

African American History



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1. FROM JAMESTOWN TO THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, 1619-1776

a) The first Africans in North America

No one knows for sure just when the first Africans (or people of African origin) came to the New World. One theory is that Africans sailed to the continents of the Western Hemisphere before Columbus and left evidence of their visit, especially in Mexico, in language, plants, and their images on pottery. **Pedro Alonso Niño**, who sailed with Columbus in 1492, was a man of color. There certainly were Africans in the parties of explorers and adventurers who travelled both in South and North America: with Balboa when he crossed the Isthmus of Panama to the Pacific Ocean, with the Jesuits in Canada, with Pizarro in Peru. **Estevanico**, the first non-Native American to travel in what is now Arizona and New Mexico, was black, as were numerous other sailors, mariners, and pirates along the Atlantic coast.



In what is now the continental United States, the first settlement of Africans (as opposed to traveling explorers) was probably a group of servants in a Spanish colony in the area of South Carolina in 1526. They escaped from the Spaniards and found refuge with Native Americans, the first of many examples of flight and an early case of African- Indian mixing. Also, an African woman named **Angela** reportedly was brought to Point Comfort, Virginia, sometime before 1619 on the ship Treasurer.

The usual date and place given for the arrival of the first permanent blacks in British North America, however, is Jamestown, Virginia, at the end of August or beginning of September in the year 1619. An unnamed, Dutch privateer with a captured Spanish cargo, sailed into the harbor at Point Comfort (now Hampton). The ship's captain traded more than twenty Africans with George Yeardley, governor of the English settlement, for food.



It may be that no more than this is publicly known about the ship because the white settlers at Jamestown were themselves secretly involved in illegal privateering, and information on all ships is limited. The Africans who disembarked are sometimes referred to as slaves, but the kind of slavery that was to develop in North America had not yet begun to emerge, so they were really servants who, after ten years or so of work, could - and did - move out of servitude and become fully free. The Africans, about equally divided between men and women, had been given Spanish names - Pedro, Anthony, Isabella -

which probably meant they had received an unceremonious and wholesale Roman Catholic baptism as they were forcibly shipped out from Africa. This baptism part of the rationalization that slavery benefited the slaves because it made them Christians.

This little group of Africans settled in and their names began to appear in various records and documents. In March 1620, thirty-two Africans were reported living in the Jamestown colony. According to Church of England baptismal records, Anthony and Isabella married and became parents of a son, William, born around 1623, presumably the first child of African parents born in Virginia.

In 1619 there were at least a million Africans in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of Central and South America, but the men and women in Jamestown are generally considered the first African-Americans. The most important fact about them apart from their arrival in 1619 is that in time they did become free, owning property, for example, and there was apparently no distinction between them and the white servants, who were mostly English convicts. The shift from temporary to permanent servitude that evolved in Virginia over the next few years, however, was to create a unique kind of slavery, such that the apparently innocent Jamestown landing was an event full of unknown and unforeseen consequences. In the words of the African-American, historian George Washington Williams, "*No event in the history of North America has carried, with it to its last analysis such terrible forces.*"



For more, see:

Arrival of first Africans to Virginia Colony - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p263.html>

b) Where did the slaves come from?



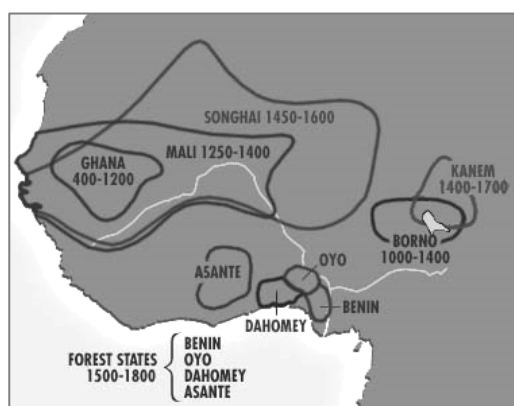
Africa, from which the slaves were forcibly brought, is a huge continent of nearly twelve million square miles, well over three times the size of the United States, and it is the home of a myriad of nations, peoples, languages, religions, and cultures. The existing evidence indicates that the East African savannah was the place some four to five million years ago where human life itself first emerged. And the whole human family developed there as these earliest people, the common ancestors of us all, evolved from food gatherers to food producers, and invented stone and then iron tools, the early defining characteristics of civilization.

Over time, one of the African kingdoms that developed became probably the most sophisticated civilization the world has ever seen. Ancient Egypt flowered into a high culture whose achievements are still dazzling. We are only now beginning to learn just how much of Egypt's genius came from the darker peoples to the south, in Egypt's vital interaction with sub-Saharan cultures. Later, Africa was a center of early Christianity, particularly in Ethiopia, the longest-lasting Christian empire, where a literate, artistic Orthodoxy persists to the present. In fact, Ethiopia was a full-scale rival to Rome and Athens in every measurable sense.

