

A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY

OF

The Negro People
in the
United States

Edited by

HERBERT APPEKER

Preface by

W. E. B. DUBOIS

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Preface

IT IS a dream come true to have the history of the Negro in America pursued in scientific documentary form. When the attempt was made in the 19th century by Nell, Wells Brown and George W. Williams, the results were received with tolerance, but with little sympathy or serious comprehension. Historians were not prepared to believe that Africans even in America had any record of thought or deed worth attention. Then came the long hammering of Carter Woodson, the series of researches by a continuous line of students, black and white; and especially the painstaking and thorough scholarship of Herbert Aptheker.

At long last we have this work which rescues from oblivion and loss, the very words and thoughts of scores of American Negroes who lived slavery, serfdom and quasi-freedom in the United States of America from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. For fifteen years Dr. Aptheker has worked to find and select 450 documents to make an authentic record and picture of what it meant to be a slave in the Land of the Free, and what it meant to be free after the Emancipation Proclamation.

Historical scholarship has done all too little of this sort of research. We have the record of kings and gentlemen ad nauseum and in stupid detail; but of the common run of human beings, and particularly of the half or wholly submerged working group, the world has saved all too little of authentic record and tried to forget or ignore even the little saved. With regard to Negroes in America, in addition to the common neglect of a society patterned on assumed aristocracy, came also the attempt, conscious or unconscious, to excuse the shame of slavery by stressing natural inferiority which would render it impossible for Negroes to make, much less leave, any record of revolt or struggle, any human reaction to utter degradation.

Many of us for years have known of the existence of wide literature which contradicted such assumptions and efforts. I hasten to greet the day of the appearance of this volume, as a milestone on the road to Truth.

W. E. B. DU BOIS

Introduction

THIS WORK attempts, within the limits of half a million words, to present the essence of the first three hundred years of the history of the American Negro people. This is done through the words of Negro men, women and children themselves.

"Too long have others spoken for us." So began, in 1827, the first editorial in the first Negro newspaper, well-titled *Freedom's Journal*. Here the Negro speaks for himself. These are the words of participants, of eye-witnesses. These are the words of the very great and the very obscure; these are the words of the mass. This is how they felt; this is what they saw; this is what they wanted.

And that is history. It is what the masses endure, how they resist, how they struggle that forms the body of true history. It is the coming into being, the bringing forth of the new—including the old, but the old as it is pregnant with the new—that is the heart of true history.

A Jim Crow society breeds and needs a Jim Crow historiography. The dominant historiography in the United States either omits the Negro people or presents them as a people without a past, as a people who have been docile, passive, parasitic, imitative. This picture is a lie. The Negro people, the most oppressed of all people in the United States, have been militant, active, creative, productive.

When John R. Lynch, Negro Congressman from Mississippi, said in 1882: "The impartial historian will record the fact that the colored people of the South have contended for their rights with a bravery and a gallantry that is worthy of the highest commendation," he spoke truly. And when the National Association of Colored Men declared in 1896 that "the American Negro has at no time in the past been either unmindful or indifferent to or failed to assert and contend for his own rights," the Association spoke the truth.

The Negro people have fought like tigers for freedom, and in doing so have enhanced the freedom struggles of all other peoples. Their history demonstrates that no matter what the despoilers of humanity may do—enslave, segregate, torture, lynch—they cannot *destroy* the people's will to freedom, their urge towards equality, justice and dignity, for without these things there is no decent life, there is no joy, there is no peace. To work in this history, to see the defiance of slaves, the courage of martyrs, the re-

sistance of the plain people, and to study the great human documents they left behind is a most rewarding experience.

Moreover, the Negro people's history demonstrates the essential identity of needs of all the common peoples of the earth—of all colors and all nationalities—so that, in the words of the Rev. J. L. Moore, of the Florida Colored Farmers' Alliance, in 1891, "the laboring colored man's interests and the laboring white man's interests are one and the same."

This *Documentary History* is offered in the hope that it may contribute, in however limited a fashion, to the realization in the United States and in our time of full equality and unity for all men and women.

Some particular aspects of this work require explanation. The editor has not sought to include material on the cultural history of the Negro people and for this would refer the reader to such anthologies as that on Negro poetry by Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes, on Negro literature by Sylvestre C. Watkins, and *The Negro Caravan* by Sterling A. Brown, Arthur P. Davis and Ulysses Lee.

