douglass who, from his first public anti-slavery speech in 1841 to his organizing and recruiting activities during the war against the slavocracy, was *the* voice of America's millions of slaves. He, in the words of a white Abolitionist, Robert Raymond, was what fighters in that movement had been praying for: one who had known slavery and was eloquent, impressive, energetic, and fearless. There he stood, a magnificent figure of a man, impregnable, incorruptible, bearing slavery's scars upon his back, suffering, as he spoke, the anguish of knowing that a brother and four sisters were yet slaves. Those who once saw and heard Frederick Douglass never forgot him.

To Elizabeth Cady Stanton he appeared "like an African prince, conscious of his dignity and power, grand in his physical proportions, majestic in his wrath, as with keen wit, satire, and indignation he portrayed the bitterness of slavery, the humiliation of subjection to those who in all human virtues and capacities were inferior to himself." Wendell Phillips could only say, "He is one of our ablest men." A tailor in Bristol, England, after hearing him said he had never been so moved in his life and found it difficult to believe that such a man had been a slave only a few years before.

When Douglass met the despicable taunts about the inhumanity of the Negro, uttered by the Tammany wardheeler, Police Captain Rynders, by facing him and demanding, "Am I a man?" the effect was nothing short of stupendous.

Douglass and his co-workers did not confine themselves to the United States. Negro fugitives in Canada formed the Windsor Anti-Slavery Society. The additional influx of Negroes after the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 led to the formation in Toronto the next year of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada under the leadership of Jeremiah W. Loguen and Samuel R. Ward. The importance of this work is graphically demonstrated by the fact that forty thousand Canadians enlisted in the Union Army during the Civil War.

England, Scotland, and Ireland were often visited by Negro Abolitionists, like Nathaniel Paul, Ellen and William Craft, Samuel R. Ward, Sarah P. Remond, Alexander Crummell, William Wells Brown, James W. C. Pennington, Henry Highland Garnet, Frederick Douglass, and Charles L. Remond. After eighteen months' work Charles L. Remond returned in 1841 with an anti-slavery petition signed by sixty thousand men and women of Ireland, headed by Daniel O'Connell. The work was carried into France by William Wells Brown, while in 1850 Henry H. Garnet and

James W. C. Pennington helped set up an anti-slavery society in Frankfort, Germany.

The facts relating to the part played by the Negro people in the last acts of the drama of slavery's abolition, from John Brown's opening scene to the finale produced by Lincoln's army, have been developed elsewhere. Both scenes were made possible only through the Negro's participation. It was he who, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, when the final test came, "with silent tongue, and clenched teeth, and steady eye, and well-poised bayonet . . . helped mankind on to this great consummation."

The history of the American Negro is filled with deeds of unsurpassed heroism and titanic efforts to realize his aspirations, and the aspirations of all other men, for equality and freedom. This is true from 1526, the year of the first slave rebellion in present-day South Carolina, to the efforts, more than three hundred years later, of the two hundred thousand men who shouldered muskets in Lincoln's Army of Liberation, and the thirty-six thousand among them who died in that Army's battles.

Of major importance in that history is the narrative of the prime role of the Negro people in carrying forward the Abolitionist movement. This brief sketch of their part in that epic crusade can close with no more fitting words than those uttered by a Negro minister, the Reverend Alexander Crummell, one of the combatants:

Let our posterity know that we their ancestors, uncultured and unlearned, amid all trials and temptations, were men of integrity; recognized with gratefulness their truest friends dishonoured and in peril; were enabled to resist the seductions of ease and the intimidations of power; were true to themselves, the age in which they lived, their abject race, and the cause of man; shrunk not from trial, nor from suffering:—but conscious of Responsibility and impelled by Duty, gave themselves up to the vindication of the high hopes, and the lofty aims of true Humanity!

For an extended bibliography, see the author's article, under the same title, in *Science and Society*, 1941, V, Nos. 1 and 2.

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