Islam overshadowed Christianity after the Arab invasion of the continent in the 7th century, and warriors for the new religion converted the people of much of North and sub-Saharan Africa. Islam built citadels of learning in both the sciences and the humanities, and was the boost for the growth of great urban centers like the city of Timbuktu. North-south trade routes made much of Africa prosperous in the exchange of gold and salt and encouraged an economy which produced and sustained rich medieval West African kingdoms like Mali, Songhay, Ghana, Asante, Borno and Kanem.

At the very time of Europe's Dark Ages, these stable imperial states, based on control of the gold trade, were enlightened with sacred kingships, strong military establishments providing security and stability, courts of law administering impartial justice, and advanced medicine, metallurgy, and architecture. The trade economy created enriching cultural interchanges as well as financial wealth.

Despite its strengths, West Africa's governments began to weaken, however, when the commerce in slaves began to compete with the commerce in gold. Outsiders introduced attractive merchandise specially Europeans, who brought in guns, which started an arms race among the kingdoms. In the resulting wars, captives became slaves. The Arabs began the slave trade with their market for imported women and girls to the East. The Portuguese traded male slaves in Europe with minimal success in the fifteenth century, but they sold more in the sixteenth century as laborers in the sugar cane plantations in the islands off the West African coast (Cape Verde, Canary, etc).



Several West African countries deeply involved in slave trading began to suffer internal dissent as the European powers, which were colonizing more and more of North and South America, demanded more slave labor to work in the money-making plantations and mines of the New World. By 1700 slavery was taking some 50,000 people a year from Africa. By 1800 the number was at least 100,000 annually. The African kingdoms fractured, divided by internal wars and weakened by the population drain. When Europeans visited the continent in the eighteenth century, they saw the last stages of collapsed civilizations. These travelers reported what they saw, and Africa was perceived in Europe and North America as a desolate and destitute place, whose glorious history was forgotten if not unknown.



For more, see:

African History

<http://africanhistory.about.com/cs/slavery/a/slavenumbers.htm>

Wikipedia – African slave trade

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_slave_trade

"Africa my Africa...
I have never known you
But my face is full of your blood."
David Diop

c) The Middle Passage



The Middle Passage was a term used to describe the triangular route of trade that brought Africans to the Americas and rum and sugar cane to Europe. The first passage was from Europe to Africa with trading goods – brandy, cloth, iron, guns, and weapons. The second passage was from Africa to the Americas/West Indies with merchandise for sell – the human cargo. The third passage was from the Americas/West Indies with money, sugar and tobacco –earned from the sell of the human cargo. The ships then repeated the cycle for over four centuries of legal and illegal slave trading.

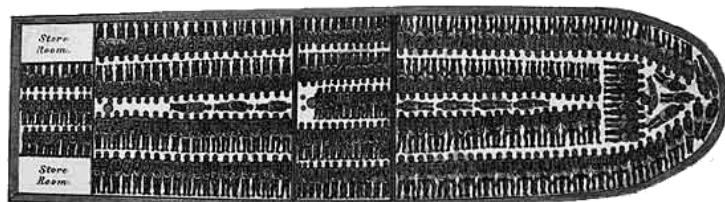
Of all the horrors of slavery, the slave trade, and the slave system, probably no aspect was worse than the Middle Passage, the transport of Africans by ship across the Atlantic from Africa to the New World. Slaves were brought, usually by forced march, from the interior of the continent to the western coast. This march itself was brutal, and the explorer **David Livingstone** claimed (although the number is hard to believe) that only 10 percent survived the arduous walk to various ports where they were penned like animals awaiting shipment.

Captured, stolen, separated from their families, homes and customs, thrown in with strangers, the Africans' first reaction was anger at their horrible situation, and fear for their future. Many knew that those taken and sold to white people never returned, contrary to Africans captured in war by other Africans. With only limited information of a land beyond the sea, Africans reported they could only suppose that they would be eaten by whites, who probably were insatiable cannibals.

Stripped naked and branded like animals to identify ownership, the Africans were stowed, as freight in ships bound for America. Slavery was a business, so the higher the ratio of slaves to cubic foot of hold space, the greater the income, and the less they were fed, the greater the profits. Slaves were chained together, usually by chains on the ankles, and arranged in confined ships' storerooms, unable to move, turn, or stand, often lying against each other like spoons on shelves only eighteen inches (50 cm) high. Women and children were usually allowed more mobility, but this was so that the white sailors could have sexual access to them. Continual rape was the norm: the crew had unlimited access, according to John Newton, a slave ship captain who later became an abolitionist.



Slaves were allowed on deck once or twice a day, where they were forced under the lash to dance for exercise in the hope that more would survive the brutal trip. Dancing, for many Africans, was part of their religious ritual, and to profane sacred acts took away even the consolation of religion. Food and water were minimal. Slaves on deck sometimes were kept under canvas at night, especially in bad weather. The transatlantic crossing took at least five weeks and could extend to three months, depending, on the weather. A becalmed ship in summer heat was a virtual hell on earth.