The work also has a chronological limitation since it ends in 1910. We halt here for the first decade of the twentieth century brings us to the threshold of the modern period of American Negro history. We come to the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; to the consolidation of great monopolies, the beginnings of the "New South," and the development of imperialism.

The next ten year period sees a new era begin: the First World War; the passing of Booker T. Washington; the growth of the N.A.A.C.P. and of the National Urban League; the shift in Negro population characteristics from about one-quarter urban in 1910 to over one-third urban in 1920; the leap forward of Southern-born Negroes in the North by over 320,000 between 1910 and 1920, more than the entire number in the preceding forty years and five times the average of the previous decade; and with all this, the beginnings of mass Negro entry into industry. A subsequent volume is now in preparation bringing the story through World War II.

In an undertaking of this sort space considerations were of very great importance. Originally the editor's collated documents totalled some two million words, and more than that had been discarded at first reading. The editor has striven to avoid repetitiousness in the documents. Historical significance and typicality were primary considerations in the selecting of documents, and an effort has been made to illuminate the many-sidedness and richness of Negro history.

The editor has labored for brevity in his documentary introductions and has tried to keep the explanatory footnotes to a minimum consistent

with providing sufficient information to place the documents in their time. Some documents because of their transcendent historic quality, as Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Speech of 1895 and the original 1905 declaration of the Niagara Movement, are presented in their entirety, but generally documents have been extracted, limited by the aim of getting across their essence and something of their flavor.

With each document is given its source and, normally, the library, archive or repository where this source was consulted. Where no library is indicated, the New York Public Library was used. Unless otherwise stated all newspapers were examined in the microfilm division of the Schomburg Collection, 135th Street Branch, New York Public Library.

All footnotes are the editor's and all bracketed words are his, unless stated otherwise. In no case have words themselves been changed, except in Document 120[d], where the reason for the change is given. Misspellings and grammatical errors have been corrected if they occurred in printed sources and clearly were typographical mistakes. The word "Negro" has been capitalized throughout in accordance with correct usage.

All words in the documentary text itself come from Negroes with rare and immediately apparent exceptions, as in publishing testimony before investigating bodies the questions posed by white people are given; and all documents are of a contemporaneous nature, except Numbers 42 and 58 where participants tell of the events some years after their occurrence.

It is hoped that the rather complete table of contents, the numerous running heads and the detailed index will make readily accessible any particular item the reader may desire.

Many debts of gratitude have been accumulated in the course of preparing this work. The staffs of the following institutions have been very helpful: the Public Libraries of Brooklyn, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, New York, Raleigh and Richmond; and of the Schomburg Collection already mentioned; the State Archives, Historical Societies and Historical Commissions of California, Connecticut, Georgia, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia and Wisconsin; the Library of Congress and the Ridgway Library Company of Philadelphia; the libraries of Columbia University, Harvard University, Howard University and the Universities of California, Minnesota, North Carolina, South Carolina and Wisconsin; the National Archives, the American Antiquarian Society, the Boston Athenaeum and the Jefferson School of Social Science.

The writings, published and unpublished, of many historians and biographers have been essential and several of these are acknowledged within

the body of the text itself. Here the editor wishes to mention specifically his indebtedness to the work of Jack Abramowitz, James S. Allen, Fred-eric Bancroft, Horace M. Bond, Arna Bontemps, Benjamin Brawley, Helen T. Catterall, Earl Conrad, Elizabeth Donnan, Helen G. Edmonds, Arthur H. Fauset, John H. Franklin, E. Franklin Frazier, Shirley Graham, Lorenzo J. Greene, Bella Gross, Harry Haywood, Luther P. Jackson, James H. Johnston, Sidney Kessler, Elizabeth Lawson, Benjamin Quarles, L. D. Reddick, W. Sherman Savage, A. A. Taylor, Ridgely Torrence, Charles H. Wesley and Harvey Wish.

Various sections of this work were kindly read, prior to publication, by Lloyd L. Brown, Louis Burnham, John Pittman and Doxey A. Wilkerson and valuable comments and criticisms resulted. The entire manuscript was read by Philip S. Foner, distinguished labor historian and editor of the writings of Frederick Douglass, and his suggestions were most helpful. Great assistance was rendered the editor by Miss Myrtle Powell and Mrs. Madeline Lawrence, and for this he is grateful.

The life and work of the late Dr. Carter G. Woodson constantly inspired the editor. His writings, his advice and his friendship were among the most precious influences in the editor's life.