Plan of a slave ship

having no other means of suicide, but their mouths were burned with hot coals as punishment, their jaws forced open with iron clamps, and food shoved down their throats.

Sickness took many lives, especially epidemic diarrhea and dysentery. The flow of blood and flux turned ships' holds into slaughterhouses, and the smell could be so fetid that a slave ship could be smelled as far as five miles (8 km) away. Sick slaves were often simply pushed overboard, since legal abandon was covered by insurance. The death rate has been estimated at something around 15 percent. If one considers the hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children shipped every year for hundreds of years, the total of those who did not survive is enormous. The term Middle Passage has come to mean a transition, perhaps even a rite of passage. But its use as metaphor can hardly mean very much in the light of the terrible reality of the cruel and barbarous voyages that brought Africans to America. As novelist Toni Morrison points out, the passage was so horrible, no song, tale, legend, or conscious memory of it was retained by the survivors.

"Disease and death were common. Up to 25 percent of a slave ship's Africans died during the voyage. The captain and crew struggled to keep their valuable cargo alive. They forced the Africans to dance on deck for exercise. Sometimes they force-fed Africans who would rather die than suffer further." – *Olaudah Equiano*

 **For more, see:**

Understanding slavery (Discovery Education) : <http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schooladventures/slavery/equiano.html>
The Middle Passage (Africans in America) : <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p277.html>

d) The origin of American slavery

The world has known and experienced human slavery from time before recounting: prisoners captured as the booty of war, a weak group subjugated by a stronger one, unwanted children sold into servitude by poor parents. While occupying the lowest rung in the dominant group's social hierarchy, slaves nonetheless normally had certain rights and privileges. And slave status was not fixed: given the fortunes of war, for example, this year's slaves could be next year's masters.



In British North America, however, a new form of slavery evolved: a system of permanent servitude in which slaves were relegated not to the bottom of society but literally outside of it as non-human beings, and a system from which there could be no escape, because membership was based on a publicly discernible physical characteristic: color. What emerged in North America was a unique kind of slavery, in which slaves were legally defined as chattel, a term related to the words *cattle* and *capital*; that is to say the slaves were property, not persons, and what the master owned was not only the slave's labor but his or her body as well.

It seems hard to believe that this was in fact the case just over one hundred years ago in this country, but it is true. **Harriet Beecher Stowe's** antislavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was originally subtitled *The Man Who Was a Thing* in order to dramatize that in the eyes of the law, African-Americans were not people, but objects, like animals. The animal analogy is in fact a fitting one, as the slaves themselves were fed like pigs, bred like cows, whipped like horses, worked like mules, and when emancipation finally came, chased away like dogs.



The uniqueness of North American slavery can be seen by comparing it with contemporaneous slavery in South America. Whatever slavery's horrors there, slaves did have certain rights. This was probably the case because of the universalism and internationalism of the Roman Catholic Church. In Protestant North America, in contrast, the churches, because of the nature of the Reformation, were organized on national bases, and thus on racial ones.

It is important to underscore that the chattel slavery system of North America came into existence by evolution. There was nothing natural or inherent or even historical about it. It was something new and it was constructed. This should mean that because it was created, it can be destroyed; because it was learned, it can be unlearned; because it was constructed, it can be destructed. But as we shall see, a powerful ideology was developed to rationalize slavery, and we still live with that ideology three hundred years later. It is called racism.



The Africans who landed in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619 were purchased as indentured servants, and when they had paid off their contracts by their labor, they assumed their places in the community as free people. An important aspect of the Jamestown situation was the apparent presence soon afterwards of baptized Africans who were not in the original group from the famous Dutch ship (see §a p.2). In 1624 there is a record of John Phillip, an African baptized in England. Phillip could not have been a slave, because English law, under which the colony was then governed, forbade the enslaving of Christians.

The first account in Virginia of racial differentiation seems to be in 1630, when Hugh Davis, a white man, was sentenced by the court to a whipping "for corrupting his body in lying with a negro female." As historian Paul Palmer points out, however, it is not at all clear why this was considered a crime. Was it because Davis was married and thus committing adultery? Or was it because his sexual partner was black? Or because she was not a Christian? The records do not say, but it should not be a surprise that the very earliest account of American law distinguishing between blacks and whites had to do with a sexual relationship.

From 1639 on, there was in Virginia a constant accumulation of cases and laws which made distinctions between African-Americans and Euro-Americans, all to the detriment of black people and the reducing their rights. In 1639 everyone except blacks was to be armed. In 1640 we see the first case of lifelong servitude, imposed on an African-American servant who ran away but was captured; the two Euro-Americans who ran with him were also captured, but they only had their contract lengthened as punishment.

In 1641 the Gramere case first opened the question of whether an African's children might be considered the property of the master. It was decided in this instance that they were not, but the issue had been raised and would reappear. In 1656 children of indentured Indians were declared not to be servants. While we watch the situation evolve, it is worth noting that at this point in Virginia's history, African labor was becoming much more important as the colony developed a tobacco economy.

While a few African-Americans were serving lifelong indentures for one reason or another in the 1640s and '50s, it was not until the early 1660s that Virginia law itself was changed to institutionalize permanent black servitude. The Irish Servant Act of 1655, was abolished in 1660. In 1661 perpetual bondage for African-Americans became legal, and the next year saw the first use of the word *slave* in a Virginia law.

In December 1662 all children were considered slave or free depending on the status of their mothers, and so, as Palmer points out, "life-long servitude was made self-perpetuating." The law at this point actually

used livestock as the model of black people. Adjustments and refinements continued to be made in Virginia law. One of particular importance was the 1667 legislation which declared that baptism did not change a black slave's status. By now it was clear that the slaves were chattel, property, objects, and that they themselves, not just their labor, were owned by the masters.

If a permanent slave status for Africans emerged over time in Virginia, why was it that Africans alone suffered the dishonor and destiny of perpetual bondage? The answer to the question of the relationship between slavery and racism is an issue of serious debate. One view is that racism came first and that Virginia's white Englishmen identified blackness with evil, and that they believed Africans were savages. Their fear of the different along with preference for their own kind predisposed them to a prejudiced view of Africans as their natural inferiors. All these elements were certainly present and active, but were they enough to create the unique American slave system?

It is more likely that, beyond this racial predisposition, slavery in fact came first and produced racism as a consequence. This means that slavery was firstly an economic phenomenon. The large-scale production of basic produces for export, such as sugar, cotton, and tobacco, required an expanding and virtually infinite labor supply. As economist Barbara Solow points out, the Indians had been killed, Asians were too far away, and the Irish were too expensive, but Africans were close, plentiful, cheap, and gave efficient labor. Modern racism followed, then, with its myth of black inferiority to rationalize and justify a highly profitable



"Slavery was the central and determining phenomenon shaping the first centuries of American history".

Thomas Holt

economic system.

👉 **For more, see:**

Virginia and race : <http://racelrelations.about.com/od/ahistoricalviewofrace/ss/virginiaregrets.htm>

e) The three secrets of African-American history

Arthur A. Schomburg, the African-American bibliophile and historian, had a purpose in mind when he collected books by and about Africans and people of African descent. He, and others like him, knew that in the standard history books, black history was largely forgotten or ignored or even deliberately falsified, leaving both blacks and whites ignorant of the black past or with seriously damaged misconceptions about it. Schomburg gathered a library of books because he found in them the documentation of the lost history he wanted to regain, as well as the false history he wanted to correct.



As a result of his studies, Schomburg said that there were three major facts for which his library provided evidence, and that the suppression of these facts has caused misconceptions in the way black people and their history have been thought of.

The first was that blacks have been and continue to be participants, and often pioneers, in the struggle for their freedom and advancement. This means that abolitionism and the antislavery movement, for example, which Eurocentric histories describe as essentially the work of beneficent whites, was in fact just as much if not more a black enterprise. Also, the campaign for civil rights and enlightened legislation following the Civil War was as much the work of black People as it was the work of white Radical Republicans in the Congress. And although Schomburg did not live to comment on the Freedom Movement of the 1960s, the same point can be made: the real movement was the work, time, genius, energy, money, and risk of African-Americans.

Schomburg's second conclusion was that African-Americans have suffered for having been seen as a community unable to produce genius, and as a continually ignored group to which there are only occasional exceptions.

Schomburg's third discovery was that Africa, far from being a jungle of barbarism, in fact produced in its day a high culture of grandeur and sophistication. This is particularly important, Schomburg thought, because it bears on the very origins of civilization as we know it.

It has taken history and historians, specialized scholars or amateurs, a long time to face these three facts, and to unlearn the misconceptions. Not all have yet done so. Arthur Schomburg and his bibliophile colleagues collected as they did so they could present books, and other documents that would clearly and honestly speak for themselves by saying simply, "Here is the evidence."

👉 **For more, see:**

Wikipedia : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Schomburg

"If you want Negro history you will have to get it from somebody who wore the shoe, and by and by, one to the other, you will get a book".
an ex-slave

f) The effects of slavery

Researchers have long argued over the effects of slavery, particularly on black people both as individuals and as a community. One line of argument is that slavery was a global system which robbed people of their humanity, destroyed the family and personal relationships, denied the retention of any identity creating African culture, and turned African-Americans into victims of one of the most oppressive and degrading systems in history. This argument has often been used politically to explain the fragmentation of the black family, for example, and to justify social, economic, and governmental action to pay off for slavery's damage.

Another line of argument has claimed that despite the oppression of slavery, blacks created social space, maintained their humanity by fighting against the slave system in a thousand ways, forged an identity for the present and future using their memory of their roots in Africa, and through almost superhuman efforts managed not only to survive slavery but to triumph over it by making and maintaining a unique African-American culture. This is the argument, politically, of the black nationalists and separatists, the advocates of black pride.