As will be obvious to the reader, without the encouragement, guidance and gracious kindness of Dr. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois this work would not have appeared. He opened to the editor his priceless library and his enormous mass of correspondence, and many times he shared his unrivaled learning thus opening paths that the editor but dimly discerned. The editor finds it impossible to adequately express his profound appreciation to Dr. Du Bois.

Whatever failings, errors or shortcomings this work may have are the fault of the editor, and his alone is the responsibility for views and interpretations offered.

Finally, to Fay—and to Bettina—thank you.

HERBERT APTHEKER

July, 1951

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I

Through the Revolutionary Era

1

EARLY NEGRO PETITIONS FOR FREEDOM, 1661-1726

Individual Negroes quite frequently petitioned governmental bodies for freedom prior to the American Revolution. Three examples of such petitions are given below. The first, dated 1661, was in Dutch and was addressed to the colony of New Netherlands (later New York). Its prayer was granted. The second, dated 1675, was the work of a Virginia Negro and what decision was made in regard to it does not appear. The third petition, dated 1726, was addressed to the North Carolina General Court and was denied.

[a]

New Netherlands Petition, 1661

To the Noble Right Honorable Director-General and Lords Councillors of New Netherlands

Herewith very respectfully declare Emanuel Pieterse, a free Negro, and Reytory, otherwise Dorothy, Angola, free Negro woman, together husband and wife, the very humble petitioners of your noble honors, that she, Reytory, in the year 1643, on the third of August, stood as godparent or witness at the Christian baptism of a little son of one Anthony van Angola, begotten with his own wife named Louise, the which aforementioned Anthony and Louise were both free Negroes; and about four weeks thereafter the aforementioned Louise came to depart this world, leaving behind the aforementioned little son named Anthony, the which child your petitioner

out of Christian affection took to herself, and with the fruits of her hands' bitter toil she reared him as her own child, and up to the present supported him, taking all motherly solicitude and care for him, without aid of anyone in the world, not even his father (who likewise died about five years thereafter), to solicit his nourishment; and also your petitioner [i.e., Emanuel] since he was married to Reytory, has done his duty and his very best for the rearing . . . to assist . . . your petitioners . . . very respectfully address themselves to you, noble and right honorable lords, humbly begging that your noble honors consent to grant a stamp in this margin of this [document], or otherwise a document containing the consent and approval of the above-mentioned adoption and nurturing, on the part of your petitioner, in behalf of the aforementioned Anthony with the intent [of declaring] that he himself, being of free parents, reared and brought up without burden or expense of the [West Indian] Company, or of anyone else than your petitioner, in accordance therewith he may be declared by your noble honors to be a free person: this being done, [the document] was signed with the mark of Anthony Pieterston.

Manuscript in New York State Library, Albany. The editor is indebted to Professor Margaret Schlauch formerly of New York University and Professor Adriaan Barnouw of Columbia University for the translation. Ellipses indicate illegible portions of the document; bracketed words are the editor's.

[b]

Virginia Petition, 1675

To the R^T Hon^{ble} Sir William Berkeley, Knt., Gover^r and Capt. Genl. of Virg^a, with the Hon. Councill of State.

The Petition of Phillip Corven, a Negro, in all humility showeth: That yo^r pet^r being a servan^t to M^{rs} Anny^e Beazley, late of James City County, widdow, de^{ed}. The said M^{rs} Beazley made her last will & testament in writing, under her hand & seal, bearing date, the 9th day of April, An. Dom. 1664, and, amongst other things, did order, will appoint that yo^r pet^r by the then name of Negro boy Phillip, should serve her cousin, Mr. Humphrey Stafford, the terme of eight yeares, then next ensueing, and then should enjoy his freedome & be paid three barrells of corne & a sute of clothes, as by the said will appears. Sonne after the makeing of which will, the said M^{rs} Beazley departed this life, yor pe^{tr} did continue & and abide with the said M^r Stafford, (with whome he was ordered by the said will to live) some yeares, and then the said Mr. Stafford sold the remainder of yo^r pe^{tr} time to one Mr. Charles Lucas, with whom y^{or} pe^{tr} alsoe continued, doeing true & faithfull service; but the said Mr. Lucas, coveting yo^r pe^{tr}'s service longer then of right itt was

due, did not att the expiracon of the said eight yeares, discharge y^{or} pe^{tr} from his service, but compelled him to serve three years longer than the time set by the said Mrs. Beazley's will, and then not being willing y^{or} pe^{tr} should enjoy his freedome, did, contrary to all honesty and good conscience with threats & a high hand, in the time of yo^r pe^{tr}'s service with him, and by his confederacy with some persons compel yo^r pe^{tr} to sett his hand to a writeing, which the said M^r Lucas now saith is an Indenture for twenty yeares, and forced yo^r pe^{tr} to acknowledge the same in the County Court of Warwick.