The truth probably lies between these two positions. Yes, slavery broke some people and reduced them, but slavery also produced heroes like **Nat Turner** and **Harriet Tubman**, people of infinite courage and vision.

🔗 For more, see:

Causes and Effects of Slavery in the U.S.:

<http://www.bookrags.com/essay-2003/11/30/133852/80>

"Slavery was the worst days ever seen in the world. There was things past telling, but I got the scars on my body to show till this day".

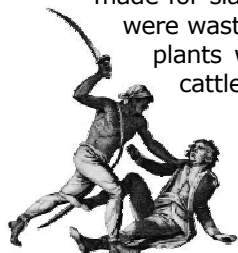
Mary Reynolds

g) The slaves' resistance

Most slaves resisted their enslavement. They either ran away or rebelled, or found innumerable subtle ways to resist the people and the system that held them in permanent and unending bondage. This kind of daily resistance was sophisticated and secret, so it is not well documented. In fact, its very success often depended on slaves' acting ignorant and pretending not to know or understand what was going on. Basically, this form of vengeance was sabotage against the plantation system, and the enslaved found a thousand plans to obstruct and reduce and weaken their never ending daily hours of unremunerated work.



One basic strategy throughout the Southern plantation system was going to work at a slow pace and taking as long as possible to have a job done. The strategy took many forms: black slave drivers sometimes intentionally slowed down showing consideration for the oldest and weakest in the team. Feigned stupidity resulted in slaves going to the wrong workplace, taking the wrong tools, never quite "understanding" how to do the work assigned. A further, more active step involved breaking tools, and this happened so often that special heavy tools had to be made for slaves who were apparently so gauche they couldn't touch anything without breaking it. Materials were wasted or mysteriously disappeared ("taking" was differentiated from "stealing"), cotton and tobacco plants were damaged when being hoed, gates were left open and the masters' valuable horses and cattle ran away.



Slaves often pretended to be sick and were excused from work by supervisors afraid that expensive slaves could die and become financial losses. Women sometimes pretended to be pregnant in order to get more food and be assigned less work. Slaves devised highly creative ways to cheat. When ordered to whip a fellow slave, Solomon Northup flicked the whip a fraction of an inch from the man's body while the intended victim screamed in pretended pain.

Mark Twain knew a slave who could imitate with his voice the sound of sawing wood, and thereby satisfy his master, who thought he heard work being done.

Resistance could and did take more serious and extreme forms. Slave-owners were sometimes poisoned by slave cooks well-informed about lethal plants. Fires of unknown origin could destroy barns, crops, and houses, and in fact there were so many fires that insurance in the South became hard to get. A few slaves even mutilated themselves, deliberately cutting off a hand or foot so they would be permanently useless for work. Some committed suicide rather than face a meaningless life of hard labor.

Perhaps the saddest accounts of all are those of the slave mothers who killed their own children, preferring to give them an early death rather than see them subjected to the horrors of an enslaved life. Toni Morrison used one such historic event as the basis for her extraordinary novel *Beloved*. All these behaviors led to the perceptions that blacks actually were lazy and slow-moving, careless and stupid into white culture, therein proving the effectiveness of this form of slave resistance.

🔗 For more, see:

Slave resistance (about.com) :

http://afroamhistory.about.com/od/slaveresistance/Slave_Resistance.htm

"There was not a day throughout the ten years I belonged to Epps that I did not consult with myself upon the project of escape".

Solomon Northup

h) The first protest against slavery

It seems to be the Quaker petition against slavery of 1688 in Germantown, Pennsylvania. However, anything claiming to be "the first runs a risk of being negate, because there is a history and precursors to everything. This is especially true for African-American history, because the slaves themselves left few conventional written records and their story has often been ignored or distorted or presumed not to exist. To speak of the first real protest against slavery in this country is of course to speak of the constant struggle of black people against the institution of enslavement from its very beginning, even though these unknown slaves left little of the evidence or documents accessible to the historian. We do know about revolts, insurrections, and mutinies and can speculate about other forms of resistance.

Another reservation is that there are a number of documents written by white people that are antecedent to the Germantown petition, and these are preserved in records available to historians. These include Roger Williams' criticism of selling Indians as slaves; the 1653 Rhode Island charter granting Africans the same status as European indentured servants; Quaker 'George Fox's 1676 assertion that Christ died for blacks as well as whites; Pieter Plockhoy's short-lived Mennonite settlement in Delaware whose constitution actually forbade slavery; Puritan theologian Richard Baxter's 1673 pamphlet in which he called slave traders "pirates" and slave owners "incarnate devils"; and William Edmundson's 1676 letter to his fellow Quakers, which states, "For perpetual slavery is an aggravation and an oppression upon the mind," and which seems to question the very nature of the institution.



Within this historical setting, it is possible to say that the Germantown petition is the first known explicit protest against the system itself. It was the work of a small group of settlers who came from the towns of Krefeld and Kriegsheim in the Rhineland (Germany) in the mid-1680s. They were not actually Germans, though, but Dutch and Swiss whose ancestors had left the Netherlands for religious and economic reasons. They had previously been Mennonites, but were now Quakers, and they settled in Germantown, outside Philadelphia. They were weavers by trade. It is likely their opposition to slavery did not come from their being Quakers. The Quakers of the day had reservations about slavery, but were certainly not opposed to the institution and in fact often held slaves. Their opposition may have come from their ethnic and national background, but more likely it is from the Mennonite religious influence under which they still lived. Whatever their motivation, at a church gathering on February 18, 1688, they wrote a petition they sent to the *Monthly Meeting*, the official local Quaker assemblage.

What did they say? The petition is a list of reasons why they opposed "the traffic of Men body." The first is really the Golden Rule: "Is there any that would be done or handled at this manner?" they asked rhetorically. Obviously, no one would, yet "we hear that ye most part of such Neggars are brought here against their will and consent." Furthermore, these people are stolen and brought to a country where there is liberty of conscience, so "here ought to be lickewise liberty of ye body."

The Germantown Quakers were highly sensitive to the problem of freedom of conscience, because they themselves had emigrated to America to obtain it. The racial nature of American slavery astonished them: "Now, tho' they are black, we cannot conceive there is more liberty to have them as slaves, as it is to have other white ones."

An additional reason listed in their petition is that slavery separated wives and husbands and took children from parents and sold them to other men. Also, slavery "makes an ill report" in Europe of the Quaker religion when people hear that "ye Quackers doe here handel men licke they handel there ye Cattel". Lastly, the petition raised the question of why the slaves should not join together, rise up, and attack their masters and mistresses, and slave rebellion would be justified: "have these Neggars not as much right to fight for their freedom, as you. have to keep them slaves?"



The Germantown petition is clear and obviously came from the heart. It was directed to the *Monthly Meeting* and asked fellow Quakers that if they could justify human slavery, please to do so to the satisfaction of the Germantowners as well as to those back in Europe, to whom it is a "terror" that blacks "should be handled so in Pennsylvania".

How was the petition received? It was discussed, but, the clerk reported, it was passed on up the line. The Quarterly Meeting evaded the issue in exactly the same way. When the Yearly Meeting received the petition, "It was adjudged not to be so proper for this Meeting," probably because so many Quakers, especially in other colonies, were slaveholders. '

And so the Germantown petition came to an inglorious end. It was lost in the files and archives until a Philadelphia bookseller, discovered it 156 years later, in 1844, and published it for the first time. But before it got filed away, the petition probably influenced **George Keith**, a schismatic Quaker, who wrote an antislavery protest published in 1693 that is considered the first printed antislavery document.

 **For more, see:**

Quaker Petition To Congress (classbrain.com) :
http://www.classbrain.com/artteenst/publish/article_35.shtml

i) The secret meanings of spirituals

The spirituals, also known as the slave songs or plantation songs, were called, by **W.E.B. Du Bois**, "the slave's one articulate message to the world." Little known to white people, the songs are primarily religious in nature, often recounting and retelling Bible stories. It is also true, however, that many of the songs had double meanings and were used by slaves to communicate secretly with one another, sometimes in the very presence of whites.

What made the spirituals do double duty as religious hymns and coded messages was their common themes of slavery, flight, deliverance, and Heaven. One of the best-known, and one of the clearest symbolically, is "Go Down, Moses":

*You may hinder me here, but you can't up there,
Let my people go.
He sits in the heavens and answers prayer.
Let my people go.
Go down, Moses, Way down in Egypt land.
Tell old Pharaoh Let my people go.*

While this is a rehearsing of a scriptural narrative, it is also a personal existential expression and a profound statement of social protest.

A song which, on the surface, speaks of death, is also about running away or additional sufferings that will be overcome by death (or escape)::

*No more auction block for me,
No more, no more.
No more auction block for me.
Many thousand gone.
No more peck of corn for me.
No more mistress' call for me.
No more hundred lash for me.*

A song that Harriet Tubman reportedly sang to signal to slaves that they should gather in preparation for "escaping home":

*I'll meet you in the morning
When I reach the Promised Land
On the other side of Jordan
For I'm bound for the Promised Land.*

Or:

*Sweep it clean, Ain't going to tarry here;
I sweep my house with the gospel broom.*

Some of the spirituals convey great poignancy in their expression of the desperation slaves felt facing the terrible dangers of trying to reach the free land of the North or Canada:

*I'm running for my life, I'm running for my life,
If anybody asks you what's the matter with me,
Just tell them I say, I'm running for my life.*

These songs were not all personal, but some articulated important religious truths which also carried radical and egalitarian social and political implications:

*Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel, deliver Daniel.
Didn't my Lord deliver Daniel, and why not every man?*

Du Bois was quite right that the spirituals were the one means at the slaves' disposal to express themselves to the world. In that light, they are an incredible achievement. They clearly explain the slaves' deep religious faith and, at the same time, the unique way that that faith was interconnected both with protest against oppression and expression of freedom. The slaves' view of the social order was clearly expressed in the spiritual about Samson in the Temple, in which Samson says, "If I had my way, I'd tear this building down."