Now, for that itt please yo^r Hon^r, yo^r pe^{tr}, who all the time of the makeing the said forced writing, in the servicee of the said Mr. Lucas, and never discharged from the same, the said M^r Lucas alwaies unjustly pretending that yo^r pe^{tr} was to serve him three yeares longer, by an order of Court, wh^h is untrue, which pretence of the said Mr. Lucas will appeare to yo^r hon^s by y^e testimony of persons of good credit

Yo^r Pe^{tr} therefore most humbly prayeth yo^r hon^{rs} to order that the said M^r Lucas make him sattisfaction for the said three yeares service above his time, and pay him corne & clothes, with costs of suite.

And yo^r pe^{tr} (as in duty bound) shall ever pray, &c.

Wm. P. Palmer, ed., *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, I (Richmond, 1875), pp. 9-10.

[c]

North Carolina Petition, 1726

To the Honoble Christopher Gale Esqr Chief Justice of the General Court February the third one thousand Seven hundred & twenty Six

The Complaint and petition of peter Vantrump a free Negro Sheweth that yor Complainant being a free Negro and at his own voluntary dispossall & hath hired himself to Service Sundry times particularly in New York and other places and being at St Thomas's this Summer past one Captain Mackie in a Brigantine from thence being bound (as he reported) to Europe Your Honors Complainant agreed to go with him in Order to gett to Holland but instead of proceeding the Sayd Voyage the Sayd Mackie came to North Carolina where combining with one Edmund porter of this province and fearing the Sayd Mackie not to be on a lawfull Trade Yor Complainant was desirous to leave him and the Sayd porter by plausible pretences gott Your Complainant to come away from the Sayd Mackie with him although Your Complainant often told the Sayd porter that he was not a Slave but a free man Yet nevertheless the Sayd porter now against all right now pretends Your Complainant to be his Slave and hath held and used him as

Such wherefore Your Complainant prays he may be adjudg^d & declar^d free as in Justice he ought to be & Sign^d Peter Vantrump.

Wm. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina*, II (Raleigh, 1886), pp. 702-03.

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STATEMENTS OF SLAVE REBELS, 1741

The history of American Negro slavery was marked by very many conspiracies and revolts on the part of the Negroes. The colonial period was no exception to this. The New York City slave plot of 1741, during which many buildings were destroyed by fire, was one of the major events of this character. It provoked hysteria leading to exaggeration of the extent of the actual conspiracy, but that one existed is clear. To obtain direct statements from contemporary Negroes themselves concerning these events is not easy. Below appear the confessions of two Negroes made in New York City on the afternoon of May 30, 1741, while chained to stakes before a howling, impatient mob. Following these confessions, the slaves were burned alive. In addition, twenty-nine other Negroes were executed as were four whites including, among the latter, two women.

The recorder of the slaves' confessions takes us to the scene of the execution.

Mr. Moore, the deputy secretary, undertook singly to examine them both, endeavoring to persuade them to confess their guilt, and all they knew of the matter, without effect, till at length Mr. Roosevelt came up to him, and said he would undertake Quaco, whilst Mr. Moore examined Cuffee; but before they could proceed to the purpose, each of them was obliged to flatter his respective criminal that his fellow sufferer had begun, which stratagem prevailed; Mr. Roosevelt stuck to Quaco altogether, and Mr. Moore took Cuffee's confession, and sometimes also minutes of what each said; and afterwards upon drawing up their confessions in form from their minutes, they therefore intermixed what came from each.

Quaco's confession at the stake. He said—

1. That Hughson was the first contriver of the whole plot, and promoter of it; which was to burn the houses of the town; Cuffee said, to kill the people.

2. That Hughson brought in first Caesar, Varack's; then Prince, Auboyneau's; Cuffee, Philipse's; and others, amongst whom were old Kip's Negro; Robin, Chambers'; Cuffee, Gomez's; Jack, Codweis's, and another short Negro, that cooks for him.

3. That he (Quaco) did fire the fort; that it was by a lighted stick taken out of the servant's hall, about eight o'clock at night; that he went up the