☞ **For more, see:**

Sweet chariot, the story of the Spirituals :
<http://ctl.du.edu/spirituals/Freedom/coded.cfm>

The spirituals and the blues: how they are similar :
<http://www.megaessays.com/viewpaper/4703.html>



"Dark and thorny is the pathway
Where de pilgrim makes his ways.
But beyond dis vale of sorrow
Lie de fields of endless days".

Harriet Tubman

j) The slave catechism

The white Southern churches helped reinforce the slave system by providing ethical, religious, and biblical reasons for human bondage and by behaving in paternalistic ways. The white Northern churches were one of the chief targets of the abolitionists, who were themselves mostly church people but who often abandoned their congregations because of the churches' complicity with the evil of slavery. Many Southern slaveholders were Episcopalians who believed themselves, as the descendants of the Cavaliers, natural aristocrats. When they provided religious instruction and worship for their slaves, their purpose was really to reinforce the status quo.

The following is a portion of a religious catechism written for slaves. It was published in the *Southern Episcopalian* in April 1854:

- Q. Who gave you a master and a mistress?
 A. God gave them to me.
- Q. Who says; that you must obey them?
 A. God says that I must.
- Q. What book tells you these things?
 A. The Bible.
- Q. How does God do all his work?
 A. He always does it right.
- Q. Does God love to work?
 A. Yes, God is always at work.
- Q. What does God say about your work?
 A. He says; that those who will not work shall not eat.
- Q. Did Adam and Eve have to work?
 A. Yes, they had to keep the garden.
- Q. Was it hard to keep that garden?
 A. No, it was very easy.
- Q. What makes the crops so hard to grow now?
 A. Sin makes it.
- Q. What makes you lazy?
 A. My wicked heart.
- Q. How do you know your heart is wicked?
 A. I feel it every day.
- Q. Who teaches you so many wicked things?
 A. The Devil.
- Q. Must you let the Devil teach you?
 A. No, I must not.



As African-Americans accepted Protestant Christianity, they got rid of the interpretation represented by this catechism, and emphasized instead the Bible's and Christian theology's image of liberation. They identified with the narrative of Israel in Egyptian bondage, and Jesus' redemptive suffering. In fact, the slaves transformed the established religion of the time and created something new: their own Afro-Protestant church.

"Indeed, I never heard a sermon to slaves but what made obedience to masters by the slaves the fundamental and supreme law of religion".

The Reverend Nelson of North Carolina

 **For more, see:**

A slave catechism : http://pages.prodigy.net/etsm/a_slave_catechism.htm

k) The black church



It has been suggested that African slaves in America achieved two extraordinary accomplishments, one social, one cultural. First, despite the variety of ethnic groups, cultures, languages, and religions the slaves came from in Africa, they joined themselves here into a single people. Second, they transformed the evangelical Protestantism of the American South into a discrete new phenomenon which, despite its important internal differences and divisions, was unified by what historian Laurie Maffly-Kipp calls "shared suffering and deliverance," and which we can call the black church.

The slaves did this both by bringing their own religious sensibility and culture into the world they found and by emphasizing within biblical Protestantism the themes and components most relevant to them and to their own situation. The result was a distinct and unique entity, the Afro-Protestant folk church.

One of the more remarkable features of the early black church was its creative appropriation and adaptation of the Bible, the basis of Protestant authority. Africans identified with the slavery of the children of God in Egypt and Israel's eventual deliverance under Moses. In the New Testament they identified with the birth of Jesus as an innocent child and his unjust humiliation, suffering, and death. In African style, they told the stories of the Bible by turning them into songs, the Negro spirituals. The slaves were largely illiterate, but when the spirituals are tied together, they in fact constitute the entire biblical narrative text.

With good reason, the slavocracy -the slaveholders in the American South- feared the black church as a potential base for insurrection, and tried to control it. By law, for instance, slaves could not gather for worship unless a white person was present, although on negligent plantations, a white child occasionally fulfilled the technical requirements. But even with restrictions, the black church developed. Therefore it was the institution with the most African memory, the one in which indigenous leadership could develop, the one most reflective of African-American people and their experience, and the one that became the heart and centerpiece of the black community.

 **For more, see:**

Wikipedia : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_church

"Let the church roll on".

Negro Spiritual

l) Stono, South Carolina, 1739

The major slave revolt in colonial America was the Stono Rebellion of 1739 in South Carolina, where African-Americans constituted some two-thirds of the colony's total population of sixty thousand. The mutiny took place not only because of the slaves' numerical superiority and, their hatred of the system, but also because word had spread rapidly through the slave communities of the recent outbreak of war between England and Spain. The slaves were sympathetic to, Spanish interests, partly because their masters were English, partly because Spain had created a haven for fugitives in their own colony of Florida.



The moment seemed ripe for revolt. Under the leadership of a slave, probably from Angola, named **Jemmy**, a dozen Africans chose the morning of Sunday, September 9, 1739, when the planters were in church, to rebel. At Stono Bridge in St. Paul's Parish, some twenty miles from Charleston, they killed storekeepers and collected arms and ammunition. They organized themselves into military formation with a flag and drum, gathered perhaps a hundred recruits along the way, and marched South, presumably towards St. Augustine, Florida, and freedom. They killed nearly twenty whites before stopping in an open field.



A group of planters overtook them there on Sunday afternoon, breaking up the outnumbered rebel army and killing about twenty in the fighting. Forty other blacks who either surrendered or were captured were also killed. The Stono Rebellion had lasted less than one day and was over. The consequences, however, influenced subsequent legal and social development in the South Carolina colony. Whites reacted with panic to the possibilities of further rebellion, and strengthened the codes that controlled slaves' lives and movements. In addition, the ruling whites recruited working-class whites into the colony in an attempt to counter the African-Americans' numerical superiority.

 **For more, see:**

Stono's Rebellion (1739) :

http://www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/jb/colonial/stono_1

"About 20 Africans raided a store near Wallace Creek, a branch of the Stono River. Taking guns and other weapons, they killed two shop keepers. The rebels marched south towards promised freedom in Spanish Florida, waving flags, beating drums and shouting 'Liberty!' "

Stono bridge billboard

APPENDIX 1

The first African-American poet



During the French and Indian War, **Lucy Terry Prince**, a slave in Deerfield, Massachusetts, composed a poem when Abenaki Indians raided a local hayfield on August 25, 1746, killing a number of white settlers and abducting others. Titled "*Bars Fight*" (a reference to, a common fence around the field), the poem tells a story in the African griot tradition. It is not known when the poem was first written down—other oral versions seem to have existed—but it was not published until 1855 in Josiah Gilbert Holland's *History of Western Massachusetts*.

"Seventeen hundred forty-six
The Indians did in ambush lay
Some very valiant men to slay
The names of whom I'll not leave out..."
Lucy Terry Prince

👉 **For more, see:**

L. T. Prince - "*Bars Fight*" :
<http://www.accd.edu/sac/english/bailey/lterry.htm>

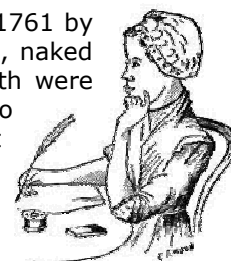
The first African-American to write a book

Phillis Wheatley was a slave, bought as a house servant on a Boston dock in July 1761 by Susannah Wheatley, the wife of John Wheatley, a rich merchant. Phillis was a thin, sickly, naked child, judged by her owners to be seven or eight years old because her front baby teeth were missing. She was for sale cheap because the ship's captain was afraid she was too frail to live. In a humiliating reminder of her condition, she was given the name of the ship that had delivered her into bondage.

Probably from a literate Islamic family, she first tried to draw letters at an early age. In any case, she was soon writing English letters and putting them together, and the Wheatley family marveled at her intelligence, her facility with language, and her ability not only to read and write, but to compose poetry. Mrs. Wheatley pampered the young slave, relieved her of some housework, and encouraged her to write.

The poem that made her internationally famous, however, was "*On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, 1770*," an elegy for the evangelical preacher who had electrified America in the religious revivals of the Great Awakening.

Wheatley wrote enough poems to make a book, but not enough subscribers could be found in Boston to finance publication. Through the international evangelical network, Wheatley came to the attention of Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, an English noblewoman and philanthropist. With Hastings' support, *Poems on Various Subjects, Moral and Religious*, a collection of thirty-nine poems in stylized heroic couplets, was issued in London in 1773. Its authenticity was verified by prominent Bostonians, who testified it was actually the work of an African-American slave girl. It was the first book by an African-American and the second by an American woman, and it has remained in print ever since.



👉 **For more, see:** Phillis Wheatley : http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phillis_Wheatley

The first African-American to die for American independence



The first American to die in the struggle for American independence from Great Britain was **Crispus Attucks** (1723 – March 5, 1770) in what is known as *The Boston Massacre*. He was one of five people killed in Boston, Massachusetts. He has been frequently named as the first martyr of the American Revolution and is the only Boston Massacre victim whose name is commonly remembered. He remains an important and inspirational figure in American history.

Little is known for certain about Attucks beyond his involvement in the massacre. Fragmentary evidence suggests that he may have been of African American and Native American ancestry. In the early 19th century, as the Abolitionist movement gained momentum in Boston, Attucks was mentioned as an example of a black American who played a heroic role in the history of the United States. Because Crispus Attucks may also have had Wampanoag Indian ancestors, his story also holds special significance for many Native Americans.

👉 **For more, see:**

Crispus Attucks (AfricaWithin) :
http://www.africawithin.com/bios/crispus_attucks.htm

"Few people remember the soldiers' names or Capt. Preston or even that John Adams defended the British soldiers, yet they know Crispus Attucks"
Hillar Zobel